

JULY-SEPTEMBER

Q
2004

Religion in Relationships



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide
for Young Adults



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Religion in Relationships



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Welcome to *CQ's* World



The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writers who have participated in *CQ's* writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School Bible study guide, four hundred individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about 70,000. It is published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Indonesian, and Finnish.

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TEACHER PREPARATION
IN MINUTES...**

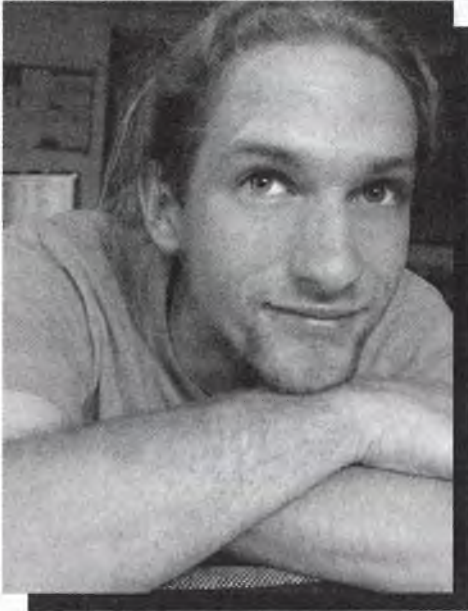


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This Quarter's Illustrators



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Getting the most Out of CQ

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

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

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

Circulation of CQ is about 70,000.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

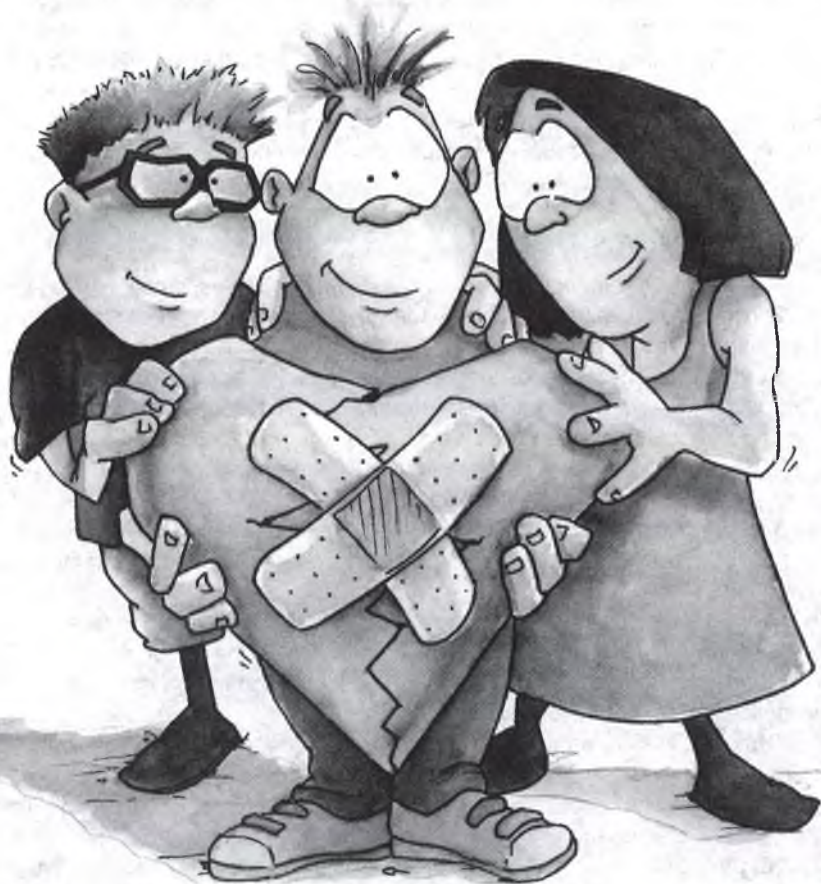
"Opinion" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

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

CQ AND THE CHURCH

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

Created for Community



“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7, NIV).

Sharing the Truth With Passion

INTRODUCTION

Acts 9:15; 1 Cor. 13:2

There was something about them that made him angry. Maybe it was their quiet peace or subtle confidence. He could not understand it. So many of them willing to die for this God they could not see, feel, or touch.

But one day he too experienced it. After his encounter with Jesus, he found himself also believing. Now he understood why those whom he had at first persecuted could not give up their God. Now he also wanted to shout from the mountaintops that he had experienced what it meant to be in the presence of the One who makes life worth living.

Yet Paul understood that the greatest testimony of this Man named Jesus was His own life. Jesus was capable of touching everyone with His love. He forgave the unforgivable; He had mercy on the merciless; He brought salvation to the sinful. Paul had experienced it for himself. As a result, he could now share with everyone an unquestionable truth: that Jesus mends broken hearts, is rest for the weary, makes the cripple walk again, heals the sick, and becomes a father to the orphaned.

**There was something
about them that made
him angry.**

To share the truth effectively, Paul found it necessary to emulate Jesus' example of reaching out to people and touching their lives. Thus, he went far beyond the temple walls and outside his city to do God's work. One day he was in Iconium, another day in Ephesus, the next writing to the Corinthians, and so on. Be it from the pulpit, in the home of a friend, or through a letter, he communed with people from all walks of life and shared with passion and by example the principles of God's love.

The Lord said of Paul, "He is a chosen vessel unto me" (Acts 9:15, KJV). We, too, are chosen vessels that can go into our communities, even beyond our boundaries, and inspire people with love and with truth. We carry out this task by reaching out to people wherever and however they need us most: by lending a listening ear, offering help, giving a word of encouragement, establishing friendships, showing genuine concern and care. For although many may have heard about God, they have not yet experienced Him. Like Paul we, too, must share with them the truth about His love.

Sunday
June 27

Agents of Love and Life

LOGOS

Exod. 20:2-17; Isa. 1:10-17; 1 Corinthians 13

The Purpose of Humankind's Creation (1 Corinthians 13)

The work of creation was an act of love. When God created humanity, He did so moved by His perfect love. His example teaches us that love is not a concept or a theory, that love is not a feeling, that love is a decision to share with others the best of one's self. Therefore, love cannot exist in isolation or as part of a selfish atmosphere.

In divine history the Godhead shared love within the Triune community. In His act of creating humankind, God extended and expanded the community of love into a vast universe of countless beings. They were to share love and live committed to the principles of love.

In creation God shared with humanity three precious gifts: life, love, and freedom. Humanity was afforded freedom to decide if they would remain connected to God in a relationship of love. Therefore, life would be meaningless, and love would be nonexistent if there was no freedom.

No Change in God's Original Plan (Isa. 1:10-17)

When sin came into the perfect universe, the balance between justice and harmonious living in the earth's community was shattered. Where there was love, hate took over. Where there was life, death reigned. Where there was freedom, bondage perverted. Where there was harmony and respect, chaos abounded. The loving relationship between God and humankind was shattered. Living a well-balanced life in the human community was ruined (Isa. 1:10-17).

Moved again by His everlasting love, God conceived and executed the plan of salvation. Jesus came to earth to pay the price for humanity's salvation and to restore the harmony that was lost. Jesus has made it possible for humankind to be reconciled with God. In addition His sacrifice has empowered humanity to be reconciled with each other; "He has given us this

**The Ten Commandments
are the most liberating
set of guidelines humanity
has ever seen.**

command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 John 4:21, NIV). In light of this fact, Christianity makes perfect sense. It is the solution to humanity's antagonistic and antisocial attitude. "Love comes from God. Everyone who loves

has been born of God and knows God" (verse 7, NIV). Through Jesus the community of life, love, and freedom is re-established.

The Ten Commandments are the ingredients for harmonious living (Exod. 20:2-17).

Contrary to popular belief, and even to the position of mainstream Christianity, the Ten Commandments are the most liberating set of guidelines humanity has ever seen. They are liberating because they are founded on the love of God. As a matter of fact, when they were introduced as such, they were given to a people who had just been freed from bondage. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (verse 2, NIV).

Today the Decalogue is still given to people who want to be free—free from the bondage of sin, free from the pain of broken relationships, free by the blood of Jesus Christ. The first four commandments (20:3-11) are the principles for a healthy relationship with God. The other six commandments (verses 12-17) are the principles for healthy relationships in our community. Every person who has experienced the liberating power of salvation must become an agent of love and life in his or her community by example and actions.

REACT

1. How can I be an agent of reconciliation among family and friends?
2. How can I be more involved in my community without compromising my principles?
3. In what specific ways can you apply the first four commandments in your relationship with God?
4. In what specific instances can you apply the last six commandments in your relationships with others?
5. What impact does TV, video, big screen movies, and song lyrics today have on our perception of the meaning of words like "life," "love," and "freedom"? Contrast meaning derived in our modern-day experience with that of the meaning of those words described in our lesson this week.
6. Give an example of a time when you experienced unconditional love.
7. Why are so many Christians caught in the traps of love-triangles or abusive bondage?

Monday
June 28

Illuminating His Light

TESTIMONY

Matt. 5:13-16; 1 Cor. 13:11-13

God has given each of us unique gifts. These gifts are to be used as beacons of light in a world enshrouded in darkness and afflicted by pain, suffering, and death. Many in our own communities are emotionally starved from lack of meaningful relationships and loneliness. For many of these persons, life seems to be an endless, meaningless shuffle leading to nowhere. Yet our unique gifts, whatever they may be, can alleviate the sorrow of the heartbroken, bring comfort to the desolate, and give hope to the hopeless. A simple smile, a warm touch, a word of cheer, a prayer of gratitude—all offer a ray of hope and testify to the love and power of our Savior.

At times, however, we may feel the need to hide our light. This we do out of shyness, self-consciousness, fear, or the feeling that it is really not that important after all. But we fail to realize that it takes more effort to suppress it than to reflect it. “The light that shines from those who receive Jesus Christ is not self-originated. It is all

The light of Christ in you is so powerful that it can never be contained.

from the Light and Life of the world. . . . Christ is the light, the life, the holiness, the sanctification, of all who believe, and His light is to be received and imparted in all good works. In many different ways His grace is

also acting as the salt of the earth; whithersoever this salt finds its way, to homes or communities, it becomes a preserving power to save all that is good, and to destroy all that is evil.”*

The light of Christ in you is so powerful that it can never be contained. People will always be able to tell that you are different. Even if you are one in a crowd of ten, your light will make a difference. If you are one in a crowd of 50, your light will shine even brighter (Matt. 5:14). God has appointed you to be a light in your community—at school, at work, on the street, in the subway, wherever you may be. Many biblical and modern-day believers attest to this fact. Noble Alexander, a Cuban minister who was incarcerated for 22 years, illuminated Christ's light even while suffering torture and disdain. You and I can shine our lights right where we are.

REACT

What word would you substitute for “light” that would give fresh meaning to being one who lives daily as an ambassador of Christ in one's community?

**God's Amazing Grace*, p. 124.

The Secret to Loving and Living

EVIDENCE

Exod. 20:2-17

The Ten Commandments can have very different connotations in our world today. To some it is a set of archaic rules stemming from a biblical myth about how a supreme being tells humankind how they should live life. To others they are a list of unrealistic demands that make his life less enjoyable. For Christians, however, they are God's ultimate ideal of rightful living.

In a world where the ruling philosophy is "Everything and anything goes," the Ten Commandments can seem totally antiquated. Yet we must accept that with all our modern views we have not been able to find ways in which to live peacefully and love everyone. This is because in our often shallow interpretations of the Bible, we fail

**"That which we owe to God
is indispensable to that which
we owe to man."**

to realize that the Ten Commandments are not an expression of God's arbitrary authority but that they are, in fact, an expression of His love.

"Though given to man by divine authority, the Decalogue is not an arbitrary creation of the divine will. It is, rather, an expression of the divine nature. . . . The Decalogue is the expression not only of holiness but also of love."¹ When we choose to obey God's law, we do so out of utmost respect and love for Him. Otherwise, how could we refuse to worship other gods, bow down to graven images, take His name in vain, or desecrate His holy day? Hopefully, it is because we truly love Him. Similarly, when we choose to obey God's law, we choose to honor the rights of our fellow human beings by honoring our parents and respecting the life, property, relationships, reputation, and dignity of everyone.

"The fact that the Ten Commandments were written on two tables of stone emphasizes their application to two classes of moral obligations: duty to God and duty to man (Matt. 22:34-40). That which we owe to God is indispensable to that which we owe to man, for neglect of duties toward our neighbor will speedily follow the neglect of duty toward God."² In providing us with guidelines for living, God is teaching us how to take care of our obligations to Him, as our Father, and to our fellow men as our brothers and sisters.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 600.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 601.

Wednesday
June 30

Loving the Unlovable

HOW-TO

Isa. 1:15-17

Christians everywhere face the challenge of learning to love genuinely those who have disregarded the laws of God and in turn show no interest or concern for their fellow humanity. The crack addict who cannot hold a steady job and constantly begs for change, the muggers who await old ladies to rob them of their goods, the uncaring mother who publicly barrages her little ones with obscene language—who can truly love them?

God does.

Yet the tug-of-war between those who should show love (us) and those who are

Loving one another is not an impossible task.

not interested in either showing or receiving, is one that could end in victory if both sides were to learn to love one another. Yet the fact is that this ideal, however honorable, is not necessarily

a custom in most communities. Loving one another is not an impossible task; but it is one that requires much prayer, perseverance, and effort.

God showed His unconditional love for His children after they had sinned by providing them with instructions on how to reinstate and maintain their relationship with Him and their fellow human beings. If we use the love of Christ as a guideline, we can easily overcome the sometimes seemingly difficult relational barriers. Relating to the unlovable, unreachable, and untouchable in our communities might become easier than we think. Here are a few steps:

1. Establish a personal relationship with Christ first. Before reaching out to those in our community, we must first ensure that we are grounded in Christ. Present yourself and the needs of your community daily before the Lord in prayer.

2. Use the guidelines of love given by God. Christ's ultimate example of love was that He gave His life for His friends (John 15:13). The Bible is filled with lessons and examples of how we should love one another. Review them and do likewise.

3. Be loving and nonjudgmental. Judgment is reserved for the Father (Ps. 50:6). Remember, not everyone in your community is on the same spiritual level as you are. Hate the sin, but love the sinner.

4. Give generously. The most thriving and friendly communities are those where their members unselfishly seek to cater to each other's needs. Give your time, talents, and most importantly, your love.

Called to Serve

OPINION

Matt. 25:34, 35; 1 Cor. 13:13

Recently one of my friends confessed that she would never step foot in our church again because she did not feel welcome. Although she frequently attended church services and participated in some of the activities, she did not feel part of the church family. She felt like an outcast, sitting silently on the outskirts of the seashore, because she was not embraced by the members.

After listening to her that night, I went home weeping. I knew Cora* but I did not know her. I conversed with her, but again, I did not know her. I felt as if I had not done my job as a Christian. I had failed to embrace her the way Jesus would. I had failed to love her the way Jesus would. Most importantly, I had failed at being her friend the way Jesus wanted me to.

I knew Cora but I did not know her.

Cora's decision taught me that as a Christian I have a duty to serve others. My duty to service is manifest in the way I reach out to others in church, at my workplace, and in my community. As Christians we are representatives of Christ on earth. We represent Him by the love and genuine care that we show. For some we may become the only manifestation of Jesus that they will ever come in contact with. Therefore, love is indeed the most important spiritual fruit we can bear (1 Cor. 13:13). Once we bear the fruit of love, we will have no problem serving others because love has no boundaries.

As a child, I remember asking my grandmother, "Why are you so helpful?" Grandma would always go out of her way to visit the sick, wash clothes or cook for someone who was not able to do so, wash the feet of someone whom others had slighted. I could not understand her devotion. Why would she do these things? As I grew older, I began to understand Grandma's passion for serving others. It came from her conviction that service is something God wants all of us to do.

As Christians we need to recognize that there are a lot of opportunities for service in our churches, workplaces, and communities. We manifest our love to others not only with large donations and impressive events in the community, but also with simple acts of kindness, a sincere hand of friendship, an email of encouragement, a positive disposition. Service to others at all times and in all places is our first duty.

*Not her real name.

Friday
July 2

The Love Connection

EXPLORATION

Isa. 8:5-13

CONCLUDE

The very essence of God is love. When we come to know Him, His love permeates everything we do and changes the way we relate to others. God left us a set of guidelines designed to show us how to love Him and others. We have been given the tools, the mandate, and the opportunity to reach out in love to a world that is starving for words of kindness and acts of mercy, yet somehow we fall short of God's desire for us. Only as we are truly converted can we become vessels through which God's boundless love can connect with those around us.

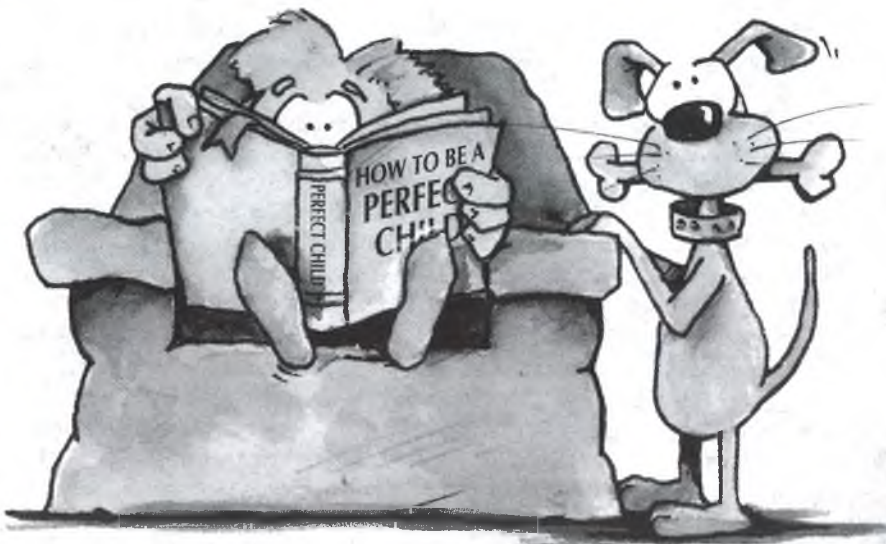
CONSIDER

- Interviewing a stranger on the street in your community. Ask him or her what things would make him feel loved. Also ask what you could do as a Christian to show him or her God's love.
- Thinking about the unique gifts God has given you and design a plan to use them in the community outside your church.
- Paraphrasing the Ten Commandments to reflect today's society. Share your perspective with your Sabbath School group.
- Evaluating your disposition to show acts of love to others based on the following criteria: initiative; keeping score; and what you expect in return. Start with your family.
- Visiting the following Web page and sharing it with three friends: <<http://www.heartlight.org/gallery/1041.html>>
- Searching for a hymn that talks about loving others. Reflect on its meaning.
- Making a collage depicting the world's view of love using cutouts from magazines.

CONNECT

1 Corinthians 13; Isaiah 58:5-13.
The Desire of Ages, chap. 54.
Charles M. Sheldon, *In His Steps*.

“Honor your Father and your Mother”



“ ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth’ ” (Eph. 6:2, 3, NKJV).

INTRODUCTION

Exod. 20:12

As a Christian adult, you love your parents, but you really are different from them. You know what they want you to do, and certainly you can see that they want you to be like them. Wouldn't that be a nice compliment, and an honor, to your parents?

What about honor and obedience when parents have uncontrolled anger and addictions?

But you don't want to be just like them. How can you show honor and obedience to your parents yet not do everything the way they would like you to? What about the fact that they have more experience in life when it comes to their advice giving? All children naturally

push the limits parents set, but why? What should parents consider as their children's rights? Are parents to raise children to be obedient to them, to God, and/or to human laws?

From another angle what about honor and obedience when parents have uncontrolled anger and addictions, causing various forms of abuse? Must Christian children have an ongoing interaction with these parents to show them aspects of Christianity? Is Christian honor and obedience shown in a different way from what the world would expect? What about what Jesus said: " 'He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me' " (Matt. 10:37, NKJV).

Adventist or not, shouldn't a true Christian be one who is so struck by God's love for him in such a way that he sees he ought to treat others likewise—as much as he is able? But what does love do? Observe Jesus as He tried to explain to His parents His life calling. Observe Him obeying the heart of the law, though not the letter. (See Luke 6:1, for one example.) Is this a lawless love? Observe Him as He condemned sin yet socialized with the sinners that accepted Him and the freedom from sin He had to offer. Those who did not, He still cared about and was available to, if they chose. He treats us the same way.

We keep the Sabbath commandment, but undoubtedly as sinners we do not keep it perfectly. And if we did, would we need a Savior? Just so, we try to honor and obey our parents, but undoubtedly, we still fail. Thank God, He saves us anyway! (1 Cor. 15:57).

Paradigm Shift

EVIDENCE

Exod. 20:12

I grew up picturing the scene on Mt. Sinai as this: Moses, this old man, trying to hold on to some huge walking stick while fumbling around, trying not to drop these massive stone tablets, each about the thickness of his arm. My picture completely changed when I went to Israel a few summers ago. In the museums there I saw many stone tablets that were about the size of my palm. Archeology shows that writing things on small stone tablets was a common way of written communication during that time. It is likely the Ten Commandments were written on tablets like these. It makes sense when you think about it: Anything very big would have been extremely difficult for Moses to carry.

Over half the commandments are in regards to us and how we treat each other. Judaism was the first religion to incorporate worship (how we relate to God) and ethics (how we relate to each other) under one religious cloak. God obviously considers ethics very important. One ethical command is “Honor your father and your mother” (Exod. 20:12, NKJV). Considering that it’s first among commandments regarding how we treat each other, it must be taken as a priority.

Our families make up a lot of who we are. Whether or not we had a childhood with two loving parents or we felt distant from our parents, it still affects who we are. God doesn’t want us to honor our parents just for their sake, but also for our own.

**Our families make up a lot
of who we are.**

Just as I had a misconception as to what the Ten Commandments looked like, I also had a wrong picture of God and the reason God gave us the commandments. When I was young and memorized the different commandments, I thought that these were a list of things to do, and if I did them, then I would be sinless. It was a checklist.

Now I have a new understanding of the purpose behind the commandments. Humans were not created to live in a sinful world. God created us sinless to live in a perfect world. But we sinned and now have to live in a sinful world. God saw that we weren’t prepared to live in sin, but loved us so much that God wanted to help us. One way of helping us is to give us guidelines for how to live the best we can while on earth. These are loving commands, not arbitrary ones.

Honoring our parents is not just to give them glory; it is also to fulfill us. It may require forgiving wrongs done, but it is all part of a healing process. When my relationship with my parents is at peace, I can be more at peace with who I am.

Monday
July 5

“Childrening” Workshops Anyone?

LOGOS

Gen. 22:1-14; Exod. 20:12; Luke 2:41-52; Eph. 6:1-3; 1 Pet. 5:5

In today's climate it is remarkable that we are spending this week learning how to show respect and offer affection to our parents and those who are older. There is a seemingly infinite number of retreats, seminars, and workshops to help people become good parents. These are often referred to as parenting workshops. The shelves of Christian bookstores are overcrowded with books and tapes on the subject. Where are there similar resources to help people become good *children*?

Perhaps it is past time that someone offer *childrening* seminars. Ironically the Bible has just as much to say, if not more, about our relationships as children as it does about our relationships as parents.

The foundation of respect is a relationship with God.

The Bible does not appeal to parental conduct as the foundation for respect. In other words, it does not say, “Each of you must show respect for your parents because they were good to you.”

The Bible does not appeal
to societal standards.

Nor does the Bible appeal to societal standards. In other words, it does *not* say, “Each of you must show respect for your parents because it is the *law*.”

Rather, it says that this respect flows out of a personal relationship—“for I, the Lord, am your God” (Lev. 19:3, NLT). For the Christian *all* relationships flow out of that primary relationship with a loving heavenly Father who calls us His own. When tempted to think, *How can I respect my parents when you look at how they have misbehaved*, we must remember that respect is rooted in our connection with God, not in someone else's behavior.

The way we treat our own parents is the foundation of how we treat others.

When Paul was giving Timothy instructions on how to relate to older men and women, he assumed that Timothy treated his own parents with respect (1 Tim. 5:1-8). On this basis he advised Timothy to treat the elderly as he would treat his own parents. The key to establishing good relationships with older people, generally, is to establish strong relationships with our own parents. The reason that we do this is that it pleases the Lord (Col. 3:20). Respect was more than merely listening politely to what parents had to say. It also involved caring for their basic human needs. Paul extends this care for parents to include the elderly within the body of Christ.

The rewards of respect include a fulfilled life.

