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ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

THE BOOK OF LUKE

April • May • June 2015

Adult
Sabbath School
Bible Study Guide
April | May | June 2015

THE BOOK OF LUKE



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH

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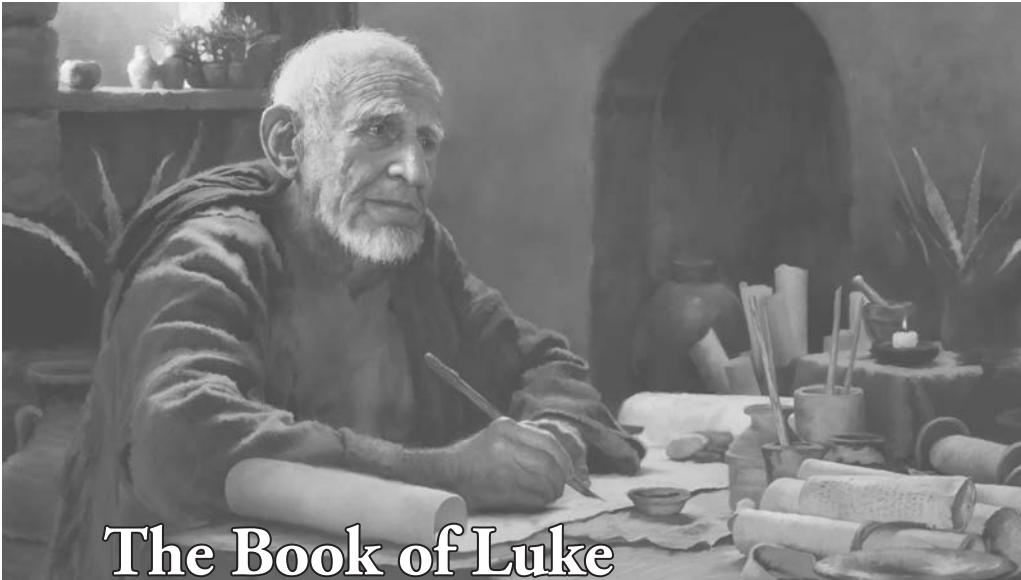
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The Book of Luke

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (*Luke 15:20*).

We know that verse. It comes from one of the most well-known and beloved stories in all literature, sacred or mundane. Astonishingly enough, we would never have heard it but for a simple missionary doctor who embedded that precious gem in a letter he wrote to his learned friend Theophilus.

The doctor’s name is Luke, a Gentile convert, and the letter is The Gospel According to Luke. In addition to the Gospel, Luke also wrote the book of Acts. Having been a travel companion of Paul, Luke was a keen observer of, and participant in, the great Jesus movement sweeping the Roman Empire. This close association with Paul led Luke not only to grasp the profound meaning of the Christian church—which stood its ground against Caesar’s demand to be honored as divine—but also to learn more deeply from credible sources about the Man behind it all: Jesus Christ. So, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke wrote a two-volume work on what could be called “Origin and History of the Christian Church.”

Part 1 of this work is the Gospel, written and delivered to Theophilus before Acts was written (*Acts 1:1*). Many conservative scholars date Luke’s Gospel to about A.D. 61–63.

Theophilus was a Greek convert, and in addressing the letter to him, Luke was

especially conscious of directing his Gospel to the Greek and Gentile members of the community of faith, while not disregarding Jesus' Jewish roots. Matthew wrote primarily to the Jews, and so he emphasizes Jesus as the Messiah. Mark wrote to the Romans, and we see Jesus marching across the land with the news about the kingdom. John was a deep thinker, and in his Gospel emerges Jesus the Word, the Creator, the Son of God. But Luke writes with an eye on the Gentiles. To them he presents Jesus, the Son of man, as the Savior of the world and Friend of humanity. The universality of salvation is the underlying theme of his Gospel; so, his genealogy traces Jesus all the way to Adam and links him to God, while Matthew's genealogy stops with Abraham, the father of the Jews (*Luke 3:23–38; compare with Matt. 1:1–17*).

Luke writes with an eye on the Gentiles. To them he presents Jesus, the Son of man, as the Savior of the world and Friend of humanity.

Luke's Gospel is the longest in the New Testament. Some miracles appear only in Luke, such as the raising of the widow of Nain's son (*Luke 7:11–18*) and the healing of Malchus (*Luke 22:50, 51*). (For other miracles, see *Luke 5:4–11, 13:11–17, 14:1–6, 17:11–19*.) Many parables are peculiar to Luke, including several famous ones: the good Samaritan (*Luke 10:30–37*), the rich foolish man (*Luke 12:16–21*), the prodigal son (*Luke 15:11–32*); the rich man and Lazarus (*Luke 16:19–31*), and the Pharisee and the publican (*Luke 18:10–14*). The Zacchaeus story (*Luke 19:1–10*) is also Luke's unique contribution.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Luke claims to have surveyed the historical materials, interviewed the eyewitnesses (*Luke 1:2*), and then with "perfect understanding of all things" wrote "an orderly account" that readers "may know the certainty" of Jesus and His good news (*vss. 3, 4, NKJV*).

When asked if he would recommend a good biography of Jesus, the great theologian James Denney replied, "Have you tried the one that Luke wrote?"

Good idea. Let's try it together, as a world church, this quarter.

John M. Fowler has served the church for 53 years as pastor, theology and philosophy teacher, editor, and educational administrator. As author of numerous articles and books, he has written two other Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guides: "The Cosmic Conflict Between Christ and Satan" (2002) and "Ephesians: The Gospel of Relationships" (2005).

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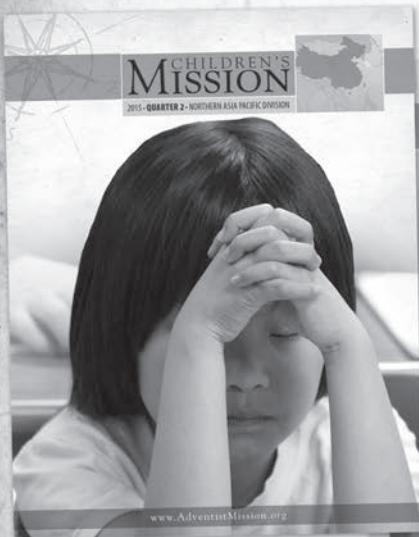
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The Coming of Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 1:2, 3; 2 Tim. 3:16; Luke 1:5–22; Deut. 18:15; Luke 2:9–12, 25–32.*

Memory Text: “‘For with God nothing will be impossible’ ” (*Luke 1:37, NKJV*).

The Gospel of Luke was written primarily to the Gentiles. Luke himself was a Gentile (implied in the context of Colossians 4:10–14), as was Theophilus, to whom the Gospel is addressed.

In addition to being a physician, Luke was a meticulous historian. In introducing the Gospel, Luke places Jesus in real history; that is, he puts the story in the historical context of its times: Herod was the king of Judea (*Luke 1:5*), Augustus reigned over the Roman Empire (*Luke 2:1*), and a priest by the name of Zacharias was exercising his turn in the temple in Jerusalem (*Luke 1:5, 9*). In chapter 3, Luke mentions six contemporary dates related to the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus.

Thus, Luke places the story of Jesus in history—real people, real times—in order to dismiss any idea of mythology with his narrative. His readers must stand in awe and wonder at the fact that Jesus is real and that through Him God has invaded history with the “‘Savior, who is Christ the Lord’ ” (*Luke 2:11, NKJV*).

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 4.*

“An Orderly Account”

Acts 1:1 tells us that before Acts was written, its author wrote a “former account.” This, and the fact that both accounts were addressed to Theophilus, helps lead us to conclude that one author was responsible for both books. The two accounts can be viewed as parts 1 and 2 of “Origin and History of the Christian Church.” Part 1 is a narrative of the life and work of Jesus (the Gospel of Luke), and part 2 (Acts of the Apostles) is an account of the spread of the message of Jesus and of the early church.

How was the Gospel written? Read Luke 1:2, 3 and 2 Timothy 3:16.

Luke was aware of many who had written about the events that had shaken the city of Jerusalem and beyond—the events concerning Jesus Christ. The sources for such literary works included many “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” (*Luke 1:2, NKJV*)—a clear reference to the disciples and other contemporaries of Jesus. Luke himself had an exposure to these witnesses and ministers (such as Paul and other apostolic leaders) and possibly also to the Gospels written by Mark and Matthew. Luke, obviously, was not an eyewitness to the Jesus story, but he was a credible and authentic convert to Christ.

Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience, presenting Jesus as the Great Teacher, the fulfillment of prophecy, and the King of the Jews. He often referred to Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled in Christ. Mark wrote to a Roman audience about Jesus, the Person of action. Luke, a doctor and a Gentile, wrote to the Greeks and the Gentiles about the universal Jesus—the Savior of the world. Luke mentions that the purpose of his writing is twofold: to present an “orderly account” (*Luke 1:3, NKJV*) and to provide certainty to the great teachings of the new era. Certainty about truth, as in Jesus, is one goal of his Gospel.

Luke, an inspired author of Scripture, used other material in his writings. Very interesting! Obviously, that use of other sources doesn't negate the inspiration or authority of what he wrote. What lessons should that have for us as Seventh-day Adventists regarding the question of how inspiration, either canonical or noncanonical, works on inspired writers?

“Call His Name John”

For nearly four hundred years after Malachi, divine silence marked the history of Israel. With the birth announcements of John the Baptist and Jesus, the divine silence was about to be broken.

The birth stories of John and Jesus have parallels. Both are miracles: in the case of John, Elizabeth had gone well past the child-bearing age; in the case of Jesus, a virgin was to bear the child. The angel Gabriel announced both birth promises. Both announcements were received in a spirit of wonder, joy, and surrender to God’s will. Both babies were to grow and become strong in the Spirit (*Luke 1:80, 2:40*).

But the mission and the ministry of the two miracle babies were distinct and different. John was to be a preparer of the way for Jesus (*Luke 1:13–17*). Jesus is “ ‘the Son of God’ ” (*vs. 35*) and the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies (*vss. 31–33*).

Read *Luke 1:5–22*. Though Zacharias is depicted as “blameless,” his lack of faith at the angel’s announcement brought a rebuke. How does this help us to understand what the concept of “blameless” means for a believer in Jesus?

“The birth of a son to Zacharias, like the birth of the child of Abraham, and that of Mary, was to teach a great spiritual truth, a truth that we are slow to learn and ready to forget. In ourselves we are incapable of doing any good thing; but that which we cannot do will be wrought by the power of God in every submissive and believing soul. It was through faith that the child of promise was given. It is through faith that spiritual life is begotten, and we are enabled to do the works of righteousness.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 98.

The miracle of John had a decisive purpose in God’s dealing with His people. After 400 years of prophetic absence in the history of Israel, John did break forth into that history with a specific message and with a decisive power. John’s mission and message was “ ‘to make ready a people prepared for the Lord’ ” (*Luke 1:17, NKJV*). He was to be the forerunner of the Messiah, the one to prepare the way for the mission of Jesus.

“Call His Name Jesus”

The birth of Jesus Christ was no normal event. It was marked in God’s eternal calendar, and “when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman” (*Gal. 4:4, NKJV*). It is the fulfillment of the first promise God made after the entrance of sin in Eden (*Gen. 3:15*).

Read the following texts. In each one, how was the birth of Jesus an amazing fulfillment of prophecy? What does this tell us about why we must learn to trust all God’s promises? *Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22–24; Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:22, 23; Mic. 5:2; Luke 2:4–7.*

Six months after Gabriel announced to Zacharias the coming birth of John, he announced to Mary of Nazareth an even greater miracle: that a virgin will “ ‘conceive . . . and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS’ ” (*Luke 1:31, NKJV*).

The virgin birth of Jesus goes against all nature, and it cannot be explained by nature or naturalistic philosophy. Even Mary had her question: “ ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’ ” (*vs. 34, NKJV*). The angel assured her that this would be the work of the Holy Spirit (*vs. 35*), and “ ‘with God nothing will be impossible’ ” (*vs. 37, NKJV*). Mary’s immediate and faithful submission was remarkable: “ ‘Let it be to me according to your word’ ” (*vs. 38, NKJV*). Every human question, no matter how natural or logical, must give way to the divine answer. Be it Creation or the Cross, the Incarnation or the Resurrection, the downpour of manna or the outpouring of Pentecost—the divine initiative demands human surrender and acceptance.

While Mary answered her own question by submission and surrender to God’s sovereignty and eternal purpose, Gabriel assured her with another great answer: “ ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God’ ” (*vs. 35, NKJV*).

Some secular cultures have been browbeaten into believing that everything, ultimately, has a naturalistic and scientific explanation. Why is this such a narrow, even superficial, view of the grandeur and greatness of reality?

The Manger of Bethlehem

Luke begins the story of the Bethlehem manger with a note of history. Joseph and Mary left their home in Nazareth to travel to their ancestral town of Bethlehem as a result of a census decree of Caesar Augustus, the emperor of Rome, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Such historical details must lead Bible students to appreciate Luke's submission to the Holy Spirit, so that he would record the details of the Incarnation within the framework of history.

Reflect on the poverty of Jesus as seen in Luke 2:7. Compare the image of “swaddling clothes,” the “manger,” and “no room . . . in the inn,” with Paul’s description of the condescension of Jesus in Philippians 2:5–8. What kind of a road did Jesus walk on our behalf?

The story of the poor circumstances in which the Lord of heaven incarnated Himself continues with the first visitors the manger had: the shepherds. Not to the rich or the powerful, not to the scribes or the priests, not to rulers and the powers that held sway over the land did the “good tidings of great joy” (*Luke 2:10, NKJV*) come, but to humble and despised shepherds. Observe the majesty and the simplicity of the message: *A Savior is born to you. In the city of David. He is Christ the Lord, the Anointed One. You will find Him wrapped in swaddling clothes* (author’s translation). Heaven’s most precious gift came in such a simple package, as often it does. But the gift brings “glory to God,” “on earth peace,” and “goodwill toward men” (*vs. 14, NKJV*).

Luke’s record of the angel (*Luke 2:9–12*) brings out three vital matters of Christian theology. First, the good news of the gospel is for “all people.” In Jesus both the Jew and the Gentile become one people of God. Second, Jesus is the Savior; there is no one else. Third, Jesus is Christ the Lord. These three themes, so clearly established early in Luke, later became the foundation of the apostolic preaching, particularly that of Paul.

Think about what we believe as Christians: the Creator of all that was made (*John 1:1–3*) not only entered into this fallen world as a human being but lived the hard life that He did, only to wind up on a cross. If we *really* believe that, why should every aspect of our life be lived in submission to this amazing truth? What parts of your life reflect your belief in the story of Jesus, and what parts don’t?

The Witnesses to the Savior

Although writing primarily to the Gentiles, Luke was aware of the importance of the Jewish heritage through the Old Testament. He takes care to link the New Testament story with the Old and provides the scene of Mary and Joseph having the Baby Jesus circumcised on the eighth day and taking Him to the temple in Jerusalem, all according to Jewish law (*Luke 2:22–24*).

Read Luke 2:25–32. Note three points about the theology of salvation that Simeon brings to the fore: salvation is through Jesus; salvation is prepared by God; salvation is for all peoples—to the Gentiles as well as to Israel. How do these truths tie in with the first angel’s message of Revelation 14:6, 7?

Simeon’s prophecy also predicted two significant features of Jesus’ ministry.

First, Christ is “ ‘destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel’ ” (*Luke 2:34, NKJV*). Yes, Christ has brought light and salvation to all, but not without cost to the recipient. With Christ there is no neutral ground: accept Him or reject Him, and upon the appropriate response one’s salvation depends. Christ demands exclusiveness; we abide in Him or we do not. Those who abide in Him will rise up and be part of His kingdom; those who reject Him or remain indifferent to Him will fall to the ground and perish without hope. Faith in Christ is nonnegotiable.

Second, Simeon prophesies to Mary, “ ‘a sword will pierce through your own soul also’ ” (*Luke 2:35, NKJV*). The reference no doubt is to the Cross, which Mary will witness. Mary and all the generations that follow her ought to remember that without the Cross, there is no salvation. The Cross is the hub around which the entire plan of salvation revolves.

Salvation is a gift in that we can do nothing to earn it. Yet, it can still be very costly to those who claim it for themselves. What has following Christ cost you, and why is that cost, whatever it may be, cheap enough?

Further Study: “Luke, the writer of the Gospel that bears his name, was a medical missionary. In the Scriptures he is called ‘the beloved physician.’ Colossians 4:14. The apostle Paul heard of his skill as a physician, and sought him out as one to whom the Lord had entrusted a special work. He secured his co-operation, and for some time Luke accompanied him in his travels from place to place. After a time, Paul left Luke at Philippi, in Macedonia. Here he continued to labor for several years, both as a physician and as a teacher of the gospel. In his work as a physician he ministered to the sick, and then prayed for the healing power of God to rest upon the afflicted ones. Thus the way was opened for the gospel message. Luke’s success as a physician gained for him many opportunities for preaching Christ among the heathen. It is the divine plan that we shall work as the disciples worked.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 140, 141.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 If Luke, in writing his Gospel, took into account previously published materials, how are we to understand the inspiration of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16)? How does inspiration work? See Ellen G. White, “The Inspiration of the Prophetic Writers,” *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 15–23.
- 2 The virgin birth is of God’s making, marked by His mystery, majesty, and mission. It is truly beyond human understanding too. But the question is, So what? How many secular things are beyond human understanding as well? If God does exist, and He has the power to create and sustain the universe, why should something like the virgin birth be beyond His power? Only those whose worldview is limited to natural laws alone (at least the ones we now currently understand) could, a priori, dismiss the idea of a virgin birth. In contrast, those whose worldview incorporates the supernatural should have, a priori, no reason to reject it. After all, look at what the angel said to Mary after giving her the incredible news: “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37).
- 3 An American TV interviewer is reported to have said that if he had an opportunity, the person he would most like to interview would be Jesus, and he would ask Him just one question: “Are You indeed born of a virgin?” Why is that question, and the answer to it, so important?

A Divine Encounter

TANG YUE, CHINA

Taking her six-year-old son by the hand, Tang Yue didn't expect anything unusual to happen as she walked from her home to the nearby market. Little did she know that she was about to experience a divine encounter.

Tang Yue believed in God, and on Sundays she met together with other Christian believers. But at the moment, her thoughts were centered on what she needed to get at the market. As she walked down the street, two kind-looking men approached her and stopped.

"You know," said one, "keeping Sunday is not from the Bible." He held up a Bible and showed the astonished Tang Yue texts regarding the seventh-day Sabbath. Encouraging her to see for herself, the other man told her, "You can search the Internet, and see what day is really the Sabbath day."

Then the men concluded their brief presentation by telling Tang Yue, "Jesus came to this world, and the 'Saturday church' is really the church of God." Then as quickly as they had come, the two men disappeared into the crowd.

Astonished by this strange, brief meeting, Tang Yue went home and began searching the Internet for answers to the questions the strangers had raised. To her surprise, she came across an amazing Web site in Chinese that had answers to her questions, including clear answers about the seventh day, Saturday, being God's true Sabbath. The Web site also offered easy-to-follow Bible studies. Learning that the Web site was from a Seventh-day Adventist ministry, she wondered if there might be an Adventist church nearby that she could visit.

During another Internet search, Tang Yue was happy to learn that there was an Adventist church in her city, and she decided to visit. *Surely there must be something special about this church*, she thought to herself.

Finding her way to the church the following Sabbath, Tang Yue looked for the two men who had approached her on the street, but she didn't see them. In fact, she never saw them again.

But she keeps returning to the Adventist church and believes that she has found her spiritual home. "[This church] is teaching very closely to the Bible," says Tang Yue. "It is very different from the Sunday church. I believe that what the Adventists are teaching is the truth and that Jesus is coming soon."

Tang Yue continues to worship regularly with Seventh-day Adventists who meet together in an apartment within a city in central China.

This quarter, a part of your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is going to help provide more places of worship for believers in China.

Gina Wahlen, editor of the mission quarterlies, wrote the Inside Stories, unless otherwise indicated.

Baptism *and the* Temptations



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Luke 3:1–14; Rom. 6:1–6; Luke 3:21, 22; Luke 4:5–8; Isa. 14:13, 14; Luke 4:9–13.*

Memory Text: “And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, ‘You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased’ ” (*Luke 3:22, NKJV*).

As we saw last week, Luke provides a list of great historical dignitaries to, we believe, help show that his account of Jesus and John is as real and as historical as these powerful men.

But there’s another important reason to mention these mighty men of power and influence. It is to contrast them with the humble man of the wilderness, John the Baptist, God’s chosen messenger who was to “prepare the way” for the most significant event in all human history so far: the coming of Jesus, the world’s Redeemer. How interesting that God chose not one of the world’s “great” men to herald the Messiah but one of the “lowlier” ones instead.

Scholars put all these historic personalities together and give us a date close to A.D. 27 or 28 for the start of the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus. It is within the historical time frame of these Roman Empire luminaries that Jesus was baptized and received the benediction of Heaven that He is God’s “beloved Son” (*Luke 3:22*). Luke establishes this fact right at the outset, even before he presents to his readers the “orderly account” of the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 11.

Prepare the Way of the Lord

In Luke 3, John appears in his unique and crucial role in salvation history. Whatever else one could say about John's preaching, he was not sugarcoating his words in order to please the crowd.

Read Luke 3:1–14. His words are filled with important truths, not just for those within earshot but for all of us. What points in particular can you take from what John is saying here?

Repentance is not just a theoretical notion. It is a way of life. The word comes from the Greek *metanoia*, which means a change of mind, and this leads to a new life.

To “baptize” means to dip or immerse fully in water. Immersion has a profound meaning. Even before the time of John, the Jews had attached meaning to baptism by immersion. It was a common practice when Gentile proselytes chose to join the Jewish faith.

In inviting Jews to be baptized, John the Baptist was setting forth a new principle: baptism is an occasion to publicly renounce one's old sinful ways and to prepare oneself for the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptist thus introduced a symbolic act of renunciation of sin and consecration to a new way of life as citizens of the Messianic kingdom, which was about to be inaugurated. John was quick to add that he was baptizing only with water, but the One who was to follow him “ ‘will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire’ ” (*Luke 3:16, NKJV*). Thus, a crucial point is made: baptism as an act of immersion in water is only an outer symbol of an inward change—a change that would eventually be sealed by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Read Romans 6:1–6. What spiritual lessons is the apostle Paul drawing out of the act of baptism? Note the comparison he makes between the act of immersion and rising out of the water with dying to sin and living for righteousness. How have you experienced the reality of this new life in Christ?

“You Are My Beloved Son”

In Luke 2:41–50, we read the famous story of Joseph and Mary’s losing sight of Jesus in Jerusalem. What’s especially fascinating is Jesus’ response to Mary when she rebukes Him (*vs. 48*). Jesus’ answer is an affirmation of His divine self-consciousness, that He is the Son of God. “ ‘Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?’ ” (*vs. 49, NKJV*). As the next verse says, Joseph and Mary didn’t grasp the implications of what Jesus had said to them. In all fairness, how could they? After all, even the disciples, after years with Jesus, were still not totally certain of who He was and what He was to do.

