

# Southern Africa-Indian Ocean

## DIVISION

ADULT  
SABBATH SCHOOL  
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE  
*April • May • June 2009*

ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

# The Christian Life

Unions	Churches	Members	Population
Angola Union Mission	948	313,831	16,448,000
Botswana Union Mission	86	27,702	1,753,000
Indian Ocean Union Mission	471	104,141	21,307,000
Malawi Union Mission	1,212	272,642	13,070,000
Mozambique Union Mission	976	221,116	20,359,000
Southern Africa Union Conference	886	106,066	52,878,000
Zambia Union Mission	1,704	546,367	11,477,000
Zimbabwe Union Conference	959	522,426	13,349,000
<b>Total*</b>	<b>7,242</b>	<b>2,114,291</b>	<b>150,641,000</b>

\*Total from Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 2008

**Mission Projects**  
Our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division with these projects:

- 1 Replace Cuale and Quicuco Primary Schools, which were damaged or destroyed during the 30-year civil war in Angola.
- 2 Help build a classroom and administration block at newly established Bongo University.
- 3 Build a library for newly established Zambia Adventist University.

For more information, visit [www.adventistmission.org](http://www.adventistmission.org)

Map not drawn to scale

Where legally possible, offerings will go to these projects; otherwise special arrangement will be made with the General Conference for distribution of funds based on the laws of the countries where these offerings are collected.



\*EAQ090401\*

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

April • May • June 2009



# Contents

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<b>1</b>	<b>Love</b> — <i>March 28–April 3</i> —————	6
<b>2</b>	<b>Faith</b> — <i>April 4–10</i> —————	14
<b>3</b>	<b>Hope</b> — <i>April 11–17</i> —————	22
<b>4</b>	<b>Life</b> — <i>April 18–24</i> —————	30
<b>5</b>	<b>Revelation</b> — <i>April 25–May 1</i> —————	38
<b>6</b>	<b>Sin</b> — <i>May 2–8</i> —————	46
<b>7</b>	<b>Grace</b> — <i>May 9–15</i> —————	56
<b>8</b>	<b>Rest</b> — <i>May 16–22</i> —————	64
<b>9</b>	<b>Heaven</b> — <i>May 23–29</i> —————	72
<b>10</b>	<b>Discipleship</b> — <i>May 30–June 5</i> —————	80
<b>11</b>	<b>Stewardship</b> — <i>June 6–12</i> —————	88
<b>12</b>	<b>Community</b> — <i>June 13–19</i> —————	96
<b>13</b>	<b>Mission</b> — <i>June 20–26</i> —————	104

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**Editorial Office** 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904  
Come visit us at our Web site: <http://www.absg.adventist.org>

**Principal Contributor**  
Reinder Bruinsma

**Editor**  
Clifford R. Goldstein

**Associate Editor**  
Soraya Homayouni

**Publication Manager**  
Lea Alexander Greve

**Editorial Assistant**  
Tresa Beard

**Pacific Press® Coordinator**  
Paul A. Hey

**Art Director and Illustrator**  
Lars Justinen

**Concept Design**  
Dever Designs

The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Manuscript Evaluation Committee, whose members serve as consulting editors. The published guide reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).



# Walking the

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One of the great eighteenth-to nineteenth-century thinkers, Pierre Laplace, wrote a book about the motion of the planets. He called it *Celestial Mechanics*, and he presented a copy of the book, in person, to Emperor Napoleon. Someone had told Napoleon beforehand that the book never mentioned God. The emperor took the book and said, “Mr. Laplace, they tell me you have written this large book on the system of the universe, and have never even mentioned its Creator.” Laplace, unflinchingly, responded, “I have no need of that hypothesis.”

This story is a metaphor for what’s been known as “the modern era,” an era in which logic, reason, and science have formed the foundation of all truth. According to this view, all reality can be reduced to formulas, to laws, and to scientific predictions. If it can’t be explained through logic, reason, and science, it isn’t real.

*Experience never should take away from the importance of correct biblical teaching.*

In recent years there’s been a backlash against this thinking. People don’t believe, and rightly so, that all reality can be explained in cold rationality alone. There’s something about us that

no formula, no test tube, and no scientific law ever could capture.

This backlash has spilled over into all realms of life, including religion; however, as with most reactions, it has in some cases gone too far, even to the point of pushing aside or ignoring the concept of doctrinal truth. What’s important, we’re told, isn’t teachings or doctrine but experience. What does your faith do for you now—that’s what matters. Instead of saying, “Here are compelling reasons to believe in Jesus Christ and His promise of salvation,” the trend (again, a backlash) is to say, “Our community of faith invites you to join us in our venture of trust and commitment.”

Now, this doesn’t have to be all bad. Did not Jesus say that His truth would have concrete and practical results in our lives (*John 8:32*)? Of

# Walk

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course. Truth is not just knowledge of doctrines and texts but something that influences the believer on a personal level. Truth affects the spiritual life and impacts how a person will relate to the challenges of daily living. There is a practical, life-changing aspect of our religion that never should be denied or denigrated. At the same time, the role of experience never should take away from the importance of correct biblical teachings.

This quarter we want to look at both aspects of our faith: doctrine and experience. In our study during this quarter we will focus on 13 essential themes of the Christian faith, 13 essential teachings. Each week's lesson will attempt to maintain a careful balance between a correct biblical understanding of these various elements of our faith and how they impact our daily experience. It's our hope that at the end of the quarter you not only will understand these themes better but also have been enriched as far as your Christian experience is concerned. Each lesson is not just about truth but about "the truth as it is in Jesus."

After all, He is the One who is the Alpha and Omega of our faith. There may be 13 different themes, but they will have one focus: the One in whom "we live, and move, and have our being" (*Acts 17:28*).

*Reinder Bruinsma, born in the Netherlands, has served in various offices in his long career in the church. Bruinsma is the author of almost twenty books, some of which have been translated into a number of languages, and was president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Netherlands when he wrote this Bible study guide.*

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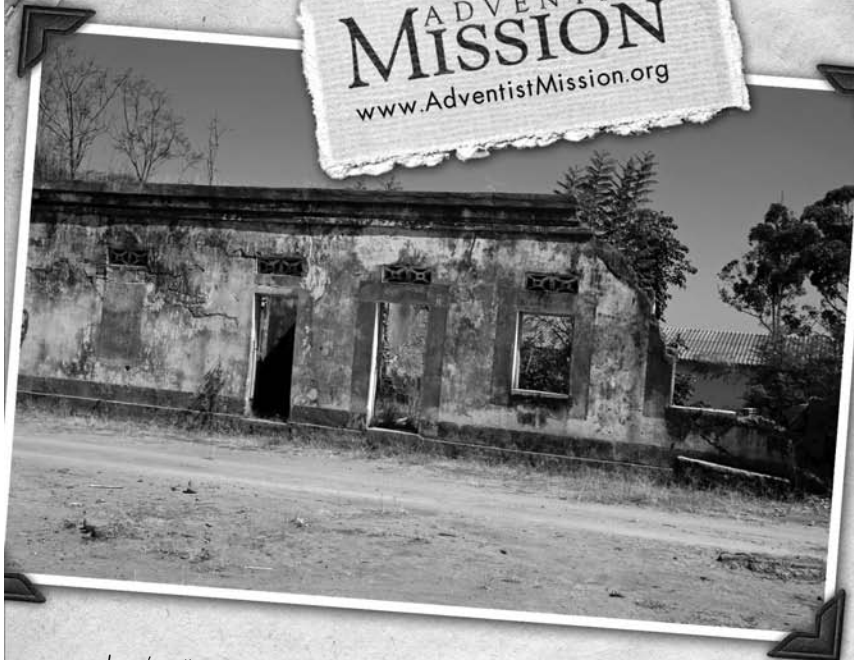
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# ADVENTIST MISSION

[www.AdventistMission.org](http://www.AdventistMission.org)



Imagine living in a war zone. Imagine a child walking to school and finding the school in ruins—burned, pillaged, deserted. Imagine knowing that his only hope for an education lies in the ashes under his feet.

The children of Angola know the feeling. For 35 years their country was wracked by civil war, war that left lives and buildings in ruins. But in 2002 the war ended. The people now live in freedom. But many of the Adventist schools still lie in ruins. Hope for an education must wait a while longer.

I want to help these children get the education they deserve. I want to see them learning to read and write and praise God. I'm glad that this quarter part of our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help rebuild two Adventist primary schools and will help the Adventist university in central Angola. I've seen the face of despair. And I've seen the face of hope. For me it's personal.

# Love



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Isaiah 53, Matt. 22:37–39, 1 Corinthians 13, 1 John 3, 1 John 4.*

**Memory Text:** “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (*1 Corinthians 13:13, NIV*).

It is only fitting that a study guide dealing with key concepts of the Christian faith should start with the topic of love. The apostle Paul points out that however important faith and hope and other elements of Christianity are, it all starts with love. Without love, we are, as he said, “nothing” (*1 Cor. 13:2*).