Proverbs 4:1 says, “Listen to your father’s instruction” (NLT). It follows with a series of benefits that follow respectful listening. Proverbs 1:8 emphasizes both the teaching of mother and father. Learning from parental wisdom is only one of many benefits leading up to a fulfilled life. Even Jesus’ development—mentally, spiritually, and socially—is associated with His obedience to His parents. Though contemporary worldly wisdom urges us to “do our own thing” and chants the mantras “I gotta be me” and “I did it my way,” biblical wisdom calls us beyond worldly narcissism to live at peace in community. Biblical wisdom calls us, not to isolated, self-serving independence, but to fulfilling connectedness with others. The self-denial that enables us to live in community is first learned through obedience to our parents. In addition to wisdom and humility, there is an inner reward that comes to us—a sense of peace—just because we know that following the Lord’s instructions about relationships with parents is the right thing to do (Eph. 6:1-3).

The final reward of a life lived with respect is the honor shown us by God Himself.

Showing respect and honor to others is the prerequisite to receiving respect and honor. Peter advised young men to accept the authority of the elders (older people) and to serve each other with humility with the promise that, in due course, God would honor those who did so (1 Pet. 5:5, 6).

Obviously, there is no higher honor than this. Those who aspire to be great must first learn that those who wish to be great in God’s kingdom must first learn to serve others in respect and humility. In this way we take on the mind of Christ, which is so beautifully described in the second chapter of Philippians. Thinking of others as better than ourselves, we become interested in their concerns and desires. This is what respect is: recognizing that God has created us all and that He is just as interested in our parents’ opinions as He is ours, just as interested in their affairs as He is ours, and just as involved in their lives as He is ours. Contrary to worldly wisdom this does not diminish the respect others show toward us. Instead, this respectful attitude increases it.

REACT

1. How will a shaky relationship with God affect the way I respect other people?
2. How can a healthy relationship with parents prepare children to have positive relationships with society as a whole?
3. How does self-centeredness undermine my ability to respect others?
4. How can I demonstrate respect toward those who are older when I do not agree with them?

Tuesday
July 6

The Fifth Commandment

TESTIMONY

Exod. 20:12; 1 John 5:3

“Satan's enmity against God's law had impelled him to war against every precept of the Decalogue. To the great principle of love and loyalty to God, the Father of all, the principle of filial love and obedience is closely related. Contempt for parental authority will soon lead to contempt for the authority of God.”

The fifth commandment is not something to be taken lightly. Satan is at work to break up relationships; to destroy our honor for all authority figures—including

To “ ‘honor your father and your mother’ ” was not a suggestion.

our parents, that we will eventually succumb to his allegiance—to meet the fate prepared for the devil himself, and his angels. “Those who fail to bear the test, who fail to honor their God-fearing parents, fail to obey God,

and therefore cannot expect to come into the land of promise.”² Hence, to “ ‘honor your father and your mother’ ” (Exod. 20:12, NIV) was not a suggestion. It came from the mind of God—written by God; by honoring our parents, we are honoring our Creator. God desires obedience, not because He is a rash God, giving orders just because He can. He is a personal God; a heavenly Father, who is looking after His children, and ultimately to see them home.

God created us for the sole purpose of having a relationship with us; that's why we exist.

He had His own Son die because He did not want to be separated from us for all eternity. Obeying His commandments is an outward expression of thankfulness and love. “This is love for God: to obey his commands” (1 John 5:3, NIV).

How much we love God should be reflective of how we treat not only our parents, but His other children—including our elders. There is so much we could learn from them, if we weren't so wrapped up in being heard, if we genuinely showed interest in our elders. God has put these people in our path so we will be ready for what's ahead. Our eternity depends on this.

REACT

For most of us, our first experience with authority begins at home with our parents. Give examples of how this has affected how you treat older people.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 337.

2. *Messages to Young People*, pp. 331, 332.

"Honor Thy Mother"

HOW-TO

Luke 2:49; John 16:21

I don't think I would have gotten away with the type of response that Jesus gave to His mother when she and His father were searching for Him. I probably would've been slapped in the face. But then I ain't no Jesus.

It's always been a challenge for me to follow the fifth commandment. It's not that it's too hard to abide by or too lofty a mandate to keep. It's simply that I grew up without a father, so my mother has had to double up as both mother and father throughout my formative years. This fatherless upbringing has allowed me to have a renewed sense of appreciation for mothers and their parental influence in the lives of those God has entrusted them with.

The status of mothers in Bible times and today differ greatly. Ever since Eve's beginning, mothers and women in general have occupied a seemingly "lesser" rank in Bible hierarchy. Let's keep it real: Hebrew history as evidenced in Scripture has always been disproportionately slanted toward men.

Take the word "mother," for example. The King James

Version of the Bible registers only 299 instances of the word, whereas its paternal counterpart "father" is way ahead with 1,512 hits.*

But more than simply being intent on making a case for the excess of masculine intervention in the Bible, one must not forget that the role of women—particularly mothers—was of absolute importance in the preservation of the Jewish lineage, and were it not for the motherly qualities of, say, someone like Rahab—a lowly prostitute—Jesus' ancestry line would have been interrupted, which would have resulted in no Jesus at all. But God had a bigger plan, and mothers were an essential part of it (Gen. 17:16).

Nowadays, especially in Western civilizations, the pressure of economic stability and the rise of women from a state of "inferiority" have prompted many mothers to leave the home and join their male counterparts as a part of the corporate world. The repercussions of such a move have affected the core infrastructure of the family, thus jeopardizing the model God intended for young children to be raised, which in turn can lead to dysfunction within the home (Prov. 29:15).

This shift in roles makes the prominence of mothers today all the more significant. Their impact must not be downplayed.

*Scripture-search portal BibleGateway.com.

**The status of mothers
in Bible times and today
differ greatly.**

Thursday
July 8

To Love and to Obey

OPINION

Eph. 6:1; 1 Tim. 5:1-4

As a child it was almost impossible for me to engage in childish pranks without some form of punishment following. When I misbehaved at home, I was disciplined by my parents. If I misbehaved at school, the responsibility of a suitable punishment lay with my teachers, who also ensured that I received another portion from my parents. I would have expected then, that if I were anything but good on the way to or from school, I would be free from any type of correction. Wrong!

Unfortunately for me at that time, I had more than two parents. It was deemed a sign of disrespect—even insult—to disregard or ignore any adult, including those

I had more than two parents.

who were mere strangers. I had to obey when they made a reasonable request of me, and I always had to remain polite. If I attempted anything

other than what was expected of me, I knew what the scene at my home would be like later on. Furthermore, some grown-ups would not wait for a conference with my parents but would actually punish me themselves. I would have only made the matter worse for myself by daring to complain to my parents.

Back then I thought that was just one of my parents' meaningless and overbearing rules. Why did I have to listen to people I sometimes barely knew? What was the point of that? Well, after delving into the Scriptures, I discovered the answer to my questions. In Ephesians God admonishes us to honor our biological parents for it is right to do so. But Scripture goes even further: "Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers" (1 Tim. 5:1, NKJV). This describes accurately the value my parents were trying to instill in me at an early age. I finally understood. If we are unable to love, honor, and obey the many earthly parents God has given us, how can we truly love, honor, and obey Him, our heavenly Father? Sadly, today, many believe that they are obligated only to their parents, and still, for many, that is too great an expectation.

Once I thought it an unnecessary burden to respect every older person I met at school, church, and everywhere else. I have since then realized that I was indeed blessed by the instruction I received in my youth. With much practice of this previously strange phenomenon, I was eventually shaped into a better representation of a child of God. Now, as a result of my love for, and obedience toward, my elders, I have more parents and siblings than I ever imagined possible and my family still continues to grow and grow.

Honoring Your Parents Is Honoring God

EXPLORATION

Eph. 6:2

CONCLUDE

Ellen White tells us that “contempt for parental authority will soon lead to contempt for the authority of God.”* For this reason abiding by the fifth commandment, (“the first commandment with promise”) (Eph. 6:2, KJV), is vital to our relationship with our Creator. Honoring our parents was not a suggestion; it is a commandment from God and like all His admonitions it was given for our own good and comes from God’s undying love for us.

CONSIDER

- Writing a skit and acting out how two siblings, one obedient and one disobedient, might realize the values covered in this week’s lesson.
- Role-playing with a friend, one person being the errant child and one a parent. Devise workable solutions to problems that have come up in this week’s study.
- Watching the animated video *Lion King*, and analyze what it has to say about obedience to one’s parents. Think about this question: How does a child’s pursuit of independence relate to obedience to his or her parents?
- Sharing with a study partner experiences in which you have witnessed errant children and the consequences that resulted from their actions.
- Brainstorming on the types of disobedience and categorizing them. Analyze the possible causes for such actions (e.g., what might cause an individual to be drawn into such misbehavior) and then try to devise ways to avoid such temptations. Also try to think of ways to replace the bad habits with newer, more positive activities.
- Reading the parable of the two sons in Matthew 21:28-32. Contrast the differences between obedient Bible characters and disobedient ones (e.g., Cain and Abel, Abraham and Lot, Samuel and the sons of Eli).
- Watching three different TV sitcoms that depict a family. Analyze how the role of children are depicted in these programs with regards to their relationships with their parents.

CONNECT

Messages to Young People, chaps. 111–113.

Morris L. Venden, *How to Know God’s Will in Your Life*.

**Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 337.

Parenthood— joys and responsibilities



“Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him” (Ps. 127:3, NLT).

No Time, No Relationship

INTRODUCTION

Prov. 22:6; 2 Tim. 3:15

Sometimes I read my Bible. One verse is enough for the day. Already it is 6:30 A.M. I must leave my house for work; I prepare breakfast, a lunch box for my husband and our two children. I can't have breakfast with them as I will be late. I leave them quietly. My helper will take over.

After a long day I return at 7:30 P.M. I must prepare dinner for my family. We have our dinner at 8:30. Kids are ready for bed. No time to check their homework, no time for family prayer, no time for bedtime stories, no time for my children, no time for my husband. I don't know my kids anymore; I don't know my husband.

**Parenthood is not
a piece of cake.**

That's the life of a working mother. Parenthood is not a piece of cake. God, give me only two more hours per day: one for You and one for my family.

"Great responsibilities rest upon parents, and they should strive earnestly to fulfill their God-appointed mission. When they see the need of bending all the energies of the being to the work of training their children for God, a great deal of the frivolity and unnecessary pretense that is now seen will be put away. They will consider no sacrifice or toil too great that will enable them to prepare to meet the Lord with joy. This is a most precious part of their service as followers of God, and one that they cannot afford to neglect."*

God gave us children to take care of them, according to His way. He loaned us families to train for His kingdom. Are we really doing our duty as parents, as God does for us? God gave us the responsibility to train and love our families according to His will.

If we don't have time for God, how are we as parents doing what He wants us to do with the children He gave us? How are we going to prepare our families for the world to come?

**Child Guidance*, p. 478.

Sunday
July 11

Parental Control and Support

LOGOS

Ps. 127:3; Prov. 13:24; 23:13, 14; 29:15; Eph. 6:4; Phil. 4:9

Children are the greatest treasures parents have on earth. “Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him” (Ps. 127:3, NLT). They are God’s priceless gifts, and He counsels parents to “bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4, NIV). God’s plan for parents is to have their own children at home, to be their first teachers. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 outlines the various responsibilities laid on parents to instruct their own children.

Parenting is one of the most challenging tasks in life. Most parents carry out this task with hardly any training in parenthood, discipline, or character building.

**Parents cannot expect
their children to do
what they themselves
do not do.**

They stumble along trying to do their best. Even as times have changed, human relationships, which form the roots of character growth, have not. “Children still need parents, for these close early relationships establish the beginnings of humanness. Youngsters still need guid-

ance, forms of restraint, along with support and encouragement as they grow away from the shelter of the family and into adulthood.”¹

Obedience (Eph. 6:1-3)

The unchangeable fact is that each child is born with a sinful nature. Because of this, children have a natural inclination to sin if left to themselves. Christian parents must realize these facts and from the very beginning determine that, by God’s grace and guidance, they will train up their children in the right way. “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Prov. 22:6, NIV). The devil does not wait to begin influencing children, so parents must start the training in the right path at the earliest opportunity possible. Disobedience to parents is a major step toward disobedience to God.

Obedience learned in childhood has significant impact on building a lifelong relationship with God. The Bible tells us that if we love God, we will obey His commandments. Thus, obedience is a love response. God’s Word gives instructions in obedience: “My son, keep your father’s commands and do not forsake your mother’s teaching” (Prov. 6:20, NIV). “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’—which is the first com-

mandment with a promise—‘that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth’ ” (Eph. 6:1-3, NIV).

Jesus is a beautiful example of being obedient to parents. At the age of 12, He was found in the temple by His mother and Joseph. Though He would have loved being in the temple a little longer and interacting with the scholars, “He went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them” (Luke 2:51, NIV).

Some think obedience is a negative word. Obedience “does not mean a non-thinking, do-what-everyone-else-tells-you person. Nor need it lead to a ‘salvation by works’ approach to God, either. How you teach obedience and Christian values makes the difference between a ‘grace’ or ‘works’ outlook toward religion.”²

Discipline

According to researchers control and support are the two main aspects of the parent-child relationship that lead to success or failure. Control describes how much influence you try to exert over what the child does. It can vary from very little to a great deal. Support includes forming a warm relationship with children and guiding them in growing up. The ideal parenting style is the one with a high-control, high-support pattern. Such parents are child-centered. They encourage children to be independent and at the same time set clear standards and expectations. Punishment is used out of concern for the child. God’s Word says, “Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul” (Prov. 29:17, NIV). Children feel that their parents care for them. “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him” (13:24, NIV).

Ellen White, in *Child Guidance*, supports such a parenting style. She describes such parents as being self-controlled. While they show sympathy and understanding, they also use discipline whenever necessary. Such a parenting style fits the way God treats us. God is loving and wants us to use the standards He has set for us.

Parents as Examples

Parents cannot expect their children to do what they themselves do not do. They must practice what they teach and be good role models for them. Parents stand in the place of God to the small child. It is important that they know the Lord and obey Him, just as they expect the child to show them obedience. Parents need to have constant fellowship with God—reading His Word and speaking to Him through prayer. Knowing God’s will will better equip parents and make them better examples for their children.

1. N. L. Van Pelt, *The Compleat Parent* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Association, 1976), p. 14.
2. D. J. Habenicht, *How to Help Your Child Really Love Jesus* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994).

Monday
July 12

Only With His Help

TESTIMONY

Eph. 6:4

The significance of instruction on child guidance is best understood as we note the important place it takes in the Word of God. "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4, NIV).

"The training of children constitutes an important part of God's plan for demonstrating the power of Christianity. A solemn responsibility rests upon parents so to train their children that when they go forth into the world, they will do good."¹

"More than human wisdom is needed by parents at every step, that they may understand how best to educate their children for a useful, happy life here, and for higher service and greater joy hereafter."²

It can't be easy. Nothing ever in this world is.

It's not easy. It can't be easy. Nothing ever in this world is. It becomes possible only when we ask for help. "The Creator of the universe will give you help. In His strength, and through His name, you can lead your children to be overcomers. Teach them to look to God for strength. Tell them that He hears their prayers. Teach them to overcome evil with good.

"Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, faith, and charity are the elements of the Christian character. These precious graces are the fruits of the Spirit. They are the Christian's crown and shield."³

"God has given parents their work, to form the characters of their children after the divine Pattern. By His grace, they can accomplish the task, but it will require patient, painstaking effort."⁴

The results, however, are everlasting. For in everything we do, if we do with all our heart, and in love, we will be blessed for our efforts.

REACT

1. If it is the task of the parents to train their children, what is required of the children?
2. Are parents the only ones responsible in the upbringing of the child? If there are others, who?

1. *Child Guidance*, p. 21.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 173.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

Broken Innocence

EVIDENCE

Eph. 6:4

Subjects in philosophy and logic taught me a lot in my college years. But the debate about “parenthood versus abortion” made me realize that parenting is the highest rule of each parent.

I was enrolled in a non-Adventist school with widely varying beliefs among students. I stood up without hesitation during our class debate when I heard one of my classmates state that abortion doesn't matter much to human beings because life does not exist inside the mother's womb until the baby is born. I asked her how a fetus could grow if there's no life inside the womb? She agreed and our professor explained further that when the sperm and the ovum meet, life begins inside the womb.

Modernization has broken the innocence of children.

One time I was sitting on a bench when I saw a mother and daughter arguing. She was telling her teenage daughter, “I love you but I don't like you, because you're the fruit of my misstep!” I pitied the girl when her mom left her crying. But I was puzzled by the mother's phrase. Does she love her only for being her daughter? Who is to blame for becoming a mother at her earlier age? How would she expect her daughter to be a fulfilled parent someday after what she had said to her? Didn't she know that having a child is a gift from God? “Children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward” (Ps. 127:3, NKJV).

“A mother who lacks discernment, and who does not follow the guidance of the Lord, may educate her children to be deceivers and hypocrites.”*

Modernization has broken the innocence of children. Statistics show the increase of juvenile delinquency, gang rape, child abuse, suicide, etc. Children, who represent the future of our society, must be nurtured with a careful blend of love and respect.

“He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Prov. 13:24, NKJV). Our heavenly Father has a wonderful heart, and His hand does not cease to discipline us when we fail. “He . . . opens [our] ear to instruction, and commands that [we] turn from iniquity” (Job 36:10, NKJV).

**Child Guidance*, p. 151.

REACT

How do you explain the idea that someone could claim to love a daughter without liking her?

Wednesday
July 14

Parents and Children

HOW -TO

Prov. 13:24; 23:13; 29:15; Eph. 6:4; Phil. 4:5

Everyone had something good to tell about their parents except for Salome. She hated her parents. Remembering the situation at home, Salome said, "My parents are the most cruel parents you have ever seen."

When Salome was just a child, her parents never cared to see how she was growing. When she did anything wrong or was not pleasant, her parents would not rebuke her but say, "Oh, never mind, she's still a kid. She will grow out of it." This went on and on until Salome became very bad. Later when her parents

Salome hated her parents.

decided to act, life became all "do's" and "don't's." The rules had to be followed or there was severe punishment. This made Salome worse each day until she finally ran away from home.

Parents can either build or destroy a child's character. Christian parents are responsible for their children's character—good or bad. The parents' responsibility to their children is to teach, instruct, and correct them in the right way.

Parents who are afraid of disciplining their children will be held accountable for them (Prov. 23:14). In disciplining a child, the parents should:

1. Show love. Love is above all things. Parents should not provoke their children to wrath (Eph. 6:4) but nurture them in love and with care.

2. Show trust and respect. Parents who trust and respect their children receive the same in return.

3. Show unity. If the Father says No and the mother says Yes, this can create a problem for the children. Parents should be united in teaching, instructing, and correcting their children.

4. Represent God's character. Parents are role models to their children, so if children see God's character in them, the children will most likely adopt it.

In doing so, the parents will invest in their children's good Christian character, which will be an asset to the children, to the parents, and to God.

REACT

1. At what age should parents begin to discipline their children?
2. What do Proverbs 13:24; 23:13 mean by saying a rod is a mode of discipline?
3. How can parents discipline with love?

Child Guidance, pp. 215-243.

Bundle Up With Good Friends

OPINION

Prov. 12:26

Parents are known for telling their kids what to do. I can't help remembering my parents telling me when to wear a coat when it was too cold. "Bundle up!" they'd say. And sometimes to take it off when it was too hot. That's because the weather had serious affects on my health. If it got too chilly, I could catch a cold; if it was too warm, I might become too dehydrated. Either way my parents were there to know the weather and how it would affect me. In the same way parents try to protect their children from the elements, so they should keep in mind the social elements that their children are in.

Parents can't be everywhere but they can teach their children how to "bundle up" socially. Friends become the primary influence in a child's life as they get older; and while parents become the caretakers if the child has not been taught skills of selecting friends, other people can become the child's mind shapers. It's in those teenage years when child and parents seem more like fire and water that the child needs their guidance the most.

**It's when child and parents
seem more like fire and
water that the child needs
their guidance the most.**

Teaching children how to choose friends might be low on some of our totem poles of priorities. We never see a child taken out of a home because he wasn't able to make good friends, but we do see a kid go to jail because she was with her friends when a crime happened. Single parents really need not only to bundle up their kids with a good coat when it's cold, but also to bundle them up with social skills to keep them from spiritual hypothermia.

When children are not taught how to keep warm, they might bundle up with the wrong type of clothing to protect them from the elements. They may catch a cold—or, worse, suffer hypothermia. Our child's friendships are as much a part of parenting concern as is clothing. If we don't teach our child how to form friendships, he or she could be led into hell and never feel it.

REACT

1. Can you think of anyone in the Bible who sinned without being influenced by others? Explain your answer.
2. How would you go about teaching a child how to choose friends? Be specific.

Friday
July 16

The Ultimate Challenge

EXPLORATION

Prov. 20:7

CONCLUDE

If parents were honest, they would probably admit that their children have brought them the greatest happiness—and the greatest frustration. Most people have no idea the challenges that await them once children enter their lives. Parenthood is not just a new role but an ever-changing mixture of discovery and adjustment. To be a good parent, one must become an obedient child of God. Only with His assistance can we properly prepare the next generation to carry on where we leave off.

CONSIDER

- Writing down the ten most important qualities of a parent. Then rearrange them from most important to least. Circle the qualities you believe that you already possess.
- Writing a letter to your children. (If you aren't a parent, write to the children you hope to have someday, or the children you wish you'd had.) Tell them the five most important things they need to know.
- Singing "Lord, Bless Our Homes" in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 654. Then write a fifth verse that expresses specific needs of the Christian family in 2004.
- Creating a sculpture to represent the relationship between a parent and child. Do one that illustrates a close relationship and another to portray a distant relationship.
- Interviewing a young parent and a senior citizen. Ask them about their challenges as parents. Note the similarities and differences between the two.
- Praying for five families you know who are experiencing conflict in their homes.
- Exploring the Internet for Web sites that deal with parenting. Analyze two or three of these as to how they agree or disagree with biblical principles.

CONNECT

Child Guidance, chaps. 25–30.

Jeffrey and Pattie-jean Brown, *A Guide to Parenting*; Jonathan and Ana Gallagher, *Parenthood: A Christian Perspective on Practical Parenting*.

Marriage is Not out of Date



"Have you considered divorce yet?"

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25, NIV).

Until Divorce Do Us Part?

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 19:4-6

"I don't want to sound like a prophet of doom, but just in case things don't work out and you have to figure out who owns what, it's just so much simpler if you have separate bank accounts." The financial counselor at our local bank finished her speech with a you-know-how-it-can-be look. I sighed inwardly and struggled to maintain a poker face. My husband and I determined before we got married that we would never use the "D" word in reference to ourselves, yet society demands that we live as if we don't take our marriage vows seriously. Why?

In our consumer-oriented society, our expectations of romantic relationships, particularly marriage, are the same as our expectations of a product endorsed by a sales company with a good reputation: complete customer satisfaction with no obligations and no money down. An advertisement for a relationship endorsed by today's society might say the following:

"Looking for excitement and love, but afraid of commitment? Try our Live Together Option. If you call now, you can receive our product on a trial basis. If you are not completely satisfied at the end of 30 days (or 30 years), simply return the product in its original packaging, and we will refund your money in full!

"Dreaming of a fairytale life? Try our Marriage Option. To ensure complete customer satisfaction, we offer an unlimited return policy. You are free to cancel your order at any time or exchange it for a more updated version. Some restrictions apply.*

*"No lifetime guarantees. Due to our unlimited return and exchange policy, no warranties are available. The customer agrees to assume responsibility for liabilities and risks incurred in the contract. Liabilities and risks include but are not limited to insecurity, heartbreak, divorce, broken homes, and dysfunctional/co-dependent relationships."

In the 1800s Ellen White wrote that "marriage is a blessing; it guards the purity and happiness of the race, it provides for man's social needs, it elevates the physical, the intellectual, and the moral nature."[†] Is this still true in 2004? Yes! Marriage is *not* out of date.

The relationships that society advertises may look glamorous on the surface, but a relationship based on God's standards is the only one that really delivers what it promises. It is the only one that offers lasting satisfaction and a lifetime guarantee. So what makes marriage, as God intended it, so special? That's the topic of this week's lesson.

[†]The Adventist Home, p. 26.

Water Into Wine

EVIDENCE

John 2:6-8; 1 Pet. 3:7

At the wedding in Cana, Jesus changed the course of events. By attending, Jesus blessed the institution of marriage. Looking beyond this we discover the transformation Christ offers in His first miracle.

The six empty stone jars had held water for ceremonial washing required by the law.

Jesus first provides the basis for existence by ordering the servants to fill the jars with water. Then He transforms it into wine. Out of the simple comes the exquisite. Wine is the symbol of His gracious gift of salvation, of the abundant life and the Messianic wedding feast.

Later He used it in the Communion service consolidating the covenant relationship between Himself and His bride—the church.