For example, after His resurrection, Jesus was talking to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. One of them, in referring to Jesus, had said that Jesus “ ‘was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people’ ” (*Luke 24:19, NKJV*). Jesus, of course, was much more than a prophet. Even then they still didn’t grasp who He was and what He had come to do.

Read Matthew 3:13–17, John 1:29–34, and Luke 3:21, 22. What is the significance of Jesus’ baptism?

At His baptism, Heaven attested that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus sought baptism not because He needed it as part of a postrepentance process but to set an example for others (*Matt. 3:14, 15*). Three important factors stand out concerning the baptism of Jesus: (1) the Baptist’s proclamation, “ ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ ” (*John 1:29, NKJV*); (2) the Holy Spirit’s anointing Him for His mission ahead; and (3) the heavenly proclamation that Jesus is the Son of God, in whom the Father is well pleased.

Think about it: the spotless Son of God, the Creator of the cosmos, was baptized by a mere human being, all part of the plan of salvation. How should this amazing condescension on His part help us to be willing to humble ourselves whenever the occasion warrants it?

Not by “Bread Alone”

“Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, . . . was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil” (*Luke 4:1, 2, NKJV*). Born for a God-ordained mission, commissioned to the task at His baptism, equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus the Christ retreated into the wilderness to contemplate the task ahead.

The temptation in the wilderness was a significant battle between Christ and Satan in the great controversy, which has raged ever since Lucifer’s rebellion in heaven. In the wilderness, when the Savior was weak from 40 days of fasting, when the journey ahead looked bleak and weary, Satan took personal command in his attack against Jesus. “Satan saw that he must either conquer or be conquered. The issues of the conflict involved too much to be entrusted to his confederate angels. He must personally conduct the warfare.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 116.

Note what Satan said to Christ: “‘If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread’ ” (*Luke 4:3, NKJV*). **What is Satan trying to do in this account that reflects what he attempted to do in heaven?**

Bread is not the central issue here. Yes, the 40-day fasting in the wilderness must have made the Savior hungry, and Satan used that circumstance as bait. But Satan knew that Jesus is the Creator of the universe. To Him who created the universe out of nothing, making bread out of stone was not an issue. The crucial point in the temptation is found in its preface: “‘If You are the Son of God.’ ” Only 40 days before, the voice from heaven attested that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, and now should Jesus doubt that heavenly assurance? Doubting God’s Word is the first step in yielding to temptation. In heaven Satan challenged the authority of Jesus; he does so here as well, even if in a much more subtle manner than he tried in heaven.

How can you learn not to succumb to Satan’s attempts to get you, as he tries with all of us, to doubt God’s promises?

“Worship Me”

Read Luke 4:5–8. Why would Satan want Jesus to worship Him? What crucial issue was at stake here?

Worship is the sole prerogative of God. It is the one factor that forever separates the creature from the Creator. One of the issues in Lucifer’s rebellion against God in heaven is that of worship. Lucifer’s ambition was well summarized by Isaiah 14:13, 14: to ascend to heaven, to exalt his throne above the stars of heaven, to be like the Most High. It was an attempt to usurp the authority that belongs only to the Creator and never to any creature, no matter how exalted.

In this context we can better understand what is happening in this temptation. When Jesus was about to set out on His mission to redeem the world back to God’s ownership and authority, Satan took Him to the top of a mountain, provided a panoramic view of all the kingdoms, and offered them to Him for a simple act: “ ‘If You will worship before me, all will be Yours’ ” (*Luke 4:7, NKJV*).

Satan was trying to divert Christ’s perspective from His divine priority and to entice Him with pomp and glory for no greater price than just a bow. He was trying to get here, again, the authority and worship that he failed to get in heaven.

Notice how Christ dismissed the tempter with utter contempt. “ ‘Get behind Me, Satan!’ ” (*vs. 8, NKJV*). Worship, and the service that goes with it, belong to the Creator God alone. Here again the Word of the Lord comes to His help. Did not Inspiration say through Moses, “ ‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God. . . . You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him’ ” (*Deut. 6:4, 5, 13, NKJV*)? Absolutely resolving to follow God in faith and obedience is the ultimate answer to Satan’s lies and tricks.

Any of us can face temptations to compromise our faith, even in “small ways.” Your job, your passing of a university examination, your promotion, demands a compromise in regard to Sabbath. At what point can you make a deal? When, if ever, is the price right?

Christ the Victor

Luke and Matthew reverse the order of the second and third temptations. The reason is not clear, but that need not detain us. The crucial point is the ultimate victory of Jesus over Satan, proclaimed by both Gospels. The significant factor that emerges from study of the temptations is that Jesus Christ is a real Person—tempted as we are but without sin (*Heb. 4:15*). With victory in each of the temptations, with His triumph over Satan, with the Word of God in His mouth, and connected with Heaven’s powerhouse through prayer, Jesus emerges to proclaim the kingdom of God and to inaugurate the Messianic age.

Read Luke 4:9–13 and Matthew 4:5–7. In the first two temptations, Jesus used the Scripture to overcome Satan’s enticements. Now, in the third, Satan does the same and quotes the Scripture to test whether Jesus really takes the Word of God seriously. What is happening here, and how does Jesus respond?

Satan takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem, the most sacred place in Jewish history. The city of Zion, the temple where God dwells among His people, becomes the avenue for Satan’s confrontation with Jesus. “If You are the Son of God” is once again the preface. Watch what Satan says: *If God is indeed your Father, and if your mission is indeed at His bidding, throw yourself down from the pinnacle. Surely, if all that is true, God will not let you get hurt.* He then quotes Scripture: “ ‘He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you’ ” (*Luke 4:10, NKJV*).

Satan knows the Scripture but misinterprets it. His tactic is to lead Jesus to put God to the test. God has indeed promised the protection of His angels, but only within the context of doing His will, such as in the case of Daniel and his companions. Jesus answers Satan decisively again by using Scripture, declaring that it is not for us to put God to the test (*vs. 12*). Our duty is to place ourselves in God’s will and let Him do the rest.

Note four major biblical teachings on temptation: (1) No one is free from temptations; (2) when God allows temptations to come to us, He also provides grace to resist and strength to overcome; (3) temptations do not come the same way every time; and (4) no one is tempted beyond his or her strength to bear (*1 Cor. 10:13*).

Further Study: “If Joseph and Mary had stayed their minds upon God by meditation and prayer, they would have realized the sacredness of their trust, and would not have lost sight of Jesus. By one day’s neglect they lost the Saviour; but it cost them three days of anxious search to find Him. So with us; by idle talk, evilspeaking, or neglect of prayer, we may in one day lose the Saviour’s presence, and it may take many days of sorrowful search to find Him, and regain the peace that we have lost.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 83.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 **Temptation in itself is not sin. In the biblical sense, temptation has the potential to affirm the possibility of holiness. To be tempted is one thing; to fall into sin is another. At the same time, what is our responsibility about doing all that we can even to avoid temptation?**
- 2 **Philosophers and theologians often talk about what they call a “metanarrative,” a grand overarching story or theme in which other stories occur. To put it another way, a metanarrative is the background, the context, in which other stories and events unfold. As Seventh-day Adventists, we see the great controversy as the metanarrative or background for what has been happening, not only here on earth but in heaven as well. What texts in the Bible show us the reality of the great controversy and how it helps explain what is going on in the world?**
- 3 **What are some of the most powerful Bible texts that promise us victory over the temptations that come our way? Why, though, even with these promises, is it still so easy to fall?**
- 4 **One of the daily studies this week made the following statement: “Doubting God’s Word is the first step in yielding to temptation.” Why would that be so?**
- 5 **In what ways can idolatry be much more subtle than bowing down and worshiping something other than the Lord?**

The Witness of a House Church

ZHANG WEI,* CHINA

Zhang Wei was no ordinary citizen. He had served faithfully in the Chinese army, and as a well-respected individual he served as mayor of his village.

There came a time, however, when Zhang Wei decided to move to a large city where he could earn more money in construction.

One day as he was walking along a city street, something caught his attention—he heard singing coming from the ground level of a large apartment building. Drawing closer, he looked through the open windows and saw people singing and praying together.

Soon someone stepped outside of the apartment and invited Zhang Wei to come in. Claiming to be Buddhist, Zhang Wei was somewhat reticent to step inside; but as he was curious to learn more, he finally decided to enter this Seventh-day Adventist house church.

He noticed that many of the people had Bibles, and he wanted to learn more about this unusual book. Happily, the Adventists shared with Zhang Wei some of their most treasured Bible truths and prayed with him.

Zhang Wei often returned to the Adventist house church. One day, the subject of healthy living came up, including diet.

Explaining the biblical laws of clean and unclean meats, the members told Zhang Wei that pigs were unclean and that often the animals were infested with worms.

Not believing them, Zhang Wei decided to conduct a little experiment. Many people worked at the same construction site, and the company cook would sometimes purchase an entire pig to feed the crew.

Curious to see how unclean the pig was, when no one was looking Zhang Wei quickly took a knife and sliced the animal open—and found the swine's flesh crawling with worms from head to hoof. Shocked and disgusted, he never ate pork again.

Before long, Zhang Wei accepted all of the Bible truths and was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. After his baptism, however, the pastor encouraged Zhang Wei to return to his home village and let his light shine for Jesus.

Zhang Wei returned to his village where he began an Adventist house church with just one person—himself! But he started sharing the things he had learned from the Bible with others, and soon the church grew.

Today, the county where Zhang Wei lives has six Adventist churches, and three neighboring counties each have churches due to the prayers and powerful witness of Zhang Wei.

* *Not his real name.*

Who Is Jesus Christ?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 4:16–30, 6:5, Eph. 1:3–5, Luke 9:18–27, 2 Pet. 1:16–18.*

Memory Text: “He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered and said, ‘The Christ of God’ ” (*Luke 9:20, NKJV*).

Who is Jesus Christ? This question is not a philosophical or a sociological gimmick. It gets to the heart of who humans are and, even more important, what eternity will hold for them.

People can admire the works of Jesus, honor His words, extol His patience, advocate His nonviolence, acclaim His decisiveness, praise His selflessness, and stand speechless at the cruel end of His life. Many may even be ready to accept Jesus as a good man who tried to set things right—to infuse fairness where there was injustice, to offer healing where there was sickness, and to bring comfort where there was only misery.

Yes, Jesus could well earn the name of the best teacher, a revolutionary, a leader par excellence, and a psychologist who can probe into the depths of one's soul. He was all these and so much more.

None of these things, however, comes near to answering the all-important question that Jesus Himself raised: “ ‘Who do you say that I am?’ ” (*Luke 9:20, NKJV*).

It is a question that demands an answer, and on that answer the destiny of humanity hinges.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 18.

Reactions to Jesus

Read the Gospels; read the New Testament. All through these books incredible claims are made about not only what Jesus did but, even more important, about who Jesus was. (Of course, what Jesus did powerfully attested to who He was.) These claims—that He is God, that He is our Redeemer, that He alone is the way to eternal life—demand our attention because they are full of implications that have eternal consequences for every human being.

Read Luke 4:16–30. What caused the people to react as they did? See also John 3:19.

His hometown audience was thrilled at first to see Jesus, who, after performing many miracles and wonders, returned to Nazareth, and they “marveled at the gracious words” He spoke (*Luke 4:22, NKJV*). But their reaction to His rebuke showed what spirit truly animated them.

Read Luke 7:17–22. What was John’s question about Jesus, and why would he have asked it?

Even John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus and the one who announced Jesus as “the Lamb of God,” had doubts creeping into the depths of his soul. He wanted to know: “ ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’ ” (*Luke 7:19, NKJV*).

Notice, too, that Jesus does not answer John’s question directly; instead, He points to acts that cry out in witness: “ ‘The lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them’ ” (*vs. 22, NKJV*). One could argue that Jesus didn’t need to answer John’s question directly; His deeds and actions gave ample testimony of who He was.

In a sense, the answer that Jesus gave might have caused John even a bit more consternation. After all, if Jesus has the power to do all these incredible things, why am I languishing here in jail? Who hasn’t, amid their own personal tragedies, wondered something similar: If God has all this power, why is this happening to me? Why is the cross, and all it represents and promises, our only answer?

Son of God

“Son of man” and “Son of God” are two names used in the Gospels to describe who Jesus is. The first indicates God incarnate; the second points to His divinity as the second Person of the Godhead. Together, the two phrases invite us to ponder the miracle of Jesus Christ: God who is both divine and human. It’s a hard concept to grasp, but that difficulty does not in any way take away from this amazing truth and the great hope that it offers us.

Read Luke 1:31, 32, 35; 2:11. What do these verses tell us about who Jesus really is?

In Luke 1:31, 32, the angel links the name “JESUS” with the “Son of the Highest” to whom the “Lord God will give” the throne of David (*NKJV*). Jesus is the Son of God. He is also the Christ, the Messiah, who shall restore David’s throne, not as an earthly deliverer but in the eschatological sense in that He will ultimately defeat Satan’s attempt to usurp the throne of God Himself. To the shepherds, the angel announced that the babe in the manger is the “‘Savior, who is Christ the Lord’ ” (*Luke 2:11, NKJV*).

At the same time, the title “Son of God” not only affirms Christ’s position in the Godhead but also reveals the close and intimate relationship that Jesus had with God the Father while Jesus was on earth.

Yet, the relationship between the Father and the Son is not the same as the relationship that we have with God. While our relationship is a result of the work of Christ both as Creator and Redeemer, His relationship to the Father as the Son is as of one of three equal, eternal partners. Through His divinity Jesus maintained the closest possible ties to the Father.

“Jesus says, ‘My Father which is in heaven,’ as reminding His disciples that while by His humanity He is linked with them, a sharer in their trials, and sympathizing with them in their sufferings, by His divinity He is connected with the throne of the Infinite.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 442.

What does it mean to us that Jesus is, in the fullest sense, God? Though this truth is filled with many implications, one of the most amazing is that, though God, Jesus condescended to not only take upon Himself our humanity but to offer Himself as a sacrifice in that humanity for us. We are talking about *God* here! What wonderful hope does this truth have for us because of what it tells us about what God is really like?

Son of Man

Although Jesus was fully conscious that He was both the Son of man and the Son of God (*Luke 22:67–70*), “Son of Man” was our Savior’s favorite way of self-designation. The other instances in which the title appears are in Daniel 7:13, in Stephen’s speech (*Acts 7:56*), and in Revelation 1:13 and 14:14. The title appears more than 80 times in the Gospels and 25 in Luke. Luke’s usage shows the author’s deep interest in the humanity of Jesus as the universal Man who was sent by God to proclaim the good news of salvation.

“The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. This is to be our study. Christ was a real man; He gave proof of His humility in becoming a man. Yet He was God in the flesh.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 244.

The use of “Son of man” in Luke provides various insights into the nature, mission, and destiny of the Incarnate Jesus.

First, the title identifies Him as a human (*Luke 7:34*), with no worldly address or security (*Luke 9:58*).

Second, Luke uses the title to assert Christ’s divine nature and status: for the “‘Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath’ ” (*Luke 6:5, NKJV*). Therefore, He is also the Creator, with the power to forgive sins (*Luke 5:24*).

Third, to accomplish this redemptive mission ordained by the Godhead before the foundations of the world (*Eph. 1:3–5*), the Son of man came to seek and save the lost (*Luke 9:56, 19:10*). But redemption itself cannot be completed until “ ‘the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected . . . and be killed, and be raised the third day’ ” (*Luke 9:22, NKJV*). This self-awareness of the Son of man about the path He had to tread, and the price He had to pay for the Redemption of humankind from sin, reveals not only the divine origin of the plan of Redemption but also Christ’s submission in His humanity to that plan.

Fourth, note how complete a picture of the suffering Messiah that Luke portrays in the following passages: His foreknowledge of the Cross (*Luke 18:31–33*); His betrayal (*Luke 9:44*); His death as a fulfillment of prophecy (*Luke 22:22*); His Crucifixion and Resurrection (*Luke 24:7; compare with Luke 11:30*); and His role as the Mediator before the Father (*Luke 12:8*).

Fifth, Luke sees the Son of man in last-day terms as the One who returns to earth to reward His saints and to wrap up the great controversy (*Luke 9:26; 12:4; 17:24, 26, 30; 21:36; 22:69*).

In short, the title “Son of man” incorporates the multifaceted aspect not only of who Christ was but of what He came to do and what He has accomplished and will accomplish for us in the plan of salvation.

“The Christ of God”

Read Luke 9:18–27. Why would Jesus have asked the disciples a question whose answer He already knew? What lesson was He seeking to teach them not only about Himself but about what it means to follow Him?

“Who do you say that I am?” (Luke 9:20, NKJV). The question that Jesus asked 2,000 years ago still haunts history. People have given many different answers. A great teacher. A profound ethicist. An embodiment of truth. An edifice of self-sacrifice. A fearless prophet. A social reformer. A great model of everything a human being should be. But no answer short of the confession that the original question drew from the lips of Peter will do.

After revealing His authority over nature (Luke 8:22–25), His power over demons (vs. 26–35), His might over diseases (Luke 5:12–15, 8:43–48), His ability to feed the 5,000 out of almost nothing (Luke 9:13–17), His power over death itself (Luke 8:51–56)—Jesus confronts His disciples with, really, two questions: first, what others thought of Him; next, what the disciples themselves thought. He didn’t ask in order to learn something that He didn’t already know. Rather, He asked in order to help them to understand that who He was would, in fact, demand from them a commitment that would cost everything.

“Our knowledge of Jesus must never be at second hand. We might know every verdict ever passed on Jesus; we might know every Christology that human minds have ever thought out; we might be able to give a competent summary of the teaching about Jesus of every great thinker and theologian—and still not be Christians. Christianity never consists in *knowing about* Jesus; it always consists in *knowing Jesus*. Jesus Christ demands a personal verdict. He did not ask only Peter, he asks every one of us: ‘You—what do *you* think of me?’ ”—William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2009), vol. 2, p. 161.

Our response to the question Jesus asked cannot be anything short of Peter’s confession: Jesus is “the Christ of God” (Luke 9:20, NKJV). “Christ” means the Anointed One, the Messiah, whose mission is not that of a political liberator but the Savior who will free humanity from the grip of Satan and sin and inaugurate the kingdom of righteousness.

It’s not enough simply knowing who Jesus is. Rather, we need to know Him for ourselves. If, then, you claim to know Jesus, what, in fact, do you know about Him? That is, what has your own personal knowledge of Jesus taught you about Him and about what He is like?

The Transfiguration

Read all three Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration (*Luke 9:27–36, Matt. 17:1–9, Mark 9:2–8*). (Read also Peter’s firsthand account of the incident, and note the truth the apostle establishes from his eyewitness experience; see 2 Peter 1:16–18.) What additional information does Luke provide, and why is it important?

Luke begins the narrative with a detail that Matthew and Mark do not mention: Jesus took Peter, John, and James up the mountain *to pray*. Jesus set His eyes and mind toward Jerusalem and predicted the path of suffering that lay before Him. Jesus wanted to be certain that what He was doing was what God wanted Him to do. At such moments, prayer is the only way of finding certainty and assurance. The process of prayer instantly poured out divine glory on the person of Jesus: “His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening” (*Luke 9:29, NKJV*).

The transfigured Jesus was in conversation with Moses and Elijah about “His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (*vs. 31, NKJV*). The word *decease* can be understood in two ways: His upcoming death in Jerusalem, although the Greek used here, *exodus*, is not often used for death; hence, “decease” can also mean the great “exodus” Jesus was about to accomplish in Jerusalem, the mighty redemptive exodus that would bring about deliverance from sin.

The conference of the three concluded with a voice of approval from heaven: “ ‘This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!’ ” (*vs. 35, NKJV*). The Transfiguration anoints Jesus with glory, assures His Sonship once again, and announces that Redemption will cost the Son’s life. Therefore, the heavenly command to the disciples: listen to Him. Without obedience and exclusive loyalty to Him, there is no discipleship.

Ellen G. White wrote that these men, meaning Moses and Elijah, who had been “chosen above every angel around the throne, had come to commune with Jesus concerning the scenes of His suffering, and to comfort Him with the assurance of the sympathy of heaven. The hope of the world, the salvation of every human being, was the burden of their interview.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 425. Thus, even Jesus Himself, who had comforted so many others, sought solace and comfort for Himself. What should that tell us about how even the strongest spiritually among us, even our leaders, teachers, and guides, can at times need solace, encouragement, and help from others? In fact, whom do you know right now who could use solace, comfort, and encouragement?

Further Study: “Avoid every question in relation to the humanity of Christ which is liable to be misunderstood. Truth lies close to the track of presumption. In treating upon the humanity of Christ, you need to guard strenuously every assertion, lest your words be taken to mean more than they imply, and thus you lose or dim the clear perceptions of His humanity as combined with divinity. His birth was a miracle of God. . . . Never, in any way, leave the slightest impression upon human minds that a taint of, or inclination to, corruption rested upon Christ, or that He in any way yielded to corruption. He was tempted in all points like as man is tempted, yet He is called ‘that holy thing.’ It is a mystery that is left unexplained to mortals that Christ could be tempted in all points like as we are, and yet be without sin. The incarnation of Christ has ever been, and will ever remain, a mystery.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 1128, 1129.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read the Ellen G. White statement above about the human nature of Christ. We must face the fact that Jesus’ human nature, as with His divine nature, is a great truth that for now we will never fully fathom. As she wrote: “The incarnation of Christ has ever been, and will ever remain, a mystery.” Why, then, must we be very careful about making harsh judgments on those who don’t necessarily understand this “mystery” the same way that we do?
- 2 Think about what happened on the mount of transfiguration. This amazing event in salvation history was about to happen, and what were the chosen disciples who came with Him on the mountain doing at first? Sleeping! In what ways could this be a metaphor for ourselves, as individual believers, or for us as a church who live right before another great event in salvation history, the second coming of Jesus?
- 3 Read some of the things that Jesus had said about Himself. Why, then, is the idea that Jesus was merely a great man, a great prophet, or a great spiritual leader logically flawed? Why must we either accept that He is what He said He is or that He was a lunatic and someone who was greatly deceived about Himself? Why is there no other option for us in regard to the identity of Jesus?

The “Under-the-Ground” Bible

A PASTOR, CHINA

During the time of China’s Cultural Revolution, it was very dangerous to own a Bible. Someone we knew, however, was able to obtain one. Since it was such a rare and precious book, he wanted to share it with as many people as possible, so he carefully took the Bible apart and gave one or two books of the Bible to various Seventh-day Adventist families.

Our family received the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, and we read them again and again, treasuring every word. As I child, I enjoyed the many exciting stories contained in those two books! My older brother could write, so he copied the books by hand to share with others.

A few years later, another Adventist found a very small Bible that had been put into a plastic bag and buried in the ground. Because of poor eyesight, the man wasn’t able to read the small print, so he gave the Bible to me when I was 18. I was so excited! Here was a complete Bible that I was holding in my hands for the very first time!

This “under-the-ground” Bible became very precious to me, and I read it from the first chapter to the last more than ten times. I spent a lot of time with it, marking important passages, and writing down some of my thoughts.