Some five centuries before Christ was born, the Greek philosopher Sophocles said, “One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life. That word is love.” True as these words are, this Greek sage still was ignorant about the depth of love that was to be proclaimed and modeled by our Savior.

*God is love.* Whatever else God is, and whatever He has done, is doing, and will do—everything is a manifestation of His love. This love is as comforting as it is difficult to comprehend. God's love far exceeds what human beings usually label as love, which is sometimes a mere shallow feeling or temporary infatuation that's often mixed with selfishness and greed. God does not just *have* love or *show* love. He *is* love.

**The Week at a Glance:** God's love for humanity has been revealed in numerous ways, the greatest being the cross. As followers of Jesus, we respond to His love by loving others as Christ loves us.

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

## Love—the Fabric of Life

We need to eat and drink in order to stay alive. Without liquid to drink or food to eat, we come to an end soon. But in order to live in any real sense of the word, we also need love. Life without love is a subhuman kind of existence. There is a built-in need in us to receive love. We need the love of parents. We need the love of family and friends. We need to be part of a loving community. But just as much as we need to receive love, we also need to give love. We are not truly human if we cannot love. But let's be clear: True love does not begin with us. The capacity for love is created in us by our Creator. (See *Gen. 1:26 and John 3:16*.)

**How** all-important is love in the life of the follower of Christ? *Matt. 22:37–39, 1 Cor. 13:1–3, 1 John 3:14.*

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God's love always precedes our love. Whatever else we say about love, this point is crucial. True "love is not an impulse, but a divine principle, a permanent power. The unconsecrated heart cannot originate or produce it. Only in the heart where Jesus reigns is it found. 'We love Him, because He first loved us' [*1 John 4:19*]. In the heart renewed by divine grace, love is the ruling principle of action." —Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 551.

The famous British author C. S. Lewis uses the terms "Gift-love" and "Need-love" to differentiate between God's love and human forms of love. While God wants our love more than anything else, He does not need our love in the same way in which we need love from Him and from fellow human beings. "We [must] begin at the real beginning, with love as the Divine energy. This primal love is Gift-love. In God there is no hunger that needs to be filled, only plenteousness that desires to give."—C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), p. 121. Our human love needs to be transformed by divine love, so that—while we will continue to yearn for love from others—we will be able to give love in a truly Christlike manner.

**From your own experience, what is the difference between human love and God's love? What kind of human love best exemplifies God's love? How can we better manifest God's love in our own lives?**



## The Old Testament God—a God of Love

It is often said that God’s love is clearly manifested only in the New Testament, while the “Old Testament God” is a God of justice and wrath. But careful study of the entire Bible shows that God does not have such a split personality. Though God’s love was manifested in the fullest measure in Christ (as portrayed in the New Testament), the God of Old Testament times is just as much a God of supreme love. God does not change (*James 1:17*). He does not gradually evolve from a God of wrath or a God of justice into a God of love. God’s love is eternal. The words to His Old Testament people apply to all times: “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (*Jer. 31:3, NIV*).

**Take** a look at a few important evidences of God’s love in Old Testament times as listed below and add a few other clear evidences of His love found elsewhere in the Old Testament.

• **God’s love in creation** (*Gen. 1:26–31, 2:21–25*).

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• **Providing a solution for the sin problem** (*Gen. 3:15, 22:8, Isaiah 53*).

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• **The gift of the Sabbath** (*Exod. 31:12–17*).

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• **The continuous gift of prophecy** (*Amos 3:7*).

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There are stories and statements in the Old Testament that are, at least on the surface, difficult to understand. It is true that we read about bloodshed and war. But never forget that God is consistently portrayed as the covenant God who draws people to Himself and does not forsake them, in spite of the fact that they turn their backs on Him time and again.

**What do you answer when confronted with questions about war and bloodshed in the Old Testament? How do you reconcile the divine commands to eliminate entire nations (for instance, Israel taking possession of the land of Canaan) with the concept of a God of love?**

## The New Testament God—a God of Love

Why did Jesus Christ come to the world? Why did He have to suffer, and was it necessary for Him to die on a cross? And why will He come again and restore this world to its original unblemished condition? Was there no other way? And if not, why does it take so long before the sin problem is fully dealt with? We are in no position to answer these questions. In His infinite wisdom God *devised* a plan to deal with the predicament of sin in the best possible way. Being a holy God, He could not overlook the rebellion against His perfect law; being love, He could not stand back and let His creatures perish without doing His utmost to save them.

“God’s holiness is his majestic purity that cannot tolerate moral evil. God’s love is his outgoing, tenderhearted embrace of the sinner. God’s holiness is his separateness from what is unclean and profane. God’s love is his willingness to identify with those who are unclean in order to help them. . . . [But] God’s wrath is provisional whereas his love is eternal.”—Donald G. Bloesch, *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), pp. 140–143.

**What** do the following texts tell us about the New Testament message of God’s love?

- God’s gift of His Son (*John 3:16*)
- The Son’s giving of Himself (*Phil. 2:5–8*)
- The gift of the Holy Spirit (*John 14:15–18, Acts 2:1–4*)
- The availability of spiritual gifts (*Eph. 4:11–13*)
- The certainty of salvation (*1 John 3:1–3*)
- An eternal future in an environment of love (*2 Peter 3:13*)

**How** would you summarize the New Testament message about the love of God?

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How do the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12 fit in this overall New Testament theme of divine love? Ellen White speaks about the message of the third angel as the good news of justification by faith “in verity.” How does that all fit in with the theme of God’s love for humanity?

## A Response of Love

The tragic reality of this world is one of self-love, blind ambition, hatred, competition, corruption, and war. As long as the citizens of this world let themselves, knowingly or unknowingly, be guided by the principles of the prince of darkness, love will have no chance to blossom. Mother Teresa once said, “If you judge people, you have no time to love them.”

If we truly have been converted and become disciples of the Lord, the principle of love will reign in our lives. Whatever our weaknesses, we will steadily grow in our love for God and for our fellow human beings. In a very real sense conversion is reorientation—a shift away from the love of self to the love for God and to the love of others.

**What** underlying principle should we discern as we study the commandments that God has given us? Has this principle been operating differently since Christ came to this world? *Deut. 6:5, 6; Matt. 22:37–40.*

If we truly have been changed by Jesus Christ, His love will characterize our dealings with other people. Though we may not like some people, we are called to love everyone, even our greatest enemy. This not only will benefit the people we associate with but will also prove an enormous blessing for ourselves. Give love and unconditional acceptance to those you encounter and notice what happens.

**How** should love permeate what we say and do? *Matt. 5:44, 25:31–46, 1 Pet. 1:22.*

“If church members will put away all self-worship, and will receive in their hearts the love for God and for one another that filled Christ’s heart, our heavenly Father will constantly manifest His power through them. Let His people be drawn together with the cords of divine love. Then the world will recognize the miracle-working power of God, and will acknowledge that He is the Strength and the Helper of His commandment-keeping people.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 940.

**Are you naturally loving or naturally selfish and self-centered? What practical steps can you take to move away from self and manifest love toward others?**

## Love Personified

Jesus Christ is our ultimate Role Model. If we wonder what our love should be like, we need to look only at our Savior. In Him we see the perfect example. Humanly speaking, Christ had every reason to dislike or even hate a lot of people. The spiritual leaders were so envious of His success that they constantly harassed Him and eventually decided to eliminate Him. Why should He have loved these people? His own family was at times less than supportive. His disciples often fought among themselves and were absent when their presence would have counted most. How could He love them at those moments when they totally forsook Him?

Besides all this, Jesus also manifested His love in particular toward those who would not get much positive attention from the spiritual leaders of His day: women (including prostitutes), those who suffered from leprosy, people from Samaria, members of the occupying force, and tax gatherers.

Take a careful look at some concrete examples of Jesus showing unselfish love, in circumstances in which most people would have found it difficult to do so.

1. Luke 17:12–19
2. John 13:1–17
3. John 19:25–27

**How** should the manifestation of divine love in the ministry of Jesus impact our discipleship? *2 Cor. 5:14, Phil. 2:2.*

The love of Christ compels us, the apostle Paul says (*2 Cor. 5:14*). The English translation is somewhat ambiguous, for the original Greek construction may be translated as the love that comes from Christ, as well as the love that we have for Christ. Both meanings are grammatically justified and also are theologically correct. When we grasp something of the magnitude of Christ's love, it will create a loving response, and this will give us the intense desire to share that love with others.