A marriage is a legally binding contract with negative consequences if you break the contract through abuse, neglect, abandonment, or unfaithfulness. The law says nothing about the qualities for a good marriage. For this you have to go beyond the law to the very core of human relationships: love for each other.

Jesus showed that water—the law, or principle—is insufficient to make a marriage into a celebration of true life. He says, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10, NKJV).

Peter, a married man, used marriage as a picture of living out the gospel:

● “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives” (1 Pet. 3:7, NIV)—see her needs, accept her for what she is . . .

● “Treat them with respect” (verse 7, NIV)—see her as someone unique . . .

● “As the weaker partner” (verse 7, NIV)—the church is Christ’s weaker partner—we are fallible. We have our limitations. Respect that, do not expect the impossible . . .

● “As heirs with you of the gracious gift of life” (verse 7, NIV). Before Christ you are equals, you are partners in the grace He gives you as individuals and partners in marriage. The inheritance of grace grows to unimaginable proportions when you look at it as Christ’s gift to you both (Gal. 3:26-29).

Marriage is a matter of living not only according to law. Faithfulness is more than the duty of being a provider; it is giving of what you are in your heart, it is the generosity that only the presence of the Holy Spirit can give (Ruth 3).

**For this you have to go
beyond the law.**

Monday
July 19

The Good Partnership

LOGOS

Gen. 2:18-25; John 2:1-11; Eph. 5:22-33; Heb. 13:4; 1 Pet. 3:1-7

The Gift of Marriage (Gen. 2:18-25)

Three things came to us from the world before the entrance of sin: the Sabbath, work, and marriage. In one sense marriage gives meaning to both the Sabbath and work. Rest on the Sabbath is not only cessation from work, but it is a time of worship, fellowship, and relationship. We relate to God our Creator, to our fellow

**Everyone needs to love
and be loved.**

believers in Christ, and in the marriage bond to each other whether husband or wife. With children the Sabbath, work, and marriage come together in a unity of divine and human relationships. Marriage enriches the experience of Sabbath worship, and the Sabbath provides the opportunity not only for worship but for socializing with family and friends. To focus intentionally on making the Sabbath a weekly renewal of marital and family relationships has the possibility of greatly enriching the marriage experience.

The Separation (Gen. 2:24)

At the creation of Eve and her uniting with Adam, God declared of marriage: "A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24, NKJV).

A man and woman who enter into marriage relations need to understand that it involves separation from the home of their parents. Parents also need to appreciate and recognize this truth. And in marriage both the man and woman surrender the freedoms of the single life for the joys, responsibilities, and pleasures of marriage. Both the separation from parents and the uniting with one's husband or wife are learning experiences for all concerned. They need to be seriously considered and understood. It is tragic when either of the parents will not let their children go or the children keep returning to the parents.

Marriage Possibilities (Eph. 5:22-33)

Longfellow wrote in his poem "The Psalm of Life":

Heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight.

The same is true of marriage and a loving relationship. Everyone needs to love and be loved. The need to be loved and to love is written into the very constitution of our being. This desire and need can find its truest expression in the love of a

wife or husband and the love of God. Every married person ought to know the certainty and security that comes from the faithful love of a husband or wife and the love God has for us. Marriage is perhaps the highest level of trust to which we commit ourselves in this life. It has the possibility of incredible happiness for all who without reserve commit themselves to it. To commit is the cement that binds each to the other. There can be no reserve if a marriage is to be successful.

The Model for Marriage (1 Pet. 3:1-7)

In many places God's love for the church is said to be like the love of a husband for his wife. The emphasis on this model is that the love of Jesus is faithful, constant, and true. So husbands and wives should be constant and faithful in the love they have for each other. Like divine love the love in marriage should be proactive and not passive. We should not only love each other; we should demonstrate that love so that it becomes as Solomon described it: "As strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away" (Song of Sol. 8:6, 7, NIV, alternative marginal reading).

The Danger to Marriage (Heb. 13:4)

Beautiful as marriage is, it is always under attack from demonic powers, the enemies of God and humankind. Enticement to violate the marriage vow is made to appear attractive and desirable. The reality is that relationships outside of marriage are frequently sad and often sordid affairs. Tragically, those who separate from their wife or husband discover that they have not only hurt their spouse and involved children, parents, and in-laws, they also hurt themselves. The happiness looked for, they discover, is a passing passion that does not endure.

Marriage is a tender plant that, when it is nourished by love, grows to become a mighty oak. Happiness in human relationships cannot be built on other people's misery. This is a sad, sad lesson, often learned with much pain in the school of reality, where sentiment, illusion, and lust are disclosed for what they are: futile pretty bubbles that all too easily burst.

REACT

1. If you had to list three non-negotiable elements of a marriage relationship, what would they be?
2. How can a person who is single and has never been married relate to the marriage metaphor of God's love for us? Is there another model that would work better for single people? If so, what is it?
3. To what extent does God work hard to maintain a relationship with us?
4. Is marriage for everyone? Read 1 Corinthians 7:8, 9, 25-28.

Tuesday
July 20

Marriage in a Lonely World

TESTIMONY

Eph. 5:25

We are living in a lonely world. "There are many in our world who are starving for the love and sympathy which should be given them. Many men love their wives,

**God "ordained that men
and women should be
united in holy wedlock."**

but are too selfish to manifest it. They have a false dignity and pride, and will not show their love by words and deeds. There are many men who never know how starved is the heart of the wife for words of tender appreciation and affection.

... The religion of Christ will lead us to be kind and courteous and not so tenacious of our opinions. We should die to self and esteem others better than ourselves."¹

God "sanctioned marriage, recognizing it as an institution that He Himself had established. He ordained that men and women should be united in holy wedlock, to rear families whose members, crowned with honor, should be recognized as members of the family above."²

"Marriage, a union for life, is a symbol of the union between Christ and His church. The spirit that Christ manifests toward the church is the spirit that husband and wife are to manifest toward each other.

"Neither husband nor wife is to make a plea for rulership. The Lord has laid down the principle that is to guide in this matter. The husband is to cherish his wife as Christ cherishes the church. And the wife is to respect and love her husband. Both are to cultivate the spirit of kindness, being determined never to grieve or injure the other."³

"Manifestations of self-will destroy the peace and happiness of the home. Let not your married life be one of contention. If you do you will both be unhappy. Be kind in speech and gentle in action, giving up your own wishes. Watch well your words, for they have a powerful influence for good or for ill. Allow no sharpness to come into your voices. Bring into your united life the fragrance of Christlikeness."⁴

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 527, 528.

2. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 356.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, pp. 46, 47.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Perspective Is Everything

HOW-TO

Gen. 2:18-25; Eph. 5:22, 23; Heb. 13:4; 1 Pet. 3:1-7

You have to think right before you can live right.

Paul wrote: "Do not shape your lives to meet the fleeting fashions of this world; but be transformed from it, by the renewal of your mind, until the very essence of your being is altered, so that, in your own life, you may know that the will of God is good and well-pleasing and perfect" (Rom. 12:2, Barclay's Translation).

None of us is born with all the mental equipment and knowledge essential to live right and avoid making mistakes. We come to the place of understanding and mental and psychological maturity by trial and error. We learn by experience, whether it is our own or observation of how others act and behave.

In marriage perspective is vital. Marriage is one of the highest and most beautiful gifts of God. It has limitless possibilities for the deepest and most satisfying of life's experiences. But carelessness and indifference are ingredients to poison and destroy this most beautiful of God's blessings. There are deadly enemies to be fought and resisted with devotion, love, and care.

Someone has written:

Two men looked out through prison bars
One saw mud; the other stars.

If we are blind to what we have, we may lose sight of the stars and end up in the mud. Perspective makes the difference.

We do not find love. Love finds us. It is nowhere more true than in marriage that the love we give is the love we receive back, plus a large percentage of interest.

We were made to love because the God who made us is Himself love. His

love for us is the nature of the love, which in life and in marriage, we can give to each other. Our love must be a true love—a love that can bear the trials, irritations, and mishaps

**There are deadly enemies
to be fought.**

of family life without rancor, discontent, or alteration. This is the point of Paul's advice when he wrote: "Do not shape your lives to meet the fleeting fashions of this world; but be transformed from it, by the renewal of your mind" (Rom. 12:2, Barclay's Translation).

When we know and understand that "love never fails" (1 Cor. 13:8, NKJV) and give ourselves to it not only in the marriage relationship but also in life itself, we have discovered the true perspective on life.

Thursday
July 22

It Takes a Little Rain to Make Love Grow

OPINION

Rom. 13:8

"It takes a little rain to make love grow."*

Marriage has it. The church has it. Do you have it? The love Jesus revealed by His example is the fulfillment of the law "for he who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8, NKJV).

I met my wife, Sylvi, about 25 years ago. We have never experienced any major problems. On the contrary, our life together has been the source of great happiness and wonderful memories. When our two daughters were small, I had a very demanding job. During this time Sylvi's love supported the family in different ways. She was patient and demonstrated her love by taking care of the practical everyday things when I

**The church presents
opportunities to give
and take.**

had too many business trips and late nights at the office. Today our roles are reversed. It has been a learning experience. While I am "between jobs," I try to help and support my wife, who has a demanding and challenging job. I can give her something in return for all her work in holding the family together while the children were growing up. I have discovered that as I think of her needs I love her more than ever.

The church presents opportunities to give and take. A church filled with "takers" delivers only entertainment, not love. The church begins to live when we are willing to share the love Jesus has given us. The church—the body of Christ—is comprised of individuals. It is through us that love and fulfillment of the law becomes a reality. Sometimes traditions, dogma, and fundamentals of faith blind us to the experience of Jesus' passion—to give more than we receive. A church filled with this kind of love is a growing church.

There is no guarantee that everyone will experience a perfect relationship or an overabundance of love in a marriage or in the church. We all experience failure and disappointments we cannot do anything about. However, there is hope. There is a way forward where every roadblock becomes a building block to better relationships within our family and the church. You must be willing to give some of yourself and risk not getting it back or being rejected. Don't give up. It takes a little rain to make love grow.

*The Oak Ridge Boys.

Marriage: Committed to an Institution?

EXPLORATION

Eph. 5:21-33

CONCLUDE

Are you crazy for being committed to the institution—of marriage? The world advertises promiscuous sex and serial polygamy. However, Christians actually believe that marriage was made for two people until death do them part. Now that sounds like a great fairy tale, but God tells us it's hard work and long hours. Marriage was designed for mutual cooperation that looks like submission by the wife and self-sacrifice by the husband. So lofty are God's plans for marriage that He uses marriage as a parable for how He feels about His church. He's crazy about us!

CONSIDER

- Interviewing your parents or a married couple in the church that you respect. Ask them how they came to meet and marry and what they have learned about marriage.
- Researching the divorce rates of people who cohabit before marriage versus those who remain apart before marriage. Information can be found at your local library and on the Internet.
- Listening to the song "I Will Be Here" by Steven Curtis Chapman. Journal what principles the song elicits about marriage.
- Investigating which animals are known to mate for life. Document how this instinct helps the species, drawing parallels to humans.
- Standing at a busy thoroughfare and taking a survey of people on the street. Record their answers to this question: In a marriage who is supposed to have the final word?
- Writing a marriage mission statement whether you're married or not. Include what kind of commitments you will make, what you expect from each other, and what you will accomplish as a married couple.

CONNECT

Genesis 2:18-25; Song of Solomon; 1 Peter 3:1-7.

Les Parrott III, *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*; Arterburn/Stoeker, *Every Man's Battle*.

Friendship



"It's my prerequisite for friendships"

**"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born
for adversity" (Prov. 17:17, NIV).**

The Power of Friendship

INTRODUCTION

1 Sam. 1:20; John 15:12-15; 2 Cor. 6:15-18; Phil. 2:3-8

I just visited <www.dictionary.com> where I entered the word "friend," and within a nanosecond, the meanings came back:

1. A person whom one knows, likes, and trusts.
2. A person whom one knows; an acquaintance.
3. A person with whom one is allied in a struggle or cause; a comrade.
4. One who supports, sympathizes with, or patronizes a group, cause, or movement.

It's strange how words such as "father," "family," and "friendship," which should automatically engender feelings of warmth, protection, and joy, so often trigger memories of hurt and pain. Some of life's hardest blows are most often dealt you at the hand of someone who is close to you. After all, can one be betrayed by a complete stranger? Friendship connotes some level of acquaintance and trust. "Your worst enemy could be your best friend and your best friend your worst enemy . . . only your friend knows your secrets, so only he could reveal it."*

**Some of life's hardest blows
are dealt you at the hand of
someone close to you.**

I grew up in a home where my parents did not take kindly to their kids forming close associations with neighbors or schoolmates. They feared the power of negative influence. In counseling us, they referenced those who got into trouble because of their friends. Yet over the years I still developed friendships that proved to be a total waste of time. I've had friends who required the world of me but were never there when I needed them. I've had friends who kept record of things they'd done for me with the intention that I'd repay in due season.

However, not all of them were like that. There are some friendships that have endured the tests of time and have positively touched and shaped my life.

Though the Bible cautions us against certain types of friendships (2 Cor. 6:14-18; Prov. 22:24, 25), it is nonetheless replete with lofty ideals of this social phenomenon. The story of David and Jonathan is a prime example, yet it falls short compared with the friendship that has been shown us by Jesus Himself. "'Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends'" (John 15:13, NKJV). That's what Christ did for us, and rather than just being called servants, Jesus considers us His friends if we keep His commandments.

*Bob Marley, "Who the Cap Fit," 1976.

Sunday
July 25

The Epitome of Friendship

LOGOS

1 Samuel 20; John 15:12-15; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; Phil. 2:3-8

Befriending Without Being Yoked (2 Cor. 6:14-18)

In 2 Corinthians 6:14 we are instructed to “not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (NKJV). In attempting to define “unequally yoked,” we can say that it is a relationship or alliance in which one must compromise Christian beliefs in order for it to survive. Upon reading this passage of Scripture, however, many of us would conclude that we should have very little, if any, alliances with nonbelievers. This school of thought leads many of us to believe that nonbelievers are simply contaminating agents that should be avoided. Whether or not we would admit

it or realize it, many of us have reduced our circle of friends exclusively to believers while we hope that someone else would befriend the

**Nonbelievers need and deserve
our love and friendship.**

nonbelievers. Using the example of Jesus, let us consider how we can befriend nonbelievers without being unequally yoked with them.

Jesus invited “tax collectors and sinners” to dine with Him (Matt. 9:10, 11). These people were bitterly looked down upon by the religious people as distastefully sinful and unclean. Jesus is then questioned as to why He would invite such people to have dinner with Him. Based on His answer (verses 12, 13), we learn that nonbelievers need and deserve our love and friendship just as much as anyone else. We also realize that in His dealings with nonbelievers, Jesus never put aside His beliefs and values. Furthermore, as Christians we must reach out to and befriend nonbelievers. In doing so, however, if we find that we must set aside our Christian values in order to maintain these unions, then we are unequally yoked.

A True Act of Friendship (1 Samuel 20)

After reading 1 Samuel 20, we can conclude that Jonathan was a true friend of David. Saul, the king of Israel, wanted desperately to take David’s life. Jonathan, son of Saul, was willing to do everything possible to save David’s life, even if it meant standing in harm’s way.

In considering the nature and results of friendship, two points are worth mentioning. The first is that a true friend sets aside his personal interests for a greater purpose. As the son of King Saul, it would have been Jonathan’s birthright to be the next king of Israel. He could have easily allowed selfish motives to overtake

him, allowing David to be killed. Instead, as a follower of God and a friend of David, Jonathan did all he could to preserve David's life.

The second point is that a simple act of kindness can have far-reaching results. In tracing the family tree of Jesus Christ, we discover that David was an ancestor (Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38). Having his life preserved, David was able to continue the ancestry that would eventually lead to the birth of the Savior. This implies that as a result of Jonathan's selfless act of love and friendship, God's plan of salvation was able to continue.

Christ—the Ultimate Friend (John 15:12-15; Phil. 2:3-8)

As great as Jonathan's gesture of love and friendship was, it doesn't remotely compare to what Jesus Christ has done for us. He says, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13, NKJV). Jesus then says, "You are My friends" (verse 14, NKJV). Jonathan was willing to put his life on the line so that David could live the rest of his life. On an infinitely grander scale, Jesus put His life on the line so that all who believe in Him would live in a world that has no end (3:16). Jonathan laid down his life for David, someone who accepted his friendship. Jesus Christ laid down His life for a human race that did not readily accept His friendship. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8, NKJV).

No matter how faithful our friends can be to us, their friendship can't even begin to compare to the friendship Jesus has to offer. It was previously mentioned that a true friend is willing to relinquish personal interests for a greater purpose. There is no example of this that is greater than that of our Savior. Instead of seeking to maintain His equality with God and His place in heaven, He "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:7, NKJV).

When Jesus was asked about the commandments, He summed it up in the following words: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind'" (Matt. 22:37, NKJV). However, He did not stop there: "'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (verse 39, NKJV). Paul adds emphasis to this point by saying, "In humility consider others better than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3, NIV). It is our relationship with God that allows us to love and befriend others in such a way. When the love of God penetrates our hearts, we are even able to love and befriend those who are not deserving of it (Matt. 5:44).

REACT

Many people take their Christian witness literally and restrict their active witnessing to being involved with other Christians—helping out at church or leading in small-group Bible studies, etc. Is this what Jesus meant in Matthew 28:19, 20?

Monday
July 26

“Without Partiality, and Without Hypocrisy”

TESTIMONY

John 15:12-15

Jesus says, “‘Love one another, as I have loved you.’ Love is not simply an impulse, a transitory emotion, dependent upon circumstances; it is a living principle, a permanent power. The soul is fed by the streams of pure love that flow from

**“We should not narrow
our circle of friends to a
few favorites.”**

the heart of Christ, as a well-spring that never fails. O, how is the heart quickened, how are its motives ennobled, its affections deepened, by this communion! Under the education and discipline of the Holy Spirit, the chil-

children of God love one another, truly, sincerely, unaffectedly—‘without partiality, and without hypocrisy.’”¹

“We should have the love of Christ in the heart to such a degree that our interest in others will be impartial and sincere. Our affections should take a wide range, and not center simply upon a few who flatter us by special confidences. The tendency of such friendship is to lead us to neglect those who are in greater need of love than those upon whom we bestow our attentions. “We should not narrow our circle of friends to a few favorites because they pet and flatter us by their professed affection. The partial attention so often bestowed and received, works not for the highest good of those who would serve God. . . .

“Instead of seeking to become a favorite yourself, or to flatter one who may be highly regarded, see if there is not a poor child who is not a favorite, to whom no special kindnesses are shown, and make this one the object of your unselfish attention. Those who are especially attractive will be at no loss for friends; while those who are less pleasing in appearance, who are timid and hard to become acquainted with, may have choice traits of character, and they are the purchased of the blood of Christ.”²

REACT

1. What does it mean to lay down your life for your friend?
2. Name some individuals you find it difficult to love. List the barriers that may be hindering you from applying the love principle. What can be done on your part to move past those barriers?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1140.

2. *Our High Calling*, p. 259.

Friends for all Seasons

EVIDENCE

1 Samuel 20

It was a beautiful day in Florida, and a Sabbath at that! The services were especially good that morning, though kind of long. Church ended, and my aunt and I headed for the car. I recall kicking off my shoes to make myself more comfortable as I started the engine. It roared to life. I shifted the gear selector into "drive." As my foot weighed down on the gas, the car shot backward—I had mistakenly put it into reverse! I felt a dull thump and the shrill, hysterical cry of a woman's voice, screaming, "My baby, my baby!"

I was so shaken that words cannot describe it. My aunt jumped out to investigate. I could not move. My heart was pounding so heavily. She confirmed my fears: I had hit somebody! And to make matters worse, the person was carrying a baby in his arms! I just wanted to die. I began crying, my entire body shaking. This couldn't be happening! Word spread quickly, and before long a large crowd had gathered.

That was when someone opened my door. I looked up, and through my tear-matted eyes, I recognized the tender, sympathetic faces of my friends Keithia and Jelaine. They whispered words of comfort and encouragement as they embraced me. Their very presence renewed my strength, and not only was I able to exit the vehicle, but I could stand.

Someone had called the paramedics, but the police arrived first. Tears were still running down my face as I gave my statement, but I was no longer as frightened as before. I later learned that the baby was OK and the man's injuries were not as serious as I had feared. I thanked God for that immensely, and also for the friends who stood by me during my ordeal. They are, indeed, friends for all seasons.

I believe that this was how David must have felt about Jonathan. During his worst moments as a young man, being hounded as he was by that power-hungry madman Saul, David found solace and hope in the friendship that existed between him and Jonathan.

**As friends they must have
had disagreements.**

With all the many people who supported him, there was none who brought him more comfort and cheer than Jonathan. Their friendship stood the test of time. As friends they must have had disagreements, as is common to all relationships. Yet, somehow, the friendship endured, even to the point that Jonathan actually put his life on the line to save his friend.

Wednesday
July 28

How to Be a True Friend

HOW-TO

1 Samuel 20; John 15:12-15; 2 Cor. 6:15-18; Phil. 2:3-8

Because I was an only child, I was always seen as shy in the early stages of my life. I remember sitting with my mother in church, sucking my left thumb while

The thought of forming close relationships outside my circle was out of the question.

watching all the other children laugh and play with their friends. As a result of that, I did not know how to reach out to others of my own age.

It was only during my last years in high school, along with my first year of attending Andrews University, that the meaning of true friendship actually became real. The opportunity of having more than one person to support you through your life's struggles was a comforting experience for me. Not only were they there for me when I was down (and vice versa), but also present when my spirits soared above the clouds. Our love could almost be described as unconditional.

So it is with God and His Son. The special bond between them was not only a Father and Son relationship expressed between the Two, but the crown of an infinite love He extends to us. He was neither ignorant nor boastful toward us humans. Instead Christ clothed Himself in our form and accepted, cherished, and even became sensitive to our needs and concerns (Phil. 2:6-8).

How can we demonstrate our personal relationship with God so others may know about Him? Here are a few steps:

1. Get a clear transparency. In order to sustain a healthy friendship, our hearts have to be free of bad intentions such as using a friend for our own personal use (Phil. 2:3, 4; 2 Cor. 6:17, 18).

2. Write a statement of promise. Upon our hearts we should promise always to be a friend (1 Sam. 20:42). Though the words might not be expressed all the time, making a covenant secures the other person's feelings.

3. Transfer your transparency unto the projector and turn on the light of friendship. Others cannot see the love you share with God in the dark, but with light everyone can see and show others. "Light comes to the soul through God's word [which teaches love], through His servants, or by the direct agency of His Spirit; but when one ray of light is discarded, there is a partial benumbing of the spiritual perceptions."*

**The Desire of Ages*, p. 322.

Back to Basics or System Overhaul?

OPINION

James 4:10

Several years ago, there was a best-selling book written by Unitarian minister Robert Fulghum entitled *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. The following is a partial listing of suggestions made by the author as to how to live and act, based upon our childhood tendencies:

1. Share everything.
2. Play fair.
3. Don't hit people.
4. Put things back where you found them.
5. Clean up your own mess.
6. Don't take things that aren't yours.
7. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.
8. Wash your hands before you eat.
9. Warm cookies and milk are good for you.
10. Live a balanced life. Learn a little and think a little and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day a little.
11. Take a nap every afternoon.
12. When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.

Contrary to this, I must admit that most of the problems that I have had in my adult friendships have resulted from the very same mentality to which Mr. Fulghum advises we revert: childish ways of understanding and thinking.

Now that I have entered into the understanding and knowledge of Christ, my outlook on life and friendships has changed drastically for the better. "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, because I understood and thought as a child. But when I grew up, I put my childish ways of thinking behind me" (1 Cor. 13:11, *The Clear Word*). God's Word empowers me with the authority to live, think, and behave as an adult, not as a child.

Have you ever had a complete system overhaul? When a computer is sluggish, crashes all the time, and rejects the saving of new files, it's time to perform a system overhaul. When it is your heart's deepest desire to have intimacy with God and rich relationships with others, you will choose not to go back to the basics, but instead move forward with Jesus to perform a complete system overhaul on your heart and mind. From there He will determine what the true basics of life really are, as His desire for us is to come unto Him as little children. Hopefully, once we learn to apply the principles of true humility and repentance to ourselves, then we can truly, "hold hands and stick together."

Friday
July 30

Through Thick and Thin

EXPLORATION

Prov. 18:24

CONCLUDE

Friendship comes in many degrees and “flavors”—from mild acquaintances to bosom buddies. The concept of friendship conjures up positive images, such as love, support, encouragement, loyalty, admiration, and trust. On the darker side, however, friendship has too often been associated with hurt, betrayal, and disappointment. But of all the examples of friendship, none surpasses that of our Friend Jesus, who laid down His life so that we could live eternally.