I remembered my great-grandmother telling me about Noah when I was very young, but here I was at 18, reading about the Flood for the first time.

As I read the Bible, I started to understand what this book is about. I learned more about Jesus and His teachings. I discovered the truth in the Bible that can help us to have better lives. The more I read, the more interested I became.

When I was 20, I visited an area where most people knew nothing about the Bible. I was invited to speak to groups in various homes. I showed them my little Bible and shared what I had learned from it. As word spread, I was invited to speak in many other homes as well.

While sharing, I noticed that the young people—those in their mid-teens—were especially interested.

They were so eager to learn that I wrote out 1,000 Bible texts and gave them to the young people, who memorized the texts. I found this was an excellent way for them to learn the Bible!

The Call *to* Discipleship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 5:1–11, 6:12–16, 9:1–6, Matt. 10:5–15, Luke 10:1–24, Luke 9:23–25, Matt. 16:24–28.*

Memory Text: “Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’” (*Luke 9:23, NKJV*).

Disciple” means a follower, or a pupil. The word *disciple* occurs more than two hundred fifty times in the Bible, mostly but not exclusively in the Gospels and Acts.

Being a disciple energizes the spirit, challenges the mind, and demands our utmost in our relationship with God and our fellow humans. Without total allegiance to Christ and the demands of His life and message, there can be no discipleship. What higher calling could one have?

“God takes men as they are, and educates them for His service, if they will yield themselves to Him. The Spirit of God, received into the soul, will quicken all its faculties. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the mind that is devoted unreservedly to God develops harmoniously, and is strengthened to comprehend and fulfill the requirements of God. The weak, vacillating character becomes changed to one of strength and steadfastness. Continual devotion establishes so close a relation between Jesus and His disciple that the Christian becomes like Him in mind and character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 251.

This week we'll look at how Jesus called those who were to follow Him and see what lesson we can learn that can help us in our continuation of the work that He had started on earth.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 25.

Fishers of Men

Simon and Andrew had toiled all night. Seasoned fishermen, they knew the art of fishing, and they knew when to quit. Nightlong work yielded nothing. In the midst of their disappointment came an unsolicited command: “ ‘Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch’ ” (*Luke 5:4, NKJV*). Simon’s response was one of hopelessness and anguish: “ ‘We have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word . . .’ ” (*vs. 5, NKJV*).

Who is this carpenter counseling a fisherman about fishing? Simon could have turned away, but is it possible that Jesus’ comforting and authentic preaching earlier had some effect? Hence, the response: “ ‘nevertheless at Your word.’ ”

Thus, the first lesson of discipleship: obedience to Christ’s Word. Andrew, John, and James also soon learned that the long and fruitless night had given way to a bright and astonishing dawn, with a multitude of fish caught. At once, Peter fell to his knees and cried out: “ ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man’ ” (*vs. 8, NKJV*). Recognition of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of oneself is another essential step in the call to discipleship. As Isaiah had (*Isa. 6:5*), Peter had taken that step.

Read *Luke 5:1–11, Matthew 4:18–22, and Mark 1:16–20. Consider the miracle, the astonishment of the fishermen, the confession of Peter, and the authority of Jesus. What does each one of these accounts say about the path of discipleship?*

“ ‘Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men’ ” (*Luke 5:10, NKJV*). The transition from being fishermen to becoming fishers of men is extraordinary: it requires absolute self-surrender to the Master, recognition of one’s inability and sinfulness, a reaching out to Christ in faith for the strength to walk the lonely and unknown path of discipleship, and continual reliance on Christ and Him alone. The life of a fisherman is uncertain and dangerous, battling ruthless waves, unsure of a steady income. The life of a fisher of men is no less so, but the Lord promises, “Fear not.” Discipleship is not an easy road; it has its ups and downs, its joys and challenges, but a disciple is not called to walk alone. The One who said “Fear not” is by the side of the faithful disciple.

Go back and read again Peter’s confession about being a sinful man. Notice how his sinfulness prompted him to want to be separated from Jesus. What is it about sin that does that to us, that pushes us away from God?

Selection of the Twelve

Discipleship is not self-made. It is a result of responding to the call of Jesus. Luke mentions that Jesus has already called Peter, Andrew, John, and James (*Luke 5:11*) and Levi Matthew, the tax collector (*vss. 27–32*). Now the writer places the selection of the Twelve in a strategic location in his narrative: immediately after the Sabbath healing of a man with a withered hand (*Luke 6:6–11*), which led the Pharisees to plot the murder of Jesus. The Lord knew that it was time to consolidate His work and prepare a team of workers whom He could train and prepare for the task beyond the cross.

Read *Luke 6:12–16, 9:1–6*. What do these verses tell us about the calling of the twelve apostles?

Among the multitudes that followed Him, there were many disciples—ones who followed Him as students would follow a teacher. But Christ’s task is more than that of teaching. His is to build a community of the redeemed, a church that will take His saving message to the ends of the earth. For that purpose, He needs more than disciples. “From them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles” (*Luke 6:13, NKJV*). *Apostle* means someone sent with a special message for a special purpose. Luke uses the word six times in the Gospel and more than twenty-five times in Acts (Matthew and Mark use it only once each).

The Twelve were chosen not because of their education, economic background, social prominence, moral eminence, or anything that marked them as worthy of selection. They were ordinary men from ordinary backgrounds: fishermen, a tax collector, a Zealot, a doubter, and one who turned out to be a traitor. They were called for one purpose only: to be ambassadors of the King and His kingdom.

“God takes men as they are, with the human elements in their character, and trains them for His service, if they will be disciplined and learn of Him. They are not chosen because they are perfect, but notwithstanding their imperfections, that through the knowledge and practice of the truth, through the grace of Christ, they may become transformed into His image.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 294.

Let’s face it: we’re not perfect, nor are others in the church perfect. We all are in a process of growing (even if others seem to grow more slowly than we would like them to!). How, in the meantime, do we learn to work with others and accept them as they are?

Commissioning of the Apostles

Read Luke 9:1–6 and Matthew 10:5–15. What spiritual truths can we learn from the verses about how Jesus called these men?

Luke describes the commissioning of the apostles as a three-step process.

First, Jesus called them together (*Luke 9:1*). The word *call* or *calling* is as vital to Christian mission as it is to Christian vocabulary. Before it can become a theological term, it must become a personal experience. The apostles must heed the One who calls, come to Him, and be “together.” Both the obedience to Him who calls and the surrender of everything to Him are essential to experience the unity that is vital for the mission to succeed.

Second, Jesus “gave them power and authority” (*vs. 1, NKJV*). Jesus never sends His emissaries empty-handed. Nor does He expect us to be His representatives in our own strength. Our education, culture, status, wealth, or intelligence are powerless to accomplish His mission. It is Christ who enables, equips, and empowers. The Greek word for “power” is *dynamis*, from which we derive “dynamo,” a source of light, and “dynamite,” a source of energy that can plow through a mountain. The power and authority that Jesus gives are sufficient to crush the devil and defeat his purposes. Jesus is our power. “As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 333.

Third, Jesus “sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (*vs. 2, NKJV*). Preaching and healing go together, and the mission of the disciples is to care for the whole person—body, mind, and soul. Sin and Satan have captured the whole person, and the whole person must be brought under the sanctifying power of Jesus.

The life of discipleship can be maintained only when that life is totally given to Christ, with nothing coming in between. Neither gold nor silver, neither father nor mother, neither spouse nor child, neither life nor death, neither the contingencies of today nor the emergencies of tomorrow shall come between the disciple and Christ. Christ, His kingdom, and the witness to a lost world alone matter.

“**‘Take nothing for the journey’**” (*vs. 3, NKJV*). **What principle is expressed here that’s important for us to understand and to experience for ourselves?**

Sending the Seventy

Read Luke 10:1–24. What does this account, of the sending out of the 70, teach us about the work of soul winning amid the reality of the great controversy?

During His ministry, more than the Twelve followed Jesus. When Peter addressed the believers leading to the selection of a substitute for Judas, the group consisted of at least one hundred twenty believers (*Acts 1:15*). Paul tells us that Jesus had at least five hundred followers at His ascension (*1 Cor. 15:6*). So, the sending of the 70 does not limit the number of followers that Jesus had but only suggests His choice of a special group on a limited mission to go before Him into the towns of Galilee and prepare the way for His subsequent visits.

Only the Gospel of Luke records the account of the 70, very typical of the missionary-minded Luke. The number 70 is symbolic in Scripture, as well as in Jewish history. Genesis 10 lists 70 nations of the world as descendants of Noah, and Luke was a writer with a universal worldview. Moses appointed 70 elders to assist him in his work (*Num. 11:16, 17, 24, 25*). The Sanhedrin was made up of 70 members. Whether all these have any significance in Jesus' calling of the 70 is not mentioned in Scripture and need not detain us in speculation. But what is important is that Jesus, as a trainer of leaders for the church, has left a strategy not to concentrate power and responsibility in a few but to spread it across the spectrum of disciples.

Joy and fulfillment marked the return of the 70. They reported to Jesus: “ ‘Even the demons are subject to us in Your name’ ” (*Luke 10:17, NKJV*). Success in soul winning is never the work of the evangelist. The evangelist is only a medium. The success comes through “Your name.” The name and power of Jesus are at the heart of every successful gospel mission.

But note three remarkable reactions of Jesus to the success of the mission of the 70. First, in the success of evangelism, Jesus sees a defeat of Satan (*vs. 18*). Second, the more involved one is in gospel work, the more authority is promised (*vs. 19*). Third, the evangelist's joy should be not in what has been accomplished on earth but because his or her name is written in heaven (*vs. 20*). Heaven rejoices and takes note of every person won from the clutches of Satan. Every soul won to the kingdom is a blow to Satan's schemes.

Read again Luke 10:24. What are some of the things that we have seen that prophets and kings wanted to see but didn't? What should that mean to us?

The Cost of Discipleship

Socrates had Plato. Gamaliel had Saul. Leaders of various religions had their devout followers. The difference between discipleship in such cases and the discipleship of Jesus is that the former is based on the content of human philosophy, whereas the latter is rooted in the person and accomplishment of Jesus Himself. Thus, Christian discipleship rests not just on Christ's teachings but also on what He did for human salvation. Hence, Jesus bids all His followers to fully identify themselves with Him, to take up their cross, and to follow His leadings. Without people walking in the footprints of Calvary, there is no Christian discipleship.

Read Luke 9:23–25, Matthew 16:24–28, and Mark 8:34–36. What is the crucial message here for anyone who claims to be a Christian?

Christian discipleship is an operative link between the saved and the Savior; as the saved, we are to follow the Savior. Thus Paul could say, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (*Gal. 2:20, NIV*).

The cost of discipleship is defined in Luke 9:23: “‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me’” (*Luke 9:23, NKJV*). Note these operative words: “deny,” “take up,” and “follow.” When we read that Peter denied Jesus, we could not have a better definition of “deny.” Peter was saying, “I do not know Jesus.” So, when the call to discipleship demands that I deny myself, I must be able to say I do not know me; self is dead. In its stead, Christ must live (*Gal. 2:20*). Second, to take up the cross daily is a call to experience self-crucifixion on a continual basis. Third, to follow demands that the focus and direction of life is Christ and Him alone.

Jesus expands the cost of discipleship even further, as revealed in Luke 9:57–62: nothing takes precedence over Jesus. He, and He alone, stands supreme in friendship and fellowship, work and worship. In Christian discipleship, death to self is not an option; it is a necessity. “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. . . . It is the same death every time—death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call. . . . Only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ.” —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1965), p. 99.

What has following Christ cost you? Think hard about your answer and the implications of it.

Further Study: “Lifting the cross cuts away self from the soul, and places man where he learns how to bear Christ’s burdens. We cannot follow Christ without wearing His yoke, without lifting the cross and bearing it after Him. If our will is not in accord with the divine requirements, we are to deny our inclinations, give up our darling desires, and step in Christ’s footsteps.”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 69.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Go back and look at the question at the end of Wednesday’s study, in regard to Luke 10:24. What are some of the things that we, living in this day and age, have been privy to witness that “many prophets and kings” would have liked to see but didn’t? What about, for example, the fulfillment of prophecies? Think about how much of Daniel 2, 7, and 8 were still in the future for many of those prophets and kings but are now historical facts for us. What else can you think of?
- 2** Dwell more on the words of Jesus about one gaining the whole world but losing one’s soul. What does He mean by that? Or what about losing one’s life in order to save it? What does that mean? It’s one thing for a nonbeliever to cling selfishly to the things of this world. Why not, because that’s all they believe that they have? What else would they cling to? But why, even as believers in Jesus, those who know that this world will end and a new one will one day start, do we find ourselves so readily seeking to gain as much of this world as we can? How can we protect ourselves from this very dangerous spiritual trap?
- 3** Read Luke 10:17–20. One can understand the excitement of these people as they saw that even demons were subject to them in Christ’s name. Look at Jesus’ response to them. What was He saying that’s so important for anyone involved in outreach to understand?
- 4** Who are some people, besides Bible characters, whose choice to follow Christ has cost them a lot, perhaps more than most of us? In class, ask yourselves, “What did these people lose, what did following Christ cost them, and would I be willing to do the same?”

“I’ve Been Waiting for a While”

A PASTOR, CHINA

Since the 1990s, we have had some religious freedom and now have a few church buildings. One Seventh-day Adventist church is located near a large factory of an import-export business. The business owner is a friend of an Adventist church member, and the two women often talk together. One day the subject of faith came up, and the Adventist shared her belief in God, the Bible, and what it means to be a Seventh-day Adventist.

The businesswoman was impressed and told her friend, “You have a good church. Your doctrines can really help people. Would you be willing to talk to my employees?” The Adventist considered the invitation but felt intimidated. *All of the employees are nonbelievers, even atheists*, she thought.

After some time, her friend brought it up again. “Hey, I’ve been waiting for a while. Why didn’t you send someone?” The church member realized that this was an opportunity, and she let the Adventist pastor know.

When he arrived at the factory, the owner invited the department heads to a meeting. The pastor spoke about Jesus and His teachings. “This is a good message and can help our employees have better, more positive lives,” the department heads told him. “Why don’t you come and speak to our employees?”

A date was arranged, and the pastor returned. About sixty employees came to the voluntary meeting, and the presentation was well received. The pastor accepted the invitation to give presentations to the employees every two weeks. After six presentations, the pastor invited the employees to accept Jesus as their Savior, and 30 responded with a Yes.

At Christmastime, the Adventist church organized a big event for all 200 employees of the factory. The factory owner also invited other nearby companies to join them. When the other business owners came, they told the woman that they noticed her employees had changed. “After your employees believed in God, they seem very nice. We also want to encourage our employees to do the same.” Now the Adventist pastor is meeting with the employees every Sunday evening. Additionally, the businesswoman owns other factories and plans to start a similar program at the other locations.

Following the Christmas event, the businesswoman came to the Adventist church and attended the Communion service. Her friend warmly welcomed her and encouraged her to continue coming. She plans to be baptized soon, along with 30 of her employees.

Christ as the Lord of the Sabbath



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 1:21, 6:2; Luke 4:17–19, 31–37; 2 Cor. 5:17; Luke 6:1–11; 13:10–16.*

Memory Text: “‘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*).

Although Luke wrote his Gospel primarily for the Gentiles, it is significant how frequently he refers to the Sabbath. Of the 54 times the Gospels and Acts refer to Sabbath, 17 are in Luke and 9 in Acts; there are 9 in Matthew, and 10 in Mark and 9 in John. As a Gentile convert, Luke certainly believed in the seventh-day Sabbath for Jews, as well as Gentiles. The first coming of Christ made no difference concerning the keeping of the Sabbath.

Indeed, “Christ, during His earthly ministry, emphasized the binding claims of the Sabbath; in all His teaching He showed reverence for the institution He Himself had given. In His day, the Sabbath had become so perverted that its observance reflected the character of selfish and arbitrary men rather than the character of God. Christ set aside the false teaching by which those who claimed to know God had misrepresented Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 183.

This week's lesson turns to Jesus as the Lord of the Sabbath: how He observed it and how He set an example for us to follow. The practice of observing the first day of the week as Sabbath has no sanction either in Christ or in the New Testament.

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

“As His Custom Was”

“As His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day” (*Luke 4:16, NKJV*). This is a good Seventh-day Adventist text. Most of us use it in evangelistic meetings or in Bible studies in order to emphasize the point that it was the practice of Jesus to keep the Sabbath.

Synagogues played a crucial role in Jewish religious life. During the exile, when the temple no longer existed, synagogues were built for worship and for the schooling of young children. A synagogue could be built wherever there were at least ten Jewish families. Growing up in Nazareth, Jesus followed the “custom” of going to the synagogue each Sabbath, and now on His first journey to His hometown, the Sabbath finds Him in the synagogue.

Read Mark 1:21, 6:2, Luke 4:16–30, 6:6–11, 13:10–16, 14:1–5. What do these texts teach us about Jesus and the Sabbath? As you read them, ask yourself where, if anywhere, you can find indications that Jesus was either abolishing our obligation to keep the Sabbath or pointing to another day to replace it?

“As His custom was” (*Luke 4:16, NKJV*). Only Luke uses this phrase: in Luke 4:16, as Jesus attended the synagogue in Nazareth; and in Luke 22:39, as the cross drew near, Jesus “went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives” (*RSV*). Both times the “custom” had to do with worship and prayer.

Why should we make it our custom to go to church on Sabbath, as Jesus went to the synagogue on Sabbath?

First, God is everywhere. He may be worshiped anywhere, but there’s something special about getting together in a common place on the day designated at Creation and commanded in His moral law.

Second, it provides a public opportunity to affirm that God is our Creator and Redeemer.

Finally, it gives an opportunity for fellowship and sharing one another’s joys and concerns.

Those who accuse us of legalism or of being in bondage because we keep the Sabbath have obviously missed out on the great blessing that the Sabbath can bring. In what ways have you experienced just how liberating Sabbath keeping can be?

Sabbath: Its Message and Meaning

“When He had opened the book” (*Luke 4:17, NKJV*). The Sabbath was not only for going to church in order to worship but also to hear God’s Word. A life without His Word is not far from the trap of sin: “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (*Ps. 119:11, NKJV*).

Read **Luke 4:17–19.** Today, looking back upon what we know about Jesus, about who He was, and what He has accomplished for us, how do we understand the meaning of these words? How have you experienced the reality of His Messianic claims in your own walk with the Lord?

After reading from Isaiah 61:1, 2, Jesus said, “ ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’ ” (*Luke 4:21, NKJV*). The word *today* deserves note. The Jews expected the kingdom of God to come at some time in the future in a dramatic, militaristic way, uprooting an alien regime from Judea, and ushering in the Davidic throne. But Jesus was saying that the kingdom had already come in His person and that He would break the power of sin, crush the devil, and free the oppressed captives of his domain.

Think, too, about how closely tied the Sabbath is with His Messianic claims. The Sabbath is a day of rest, rest in Christ (*Heb. 4:1–4*); the Sabbath is a symbol of freedom, of liberation, the freedom and liberation we have in Christ (*Rom. 6:6, 7*); the Sabbath reveals not only God’s creation but the promise of re-creation in Christ, as well (*2 Cor. 5:17, 1 Cor. 15:51–53*). It’s no coincidence, either, that Jesus chose the Sabbath day to do many of His healings, to free those who had been oppressed and imprisoned by sickness.

The Sabbath day is a weekly reminder, etched in something more immutable than stone (time!), of what we have been given in Jesus.

How has Sabbath keeping helped you to understand better salvation by faith alone, in that we can rest in what Christ has done for us, as opposed to seeking to earn our way to heaven?

Sabbath Healings at Capernaum

Rejection at Nazareth sent Jesus back to Capernaum, where He had already ministered before (*Matt. 4:13*). This important city became the base for Jesus' Galilean ministry. In this city was a synagogue, possibly built by a Roman officer (*Luke 7:5*), and Jesus, as per His custom, went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day.

On this single Sabbath, Jesus' ministry covered a wide range of activities—teaching, healing, preaching. Nothing is said as to what Jesus preached, but the reaction of the people was one of astonishment, “for His word was with authority” (*Luke 4:32, NKJV*). His teaching stood in contrast to that of the rabbis. No simple palliatives. Here was preaching with authority, rooted in the Scriptures, delivered with the power of the Holy Spirit, calling sin by its right name, and urging repentance.

Read Luke 4:31–37. What powerful truths are revealed in these verses about (1) the great controversy, (2) the reality of demons, (3) the purpose of the Sabbath, and (4) the power of God over evil? What else can you find there?

In Luke 4:31–41, we have the first of many healings on the Sabbath that Luke records (*see Luke 4:38, 39; 6:6–11; 13:10–16; 14:1–16*). In the Nazareth sermon, Jesus announced that it was His mission to relieve, to heal, and to restore those who are brokenhearted and oppressed. Here in Capernaum, on a Sabbath day, when the synagogue was full of worshipers, a demon-possessed man confronted Jesus with a confession: “‘Let us alone! . . . You, Jesus of Nazareth. . . . I know who You are—the Holy One of God!’” (*Luke 4:34, NKJV*). The demon, being one of the satanic host, and as such a supernatural being, was quick to recognize the Incarnate Savior. In this account, the veil between the seen and unseen world has been pulled aside.

Think of how openly the great controversy was manifested here. Often it's not that obvious. How, though, are you seeing it played out in your own life? What is your only hope of victory in this battle? See also 1 Cor. 15:2.

The Lord of the Sabbath

Luke 6:1–11 provides two accounts of Jesus dealing with the Pharisees over the Sabbath.

Read the first story in Luke 6:1–5. How did Jesus face the accusation that He and His disciples did not care for the Law and the Sabbath?

While walking through a field, the disciples plucked the heads of grain, rubbed them in their palms, and ate them. But the Pharisees twisted the fact to charge the disciples with breaking the Sabbath commandment. Jesus sets the story straight and refers the Pharisees to David, who, when he was hungry, entered the House of God and he and his men ate the shewbread, which only the priests were allowed to eat. By doing this, Jesus was pointing out how the Pharisees, through a long history of legalism, have heaped rule upon rule, tradition upon tradition, and turned the Sabbath from the joy it was supposed to be into a burden instead.

Read the second story in Luke 6:6–11. What lessons about the Sabbath are seen here as well?

Although all the synoptic Gospels narrate this story, only Luke tells us that the hand that was withered was the man's right hand. Dr. Luke's additional detail helps us to understand the serious impact this physical deficiency must have had on the man's ability to carry on a normal life. The occasion stirred two responses: first, the Pharisees waited to charge Jesus with Sabbath breaking in the event He chose to heal the man. Second, Jesus read their hearts and proceeded to show that He is the Lord of the Sabbath, the One who created the Sabbath, and that He will not fail in His mission to deliver the broken man from the bondage of the sin-sick world. Thus, He placed Sabbath keeping in its divine perspective: it is lawful on the Sabbath day to do good and to save life (*Luke 6:9–11*).

Think how blinded these leaders were by their own rules and regulations, which they thought were God's. How can we make sure that we don't fall into the same trap of allowing traditions and human teachings to blind us to deeper divine truths?