**Jesus also loved those who were despised by most other people and were generally considered rather unlovable. He went out of His way to show them His love. How do I show my love to the homeless, to people who live at the fringes of society, and to those who do not in any way represent the values that I treasure?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “God’s Love for Man,” pp. 9–16, in *Steps to Christ*. Also read “Calvary,” pp. 741–757 and “‘It Is Finished,’” pp. 758–768, in *The Desire of Ages*, which deal with the final moments of Christ’s earthly life. The book *The Four Loves*, by C. S. Lewis, is an inspiring essay on the various kinds of human and divine love.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 One cannot escape the “why” question: If God is love, why is there so much suffering? It is not only the scale of suffering that causes people to question God’s love but also the fact that so much appears to affect innocent people, and so much appears utterly senseless. How do we, as Seventh-day Adventist Christians, deal with this reality? How does our understanding of the great controversy help us understand this difficult topic?
- 2 How can one love an abusing parent, a serial killer, or a totally selfish person? How did Jesus love those who were totally unlovable?
- 3 How can one continue loving if there is no response to that love? Again, how did Jesus continue to love those who would never love Him back?
- 4 Who are the outcasts, the despised, and the reviled in your own society? What kind of outreach and ministry does your church have for those people? What would it take to get yourself and your church involved in such a work?
- 5 In a real sense, true love demands a death to self, a willingness to put self aside for the good of others. What choices do we have to make in order to experience that death ourselves?
- 6 Besides the Cross, what are other ways that we can see God’s love for humanity?

**Summary:** God is love. This characteristic is the basis for everything God is and does. This loving God is already revealed in the Old Testament, but His love is seen in its ultimate form in the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation. This divine love finds a response in the love of the Christian. If we profess to be disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, our life will be marked by unconditional love toward our Maker and unselfish love for others.

## Mad Man Goes to Church

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Mekonin lived in a farming village in Ethiopia. Many people in this village didn't like Adventists, and some even wanted to destroy the local Adventist church.

One day people noticed that Mekonin was behaving erratically. He became angry easily and even tried to kill his wife. Fortunately, she and their children fled to her parents' home. As Mekonin's behavior became more demonic, the neighbors feared for their own safety. They chained him to a pillar in his home and stayed a safe distance away.

Then someone mentioned that when the Adventists pray for people, they're healed. The next Sabbath morning several strong men bound Mekonin in chains and led him to the Adventist church. The men sat down on a bench near the back surrounding Mekonin, ready to subdue him if he became aggressive. The visitors sat quietly through Sabbath School and church. Then the pastor, deacons, and church elders gathered around Mekonin and prayed for him.

"Why don't you throw water on him?" one of the neighbors asked. The pastor explained that the power to heal Mekonin was in Christ, not in the water. The pastor asked the men to bring Mekonin back the next day for prayer.

On Sunday the neighbors returned to the Adventist church with Mekonin, but this time he came without the chains. About 60 people came to pray for Mekonin or to watch what happened.

The following Sabbath, Mekonin visited the Adventist church again. He walked with some Adventist members and was not bound by chains. Mekonin took part in the worship service. The pastor knew of another Adventist church nearer to Mekonin's home and asked the local elders to go to Mekonin's home and pray with him. Other Adventist groups learned about Mekonin's condition and joined in praying for him. Within two weeks Mekonin was healed of the demons who had possessed him.

Mekonin's wife learned that her husband had been healed; she and her children returned home.

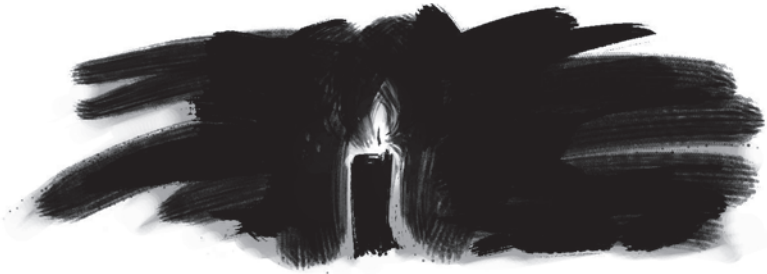
Mekonin and his wife joined the Adventist church, along with neighbors who had once wanted to destroy the church but had seen God heal Mekonin in answer to the believers' prayers. Today six Adventist churches stand in the area near Mekonin's home, testimonies of God's goodness and power to save.

Your mission offerings help spread the gospel in farming villages and large cities around the world so that people chained by darkness can be freed by Jesus, the Light of the World.

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CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN is editor of Mission.

# Faith



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Eph. 6:10–18; Hebrews 11; James 2:18, 19; 1 Pet. 1:3–8.*

**Memory Text:** “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (*Ephesians 2:8, 9, NIV*).

Faith is not to be confused with rational conviction. Faith in the biblical sense is not based primarily on our reason (even though it is not unreasonable or irrational!); nor is it based on our emotions (though emotions do play a role). Faith is a deep-rooted assurance that affects the entire person. Faith is a principle that governs the life. Faith is the means by which we reach out and grab hold of the promises of a God we can't see yet we know is there.

Hebrews 11:1 speaks about the “substance” of our faith. William G. Johnsson, an expert on Hebrews, suggests that the best translation is, “Faith is the title deed to what we hope for, the certainty of what we do not see.”—*Hebrews, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), p. 204.

**The Week at a Glance:** Faith is the guiding principle in the life of a Christian. It's how we are to live and to relate to God and to others. However important an intellectual assent to doctrines is, faith is so much more than just that. This week we'll look at how much more.

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

## Faith—a Gift From God

What is faith?

A simple definition could read something like this: “Faith is a confident and obedient trust in the reality, power, and love of God as revealed in His acts and in His promises to us.”

What a wonderful gift to have in a terribly fallen and broken world such as ours. No wonder many believe that faith is the most wonderful of all gifts humans could have.

Now, the question is, Have you ever tried to discover where your faith originated? Why is it that you have faith in God and in others you know don’t? Was it your upbringing? Did you have believing parents? Have you always attended church? Did your study of the Bible, and your reading of books about the Bible, convince you that there is a God who loves you? Did you find satisfying philosophical arguments that prepared you for the “leap” of faith? In the final analysis, faith is a miracle, a gift from God.

**How** does the apostle Paul underline the gift-character of faith? *Eph. 2:8.*

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One thing is sure: Just as we cannot be fully human without love, we cannot be what we are intended to be without faith. “ ‘Without faith it is impossible to please God.’ . . . Note that Hebrews does not teach that without faith it is difficult to please God, or that without faith it will take a long time to satisfy Him. To the contrary, it claims that it is *impossible*. In short, faith has no substitute. It is by faith that God’s heroes lived in the past, and it is by faith that His people must live today.”—George R. Knight, *Exploring Hebrews: A Devotional Commentary* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2003), p. 198.

**How** can we position ourselves in a way that prepares us for the gift of faith? That is, what changes can we make in our lives to make us more receptive to that gift? *Rom. 10:17; see also Heb. 11:6.*

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Sometimes you hear people say that they wish they had faith. What would you advise such people? What kind of changes might they need to make in order to be more receptive to receiving the gift? *See Mark 9:24.*



## The Basis of Our Faith

A famous English hymn that has been translated in countless languages reminds us, “My hope is built on nothing less / Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness” (*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 522). It is important that we never forget this truth. Jesus Christ is the ultimate foundation and source of our faith. But even though the gift of faith is a mystery that remains beyond our comprehension, we have been given some insights into how faith is awakened and strengthened. Some men and women in Bible times had a sudden experience that started them on the journey of faith. Paul is probably the most prominent example. Others tell of a much more gradual awareness of God’s leading in their life, which brought focus and direction in their pilgrimage of faith. No doubt, experience is an essential and powerful component of our spiritual life. But faith also must have content, and the revelation provided in the Scriptures plays the major role in establishing us in our faith.

**What** role do the Scriptures play in the faith experience of the believer? *John 5:39, 2 Tim. 3:15.*

Clearly, the Scriptures are of extreme importance, and if we neglect them it will be at our own peril. But how the Scriptures exactly help to awaken and build our faith cannot be expressed in any human formula. Not even the famous faith definition of Hebrews 11 provides this. “Hebrews 11:1 doesn’t give us a definition of *pistis* [the Greek word for faith] so much as a description of the way faith works. Certainly the apostle isn’t advancing a psychological explanation of faith. Rather, he sets out the two cardinal abilities that faith makes possible—turning hope into reality and the unseen into sight.”—William G. Johnsson, *Hebrews*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier, p. 205.

**What** does James 2:18, 19 tell us about the character of faith? Why is faith more than intellectual assent to belief in the existence of God and other doctrines?

Why is Bible reading a life-changing experience for some people while others claim that it “does nothing” for them? What would you advise a person who reads the Bible and enjoys it as literature but claims not to hear the voice of God speaking in it?

## Exercising Faith

In their telling of the stories of Christ's healing miracles, the Gospel writers emphasized that the underlying factor was not magic but faith. The people who were healed were challenged to exercise their faith. " 'According to your faith will it be done to you,' " Jesus said (*Matt. 9:29, NIV*). Extraordinary experiences that carry an undeniable stamp of miraculous divine intervention do not always result in faith, however. The truth is that many people find ways of explaining such divine interventions away.

**Read** Luke 16:30, 31. What important point can we take from here?

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Our faith will be strengthened by the experience of seeing God at work in our own lives and in the lives of others, but our faith often will precede God's interventions in our life. Faith will expect God to show His hand. God has promised that He will act through us and on our behalf if we have faith in Him. In that trusting faith we must take Him at His word.