CONSIDER

- Finding someone who is unpopular, unattractive, a loner, or just not “cool,” and genuinely befriending them. Look for the person’s good qualities and help them to recognize their worth in Christ’s sight and in yours.
- Conducting an informal survey on friendship among church members, classmates, neighbors, and/or coworkers. Ask them to list qualities of a true friend and characteristics of one who is not a true friend. Compile the results into two lists and share the findings with your Sabbath School class.
- Thinking about your closest friends and honestly rating your own relationship with them, considering whether you are the kind of friend who sticks closer than a brother. Then ask God to help you to be a better friend.
- Rereading the story of David and Jonathan and then writing a poem or ballad about true friendship. Share your creative works with others.
- Analyzing your circle of friends to determine whether or not your associations include nonbelievers. If not, write the names of three nonbelievers whom you will make a conscious effort to befriend along with a list of steps you will take to accomplish this.
- Getting together with friends to plan friendship evangelism projects. One idea is to make loaves of bread and take them to neighbors along with a tract designed to introduce people to the Adventist Church.
- Doing a personal Bible study on friendship. Read stories of friends in the Bible and keep a journal of the lessons you learn from these. Ask God to help you apply to your own life what you learn.

CONNECT

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

My Life Today, pp. 204, 207-210, 212, 216.

Religion in the Workplace



**“He who walks with integrity walks securely,
but he who perverts his ways will become known”
(Prov. 10:9, NKJV).**

Practice What You Preach

INTRODUCTION

1 Thess. 5:12

"My boss is so stupid. She has no idea how to manage and expects too much from us."

"We ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you" (1 Thess. 5:12, TEV).

"We're having some drinks after work this Friday night. Would you like to come along?"

"You idiot! You've broken the photocopier again!"

"Remember that the Sabbath day belongs to me. You have six days when you can do your work, but the seventh day of each week belongs to me, your God" (Exod. 20:8-10, TEV).

"You idiot! You've broken the photocopier again! I can't trust you with anything!"

"Be patient with everyone" (1 Thess. 5:14, TEV).

"I need some paper for my printer at home. I'll just get some from the cupboard."

"Do not steal" (Exod. 20:15, TEV).

"He is so rude to me. I'll get back at them tomorrow in the meeting."

"Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt. 22:39, TEV).

"I can't make it to the program at church this week. I have to finish this big project and I will get a good bonus in my pay."

"It is better to have only a little with peace of mind than be busy all the time with both hands trying to catch the wind" (Eccles. 4:6, TEV).

Those of us who are working will often spend as much time with our work colleagues as with our families. This means that we develop close relationships with these people. Now we usually don't have much choice about the people we have to work with or who our boss is. Some of your work colleagues may be kind, loving, honest, and considerate; others may be rude or nasty. Some may be hostile, even insulting, to your Christian beliefs. We do have a choice, however, in how to treat other people and in our behavior at work.

Each day of work is an opportunity to witness in the most practical sense. This witness comes from working hard and honestly for what we earn, for showing love and kindness to everyone, for being a genuine friend to others. Then when we have the opportunity to share the good news about Jesus, the way has been prepared.

The Real World of Christianity

EVIDENCE

Lev. 19:36

Between the Enron scandal, WorldCom, and Martha Stewart, the present decade has echoed of forgotten biblical values that warned a small tribe of farmers and traders to "use honest scales" (Lev. 19:36, NIV). Yet maybe some of those obscure Old Testament verses still do have relevance for us today. In our modern-day enlightenment that has taken biblical and archeological evidences to unfathomable levels, have we forgotten about the simple witness of rightful living?

So often in our religious fervor, we protest, picket, and politicize to get our point across and forget the most basic of methods of persuasion: our life. I remember when I started my first job out of college. How aware I was of how different my spiritual beliefs were from those of my coworkers. The majority did claim Protestant ideals, but not many claimed the truths behind them. Constantly I was confronted with: Am I being a witness for Christ with my work habits? What standards should govern my ethics? Can I be a good Christian and a good businessman?

All my life I had entertained thoughts of becoming a minister or missionary for Christ. Traveling to foreign lands to reach tribes of people who had never seen or heard about the truths of our Lord Jesus Christ intrigued me. Yet, the more I spent time where I was, the more I realized that the essence of the Christian faith had still not reached a real level in the lives of most of us today. Christianity should not just be a hobby, practiced in our free time; it must permeate our existence.

Someone once asked Mohatma Gandhi, "What is the greatest hindrance to Christianity in India?" His response was "Christians."* If we profess to be Christians, then we must think, speak, and act in every way as Christians. This became a far greater challenge to my world than just my traditional views of evangelism.

Over the past few years, our culture has been swept up by the craze of reality television. Millions watch each week to see what plays out in the real world, who will be the next survivor or American idol, all the while, creating opinions about each of the contestants based on their every move captured on camera. How differently would each of us act today if we recognized how that same challenge faces us today.

**Have we forgotten about the
simple witness of rightful living?**

*<E-devotionals,01/01/2001,
<http://www.e-devotionals.org/2001/de010117.htm>>

Monday
August 2

Worship Isn't Just for Sabbath

LOGOS

Gen. 2:15; 3:17-19; Lev. 19:35, 36; Eccles. 9:10; Matt. 18:21

When I began my current job, I found that one of my colleagues was studying part time at a Bible college nearby. He would leave early twice a week so he could attend his classes. When he completed his course about two years later, he left for Thailand to spend the next two years helping to plant new churches in the city of Bangkok.

During the time we worked together, he would begin early and finish late to make up for the days he left early. If someone needed help, even with something as menial as cups to be washed or furniture to move, Peter was the first to offer assistance. He didn't ask for praise or recognition, but instead made it his mission to serve those he worked

**We should not look at work
as something to fill in time
or pay the bills.**

with. When it came time for him to leave, those he worked closest with organized a farewell dinner. The giant card they included with his gift was filled inside, outside, back, and front with memories, words of encouragement, and best wishes. Being the last to write, I had a chance to read what others had written. It was obvious that Peter had spent time with each person in the company, from the director to the receptionist. He'd been more than just a fellow coworker, he'd been a true friend, someone who'd lived his Christianity not just in church, but every day of the week at work.

Others have come and gone, including other Christians, and quickly been forgotten, but Peter's name still comes up in conversation around the office, and two years later people still remember what he stood for. He never led a Bible study or held a prayer meeting there, so how did he make such an impact on the lives of those he worked with?

Many Christians see work as "part of the secular world, not to be confused with the sacred world. 'God stuff' includes such things as prayer, Bible study, worship services, and donations of time and money to worthy ministries. Work is secular."* This view is contrary to that of the Bible. From the very beginning in the Garden of Eden, God gave humankind the privilege of working and taking care of the newly created earth (Gen. 1:28; 2:15). Many of the parables Jesus told were related to work or were set in the marketplace. As fellow workers with God (1 Cor. 3:9), we are expected to live the Christian life wherever we are.

How then are we to conduct ourselves as representatives of God today and

tomorrow when we arrive at our individual workplaces?

Ecclesiastes 9:10 and Colossians 3:23 tell us that whatever we do, we should do it with all our strength and heart, as though we are working for the Lord and not for others. We should not look at work as something to fill in time or pay the bills, but as an opportunity to be of service to others. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:3-5, NIV).

Every interaction we have is a chance to influence someone in a positive or negative way. We see those we work with every day for weeks, months, and even years. There is a saying: Actions speak louder than words. It is important that those we work with know we are Christians, but as with my colleague Peter, it is not necessary to preach long sermons or conduct Bible studies. Through our relationship with people, we can show them a loving and caring God who is interested in every aspect of their lives.

Leviticus 19:35, 36 details the importance of honesty in our business dealings. Whether we are an employee recording hours worked on a time sheet or stocking up from the office stationery cupboard or a salesperson trying to sell something to customers that they don't really need or can't afford, we need to show integrity and honesty.

The workplace offers us a unique opportunity to demonstrate that worshipping God is not just for one day of the week. It is a choice we make about how to live our lives on a daily basis. If we work hard, display integrity, and genuinely care about the needs of those around us, over time people will respect what we stand for. They may not always agree with us, but they will be more open to listening to our point of view. It is our responsibility to plant the seed; God will do the rest.

REACT

1. Are some occupations easier to witness in? Explain your answer.
2. If your colleagues are talking about their weekends and they ask you what you did, how would you include church/Sabbath in your answer?
3. How might you bring God/Christianity into the following common topics: sports, health and exercise, movies and entertainment, holidays?
4. What does it mean to make disciples of all people?
5. Is there a component to witnessing that calls for overt acts as opposed to passive ones?
6. In practical terms how does one "pray without ceasing"? (1 Thess. 5:17, KJV).

*Stephen R. Graves and Thomas G. Addington, *The Fourth Frontier: Exploring the New World of Work* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), p. 9.

TESTIMONY

Prov. 9:10

**What a challenge for us
to show our workmates
that we trust in God.**

"All branches of business, all manner of employments, are under the eye of God; and every Christian has been given ability to do something in the cause of the Master. Whether engaged in business in the field, in the warehouse, or in the counting room, men will be held responsible to God for the wise and honest employment of their talents. They are just as accountable to God for their work, as

the minister who labors in word and doctrine is for his. If men acquire property in a manner that is not approved by the word of God, they obtain it at a sacrifice of the principles of honesty. An inordinate desire for gain will lead

even the professed followers of Christ into imitation of the customs of the world. They will be influenced to dishonor their religion, by overreaching in trade, oppressing the widow and the orphan, and turning away the stranger from his right."¹

What a challenge for us to show our workmates that we trust in God and He is able to help us to live a life of "simplicity, honesty, truthfulness, purity, unsullied integrity."²

"Life's best things—simplicity, honesty, truthfulness, purity, unsullied integrity—cannot be bought or sold; they are as free to the ignorant as to the educated, to the black man as to the white man, to the humble peasant as to the king upon his throne. Humble workers, who do not trust in their own strength, but who labor in simplicity, trusting always in God, will share in the joy of the Saviour. Their persevering prayers will bring souls to the cross."³

"Heavenly angels will respond to their self-sacrificing efforts. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus will move upon the hearts, working miracles in the conversion of sinners. Men and women will be gathered into church fellowship, meeting-houses will be built, and schools established. The hearts of the workers will be filled with joy as they see the salvation of God."⁴

1. *Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 142, 143.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 27.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 4, 1907.

Letting Them Have It

HOW-TO

Eccles. 9:10; Matt. 7:1, 2; 8:21

It's been one of those days, you're just about ready to let them have it! Bill has managed for the umpteenth time this quarter to take credit for your work; your manager has chosen you to be the lucky person to work late tonight; and when you thought things just couldn't get any worse, Suzy has used your mug, once again, as a breeding ground for a new type of fungi.

Suzy has used your mug as a breeding ground for a new type of fungi.

Of course, there are limitations to how much we can give before burnout takes the better of us; however, as examples of Christ we need to show that Christians can turn the other cheek and go the extra mile.

There are three simple guidelines to help us reflect Christ's love in the workplace:

1. Do not judge others. "Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. For others will treat you as you treat them. Whatever measure you use in judging others, it will be used to measure how you are judged" (Matt 7:1, 2, NLT). "You may be saying, 'What terrible people you have been talking about!' But you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you do these very same things" (Rom. 2:1, NLT).

2. Give your best. It is easy to slack off; everybody else is doing it. Why should you have to work harder than anyone else? God tells us, "Whatever you do, do well. For when you go to the grave, there will be no work or planning or knowledge or wisdom" (Eccles. 9:10, NLT). Keeping up with today's lifestyle can be exhausting; however, entrusting our energy and enthusiasm to God allows access to an endless supply. Give this a try; you'll be pleasantly surprised.

3. Learn to forgive. When you are ill-treated at work or feel cheated, it is better to forgive than to retaliate (Matt. 18:21; 1 Pet. 2:20). Being gracious in the workplace is one of the best examples of God's love in your life. By using gentle, rather than harsh words, to deal with conflict, we are able to keep from stirring anger and turn away wrath (Prov. 15:1). By following these simple guidelines we are able to give a new meaning to the term "letting them have it"—we can let them have the full force of God's love in our lives.

OPINION

Heb. 13:17

I have often wondered, What was God's hidden purpose in giving humanity employment during and after Eden? We work, we have vacations, we head back to work again to deal with the politics, the rivalry, the gossip, the cliques. Many people dread the thought of getting up on Monday mornings just to get stuck in traffic or crowded into some subway; only to find their destinations to be some dead-end job. Working in a foreign culture, as I have and am currently doing, can heighten your hidden rage.

On any particular morning I arrive at work with the tune "Onward Christian Soldiers" stuck in my head only to encounter some problem that awaits me at the door and puts me on the defensive. And if you're in a management position, it seems your subordinates can hardly wait for you to take off your coat before approaching you with some emergency.

I am then ready to bark, "Can't this wait for me to get settled before I get bombarded with all these problems?" Even though I professed to follow the humble Man of Nazareth, I could still hear others warning their colleagues, "Wait till Clarence gets into the work mode before you start attacking him with questions."

"Every association of life calls for the exercise of self-control, forbearance, and

"Every association of life calls for the exercise of self-control, forbearance, and sympathy."

sympathy. We differ so widely in disposition, habits, education, that our ways of looking at things vary. . . . Many have borne so few burdens, their hearts have known so little real anguish, they have felt so little perplexity and distress in behalf of others, that they cannot understand the work

of the true burden bearer. . . . The work of many a burden bearer is not understood, his labors are not appreciated. . . . When others take up the burdens he has laid down, and meet the difficulties he encountered, they can understand how his faith and courage were tested. . . . Experience teaches them sympathy."¹

Who's your boss? Are you able to show him or her Christian traits of character even if you are being unjustly reprimanded? "If impatient words are spoken to you, never reply in the same spirit. Remember that 'a soft answer turneth away wrath.' Proverbs 15:1. And there is wonderful power in silence."²

1. *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 483, 484.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 486.

The Silent Sermon

EXPLORATION

Eccles. 3:12

CONCLUDE

It is easy to confine religion neatly to the one-hour worship service on Sabbath morning. However, when compared with the 40 or more hours spent at work each week, time spent in the sanctuary represents only a tiny fraction of our interactions with others. In fact it is during the time away from church that the rubber meets the road—where the words preached from the pulpit are given life by the believers. And the most powerful and moving witness is not found in a stirring sermon, but in the quiet eloquence of a life lived with integrity, honesty, and consistent compassion.

CONSIDER

- Calculating the number of hours per week that you spend at work as well as the number of hours per week that you spend at church. Compare these and consider where the greatest opportunity to witness lies.
- Interviewing someone you know, of any religious background, who is now retired. Try to discern what they think, now, was most important, or what they were most proud of, in their work.
- Thinking of the qualities of the people you respect most. List those qualities, particularly those that you see in colleagues at work, and consider how you can incorporate more of those qualities into your daily life. How many of the characteristics that you listed are also associated traditionally with the activities of a pastor or evangelist?
- Writing anonymous notes of appreciation to coworkers—perhaps, most importantly, to those with whom you do not always get along.
- Inviting a colleague that you don't know very well to have lunch with you. Plan to spend the majority of the time listening.
- Reading Ecclesiastes 2:11, 20; 6:7. How do these reflections on the futility of labor fit into this lesson? When does our work become futile, according to these verses? And, considering the perspective of these verses, what should be the ultimate work-place accomplishments?
- Exploring the Internet for Web sites that deal with workplace issues. Think about how a Christian should relate to and impact these issues.

CONNECT

Book of Ecclesiastes.

William Carr Peel and Walt Larimore, *Going Public With Your Work: Becoming a Spiritual Influence at Work*.

Respect for Authorities



“It is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience” (Rom. 13:5, NIV).

David's Perspective

INTRODUCTION

1 Sam. 26:23

It seems darker than the bowels of a cave. The moon is a thin sliver. I hear nothing, not even the cricket's symphony—only the slow, shallow breaths of a man lying on the ground. He stirs. General Abner lies nearby. Sentries snore deeply.

A shadowy light catches the glint of gold wrapped around his head. His spear is stuck in the ground. A limp banner stirs in a slow brush of air. Yes, this is King Saul, the one who is hunt-

**Is God truly the beginning
of all authority?**

ing me like wild game animal. He has fallen so far from God. Samuel did anoint me to be king of Israel. Is now the time?

What is authority? Is God truly the beginning of all authority? Whether authorities choose to follow God or not is their choice. My God is not a God of force. I know He desires us to follow Him. What then is my choice?

Does God have the right to be in control? Yes! (Ps. 100:3). God has given us authority figures as examples of what He is like. King Saul has proven that he no longer desires to follow the Lord our God. I know, however, that is not an excuse to disrespect him or, worse, to harm him in any way.

This is the second time I have faced this decision. Here he sleeps. Many battles have shown me how to kill. One swift move and it would be over. What about the consequences of this one life being taken? At last I would be king. But what kind of a subject would I be, then, of God's kingdom? Could I be a king God could bless?

Here I stand. In my hands I hold a spear that is not mine, a water jug that I don't own. I shout. I call. He's listening. "The Lord delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the Lord's anointed" (1 Sam. 26:23, NIV).

To my friends in 2004: The only time anyone is to disobey an authority figure is when they give a command that is contrary to the law of God (Acts 4:19). We (yes, me too) need to understand the importance of listening to and obeying our earthly authority figures (1 Pet. 2:13). We do this "for the Lord's sake." God wants me to know Him as my King, Someone I am to trust and obey. God wants me to be an example to the world of how followers of God are to relate to others (verse 15-17). God wants me to show Him my loyalty and do things He asks because of my love for Him (John 14:15).

I am not perfect, I messed up too many times. Take this truth from me to you: God wants a solid, loving, living, and royal relationship with you. I know! (Ps. 9:9-11).

In the love of God, your servant,

David, son of Jesse.

Sunday
August 8

Am I a Model Citizen?

LOGOS

Matt. 5:13-16; 22:15-21; Acts 5:29; Rom. 13:1-5; 1 Pet. 2:13-15

A City Set on a Hill (Matt. 5:13-16)

John Calvin established Geneva as a "city that is set on a hill" (Matt. 5:14, NKJV), where citizens chosen by God demonstrated their predestination by good deeds. In 1630, John Winthrop quoted Matthew 5:13-16 as he expressed his mission and that of his fellow Puritans in the colony of Massachusetts. Most recently Seventh-day Adventist administrators have sought to create model communities in hospitals, industries, and schools. Some who live in these Adventist communities love them. But often our best attempts to create heaven on earth breeds resentment, criticism, and anger.

Maybe Calvin's and Winthrop's time-honored interpretations of this text are wrong. Maybe Jesus wasn't talking about establishing a Christian society. The rest

The city Jesus describes is not lit by government-instituted streetlights.

of the Sermon on the Mount seems to be addressing the individual's relation to his or her community. Model religious societies lead to Pharisaism, a belief that you can create righteous people by making and enforcing

strict rules. The city Jesus describes is not lit by government-instituted streetlights. Instead it is brightened by many small candles, placed in hundreds of windows by individuals, each moved by a personal sense that he or she needs the light.

Caesar versus God (Matt. 22:15-21; Acts 5:29; 1 Pet. 2:13-15)

Throughout His ministry, Christ showed a disregard toward politics that many disciples found frustrating. It was an era that called for a revolutionary leader. But when Roman soldiers forced His fellow Jews to be pack animals, Jesus told the oppressed to go the second mile (Matt. 5:41). When the people rose to appoint Him their leader, Jesus withdrew (John 6:15). Asked if the hated Roman taxes should be boycotted on religious grounds, Jesus said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's" (Matt. 22:21, NIV).

Even in His trial Jesus showed respect for the high priest (John 18:21-23). And according to Jesus, Pilate's authority to judge was given to him by God (19:11). Neither the high priest nor Pilate used their God-given authority properly. Yet Jesus, seeing them as instruments of Providence, was obedient to death.

In contrast his followers, Peter and the apostles, stand up against their local authorities. Instructed not to teach in Jesus' name, they tell the senate, "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29, NIV). Peter himself will be pun-

ished and ultimately, tradition reports, executed, for his disobedience to worldly authorities. But it is Peter who advises us that governors are sent by God to punish wrongdoers (1 Pet. 2:13-17). Does that make Peter a wrongdoer?

Doing as Paul Says, Not as Paul Does? (Rom. 13:1-5)

In the same way Paul's writings seem to contradict his behavior. He instructs the Roman Christians to be subject to governing authorities. But in the book of Acts, we read that Paul was arrested for starting riots (Acts 24:5). Though the early Christians seemed to want to be law-abiding model citizens, they had a reputation for being troublemakers.

Of course I'm exaggerating Paul's (and Peter's) contradictions for the sake of argument. There is evidence that Paul was proud of being a Roman citizen (21:39). He appealed to the Roman justice system to save him (22:25; 25:10, 11). Like many people in his society, he longed to visit that famous city, only in Paul's case his dream was to evangelize the capital of the empire (Rom. 1:15).

Paul (like Jesus) does not want to change his world by mass revolution, but by individual conversion. As a citizen he admired the Roman system, but as a Christian he had faith in God's higher authority. When the Roman justice failed him, Paul's faith in Providence was bolstered by a night visit from Jesus in prison. "Take courage!" Jesus told him, "As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" (Acts 23:11, NIV).

Obedient to Death (Phil. 1:19-21)

As Christians we are called to be obedient to God's chosen authority figures. But if that authority contradicts God's law, His law is preeminent.

Like Jesus, Peter, and Paul, Christians from all generations have found themselves arrested for practicing their faith. But while Peter was brandishing his sword in the Garden, Jesus warned him, we do not defend our Lord by force. Instead our submission to authorities must be a submission to death.

Maybe, like Paul, we can say, "What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel" (Phil. 1:12, NIV).

REACT

1. Is it a mistake to try to create Christian communities? Is this contradicting what Jesus expressed in Matthew 5:13? Explain your answer.

2. How can obedience to worldly authorities be a witness? (1 Pet. 2:13-15). Can a Christian's disobedience also be a witness? (Phil. 1:19-21).

3. Are there times when a Christian should protest a government's decisions? (Amos 5:12-15).

5. Is it more Christian to vote or to abstain from voting? Explain your answer.

Monday
August 9

“We Must Obey God”

TESTIMONY

Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-29

The principle for which the disciples stood so fearlessly when, in answer to the command not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus, they declared, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge” (Acts 4:19, NKJV), is the same that the adherents of the gospel struggled to maintain in the days of the Reformation. When in 1529 the German princes assembled at the

**Mighty issues for the world
were at stake.**

Diet of Spires, there was presented the emperor’s decree restricting religious liberty, and prohibiting all further dissemination of the reformed doctrines. It seemed that the

hope of the world was about to be crushed out. Would the princes accept the decree? Should the light of the gospel be shut out from the multitudes still in darkness? Mighty issues for the world were at stake. Those who had accepted the reformed faith met together, and their unanimous decision was, “Let us reject this decree. In matters of conscience the majority has no power.”¹

We are firmly to maintain this principle in our day. The banner of truth and religious liberty held aloft by the founders of the gospel church and by God’s witnesses during the centuries that have passed since then, has, in this last conflict, been committed to our hands. We are to receive this Word as supreme authority. We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God’s Word must be recognized as above all human legislation. A “Thus saith the Lord” is not to be set aside for a “Thus saith the church” or a “Thus saith the state.” The crown of Christ is to be lifted above the diadems of earthly potentates.

We are not required to defy authorities. Our words, whether spoken or written, should be carefully considered, lest we place ourselves on record as uttering that which would make us appear antagonistic to law and order. We are not to say or do anything that would unnecessarily close up our way. We are to go forward in Christ’s name, advocating the truths committed to us. If we are forbidden by men to do this work, then we may say, as did the apostles, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19, 20, NKJV).

1. Merle d’Aubigne, *History of the Reformation*, b. 13, ch. 5.

2. *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 68, 69.

For God and Country

EVIDENCE

1 Pet. 2:13; 15

As Christians, sometimes we may wonder how other Christians can work in government and politics. Through the media we often view the scandals of government and the personal downfall of many leaders. Their actions are analyzed and the viewing public often reacts with almost automatic responses: "They're all like that—he just got caught," "There's something wrong with the system," or "That's why I stay away from that sort of thing."

The question for Seventh-day Adventists who lack faith in the political system and therefore don't get involved is: What is the impact, or potential impact, of not being involved? Undoubtedly, many supporters of former Vice President Gore were asking themselves this in late 2000. And probably more than a few relieved supporters of President Bush.

The ideal of government and public service is something in which Christians need to be re-engaged. Democracies were built to ensure that the needs and desires of the people were heard and acted upon. As Seventh-day Adventists, if we exclude ourselves from the public policy process, we risk becoming obsolete in our abilities to represent ourselves and those we serve. If we as a church truly represent God's interests, we need to ensure that the church's interests are known and considered by the ruling class of our worldly society.