The Sabbath: The Sick Versus the Ox and the Donkey

Of the three synoptic Gospels, only Luke records these two Sabbath healings of Jesus (*Luke 13:10–16, 14:1–15*). The first caused the ruler of the synagogue to be indignant with Jesus; the second put the Pharisees to silence. In either case, the enemies of Jesus were using their misinterpretation of the Law to accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath.

Read Luke 13:10–16 and 14:1–6. What important truths are revealed here about how easy it is to pervert crucial biblical truths?

Consider the crippled woman. She belonged to a gender that was looked down upon by the Pharisees; she was crippled for 18 years, long enough to test anyone’s patience and to multiply in her a sense of life’s meaninglessness; and, finally, she was totally unable to free herself.

To her comes divine grace personified. Jesus *sees* her, *calls* her to come near Him, *speaks* to her in order that she may be healed, *lays* His hands on her, and “immediately she was made straight” (*Luke 13:13, NKJV*). Eighteen-year-old agony suddenly gives way to a moment of undiluted joy, and she “*glorified* God” (*vs. 13*). Each verb that Luke used is Inspiration’s way of recognizing the worth and dignity of the woman and, indeed, the worth and dignity of every despised individual, regardless of that person’s situation.

In the second miracle (*Luke 14:1–6*), Jesus—on His way to a Pharisee’s home for a meal on the Sabbath—heals a man who suffered from dropsy. Anticipating the objections from the leaders who were watching Him closely, Jesus raised two questions: first, on the purpose of the law (“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” *[vs. 3]*); second, on the worth of a human being (“Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?” *[vs. 5, NKJV]*). His point should have been obvious; in fact, it was, because according to Luke they had no answer to what He had said. Jesus revealed their hypocrisy, the worst kind because it came under a veil of supposed holiness and righteous indignation over what they perceived to be an egregious violation of God’s holy law.

How careful we need to be.

Further Study: “God could not for a moment stay His hand, or man would faint and die. And man also has a work to perform on this [the Sabbath] day. The necessities of life must be attended to, the sick must be cared for, the wants of the needy must be supplied. He will not be held guiltless who neglects to relieve suffering on the Sabbath. God’s holy rest day was made for man, and acts of mercy are in perfect harmony with its intent. God does not desire His creatures to suffer an hour’s pain that may be relieved upon the Sabbath or any other day.” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 207.

“No other institution which was committed to the Jews tended so fully to distinguish them from surrounding nations as did the Sabbath. God designed that its observance should designate them as His worshippers. It was to be a token of their separation from idolatry, and their connection with the true God. But in order to keep the Sabbath holy, men must themselves be holy. Through faith they must become partakers of the righteousness of Christ.” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 283.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Isn’t it amazing just how clear the Bible is about Jesus and the Sabbath? And yet, millions of churchgoers around the world still insist that the seventh-day Sabbath is no longer binding or that it doesn’t matter or that keeping it is tantamount to legalism. What should this tell us about why unwavering fealty and obedience to the Word of God are so important? On something as foundational as God’s holy law, the masses are so deceived. What crucial warning does Jesus give us in Mark 13:22?
- ② Look at how Satan has worked so hard to destroy the Sabbath: either he used the leaders in Israel to turn it into a heavy burden, all but denuding it of so much of what it was supposed to mean and be; or he used, and still uses, leaders in the church to dismiss it as antiquated, legalistic, or a mere Jewish tradition. What is it about the Sabbath, and what it entails, that would make it such a target of Satan’s enmity?
- ③ Jesus is the “‘Lord of the Sabbath’ ” (*Luke 6:5, NKJV*). What implications does this statement have for Christians and their attitude toward the Sabbath?

Guided and Transformed

HELIO, JAPAN

My father, a Japanese emigrant to Brazil, was a Buddhist. My mother, who was of Japanese descent, was raised a Roman Catholic. Our home was an interesting mixture of Catholicism with Buddhism.

When I was 14, my father died of tuberculosis. He longed to be healed, and perhaps that was why he didn't reject having a Christian religion in the house. He prayed every day.

My father had a small watchmaking business, and after his death, I had to take over. It was difficult to accept his death and suddenly become the breadwinner. During that time, I started reading the Bible and read a passage that stayed with me: " 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' " (*John 14:6, NIV*).

Life was difficult; at the age of 26, I went to Japan to get a better perspective, but things only got worse. I was having terrible back pain and spent much money trying to find relief, but nothing helped. To make matters worse, my three-year marriage fell apart.

My life lost direction until a Seventh-day Adventist, Silvio, began working at the factory where I worked. What caught my attention about this man was his composure and good humor in all circumstances, although every day he suffered from severe pain due to an accident years ago. I knew about pain, so I really admired Silvio.

At that time, I was a member of a Japanese spiritualist sect called Mahikari. We believed in two gods—the god of the universe and the god of the earth. Every time I bowed down to these gods, I remembered John 14:6 and wondered where Jesus Christ was.

Some months after Silvio started working at the factory, he invited me to his church. We became good friends, and during our lunch hour, Silvio told me about Jesus and how He could change my life. But it was because of Silvio's personal testimony that I wanted to know about the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

I began attending church with Silvio in the city of Hamamatsu and took Bible studies with the pastor. Before long, I was baptized.

It has been ten years since then, and I'm a literature evangelist with the Japan Union. I also lead out in a newly formed Adventist church in the city of Yaizu. I am married to a Japanese Seventh-day Adventist nurse, and we have a two-year-old child.

I praise the Lord for how He has guided and transformed my life.

Women *in the* Ministry of Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 1:39–55; 2:36–38; 7:11–17, 36–50; Rom. 10:17; Luke 8:1–3; 18:1–8.*

Memory Text: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. . . . There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (*Galatians 3:26–28, NKJV*).

Luke’s Gospel is sometimes called “the Gospel of Women” because, more than any other one, it makes special mention of how caring Jesus was to the needs of women and also of how involved women were in His ministry.

In the time of Jesus, as in some cultures today, women were deemed of little worth. Some Jewish men in that time thanked God that they were not created a slave, a Gentile, or a woman. Greek and Roman society sometimes treated women even worse. Roman culture developed its permissiveness to an almost unlimited licentiousness. A man often had a wife only in order to produce legitimate children who would inherit his property, and he had concubines for his own sinful pleasures.

Against such a backdrop of women being treated so badly, Jesus brought the good news that women are, indeed, daughters of Abraham (*see Luke 13:16*). How happy the women of those days must have been to hear that, in Jesus, they are children of God and of equal worth with men in the sight of God. The message today for women of all nations remains the same: we are all, men and women, one in Christ Jesus.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 9.

Women Who Welcomed Jesus' Advent

Only Luke records the reaction of these women to the wonder of cosmic history: that the Son of God took human flesh in order to complete the redemptive mission of the Father and to fulfill the Messianic hopes of His people. Though these women didn't fully understand what was happening, their words and reactions to these astonishing events revealed their faith and wonder at the works of God.

Read Luke 1:39–45, the encounter between Elizabeth and Mary. What does Elizabeth say that reveals her understanding, however limited, of the great events that were taking place?

After Elizabeth spoke, Mary then followed with her own words (*Luke 1:46–55*). Often understood to be a song, these words are full of fragments from the Old Testament, attesting that Mary was a devoted student of Scripture and thus a fit mother for Jesus. Mary's song is rooted not only in Scripture but deep down in her relationship with God. An identity emerges between her soul and her Lord, and between her faith and Abraham's hope.

Read Luke 2:36–38. What important truths are brought to light in the story of Anna in the temple?

Expectant hope finds its radical fulfillment in Jesus. An old widow recognizes the miracle, and from then on she made it her compulsive mission to proclaim the Savior to all those who came to the temple. She became the first woman evangelist of the gospel.

Try to imagine the wonder and astonishment of these women at the events unfolding around them. What can we do to help keep alive in our own hearts the wonder and astonishment of the great truths that we have been called to proclaim?

Women and Jesus' Healing Ministry

Read Luke 7:11–17, the story about the miracle at Nain. This woman, impoverished and widowed, now faced another trial, the death of her only son. A large crowd of mourners was with her in the funeral procession, expressing public grief and sympathy. The loss of her only son coupled with the uncertain future of life alone turned the widow into a picture of absolute sorrow and hopelessness.

But the funeral procession going out of the city met with another procession entering into it. At the head of the outgoing procession was death in a casket; at the head of the incoming procession was life in the majesty of the Creator. As the processions met, Jesus saw the widow, hopeless and full of grief. “When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, ‘Don’t cry’ ” (*Luke 7:13, NIV*). The plea not to cry would have been meaningless had it not come from Jesus, the Lord of life. For behind the command “Don’t cry!” was the power to remove the reason for her crying: Jesus reached forward, touched the coffin, and ordered the young man to arise. The touch was considered a ceremonial defilement (*Num. 19:11–13*), but to Jesus, compassion was more important than ceremonies. Meeting human needs was more urgent than adhering to mere rituals.

The village of Nain not only witnessed a great miracle but also received a marvelous message: in Jesus there is no difference between the emotional pangs of men and those of women. And His presence confronts and confounds the power of death.

Read also Luke 8:41, 42, 49–56. Jairus was an influential person—a ruler of the synagogue, an officer in charge of the care and services of the synagogue. Each Sabbath he would choose the person who would lead in prayer, Scripture reading, and preaching. He was a person not only of eminence and influence but also of wealth and power. He loved his daughter and did not hesitate to approach Jesus for the healing of his child.

In these stories, it was the power of Jesus' words that brought a dead son back to his mother and a dead daughter back to her father. Think about how incredible these acts must have been to those who saw them, especially to the parents. What do these accounts tell us about the power of God? What do they tell us about just how limited we are in understanding that power? (After all, science at present doesn't have a clue about how this could happen.) Most important, though, what must we do in order to learn to trust in this power and the goodness of the God who wields it, regardless of our present circumstances?

Women of Gratitude and Faith

In Luke 7:36–50, Jesus turned a meal into an event of spiritual magnitude that offered dignity to a sinful woman. Simon, a leading citizen, a Pharisee, invited Jesus for a meal. Invitees seated, there was a sudden disruption: “a woman in the city who was a sinner” (*vs. 37, NKJV*) rushed straight to Jesus, broke an alabaster box of very expensive perfume, poured the ointment on Him, bowed down to His feet, and washed them with her tears.

What lessons can we learn from the woman’s outpouring of gratitude and Jesus’ acceptance of her act of faith?

“When to human eyes her case appeared hopeless, Christ saw in Mary capabilities for good. He saw the better traits of her character. The plan of redemption has invested humanity with great possibilities, and in Mary these possibilities were to be realized. Through His grace she became a partaker of the divine nature. . . . Mary was first at the tomb after His resurrection. It was Mary who first proclaimed a risen Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 568.

In Luke 8:43–48, a case of supreme wretchedness becomes the object of the Savior’s supreme regard. For so long, this woman had an incurable disease that ravaged her body and soul. Yet, in this 12-year tragedy, a flicker of hope suddenly burst on the scene: “She heard about Jesus” (*Mark 5:27, NKJV*).

What did she hear? A little or a lot, we do not know. But she knew that Jesus cared for the poor; He embraced social outcasts; He touched lepers; He turned water into wine; and above all, He cared for desperate people, of which she was one. But hearing was not enough; hearing must lead to faith (*Rom. 10:17*). And that faith led her to a simple act of touching the edge of His garment. That touch was faith-driven, purposeful, efficacious, and Christ-focused. Only such a faith can receive the benediction of the Life-Giver: “‘your faith has made you well’ ” (*Luke 8:48, NKJV*).

It’s so easy to look at people and judge them, isn’t it? Even if we often don’t verbalize it, in our hearts we judge them, which is still so wrong. How can we learn to stop judging others, even in our thoughts, when who knows what we’d do were we in their situations?

Some Women Who Followed Jesus

Read Luke 10:38–42. What important spiritual truths can we take from this story (see also Luke 8:14) for ourselves?

As the hostess, Martha “was distracted with much serving” (Luke 10:40, *NKJV*) and was busy in getting the best for the guests. But Mary “sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word” (vs. 39, *NKJV*). So much so that Martha complained to Jesus that she alone was left to do the hard work. While Jesus did not rebuke Martha for her preoccupation with service, He pointed out the need for right priorities in life. Fellowship with Jesus is the first essential in discipleship; potluck can come later.

“The cause of Christ needs careful, energetic workers. There is a wide field for the Marthas, with their zeal in active religious work. But let them first sit with Mary at the feet of Jesus. Let diligence, promptness, and energy be sanctified by the grace of Christ; then the life will be an unconquerable power for good.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 525.

Read Luke 8:1–3; 23:55, 56; 24:1–12. What do these verses teach about the role of women in Christ’s ministry?

As His ministry expanded, Jesus “went through every city and village, preaching” and teaching (Luke 8:1, *NKJV*), with the 12 disciples accompanying Him. Luke also records the powerful testimonies of certain women whom Jesus had healed, who were touched by His preaching, and who were of wealth, also followed Him in His enlarged ministry. Here are some whom Luke mentions: (1) certain women healed of evil spirits, including Mary Magdalene; (2) Joanna, wife of Chuza, business manager of Herod; (3) Susanna; and (4) “many others who provided for Him” (vs. 3, *NKJV*).

When we understand that Jesus died for every human being, we can better grasp the true equality of every person before God. How well do we reflect this truth in our attitude toward others? That is, how can you root out, if necessary, any attitude in which you might tend to look down upon others as somehow less worthy than yourself?

Persistent in Prayer, Sacrificial in Giving

Luke shows how Jesus turned to two widows in order to teach important spiritual truths.

In the first case (*Luke 18:1–8*), Jesus pitied a poor and powerless widow who was up against a wicked and powerful judge in her fight for justice. She was a victim of injustice and fraud, and yet she believed in the rule of the law and in justice. But the judge was anti-God and anti-people, and so he obviously did not care to help the widow. Caring for widows is a biblical requirement (*Exod. 22:22–24, Ps. 68:5, Isa. 1:17*), but the judge took delight in ignoring the law. However, the widow had one weapon, perseverance, and with it she wore out the judge and got her justice.

The parable teaches three important lessons: (1) always pray and never get discouraged (*Luke 18:1*), (2) prayer changes things—even the heart of an evil judge, and (3) persistent faith is a conquering faith. True faith has eternal counsel to every Christian: never give up, even if that means waiting for the final vindication when the “ ‘Son of Man comes’ ” (*vs. 8, NKJV*).

In the second case (*Luke 21:1–4, Mark 12:41–44*), no sooner had Jesus finished denouncing the religious hypocrisy and pretension of the scribes and the leaders around the temple than He pointed out a stark contrast to them: a poor widow who reveals the nature of genuine religion.

Jesus described some of the religious leaders as those who “ ‘devour widows’ houses’ ” (*Luke 20:47, NKJV*) and who violate the biblical mandate to care for the widows and the poor. As today, many gave only in order to look pious; and worse, what they gave, they gave out of their own surplus wealth. Their giving really involved no personal sacrifice. In contrast, Jesus asked His disciples to look to the widow as the model of true religion, for she gave all that she had.

Show was the motive of the first group; sacrifice and the glory of God was the motive of the widow. To acknowledge God’s ownership of all that she had and to serve Him with all she had was the force that propelled the widow to give her two mites. What counts before the all-seeing eyes of the Creator is not what we give but why we give; not how much we give but the measure of our sacrifice.

How much do you sacrifice of yourself for the good of others and for the cause of God?

Further Study: He “who remembered His mother when He was hanging in agony upon the cross; who appeared to the weeping women and made them His messengers to spread the first glad tidings of a risen Saviour—He is woman’s best friend today and is ready to aid her in all the relations of life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 204.

“The Lord has a work for women as well as for men. They may take their places in His work at this crisis, and He will work through them. If they are imbued with a sense of their duty, and labor under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they will have just the self-possession required for this time. The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and will give them a power that exceeds that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, pp. 464, 465.

Discussion Questions:

❶ One of the most interesting aspects of the Gospels, including Luke, has to do with the role of women in regard to the resurrection of Jesus. All the Gospel stories have women as the first ones to see the risen Christ and to proclaim His resurrection to others. Biblical apologists have been able to use this fact to help affirm the reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus, which some people deny or question. Why is the role of women here so important? Because if, as some claim, the stories of Jesus’ resurrection were fabricated by the authors, why would they have put women, who weren’t highly regarded in that society, as the first ones to see and to proclaim Jesus? If they were making up stories in order to try to get people at that time to believe, why use women as opposed to men? Discuss.

❷ In a society that didn’t always recognize the dignity of women, Jesus recognized the status that belongs to them in God’s creative order as children of God. Women as well as men are made in God’s image and equal in His sight. At the same time, however equal before God, men and women are not the same. How can we affirm the equality of men and women before God and yet, at the same time, affirm and acknowledge the differences?

More Precious Than Money

RUTH, JAPAN

Ruth was born and raised in Ecuador without knowing God. She sensed that something was missing in her life and visited many churches, but none satisfied. Then she visited a Seventh-day Adventist church and found that “the people were kind, and the pastor treated people equally.”

Ruth received a DVD—*The Last Hope*, featuring presentations on Revelation by Pastor Luis Gonçalves. Not sure what it was about, Ruth set the DVD aside and forgot about it.

Sometime later Ruth and her husband moved to Japan, where they obtained work in manufacturing. Although successful at her job, Ruth still wasn’t satisfied. One day, she noticed an advertisement in a free newspaper, inviting people to the Seventh-day Adventist church. Remembering her friendly encounter in Ecuador, Ruth decided to visit. While there, she was delighted to meet Diana, the head elder’s wife, who was Brazilian. Diana offered to study the Bible with Ruth. When the two met for their first Bible study, Diana brought a DVD by Pastor Luis Gonçalves! Ruth realized that it was the same DVD she had received in Ecuador. Convinced that this was more than just a coincidence, Ruth watched the DVD. As she continued studying, Ruth was convicted that she had found the truth.

When she learned that the seventh day was God’s holy day, Ruth quickly decided to quit working on Sabbath. “Are you crazy?” her coworkers asked. “You get paid a higher rate on Saturdays. Why don’t you earn the money and give it to your church?”

“There’s something more precious than money,” Ruth replied. “Such as going to church each Sabbath and learning new things.”

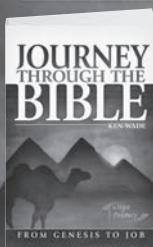
Soon Ruth was ready to make a full commitment and was baptized. When her coworkers realized that Ruth was serious about her newfound faith, they turned against her. “You’ve changed,” some told her. “I can’t work with you,” said another. But her supervisor still valued Ruth and allowed her to take every Saturday off.

“Many things have changed in my life,” Ruth explains. “The way I think, my habits, my relationships with people, everything. Before, I had a hard heart, but now I’m rich in emotion and can empathize with others.”

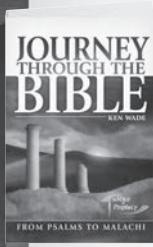
Ruth is one of the many South American immigrants in Japan. Members of the Seventh-day Adventist international church in Japan are actively seeking to reach others like Ruth. One of this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering projects is to help build an international evangelistic center in Japan. For more stories either in print or video, visit www.adventistmission.org. Did you know that you don’t have to wait for the end of the quarter to give to the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering projects? You can give any time on our secure Web site at giving.adventistmission.org.

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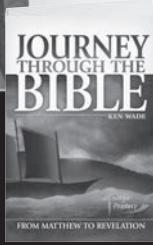
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PLANTING A CHURCH WITH PANCAKES

When Mrs. Shin's 13-year-old daughter, Bo Hwa, was lonely because there were no teens at church, Mrs. Shin knew what to do. Getting up before dawn, she handcrafted 2,000 *hotok* (Korean pancakes) and sold them every morning to hungry students near the local high school. As she befriended her young customers, the young people soon went to the Shins' home and learned about Jesus. Over the past 16 years, more than 400 young people have been baptized as a direct result of the Shins' ministry. Meeting in a makeshift building, the young members are delighted that their church plant has been chosen to receive part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Read more of the story in the youth and adult Mission magazine at www.adventistmission.org/resources. Please plan to give generously to this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.



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Jesus, *the* Holy Spirit, and Prayer



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Luke 2:25–32, John 16:5–7, Luke 23:46, Luke 11:1–4, Matt. 7:21–23, Luke 11:9–13.*

Memory Text: “ ‘So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened’ ” (*Luke 11:9, 10, NKJV*).

Of the three synoptic Gospels, Luke speaks more often than do the others about Jesus’ relationship to the Holy Spirit. While Matthew refers to the Spirit 12 times and Mark does so 6 times, Luke has 17 references in his Gospel and 57 in the book of Acts. From the conception of Jesus into humanity (*Luke 1:35*) to the directive establishing His global mission (*Luke 24:44–49*), Luke sees an operational link between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The link is basic to understanding the ministry of our Savior. Likewise, Luke shows the importance of prayer in Jesus’ life and mission. Fully divine, equal with the Father and the Spirit, Jesus in His humanity left us an example in regard to prayer.

If Jesus saw the need for prayer, how much more must we need it?

“Without unceasing prayer and diligent watching we are in danger of growing careless and of deviating from the right path. The adversary seeks continually to obstruct the way to the mercy seat, that we may not by earnest supplication and faith obtain grace and power to resist temptation.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 95.

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

Jesus and the Holy Spirit

As a Gentile convert and a missionary companion of the apostle Paul, Luke viewed the entire Christological entrance into history—from Jesus’ incarnation to His ascension and to the spread of the church—as a divine wonder brought about and guided by the Holy Spirit. In Jesus’ life we see the whole Godhead at work in our redemption (*Luke 3:21, 22*); and, through his constant references to the Holy Spirit, Luke emphasizes this point.

What do the following texts tell us about the role of the Holy Spirit in Christ’s coming here in human flesh? *Luke 1:35, 41; 2:25–32.*

Jesus’ mission began with several references to the Holy Spirit. According to Luke, John the Baptist predicted that although he baptized with water, the One who would follow him would baptize with the Spirit (*Luke 3:16*). At Jesus’ baptism, both the Father and the Holy Spirit affirmed the authenticity of His redemptive mission. God the Father declared from above that Christ is His beloved Son sent to redeem humankind, while the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove (*vss. 21, 22*). From then on Jesus was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (*Luke 4:1, NKJV*) and ready to take on the foe in the desert, as well as to begin His ministry (*vs. 14*).

The opening words of His Nazareth sermon were an application of Isaiah’s Messianic prophecy to Himself: “‘The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me’ ” (*vs. 18, NKJV*). The Spirit was His constant companion, His affirming strength, and His abiding presence among His followers when Jesus would no longer be in their midst (*John 16:5–7*). Not only that, Jesus promised that God would give the gift of the Spirit to those who ask for it (*Luke 11:13*). The Spirit that ever linked Christ to His Father and the redemptive mission is the same Spirit that would strengthen the disciples in their journey of faith. Hence, the crucial importance of the Spirit in Christian life: indeed, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the gravest of all sins (*Luke 12:10*).

What are concrete, practical ways we can open ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit? That is, how can we be careful that our choices are not in any way hardening us to His voice?