**How** do Romans 1:17; Galatians 5:6; James 2:17, 18; and 1 John 5:4, 5 reflect various aspects of this "living through faith"?

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**What** is, on the other hand, the tragic result when faith is absent?  
*Rom. 11:20, Heb. 3:19.*

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The context of Romans 11:20 makes it clear that Paul was speaking about the ancient Hebrews, who had received the promise of salvation in a covenant relationship with Him. They could have experienced the abundant life in Christ that faith brings to all who exercise it, but their experience, and failure, is a clear reminder to us that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (*Heb. 11:6, NIV*).

**Though your faith is a gift, what good reasons do you have for it? Also, even more important, what are practical ways in which you can strengthen your faith? At the same time, what are sure ways of losing it?**

## Growing in Faith

Faith will increase if, when brought in contact with doubts and obstacles, we press on ahead, claiming the promises of God regardless of how we might feel at any given moment or regardless of how hostile the circumstances might be. Faith is more than a feeling; it's a principle that transcends the fickleness of human emotions. Faith is doing what we know God asks us to do even though we don't feel like doing it.

If you are growing in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ, you will improve every privilege and opportunity to gain more knowledge of the life and character of Christ; that is, you will do everything you can to grow in grace and increase in faith.

Faith in Jesus will grow as you become better acquainted with Him. This can happen by dwelling upon His life and love. You cannot dishonor God more than to profess to be His disciple while keeping yourself at a distance from Him.

**What** challenge did Peter hold out to the believers? *2 Pet. 3:18.*

**How** had the church in Thessalonica lived up to that challenge? *2 Thess. 1:3.*

**And** how does the “shield of faith” help you to grow spiritually? How does faith relate to the rest of the “armour of God” as described in Ephesians 6:10–18?

The goal of the Christian is to become “mature” in faith. This is a lifelong process. While we experience the blessing of growth and “stand firm in the faith” (*1 Cor. 16:13, NIV*), we may at times wonder why others are still “weak” (*Rom. 14:1*). There is often a tendency to forget that it also has taken most of us considerable time before we arrived at where we are today spiritually. But whatever our reaction may be, it never should be one of pride and judgment (*1 Cor. 10:12*). God is the One who makes every seed of faith sprout, and He also is to be credited for any growth that takes place in our spiritual life. Yet, while that is a truth that must never be forgotten, we also must remember that by our personal choices we can help create the right kind of environment in which spiritual growth can take place.

**Are there associations you have, places you visit, or certain kinds of media you expose yourself to that negatively impact faith? If so, how willing are you to give them up? The answer depends on how important your faith really is to you.**

## Faith in a Person

Doctrines are important. When we say that we believe in God, we will want to know more about God, and we will be eager to absorb what He has revealed to us. It only is natural that we want to provide a structured account of what we believe about our Creator and His dealings with us, and we want to be sure that we know His will. But though we believe that the doctrines of our church are true, our faith is anchored, not in a doctrinal system alone, but in Jesus. The doctrines are not an end in and of themselves. The doctrines help us better understand Jesus and what He has done for us.

In a sense, the role of doctrines in the Christian faith may be compared to the role of grammar. We can communicate through language only because there is a grammatical structure in the words we say and write. Similarly, we give a structure to the content of our faith through the doctrines. Anselm, a medieval theologian, spoke the famous words that theology is faith that seeks to understand itself.

**What** does the New Testament tell us about the importance of sound doctrine? *1 Tim. 4:16, Titus 2:1.*

Sound doctrine is essential, but doctrine and theology that remain lifeless theory can save no one. One even can be a theologian without being a believer. Faith, ultimately, is not just holding a number of beliefs as biblically correct but is trust in the Person of whom these doctrines speak.

**How** is salvation in this life and the life beyond connected with faith in the Source of life? *John 3:36, 6:35.*

**What** is the fundamental conviction on which the church is built? *Matt. 16:13–19.*

The passage in Matthew 16 often has been used as proof that the apostle Peter should be considered the founder of the Christian church. This idea finds no biblical support. On the contrary: Christ is the Stone on which the church is built. (*See 1 Pet. 2:4–8.*) And it is the faith in this Stone—the unshakable conviction that Jesus, the Son of God, is our Savior—that makes the church what it is, not a human institution but the church of God.

Someone says, “I believe in Jesus, believe in the teachings, yet sometimes I can’t help struggling with doubt.” What would you say to that person? What help and counsel could you give?

**Further Study:** "Peter exhorts his brethren to 'grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' 2 Peter 3:18. When the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. . . .

"By faith we may look to the hereafter and grasp the pledge of God for a growth of intellect, the human faculties uniting with the divine, and every power of the soul being brought into direct contact with the Source of light. We may rejoice that all which has perplexed us in the providences of God will then be made plain."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 112, 113.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Hebrews 11 provides a gallery of heroes of faith. Notice, though, how flawed in character and actions just about every one of them were. What encouragement can you draw from their mistakes and sins when you yourself are tempted to give up faith because of your own sins and flaws?
- 2 Many of us have at some time or another gone through a crisis of faith and have come out of this experience renewed. If this has happened to you, how did you survive the crisis? What can you do when it appears that members of your family or local church members are in the midst of a similar struggle? What did you learn from your own experience that could help them?
- 3 What are the challenges to your faith? Are they of an intellectual nature, that is in the area of science versus religion? Or are they related to the environment in which you live and work, or where you find your recreation? Or possibly in the area of relationships? Why is it important to meet these challenges head-on?
- 4 You don't need faith to believe in what you can prove; you need faith to believe in what you can't prove. Why is it important to realize that regardless of all the evidence we have for our beliefs, there will be things we just don't understand?

**Summary:** Faith is experience. It has to do with certainty. And with trust. The Scriptures play a role in the awakening, the strengthening, and the sustenance of faith. But faith isn't just belief; it is a principle that guides how we live our lives before God and others.

## A Place to Call Home

by ZHANA SEDYSHEVA

I live in Vladivostok, the large seaport on the eastern coast of Russia. My young daughter was seriously ill, and I began to despair that she would recover. I prayed to the great God above, and He healed her! I wanted to thank Him for this miracle by worshiping in a church, but I didn't know which church I should pray in. My friend suggested that I worship at the Adventist church in another part of the city.

I was impressed by the simplicity of the worship service I found there, and I left feeling calm and at peace. I continued worshiping there and eventually joined the Adventist Church. The congregation was growing, and eventually the rented room where we met could not hold everyone who wanted to worship there. We prayed for another place to worship, and I hoped it would be closer to where I lived.

We rented a restaurant where we could hold our worship services. The restaurant was quiet, but a tourist club next door was so noisy that it disrupted our worship. We prayed for a more suitable place to worship, a place large enough to hold all of us, a place away from the noise of other businesses.

I worked in a kindergarten and asked the manager whether we could rent the large kindergarten hall for our worship. We were permitted to use the hall on Sabbaths. It was light and roomy—and quiet! But before long someone wrote an anonymous letter filled with angry criticism that the kindergarten would allow a religious group to meet in the building on Sabbaths.

I felt sick that our worship could cause problems for this school, which had a fine reputation in the city. I tried to put the matter into God's hands, but again and again we were attacked. I was so troubled that I became physically sick. The church members prayed for me and for the kindergarten, and God answered. I recovered my health, and the criticisms against the kindergarten were dismissed when the parents of children in the kindergarten defended us.

Now the city of Vladivostok has given permission for our mother church to build a new church and evangelistic center. Although we see no human means to build this church, we know that God will provide for us. I am on fire with a renewed desire to share His message with my colleagues and friends.

Your Sabbath School mission offerings help us spread God's message in difficult-to-reach areas such as Russia. Thank you for your prayers and your support.

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ZHANA SEDYSHEVA is a Sabbath School superintendent in Vladivostok, Russia.

# Hope



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Luke 21:25, 26; John 5:24; 1 Cor. 15:20–26; 50–55; Revelation 21.*

**Memory Text:** “Always be prepared to give the answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have” (*1 Peter 3:15, NIV*).

The twentieth century began in a mood of great optimism. Since the beginning of the Enlightenment Era, optimism had dominated the way of thinking in the Western world. As human beings, we could not only discover all truth using reason, we also were capable of moral perfection. New inventions, new modes of travel, the dramatic increase of medical knowledge, the introduction of new machines, and the steady advancement of human morals would improve all lives. But after two world wars, the holocaust, the nuclear threat of the cold war, and worldwide terrorism as an ever-present danger, coupled with the realization that humankind is in the process of destroying the environment it needs for human survival, little reason for optimism remains.

However, there is hope, not in what we see or in what we can do but in what God has promised us through Jesus, His Son.

**The Week at a Glance:** As followers of Christ we can have hope even amid a world that in and of itself offers none. And that's because this hope is not based on ourselves or on anything we or the world can offer. This hope is based solely on Jesus and His promises to us.