This is not to say that we must form political parties, engage lobbyists, or leave our service to the church for service to politicians. It is to say that we need to find ways to effect change at all levels of government. If you serve in a government as a public servant, you have an ability to influence those around you in positive ways—by how you reflect Christ in your life. You have the means by which to help those who need help by representing their needs to decision-makers. You also have an ability to advocate beneficial changes to laws as you serve the lawmakers.

**We may wonder how other
Christians can work in
government.**

The Christian's involvement in politics and government can present challenges. There is no doubt that actions occur that we as a church do not condone. But one always has to come back to a fundamental choice: Stay away from the public process to avoid potential moral questions, or work from within the system to effect change through our example as Christians.

Wednesday
August 11

What Citizenship Means

HOW-TO

Rom. 13:1-7

Christians are blessed to be a part of the heavenly kingdom. "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20, NKJV). We have been conveyed into the kingdom by God's dear Son (Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9).

But as pilgrims we live and work under the governments of men, which include a variety of political systems (democracies, kingdoms, dictatorships), offering varying degrees of freedom and responsibility.

Paul strongly argues for us to be in subjection to people in political leadership and that we should pay our obligatory taxes without complaint. Since God has established the rules, we cannot minimize duty, responsibility, and respect to those in authority on earth. So let us not dwell on

We are admonished to be subject to governing authorities.

rules and laws, but lift up our Lord as our primary concern (Rom. 13:1-7). We must obey God before humanity and avoid becoming entangled with the affairs of this life to the neglect of our service to God (2 Tim. 2:4). What God ordains people will corrupt and ruin for their gain. Since God appointed governments and their representatives, if we respect and honor God, then we will respect and honor these governments also (Prov. 8:15; Dan. 2:21).

We are admonished to be subject to governing authorities. Governing authorities that exist have been appointed by God (Rom. 13:1). God established governments and even brought them into power for His purpose and glory (1 Pet. 2:11-17). God even uses evil governments for His divine purpose (Exod. 1:9).

As an act of submission, we should pay our taxes (Rom. 13:6, 7), which can be a form of devotion to God because submission to rule is divinely ordered. So be a good citizen and pay your just amount without complaining! (Matt. 22:21).

We must respect and continue to pray for those in power. We are to respect the police and other authorities, as well as support and pray for them. We should be in prayer for our leaders whether we like them or not. We are to offer supplication, prayer, and intercession (1 Tim. 2:1, 2). If we want to live in peace, we should pray for those who govern, that God will guide them into peace.

REACT

Should we enter politics, serve in law enforcement, enlist in the military? Explain your answer.

Keeping Our Word

OPINION

Matt. 5:13-16

We Christians are the salt of the earth, just as political issues are the salt of government officials. As Christians we are expected to act in a good and just manner and to be trustworthy and honest toward other people.

The government is expected to act in the same way, just and trustworthy when it comes to dealing with political matters—no matter what the problem is. Officials are also expected to keep their word.

Some people believe that the government will keep its word on political issues. But most governments don't. This is where the government loses people who believed in them. The politicians have gone against their word, and now it is hard for those people to trust them again. This can also be true for us as Christians. If we break a promise, how are our friends going to be able to trust us again?

Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men" (Matt. 5:13, NKJV).

This is how we feel when someone breaks a promise; we feel as if we want to trample all over them for what they have done to us. Some people feel like that when a politician breaks his policy on a political issue that he has been promising. Some feel that the politician has trampled all over them!

Therefore I guess you can say that we as Christians can

relate to the political issues of the world today. We also break our promises, because of this sinful world that we live in, just as the government breaks their promises on political issues.

But Jesus challenged us to be different from this world. We are the salt of the world.

If we break a promise, how are our friends going to be able to trust us again?

REACT

1. Can we as Christians relate to political issues of the world today? If so, how? Explain your answer.

2. What kind of influence should we as Christians have on society involving political issues?

3. If politicians can't be trusted, what should be a Christian's relationship to government?

Friday
August 13

I Pledge Allegiance to the Lamb

EXPLORATION

Rom. 13:5

CONCLUDE

Adhering to earthly authorities is a personal decision and cannot be forced; however, we must be subservient in obeisance, unless human laws conflict with God's. Our duty is to participate in public service and government, carefully considering our actions and words. Governing leaders are divinely appointed for His purpose. Therefore, we must comply reverently, praying for them and paying our dues. When choosing God's laws, we must be guileless, reflecting His love, honor, and integrity in our daily lives to win souls to heaven. Our challenge is to keep our word, so that whatever we choose will ultimately honor God.

CONSIDER

- Attending town meetings, legislative hearings, or parent-teacher association gatherings. Listen to what is discussed and offer feedback in a way that would uphold your faith.
- Learning all the names of your local government leaders. Record their names in a prayer journal, making sure to include their names in your daily devotions.
- Visiting your local government's Web site to become acquainted with its structure and function. Take note of anything that might be of spiritual conflict and write a letter to your local representative.
- Volunteering your time for your local law enforcement's or firefighter's charity events. Take the opportunity to make new friends and witness to everyone you meet.
- Sending out holiday or seasonal greeting cards to local government officials. Let them know you support their efforts and are praying for them.
- Listening to the song "I Pledge Allegiance to the Lamb" by Ray Boltz. Write down your thoughts on the song and share those with your Sabbath School class.

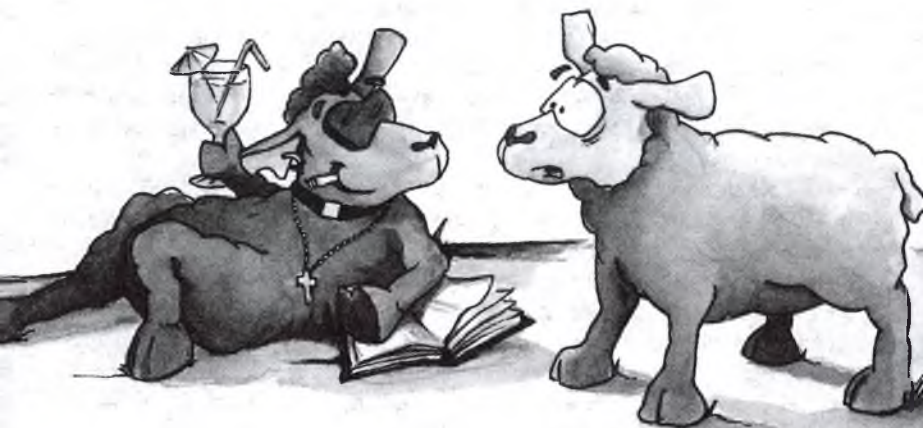
CONNECT

Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience*.

<<http://www.cs.indiana.edu/statecraft/civ.dis.html>>

<<http://www.mcc.org/us/washington/immigration.html>>

Christ's other Sheep



"You're obviously from a different flock"

"I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" "
(John 10:16, NIV).

Christmas With a Priest

INTRODUCTION

John 10:16

**It brings up too many
theological questions.**

I raised my glass and wished a very merry Christmas to the Catholic priest dressed in a full Santa outfit. The Catholic priest and I were missionaries in Zambia. There was a lot of joy and unity floating around at this United States Embassy Christmas party in the heart of Africa. The children played on the grass, the women brought out their best desserts, and

I talked about religion with Santa Claus and a Church of God missionary with eight children.

What did Jesus mean about having other sheep anyway? How could He say that? It brings up too many theological questions. Most Catholics and Lutherans believe that the church as a community is the major tool through which God works. In our own community the idea of church in the Bible is often overlooked as we stress personal relationships. The question of how to relate the distinctive Adventist message to people in other churches and not just individuals becomes particularly perplexing.

Quickly we discover that our belief system incorporates more than a concept of an individual saved by grace, but a community through which God works. We are left asking two questions:

1. How do we relate the propositions in our theology?
2. How do we make specific decisions in the relationships that we have built?

Ministry is built on relationships. Ministry is built through communication. Ministry is built through presence. As a remnant people let us embrace the discussion of presenting Christ even in the three angels' messages. Let us take another look at what happens when we encounter other sheep. Let us commit to following God and His Word even if that means changing how we relate.

The Similarity of Difference

EVIDENCE

Mark 9:38-40

With more than 340 Protestant denominations, we often rub shoulders with Christians who are much “different” from ourselves. So how would the Master have us relate to them? Jesus, always ahead of His time, decided to clarify this issue some 2,000 years ago. Read today’s text. Earlier, as recorded in John 10:16, His disciples were told of the “‘other sheep that are not of this sheep pen’” (NIV); today they have a personal encounter with one. Unnamed but certainly not unknown, this man begins casting out demons in the name of Christ.

After smugly rebuking the man, the disciples, via John, reported back to Jesus. “‘Teacher,’ said John, ‘we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because *he was not one of us*’” (Mark 9:38, NIV, italics supplied). The disciples’ actions are fueled by superiority (they had just been arguing over who is the greatest) and expressed as a helpful distinction—“he was not one of us.”

Their fixation with this man’s differences made it impossible to perceive the way Christ was using him. As a result of this faulty paradigm—that true disciples must be just like themselves—they failed to notice the commonalities they had with the man “‘Do not stop him,’ Jesus said. . . . For whoever is not against us is for us’” (verses 39, 40, NIV). Powerful words! Jesus wanted to set things straight: The disciples’ first duty toward other Christians (as well as ours) was identification, not isolation. We should affirm the way Christ is working through them, not disassociate because of our differences.

Consequently, if God has called us to appreciate similarities with His other sheep, then why dwell on our doctrinal differences at all? We must begin to understand the intimate connection between doctrine and experience. Doctrines, as one thinker put it, are “attempts to preserve something that is all too easily lost through misunderstanding, namely, an experience.”*

Why dwell on our doctrinal
differences at all?

In other words our doctrines are the framework through which encounters with God can be shared. Therefore, what is transmitted is not logic or a string of words, but an experience with God. Sheep are sheep. Regardless of variation, they all belong to the same group and have the same shepherd. However, the potential for intimacy between the shepherd and those beyond the borders of the sheep pen is limited! God wants you to lovingly call them into a deeper experience.

*Alister E. McGrath, *Studies in Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 1997), p. 360.

Monday
August 16

Living Inside the Box

LOGOS

John 10:16; 13:34, 35; 1 Corinthians 13; 2 Pet. 1:12; Rev. 14:1-12

The airplane was crowded. I found my seat assignment and took my place next to a man whom I guessed to be about my age. We exchanged greetings and then disinterestedly listened to the safety and flight instructions read by the flight attendant. After a routine takeoff and at approximately 28,000 feet, I introduced myself.

"My name is Ken."

"Pleased to meet you. I'm Tom," he replied.

"Tom, where are you headed today?" I asked.

"My ticket says San Diego and I am hoping that is where the plane is going!"

"Hey, me too! I'm going to a conference for a couple of days."

"What conference?" Tom asked.

"It's a yearly ministers' conference that I have attended before."

"Are you a preacher?" Tom asked.

"Yes. Specifically I am a campus chaplain at a Seventh-day Adventist university."

"That's great," Tom exclaimed. "I am a pastor too and it looks like we are both going to the same conference. Small world, huh?"

For the next couple of hours these two preachers conducted their own conference. We shared common struggles and challenges facing ministry today. We

**This one defining command
is the best evidence of
practical Christianity.**

found common ground in seeking to balance one's ministry and personal life responsibilities. We celebrated God's active work in changed lives of members of our congregation and our personal journey with

the Savior. We carefully listened as we explored the "differences" our respective denominations afforded us.

When we ventured into the area of lifestyles, our perspectives were contrastingly different. Tom's personal freedoms allowed him to be an avid tobacconist and to enjoy exotic tobacco products. Tom also was a wine connoisseur and cultivated a vineyard which produced his personal wine products. And Tom and I are both pastors, headed to a pastor's convention, to become better equipped to save "lost sheep."

Jesus said, " 'Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd' " (John 10:16, NKJV).

Who are the "other sheep"? Are they other believers, other members of other denominations, or lost people? The context of this passage states that Jesus

knows His sheep, or His people. Jesus knows those outside the fold and is committed to saving them.

Do you and I have a role to play in partnering with Jesus so people can hear the voice of Jesus?

Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (13:34, 35, NKJV).

This one defining command is the best evidence of practical Christianity: to love one another, as Jesus has loved us. It’s about loving lost people, loving believers, and loving those we might consider to be outside the parameters of our belief structure.

Here is a reality check. How does your spiritual community rank against the standard of love Jesus proposes?

Read 1 Corinthians 13 on the qualities of love.

A profound passage written by Peter—1 Peter 1:1-14—reminds us that God has given to us the important things that really matter in life. They are not “things” we often think of, but, rather, personality and character traits that will provide meaning to our existence.

I know you have heard these things before. So have I. But I need to be reminded that love is the bottom line. It is popular to talk and think “outside the box”! We would do well to live love consistently “inside the box.” Perhaps then those not of this flock would be compelled to join us.

REACT

1. What is the proper place of doctrine in the Christian life?

2. How can we create ways to meet and interact with Christians outside our own church family without placing ourselves in situations that introduce conflict early on in the relationship?

3. As we develop friendships with non-Adventist believers, what are some practical ways to maintain our spiritual strength so that we become increasingly able to express our distinctive beliefs without compromising biblical doctrine?

4. If someone’s personal freedoms are self-destructive or hurtful to others, how should we address them? Is there ever a point at which we should question a person’s feeling of freedom to do those hurtful things? If so, how do we know when that point comes?

5. First Peter 1:7 talks about “the proof of your faith” (NASB). In what sense should faith be proven?

Tuesday
August 17

"An Excellent Effect"

TESTIMONY

1 Cor. 9:19-23

As Seventh-day Adventists, the doctrines we hold carry a mixture of compatibility with fellow Christians in other denominations. Though we are often known best for our peculiar beliefs, many Christians are unaware of the tenets we share in common. It is through developing personal relationships with fellow believers that we will be able to establish mutual trust.

"Paul did not approach the Jews in a way to excite their prejudices. . . . He varied

"There are some who will not be convinced by any method of presenting the special truths for this time."

his manner of labor, always shaping his message to the circumstances under which he was placed. . . . There are some who will not be convinced by any method of presenting the special truths for this time. The laborer for God should, nevertheless, study carefully the best

methods, in order that he may not needlessly arouse prejudice or stir up combativeness in his hearers."¹

Ellen White speaks of the need for both ministers and church members to extend friendship to the leaders of other denominations. "If our ministers show themselves friendly and sociable, and do not act as if they were ashamed of the message they bear, it will have an excellent effect, and may give these pastors and their congregations favorable impressions of the truth. At any rate, it is right to give them a chance to be kind and favorable if they will."²

"There are many [truths] . . . which are dear to all Christians. Here is common ground, upon which we can meet people of other denominations; and in becoming acquainted with them we should dwell mostly upon topics in which all feel an interest, and which will not lead directly and pointedly to the subjects of disagreement."³

We should consider interaction with believers from other churches as opportunities to fellowship in Christ. We should never be afraid to explain our faith with straightforward clarity, yet we should allow our common ground to build the foundation of our relationships. "Present the truth in humility, with the deepest love for souls, and an earnest desire for their salvation."⁴

1. *Gospel Workers*, p. 300.

2. *Evangelism*, p. 143.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

How Would You Answer?

HOW-TO

John 13:34, 35; Acts 8:35; 2 Cor. 5:20

They are all around you. They ride your bus and eat at your favorite restaurant. They work out at your gym and fill their car next to yours at the gas station. They are your neighbors here on earth and will live next door to you in eternity. They love God just as much as you do, and He loves them as much as He loves you. Who are these people? They are Christians of other denominations. We interact with them regularly. As Seventh-day Adventists, how should we relate to them?

1. Give them love. Overwhelm them with active, Christlike love. Why? So we can convert them to Adventism? No. Love them because we are Christ's representatives (2 Cor. 5:20). Love them because Christ asked us to love them. And love them so that all people, both Christians and non-Christians, will know that we are followers of Jesus (John 13:34, 35).

2. Lift them up. Prayer is key. The act is mentioned in the Bible literally hundreds of times. However, all too often our prayers remain limited to our own church members and to our own church's mission. But let's not stop here. Search for opportunities to pray with other Christians and for other Christians. As you drive by other churches, pray that the Christians who worship within will find huge success in bringing people to Jesus.

3. Keep it simple. While hitchhiking through Alaska, my friend and I caught a ride with a man in his mid-twenties. As the miles whizzed by, our conversation turned to religion. When he found out we were Seventh-day Adventists, he turned and looked directly at me. "What do Seventh-day Adventists believe?" he asked. I launched into an explanation beginning with the state of the dead followed closely behind by a breakdown of the seventh-day Sabbath.

Then it was his turn to share his beliefs.

Then it was his turn to share his beliefs. I wanted to slide under the floor mat as he began. His first and only emphasis was on Jesus Christ as His Savior. This encounter made me change my approach. Sure, I still look for opportunities to share distinct Adventist beliefs. But, like Philip when he met the Ethiopian eunuch on the desert road, I now begin with what matters most to us as Seventh-day Adventists. I share the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:35).

REACT

How would you respond to a Christian who asked, "What do Seventh-day Adventists believe?"

Thursday
August 19

Why Can't I Convert Her?

OPINION

Acts 2:40, 41

Why won't she listen to me? I asked myself. *I have shown her that it was man and not God who changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. To do this I have used both the Bible and materials from the Catholic Church that state this is so. Then why won't she become a Seventh-day Adventist?* This is the struggle I had several years ago when I was trying to convince my good friend Kristin to become a Sabbath keeper.

"I see what you are saying, Chad, but I just don't see why I have to keep the Sabbath," she would respond. Statements like that would infuriate me! She understood the truth but had no conviction to change.

Why can't I convert her? was the question I began asking myself. That question though is overflowing with error. Look at the pronoun I was using: "I." It seems that

"You keep Saturday, right?"

many of us when witnessing to Christ's other sheep, fall into the trap of thinking we convert people, therefore if a person is not converted we get down on

ourselves. The result of conversion is not our concern. We are not the converters; this is the work of the Holy Spirit, and Acts 2:4, 41 demonstrates this.

Peter was the speaker and the witness but who was the converter? "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. . . . Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (verses 4, 41, NIV). The Holy Spirit was the One who enabled Peter to speak on the Day of Pentecost; it was the Spirit who gave the message and thus the Spirit who did the converting.

On a flight home from California, I sat next to two teenage girls. One of them immediately struck up a conversation with me, and I knew I was going to be doing some converting. One of the girls was a Christian, and the other wasn't. The Christian asked me what religion I was and I told her I was a Seventh-day Adventist. She then asked me what was different about Seventh-day Adventists from Baptists. Of course—in proper witnessing fashion—I shared with her first our similarities and then I said, "We worship on a different day." Before I could say anything else the non-Christian girl burst in with the question, "You keep Saturday, right?" I replied with the affirmative and inquired how she knew that. She responded, "Well, isn't that what the Bible says?" I assured her it was.

God showed me that He is the Teacher, and His Word alone had already shown this girl the truth. The Christian young lady then asked me to show her where the Bible taught about the Sabbath. Now it was my turn to be available to God.

Barriers or Bridges?

EXPLORATION

John 10:16

CONCLUDE

When we look at differences between us and other believers, it seems easier to raise barriers than to build bridges. Jesus did not call us to the isolation and superiority of the mountaintop, but rather to find common ground and build friendships for eternity. We don't always know how to relate to those with a different belief system; it can seem daunting but it's actually very simple. We don't convert; God does. Doctrine doesn't save; the blood of Jesus does. So let's put aside all judgment and fear. Our job is to build bridges and let God do His part.

CONSIDER

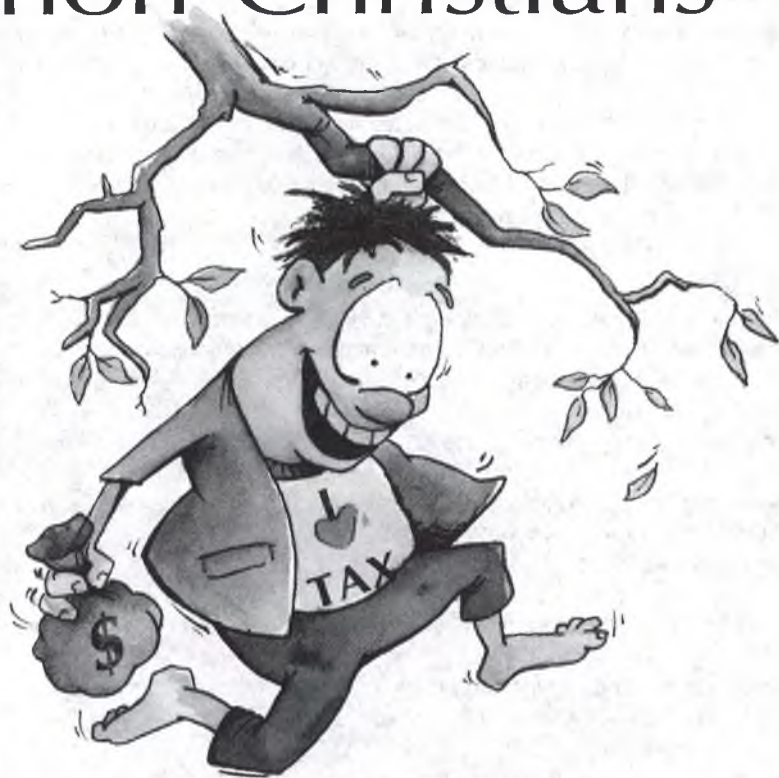
- Drawing a Venn graph to depict the differences and similarities you find between yourself and a Christian from another denomination.
- Making a list showing what scares you about forming friendships with non-Adventist believers.
- Videotaping common behaviors we as an Adventist subculture might exhibit that could alienate another believer.
- Searching for opportunities to build relationships with people outside your church and journaling your experience.
- Role-playing the "other sheep" relating to an Adventist and sharing how you felt throughout the experience.
- Reflecting upon the prejudices you might have regarding people of other faiths.
- Starting a prayer list to include people of a different faith whom you know but haven't taken the time to get close to. Ask God to show you how to relate to them.

CONNECT

Numbers 11:26-29; John 4:4-42; 1 Corinthians 9:20-23.

The Desire of Ages, chap. 19.

How to **Relate** to non-Christians



*"I've been hanging around
for a friend like you"*

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, NIV).

The World's Best Friend

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 5:16, 43, 44; Luke 19:7

There was going to be a double anniversary celebration at the Grand Concourse Seventh-day Adventist Church located in the Bronx, New York. They were going to celebrate the 75th anniversary for the building they are using for worship services and the 30th anniversary for the existence of the church in the area.

**We develop relationships
with people who have
inspired us in some way.**

What made me decide to attend the celebrations was the preacher for the day. Charles Bradford, pastor, evangelist,

and author of the book *Preaching to the Times*. I looked forward to this day, to meet a man I have heard as a great preacher in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. At the end of his powerful sermon, I had the privilege of shaking hands with him.

As humans we develop relationships with people who have inspired us in some way. We look for role models.

Luke 19:1-10 is the story of Zacchaeus's discourse with the greatest Teacher the world has ever known. The God of relationships had an encounter with the chief tax collector living in Jericho. Zacchaeus "sought to see who Jesus was" (Luke 19:3, NKJV). Just as he "climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him" (verse 4, NKJV), I rushed through New York traffic that Sabbath morning to have a glance at a role model.

The only incongruity to the two incidents is that I am a member of the church while Zacchaeus was regarded by the people of his time as chief of sinners, hence the reaction from the people. When they saw this, they murmured, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner" (verse 7, NKJV).

The great Master-Teacher gave us a vivid picture of how we ought to relate to non-Christians. Our love and friendship should not be limited to Adventist Christians only, but to all persons we come in contact with. Friendship evangelism is one of the best tools of reaching others. As Adventists we always withdraw from people of other Christian denominations because we regard ourselves as bearers of the truth. It is true that we possess the truth, but what good will it do if we keep it to ourselves?

Christ came to this lost world to save it. To further that intention, He sought—took all likely means—to effect salvation, even friendships. That's the focus of our study this week.

Sunday
August 22

Mission to the World

LOGOS

John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 1:18-20; 2:14-16; Phil. 2:5-11; Rev. 14:6, 7

For us to understand fully how we should relate to non-Christians, we first ought to understand the broad picture of Christ's mission to a world destined for destruction. The first sermon that Jesus preached in the synagogue on Sabbath morning uses an Old Testament passage to explain both Himself and the nature of the salvation that God is bringing through Him.