The Prayer Life of Jesus

Among the many times that Jesus prayed, some are recorded only in Luke. Note the following incidents that show Jesus in prayer during great moments in His life.

1. Jesus prayed at His baptism (*Luke 3:21*). “A new and important era was opening before Him. He was now, upon a wider stage, entering on the conflict of His life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 111. He dared not begin that wider stage of His public ministry—which would take Him eventually to Calvary’s cross—without prayer.

2. Jesus prayed before choosing His 12 disciples (*Luke 6:12, 13*). No leader chooses his followers haphazardly. But Jesus was not just selecting followers but choosing those who would understand and identify completely with His Person and His mission. “Their office was the most important to which human beings had ever been called, and was second only to that of Christ Himself.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 291.

3. Jesus prayed for His disciples (*Luke 9:18*). Discipleship demands absolute commitment to Jesus and an understanding of His identity. In order that the Twelve might know who He was, Jesus “was alone praying,” and then after that He challenged them with the crucial question: “ ‘Who do you say that I am?’ ” (*Luke 9:20, NKJV*).

4. Jesus prayed before His transfiguration (*Luke 9:28–36*) and obtained for Himself Heaven’s second endorsement that He is God’s “beloved Son.” Trials thus far, and trials to come, could not change the closest affinity between the Father and the Son. The prayer also resulted in the disciples becoming “eyewitnesses of His majesty” (*2 Pet. 1:16, NKJV*).

5. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane (*Luke 22:39–46*). This is perhaps the most important prayer in the history of salvation. Here we have the Savior linking heaven and earth, and by so doing He establishes three crucial principles: the primacy of God’s will and purpose; the commitment to fulfill that primacy even at the risk of blood and death; and the strength to overcome every temptation along the way toward fulfilling God’s purpose.

6. Jesus prayed, committing His life into God’s hands (*Luke 23:46*). In His final words on the cross, “ ‘Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit’ ” (*NKJV*), Jesus gives us the ultimate purpose of prayer. At birth or at death, before enemies or friends, while asleep or awake, prayer must keep us in permanent linkage with God.

What do these examples from Jesus’ prayer life tell you about your own prayer life?

The Model Prayer: Part 1

Read Luke 11:1–4. How do these verses help us to understand how prayer works?

“Father” is Christ’s favorite way of describing God and is so recorded at least one hundred seventy times in the four Gospels. In addressing God as our Father, we acknowledge that God is a Person, capable of the most intimate relationship with humans. God is as personal, as real, as loving, and as caring as a human father. But He is the Father *in heaven*. He is different from our earthly father, for He is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and perfectly holy.

The phrase “Father in heaven” forever reminds us that God is holy and personal and that Christianity is neither a mere philosophic idea nor a pantheistic notion of a god who is everything.

“*Hallowed be Your name*” (Luke 11:2, NKJV). Here we have another reminder of the holiness and sacredness of God. Those who claim to follow the Lord must sanctify His name in word and deed. To claim to follow Him and yet to sin against Him is to defile that name. The words of Jesus in Matthew 7:21–23 can help us better to understand what it means to hallow God’s name.

“*Your kingdom come*” (Luke 11:2, NKJV). The Gospels refer to the kingdom of God more than one hundred times: nearly forty in Luke, nearly fifty in Matthew, 16 in Mark, and 3 in John. It is what Jesus came to reveal and establish, both in the present reality of the kingdom of grace and in the future promise of the kingdom of glory. Without entering the first kingdom, there would be no entry into the second, and it is the Savior’s wish that His disciples should experience the first in anticipation of the second.

“*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” (Luke 11:2, NKJV). The will of God is recognized and obeyed in heaven. Jesus takes that fact and converts it into a hope that such will be the case on earth, as well. “On earth” suggests not generality but particularity. Let the will of God be done on earth, but let it begin with us, with each one of us personally.

Do you know the Lord, or just about Him? In what ways can your prayer life draw you closer to Him?

The Model Prayer: Part 2

“ ‘Give us day by day our daily bread’ ” (Luke 11:3, NKJV). The petition begins with the word *give*. Whether the word comes from the lips of a millionaire or an orphan in perpetual want, the prayer is at once an expression of dependence and acknowledgment of trust. We are all dependent on God, and the imperative plea, “Give,” forces us to recognize that God is the source of all gifts. He is the Creator. In Him we live, move, and have our being. “It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves” (Ps. 100:3, NKJV).

God is the Father who gives us all that we need. In light of this promise, what grand assurance can you find in Luke 11:9–13?

“ ‘Forgive us our sins’ ” (Luke 11:4, NKJV). The prayer to forgive as “ ‘we also forgive’ ” (vs. 4, NKJV) emphasizes the fact that if we truly have accepted God’s forgiveness into our hearts, we will be ready and willing to forgive others also. Logically, it also follows that if we do not forgive others, then we have not really accepted God’s forgiveness (Matt. 6:14). “God’s forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 114. Therefore, as disciples of Christ, we have the joy of living within the widening circle of divine grace—receiving God’s benevolence on the one hand as well as extending His love and forgiveness to others who may have offended us.

“ ‘Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us’ ” (Luke 11:4, NKJV). Two facts need to be noted. First, temptation is not sin. The Greek word for “temptation” is *peirasmos*. Greek nouns that end in *-asmos* normally describe a process, not a product. The Scriptures do not look at temptation as a finished product; it is a method, a process used to achieve a particular product. Although temptation is not sin, yielding to it is. Second, God is not the author of temptation (James 1:13). God may allow temptations to come, but He never tempts in the sense of alluring one to sin. The prayer, therefore, is recognition that God is the source of ultimate strength to resist the evil one.

Review Luke 11:1–4. Think about all the issues it covers. In what ways can your experience with each of these issues be enriched and deepened through prayer?

More Lessons on Prayer

Immediately after giving His disciples a model prayer, Jesus taught them, through the parable of a friend at midnight (*Luke 11:5–13*), the need for persistent prayer. Then, as He neared the end of His ministry, He reminded His followers of the need for penitence and humility in prayer (*Luke 18:9–14*). Both of these parables show that prayer is not just a religious routine but also a persistent walking, talking, and living with the Father.

Read *Luke 11:5–8*. Jesus told this parable to encourage perseverance in prayer. Prayer should not become a routine. Instead, prayer should be the foundation of a relationship—of absolute, persistent, and continual reliance on God. Prayer is the breath of the soul: without it, we are spiritually dead. Jesus tells the parable of a neighbor who refuses to be neighborly. The continuous pleas of his friend for a loaf of bread to meet a midnight emergency go in vain. But finally, even such a neighbor gives up and yields to the persistence of the continuous midnight knocks. How much more responsive would God be toward someone persistent in prayer? Such persistence is not to change God’s mind but to strengthen our trust.

Read *Luke 18:9–14*. What’s the crucial lesson here about prayer?

The Pharisee expected God to endorse him on the basis of what he had done, his works of righteousness. The publican threw himself at God’s mercy and pleaded for acceptance on the basis of God’s grace. God’s acceptance comes to us not on the basis of who or what we are but through His grace alone. Only those who are penitent, humble, and broken in spirit can receive that grace.

“Meekness and lowliness are the conditions of success and victory. A crown of glory awaits those who bow at the foot of the cross.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 590.

People who have not known the Lord tend to compare themselves to those who are, supposedly, worse than they are, all in order to convince themselves that they are not so bad. Why is that such a spiritual deception? What does it matter if others are worse than we are?

Further Study: “The soul that turns to God for its help, its support, its power, by daily, earnest prayer, will have noble aspirations, clear perceptions of truth and duty, lofty purposes of action, and a continual hungering and thirsting after righteousness. By maintaining a connection with God, we shall be enabled to diffuse to others, through our association with them, the light, the peace, the serenity, that rule in our hearts. The strength acquired in prayer to God, united with persevering effort in training the mind in thoughtfulness and care-taking, prepares one for daily duties and keeps the spirit in peace under all circumstances.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 85.

“In calling God our Father, we recognize all His children as our brethren. We are all a part of the great web of humanity, all members of one family. In our petitions we are to include our neighbors as well as ourselves. No one prays aright who seeks a blessing for himself alone.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 105.

Discussion Questions:

1 Luke’s linking of Jesus and the Holy Spirit does not end with his Gospel alone. No one can read the book of Acts, Luke’s second volume for the history of the Christian church, without noting the compelling dynamic of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian community, its missions, and its ministers. Indeed, only Luke records Jesus’ post-resurrection instruction to His disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they “‘are endued with power from on high’ ” (*Luke 24:49, NKJV*) before they could go to the ends of the earth with the message of the crucified and risen Savior. Luke then begins the book of Acts with Jesus repeating the promise of the Holy Spirit (*Acts 1:7, 8*) and the promise being fulfilled at Pentecost (*Acts 2*). What does all this tell us about the central role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church?

2 In what ways is the very act of prayer itself an acknowledgment of our dependence on and need of God? Read Luke 18:9. What deep spiritual problem was Jesus addressing with the parable that followed?

The Banner Man

SONG SUNGSUB, SOUTH KOREA

Wherever Song Sungsub goes, people follow—sometimes with stares, sometimes with their feet—but that’s OK because he has a message to share.

“I wanted people to see the truth, so my strategy was to come up with a way for them to immediately see the heart of the three angels’ messages—the Sabbath.”

Sungsub designed a customized backpack advertising banner, proclaiming in large letters that the “Sabbath Day = Saturday = Seventh-day.” The banner included more details surrounding the main message.

Sungsub wears his backpack banner as he rides his bicycle to and from work each day. He also takes it for a walk in the park and has been happily surprised with the response.

“When people see the banner, they are curious, and they read it with loud voices. There are always people around, and they talk about it. The Sabbath is an important message, a testing truth. There are many ways to spread this message, but this is my strategy,” Sungsub says.

In thinking about his unique form of evangelizing, Sungsub had two biblical examples in mind: Jonah, who was sent to walk around a large city proclaiming the need for repentance, and the children of Israel who were a silent witness as they marched around Jericho.

“The idea,” he said, “is that in this way I will be able to proclaim the Sabbath truth effectively and conveniently.” He is delighted that many people are interested in the message he carries.

“One day I took the subway, and someone followed me. Finally the man said, ‘I know this is truth. Is there a church that keeps the Sabbath day?’ ”

Another time Sungsub was walking through a park when he was approached by a couple. “You must be from the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” they said. “We haven’t attended church in a long time. Where’s the church? We’ve been looking for one!”

“Sometimes people ask me how can I carry this banner around,” Sungsub admits. “My heart isn’t brave enough, and I need to behave well because I’m carrying this important message. My mind should be peaceful, so I pray a lot. Then I feel at peace and am filled with the Holy Spirit’s power.” And the idea is catching on. Recently, an elder in Sungsub’s church asked for a copy of the banner’s design.

“I feel very happy,” says Sungsub. “I am seeking lost sheep. My strategy is just one glance, and it’s forever recorded in their minds. And whenever people ask, I share some literature with them. Who knows what the results will be?”

To see pictures of Sungsub’s banner, visit our Web site and choose “Youth and Adult Magazine” under the “Resources” menu.

The Mission of Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 15:4–7, 11–32; 16:19–31; 18:35–43; 19:1–10.*

Memory Text: “‘The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost’ ” (*Luke 19:10, NKJV*).

If we were to write a mission statement for Jesus, we could not do any better than to repeat His own words: “‘To seek and to save that which was lost.’ ”

What was lost? It was humanity itself, which was alienated from God, subject to death, and filled with fear, disappointment, and despair. If nothing were done in our behalf, all would be lost.

Thanks to Jesus, though, we all have great reasons to be hopeful.

“In the apostasy, man alienated himself from God; earth was cut off from heaven. Across the gulf that lay between, there could be no communion. But through Christ, earth is again linked with heaven. With His own merits, Christ has bridged the gulf which sin had made. . . . Christ connects fallen man in his weakness and helplessness with the Source of infinite power.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 20.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is a story of God seeking after lost humanity. Luke illustrates this truth by using three important parables: the lost sheep (*Luke 15:4–7*), the lost coin (*vss. 8–10*), and the lost son (*vss. 11–32*).

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

The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin

Read Luke 15:4–7. What does this tell us about God’s love for us? Why is it so important to understand that it was the shepherd who went looking for the lost sheep?

In a world that can appear uncaring and indifferent to us, this parable reveals a startling truth: God loves us so much that He Himself will come after us, in order to bring us to Him. We often talk about people seeking God; in reality, God is seeking us.

“The soul that has given himself to Christ is more precious in His sight than the whole world. The Saviour would have passed through the agony of Calvary that one might be saved in His kingdom. He will never abandon one for whom He has died. Unless His followers choose to leave Him, He will hold them fast.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 483.

Read Luke 15:8, 9. This parable is found only in Luke. The lost coin could have one of two meanings. First, Judea during the time of Jesus was full of poor people, and in most homes one coin (*drachma*) could have been more than a day’s wage, barely enough to keep the family from starving. Second, as a mark of being married, some women wore a headdress made up of ten coins—a huge sum, saved over a long time in the case of poor families.

In either case, the loss was a serious matter. So, the woman, utterly broken and in deep grief, lights a lamp (the house perhaps had no windows or perhaps only a small window), picks up a broom, and turns the house upside down until she finds that coin. Her soul is filled with overflowing joy, and the overflow floods to all her friends.

“The coin, though lying among dust and rubbish, is a piece of silver or gold still. Its owner seeks it because it is of value. So, every soul, however degraded by sin, is in God’s sight accounted precious. As the coin bears the image and superscription of the reigning power, so man at his creation bore the image and superscription of God; and though now marred and dim through the influence of sin, the traces of this inscription remain upon every soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 194.

So much of modern science and philosophy tells us that we are nothing but chance creations in a meaningless universe that does not care at all about our fate or us. What completely different worldview is presented in these two parables?

The Parable of the Lost Son: Part 1

Hailed in history as the most beautiful short story ever told on the forgiving nature of love, the parable of the prodigal son (*Luke 15:11–32*), narrated only by Luke, may well be called the parable of the loving father and two lost sons. One son chose the lawlessness of the distant land over the love of the father. The other son chose to stay in the home but did not fully know the love of the father or the meaning of a brother. The parable may be studied in seven parts, four dealing with the prodigal, two with the Father, and one with the elder brother.

1. “Give me” (*Luke 15:12*). The younger son’s decision to demand of his father his portion of the property was no sudden, impulsive urge. Sin often results after a long time of brooding over misplaced priorities. The younger son must have heard from friends about the glitter and glamour of distant lands. Life at home was too rigid. Love was there, but it had its own boundaries; the distant land offered him life without restrictions. The father was too protective, his love too embracing. The son wanted freedom, and in the quest for unhindered freedom was the seed of rebellion.

2. “Why me?” (*Luke 15:13–16*). The son cashed in his entire share and set off to the “far country.” The far country is a place far away from the father’s home. Love’s caring eyes, law’s protective fence, grace’s ever-present embrace are foreign to the far country. It is a distant land of “riotous living” (*vs. 13*). The Greek word for “riotous” (*asotos*) appears three other times as a noun in the New Testament: for drunkenness (*Eph. 5:18*), rebelliousness (*Titus 1:6*), and debauchery that includes “lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries” (*1 Pet. 4:3, 4, NKJV*). Such pleasures of godless living wasted away his health and wealth, and soon he became moneyless, friendless, and foodless. His glittering life wound up in a gutter. Starved to the point of being in perpetual want, he found employment in caring for the pigs, a harsh fate for a Jew.

3. “Make me” (*Luke 15:17–19*). But even the prodigal is still a son, with the power of choice to turn around. So, the son “ ‘came to his senses’ ” and remembered a place called home, a person known as father, a relational bond called love. He walked back home, with a speech in his hand, to plead with the father: “ ‘Make me.’ ” That is, make me whatever you want, but let me be within your watchful eyes, within the care of your love. What better home is there but the Father’s heart.

The world can appear very alluring. What specific things of the world do you find yourself particularly tempted by, that you find yourself thinking, “Oh, that’s not so bad,” when deep down you know it is?

The Parable of the Lost Son: Part 2

4. The return home (*Luke 15:17–20*) was a journey of repentance. The journey began “‘when he came to himself’ ” (NKJV). Recognition of where he was, in comparison with what his father’s home was, drove him to “arise” and “go” to his father. The prodigal son returns home with a four-part speech that defines the true meaning of repentance.

First, there is an *acknowledgment* of the father as “‘my father’ ” (*vs. 18, NKJV*). The prodigal son now needs to lean upon and trust his father’s love and forgiveness, just as we must learn to trust in our heavenly Father’s love and forgiveness.

Second, *confession*: what the prodigal did is not an error of judgment, but a sin against God and his father (*vs. 18*).

Third, *contrition*: “‘I am no longer worthy’ ” (*vs. 19, NKJV*). Recognition of one’s unworthiness, in contrast to the worthiness of God, is essential for true repentance to take place.

Fourth, *petition*: “‘Make me’ ” (*vs. 19, NKJV*). Surrender to whatever God wills is the destination of repentance. The son has come home.

5. The waiting father (*Luke 15:20, 21*). The wait and the vigil, the grief and the hope, began at the moment the prodigal son stepped out of the home. The wait was over when the father saw him “a great way off,” and then “had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (*vs. 20*). No other image captures the character of God as that of the waiting father.

6. The rejoicing family (*Luke 15:22–25*). The father embraced the son, clothed him with a new robe, put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet, and ordered a feast. The family was in celebration. If leaving the home was death, the return was a resurrection, and worthy of rejoicing. The son was indeed a prodigal, but nevertheless a son, and over every repentant son there is joy in heaven (*vs. 7*).

7. The elder son (*Luke 15:25–32*). The younger son was lost when he stepped out of the home to go to a distant land; the older son was lost because, though he was home in the body, his heart was in a distant land. Such a heart is angry (*vs. 28*), complaining, and self-righteous (*vs. 29*), and refuses to recognize a brother. Instead, it recognizes only a “‘son of yours,’ ” a spendthrift without character (*vs. 30, NKJV*). The elder son’s attitude toward the father is the same as that of the Pharisees who accused Jesus: “‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them’ ” (*vs. 2, NKJV*). The father’s final word with his elder son reflects heaven’s attitude to all repentant sinners: “‘It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found’ ” (*vs. 32, NKJV*).

Put yourself in the older brother’s shoes. However wrong his thinking, why does it make so much “sense” that he would feel that way? How does this story reveal ways in which the gospel goes beyond what “makes sense”?

Lost Opportunities

Although Jesus came to seek and save those lost in sin, He never forces anyone to accept the salvation He offers. Salvation is free and available to all, but one must accept the free offer in faith, which results in a life in conformity with God's will. The only time we have for such an experience is while we live on earth; no other opportunity exists.

Read Luke 16:19–31. What's the main message of this parable?

The parable is recorded only in Luke, and it teaches two great truths with respect to salvation: the importance of “today” in the process of salvation and the absence of another opportunity for salvation after death.

Today is the day of salvation. The parable does not teach that there is something inherently evil in riches or something inescapably good in being poor. What it does teach is that the opportunity of being saved and living saved must not be missed while we are on this earth. Rich or poor, educated or illiterate, powerful or powerless, we have no second chance. All are saved and judged by their attitude today, now, to Jesus. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).

The parable also teaches that eternal reward has nothing to do with material possessions. The rich man was “ ‘clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day’ ” (Luke 16:19, NKJV) but missed the essential of life: God. Where God is not recognized, fellow human beings are not noticed. The rich man's sin was not in his richness but in his failure to recognize that God's family is broader than he was prepared to accept.

There is no second chance for salvation after death. The second inescapable truth that Jesus teaches here is that there is no second chance for salvation after death. “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27, NKJV). Another point of this parable is to show people that we have been given enough evidence now, in this life, to make a conscious choice for or against God. Any theology that teaches some kind of “second chance” after death is a great deception.

We love to talk about how much God loves us and all that He has done and is doing to save us. What should this parable teach us, though, about the danger of taking God's love and offer of salvation for granted?

Was Blind but Now I See

The mission statement of Jesus that He came to seek and save that which was lost is an affirmation of a holistic ministry. He came to make men and women whole, to transform them physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially. Luke gives us two instances that illustrate how Jesus restored two broken men into wholeness. One was blind physically, the other spiritually; both were outcasts—one a beggar and the other a tax collector. But both men were candidates for Christ’s saving mission, and neither was beyond His heart or reach.

Read Luke 18:35–43. What does this passage teach about our utter dependence upon God? Who among us at times has not cried out, “Have mercy on me”?

Mark names the man as Bartimaeus (*Mark 10:46*). He was a beggar outside of Jericho. Physically challenged, socially of no consequence, and poverty stricken, he suddenly found himself in the sweep of heaven’s wonder: “Jesus of Nazareth was passing by” (*Luke 18:37, NKJV*), and his faith surged upward to cry out, “ ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ ” (*vs. 39, NKJV*). Faith requires neither eyes nor ears, neither feet nor hands, but only a heart that connects to the Creator of the world.

Read Luke 19:1–10. Who was the “blind” man in this story?

Only Luke records the story of Zacchaeus, the last of Jesus’ many encounters with outcasts. Christ’s mission, to seek and save that which was lost, was gloriously fulfilled in this encounter with Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was Jericho’s chief tax collector, a chief sinner in the judgment of the city’s Pharisees, but a chief sinner sought and saved by the Savior. What strange places and methods Jesus used to accomplish His mission: a sycamore tree, a curious man seeking to see who Jesus was, and a loving Lord commanding the man to come down, for He had a self-invited lunch appointment with him. But more important, Jesus had a delivery to make: “ ‘Today salvation has come to this house’ ” (*Luke 19:9, NKJV*), but not before Zacchaeus made things right (*vs. 8*).

It’s easy to see other people’s faults and shortcomings, isn’t it? But we can so often be blind to our own. What are some areas in your life that you need to face up to, confess, and get the victory over which you have been putting off for way too long?

Further Study: “By the lost sheep Christ represents not only the individual sinner but the one world that has apostatized and has been ruined by sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 190.

On the value of one soul: “The value of a soul, who can estimate? Would you know its worth, go to Gethsemane, and there watch with Christ through those hours of anguish, when He sweat as it were great drops of blood. Look upon the Saviour uplifted on the cross. . . . At the foot of the cross, remembering that for one sinner Christ would have laid down His life, you may estimate the value of a soul.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 196.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 While all religions portray the human being in search of God, Christianity presents God as the seeker: Adam, where are you (*Gen. 3:9*)? Cain, where is your brother (*Gen. 4:9*)? Elijah, what are you doing here (*1 Kings 19:9*)? Zacchaeus, come down (*Luke 19:5*). What has been your own experience with God seeking you out?
- 2 Look again at the final question at the end of Tuesday’s study. What was the fatal mistake that the older son made? What spiritual defects were revealed in his attitude? Why is it easier to have that same attitude than we might think? See also Matthew 20:1–16.
- 3 In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus said that even if someone were to come back from the dead, there would be those who would not believe. In what ways did this parable foretell the reaction of some to the resurrection of Jesus, in which some still didn’t believe despite the powerful evidence for His resurrection?
- 4 One of the most impressive aspects of Jesus’ saving ministry is the equality with which He treated all people, such as the blind beggar and Zacchaeus, or Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. The Cross, more than anything else, shows the equality of all people before God. How should this crucial truth impact how we treat others, even those toward whom—because of politics, culture, ethnicity, whatever—we might have previously held ill feelings? Why is that attitude so anti-Jesus?
- 5 Compare the story of the prodigal son with the story of the rich man and Lazarus. How do the two balance each other out?