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

## Hope Amid Our World

Life after September 11, 2001, has greatly changed. People will always remember the images of passenger airliners flying into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. We all realize that it can happen again. There is no way we can be fully protected from people who are prepared to die as they use an airplane, filled with men, women, and children, as a flying bomb or are willing to blow themselves up at a bus stop or in a supermarket. There is fear everywhere, and considering the world we live in, that fear is understandable.

**What** did Jesus single out as one of the characteristics of the time of the end? *Luke 21:25, 26.*

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“Transgression has almost reached its limit. Confusion fills the world, and a great terror is soon to come upon human beings. The end is very near. God’s people should be preparing for what is to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 555. Imagine what she would say were she alive in our post-9/11 environment!

Ours is a world of war, corruption, greed, and terror. And we know that many unpleasant things yet will occur in the future—in the world, and even in the church. But whatever happens, we have hope through Jesus. There may be anguish among the nations. People may even faint from terror—“apprehensive of what is coming on the world” (*Luke 21:26, NIV*)—but this will not be the case for those who have been expecting their Lord. None of these horrible things should take us by surprise. After all, the Bible has warned us all through its pages that we should expect toil, suffering, and trouble until Jesus returns. The fact that we see these things should only help confirm for us the truth of God’s Word.

**Read** *Luke 21:28*. What hope is Jesus offering us amid all the turmoil and fear of the world?

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Why is it so fruitless, and empty, to place our hope in this world or in what this world offers? Why do we tend to do that, even though it should be obvious by now that if we are to have any hope, it must be a hope that transcends whatever this world can give?



## Hope—Here and Now

The Christian hope has to do with the future: Christ’s return; the resurrection of God’s people; a new heaven and a new earth; eternity with God. But salvation is also a present reality. That kind of hope separates us from those without the certainty that life has meaning and that in Christ humanity has an eternal future. The apostle Paul reminds us of the radical change that takes place when we accept Jesus as our Lord. As long as we are separated from Christ, we are “without hope and without God in the world” (*Eph. 2:12, NIV*). But all this changes when we are no longer “far away” from God but have been “brought near through the blood of Christ” (*vs. 13, NIV*).

**In** what terms did Jesus describe the radical change that takes place when we “hear” His Word and believe in Him? *John 5:24.*

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**What** kind of life can be ours? *John 10:10.* What does this mean, and how should we be experiencing this promise?

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“Life” is one of the key words of the Gospel of John. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke the concept of life is primarily eternal life. “But in the Gospel of John, life is particularly focused on the present reality of what Jesus does for those who believe in Him. . . .

“There are two keys to attaining life at its best. The first is to know that the source of that life is found only in Christ (*John 14:6; 6:33–58; 1 John 5:11, 12*). Wherever Jesus is, life is (*John 11:25, 26*). The second key to attaining life is believing (*1:4, 12*). It is through continuous relationship with Jesus that individuals appropriate the life that is ever present in Jesus (*3:16, 36*).”—Jon Paulien, *John, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1995), p. 189.

**How has Jesus changed your life for the better here and now? What do you have now that you didn’t have before coming to know Jesus and the hope He gives us?**

## Hope Beyond the Grave

Death comes to all of us (unless we are alive at the moment of Christ's return). All of us have lost loved ones in death. We are daily confronted with the grim reality of death. We see it as we pass cemeteries, see hearses, or switch on the television news. But even worse, we face it up close as we say our final goodbye to a friend or relative. Death is our archenemy, but it is one that will be defeated.

**What** is the glorious truth about the reality of death? *1 Cor. 15:20–26, 50–55, 1 Pet. 1:3.*

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**How** does the certainty of the resurrection divide humanity? *1 Thess. 4:14.*

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The apostle Paul, in his famous chapter about the resurrection (*1 Corinthians 15*), stresses that the hope of the resurrection is an essential component of our total faith experience (*vss. 12–19*). If there is no resurrection, our faith is empty.

Of course, there are many aspects of the physical resurrection that we do not understand. But of one thing we can be sure: Our “resurrection” does not depend on the safekeeping of the present material substances of our bodies. It depends on the power of our Creator to safeguard our identity and to re-create us at a given moment with a new (perfect) body that will never need any cosmetic surgery or antiaging pills.

We have no idea how God is going to perform this miracle. But the God who could create life here to begin with certainly has the power to re-create the earth and fill it with the people whose identities have been safeguarded in the divine memory. Our hope is not based on anything we can verify with our intellect or our senses. The resurrection involves a realm of existence far beyond anywhere science can take us. But it is based on the fact that Christ has conquered death. As a result, the death of the believer is but a temporary “sleep” from which he or she will be raised and given eternal life.

**Even with this great hope, the greatest any of us could have, we still hate death, we still fear it, and we still flee from it. This is only natural (for death is unnatural). At the same time, what can we do to nourish and strengthen our confidence in the great promise that we have regarding eternal life, a promise that alone can lessen our fear of death now?**

## Eternal Hope

How can finite beings ever understand what it is to be infinite? How can we, as mortals—most of whom will not live beyond 80 or 90 years—ever understand what it is to be immortal and live forever? Eternal life is not simply a continuation of our present life. That would in many ways more resemble “hell” than “heaven.” Eternal life has an altogether different quality. While we are still in our present mortal state, we will have to be content with a glimpse of what the future holds: We see but “a poor reflection” and “know [only] in part” (*1 Cor. 13:12, NIV*).

**In** what ways will eternal life differ from our present existence? *1 Cor. 15:42, 43, 52; Revelation 21*. What things will be similar?

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We are left with lots of questions as we contemplate the life that awaits us, questions that will never be fully answered here and now. But we can learn from Jesus’ own resurrection. It is important to note that the Christ who was raised from the dead was the same Person as the One who a few days earlier died on the cross. He arose with a “glorified” body that was no longer subject to the laws of nature in the way our present mortal bodies are. Yet at the same time, He possessed a continuity with the “human form” that He had prior to His death and resurrection. He was the same Person, recognizable by His outward appearance, His voice, and His gestures. That gives us good reason to conclude that in our new “glorious bodies” we will be recognized by those we knew in this life and who will enjoy the life in the beyond with us.

And yet, we can also experience some of that eternal life now. Paul explains to us (*Rom. 8:10*) that the Spirit will enter the person who has turned to Christ. The believer, therefore, is already touched by the eternal life that will become a full reality in the world to come. The presence of the Spirit is the pledge of our eternal salvation (*Eph. 1:13, 14*).

**Try to imagine what life will be like in a new heaven, a new earth, with new bodies. Let your imagination soar; write out a paragraph based on what we find in the Bible, about what this new life will be like. How foolish to throw it all away for anything that this life offers us.**

## Christ Our Hope

Long before Christ entered this world, His coming had been predicted. True to those promises, He did indeed come. Manifold are the promises that He will come a second time. He said so Himself: “I will come back!” On the final page of the Bible this promise is repeated: “Yes, I am coming soon” (*Rev. 22:20, NIV*). This is the corporate hope of Christian believers. It is “the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (*Titus 2:13, NIV*).

**In** what sense does the hope of the Christian culminate in the second coming of Jesus? (*Rev. 22:7, 10–12, 20*). Why are these promises so crucial to us?

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**How** does the time aspect mentioned in 2 Peter 3:8, 9 impact our understanding of the term *soon* in connection with the Second Coming?

The ultimate solution for the sin problem and all the misery sin has caused is not found in anything humanity can invent or arrange but in the intervention of heaven through our Lord Jesus Christ. Our hope is not in human technology, clever politicians, or social and moral progress. These things never can solve the problem of death. And although it is important to know what will precede and accompany the coming of the Lord, it is even more important that we are sure of the One we expect.

Our Lord will come soon. “It is just a matter of time, that’s all. And no one can change this fact. No tyrant can reach up and grab the world from His grasp. It remains firmly and forever in the hands of the Crucified One. None can undo Calvary anymore than they can undo their birth. . . . Since the cross, we live in time filled by the victory of Calvary—time determined by that goal. Hence, whether they know it or not, humanity does not merely advance toward a hoped-for goal in some distant day, with the possibility that it may never come. No! Humanity moves triumphantly from a goal Jesus has already reached.”—Norman Gulley, *Christ Is Coming* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1998), p. 540.

**A philosopher named Martin Heidegger once said that “only a god can save us.” Whatever he himself might have meant by that idea, why is it so true? Where are you placing your hope? If it’s in anything but the true God, why is this hope a false one?**

**Further Study:** Norman Gulley's book *Christ Is Coming* is probably the most complete Adventist book in recent times about last-day events and the second coming of Christ. You may want to scan the book and read a few chapters, in particular the chapter titled "The Greatest Rescue of All Time" (pp. 538–552). For the classic description of the moment when our hope will be fulfilled, see Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (in particular, pp. 662–678).

Try to commit the following majestic words to memory: "The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, read your depictions of what you envision eternal life in a new earth will be like. Compare and discuss what was presented.
- 2 How do you respond to those who say that this hope Christians have of another existence causes them not to care deeply enough about the woes of this existence?
- 3 How can you remain hopeful, even when everything seems to go against you?
- 4 How do we experience, here and now, some of the hope that we have in Christ? How should lives differ now because of this hope? What can we do, in a real and visible way, to show others the immediate fruit and benefits of being a follower of the living God?