"And stood up to read" (Luke 4:16, NKJV). They had in their synagogues seven readers every Sabbath, the first a priest, the second a Levite, and the five Israelites of that synagogue. The second lesson for that day being the prophecy of Isaiah, they gave Him the volume to read. We often find Christ preaching in the synagogues, but never reading except in this synagogue at

**The gospel is the
proclamation of liberty.**

Nazareth, where He had been a member for many years.

The passage He read is actually a composite one, taken from Isaiah 61, in which we find a clause "to proclaim liberty to the captives" (verse 1, NKJV). Jesus presents Himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah's spirit-filled prophetic figure, who proclaims God's eschatological redemption. Jesus brings into being what Isaiah's prophecy anticipated. Not only is He the proclaimer of the saving act of God, but He is actually realizing it in His own preaching and life. The gospel is the proclamation of liberty like that of Israel from Egypt. It is a deliverance from the worst of slaveries, from which those who wish to be free are willing to make Christ their Lord.

"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21, NKJV). Jesus preaches the "good news to the poor" (Isa. 61:1, NIV). Those marginalized in the present are looking for God's redemption. Three times the word "preach" is mentioned in the narrative. He had to preach to the poor in spirit, the meek and humble, and to those who were truly sorry for their sins. In short, He must preach the gospel and bring it to their hearts.

The "acceptable year of the Lord" is here (Isa. 61:2, NKJV). What was anticipated in the year of jubilee, which was supposed to take place every 50 years, to "proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants" (Lev. 25:10, NKJV), has now become a reality. The bonds that oppressed the people have been broken.

The prophetic words that Christ read on this occasion describe very graphically the reason that God sent His Son into the world—to redeem humanity from sin, to liberate them from slavery to the devil and from eternal death. Christ's ultimate

goal was to bring eternal redemption to all humankind. The church carries on this mission: “ ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age’ ” (Matt. 28:19, 20, NKJV).

Having understood the nature and purpose of Christ's mission, it is clear that as Christians we ought to relate to all persons both Jew or Gentile, free or bond, in a way that we will minister the gospel of salvation to their lives. Every living human being is a potential disciple. Non-Christians and those of other denominations are described by Christ as “ ‘other sheep . . . which are not of this fold’ ” (John 10:16, NKJV). When Christ said that “ ‘the harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few’ ” (Matt. 9:37, NKJV), He was not referring to the harvest as Christians, but as unbelievers. Thus we should relate in kind deeds and self-sacrificing service to all persons, especially unbelievers.

REACT

1. In what way can you relate to a Muslim fundamentalist who believes that Christians are infidels?
2. If marrying a non-Christian is not the best way to bring them to Christ, why then should we have different ways of reaching out to them when the ultimate goal is the same?
3. How should we respond if a Buddhist tells us that he found the way to God through Buddha?
4. Why do the poor, both spiritual poor and material poor, tend to be more responsive to the gospel than the wealthy and self-satisfied?
5. Is there a way to reach egotistical, self-confident people with the good news of Jesus Christ?
6. What should be our reaction if we are not yielding results from our efforts?
7. To what extent, if any, should we keep records of how many people we have witnessed to?
8. What could be the danger of doing so?

TESTIMONY

Gen. 18:2, 16, 22; 1 Thess. 1:7

From the corporate church to the individual church member, we have a duty to fulfill the commission left us by our Lord Jesus Christ. In our daily interaction with

“It required both the divine and the human to bring salvation to the world.”

non-Christians, we should take the opportunity of living the truth so that the love of Christ can be presented to the world. We are counseled to live “as His representatives among men, Christ does not choose angels who have never fallen, but human beings, men of like passions with those they seek to save. Christ took upon Himself humanity, that He might reach humanity. Divinity needed humanity; for it required both the divine and the human to bring salvation to the world. Divinity needed humanity, that humanity might afford a channel of communication between God and man.”¹

“The world will be convinced, not by what the pulpit teaches, but by what the church lives. The minister in the desk announces the theory of the gospel; the practical piety of the church demonstrates its power.”²

“God expects personal service from everyone to whom He has entrusted a knowledge of the truth for this time. Not all can go as missionaries to foreign lands, but all can be home missionaries in their families and neighborhoods.”³

“The angel sent to Philip could himself have done the work for the Ethiopian, but this is not God’s way of working. It is His plan that men are to work for their fellow men.”⁴

REACT

1. Which biblical characters give us examples of living the gospel? Explain your answer.
2. Why did God choose human beings and not angels to preach the gospel to the world?
3. Since it isn’t the pulpit that convinces the world, but the lives of church members, why don’t we just stop preaching right now and just live good lives?
4. What happens within your heart when you share Jesus with someone on a personal level?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 296.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 16.

3. *Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 30.

4. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 109.

Let's See Your Price Tag!

EVIDENCE

Prov. 14:27; 16:7

Since animals and material objects lack the high destiny of human beings, they are without inherent worth. Consequently, no animal or thing, however much it may be prized, for example, a blood race-horse, a rare painting, an old violin, an automobile, precious jewelry, or gold or silver money, has intrinsic value. These things have value only because they may be of use or pleasure to their owners, or because their owners can exchange them for things that others possess. In a word, their value is purely relative, or extrinsic.

The value of a human being is called intrinsic because it proceeds from a person himself and is not derived from other persons or things. Because of their intrinsic value, every person possesses the quality of inviolability. This forbids others from harming or injuring them in any way. Humanity's special endowments give them a place of special preeminence in the world above all visible created things, and are the basis of what is called human dignity. The term "dignity" is akin to Latin *decus*, honor or ornament. God has placed in humanity certain powers and capacities to do things he has not placed in nonsentient creation. Consequently, the ultimate basis of human dignity is the spirituality of the human soul.

Jesus Christ our Redeemer died for all humanity. He paid a price for our redemption. He loved the world so much that He died so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but is saved. To Him every soul has value because we are His creation, made in His image.

Therefore as partakers of the divine grace, how are we to relate to our brothers and sisters who, having the same value as us, do not possess the knowledge of truth? Since it is the lack of the knowledge of the value they possess that causes them to live rebellious lives, it is our duty to show them acts of love and kindness, and assure them of the great cost Christ paid for their redemption. According to Thomas Higgins, the natural law commands us to love others whether Christian or unbeliever as he writes that "while man is not obliged to like anyone, he is obliged to love all men as he loves himself."*

To Him every soul
has value.

REACT

If a convicted serial rapist and murderer donates his kidney to a dying patient, would you call that love? Explain your answer.

*Thomas J. Higgins, *Man as Man* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1958), p. 222.

Wednesday
August 25

Loving Your Neighbor

HOW-TO

Mark 12:28; Luke 10:29-37

When God created Adam, He realized the loneliness that he would experience and therefore He said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him" (Gen. 2:18, NKJV). From this statement we can only deduce that God intended humankind to be social beings, that we

should live in a community of others, and be part of the society of humanity.

After sin entered the earth, however, humankind became an enemy to himself.

After sin entered the earth, however, humankind became an enemy to itself (4:8) and finally went away

from the presence of the Lord to dwell in the land of Nod (verse 16). The distance from the Garden of Eden to the land of Nod, east of Eden, is a perfect example of how far humanity went away from the presence of the Lord.

God's love toward humankind made Him come up with a redemption plan. He sent His only Son on a mission to the world so that He may reconcile wandering humanity to Himself and that whoever believes in Him should not receive his just penalty but be saved.

Some have believed and some have not believed. Therefore to those who have believed, what should be our attitude to those who have not believed? Should we separate ourselves from them or should we allow God to use us in His work of reconciling lost humanity to Himself? Here are some suggestions:

1. We can go into full-time ministerial work such as church pastor, chaplaincy, literature evangelism and/or Bible worker. Thus we can make ourselves available to the Holy Spirit and be used to work in God's vineyard.

2. We can do voluntary work. We can volunteer to feed the homeless, do prison ministry, or visit and pray with the sick in hospitals.

3. We can support the work of God through financial and material aid. These would include Ingathering, ADRA, thirteenth Sabbath offerings, and any other special projects the church might have.

In these few highlighted examples of ministry, we can reach out to non-Christians and help them make a decision to join the fellowship of the saints. This is the commandment that our Lord Jesus left for each one of us. The commission to mission.

Who Is My Neighbor?

OPINION

Col. 3:10, 11

Have you ever wondered why Seventh-day Adventists are seldom friendly with strangers? How many times can someone walk through the subway station and find an Adventist preaching? When we see a visitor on the Sabbath, do we reach out to him or her, or do we wait till they decide to leave and then approach them just to find out when they will visit us again?

There is an African saying: "Visitors are like morning dew." This means that a visitor comes and goes just like the dew we find on the grass in the morning. If we relate this to our relationships with our fellow human beings, it would be understood that we ought to take good care of our visitors because we might not know whether we are entertaining angels.

However, not all visitors can be seen as angels. Some visitors come with heavy burdens on their hearts. They may look like angels, but their hearts are heavy with the dross of sin and the cares of this world. Therefore our relationship to strangers and visitors alike should be in a way that we minister to them the grace of God that Christ has shared with us.

We do not need to wait until the Sabbath to minister to strangers. This ought to be our way of life. It has been said that the greatest sermon that we will ever preach is our character, as such we need to express the love of God to all people whether they are Christian or not.

The Bible gives us clear evidence of how Christ related to everyone. Why should we as Seventh-day Adventists, God's true church, be choosy with whom we can associate? We are the salt of the earth, the light of hope to a dying world.

"Visitors are like morning dew."

REACT

1. My mother told me not to speak to strangers. Should Christians regard "neighbors" as strangers? Explain your answer.
2. Though we must mingle with the world in order to have a saving influence, there is a form of mingling with the world that leads us away from God. How can we know which of the two we are engaging in?
3. Are you afraid to speak to strangers? What are some creative ways shy people can lose their inhibitions enough to witness to others of Jesus' love?
4. Jesus had a very accepting posture toward most people, but He was very denunciatory toward the Pharisees. Why the contrast?

Friday
August 27

A Loving Christian Call to Arms

EXPLORATION

John 4:32

CONCLUDE

As Christians we have been entrusted with the most important message that has ever been delivered to a world sold into bondage. The good news of God's liberation of humankind is a burning hope that many, through their ignorance of it, live without. God has empowered us to help save our fellow humans, and He has already paid the ransom—all that is left is to spread the Word. We preach to all believers and nonbelievers by our every word and action.

CONSIDER

- Reading aloud John 4, the story of the Samaritan woman meeting Jesus at the well. Contrast this story with the Great Commission found at the end of the book of Matthew (28:16-20). Make a list of the similarities between the two and discuss how we may apply this to our own lives.
- Sharing with a friend your own experiences wherein someone was able to influence you in your life—for better or worse. Analyze how this influence could be destructive if wielded by someone with evil intent. Consider how such influence could be harnessed for good.
- Making a list of people with whom you share a common influence. Think about how you might influence each other for good or evil. Consider whether there are ways that you as an individual can influence strangers that you meet: by words, actions, silence, inaction, other? Explain your answer.
- Acting out a scene wherein one person tries desperately to influence another's opinion. Think about how difficult or easy the task of convincing the person was.
- Praying for the Holy Spirit to show you ways in which to reach others and share the good news of how God sent His Son to save them—or even how to convince them that they needed saving.
- Listing the ways in which others affect our opinions, beliefs, and decisions. Rank them from most to least influential. Share experiences wherein you were influenced by another person and explain what attracted you to the other person's way of thinking. Discuss ways in which you might influence others.

CONNECT

Christian Service, pp. 77-112.

Loving our Enemies?



"I'm not going to lower myself and ask for forgiveness!"

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Rom. 12:18, NIV).

INTRODUCTION

John 15:5

For several years I'd seen her at the same spot, always seated at the same place on the sidewalk, surrounded by rags, in her worn out clothes, oily hair, and a shoe box with some coins beside her. I passed her by many times and our contact would always consist of just a smile.

But this day was different. Without being able to explain why, I felt impressed and decided to stop by. I asked her name and she said it was Nair. I don't remember how long we talked. I asked her whether she had any relatives, and she said she did but preferred living

I asked her name and she said it was Nair.

where she was. Indignantly I insisted that she should get in touch with one of her children who, according to her, lived in a city close by. She didn't want to do it.

She told me she had suffered a mild stroke a few months earlier, which made it difficult for her to walk. Her food consisted of hot dogs that someone would get her with the money she earned from begging. I advised her to eat fruits and vegetables to improve her health, but she had no way of getting to the closest food store.

I promised that in the following week I would bring her a book, and she smiled. She invited me to go to her house after explaining to me where she lived. Then she asked me several times, "Will you go?" I told her I would try.

I got her some fruit, and when I handed it to her, she thanked me and smiled. Then she reminded me about the book.

As I looked through the window of the bus while riding to my cozy home, I thought about what would keep a person sitting year after year, rain or shine, on the sidewalk of a main thoroughfare instead of returning home? What had she done? What had they done? How is it possible for a person to prefer a cold, dirty sidewalk to asking forgiveness? Forgiveness is a gift; it is the only way to drop a heavy burden in the middle of the way and continue on lighter.

Some time later I passed by that thoroughfare but I never saw the woman again. I ask myself whether she has passed away, has decided to look for her children, or has finally chosen to exchange that shoe box for the warm blessing of forgiveness. I want to imagine that she did.

What about you? Do you have any shoe boxes to exchange? This week you will have the chance to exchange all your small boxes with God. Do not let this opportunity pass by!

Loving Our Fellow Men

EVIDENCE

Ps. 34:14

During World War II Nazi Germany wanted to suffocate Great Britain with aerial bombings and privation of supplies. Operation Rheinübung aimed to destroy all the warship convoys that provisioned England, provoking its surrender due to lack of food and armaments. To carry out this operation, the Germans commissioned the battleship *Bismarck*.

Weighing 50 metric tons, 250 meters in length and carrying heavy armaments, it was considered the most powerful warship of its time. Great Britain, owner of the largest deployment of ships, was able to locate and pursue the super Nazi weapon using the *Prince of Wales* and *Hood*, the last being considered the best and dearest British warship. When they met, the *Bismarck* quickly sank the *Hood* and damaged the *Prince of Wales*, forcing it to leave the scene for repairs. The fact provoked an outcry in England, and the English Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared, "I don't care how you do it, you must sink the *Bismarck*."

Less than two days later, in the morning of May 27, 1941, the *Bismarck* was surrounded and attacked by the ships and airplanes of the British navy. A torpedo dropped by an airplane made

the rudder stick, causing the ship to sail in circles. After receiving many cannon and torpedo shots, the *Bismarck* finally sank. Survivors assert that they sank the ship themselves to prevent its falling into

**There is little relevance
in knowing who
sank the ship.**

enemy hands. The British scoff at this, claiming that their bombs and torpedoes sank the *Bismarck*. The debate continues, but there is little relevance in knowing who sank the ship. More important is that 3,500 lives were lost during those battles.

History shows that humanity has always been at war. From Old Testament times to the present day, men have fought against their fellow men for many reasons, ignoring the requests of God for us to love one another, not to kill, and to forgive those who have offended us.

As Christians, we should have a particular behavior. It is our task to follow the example left us by Jesus on the cross, when He asked the Father to forgive His enemies. It is our task to disseminate these teachings. If everybody knew the Scriptures and followed its advice, we would live in a much better world.

Monday
August 30

The Challenge of Loving First

LOGOS

Jer. 31:31-34; Matt. 5:44; 6:12; Luke 6:27-36; 23:1-34

To have peace with people, as much as it depends on us (Rom. 12:18), is a biblical counsel that would seem easy to be practiced were it not for its complement: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink" (verse 20, NKJV). The recommendation of the apostle Paul is based on the principle of true Christian love delineated by Jesus during the Sermon on the Mount: "Love your enemies, . . . and pray for those who . . . persecute you" (Matt. 5:44, NKJV).

To seek peace with our fellow human beings, whenever possible, is a reaction that characterizes normal relationships, whether from Christian principles or not. Without this principle, life in society would be intolerable. To love an enemy, however, is a challenge that goes much beyond the usual human ethics. It is a command that, understood in its original context and obeyed, produces radical change in any individual.

In Matthew 5:44, the word rendered as "love" corresponds to the Greek verb *agape*. The term *agape*, one of the four Greek designations of love, fundamental-

ly implies respect. It does not refer to the same love found among family members, for example. This second kind of affection, more spontaneous and emotive, is identified as *phileo*. That was not what Jesus referred to when He commanded

**What Jesus asks should
not be mistaken for
passiveness.**

His followers to love their enemies. "To *agapan* our bitterest enemies is to treat them with respect and courtesy and to regard them as God regards them."

In this way what Jesus asks should not be mistaken for passiveness before an aggressive posture, be it on the physical, verbal, or psychological level. Human beings were created with an inviolable integrity. "If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Cor. 3:17, NKJV). Aggression to human integrity is forbidden by God. Thus, the attitude of remaining in a defensive posture, passively receiving the blows of an enemy, does not correspond to the real meaning of the biblical teaching. It is, in reality, a sign of a condition that psychologists identify as masochism.

Active Posture

Jesus' command, in fact, implies assuming an active posture toward manifestations of enmity and persecution. One of the most basic lessons in physics is that every action generates a reaction—a law that is valid both for atomic particles and

for life. An attitude rooted in hatred brings in itself the germ of vengeance. Since ancient times the law of retaliation teaches: “ ‘eye for eye, tooth for tooth’ ” (Exod. 21:24, NKJV), a behavior admitted also by the Mosaic law. Christ, however, shed greater light on this issue: “ ‘I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also’ ” (Matt. 5:39, 40, NKJV).

An active posture toward hatred, in its origin and in its effects, is better than a passive response. Passiveness accepts aggression as fate, but it makes the individual a hostage of hatred, always acting according to what others have done to him or her. It only reacts to what comes from outside. On the other hand the posture taught by the Master does not succumb to lamentation or vengeance. Love becomes an instrument to destroy the vicious cycle of hatred and to construct a cycle of openness. The biblical admonition to respond to the one who wants to take away your tunic by offering your cloak as well is a practical demonstration of the active posture principle. By showing respect and consideration for those who act with enmity, one catches the aggressor unprepared, with a pattern of response not expected. It makes him or her feel ashamed and begin rethinking his or her attitudes. This is what is understood by heaping “coals of fire on his head” (Prov. 25:22, NKJV).

To love first and not expect to be loved in return is the way of the true Christian. “ ‘Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them’ ” (Matt. 7:12, NKJV). God first loved man so that then man could love Him (1 John 4:19). To those who want to represent His character before the world, a challenge is given: to love first, to demonstrate His unprejudiced love, both for friends and enemies. “Love is a power that produces love,” recalls the German psychoanalyst Erich Fromm.² This sacred affection of divine origin is capable of transforming the person who is loved as well as the one who loves. To love an enemy is to love as Jesus loved.

REACT

1. What is the relation between your love for God and the feeling you maintain for someone who has offended you? (1 John 4:20).

2. What should you do when your attitude of loving is not reciprocated? (John 15:9).

3. What are some practical ways you can love your enemy?

4. How does love transform the giver? the receiver?

5. How do you respond to someone who says the Bible teaches an “eye for an eye,” or that it contradicts itself because it teaches both retribution and forgiveness?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 340.

2. Erich Fromm, *Art of Loving*, Portuguese edition (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2000), p. 31.

Tuesday
August 31

The Genuine Character of Christ

TESTIMONY

Matt. 5:44, 45; Luke 6:35, 36

"Strength of character consists of two things—power of will and power of self-control. Many youth mistake strong, uncontrolled passion for strength of character; but the truth is that he who is mastered by his passions is a weak man. The real greatness and nobility of the man is measured by his power to subdue his feelings, not by the power of his feelings to subdue him. The strongest man is he who, while sensitive to abuse, will yet restrain passion and forgive his enemies."¹

To many the most difficult task to accomplish is self-control. And when we talk about loving our enemies (Matt. 5:44, 45), to some it does not make sense. But

**To many the most difficult
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self-control.**

with much prayer it is possible to realize that this is one of the most revealing Bible texts about Christ's character. The example that He left on the cross is most striking. Even at the very Crucifixion, He was still able to say: "

'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do' " (Luke 23:34, NKJV).

I still recall a fight that I witnessed when I was in school. Two boys quarreled but only one of them insisted on fighting. After receiving two blows, the victim loudly said: "I am not going to fight with you." That was a testimony to all the spectators—at least, it was for me. He manifested love for his fellow human being.

"The two great principles of the law of God are supreme love to God and unselfish love to our neighbor. The first four commandments and the last six hang upon, or grow out of, these two principles. Christ explained to the lawyer who his neighbor was in the illustration of the man who was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, and who fell among thieves, and was robbed, and beaten, and left half dead. The priest and the Levite saw this man suffering, but their hearts did not respond to his wants."²

We can love our neighbor as ourselves only if we love God more than anything else. Many think it impossible to love our neighbor as ourselves, but this is the only genuine fruit of being Christlike. "Love to others is putting on the Lord Jesus Christ; it is walking and working with the invisible world in view. We are thus to keep looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."³

1. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 222.

2. *Christian Service*, p. 192.

3. *Reflecting Christ*, p. 103.

Do Your Part

HOW-TO

1 John 3; 4

“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18, NKJV). To love only those who do good to us is very easy, but to love those who for some reason injure us may seem impossible. Jesus made it clear that if we really love Him we would be able to love our enemies—that otherwise we are liars (4:20); and He goes further by saying that he who hates his brother is a murderer (3:15). Have you ever seriously thought about these Bible verses? How many persons may we have murdered by denying them forgiveness or by not asking forgiveness?

Unfortunately, we are sinful human beings. As long as we live in this world, we will be subject to hurting others and being hurt, and many of these hurts may leave scars that will be erased only when Jesus comes to rescue us. In our heavenly home there will be no more crying or pain; all our tears will be wiped away; and all our suffering, healed. But for that to happen, we must do all that is possible to live in peace with our neighbor (Rom. 12:18). We must coat ourselves with the love and mercy of God, doing our part till Jesus returns.

How many persons may we have murdered by denying them forgiveness?

1. Pray. You may not be able to forgive or ask forgiveness by yourself; so pray, asking God to help you, and He will enable you.

2. Do not wait. Before His death, Jesus asked the Father to forgive those who had crucified Him (Luke 23:34). Do not wait or leave it for a later time; it may be too late.

REACT

1. If knowing how to forgive has to do with our relationship with God, why is it, sometimes, so difficult for us?

2. What is the importance of forgiving immediately rather than waiting for a later time? Is waiting to forgive ever in God's will? Explain your answer.

3. If all sin is equal in God's eyes, how can we keep from “murdering” others with our hatred?

4. First John 3:6 states that “Whoever abides in Him does not sin” (NKJV). Is it possible to live without sin? Explain your answer.

Thursday
September 2

By the Grace of God

OPINION

Luke 6:27-36

Hatred and indifference will cause more injury to you than to your enemy.

The position of Pathfinders Club director involves many responsibilities, but much joy also. With this in mind, in 1998 I accepted the position of director of the Alpha Centaurus Pathfinders' Club, in the church of Vila Ré, São Paulo. The four years that followed were years of much learning. It seemed that every-

thing was going well. During a camporee of the East São Paulo Conference, however, I began to notice that I was very distant from the Pathfinders. I had no friendship with the majority of them.

That began to bother me. I remembered the Pathfinder pledge that ends with the words: "I will be a servant of God and a friend to man."

Am I being a friend to them? I wondered. Observing my Pathfinders, I found that they seemed to like me, but I had built a barrier that separated us. I began to improve my relationship with them, and for me the club changed completely. Now I was no longer seen as the frowning chief, who only went to the meetings to carry out the program, but as a friend who talked and laughed with them. Now I was happy: I was "a friend to man," as all Pathfinders must be.

It is easy to befriend those who like us. But are we willing to love those who consider us enemies? Jesus instructs us: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you" (Luke 6:27, 28, NKJV). This is a very difficult task.

There are always some people who show up to criticize the one who decides to do something. This situation causes anger and many times even hatred against such people. But the Spirit of Prophecy alerts that: "No one can hate his brother, or even his enemy, without placing himself under condemnation."* Note that hatred and indifference will cause more injury to you than to your enemy. We must ask God to help us to overcome this negative feeling.

Are you willing to love everyone, including your enemies? Be a true son of God and remember what Jesus said: "Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise" (Luke 6:31, NKJV).

REACT

For you, what is it to be somebody's enemy? How many enemies do you have? How do you treat them?

**Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 529.

Taking the First Step

EXPLORATION

Prov. 25:21

CONCLUDE

Loving your enemies always begins with forgiveness. Forgiveness is not forgetting. It's letting go of your right to hold a grudge. It's freeing yourself of bitterness and resentment, making room for contentment and joy to take their place. Only then are you free to show love. Forgiving is not just something you do for your enemies. It is also something you do for yourself and for God.