Praise Instead of Prejudice

DAESUNG KIM, SOUTH KOREA

Office buildings surround the Seoul Central Seventh-day Adventist Church, and it is very difficult to make contact with people. When I was pastoring there, I thought that it might be effective for the church to operate a vegetarian restaurant. If we provided fresh food and friendly service, perhaps the nearby office workers would like it.

When I first approached the church about this idea, most members were against it because they already had tried this but had failed. I assured them that I wouldn't use the church budget and that Ellen White had said many times that if we established this kind of restaurant in the cities, it would be very successful. At last, the members agreed.

As a nonprofit organization, the church isn't permitted to own a restaurant, so I organized a health association and invited those working in the surrounding offices to join so that they could eat in our restaurant. During the next three months, I visited every office and invited each person to become a member of our health association. I explained that we would provide the freshest vegetarian food and that by becoming a member of the association they could eat this delicious food Monday through Friday. The membership fee was the equivalent of US\$100 per month. Many people signed up.

The church members and I distributed more than five hundred free meal tickets. Each recipient was entitled to one free meal on a certain day at the restaurant. We were happily surprised when nearly five hundred guests arrived. As they enjoyed their meals, I announced that as members of the health association, they could eat here every day. Many joined.

To operate this kind of restaurant is not easy. It's important to have a good building, and the church pastor must have a good relationship with the community. Of course, the food is important—if it isn't tasty the guests won't continue coming. A few years after we started, we lost our cook, and her replacement wasn't as skilled. As the food quality went down, so did the number of guests. Once we replaced her, the food quality improved and again membership in the health association rose.

We found that there are many benefits coming from this venture. In Korea, many people think that Adventists are an unwanted sect. Because of this mind-set, some were reluctant to visit the restaurant.

But as our vegetarian restaurant became more well-known, Christian church pastors, Buddhist monks, and priests decided to come. After getting to know us, these people have only praise for our church, instead of prejudice. Many of our guests have high statuses in the community.

By God's grace, our vegetarian restaurant has been operating successfully for more than 12 years. It is one of 117 centers of influence in South Korea.

Jesus, *the* Master Teacher



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 8:22–25, 4:31–37, 6:20–49, 8:19–21, 10:25–37, Deut. 6:5.*

Memory Text: “And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority” (*Luke 4:32, NKJV*).

When Christ came to the earth, humanity seemed to be fast reaching its lowest point. The very foundations of society were undermined. Life had become false and artificial. . . . Disgusted with fable and falsehood, seeking to drown thought, men turned to infidelity and materialism. Leaving eternity out of their reckoning, they lived for the present.

“As they ceased to recognize the Divine, they ceased to regard the human. Truth, honor, integrity, confidence, compassion, were departing from the earth. Relentless greed and absorbing ambition gave birth to universal distrust. The idea of duty, of the obligation of strength to weakness, of human dignity and human rights, was cast aside as a dream or a fable. The common people were regarded as beasts of burden or as the tools and the steppingstones for ambition. Wealth and power, ease and self-indulgence, were sought as the highest good. Physical degeneracy, mental stupor, spiritual death, characterized the age.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 74, 75.

Against such a background we can better understand why Jesus taught the things that He did.

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

The Authority of Jesus

As a physician and scholar, Luke was acquainted with the role of authority. He was familiar with the authority of philosophy in Greek scholarship and education. He knew the authority of the Roman law in civil matters and government function. As Paul’s traveling companion he knew the ecclesiastic authority that the apostle commanded with the churches he founded. Thus, Luke understood that authority is at the core of a person’s position, an institution’s role, a state’s function, and a teacher’s relationship to his or her followers. Having rubbed shoulders with all kinds of authority at all levels of power, Luke shared with his readers that there was something matchless about Jesus and His authority. Born in a carpenter’s home, brought up for 30 years in the little Galilean town of Nazareth, known for nothing great by worldly standards, Jesus confronted everyone—Roman rulers, Jewish scholars, rabbis, ordinary people, secular and religious powers—with His teaching and ministry. His fellow townspeople “marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” (*Luke 4:22, NKJV*). He once brought hope to a widow in Nain by raising her dead son to life (*Luke 7:11–17*). The entire town went into a shiver of fear and exclaimed: “‘God has visited His people’” (*vs. 16, NKJV*). The authority of Jesus over life and death electrified not just Nain but “Judea and all the surrounding region” (*vss. 16, 17, NKJV*).

Read *Luke 8:22–25, 4:31–37, 5:24–26, 7:49, 12:8*. What do these texts reveal about the kind of authority that Jesus wielded?

Luke took time to record, not only for his friend Theophilus but also for generations to come, that Jesus, through His ministry, had established the uniqueness of His authority. As God in the flesh, He indeed had authority as no one else ever did.

Lots of people do things in the name of God, which would then of course give their actions a lot of authority. How can we be sure that when we say, “God led me to do this,” He really did? Discuss answers in class on Sabbath.

Christ's Greatest Sermon

The Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew 5–7*) is often hailed in literature as “the essence of Christianity.” Luke provides selections of the sermon in Luke 6:20–49 and elsewhere. Because Luke placed the sermon immediately after the “official” choosing of the disciples (*Luke 6:13*), some scholars have called it the “Ordination Charge to the Twelve.”

As presented in Luke 6:20–49, the sermon begins with four blessings and four woes and outlines other essential characteristics of the Christian way.

Study the following sections of Luke 6:20–49 and ask yourself how closely your life embraces the principles expressed here.

1. The Christian blessedness (*Luke 6:20–22*). How can poverty, hunger, weeping, and being hated lead to blessedness?

2. The Christian's reason for rejoicing in the midst of rejection (*Luke 6:22, 23*).

3. Woes to guard against (*Luke 6:24–26*). Review each of the four woes. Why should a Christian guard against these?

4. The Christian imperative (*Luke 6:27–31*). No command of Jesus is more debated and is considered more difficult to keep than the golden rule of love. The Christian ethic is fundamentally positive, not negative. It does not consist of what not to do but what to do. Instead of saying “Don't hate” your enemy, it insists, “Love your enemy.” Instead of the law of reciprocity (“tooth for a tooth”), the golden rule demands the ethic of pure goodness (“turn the other cheek also”). Mahatma Gandhi developed out of the golden rule an entire political philosophy of resisting evil through good and eventually used this principle to win independence for India from British colonialism. Likewise, Martin Luther King Jr. employed the ethic of the golden rule to break the evil of segregation in the United States. Where love reigns, blessedness ascends the throne.

5. The Christian way (*Luke 6:37–42*). Note Christ's insistence on forgiveness, liberal giving, exemplary living, and tolerance.

6. The Christian fruit-bearing (*Luke 6:43–45*).

7. The Christian builder (*Luke 6:48, 49*).

A New Family

Great teachers before and since Jesus have taught about unity and love, but usually it is about love within the parameters of a single group; a family defined by the exclusivity of caste, color, language, tribe, or religion. But Jesus broke down the barriers that divide humans and ushered in a new family, one that made no distinction between the usual things that divide people. Under the banner of *agape* love—unmerited, nonexclusive, universal, and sacrificial—Christ created a new family. This family reflects the original, universal, and ideal concept enshrined in the Genesis creation, which attests that every human being is created in the image of God (*Gen. 1:26, 27*) and, therefore, equal before Him.

Read Luke 8:19–21. Without in any way minimizing the ties and obligations that bind parents and children, brothers and sisters within a family, Jesus looked beyond flesh and blood and placed both of them at the altar of God as members of the “whole family in heaven and earth” (*Eph. 3:15, NKJV*). The family of Christian discipleship ought to be no less close and binding than the ties of having common parents. To Jesus the true test of “family” is not blood relationships but doing the will of God.

What do the following texts teach about the walls that Christ tore down in regard to the distinctions that so often divide humans (and often with bad results too)?

Luke 5:27–32 _____

Luke 7:1–10 _____

Luke 14:15–24 _____

Luke 17:11–19 _____

The mission and the ministry of Jesus, His forgiving heart and embracing grace, did not exclude anyone but included all who would accept His call. His everlasting love brought Him in touch with the entire spectrum of society.

What are ways that, as a church, we can better follow this crucial principle?

Love Defined: The Parable of the Good Samaritan: Part 1

Of the four Gospels, only Luke records the parables of the prodigal son and the good Samaritan (*Luke 10:25–37*). The first one illustrates the vertical dimension of love, the extraordinary love of the Father toward sinners; the second one shows us the horizontal dimension—the kind of love that should characterize human life, refusing to acknowledge any barrier between humans but living instead within Jesus’ definition of a “neighbor”: that all human beings are children of God and deserve to be loved and treated equally.

Read Luke 10:25–28 and reflect on the two central questions raised. How is each question related to the main concerns of Christian faith and life?

1. “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (vs. 25, *NKJV*).

Note that the lawyer sought for a way to inherit eternal life. To be saved from sin and to enter into God’s kingdom is indeed the noblest of all aspirations one can have, but the lawyer, like so many, had grown up with the false notion that eternal life is something one can earn by good works. Evidently he had no knowledge that “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*Rom. 6:23, NKJV*).

2. “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” (vs. 26, *NKJV*).

During the time of Jesus, it was the custom of prominent Jews, such as this lawyer, to wear a phylactery on the wrist. It was a little leather pouch in which were written some great portions of the torah, including the one that would answer Jesus’ question. Jesus directed the lawyer to what was written in Deuteronomy (*Deut. 6:5*) and Leviticus (*Lev. 19:18*)—the very thing that he might have been carrying in his phylactery. He had on his wrist, but not in his heart, the answer to His question. Jesus directed the lawyer to a great truth: eternal life is not a matter of keeping rules but calls for loving God absolutely and unreservedly and likewise all God’s creation—“the neighbor,” to be precise. However, either out of ignorance or out of arrogance, the lawyer pursued the dialogue with another query: “Who is my neighbor?”

What outward evidence reveals that you have truly been saved by grace? That is, what is it about your life that shows you are justified by faith?

Love Defined: The Parable of the Good Samaritan: Part 2

“But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ ” (*Luke 10:29, NKJV*).

An expert in the Jewish law, the lawyer must have known the answer to the question. Leviticus 19:18, where the second great commandment is spelled out, defines “neighbors” as “children of your people” (*NKJV*). Hence, instead of providing an immediate answer to the lawyer’s question or getting into a theological dispute with him and those observing the episode, Jesus lifts the lawyer and His audience to a higher plane.

Read *Luke 10:30–37*. What are the key points to this story, and what do they reveal about how we are to treat others?

Notice that Jesus said that “a certain man” (*vs. 30*) fell among thieves. Why did Jesus not identify the man’s race or status? Given the whole purpose of the story, why did it matter?

The priest and the Levite saw the wounded man but passed him by. Whatever their reasons for not helping, for us the questions are: what is true religion, and how should it be expressed (*Deut. 10:12, 13; Mic. 6:8; James 1:27*)?

Hatred and animosity marked the relationship between Jews and Samaritans, and by the time of Jesus the enmity between the two had only worsened (*Luke 9:51–54, John 4:9*). Hence, by making a Samaritan the “hero” of the story, Jesus brought home His point, in this case to the Jews, even stronger than it otherwise might have been.

Jesus described the Samaritan’s ministry in great detail: he took pity, he went to him, bandaged his wounds, poured oil and wine, carried him to an inn, paid in advance for his stay, and promised to care for any balance on his way back. All these parts of the Samaritan’s ministry together define the limitlessness of true love. The fact, too, that he did all these for a man who was possibly a Jew reveals that true love knows no frontier.

The priest and the Levite asked themselves the question: *What would happen to us if we stopped and helped this man?* The Samaritan asked: *What would happen to this man if I didn’t help him?* What is the difference between the two?

Further Study: “In His life and lessons, Christ has given a perfect exemplification of the unselfish ministry which has its origin in God. God does not live for Himself. By creating the world, and by upholding all things, He is constantly ministering for others. ‘He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.’ Matthew 5:45. This ideal of ministry God has committed to His Son. Jesus was given to stand at the head of humanity, that by His example He might teach what it means to minister. His whole life was under a law of service. He served all, ministered to all. Thus He lived the law of God, and by His example showed how we are to obey it.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 649.

The parable of the good Samaritan is not an “imaginary scene, but an actual occurrence, which was known to be exactly as represented. The priest and the Levite who had passed by on the other side were in the company that listened to Christ’s words.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 499.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Go over the important question asked at the end of Sunday’s study. Who hasn’t heard people say that they did whatever they did because God told them to? What are ways that God does talk to us? At the same time, what are the dangers involved in invoking the authority of God in order to justify our deeds?
- 2 Go back over the “four woes” in Luke 6:24–26. How are we to understand what Jesus is saying there? What is He really warning us to be careful of in this life?
- 3 Think about the whole question of authority. What is authority? What are different kinds of authority? What kinds of authority trump other kinds? How should we relate to different kinds of authority in our life? What happens when the authorities over us clash?

Searching for Peace: Part 1

TAN, CHINA

Tan thought religion was just superstition, yet somehow he still felt a spiritual longing. One day he set out on a pilgrimage in search of peace.

He journeyed to a distant city, where he met a Christian pastor who introduced him to the Bible. For several days, the two studied together, and Tan felt drawn to the God of the Bible. But he decided to search further before committing himself. Two months later, Tan returned to the pastor, wanting to learn more. They resumed their Bible studies. This time, Tan decided to become a Christian.

Sometime later, Tan decided to return to his home village to share the gospel with his family and friends.

When he arrived at his village, he began sharing his faith, but the people were not eager to listen. Some rejected his message; others made fun of him. Tan fasted and prayed. “God, is there no one here who will listen?” Tan found no one—except a local troublemaker named Tao Yeh.

Tao belonged to a gang that terrorized the town. Four members of the gang were jailed, and another was killed during some of their more violent activities. Although Tao had a reputation as a hardened gambler, fighter, and drinker, Tan talked with him about his spiritual condition and offered to pray with him. But Tao laughed and said that if he ever needed God, he would let Tan know.

No one will listen to me, Tan thought. He decided to leave town and find some believers with whom he could study. As he started out, Tao saw him and fell into step beside him. As the two walked down the road, Tan felt impressed to pray for Tao. Tao tried to brush aside Tan’s request to pray, but finally he agreed. They stopped along the road, and Tan prayed.

Before they parted, Tan gave Tao a small Bible, hoping he would read it. Then they said Goodbye. Tan wondered whether he would ever see Tao again or whether he would hear that Tao had died in some fight.

Tan set off for a large city where he had heard there was a group of active Christians. When he arrived in the city, he was warned that he should return to his home province or risk being arrested. Although he bought a train ticket home, Tan decided to remain and try to find the Christians he had heard about.

He got a map and began searching. He found a Seventh-day Adventist church and met Pastor Xo [*shoh*] and several young people who were studying to become lay church leaders. Tan was delighted when Pastor Xo invited him to stay and study the Bible.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.

Adapted from a story by Charlotte Ishkanian.

Following Jesus *in* Everyday Life



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 11:37–54; 12:4–21, 35–53; Amos 6:1; Luke 8:4–15; 22:24–27.*

Memory Text: “And the apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith’ ” (*Luke 17:5, NKJV*).

Though a great teacher, Jesus did not establish a school of theology or philosophy. His purpose was “to seek and to save that which was lost” (*Luke 19:10*). He came to reveal the character of God, a revelation that culminated in the Cross, where He not only showed humanity and unfallen worlds what God was really like, but He also paid the penalty for sin so that human beings, despite their fallen nature, could be redeemed.

In doing this, He also created a redeemed community, a community of those who, having been saved by His death, have chosen to model His life and teachings.

The call to be part of this redeemed community is a call, not to a preferred status in life but to an absolute allegiance to the One who calls, to Christ Himself. What He says becomes the disciple's law of life. What He desires becomes the disciple's sole purpose in life. No amount of outward goodness or doctrinal perfection can take the place of total allegiance to Christ and His will.

Discipleship, which we owe exclusively to the indwelling Christ, makes certain imperative requirements. No competition and no substitute are permitted.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 6.*

Flee Pharisaism

Of the more than 80 references to Pharisees in the Gospels, approximately 25 percent of them are found in Luke. Pharisees were noted for their doctrinal conservatism, as opposed to Sadducees, who were known for their liberal ideas. Pharisees were often legalists who, while professing to believe in grace, taught salvation by the keeping of the law.

Read Luke 11:37–54. What is Jesus warning about, and how is this same principle manifested today? How can we make sure that we, in our own ways, don't reflect some of the things that Jesus warned against?

A review of the woes (*Luke 11:42–54*) pronounced on the Pharisees and the scribes shows how much the call to true religion crosses every generation, including our own.

For example, while tithing is a joyful acknowledgment of God's provision, it can never be a substitute for the basic demands of love and justice in human relations (*vs. 42*).

These same ones who “ ‘neglect justice and the love of God’ ” love, instead, the “ ‘most important seats in the synagogues’ ” (*vs. 42, 43, NIV*). Talk about missing the point of true faith!

Jesus warned, too, that those who equate true religion with outward rituals alone are really unclean, somewhat like those who come in contact with the dead (*Luke 11:44; see also Num. 19:16*). How easy to confuse what's trivial with what's sacred in the eyes of God.

Also, Jesus pronounced a woe on the experts in the law who used their education and experience to place intolerable religious burdens on others while they themselves “ ‘do not touch the burdens with one of [their] fingers’ ” (*Luke 11:46, NKJV*).

Meanwhile, the Pharisees honored the prophets no longer alive but worked against the living ones. Even as Jesus spoke, some were plotting to kill the Son of God. What is important is not the honoring of prophets but the heeding of their prophetic message of love, mercy, and judgment.

The last woe is a terrible one. Some who had been entrusted with the key to God's kingdom had failed in their trusteeship. Instead of using the key wisely and letting God's people come into the kingdom, they had locked them out and thrown away the key.

Fear God

“ ‘Fear God and give glory to Him’ ” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*) is the first of the three angels’ messages, so central to Seventh-day Adventists’ life and faith. Fearing God is not being afraid, as it is often thought to be. It is realizing just who God is and what His claims on us are. It is an act of faith that involves total allegiance to Him. God becomes the sole definer and arbiter of our life—our thoughts, actions, relationships, and destiny. Discipleship based on that kind of “fear” stands on unshakable ground.

Read Luke 12:4–12. What is Jesus saying to us here about fear?

The passage shows us whom to fear and whom not to fear. We need not fear forces that can affect only our body in the present world. Instead, we must fear and obey God because in His hands is our eternal destiny. But our God—whose eyes are on the sparrow (*Luke 12:6*) and who has numbered the hairs on our heads (*vs. 7*)—is loving and caring; hence, each one of us is infinitely precious in His sight. If we truly believed that, how many earthly fears would vanish?

Read Luke 12:13–21. What is Jesus warning us about here?

While Jesus refuses to intervene between two brothers quarreling over the division of property, He does emphasize the relevance of the tenth commandment (*Exod. 20:17*) against the evil of covetousness and points out a significant truth for all time: life is not made up of things (*Luke 12:15*). The rich foolish man lived in a little world restricted to himself. Nothing else mattered to him. How careful we need to be not to fall into this same trap; this is especially crucial for those who have been blessed with an abundance of material goods.

Though we all enjoy material things, think how little ultimate satisfaction they can really give you, especially in light of eternity. Why, then, is it still so easy to make the mistake that Jesus warned about in Luke 12:16–21?

Be Prepared and Watchful

“Vigilance and fidelity have been required of Christ’s followers in every age; but now that we are standing upon the very verge of the eternal world, holding the truths we do, having so great light, so important a work, we must double our diligence.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 460, 461.

Read Luke 12:35–53 and summarize what these texts mean specifically to you, especially if you have been waiting a long time for the second coming of Jesus.

Christians cannot afford to be lax or lethargic. The context of His sure return, and the unknown hour thereof, should drive us to have our robes girded and our lamps trimmed and burning. The eschatological hope must be the driving force of our life and work, our readiness and faithfulness. It is this faithfulness to do His will on earth and readiness to meet Him in peace that distinguish between good and evil servants.

Any neglect of faithfulness on the pretext that “ ‘My master is delaying his coming’ ” (*Luke 12:45, NKJV*) is placing oneself under the severest form of God’s judgment (*vss. 45–48*). The more the privilege, the greater the responsibility, and hence, from those who are given much, much will be expected (*vs. 48*).

The ancient prophet’s judgment “Woe to you who are at ease in Zion” (*Amos 6:1, NKJV*) seems reflected in Christ’s warning that Christian discipleship is not a state of ease. Paul explains the Christian life as one of spiritual warfare (*Eph. 6:12*). The focal point is that every Christian is involved in the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan, and the Cross draws a clear line between the two. Only by continual faith in the Christ of the cross can one win the final victory.

“For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more’ ” (*Luke 12:48, NKJV*). What should this text mean to us as Seventh-day Adventists?

Be a Fruitful Witness

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in their eternal council “before the foundation of the world” (*Eph. 1:4*), laid the plan of salvation. That is, even before the first human was created and, of course, before the first humans sinned, God had a plan in place to rescue the world. The plan is rooted in the cross, and the good news of the cross must be told to everyone in the world. The responsibility of that witness is placed on every Christian.

“ ‘You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ ” (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*). The final charge of Jesus underscores the importance the Lord placed on the witnessing role of His followers.

What lessons must those in Christian witness learn from the parable of the sower and the soil? *Luke 8:4–15*.

What and when is the reward of the one who witnesses? *Luke 18:24–30*.

What does the parable of the minas (*Luke 19:11–27*) teach about faithfulness and responsibility in witnessing?

In each of these texts, and others, the dangers, the responsibilities, and the rewards of witnessing and faith are revealed. We have been charged with a solemn responsibility; but considering what we have been given, how little is really asked of us?

Be a Servant Leader

Read Luke 22:24–27. Even as the disciples were preparing for the Last Supper, they were arguing about who among them would be the greatest in the kingdom. How does Jesus respond to their foolishness, and what is so revolutionary about His reply?

Jesus' answer is unique in the history of leadership. Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, and Genghis Khan all saw leadership in terms of power and authority over others. That's pretty much how the world has always worked in regard to power.

“‘But not so among you; on the contrary,’ ” said Jesus, “ ‘he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves’ ” (*Luke 22:26, NKJV*). In so saying, the Lord of the universe reversed the definition of leadership: “ ‘Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ ” (*Matt. 20:26–28, NIV*).

In so defining servanthood and self-denial as the core principles of His way and His leadership, Jesus introduced a new dynamic to human relations: fulfillment comes not from power but from service; leadership derives its authority not from position but from servanthood; transformation begins not with the throne but with the cross. To live is to die (*John 12:24*).