**Summary:** Hope is a vital component of the Christian life. It is firmly based on what Christ accomplished on the cross. The Christian's hope has to do with the here and now, for the kingdom that is to come is, in principle, already present in the believer. Yet, the full realization of the blessed hope is future. We know that the world is still affected by the results of Satan's rebellion, but the outcome is secure: Our Lord reigns, and His eternal kingdom will soon be realized in all its glory. Our hope is to be citizens of that kingdom forever.

## Finding the Savior

Anna\* was a new Adventist Christian when she met Ahmet\* while working in Turkey. Since Sabbath was her day off, Ahmet arranged to have Sabbath off so they could spend time together. Although Ahmet was not a Christian, Anna sensed that he was searching for faith. In time the two were married.

After their son was born, Anna arranged to take him to Germany for vaccinations they could not get in Turkey. She was surprised when Ahmet said that he wanted to go with her, for she knew that he did not like Germany. He explained that he wanted to get away from his own family who were urging him to convert her to his family's traditional faith.

While in Germany, Ahmet met many Adventists and was impressed with how warm and friendly they were. He saw how different Christians are from other people. His interest in Christianity grew.

When the couple returned to Turkey, they joined a small group of believers who worship in a private home. (The Adventist Church in Turkey has fewer than a hundred members, most of whom are not ethnic Turks.) The pastor welcomed Ahmet and asked him to help translate Sabbath School lessons into Turkish. Ahmet agreed. Anna noticed that Ahmet often read her Bible and her religious books when he thought she was not watching.

As Ahmet translated the lessons, questions sometimes arose regarding the meaning of a Bible text or how to phrase a question. As Ahmet and Anna talked about such issues, Anna realized that Ahmet was thinking deeply about his relationship with Jesus. One question they discussed was, "What is Jesus to you?" Ahmet thought a moment then answered, "Jesus is my Savior." Anna praised God for this demonstration of faith in her seeking husband.

One night Ahmet couldn't sleep, so he went to the living room to read his Bible. That night he decided to be baptized. The next day he called the pastor and said, "If you have nothing better to do today, you will baptize me?" Later that day Anna and Ahmet went to the seashore, where Ahmet sealed his commitment to Christ in baptism.

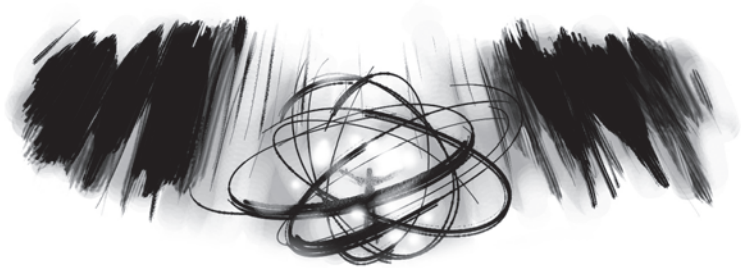
The couple closes their bakery on Sabbaths, which prompts people to ask why. Carefully Anna shares her faith with a prayer that God will open their hearts. They also offer guided tours of biblical sites such as Ephesus. Even the bus drivers notice that Christians are different. They ask questions about what Christians believe, and this opens opportunities to share God's love with His other children.

Ahmet and Anna thank God that the world church supports missionaries in Turkey. Our mission offerings provide resources to help lead searching souls to Jesus in this great unreached land.

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\* Not their real names.

# Life



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 2:7; Ps. 139:13, 14; John 1:1–3; 3; 10:10; 2 Cor. 5:17; Phil. 2:1–5.*

**Memory Text:** “‘I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full’ ” (*John 10:10, NIV*).

People nowadays live much longer than in previous generations, especially people in the so-called developed world. And that's, of course, good. Yet, it's one thing to live a long time, but what about the quality of life itself? Sometimes doctors perform all kinds of heroic actions to artificially keep a person alive even if the person has very little, if any, quality of life left.

But quality of life is not restricted to an acceptable level of physical well-being; it has a wider application. What do we do with the years that we have been given? Do we live with a purpose and in harmony with others? Do we live in satisfying relationships with fellow human beings and, most of all, with our Creator? These are important questions for all who have been given the gift of life.

**The Week at a Glance:** Life is a gift from God only. Now that we have this life, what does it mean for us? How are we to live it? Because it's a gift, we are under a divine obligation to take care of our lives, both physically and spiritually. At the same time, our belief in Jesus brings us into the community of other believers, and we become part of a new family, both in heaven and on earth, all of which should impact the quality of life we have here now.

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

## The Gift of Physical Life

How did life originate? Some people point to a godless evolutionary unfolding of human existence. Others argue for a divine role in the slow process of millions of years during which “simple” forms of life somehow made their appearance and, subsequently, developed into more complex organisms, including humans. This theory, however, creates more questions than it answers (and besides, nothing in the Bible even hints that God used evolution to create humanity). Meanwhile, several renowned scholars have in recent years convincingly argued that this theory is in a deep crisis. But even the staunchest supporters of evolutionary thinking must admit that life remains as great a mystery as ever.

At the same time, those who believe in God as the Creator of this world and of all the universe do not have all the answers either. But the creationist approach is far more logical and coherent than the improbable theory that human life resulted from chance.

**What** does divine revelation tell us about the origin of life? *Gen. 2:7, John 1:1–3.*

What is true for the mystery of life in general is also true for each human life. Although we possess a lot of scientific knowledge about the processes involved in the conception and growth of human life, each new parent who holds a newborn child in his or her arms knows intuitively that this new life is nothing less than a miracle. It is a fundamental Christian conviction that life—and human life in a very special sense—is sacred.

**In** what words does David describe the miracle of human life and the magnificent design of the human body? *Ps. 139:13, 14.*

Who does not know the words of the well-known song that says God has “the whole world in His hands”? This applies to the universe and to our entire planet. But also to each one of us individually; whoever we are and wherever we are, God holds us in His hands. We owe our physical life to Him, all of it—from beginning to end.

**What difference does it make that God is the Creator of all life, including our own? How should our stance on the origin of life impact our views about things such as the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia?**



## Physical Education

If we owe our existence to our Creator, it stands to reason that we also owe it to Him to be careful with what He has entrusted to us. There is ample evidence in the Bible that God is interested in our physical well-being. He manifested His care for the people of Israel time and again. He gave His people numerous instructions about healthful eating and sanitation. He gave them manna in the wilderness. He looked after Elijah when there was famine in the land. These are just a few of many examples of God's care for our physical well-being.

This truth becomes even clearer in the ministry of our Lord. Even a cursory reading of the Gospels leaves us in no doubt that Jesus' understanding of religion was very much practice-oriented.

**In** what ways did Jesus show interest in His own physical well-being and that of the people around Him? Take a look at the following passages and analyze what implications they have for us today.

- healing (*Mark 5*)
- rest (*Mark 6:30–32*)
- feeding (*Mark 6:33–43; esp. vs. 34*)
- Sabbath (*Luke 4:16*)

**In** what other areas did Jesus show His concern for the physical well-being of people?

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The way we treat our body has everything to do with stewardship. Whether our material possessions, our time, our talents, or our body—it is all God's property, and thus, we are required as faithful stewards to look after these gifts. But care for our body also is intimately related to the biblical view of the human person. Many Christians believe that we consist of an immortal soul that inhabits a mortal shell of flesh and blood. The Bible, however, depicts humanity as a unity of body, soul, and spirit, which cannot be separated. Our religion, therefore, does not concern just an immortal "something" but our entire being. It impacts all aspects of our existence.

**While the Bible indicates that some foods are unsuitable for human consumption (see, for example, *Leviticus 11*), the kingdom is not to be reduced to a question of what we eat and drink (see *Rom. 14:17*). How do we strike the right balance, not just in diet but in all areas of healthy living?**

## Spiritual Life

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

**What** is your understanding of what that above text means? How are we a “new creature” in Jesus?

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All inhabitants of this earth, whether they ever realize it or not, are God’s by birth. Yet, life we all share in this world is, as we all know, very temporary. Sin has brought decay and death not only to every human being but to all life on the planet. Nothing is immune to the crushing devastation caused by sin.

The good news, however, is that we have a choice whether this life is all we have or whether we will accept the wonderful gift of eternal life.

This eternal life, however, demands a turning around, a conversion. The Bible uses several metaphors to describe this crucial experience. The most graphic is that of a new birth, the image used to depict the turning point at which a person accepts the gift of eternal life in Christ. When this happens, the “old person” dies, and a “new person” is born.

**Nowhere** in the Bible is the need for this new birth described with greater clarity than in John 3. Read the section (*vss. 1–21*) that relates Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus. What does it tell us about the nature of this new birth? What is your own understanding of the new birth?