CONSIDER

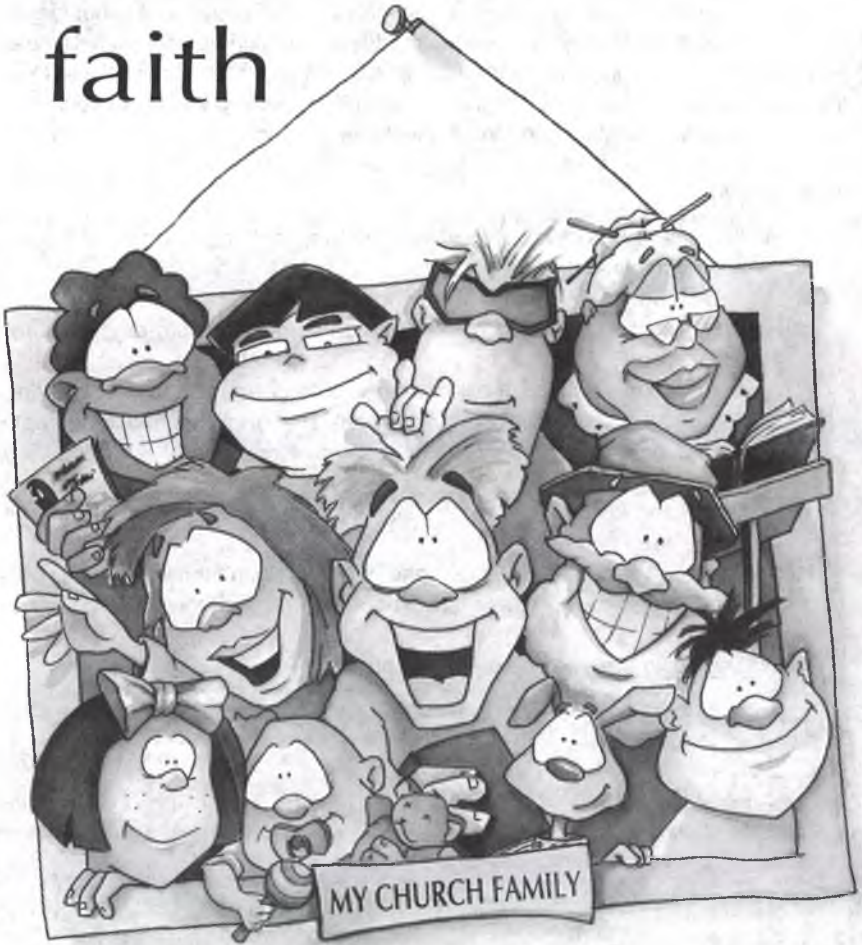
- Writing the words "forgiveness" and "resentment" on a piece of paper. Sketch symbols that represent each.
- Writing a parable to illustrate the benefit of loving your enemies.
- Reading (or singing) "Lord of All Nations" in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 588. Although not commonly sung in our churches, it contains a wonderful message on the importance of forgiveness and acceptance.
- Gathering ten pebbles and going for a walk. Prayerfully think of ten people from your past and present whom you have considered enemies. Say aloud, "I forgive you _____ for _____." (Fill in the blanks.) Then toss a pebble away signifying your releasing of the grudge you have been carrying.
- Interviewing someone who has gone through difficult times (divorce, war, domestic violence) and ask them how they dealt with forgiving their enemies.
- Writing down the benefits of loving your enemies.

CONNECT

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, chap. 7.

R. C. Sproul, *Pleasing God*, pp. 135–142; Dwight K. Nelson, *The Eleventh Commandment*.

Brothers and Sisters in the faith



**“As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith”
(Gal. 6:10, NKJV).**

Who Am I?

INTRODUCTION

Exod. 2:24; John 3:16; Rom. 3:23; 6:23

Referring to someone as a brother or sister in Christ means very little today. Not only is it a cliché, it bears little meaning because people do not treat each other as brothers and sisters should. Many Christians today have lost their sense of identity. How can I treat you as my brother when I have no idea of who I am myself?

Kim was a 16-year-old, bright and healthy, with a great future ahead, despite losing her mother at the age of three. Her father had reared her with much difficulty. He was forced to work two jobs in order to keep his little family afloat. Unfortunately, his working schedule took its toll on his relationship with his daughter. Kim went looking for attention elsewhere, and, finding

Referring to someone as a brother or sister in Christ means very little today.

more than she had bargained for, she became pregnant. Disappointed with the behavior of his daughter, her father disowned her. For many years she lived with her aunt, not having any contact with her father. There was little meaning in referring to them as father and daughter. The interaction that constitutes a relationship had dissipated into nothingness.

So-called brothers and sisters in the churches today have unfortunately lost sight of their true identity. This is easy to do when we focus on our differences instead of on our similarities. The principle common denominator, of course, is Christ. Exodus 2:24 states that God heard the groaning of His people and remembered His covenant with them. John 3:16 states that God loved the world and gave His Son so we could be saved. Romans 3:23 states that all have sinned. Romans 6:23 states that although the wages of sin is death, the gift of God—Jesus—is eternal life. If Jesus was sent for all, then we share a special bond with each other. We are brothers and sisters in Christ because of His sacrificial gift to us. When we accept Jesus, we are automatically in a relationship with each other. This relationship constitutes us being brothers and sisters in Christ.

Many years later, Kim visited her father on his death bed. She had determined to resolve the longstanding strife between them. She walked slowly up to the foot of the bed and lovingly said to her father, "I am your daughter and you are my father. Nothing can ever change that."

We are one in Christ under the banner of His blood and nothing can change that. We are now reminded of who we are. We therefore have no excuse to treat each other any other way. As long as we have unity in Christ, diversity will not prove to be a crippling issue

Sunday
September 5

Christians Belong to Each Other

LOGOS

Matt. 26:21-25; John 10:16; 17:11; Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:3, 13; Phil. 2:2

Mirrors of God's Dominion of Love (Eph. 2:7)

Talking about the electing grace of God, Daniel L. Migliore, writes that "the goal of election is the creation of a people of God and not, in the first instance, the salvation of solitary individuals. The doctrine of election is not intended to cater to excessive self-concern but precisely to open us to the blessings and responsibilities of life in community."¹

Douglas John Hall emphasizes that election to this community of believers is "a means and not an end."² Thus one should differentiate between the character of an elite and that of an elect when thinking of the church. According to Hall, Paul speaks of the mission of the elect in 1 Corinthians 1; 2 (cf. esp. 1:28) "as a community whose stewardship

Koinonia is fundamentally
a fellowship of faith.

of God's mysterious faithfulness to creation mirrors and makes concrete the character of God's dominion, which is the dominion of love and not of power."³

A Fellowship of Friends in Christ (1 John 1:7)

If the mission of the church is to mirror the saving and sustaining love of God impartially shown to all of His creatures, then the nature of the church is indeed that of "family fellowship established and expressed in the church's life"⁴ according to Acts 2:42. This fellowship, *koinonia*, is fundamentally a fellowship of faith, which identified their life with that of God's Son, with whom believers should first have a fellowship, according to 1 Corinthians 1:9.⁵

Emphasizing the nature of the church as a community of faith, Norman Young writes that although God puts a supreme value on each individual person, "Christianity is not simply a private pilgrimage. Christianity is personal; not private. As personal it does not exclude the corporate Christians also belonging to . . . an interlocking fellowship of mutual support and fellowship,"⁶ sharing in "the gospel, the Spirit, Jesus, suffering and their money."⁷

The Interdependence of Believers (Rom. 12:5)

First Corinthians is a microcosm of the relationship of believers in the world church. But, if judged on the basis of Paul's known correspondence with the

churches of primitive Christianity, it is also a church revealing severe tensions in the relationships among its members: division, ethical disorders such as sexual immorality and lawsuits before non-Christian judges, problems with both the married and the unmarried, attending idol feasts and eating food sacrificed to idols, drunkenness and gluttony, chaotic and rowdy meetings, to mention just some of the problems. Yet Paul calls them “the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy” (1 Cor. 1:2, NIV).

To give members of this church guidelines for proper behavior and Christlike relationships, Paul writes the magnificent 1 Corinthians 13 on the nature of love for Christians. More than that, this “most excellent way” (12:31, NIV) is also the way in which all the gifts of the Spirit need to be exercised in the congregation. Therefore, to mention just one example, if the gift of tongues is exercised according to the principles of love, it will not be a negative and embarrassing sign for unbelievers giving a disreputable impression of people who are out of their minds, and consequently not providing a convincing opportunity for the conversion of Gentile believers attending their meetings (14:22, 23).

But How to Do It? (John 17:10)

Addressing the staff, the newly appointed president of Helderberg College, Dr. Gary Ross, emphasized that employees of this institution were called to go beyond the basic tasks that each one is paid for in their ministry to the students. He then proceeded to mention five task enhancers: commitment, communication, integrity, teamwork, and civility.

These five pointers are just as applicable to the interrelationship among members of any Christian congregation. Commitment to Jesus Christ and each other, open and honest lines of communication among believers, an unwavering integrity before God, congenial teamwork, and a heartfelt civility toward each other will go a long way to solve problems among church members.

1. Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1991), p. 77.

2. Douglas John Hall, *Confessing the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 328.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 330.

4. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1985), p. 450. (See F. Hauck, TDNT III, pp. 789-809.)

5. *Ibid.*, p. 449.

6. Norman H. Young, *Meaning for the New Millennium* (Coooranbong, NSW: Avondale Academic Press, 2000), p. 199.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

Monday
September 6

"As the Son Was With the Father"

TESTIMONY

John 17:11

"Only as they were united with Christ could the disciples hope to have the accompanying power of the Holy Spirit and the cooperation of the angels of heaven. With the help of these divine agencies, they would present before the world a united front and would be victorious in the conflict they were compelled to wage

**"Jesus prayed that His
disciples might be one."**

unceasingly against the powers of darkness. As they should continue to labor unitedly, heavenly messengers would go before them, opening the way; hearts would be prepared for the reception of truth, and

many would be won to Christ. So long as they remained united, the church would go forth 'fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.' Song of Solomon 6:10. Nothing could withstand her onward progress. The church would advance from victory to victory, gloriously fulfilling her divine mission of proclaiming the gospel to the world."¹

"Where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there" (James 3:16, NKJV).

"One person in an institution or in a church who gives loose rein to unkind thoughts by speaking evil of the brethren may stir up the worst passions of the human heart and spread abroad a leaven of evil that will work in all who come into association with him. In this way the enemy of all righteousness gains the victory, and the result of his work is to make of no effect the Savior's prayer when He pleaded that His disciples might be one as He is one with the Father."²

"Oh, I wish that we had far greater wisdom in all things than we now have! One thing every worker in the vineyard of the Lord must learn is to practice the prayer of Christ, to move as one in Christ Jesus. Jesus prayed that His disciples might be one, as He is one with the Father. The enemy is at work to divide, to scatter. Now as never before he will make determined efforts to scatter our forces. Above every other period it is unsafe now for us to move out in lines of our own."³

As the disciples of Christ remained united, they received the blessing that was promised them. Now it is our turn to remain united and receive the blessing that God has promised us, or disregard unity and miss the blessing that God has promised us.

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 90, 91.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 937.

3. *Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 87.

Were You There?

EVIDENCE

Eph. 4:3, 13

In the book of Ephesians, Paul is developing a manual for Christian living. This manual has specific dimensions, such as the position of a believer in Christ, the concept of a new nature and new person, etc. He connects evidence with faith. In each of the Pauline letters, this faith-evidence concept is interspersed. Evidence can be looked at from two angles: (a) evidence relating to human beings—maturity is evidence that one has reached unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God; and (b) faith in God—the evidence of His presence keeps one focused. Hence the statement: “We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.”*

What sustained the three Hebrew boys in spite of the fiery furnace was the evidence of what God had done for them. What sustained Daniel in the lions’ den was the evidence of God’s presence in the history of his life. What kept the disciples and Paul striving forward in spite of all the challenges they were going through was the experiential evidence of what this great God had done for them in the past. The New King James version in Hebrews 11 uses the word “evidence” of things not seen, and this confirms the faith-evidence concept.

One of the greatest themes in the Bible is Immanuel (God with us redemptively)—the evidence of walking with God guarantees maturity in our Christian experience.

As teachers, students, members of the church, married, and single, the challenge is the evidence of walking with the Lord. Some of us profess to be walking with Him.

However, often there is no evidence of such a profession. Our children, parents, teachers, etc., must begin to see the evidence of our relationship with Christ. Evidence means bearing fruit for your community, college, university—those around you must benefit.

In each of the Pauline letters, this faith-evidence concept is interspersed throughout.

REACT

1. How can one maintain the saltiness in this day and age? Be specific.
2. Discuss the idea of “blind faith” in light of the “faith-evidence concept” presented by the author.
3. What is the importance of “experiential evidence”? The danger?

**Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 196.

Wednesday
September 8

How to Strengthen Relationships

HOW-TO

Rom. 15:1-7; Phil. 2:3-5; 4:13

The original relationship that God had with man, and man with man, was altered because of disobedience. God responded to the problem by offering Jesus

God responded to the problem by offering Jesus Christ.

Christ as the means by which individuals could enter into a new relationship with God and also a new relationship with one another. By following the

example of Jesus, this new relationship between man and God and man and man can be confirmed and strengthened.

Religion is a “verb”—it is a *doing* word—it is practice by action.

Larry Richards, author and lecturer, says, the words “one another” are key words in Scripture, especially the New Testament. It describes the attitude people have one for the other.

We can strengthen relationships with others in the following ways:

1. Romans 15:4-7. The way in which we receive or accept others, especially those who are not of our religious persuasion, is of utmost importance. Jesus accepted people, not only for who they were but also for what they could become.

2. Ephesians 4:32. Strengthening of relationships comes by forgiving one another, as Christ forgave us. We are reconciled with God and our relationship confirmed and strengthened by God’s provision in Christ for our forgiveness (2 Cor. 5:19). So we also have been given the work of reconciliation one with the other (verse 18).

3. 1 Peter 4:9. Another way to strengthen relationships is through hospitality. We can be hospitable in our homes, at school, at the university and workplace. Wherever we find ourselves, there we ought to be ready to provide for the needs of others. This breaks down prejudice and strengthens relationships.

4. Romans 12:10. An extraordinary pianist is one who can bring out the best in the one he or she accompanies. They make sure their own volume is just so as not to compete with the soloist. Their “frills and ripples” flowing beautifully and naturally from their fingers, always enhance the soloist’s presentations rather than detract from it.

When reflecting on Paul’s injunction to “honor one another above yourselves” (Rom. 12:10, NIV), this musician sets an excellent example—not only to other Christian musicians, but also to others in the family of God. Every Christian should strive to make others look and sound good. This is a strong relationship builder.

Brothers and Sisters in the Faith

OPINION

Phil. 2:2

Most times when we hear the phrase “brothers and sisters in the faith” we have the wrong idea. We think of something very unexciting and undynamic, an idea of people walking, talking, and dressing and acting the same. This is, however, not the case. In actual fact it means something very dynamic and exciting. If we look at our key text, we see that being brothers and sisters in the faith does not intend for us to be the same as everyone else. Wouldn't that be boring?

Actually, sharing the same faith gives us each our own unique identity. Being brothers and sisters in the faith allows us to develop into who we are without the fear of being rejected by our “brothers and sisters.” In a similar way God loves and accepts us just as we are—without any prejudice. He wants to have a relationship with us personally. It is this fact that makes us brothers and sisters in the faith. Like others, we have a special relationship with Jesus, and just as He accepts us as we are, so we should accept our brothers and sisters. When we have a relationship with Him, we begin to share the same things with others, e.g., love for Him and others, knowing why we are here and where we want to be one day. Being like-minded, thinking about the same things and thinking the same way as others, we still retain our unique identities. That is what Paul means in Philippians 2:2.

God does not want us to be alone in the world. He does everything He can to help us through this period we have on earth. One of His greatest methods is using us. We need to be His hands, His feet, and His eyes. This is why it is so important to realize that we do have brothers and sisters in the faith. There are other people who believe as we do, who have the same needs, and who share the same love as we do. It is very exciting to realize that no matter where we might go, or in what situation we might find ourselves, there will always be other people who share in the same loving relationship with God, people we may call “brothers and sisters in the faith.”

**Sharing the same faith
gives us each our own
unique identity.**

REACT

1. What responsibilities do we have if we regard ourselves to be brothers and sisters in the faith?
2. How can the familial brother/sister relationship help in understanding what it means to be “brothers and sisters in the faith”?

Friday
September 10

Body-building Relationships

EXPLORATION

Eph. 4:3-6

CONCLUDE

A church pastor once said, "Church would be great if it weren't for all those people." And who can blame him? Sin has wreaked havoc on our relationships in the church. The Bible clearly states that we must work at restoring relationships in the body of Christ to vibrancy and health. First, it begins with the person in the mirror. Does that person understand the common bond the Cross creates with all church members? Then we must work to strengthen our positive relationships. Next we must resolve the conflicts that we have.

CONSIDER

- Preparing a lavish meal for some of your closest church friends. At the meal explain what you value in them. Then wash their feet.
- Writing down a list of people who have helped you in your Christian faith. Beside their name, journal on what characteristics of theirs you cherished most. Pray through the list, thanking God for them.
- Writing down a list of people in the church whom you have knowingly wronged. Call them or meet them to apologize sincerely without qualification.
- Requesting your pastor to assist you in an informal poll of your entire church one Sabbath. Ask the question: "On a scale of 1 to 10, how do you rate your sense of fellowship here at church? One is very low, 10 is very high." Collect the votes and present your results on the next Sabbath.
- Videotaping or tape recording people on the street as they respond to the question: "Do you consider church to be a friendly place?"
- Composing a melody to sing the words of Ephesians 4:3-6 in the Bible version of your choice.

CONNECT

<<http://www.markhamwoodschurch.org/ministries-mission.shtml>>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship*; Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, chaps. 15-21.

Supporting our Leaders



**“Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things
grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ”
(Eph. 4:15, NIV).**

Sabbath
September 11

Praying Church or Preying Church?

INTRODUCTION

Ps. 51:3, 4, 10

"King in sex romp with army wife," screamed the tabloid headline. All copies of the *Jerusalem Enquirer* sold out early that day. Nine months later Jerusalem exchanged knowing glances as the world exclusive on the front page confirmed "King has secret love child."

Surely the monarchy would fall. Who would have confidence in any back-to-basics or old-fashioned morality speeches now? Scorned women reflected bitterly on one law for the rich . . .

David was a flawed leader. Like many modern leaders he could have filled cemeteries with the skeletons from his overflowing closet. A quick-tempered murderer with an eye for the ladies, he was also the anointed leader of Israel. How could the people, never mind Nathan, support him? Despite the headlines and tabloid lifestyle, David is the only leader to have the

**Sometimes God keeps
terrible company.**

accolade "man after God's own heart." Sometimes God keeps terrible company—He meets on a daily basis with men and women from the murky backwaters of life who can never hope to reach His standard, so He reaches down to them in love. He chooses people like ourselves to lead us—weak, in need of His grace—so we will learn to look beyond them to the only true Leader, Christ Jesus (Col. 1:18).

We have our modern-day equivalents—the unbelieving bishops and the pedophile priests—all making headlines. Closer to home we may have ministers who do not function in a church-approved manner. Do you focus critically on the minister's life, on the length of his wife's skirt, or the behavior of his teenage son? Do you indulge in righteous speculation over his fitness for his calling? Even with a banquet for thought, way beyond the usual level of juicy tidbits, maybe you have missed the point. What has God called us to do for His ministers? Is it not to hold them up in prayer in our hearts and treat them with love?

The Salvation Army has as its motto "Heart to God, hand to man." This is a useful motto for us to adopt. Moses was tired as his people waged war against the Amalekites, so Aaron and Hur held his arms up and God gave them victory. I doubt whether that made the headlines.

Jesus set the ultimate example by praying for His leaders "that all of them may be one" (John 17:21, NIV).

"Praying church, not preying church." Now there's a headline for the tabloids.

God's Plan for Leadership

EVIDENCE

Heb. 13:7, 17

Hebrews 13:7, 17 highlights the various responsibilities of both the leader and ourselves in relating to the leader. Let's have a look at these responsibilities.

Leader's Responsibilities

Hebrews 13:7 begins with the responsibility of the leader to teach us the Word of God. Leaders are to be responsible for our souls (Heb. 13:17). They are to be an example for us to follow (verse 7). This is considered in great detail in 1 Timothy 3.

The leaders are also responsible for teaching true doctrine and for protecting truth from false theology. This was particularly important in the early Christian church: "False teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29, NLT).

"Paul also urges certain claims upon his friends. (1) He reminded them of their duty. They were overseers of the flock of God. That was not a duty they had chosen but a duty for which they had been chosen. The servants of the Good Shepherd must also be shepherds of the sheep. (2) He reminded them of their danger. The infection of the world is never far away. Where truth is, falsehood ever attacks. There was a constant warfare ahead to keep the faith intact and the Church pure."* The most important responsibility of leaders is their accountability to God.

Our Responsibilities

First of all, we must recognize, as stated above, that our leaders are appointed by God—"Here is a list

of some of the members that God has placed in the body of Christ" (Acts 20:28, NLT, emphasis supplied). Because, then, God has appointed our leaders,

our first responsibility is to follow their leading (Heb.13:17). We are to trust in them as our spiritual leaders given the responsibilities they have to us and God.

"There was a constant warfare ahead to keep the faith intact and the Church pure."

*William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 152.

Monday
September 13

Lifting Up Their Arms

LOGOS

Ps. 51:3, 4, 10; Eph. 1:22, 23; 4:15; Col. 1:18; 1 Pet. 2:9

Christian Leaders (Luke 22:24-26; Matt. 20:25-28)

Jesus spent three and a half years training the disciples to be leaders of the church. What a mixed bunch they were! Just hours before His death, there they

**High visibility and responsibility
can be very tiring.**

were arguing about who would be the greatest in the coming kingdom. So once again Jesus has to point out the difference between His leaders and

those of the world. Though everyone expected worldly leaders to lord it over the ordinary people, Jesus' leaders would live to serve everyone. He wanted servant leaders, just as He had been among them.

Equal But Different? (Eph. 4:4, 11-13)

Paul seeks to be very clear about this. We are all one body, but Christ through the Holy Spirit has given gifts of leadership to some, not to make them better than the rest, but to help all become what God would have us be, equipped to live for Him and building up the church. This was how Paul saw himself. Just look at his opening words in Romans 1:1, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God" (NIV).

Lifting Up His Arms (Exod. 17:9-12)

Leaders are visible and at the front. When they are strong, people look up to them and go forward. If they become weak, it can—and all too often does—have an effect on everyone. The story of Moses' influence on the battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites gives an interesting example. Moses promised Joshua he would stand on top of a hill with his staff held high while Joshua led the army in battle. It was tiring to hold that staff up high, and after a while Moses' arms became too tired to do so any longer, so he lowered them. The result was that the Amalekites began to win. Aaron and Hur came to help, holding up Moses' arms till evening, when the battle was won. Rather than using Moses' weakness as a point to criticize, Aaron and Hur stepped in to help hold up his arms. Moses was doing what he could to serve the people of God, but he grew tired.

High visibility and responsibility can be very tiring, especially for servant leaders who are doing their best in difficult circumstances. Fatigue can lead to the servant leader letting the people down. We need to work with them whenever and

wherever we can. After all we are all on the same team, serving the same Lord.

Needing Our Support (2 Thess. 3:1-4; Col. 4:3, 4; Heb. 13:18)

Leaders need our support and understanding. They can fail, make mistakes, and have wrong attitudes, just like us. It is so easy to point the finger, to judge them unworthy of the position they are in, even think we could do better. Instead Paul suggests we make them a focus of our prayers. "I ask you to pray for us" (2 Thess. 3:1, NLT). We can support our church leaders by praying that God will use their words (and lives) to help others come to know the good news about Him. "Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should" (Col. 4:4, NLT) is the way Paul puts it. He wanted his words to make the good news clear to others. He also wanted his life to be a clear witness: "Pray for us, for our conscience is clear and we want to live honorably in everything we do" (Heb. 13:18, NLT).

Our leaders need support just as readily as Paul needed it. We need to pray for our teachers, pastors, and conference leaders. Why? Because they are human beings subject to the temptations and attacks of the enemy just like the rest of us. Unlike the rest of us, however, they can be tempted to be leaders like those of the world. Pray that God will help them be servant leaders like Jesus.