In Luke 9:46–48 something similar arose among Jesus' disciples about who would be the greatest. The principles of the world were still firmly entrenched in His disciples' minds.

The Master's answer gets to the heart of the problem and poses one of the most difficult challenges in life in general and in the Christian life in particular. Jesus' words, especially the part about being the “ ‘least among you’ ” (*vs. 48, NKJV*), show how completely backward the world's priorities are.

With the principles of the world so utterly opposite of what Jesus taught here, how are we to survive if we implement His principles in our own lives?

Further Study: “Who has the heart? With whom are our thoughts? Of whom do we love to converse? Who has our warmest affections and our best energies? If we are Christ’s, our thoughts are with Him, and our sweetest thoughts are of Him. All we have and are is consecrated to Him. We long to bear His image, breathe His spirit, do His will, and please Him in all things.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 58.

“In our life here, earthly, sin-restricted though it is, the greatest joy and the highest education are in service. And in the future state, untrammelled by the limitations of sinful humanity, it is in service that our greatest joy and our highest education will be found—witnessing, and ever as we witness learning anew ‘the riches of the glory of this mystery;’ ‘which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.’ Colossians 1:27.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 309.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Jesus called the rich and successful farmer a fool (*Luke 12:20*). One may not be rich or successful, but what makes one a fool in the sight of God?
- 2 In some of our churches, we see two groups: first, the professionals, business executives, church and community leaders, and the influential, all who get respect, notice, and regard; second, the silent and the insignificant ones who just come and go without anyone taking note of them. What can you do to make the latter feel just as important as the first group?
- 3 Though it’s easy today to deride the Pharisees for the way that they perverted the faith, how can we be sure that we, who are zealous for the faith, are not in danger of making the same mistakes? How do we stand firm for what is right without becoming a Pharisee? Or, even more important, how do we determine what is right and what is worth fighting for, as opposed to “straining at gnats”?
- 4 How do we maintain an attitude of vigilance and readiness for the return of Jesus when, with each passing year, it gets easier and easier to become less vigilant?

Searching for Peace: Part 2

TAN, CHINA

Tan didn't plan to stay long; but because no one sent him home, he stayed and studied. As he and the elderly pastor studied the Bible, Tan learned new truths about God. He had heard about the Sabbath but had thought that Sunday was the Sabbath. Other Christians worshiped on Sunday; why did this group worship on Saturday? Patiently Pastor Xo studied and prayed with Tan. Tan prayed, too, asking God to show him His truths. Little by little, God opened Tan's mind to truth, and he accepted it.

Tan stayed and studied with Pastor Xo for seven months. During this time, he was baptized and dedicated himself to work full time for God. Pastor Xo assigned Tan to work in a village nearby, where there was a small congregation of believers.

One day Tan answered a knock at his door and found Tao standing there. "I had to find you," Tao said. "I want to know your God." Surprised, Tan invited him in and learned that three days after he had left town, Tao and his friends got into a fight with a man who was the leader of a powerful gang. The young man managed to escape, but the next day someone told him that the gang leader was searching for him to kill him. His mother, distraught over her son's evil ways, begged him to leave town.

While packing to go, Tao found the Bible Tan had given him. He picked it up, and it opened to Matthew 6. Tao began to read, "Do not worry about your life. . . . But seek first [God's] kingdom. . . . Do not worry about tomorrow. . . . Each day has enough trouble of its own' " (*Matt. 6:25, 33, 34, NIV*). Tao remembered Tan's peace and wished he knew God as Tan did, so he decided to buy a one-way ticket to find his Christian friend.

Tan introduced Tao to Pastor Xo. Pastor Xo helped Tao find work, and in the evenings, they studied the Bible together. Tao absorbed the truths and accepted Christ as his Savior and was baptized. Now a new desire burned in Tao's heart—he wanted to become a Bible worker.

He decided to return home and share his new faith with the people there. His first convert was his mother, who saw the deep change in her son's life. But few others were interested enough to listen. Tao's mother feared that if he remained in the village, he might fall back into his old ways. She urged him to return to the city and continue studying, but Tao explained to her that Jesus changes lives forever.

Tao did return to the city to receive more training. He knows that it is by God's grace that he is alive, and by God's grace, he wants to live for Him. Both Tan and Tao are grateful for how God has led in their lives, and they continue to share their faith with others as lay pastors in southern China.

Adapted from a story by Charlotte Ishkanian.

The Kingdom of God



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 11:2; Luke 1:32, 33; 18:16–30; Luke 17:23, 24; Rev. 21:1–3; Luke 21:34–36.*

Memory Text: “They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God” (*Luke 13:29, NKJV*).

The kingdom of God is a major theme and a significant priority in the teachings of Jesus. The phrase occurs nearly fifty times in Matthew, 16 times in Mark, about forty times in Luke, and 3 times in John. Wherever it appears—be it in the Lord's Prayer, or in the Sermon on the Mount, or in Jesus' other preaching and parables—the kingdom of God is an expression of what God had done in history for the human race as He deals with the problem of sin and brings the great controversy with Satan to an ultimate and decisive end. The kingdom of God is unlike any kingdom the world has ever known, and that's because it's not a worldly kingdom.

“The kingdom of God comes not with outward show. It comes through the gentleness of the inspiration of His word, through the inward working of His Spirit, the fellowship of the soul with Him who is its life. The greatest manifestation of its power is seen in human nature brought to the perfection of the character of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 36.

This week we'll focus on this theme, especially as it appears in Luke.

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

Characteristics of the Kingdom of God: Part 1

The Gospels are replete with references to the kingdom of God, all cumulatively testifying that a new order has been inaugurated in and through Jesus.

What does Luke 11:2 say about the kingdom of God? Whose kingdom is it, and why is that so important?

To say that this kingdom is God's is not just saying the obvious but is rather affirming that the kingdom of God is neither a philosophic notion nor an ethical edifice. It is not a social gospel proclaiming bread and water for the hungry or equality and justice for the politically oppressed. It transcends all human goodness and moral action and finds its locus in the sovereign activity of God in the incarnate Son, who came preaching the good news of the kingdom (*Luke 4:42–44, Matt. 4:23–25*).

What does Luke 1:32, 33 teach about who inaugurated the kingdom of God and what its final result will be?

The passage is of utmost importance for two reasons: first, the Messiah anticipated in the Old Testament is none other than Jesus, “the Son of the Highest”; second, “Of his kingdom there will be no end.” This means that, through His incarnation, death, and resurrection, Jesus vanquished Satan's challenge to God's sovereignty and established for eternity God's kingdom. “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (*Rev. 11:15, NKJV*). In the clash between Christ and Satan, Satan claimed victory after the fall of Adam and Eve. But the mission of Jesus proved the falsity of Satan's claims; He defeated Satan at every turn, and with His death and resurrection Christ has assured the entire cosmos that the kingdom of God has arrived.

How can we live in a way that reflects the reality of the kingdom of God? Most important, how can we reflect that reality in our own lives? What should be different about how we, as citizens of God's kingdom, live now?

Characteristics of the Kingdom of God: Part 2

What do the following texts teach us about what citizenship in the kingdom of God is about?

Luke 18:16–30 _____

Luke 12:31–33 _____

Luke 9:59–62 _____

Entry into the kingdom of God is not dependent on one's status or position, or one's riches or the lack thereof. Luke, along with other Gospel writers, points out that one must come to Jesus with an attitude of uncompromised surrender, absolute dependency, and childlike trust; these are traits of those who have entered the kingdom of God. They must be willing to give up everything, if need be; for whatever they would not want to give up would be something that, in a sense, not only competes with Jesus but, in fact, wins. Jesus, and His claim on our life, on *every* aspect of our life, takes top priority. This makes sense, because, after all, it's only through Him that we exist to begin with. Thus, of course, He should have our complete allegiance.

Read again Luke 18:29, 30. What is Jesus saying to us, and what is He promising? *To have to leave parents, spouse, even children for the kingdom of God?* That's a demanding commitment, is it not? Jesus is not saying that these actions are required of all believers but that if one were called to leave these things for the sake of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God would be worth it.

Dwell on Jesus' words about letting the dead bury the dead. What important truth is He expressing here about not making excuses to keep from following Him when the call comes, no matter how valid those excuses might seem?

The Kingdom of God: Already, Not Yet

Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom of God. In His first public proclamation at Nazareth (*Luke 4:16–21*), Jesus affirmed that, through Him that day, Isaiah’s Messianic prophecy of the kingdom and its redeeming ministry had been inaugurated.

Luke records another saying that attests the kingdom’s present reality. Asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom would come, Jesus answered them that the “‘kingdom of God is within you’ ” (*Luke 17:21, NKJV*). Other translations suggest that the kingdom is in your midst. That is to say, with the arrival of Jesus, the kingdom has already come, with its components to include healing the sick (*Luke 9:11*), preaching the gospel (*Luke 4:16–19*), forgiving sins (*Luke 7:48–50; 19:9, 10*), and crushing the forces of evil (*Luke 11:20*). Thus, Jesus made the kingdom a present reality within the individual, transforming the person to be like Him. The kingdom of God is also seen amid the community of believers, a revelation of righteousness and salvation. This present aspect is also known as “the kingdom of God’s grace [that] is now being established, as day by day hearts that have been full of sin and rebellion yield to the sovereignty of His love.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 108.

While the “already” aspect has settled the finality of the kingdom—that is, the defeat of sin and Satan and Jesus’ victory in the great controversy—the “not yet” aspect looks forward to the physical end of evil and the establishment of the new earth: “The full establishment of the kingdom of His glory will not take place until the second coming of Christ to this world.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 108.

What do these texts teach about the kingdom of God at the end of the age? *Luke 17:23, 24; 21:5–36*.

Our world, and the state of our world—the turmoil, sorrow, and trouble in it—certainly reflect the words that Jesus expressed here. Though some argue that the pain and suffering in this world mean God doesn’t exist, we could reply that, given what Jesus warned us about almost two thousand years ago, the state of our world helps prove not only God’s existence but the truth of the Bible itself. (If the world were paradise now, Jesus’ words would be false.) Only at the end will the kingdom of God, in all its fullness, be established. Until then, we have to endure.

The Kingdom and the Second Coming of Christ

When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God, He spoke of two certainties: (1) God's activity through Christ in history to save humanity from sin and (2) God's closure of history by restoring the saved to His original plan—to live with Him forever in the earth made new (*Rev. 21:1–3*). The first, as already noted, has arrived in the mission and ministry of Christ. In Him we are already in the kingdom of grace (*Eph. 1:4–9*). The second part, the gathering of the saved in the kingdom of glory, is the future hope that those in Christ await (*Eph. 1:10, Titus 2:13*). Jesus and the rest of the New Testament link that historical moment when the faithful will inherit the kingdom of glory to the second coming of Christ.

The second coming of Christ is the final culmination of the good news that Jesus came to proclaim when He came the first time. The same Jesus who defeated sin and Satan on Calvary is soon to return to begin the process that will eradicate evil and purify this earth from the tragedy that Satan inflicted on God's creation.

Read Luke 21:34–36. In your own words, summarize the basic message. As you do, look at your life and ask yourself how these words apply to you. What do you need to do in order to make sure that you are following what Jesus tells us here?

As we await the return of Jesus, we are called to “ ‘watch . . . and pray always that you may be counted worthy . . . to stand before the Son of Man’ ” (*vs. 36, NKJV*).

Those who have experienced the kingdom of grace must wait, watch, and pray for the kingdom of glory. Between the one and the other, between the already and the not yet, the believers are to be occupied with ministry and mission, with living and hoping, with nurture and witness. The anticipation of the Second Coming demands the sanctification of our lives now and here.

Witnesses

Read Acts 1:1–8. What important truths about the kingdom of God are being expressed here?

The kingdom of God was foremost in the mind of Luke as he wrote a sequel to his Gospel, in the form of a brief history of the early church. In the opening lines of that historical account, the book of Acts, Luke states three fundamental truths regarding the kingdom of God.

First, be sure that Jesus will come again. For 40 days between His resurrection and ascension, the Lord continued to teach what He had taught the disciples before His crucifixion: “things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (*Acts 1:3, NKJV*). The mighty events of the Cross and the Resurrection had not changed anything in the teaching of Jesus in regard to the kingdom; if anything, for 40 days the risen Jesus continued to impress on the disciples the reality of the kingdom.

Second, be waiting for Jesus to come again in God’s own time. After His resurrection, Jesus’ disciples asked a serious and anxious question: “ ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ ” (*vs. 6, NKJV*). Jesus did not answer the question but corrected the disciples’ perspective: God must always be God; to probe His mind, to predict the preciseness of His plans, to penetrate His secrets is not the task of flesh and blood. He knows when the kingdom of glory should come, and He will bring it to pass in His own time (*Acts 1:7, Matt. 24:36*), just as “when the fullness of the time had come” (*Gal. 4:4*) He sent His Son to inaugurate the kingdom of grace.

Third, be witnesses to the gospel of Jesus. Christ redirected the disciples from speculation about what is not known—when the kingdom of glory will come—to what is known and must be done. The time of the Second Coming is not revealed, but we are called upon to wait for that glorious day and to “occupy” till then (*Luke 19:13*). This means that we should be involved in taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to “ ‘the end of the earth’ ” (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*). That is our responsibility—not in our own strength but by the power of the Holy Spirit, promised to be poured out on all those who shall be witnesses to what they have seen and heard (*vs. 4–8*).

These faithful followers of Jesus still had some big misconceptions about the nature of Christ’s work. And yet, the Lord was using them anyway. What message might there be for us about not needing to fully understand everything in order to still be used by God?

Further Study: “Of the poor in spirit Jesus says, ‘Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’ This kingdom is not, as Christ’s hearers had hoped, a temporal and earthly dominion. Christ was opening to men the spiritual kingdom of His love, His grace, His righteousness. The ensign of the Messiah’s reign is distinguished by the likeness of the Son of man. His subjects are the poor in spirit, the meek, the persecuted for righteousness’ sake. The kingdom of heaven is theirs.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 8.

“We are now in God’s workshop. Many of us are rough stones from the quarry. But as we lay hold upon the truth of God, its influence affects us. It elevates us and removes from us every imperfection and sin, of whatever nature. Thus we are prepared to see the King in His beauty and finally to unite with the pure and heavenly angels in the kingdom of glory. It is here that this work is to be accomplished for us, here that our bodies and spirits are to be fitted for immortality.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 355, 356.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Physicist Steven Weinberg, talking about the cosmos, famously (or infamously) wrote: “The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless.” His words made quite a stir, and he eventually tried to soften what he said. Some, though, didn’t see any reason for the controversy about the universe not having a point. “Why should it have a point?” asked Harvard astronomer Martha Geller about the universe. “What point? It’s just a physical system, what point is there? I’ve always been puzzled by that statement.” *The universe, just a system, and a pointless one at that?* As a Christian awaiting the second coming of Jesus and the full and complete establishment of the kingdom of God, how would you respond to the ideas behind these statements?
- 2 Every generation of Christians has expected Jesus to return in their time, and some pastors and evangelists have set specific dates. But each has failed. What is wrong with time setting?

Fighting With Shadows: Part 1

ABBA, MONGOLIA

Abba, a young man living in northern Mongolia, felt powerless to change the downward spiral of his life. Then his friend introduced him to God. Here he shares his personal testimony.

“Before I became a Christian, I lived a really worldly life. I drank; I smoked; and I stole things. I never thought about whether what I did was good or bad; it was just part of me. I did it naturally.

“One time my friends and I were drinking, and I got drunk long before they did. I lost consciousness, and when I awoke, I realized I was alone. I stumbled out of the house in search of my friends. I found them in one of my friend’s houses. ‘Why did you leave me?’ I demanded angrily.

“ ‘You were asleep!’ one said. ‘We couldn’t awaken you.’ They gave me another drink. I felt myself falling backwards, and everything turned black.

“I awoke in the police station, naked and cold. My arm was bloody, and my back was sore. I didn’t know what had happened. The police officer told me that I had been arrested for disturbing the peace. He said that I had been shouting and threatening people, and that I had broken several people’s windows with my fist. That explained the bloody arm. A man with the police officer said I had banged on his door and threatened him. I did not remember any of this.

“The police officer gave me my clothes, and I dressed. But my shoes were missing. When I asked for my shoes, he told me I had not been wearing shoes when I was arrested.

“A woman came into the police station to file a complaint against me. She said that I had broken windows in her house. I apologized and told her I didn’t know I had done this. I wanted to see the broken windows for myself, so the police officer took me to her home. Under one broken window lay one of my shoes. Then I went to the other house with broken windows, and found my other shoe. I knew that I was guilty. The owner of the house said that I had threatened to kill everyone in the house. Someone else told me that I had knocked on a door and when I saw my own shadow reflected in the glass, I started fighting with it. When a man came out to investigate the noise, I started fighting with him. He escaped and called the police. When the police officer came, I started fighting with him as well. It seemed I was listening to stories of a man possessed with a devil.

“I paid my fine and agreed to replace the broken windows. I even promised that I would never drink again. But three days later I was drunk. It seemed that I could not stop drinking. I realized the difficulties I was making for my mother, with whom I lived. I worked, but instead of giving her money for food, I bought alcohol.”

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.

Jesus *in* Jerusalem



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 19:28–40, Zech. 9:9, Luke 19:45–48, Matt. 21:12–17, Luke 20:9–26.*

Memory Text: “Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it” (*Luke 19:41, NKJV*).

The last week of Jesus' earthly life unfolded in Jerusalem. What tumultuous events marked that week too: the triumphal entry; Jesus weeping over the indifferent city; the cleansing of the temple; the scheming and the plotting against Him; the pathos of the Last Supper and the agony of Gethsemane; the mockery of a trial; the Crucifixion; and, finally, the Resurrection. Never before and never since has any city witnessed so critical a progression of history, one that brought the cosmic conflict between good and evil to its climax, even though no one but Jesus understood the significance of what was unfolding.

Jesus had passed through Jerusalem several times in His life. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all record Jesus as an adult visiting Jerusalem, though mostly during the Passion Week. Although other appearances of Jesus in Jerusalem are well-known—the infant Jesus being brought to the temple (*Luke 2:22–38*), the debate of the 12-year-old in the temple (*vss. 41–50*), the tempter taking Jesus to the highest point of the temple (*Luke 4:9–13*)—it is the closing week of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem that occupies the special attention of the Gospel writers.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 20.*

The Triumphal Entry

He was born in Bethlehem. He grew up in Nazareth. He taught, preached, and healed throughout Galilee, Samaria, Judea, and Perea. But one city held His constant focus: Jerusalem. Jesus “steadfastly set His face to go to” the city (*Luke 9:51, NKJV*). His entry into the city marked the most dramatic and crucial week in world history. The week began with Christ’s kingly march into the city and saw His death on the cross, by which we who were enemies “were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (*Rom. 5:10, NKJV*).

Read *Luke 19:28–40*. Imagine the excitement of the disciples. They must surely have thought that at this time King Jesus would ascend to an earthly throne at Jerusalem, the throne of King David. What important lesson about false expectations can we take from this account?

When Jesus was born, wise men from the East came knocking at the doors of Jerusalem, asking that poignant question: “ ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?’ ” (*Matt. 2:2, NKJV*). And now, a few days before the Cross, as His disciples and the multitudes thronged the city, an acclaim burst across Jerusalem’s sky: “ ‘Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!’ ” (*Luke 19:38, NKJV*).

This amazing scene fulfilled prophecy. “ ‘Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey’ ” (*Zech. 9:9, NKJV*). Yet, Jesus knew that this march of history, which began with the shouts of Hosanna, would soon wind up on Golgotha, where He would utter those triumphant words, “ ‘It is finished.’ ”

Though it was all according to God’s eternal plan, His disciples were so caught up in the traditions and teachings and expectations of their own time and culture that they completely missed His earlier warnings about what would take place and what it all meant.

Christ spoke to them, but they didn’t listen. Or maybe they listened, but what He said went so much against what they expected that they blocked it out. How can we make sure we aren’t doing the same thing when it comes to biblical truth?

Jerusalem: Cleansing the Temple

“It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves” (*Luke 19:46*).

After the triumphal entry, during which Jesus wept over Jerusalem, the first thing He did was to go to the temple.

Read *Luke 19:45–48, Matthew 21:12–17, and Mark 11:15–19. What important lessons can we take away from what Jesus had done? What should these accounts say to us as individuals and as members of a community that, in a way, functions like the temple? Eph. 2:21.*

All four Gospels mention the cleansing of the temple. While John speaks of the first cleansing (*John 2:13–25*) taking place during Jesus’ visit to the temple at the Passover of A.D. 28, others narrated the second cleansing at the end of Jesus’ ministry, this time at the Passover of A.D. 31. Thus, the two cleansings of the temple provided a parenthesis to the ministry of Jesus, showing how much He cared for the sanctity of the temple and its services, and how strategically He asserted His Messianic mission and authority.

His actions in the temple, especially the second time, which came just before His death, present an interesting question: Knowing that He was soon to die, knowing that the temple and its services would soon become null and void, Jesus nevertheless drove out those who were profaning it with their wares. Why did He not simply leave it alone, in its own corruption, especially since it would not only become unnecessary but, within a generation, would be destroyed?

Though we are not given an answer, it’s most likely because it was still God’s house, and it was still the place where the plan of salvation was revealed. In a sense one could argue that, with His upcoming death, the temple and its services served an important function in that they were the place to help faithful Jews come to understand just who Jesus was and what His death on the cross really meant. That is, the temple, which depicted the entire plan of salvation, could help many come to see in Jesus the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (*Rev. 13:8*).

The Unfaithful

The parable of the wicked vinedressers (*Luke 20:9–19*) gives us a lesson in redemptive history. The center of that history is God and His continual love for erring sinners. Although the parable was specifically addressed to the Jewish leaders of His time (“they knew He had spoken this parable against them” [*vs. 19, NKJV*]), it is timeless in its reach. It applies to every generation, every congregation, and every person on whom God’s love and trust have been poured out and from whom God expects a faithful return. We are today’s tenants, and we can draw from this parable some lessons on history as God views it.

Read *Luke 20:9–19*. How does the principle taught here apply to us, if we make the same mistakes as those in the parable?

Instead of giving to God the fruits of love and fidelity, the tenants of God’s vineyard forsook and failed God. But God, as the owner of the vineyard, sent servant after servant (*vss. 10–12*), prophet after prophet (*Jer. 35:15*) in persistent love to woo and win His people to their responsibility of stewardship. Each prophet, though, became a victim of rejection. “ ‘Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?’ ” (*Acts 7:52, NKJV*).

Divine history is a long love story. Tragedy will raise its head again and again, but glory will eventually triumph. Resurrection must follow the Cross. The stone that was rejected is now the cornerstone of a great temple that will house the commonwealth of God, where all the redeemed, the rich and the poor, the Jew and the Gentile, the male and the female, will live as one people. They shall walk in the eschatological vineyard and enjoy its fruit forever.

We might not have living prophets today to persecute, but we are just as capable of rejecting God’s messengers as were people of old. How can we make sure that we, who have been called to give the Lord “the fruit of the vineyard,” do not reject these messengers and their messages?