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The new life of the follower of Jesus, who has turned around from a life of self-service to a life of commitment to the kingdom, will be characterized by growth. The newly born spiritual person needs to feed on the right kind of spiritual food and must gradually mature. The apostle Peter encourages us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18, NIV).

**If someone were to ask you, “Have you been born-again?” what would you reply? What does your answer say to you about your walk with Jesus?**

## Social Life

Humans are, by nature, social beings. Of course, there are moments we like to be alone. We need private time for prayer and contemplation. Some need more private space and private time than do others. But we tend to feel sorry for people who are always alone, and particularly for those who do not have sufficient social skills to establish bonds of friendship and who consistently fail to enter into meaningful relationships.

The Bible pictures people as parts of various social networks. The family, friendship, ethnicity, community, and church are dominant themes. The Bible points to Jesus' Father as the Father of all humankind, which means we all are brothers and sisters in a very real sense (*Acts 17:26*). Living in relationships is the essence of human life. When Adam was created, God immediately created a partner for him. Family life was a divinely devised model for human happiness. The Bible repeatedly underlines the tremendous value of genuine friendship and the blessings of belonging to a wider community.

**What** is the key to successfully managing of our social relationships? How well do you manifest these principles? *Phil. 2:1–5*.

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The various aspects of our Christian life are blended in our membership to the body of Christ: the church. The church is more than a place where like-minded people meet and enjoy fellowship. Nonetheless, for many the church is indeed the focal point of their social life. This has both positive and negative aspects. Without Christian friends we have few, if any, role models. Associating with others who also serve God and also have adopted a biblical lifestyle will help us to remain faithful and to grow in our Christian relationship. But if we have no friends outside the circle of fellow believers, we will have few opportunities for witnessing. In many parts of the world friendship evangelism is the most successful method of church growth.

**Studies have shown that most new Adventists lose virtually all their non-Adventist friends within seven years. Take a look at yourself. Is this the pattern you see? What are the reasons? Why is it worth investing time and energy to build friendships with non-Adventists, or even with non-Christians?**

## Fullness of Life

John 10:10 records Jesus' famous statement that He has come to give us life "to the full" (*NIV*). Other Bible translations speak of "abundant life."

**Here is a partial list of important components of this "full" life. Try to add other components to that list and find scriptural support for these various aspects:**

1. It is a life full of possibilities.
2. It is a life with a purpose.
3. It is a life of inner peace.
4. It is a life with a mission.

As we grow in our Christian life, we become more and more convinced that Christ does indeed offer us life "to the full." We often have, however, a hard time explaining this to those who have not committed themselves to Christ. For them the Christian life appears to be rather boring. They dislike the fact that it seems to bring all kinds of restrictions. But Christians have learned that not all experiences one might have actually make our lives richer. Many things we might do carry a minus sign rather than a plus sign and contribute to an inner emptiness rather than a fullness of life.

**What** are some kinds of experiences we're all better off without, and why?

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"Life to the full" is not a combination of good health, good looks, satisfactory education, and a nice income. And although strong, loving relationships are certainly part of it, there is considerably more than these things. Life "to the full" is the kind of life that has meaning. It is a life that issues inner peace. Its happiness does not depend primarily on external, material circumstances. It is a life that is connected to the Source of life and will, therefore, be eternal.

**Why does all this talk of an "abundant life" sound pleasing? What about those who seem to have an "abundant life" but don't know Jesus and don't seem to have the slightest interest in knowing Him? How do we understand this phenomenon, especially when we all know Christians who are suffering terribly now? See 2 Cor. 4:18.**

**Further Study:** Ellen G. White’s famous book *Steps to Christ* focuses on our life in Christ. If, in the context of this week’s lesson, one has to choose one particular chapter, one might well go to chapter 8: “Growing Up Into Christ” (pp. 67–76). “A life in Christ is a life of restfulness. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there should be an abiding, peaceful trust. Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. Your weakness is united to His strength, your ignorance to His wisdom, your frailty to His enduring might. So you are not to look to yourself, not to let the mind dwell upon self, but look to Christ. Let the mind dwell upon His love, upon the beauty, the perfection, of His character.”—Page 70.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ When people are severely disabled or terminally ill, the question often asked is whether their life still has “quality.” Should the quality of life be defined primarily in physical terms, or are other aspects also important, or possibly even more essential? How, too, does our understanding of the origin of life influence our answer?
- ❷ For many people the looming specter of death robs life of all meaning and purpose. After all, if sooner or later we’ll all be dead and every memory of us forgotten, what can this life possibly mean? How has Jesus answered that question for us and eliminated this concern?
- ❸ What aspects of your contemporary culture rob life of its full meaning? That is, what kind of ideals and moral values are being promoted that reduce life to something less than it should be? How can we as Adventist Christians respond to these challenges?
- ❹ In what ways can our health message and principles of better living play into the promise of an “abundant life”? Might we be shortchanging ourselves on this promise?

**Summary:** This week’s lesson focused on the “full” or “abundant” life found in Jesus Christ. It is a life lived in a responsible way, caring for our physical life as best we can. It is also a life lived in relationships, for God designed humans to live in communion with others. Most of all, it is a life totally renewed in Jesus, a life that will be changed and growing in God’s grace.

## Making Up for Lost Time

by JESSE HURDLE

I ran away from home when I was 12 and grew up on the streets of Trinidad. I survived by stealing and fighting and selling drugs. At 18 I returned to Tobago, where my mom lived. She had become a Seventh-day Adventist and wanted me to go to church with her, but I wasn't interested.

I married a good woman, but I didn't change. She went to church and prayed for me, and I went out to gamble. Then something happened, and I realized that my life was heading in the wrong direction. I hardly knew my children, and I was a terrible example to them. So, one Sabbath I went to church with my wife and committed my life to Christ. "This is an answer to prayer!" she cried.

I had a lot to make right with God and my family, but God changed me. He saved me and my marriage in spite of myself.

The church members surrounded me with prayer and put me to work. I grew in Christ and obeyed when He told me to share my faith with others.

I told my friends, my colleagues, and people on the street how God had changed me. I challenged them to give God a try.

Still, I was surprised when God asked me to hold evangelistic meetings, for I'd never gone beyond primary school. But we stepped out in faith and made the meetings a family affair. We pitched a tent and held three weeks of meetings. My wife sang, my daughter helped with the programs, and my son handled the public address system. When the meetings came to a close, the people asked for more, so we added another week of meetings. Twelve people were baptized.

Ronny was one of my best friends. He helped me repair the church roof and would do anything I asked. But he refused to let God into his life. "I'll go to church when the undertaker takes me," he'd say. I talked, I prayed, I urged. But he refused. Then one day he died of a massive heart attack at 45. His death was a huge blow to me. I felt that I had failed God because my friend refused to accept Jesus as his Savior.



Ronny's death made me realize that death is only one heartbeat away. I can't let someone go without sharing a word about God. I may not get another chance to speak to them. I think of the people I led into drugs before I was a Christian. Now I want to lead them all to Christ.

Please share your faith with others, and give your mission offerings now. One day it will be too late.

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*JESSE HURDLE shares his faith with everyone he meets in Tobago.*

# Revelation



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 7:1–6, Ps. 19:1–4, Rom. 1:18–20, 2 Tim. 3:14–16, Heb. 1:1–3.*

**Memory Text:** “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (*Hebrews 1:1, 2, NIV*).

For some people, God is a distant power who at a remote moment in the past set the world in motion but no longer interferes with what happens here. That, of course, is not the God portrayed in the Bible, who instead is consistently shown to be a loving Father, the Creator who continues to take an intimate interest in His creatures. He is the Covenant God, and He seeks to establish a bond between Himself and the people made in His image.

This God is a great Communicator. Human words cannot adequately explain who and what God is, but the fact that He constantly is referred to as speaking to His people is utterly significant.

As soon as Adam was created, God spoke to Him. Immediately after the first human inhabitant of this world had sinned, God called to him, Adam, “‘where are you?’” (*Gen. 3:9, NIV*). And ever since, God has spoken to humankind in various ways (*Heb. 1:1*). Even on the final page of the Bible we find confirmation of this in the divine appeal, “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’” (*Rev. 22:17, NIV*). This week we’ll look at various ways He speaks to us today.

**The Week at a Glance:** The God who spoke the world into existence speaks to all who are willing to listen.

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

## God Reveals Himself Through Nature

**Read** Psalm 19:1–4 and Romans 1:18–20. These are the two most cited texts when the concept of God’s revelation through nature is under discussion. Summarize in your own words what these two passages teach us.

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“God has surrounded us with nature’s beautiful scenery in order to attract and interest the mind. It is His design that we should associate the glories of nature with His character. If we faithfully study the book of nature, we shall find it a fruitful source for contemplating the infinite love and power of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 144. Those who believe in the Bible will be confirmed in their convictions that when they look at the starlit sky or see the majestic trees in the forests and the beauty of the setting sun behind snow-covered mountaintops, they are seeing the works of a loving and powerful Creator. When they see an eagle in flight, admire a tulip, or marvel about the intricacies of the human body, they see evidences of God’s invisible qualities and agree that nature indeed declares the glory of God.