Appointing Our Leaders (Dan. 2:21; 4:17, 25; 5:18-21; Acts 5:34-39)

God's people were in captivity in Babylon, ruled over by a heathen king. Surely this was not meant to be? Then Nebuchadnezzar has a dream and Daniel is God's minuteman, to whom the dream and its meaning are revealed. In response to this wonder, Daniel declares, "Praise the name of God forever and ever, for he alone has all wisdom and power. He determines the course of world events; he removes kings and sets others on the throne" (Dan. 2:20, 21, NLT). Over the years this thought is reinforced to Nebuchadnezzar and then to Belshazzar. Years later Gamaliel, confronted with Peter and other apostles, gave sound advice when he said, "Leave these men alone. If they are teaching and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. But if it is of God, you will not be able to stop them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God" (Acts 5:38, 39, NLT).

Of course our church operates a form of democratic election for church officers and leaders, so we should use our judgment and reason in our choices. But if we disagree with who has been put in place, what should we do?

REACT

1. What would be a job description for each of the gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11? Do you know any pastor who fits everything on this list? Is that what God intended? Explain your answer.

2. Why do we ordain pastors, elders, and deacons and not children's Sabbath School teachers? What is being done in the ordination?

TESTIMONY

Eph. 4:11-15

“Since His ascension Christ has carried forward His work on the earth by chosen ambassadors, through whom He speaks to the children of men and ministers to their needs. The great Head of the church superintends His work through the instrumentality of men ordained by God to act as His representatives. . . .

“Christ’s ministers are the spiritual guardians of the people entrusted to their care. Their work has been likened to that of watchmen. . . . Upon their faithfulness depended the safety of all within. At stated intervals they were required to call to one another, to make sure that all were awake and that no harm had befallen any. The cry of good cheer or of warning was borne

“At stated intervals they were required to call to one another.”

from one to another, each repeating the call till it echoed round the city.”¹

To every minister the Lord declares: “O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me” (Ezek. 33:7, KJV).

“God has made His church on the earth a channel of light, and through it He communicates His purposes and His will. He does not give to one of His servants an experience independent of and contrary to the experience of the church itself. Neither does He give one man a knowledge of His will for the entire church while the church—Christ’s body—is left in darkness. In His providence He places His servants in close connection with His church in order that they may have less confidence in themselves and greater confidence in others whom He is leading out to advance His work.”²

“The Lord in His wisdom has arranged that by means of the close relationship that should be maintained by all believers, Christian shall be united to Christian and church to church. Thus the human instrumentality will be enabled to cooperate with the divine. Every agency will be subordinate to the Holy Spirit, and all the believers will be united in an organized and well-directed effort to give to the world the glad tidings of the grace of God.”³

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 360.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

Leadership Is Action, Not Position

HOW-TO

Deut. 29:2-6

When people work together for an ultimate goal, it is by human nature that one person leads out. Democracy dictates that this person is voted into place, based on their leadership qualities and vision for success in whatever the task may be, and the remaining team work together with the leader to achieve the objectives.

Leadership in the church is not greatly different. Whether they be a pastor or youth leader, their skills to give direction and understanding to the rest of the congregation or group work the same way.

Leaders need to know that the suggestions and plans they make will be carried out, and the members of the team need to know that the tasks they are assigned have been well thought out and are achievable.

This bond between leader and team can be achieved only by forming a relationship. Relationships are formed of many different factors: love, trust, patience, care, belief, understanding, to name but a few. Not all of these are needed for a relationship toward a leader, but trust and understanding are two important ones.

**This bond between leader
and team can be achieved
only by forming a
relationship.**

How can we support our church leaders?

1. Prayer. This is one of the greatest gifts to man. A direct free phone number, with no corny on-hold music, to ask for help—not just for ourselves, but for others. Prayer for your pastor, your youth leader, for the presidents and secretaries in the conferences and divisions, for the leadership skills, visions for the future, and strength to do their work (Num. 21:7).

2. Sharing experiences. Consider every experience in life a good experience. I believe that experiences, good or bad, are there to help you expand your understanding of God's love, and the way He tries to teach and strengthen us. Even great leaders can't know everything, and that is where experiences from their team can help them grow and understand things more.

3. Gratefulness. I am not suggesting that we should be giving them a huge ego trip here—merely a simple thank you, a recognition of the work that they do. It may be a letter, an email, a small gift, or even a handshake. When leading, it is hard to know whether the people you are working with are actually accepting what you are saying and doing.

Thursday
September 16

The 747 Church

OPINION

Heb. 13:17, 18; Eph. 4:11-13

Though we live in a general climate where trust and interest in leadership is declining, we must never forget that we all belong to a family—we are all part of a body. This family or body of believers is both global and local, called and created by God for a specific purpose: To prepare the world for the soon return of our Savior Jesus Christ.

To get this task done, systems and methods need to be in place, which include leadership roles. We find some of these roles in Ephesians 4:11-13. Teachers, preachers, apostles, and pastors are all leaders with one purpose: to prepare the whole church family for works of service and to be built up in unity and the knowledge of God. We all

**If the plane goes down,
we all go down.**

work together for the same aims and goals. We are all heading to and working for the same things.

I see the church like a Boeing 747 plane. We are all flying together, whether we are in economy class, business class, or first class. If the plane goes down, we all go down. If the plane goes up, we all go up. Though we may sit in different places we all share a common goal, the same destiny. God has and will gift some of us to be in leadership roles and others in supportive roles, yet we all know we are passengers on the same flight, members of the same church. If one is hurting, we all hurt; if one makes a mistake, we are all in a position to care, counsel, and support because it affects us all. Likewise, if we are uncooperative and unsupportive, it will affect and influence other passengers and members.

We must never forget that Jesus was as clear as a silver bell when He spoke about the character and nature of the Christian leader. He said: "Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43-45, NKJV). Here lies the formula for truly great leadership: Service.

REACT

1. How do your spiritual gifts relate to the good of the community and its leaders?
2. Should there be a difference between the way secular leaders function and the way our spiritual leaders function? Explain your answer.
3. Is there a first class, business class, and economy class in the church? Explain your answer.

EXPLORATION

Eph. 4:15

CONCLUDE

According to professional development coach Steven Covey, an essential characteristic of a good leader is trustworthiness. Unfortunately, we live in an age in which public trust of leadership, especially in the political and business worlds, is at an all-time low. Even within the church (both the Adventist and the larger Christian community), less-than-exemplary behavior and public scandals among church leaders have created an atmosphere of distrust. Yet, though human and subject to error, church leaders play an important role in the body of Christ, and Christians have a duty to respect and support them.

CONSIDER

- Writing a brief character sketch of someone you know (or know of) whom you consider to be a good leader. Think about the ways in which this person has positively impacted your life.
- Analyzing your own personal qualities as a leader. Think about these questions: In what ways have you exhibited good leadership skills? What are some areas in which you need to improve? Is it necessary to be elected to an office or position of responsibility to exhibit leadership skills?
- Brainstorming ways in which you and other members of your congregation can show support for and encourage your pastor and other church leaders, even if their weaknesses are showing.
- Starting a prayer ministry to pray for the leaders of your local congregation, the conference, division, and world church leaders. Also pray for secular leaders of your nation and around the world.
- Discussing with friends what is meant by the term “servant leader,” finding biblical examples of servant leaders and listing specific ways to follow these examples in your own lives.
- Reading Steven Covey’s *Principle-Centered Leadership* and/or attending his training seminar on “The Four Roles of Leadership.”
- Engaging in a discussion with church members on the appropriate way to handle the situation when a church leader is found guilty of misconduct.

CONNECT

Exodus (chapters that focus on the life, leadership, and challenges of Moses).
Patriarchs and Prophets, chap. 37.

Phillip Samaan, *Christ’s Way of Making Disciples*.

Embracing the World



“ ‘My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. . . . As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world’ ”
(John 17:15, 18, NIV).

Expand “Us”; Shrink “Them”

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 28:19

On February 12, 2003, as part of the Liz Carpenter Lecture Series of the College of Liberal Arts of the University of Texas (Austin), former President Bill Clinton addressed an overflowing crowd of students and nonstudents in the largest venue available. The theme pervading his speech was the urgency of international understanding—a most timely topic, with an impending war against Iraq hanging over the world.

With a zeal befitting a fire-and-brimstone preacher, Clinton called on his compatriots to increase their acceptance of diverse cultures, and thus promote positive interactions worldwide. “We have to build a world with more friends and fewer enemies,” he said to the resounding applause of the audience, which was diverse in age, ethnicity, and national origin.

Clinton’s call resonated positively with both Americans and non-Americans present. My friend and seatmate, Eve, and I, representing the latter category, listened with rapt attention. Independently, we both identified as most memorable his statement that “we must expand the definition of who is ‘us’ and shrink the definition of who is ‘them.’” It also turned out to be the statement quoted both in a full-length article in the student-run campus daily newspaper and in a brief summary in the university’s official biweekly tabloid published by the office of public relations.

“We must expand the definition of who is ‘us’ and shrink the definition of who is ‘them.’ ”

I have no idea as to whether there were other Seventh-day Adventists present besides Eve and me, but my heart burned with the desire that this message was being given to an audience of Seventh-day Adventists of identical ages, ethnicities, and national origins. What a fitting summary of Jesus’ parting commission to make disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28:19).

People who are of different ethnicity, culture, or religion can easily slip into the category of “enemy.” For Christians this translates into “the world.” Adventist World Radio president Ben Schoun promotes communication (talking and listening) as the way to begin to break down such barriers. Instead of condemning “them” as the enemy to be avoided, we will seek ways to embrace the world as we enlarge the circle of “us.”

*AWR Listener Mail Newsletter, vol. 2, issue 02, November 2002.

Sunday
September 19

Lessons From the Henhouse

LOGOS

Matt. 13:33; 25:31-46; John 17:15-17; 2 Cor. 5:19, 20; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 4:14

Recently there has been great excitement in our household, for once again there has been the patter of little feet—actually it has been more like the scratch of little claws. We are now the proud owners of two chooks—a black one called “Blackie,” a red one called “Reddy,” and a white one to be delivered in the next week or two. (We’re still trying to rack our brains for a name for that one!) Our four-year-old son Jacob has very willingly offered to take on the responsibility of looking after our new boarders, so I sat him down and painstakingly explained the jobs that he would have to do each day. They included:

1. Provide plenty of fresh water and food.
2. Make sure the door to the cage is locked up each night.
3. Check the wire surrounding the pen to ensure no foxes or snakes can enter.
4. Collect the eggs when they are old enough to lay them!

Never once did I suggest that he would have to scratch the dirt with them, drink from their little trough, or sleep on their roost. Nor did I ever dream in a million years that he would have to lay an egg a day to be able to stay part of our family! Sound ridiculous? Absolutely! So why do we find the concept of being “in the world” and not “part of it” so difficult?

God has asked us to take on the responsibility of looking after His children until He comes back. He has even set out our responsibilities and recorded them in His Book. They include:

1. Provide them with plenty of fresh water and food (Matt. 25:31-46).
2. Make sure they are kept safe from the most powerful prowler (John 17:15-17).
3. When they are spiritually old enough, guide them to a love and knowledge of Him that will lead them to be productive, contagious Christians in their own right (Matt. 13:33).

We were never asked to lower our standards of behavior, to fence sit, or to dabble in the grays. Nor were we asked to separate ourselves from other people in an attempt to secure our own salvation. In fact we are told the more we use our talents for God, the more they’ll grow and we’ll be strengthened. On the other hand if we don’t use them, we lose them! (Mark 4).

**We were never asked to
dabble in the grays.**

Hebrews 2:9 (and many other texts in the Bible) tells us that Christ tasted death for everyone. If that’s the case, how then should we respond to the undesirables of

the world, those who may be unclean in body, thought, or action? Aren't they also the children of God to whom we have a responsibility? If we truly are "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20, NKJV), shouldn't the whole world see in us a place to hide, confide, and abide?

Having said this, something vitally important needs to be discussed. Before we can venture into the devil's playground (and it is just that at the moment), we need to take a close look at our own spiritual condition to ensure our eternal safety. After all, didn't Ellen White say, "Keep yourselves away from the corrupting influences of the world. Do not go unbidden to places where the forces of the enemy are strongly entrenched"?¹ There are obviously some places in the world that you must feel a very strong calling to enter—and may not be suitable for the majority of Christians. Even then, to be prepared to meet the foe and have maximum impact on the lost and searching, we must:

1. Pray earnestly and often.

2. Feed from the Bible daily. "Satan well knows that all whom he can lead to neglect prayer and the searching of the Scriptures will be overcome by his attacks."² Remember that Christ Himself used the Scriptures and prayer to defy the devil and withstand his temptations.

3. Die to self daily and make sure that we are living under God's will and not our own. "It is the daily dying to self in the little transactions of life that makes us overcomers."³

Following these guidelines will ensure that our motives are pure and our spiritual strength supernatural.

A few weeks have passed since our hens have come to live with us, and an interesting thing has begun to happen. First, Jacob won their trust by tending to their every need. Then we began to notice that they were becoming pretty friendly with the rest of the family. Could it be that when they saw the one they trusted loving another, they responded in like manner? I'm not sure if that's how chooks think, but I know for a fact that's how people do.

REACT

1. How far do we go (or do we allow our children to go) to reach all of God's children? Are there places you consider unacceptable for a good Christian to be in the name of mission? Explain your answer.

2. How does your answer to this question relate to Romans 14:13?

3. What is the role of an ambassador? In what ways does an ambassador take part in the culture of the host country? When does the ambassador uphold the customs of his or her own nation? (2 Cor. 5:19, 20; John 17:15-17).

1. *Messages to Young People*, p. 82.

2. *The Great Controversy*, p. 519.

3. *Maranatha*, p. 109.

Monday
September 20

United We Stand; Divided We Fall

TESTIMONY

Eph. 4:3, 4

As a young man I grew up in a home where the principles of the Bible were not encouraged. Neither my father nor my mother were strong believers in the Christian faith. This made it difficult to walk steadfastly in my early years, clutching to Christ as my personal Lord and Savior.

For me life was particularly depressing because my father was an alcoholic. This made him abusive—both physically and verbally. As a family we did not pray together, so I suppose that was the reason we did not stay together.

When I was 21 years old, I met someone special who introduced me to what I would consider to be the family of God. Her father was the pastor of my church;

This made it difficult to walk steadfastly in my early years.

her mother played a very supportive role for her husband in his ministry. I had the most awesome privilege of sharing in worship sessions with them. I began to

sense growth; this was like a dream come true. I began to bond more with them as though they were my own.

“The first work of Christians is to be united in the family. Then the work is to extend to their neighbors nigh and afar off. Those who have received light are to let the light shine forth in clear rays. . . . The more closely the members of a family are united in their work in the home, the more uplifting and helpful will be the influence that father and mother and sons and daughters will exert outside the home.”¹

Immediately the story of Noah and his family comes to mind—how they stuck together and how God delivered them. After the Flood destroyed the earth, they were the only humans who were saved. “The family relationship should be sanctifying in its influence. Christian homes, established and conducted in accordance with God’s plan, are a wonderful help in forming Christian character. . . . Parents and children should unite in offering loving service to Him who alone can keep human love pure and noble.”² This young lady’s family proved to be an influence in my life. They assisted in developing my “Christian character.”

1. *The Adventist Home*, p. 37.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Christians and the World

EVIDENCE

John 17:18; 1 John 2:15

Upon reading the Scriptures, we see the stark differences between the characteristics of Christians and characteristics of the world. In fact again and again we see this theme being repeated in John's writings (as compared to the other Gospels) with more than 80 uses of the word *kosmos* designated to mean opposers of God and truth.*

In the first chapter of John's Gospel (verse 10), he shows that even though Jesus, the Creator, was in the world, the world did not recognize Him as such and subsequently "received him not" (verse 11, KJV). They loved the darkness more than the Light that He is, and were therefore condemned for it (3:19). The world hated Him for pointing out their sins (7:7).

Toward the end of His ministry on earth, He spoke with His disciples at length on matters concerning the judgment of the world and its price (12:31; 14:30), and also their future (chaps. 13–16). He foretold various troubles and trials that they would have to face all because they were followers of Him and His mission—the true objects of the world's hatred (15:18, 19). Yet, because of their saving relationship with Christ, which was characterized by their light, truth, life, and peace (1:9; 14:17-19, 27; 16:33), they could look forward to the judgment and eventually the heavenly places prepared for them (14:1-4). Jesus then prayed a heartfelt prayer to His Father, beseeching Him not to take them out of the world, but to keep them from evil because they were not of the world (17:15).

**We are cautioned against
loving the world.**

Therefore coming down to the crux of the matter in terms of Christians and the world: God loves the world (3:16), which is why He came as a human being and died our death in order to satisfy His holy and just law (1:29; 3:17; 6:33, 51; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9; 12:46, 47). At the end of His time on earth, He charged His disciples (Christians) to go into all the world and continue His mission to woo all to Him (Matt. 28:19, 20).

In our quest to fulfill this Great Commission, we are cautioned against loving the world with all its lusts and pride. Christians will therefore have the "love of the Father" (1 John 1:15, NKJV) that reaches out to the people of the world and wins them for God's kingdom.

* *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 900.

Wednesday
September 22

The Life That Counts

HOW-TO

Phil. 4:3-7

Paul, the apostle chosen to “preach [of Jesus] among the Gentiles” (Gal. 1:16, NKJV), consistently revisited and wrote letters to the churches that were established by his efforts. To the church in Philippi, he, in less than a paragraph, lists beautifully how we as Christians should live.

1. Help those who labor for the gospel (Phil. 4:3). As a Christian community, we have different roles: healers, teachers, preachers, and so on, all to the fulfilling of our commission: to preach the gospel. Some members of our family take this on full time and as such need our support in every form—whether in monetary, companionship, or encouraging word. When Aquila

The work of soul winning
is not exclusive.

and Priscilla took Paul into their home as he traveled, it gave him a sense of belonging and the reassurance of their prayers; this was strength for the road.

2. “Rejoice in the Lord always” (verse 4, NKJV). Everyone who met the Life-Giver left Him leaping for joy. We now have life because of His death; the devil has lost his hold on us. Rejoice. Give thanks continuously. See God’s goodness in every situation. The life that reflects Christ amplifies words uttered on His behalf.

3. Tell everyone that the Lord is at hand (verse 5). The work of soul winning is not exclusive, but is for everyone. Unbelievers must see Christ in our words and deeds: Deal fairly in all matters; be consistent; let our convictions and not our feelings dictate our speech; be controlled. By our behavior they will know whom we represent. The life that reflects Christ amplifies words uttered on His behalf. The lives we live should never hinder the saving effects of the spoken word, and the world must hear it.

4. Do not worry about food (verse 6). In all his life David never saw God’s people abandoned or begging for sustenance. Matthew 6:25-33 reminds us not to worry or fret about food, shelter, or clothing. Instead, we are to speak to God about our concerns. He wants to know that we know that He can and will provide for our needs.

5. Believe that God is with us (verse 7). Jesus gave us His peace. Because of His love He died to give us life and will soon return to take us to that place where we will live (John 14:3). To doubt His presence and love is to refuse that life.

Listening Is an Action Word

OPINION

1 Sam. 3:10

During a minister's prayer, there was a loud whistle from the congregation. Gary's mother was horrified. Later at the end of the prayer she whispered and asked, "Gary, whatever made you do that?" Gary answered soberly, "I asked God to teach me to whistle, and just then He did!"*

I don't know what God said to Gary, but I do know God answers prayers. Through prayer, whenever we talk to Him, He listens and answers. But when we speak about the famous "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12, KJV), many of us may wonder if we have ever heard it! If we are going to hear God speak to us, we have to listen. Let me suggest a new dimension to listening to God's voice.

Listening, as we know, is a verb, and therefore is an action word. But interestingly, listening also evokes some kind of action. Failing to listen, we may find ourselves saying, "If I had only listened!" Listening is very important. In any kind of relationship, for us to know what pleases the other, each must take the time to listen. Therefore listening requires one's time in order for a relationship to grow, and the most important relationship anybody can have is a relationship with God. The question is: Are we too busy to hearken unto His voice?

As Christians we are given the responsibility to help others find their way to the Cross. But if we are too busy to listen, how can we hear Him to know what to do? Have you ever had experiences where you somehow got the idea to help someone you met while on the way somewhere? God was speaking to you through your mind. At such an instant, I believe, we need to pause a moment longer and try the "speak-Lord-thy-servant-heareth" method. In doing this, we lean not on our own under-

**A job done with the Holy
Spirit is a job well done.**

standing, but on God's wisdom as He directs us to handle the situation more effectively. I know for sure that a job done with the Holy Spirit is a job well done. The Christlike love generated at that instant will create warmth that a cold, lost soul can in no way resist. That individual may not be converted at that moment, but may be one step closer to the Cross because you took the time to listen and act. Listening is an action word.

Let's listen to God and respond with willing hearts.

*Michael Hodgin, *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), p. 225.

Friday
September 24

For the Beauty of the Earth

EXPLORATION

Matt. 25:34-46

CONCLUDE

When God created the earth, He found it good, and the ultimate sacrifice to provide for its salvation was made for all its inhabitants, without exception. It is our calling, therefore, to embrace the world as God's creation, and to treat all of its people with genuine compassion. Our grounding in God's ideals and our faith in Him to provide, should empower us to be inclusive. Our common beliefs should make us a safe haven for all who need, rather than an exclusive club.

CONSIDER

- Listing all the people you regularly spend time with. Draw circles around those who are Adventist, triangles around those who are of another religion, and squares around those who do not claim a religious affiliation. Are all three groups represented equally? If not, what can you do to change that? Is it necessary that these groups be equally represented?
- Going to a place that you consider beautiful (mountain, museum, park, stream, etc.). Read the Creation story and meditate on the idea that the world is, in its best form, diverse and worth loving and, often, full of beauty.
- Volunteering regularly at a halfway house, community center, or soup kitchen.
- Picking any Gospel and calculating the number of verses/chapters devoted to time Jesus spent in the synagogue as compared to the number of verses/chapters devoted to time Jesus spent helping or meeting people.
- Rewriting the judgment scene in Matthew 25:34-45 for a contemporary audience. Think in specific terms, replacing the general predicaments (hunger, thirst) with current issues that you may have the resources to address.
- Joining a small group or class in your local community on a subject that interests you. The group cannot be associated with your local church. Build relationships outside your comfort zone.
- Journaling about your basic beliefs and values that transcend setting or companionship. Find ways to strengthen/enrich those values in unfamiliar surroundings.

CONNECT

Genesis 1; Gospel of John.

Jonathan Kozel, *Amazing Grace*; Bill Hybels, *Rediscovering Church*.

Next Quarter's Lessons

Daniel, Aristotle, and the End

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for fourth quarter 2004, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: "To Eat or Not to Eat—That Is the Question"

Logos: Daniel 1.

WEEK AT A GLANCE: What do Babylon and Jerusalem symbolize? What caused the demise of Jerusalem? Why did innocent people have to suffer in the onslaught? Why didn't Daniel eat the king's food? If, in the end, he had been severely punished for not obeying, would his refusal to eat that food still have been the right thing to do?

Lesson 2: Nebuchadnezzar's Image

Logos: Daniel 2.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What kind of test did the king put to the wise men in order to be sure of their interpretation? How is God's power revealed in this chapter? What does Daniel 2 teach us about God? In what ways does this chapter expose our basic human helplessness and dependence upon God?

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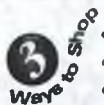
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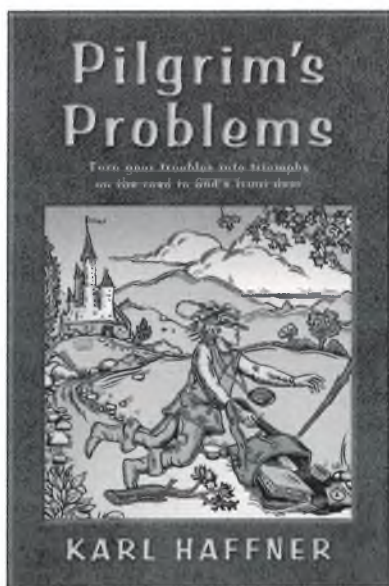
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Prabha Mamidi, Andhra Pradesh, India

Could life get any worse? Prabha wondered as she sat in the jail cell. *I am innocent of this crime. Why don't the gods bless me?* Prabha was barely 16 years old and was in prison for a crime she had not committed.



Southern Asia Division

Born into a poor family, Prabha never attended school. From early childhood she worked to help support her family. She kept house for a woman she called Ma, sometimes staying overnight to keep Ma company when Ma's son was out of town.

One night robbers broke into the house, tied up Prabha, killed her mistress, and stole her valuables. Prabha was accused of the crime and jailed. She was questioned and even beaten to force her confession. Prabha prayed to her gods to help her, but nothing happened. Then one night she had a vision of a Man dressed in white who promised to help her. Soon she was freed. Read her courageous story in this quarter's *Mission*.

Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help build chapels in India.



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