God Versus Caesar

Read Luke 20:20–26. How do we take what Jesus taught here and apply it to our own situation in whatever country we live?

During the time of Jesus, taxation by Rome was a volatile issue. Around A.D. 6, according to Josephus, Judas the Galilean, a revolutionary leader, declared that paying taxes to Caesar was treason against God. The issue, along with several Messianic claims and aspirants, set off periodic anti-Roman revolts. Against such a sensitive background, the question put before Jesus about whether it was lawful to pay taxes revealed the ulterior motive of the interrogators: to answer that it was lawful would have placed Jesus on the side of Rome, showing that He could not be the king of the Jews as declared by the crowds at His entry into Jerusalem; to say No would have meant that Jesus was following the Galilean mood and declaring the Roman rule unlawful, opening Himself to the charge of treason. They had hoped to put Jesus in a bind from which He couldn't escape.

Jesus, though, saw right through them. He pointed to the image of Caesar on a coin and pronounced His verdict: “ ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's' ” (*Luke 20:25, NKJV*). Living under Caesar, whose currency is used for day-to-day necessities, has its obligation to Caesar. But then there is another obligation, a greater one, which rises from the fact that we are made in the image of God and that to Him we owe our ultimate allegiance.

“Christ's reply was no evasion, but a candid answer to the question. . . . He declared that since they were living under the protection of the Roman power, they should render to that power the support it claimed, so long as this did not conflict with a higher duty. But while peaceably subject to the laws of the land, they should at all times give their first allegiance to God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 602.

What are ways we can continue to be good citizens in whatever country we live, while at the same time knowing that our true citizenship exists in a city “whose builder and maker is God” (*Heb. 11:10*)?

The Lord's Supper

Read Luke 22:13–20. What is the significance of the Lord's Supper taking place at the Passover?

Jesus founded the Lord's Supper against the historic context of the Passover feast. The Passover setting underscores human impotence in contrast to God's great power. It was as impossible for Israel to free itself from Egyptian bondage as it is for us to free ourselves from the consequences of sin. Liberation came from God as a gift of His love and grace, and this is the lesson Israel was to teach its children from generation to generation (*Exod. 12:26, 27*). Just as the liberation of Israel was so rooted in history by the redeeming act of God, so the liberation of humanity from sin is grounded in the historic event of the Cross. Indeed, Jesus is our "paschal lamb" (*see 1 Cor. 5:7*), and His Last Supper is "a proclaiming act wherein the community in faith gives expression to the glorious and decisive significance of the death of Christ."—G. C. Berkouwer, *The Sacraments* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1969), p. 193.

The Lord's Supper is a reminder that "on the same night in which He was betrayed" (*1 Cor. 11:23, NKJV*), on the night before He was crucified, Jesus gave a solemn message to His disciples that they needed to remember: the bread and the wine are symbols of His body, which was about to be broken, and of His blood, which was about to be shed for the remission of sins (*see Matt. 26:28*). The death of Jesus was God's sole means for our Redemption from sin. Lest we forget that the death of Jesus is heaven's provision for our salvation, Jesus ordained the Lord's Supper and commanded that it be kept until He returns (*1 Cor. 11:24–26*).

Jesus' assertion that His blood was to be "shed for many for the remission of sins" (*Matt. 26:28, NKJV*) is to be remembered even to the end of history. To ignore this assertion and choose any other means of salvation is to deny God and His chosen method of salvation.

Two crucial lessons (of many) stand out. "Christ died for us" is the first lesson to be remembered at the table of the Lord. The second lesson is that we sit as one body because of that death, which has brought us all into one fellowship. Even as we sit at the table, we sit as Christ's redeemed community of the end time, awaiting the Lord's return. Until then, the table of the Lord is a reminder that history has meaning and life has hope.

Christ gave His body and blood in order to give you the promise of eternal life. How can you personalize this amazing truth in a way that will constantly give you hope and assurance?

Further Study: “To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ is to receive Him as a personal Saviour, believing that He forgives our sins, and that we are complete in Him. It is by beholding His love, by dwelling upon it, by drinking it in, that we are to become partakers of His nature. What food is to the body, Christ must be to the soul. Food cannot benefit us unless we eat it, unless it becomes a part of our being. So Christ is of no value to us if we do not know Him as a personal Saviour. A theoretical knowledge will do us no good. We must feed upon Him, receive Him into the heart, so that His life becomes our life. His love, His grace, must be assimilated.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 389.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Consider the scenes in which Jesus cleansed the temple. In what ways can we put our faith and fidelity on sale? How can religion be used for profit, prestige, and position? More important, how can we as a church make sure we don't fall into the same deception?
- 2 Atheist writer Alex Rosenberg believes that all reality, all existence, is purely materialistic. That is, everything can and must be explained through physical processes and *only* physical processes. These processes are, of course, without design, goals, purposes, or God. “What is the purpose of the universe?” he asks. “There is none. What purposes are at work in the universe? Same answer: none.” If, though, the meaninglessness and purposelessness of the universe make you depressed, Rosenberg warns against taking your “depression seriously.” Why? Because our emotions, including depression, are nothing but specific arrangements of neurons and chemicals, and what's so serious about that? Rosenberg, however, does have an answer for those discouraged by the meaninglessness of their lives. Because depression is merely a particular configuration of neurons, simply rearrange the neurons—and you can do this with pharmaceuticals. “If you don't feel better in the morning . . . or three weeks from now, switch to another one. Three weeks is often how long it takes serotonin reuptake suppression drugs like Prozac, Wellbutrin, Paxil, Zoloft, Celexa, or Luvox to kick in. And if one doesn't work, another one probably will.” The amazing thing about his answer is that he is serious: if depressed, take drugs. Contrast this view of life with what we believe regarding Jesus Christ and what He has done for us on the cross. Why, in a very real sense, is our participation in the Lord's Supper an open and defiant refutation of the nihilism and meaninglessness presented by Rosenberg and his atheism?

Fighting With Shadows: Part 2

ABBA, MONGOLIA

“My friend, Daba, had gone to Ulaanbaatar to work, and there he became a Christian. When he returned home, he tried talking with me. Because we were friends, I listened to his advice and nodded my head; but in my heart, I was making fun of what he was saying. I thought his belief in God was foolish.

“Daba learned that some Christians were meeting nearby, and he invited me to go with him to the meeting. I went out of respect for Daba, but I was embarrassed to go to a Christian meeting. They talked about God, and I remembered that I had a New Testament at home. Afterward, I found it and began reading, but it didn’t make sense to me. Byra, the leader of the Christian group, offered to explain the Bible passages to me.

“A few weeks later, Daba invited me to a Bible study group on Saturday. I decided to go. Daba wasn’t an Adventist, but the home Bible study group was the only Christian meeting in the village, and he was eager for Christian fellowship. The morning I attended, the speaker talked about God’s love, and somehow the message got through to me. I saw in my mother’s love for me a reflection of God’s love. Even when I came home drunk and she scolded me, she was still there to encourage and help me.

“I continued attending the Bible study group. As Byra explained different Bible passages, the Bible began to make sense to me. I began reading the Bible because I wanted to, not because I felt I should. Soon I could not stop reading it, and I gave my heart to God.

“Over the years, I had promised myself many times that I would stop drinking, but I was never able to stop. Daba told me to pray and ask God for the strength. When I started praying, all my old drinking friends left town. God took them away so they wouldn’t influence me. Then he took away the desire to drink and delivered me from the chains of alcohol. My mother and sisters are amazed. They see how God is changing my life, and they ask many questions about my faith in God. Before I met Christ, fighting, drinking, and stealing were my life. But when I met Jesus, I realized that nothing in my heart was good. I asked God to give me a clean heart, a clean life, and now I long to spend time with Him. I confess, truly confess, that those times I hurt others by my words or my actions were wrong and bad. I don’t ever want to do those things again. By God’s grace I am a changed man.”

The Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to grow in Mongolia as more people come to learn about God through the witness of those who have given their lives to Him. Thank you for supporting mission.

Adapted from a story by Charlotte Ishkanian.

Crucified *and* Risen



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Gen. 3:1–6, Luke 22:39–46, 2 Cor. 13:8, Luke 22:53, Matt. 12:30, 1 Cor. 15:14.*

Memory Text: “‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again’” (*Luke 24:7, NKJV*).

From childhood Jesus was conscious that He had come to this earth to fulfill His Father’s will (*Luke 2:41–50*). He taught, healed, and ministered with an unwavering commitment to obey the Father. Now the time had come, after celebrating the Last Supper, to walk alone, to affirm God’s will, to be betrayed and denied, to be tried and crucified, and to rise victorious over death.

Throughout His life Jesus knew about the inevitability of the cross. Many times in the Gospels, the word *must* is used in relationship to the sufferings and death of Jesus (*Luke 17:25, 22:37, 24:7, Matt. 16:21, Mark 8:31, 9:12, John 3:14*). He *must* go to Jerusalem. He *must* suffer. He *must* be rejected. He *must* be lifted up, and so on. Nothing would deter the Son of God from going to Golgotha. He denounced, as coming from Satan (*Matt. 16:22, 23*), any suggestion to reject the cross. He was convinced that He “must go . . . suffer . . . be killed, and be raised” (*vs. 21, NKJV*). To Jesus, the journey to the cross was not an option; it was a “must” (*Luke 24:25, 26, 46*), a part of the divine “mystery . . . kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people” (*Col. 1:26, NIV*).

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

Gethsemane: The Fearsome Struggle

At the dawn of history, God created Adam and Eve and placed them in a beautiful garden blessed with all that they needed for a life of joy. Soon something extraordinary happened: Satan appeared (*Genesis 3*). He tempted the first couple and then plunged the young earth into a mighty controversy between good and evil, between God and Satan.

Now, in God’s own time, another garden (*Luke 22:39–46*) became a mighty battleground where the war between truth and falsehood, between righteousness and sin, and between God’s plan for human salvation and Satan’s goal for human destruction raged.

In Eden the world was plunged into the disaster of sin; in Gethsemane the world’s ultimate victory was assured. Eden saw the tragic triumph of self asserting itself against God; Gethsemane showed self surrendering itself to God and revealing the victory over sin.

Compare what happened in Eden (*Gen. 3:1–6*) with what happened in Gethsemane (*Luke 22:39–46*). **What was the big difference in what happened in both gardens?**

Gethsemane stands for two crucial things: first, for a most vicious attempt of Satan to derail Jesus from God’s mission and purpose; next, for the noblest example of reliance on God’s strength to accomplish His will and purpose. Gethsemane shows that, however strong the battle is and however weak the self is, victory is certain to those who have experienced the strength of prayer. As Jesus so famously prayed: “ ‘Nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done’ ” (*Luke 22:42, NKJV*).

All the hosts of Satan were arraigned against Jesus; the disciples, whom He loved so much, were numb to His suffering. Drops of blood were falling drop by drop; the betrayer’s kiss was just a breath away; and the priests and the temple guards were about to pounce. Yet, Jesus showed us that prayer and submission to God’s will give the needed strength to the soul to bear life’s great burdens.

Next time you are severely tempted, how can you have the kind of experience Jesus had in Gethsemane as opposed to what Adam and Eve had in Eden? What is the crucial factor that makes all the difference between them?

Judas

“Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve” (Luke 22:3, NIV). No doubt Satan worked hard to get all the disciples. What was it about Judas, though, that enabled the adversary to succeed so well with him, in contrast to the others?

Luke tells how Jesus prayed alone all night in the mountains before He chose His disciples (Luke 6:12–16). And Jesus believed that the Twelve were God’s gift to Him (John 17:6–9). Was Judas really an answer to prayer? How are we to understand what is going on here other than that even in Judas’s betrayal and apostasy, God’s purpose was to be fulfilled? (See 2 Cor. 13:8.)

Judas, who had so much potential, who could have been another Paul, instead went in a completely wrong direction. What could have been a Gethsemane experience for him was, instead, like the Fall in Eden.

“He had fostered the evil spirit of avarice until it had become the ruling motive of his life. The love of mammon overbalanced his love for Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 716.

When Jesus fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish (Luke 9:10–17), Judas was the first to grasp the political value of the miracle and “set on foot the project to take Christ by force and make Him king.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 719. But Jesus denounced the attempt, and there began Judas’s disenchantment: “His hopes were high. His disappointment was bitter.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 719. Obviously Judas, as did others, believed that Jesus would use His extraordinary powers to establish a worldly kingdom, and Judas clearly had wanted a place in that kingdom. How tragic: his desire for a place in a temporal kingdom that never came caused him to lose a place in an eternal kingdom that was sure to come.

Another time, when a devout follower of Jesus chose to anoint His feet with a costly ointment, Judas decried her act as an economic waste (John 12:1–8). All Judas could see was money, and his love of money overshadowed his love of Jesus. This fixation with money and power led Judas to put a price tag on the priceless gift of heaven (Matt. 26:15). From then on, “Satan entered Judas” (Luke 22:3, NKJV). And Judas became a lost soul.

There is nothing wrong with status, power, or money. The problem comes when these things (or anything) overshadow our faithfulness to God. Why is it always important to take stock of ourselves so that we don’t become as self-deceived as was Judas?

Either for Him or Against Him

For all else that it entails, the Cross is also the great divider of history: the divider between faith and unbelief, between betrayal and acceptance, and between eternal life and death. There is no middle ground for any human being concerning the Cross. In the end, we are either on one side or the other.

“ ‘He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad’ ” (*Matt. 12:30, NKJV*). Strong words, and they can make us a bit uncomfortable, but Jesus is simply expressing what is real and what the truth entails for those who are immersed in the great controversy between Christ and Satan. We are with Jesus or with Satan.

Yes, it’s that stark.

How did the following people relate to Jesus, and what lessons can we learn from their examples that can help us in our own relationship to God and how we relate to the Cross?

Sanhedrin (*Luke 22:53*). What mistakes did these people make, why did they make them, and how can we protect ourselves from doing something similar concerning how they viewed Jesus?

Pilate (*Luke 23:1–7, 13–25*). What led Pilate to say, “ ‘I find no fault in Him’ ” (*John 19:4, NKJV*) and at the same time sentence Him to be crucified? What can we learn from his mistake in failing to do what he knew was right?

Herod (*Luke 23:6–12*). What was his big mistake, and what can we learn from it?

The two thieves (*Luke 23:39–43*). Two sinners look at the same cross and have two different reactions. How does this scene reveal the either-or aspect of salvation—that is, we are either on one side of the great controversy or on the other?

He Is Risen

Early Sunday morning the women went to the tomb with a single purpose—to complete the burial ritual. Despite the time they had spent with Jesus, they had not truly understood what was to happen. They were certainly not expecting an empty tomb, or to be told by heavenly messengers: “He is not here, but is risen” (*Luke 24:6*).

In the first few chapters of Acts alone there are at least eight references to the resurrection of Jesus (*see Acts 1:22; 2:14–36; 3:14, 15; 4:1, 2, 10, 12, 33; 5:30–32*). **Why was the resurrection of Jesus so pivotal in apostolic preaching and in the faith of the early church? Why is it still so crucial for us today, as well?**

The women were firsthand eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. They rushed to share this good news with others, but no one believed them (*Luke 24:11*). Instead, the apostles dismissed the greatest story in redemptive history as “idle tales” of exhausted and grieving women (*vss. 10, 11*).

How soon they were to learn just how wrong they were!

The resurrection of Christ is foundational to God’s redemptive act and to the totality of Christian faith and existence. The apostle Paul makes that very clear: “If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty” (*1 Cor. 15:14, NKJV*). It is empty, or vain, because only in Christ’s resurrection can we find the hope that is ours. Without that hope, our lives here end, and they end for eternity. Christ’s life didn’t end in a tomb, and the great promise is that ours won’t either.

“If Christ is not risen from the dead, the long course of God’s redemptive acts to save his people ends in a dead-end street, in a tomb. If the resurrection of Christ is not reality, then we have no assurance that God is the *living* God, for death has the last word. Faith is futile because the object of that faith has not vindicated himself as the Lord of life. Christian faith is then incarcerated in the tomb along with the final and highest self-revelation of God in Christ—if Christ is indeed dead.”—George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 318.

“All Things Must Be Fulfilled”

Read Luke 24:13–49, which tells us about events immediately after Christ’s resurrection. In the various encounters, what does Jesus point to in order to help these people understand what happened to Him, and why is that so important, even for us today in our witness to the world?

The resurrection of Jesus should have been enough evidence to establish the Messiahship of Jesus. Beaten and brutalized before being crucified and eventually pierced, Jesus was then wrapped and placed in a tomb. Even if, as some have ridiculously suggested, He had survived both the cross and the burial, a bloodied and battered and weakened Jesus, somehow staggering from the tomb, would not have been anyone’s idea of a victorious Messiah.

Nevertheless, there Jesus was, alive and well. He walked several miles with the two men on the road to Emmaus. And yet even then, before revealing who He was, Jesus pointed them to the Scriptures, giving them a firm biblical foundation for their faith in Him.

Then, when He appeared to the disciples, showed them His flesh, and ate with them, Jesus did more: He pointed them to the Word of God: “‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things’ ” (*Luke 24:46–48, NKJV*).

Here, too, Jesus not only pointed to the Scriptures (besides the evidence that He was actually alive and among them), but He used the Scriptures to help them understand exactly what had happened to Him. Also, He directly linked His resurrection with the mission to preach the gospel to all nations.

So, even with all the powerful evidence proving who Jesus was, He always pointed His followers back to the Word of God. After all, without the Word of God among us today, how would we know of our calling and mission to preach the gospel to the world? How would we even know what the gospel was? The Bible is, then, as central to us today as it was to Jesus and His disciples.

How much time do you spend with the Bible? How does it impact how you live, the choices you make, and how you treat others?

Further Study: “The significance of the death of Christ will be seen by saints and angels. Fallen men could not have a home in the paradise of God without the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Shall we not then exalt the cross of Christ? The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden, the paradise of bliss. All who wish for security in earth or heaven must look to the Lamb of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1132.

Discussion Questions:

1 As Christians we have to live by faith; that is, we have to believe in something that we can't fully prove, that we don't have direct eyewitness evidence for. Of course, people do that all the time in a lot of things. For instance, in the context of science, one author wrote: “In summary, we have direct evidence for a surprisingly small number of the beliefs we hold.”—Richard DeWitt, *Worldviews: An Introduction to the History and Philosophy of Science*, 2nd ed. (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.: John Wiley and Sons, 2010), p. 15. Nevertheless, we have many very good reasons for our faith, for the things we believe in. In the context of the Great Commission, for instance, look at what Jesus said to the disciples: “ ‘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’ ” (*Matt. 24:14, NKJV*). Now, think about the time that Jesus spoke these words. How large was His following at the time? How many people believed in Him or even had any understanding of who He was and what He was going to accomplish? Think, too, about all the opposition that the early church was to face, for centuries, in the Roman Empire. Keeping all these facts in mind, discuss just how remarkable a prediction this statement of Jesus was and how it should help us to trust in the Word of God.

2 Dwell on the Ellen G. White passage above. How does this help us to understand just how universal the issues of sin really are? *Even the angels are not secure except by looking to Jesus.* What does this mean?

New Life From Death

MASAAKI, JAPAN

As a mortician, I'm surrounded by death every day as I prepare bodies for burial and direct funerals. For years, I have watched people mourn the deaths of loved ones and go through the ceremonies to assure that the deceased have peaceful and speedy journeys from this life to the next.

Japan is largely secular, but most people honor their ancestors by prayers, elaborate ceremonies, and worship rituals. At certain times during the year, families visit their ancestral burial sites and offer gifts and prayers. My family was no different; we prayed to our ancestors.

As I watched the leaders of various religions conduct funeral ceremonies, I noticed that most funerals involved great sadness and much weeping. But I noticed that during Christian funerals, sorrow was tempered with hope. They seemed to have faith that they would see their loved ones again. No such hope existed for most people. I began to wonder whose beliefs were correct. Just where did the spirit go after a person died?

I began watching Christians more closely. Christians, I quickly saw, faced death with a deep-rooted faith in their God. Their pastors showed great compassion toward the grieving family and spoke of their hope to see their loved ones again. One day I was in charge of a funeral in a Seventh-day Adventist church. After my preparations were completed, I sat down alone in the empty church and let the peacefulness of the sanctuary wrap around me. I thought about the times when death came close to me, the time when I almost drowned in the ocean, and the time I should have died in a motorcycle accident. As I remembered these experiences, I was surprised that instead of feeling fear, I felt a deep peace. I sensed that I was not alone.

The next morning I visited the Adventist pastor. We talked about God and the pastor assured me that Jesus wanted to be part of my life. I asked him to help me learn more. I was eager to know how the Christian faith gave its followers such hope. We studied together for several months, and I learned a lot about the God who not only created us but came to live and die so that we could live with Him forever. I had never heard of such love!

I prayed my first prayer, and God filled my heart with a peace and joy I had never known. My family, friends, and colleagues noticed the changes in my life and asked what had happened. I told them that I had met the living God, Jesus Christ, and had accepted His gift of salvation.

Now when I conduct a funeral for someone who is not a Christian, I want the grieving family to notice a difference in my life. I continue studying the Bible and learning about God's love so I can answer people who ask about my faith, and know how to encourage the sad families I meet every day.

Adapted from a story by Charlotte Ishkanian.

Next quarter's guide, entitled *Missionaries*, by Børge Schantz, will look at mission first and foremost as God's means for communicating the gospel to those who don't know it. Mission is a core part of God's sovereign activity in the process of redeeming humanity. Our study will examine how God's eternal purpose has been accomplished in the lives of individuals in the Bible whom He has used to be missionaries to the lost.

In the end, the Christian mission is God's mission, not ours. It originated in the heart of God. It is based on the love of God. And it is accomplished by the will of God.

Mission is, at the most basic level, letting the whole world know about Jesus and about what He has done for each of us and about what He promises to do for us, now and for eternity. In short, we who know about those promises—we have been called to tell others about them as well.

Lesson 1—The Missionary Nature of God

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **God Created Man and Woman** (*Genesis 1, Genesis 2*)

MONDAY: **Free Will** (*Genesis 2:15–17*)

TUESDAY: **The Fall** (*Genesis 3:6, 7*)

WEDNESDAY: **God's Initiative to Save Us** (*Genesis 3:9*)

THURSDAY: **Metaphors of Mission** (*Matthew 5:13, 14*)

Memory Text—*Isaiah 55:4, NIV*

Sabbath Gem: Before the world began, God had the plan of salvation, in order to do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

Lesson 2—The First Missionary

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Call of Abraham** (*Genesis 12:1–3*)

MONDAY: **Abraham's Testimony to Ten Kings** (*Genesis 14:8–24*)

TUESDAY: **Exemplar of Faith** (*Genesis 15:6, Galatians 3:6*)

WEDNESDAY: **Abraham, the Wanderer** (*Genesis 12:6, 7; Genesis 22:1–14*)

THURSDAY: **Abraham: A Missionary in His Own House** (*Genesis 18:18, 19*)

Memory Text—*Galatians 3:6–8, NIV*

Sabbath Gem: God wants us to be, just as God's faithful servant Abraham was, a light to the nations, a light to those who needed to know the Lord.

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.