But the Bible passages take us a step further. They also suggest that the nonbeliever, by looking at nature, will somehow catch a glimpse of a divine Power that designed and made all that is. In today’s world many close their eyes to this aspect. They have imbibed evolutionary thinking and want to explain all that exists in terms of chance and necessity. But, increasingly, scholars are admitting that there is so much evidence of intelligent design that this can be ignored only by those who stubbornly close their eyes to it.

**Ask** yourself a simple question: What is the more logical and reasonable explanation for the beauty and complexity of life: pure chance or a purposeful and planned-out creation? Defend your answer.

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**Read Psalm 19:1–4 and Romans 1:18–20 again. To what extent is God revealed in nature? At the same time, what things about God does nature not tell us? However revealing nature is, what else do we know about God that we can’t find by looking at the glories of creation?**



## God Speaks Through Our Conscience

“Conscience” is sometimes defined as the faculty, or inward principle, that helps us decide between right and wrong. Even those who do not believe in God usually possess some insight into what is morally acceptable and what must be rejected (*Rom. 2:14, 15*). The Christian believes that God is the supreme Lawgiver and that He has placed in humanity a conscience, even though sin has blunted this God-given tool for moral decision-making. In most Bible translations we do not find the word *conscience* in the Old Testament, though it occurs numerous times in the New Testament. But whether or not the term is used, the concept is present throughout Scripture.

**Name** a few stories in which we can see the impact of conscience on the lives of people. (See, for instance, *Gen. 42:18–23, Daniel 5, Matt. 27:3–5, John 8:1–9*.)

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Important though our conscience is, it is not always totally trustworthy. We notice that people in good conscience often come to very diverse conclusions about what to do in particular circumstances. The apostle Paul was aware of this, as his remarkable statement in 1 Corinthians 4:4 shows: “My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me” (*NIV*). The same apostle also warns that we can resist the pull of our conscience. In fact, some people appear to have seared their consciences with a hot iron (*1 Tim. 4:2*) or have corrupted them (*Titus 1:15*). On the other hand, there are ways of sharpening one’s conscience. Being in tune with God by regularly reading His Word and by frequently communicating with Him in prayer will make us more sensitive to the voice of the Spirit, who can speak to us through our conscience.

**How do you arrive at important moral decisions? Do you listen to your conscience? How can you be sure that your small, inner voice is not overruled by other voices in and around you? How can you know whether or not you can trust your conscience? When was the last time you let your conscience be your guide and ended up making a wrong moral decision? What did you learn from that experience that could help you from repeating it?**

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## God Speaks Through Prophets

Many people have a very restricted view of the gift of prophecy. Prophecy is mainly seen in terms of predictions, and the prophets they are aware of are those who have given their names to a number of books in the Bible. The facts are different. God used prophets on a much wider scale than one would think. And prophecy is not only about predictions. It stands for much more.

**How** does the relationship between Moses and his brother Aaron illustrate the key meaning of the word *prophet*? *Exod. 7:1–6*.

The passage of Exodus 7:1–6 highlights the true work of a prophet. Moses, who himself is referred to as a great prophet (*Deut. 34:10–12*), was assisted by his brother, who served as his spokesperson. “Moses is like God to Aaron, who is like a prophet to Pharaoh. The clear idea is that prophets don’t manufacture their own speeches but only pass on what they have heard from God.”—Jon Dybdahl, *Exodus*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), p. 80.

A prophet is a man or a woman who speaks on behalf of God. Those words have authority because the message comes from God, even though the prophet may choose his or her own words to convey that message. God used this manner of communicating with His people quite extensively, as Amos underlined when he stated, “The Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets” (*Amos 3:7, NIV*).

**What** does Scripture say about the continuation of the gift of prophecy beyond Old Testament times? Look at the following sample of the New Testament evidence. What do you conclude?

1. Prophets mentioned by name (*Luke 1:67, 2:36, Acts 13:1*)
2. The abiding gift (*1 Cor. 12:28, 14:1–5*)
3. False prophets (*2 Pet. 2:1, Rev. 2:20*)
4. A characteristic of the remnant church (*Rev. 12:17, 19:10*)

**What has been the impact of the writings of Ellen G. White (who had the gift of prophecy) upon your own life? How has God spoken to you through her ministry? In what ways could you better avail yourself of the blessings of this gift?**

## God Reveals Himself in His Word

Many of the things God has revealed through His prophets in the past have not been handed down and have not, eventually, found their way into the Bible. But some of those revelations from God, which were received by a few dozen people during a period of more than fifteen hundred years, were written down. The compilations of these writings is our Bible. Jesus and His contemporaries treasured the writings that we today refer to as the Old Testament. Today our Scriptures include also the Gospels and other apostolic writings from the first period of the church.

**Paul commended Timothy for his diligent reading of God’s Word, which, he said, has the capacity to make you wise for salvation. How does he in this context further describe the influence of the Written Word of God? 2 Tim. 3:14–16.**

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“As we contemplate the great things of God’s Word, we look into a fountain that broadens and deepens beneath our gaze. Its breadth and depth pass our knowledge. As we gaze, the vision widens; stretched out before us, we behold a boundless, shoreless sea. Such study has vivifying power. The mind and heart acquire new strength, new life.

“This experience is the highest evidence of the divine authorship of the Bible. We receive God’s Word as food for the soul through the same evidence by which we receive bread as food for the body.”  
—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 26.

More Bibles are sold today than ever before. New versions for specific target groups keep appearing. We have Bible versions that are more easily accessible to beginners, while we also have versions that lend themselves to liturgical use. And this is a good thing. But that does not necessarily mean that the Bible also is more widely read. In fact, there are indications that Bible reading among Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, is on the wane. Many do not know their Bible as a former generation once knew it. But only at our own eternal peril can we ignore the Word of God, which has the power to speak to us afresh every time we open it.

**How much time did you spend with your Bible during the past week? In the past month? Is Bible reading a prominent feature in your daily program? If not, why not? Compare the time you spent in front of the TV with the time spent reading the Word. What changes might you need to make?**

## Christ—God Comes to Us in Person

Getting letters from someone on a regular basis can go a long way toward getting to know that person more intimately. Receiving a picture will reveal another dimension of that person. But you will not really know that person until you actually have spent time face-to-face.

Because of sin, God could no longer commune with us as He had done with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Though He has communicated with us very effectively in various ways, He wanted to give us a fuller picture of Himself. And this He has done through Jesus.

**How** did God provide us with this full picture of Himself? *John 1:1, 2; John 14:9; Heb. 1:1–3.*

The precise wording of John 1:1 is important. John does not say that God showed Himself in the flesh, or appeared in the flesh. Rather, John says that Jesus became flesh at a definite point in time. Jesus came from above and became flesh; that is, He took on Himself our humanity. That our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became flesh for our salvation is probably the one tenet of the Christian faith that is basic to all Christian denominations.

**What** relationship is there between God's revelation in Scripture and His revelation in Jesus Christ? *John 5:36–40.*

For some the study of the Bible is an end in itself. Indeed, many gifted Bible scholars don't believe in God at all. Yet, reading the Bible without seeking to know the Lord whom it reveals can no more lead you to salvation than reading a recipe can fill your empty stomach.

Jesus Christ is the focus of the Scriptures. The Bible is about Him, about what He has revealed to us regarding the nature and character of God. The Bible doesn't save us, but it is the authoritative source of truth about the only One who can, Jesus of Nazareth.

**It's one thing to read the Bible; it's another to know the Bible; and it's another to recite texts by memory. But do you know the Lord revealed in the Bible? What are ways in which you can read the Bible in order to come away from it knowing God better?**

**Further Study:** “Many are the ways in which God is seeking to make Himself known to us and bring us into communion with Him. Nature speaks to our senses without ceasing. The open heart will be impressed with the love and glory of God as revealed through the works of His hands. The listening ear can hear and understand the communications of God through the things of nature. The green fields, the lofty trees, the buds and flowers, the passing cloud, the falling rain, the babbling brook, the glories of the heavens, speak to our hearts, and invite us to become acquainted with Him who made them all.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 85. Read this entire chapter in *Steps to Christ*, titled “A Knowledge of God” (pp. 85–91).

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 To what extent does nature help us find God? Does nature teach us anything about the God of the Bible, or does it merely impress us that there must be Something or Someone out there?
- 2 In class, talk about the importance of following one’s conscience. Then talk about the dangers that are involved. What are ways we can help others know if and when they can trust the prompting of their conscience?
- 3 What role do culture and upbringing have on the shaping of your conscience? In what ways has your culture influenced your concepts of right and wrong? How can you learn to transcend culture when you need to, that is, when your culture teaches something that is against the clear teaching of the Word of God?
- 4 If the gift of prophecy is a spiritual gift to God’s church, should we expect it to play a prominent role in our day and age? May we expect God to raise up other prophets similar to the way He called Ellen G. White more than a century ago? Discuss.
- 5 What are ways that we can study the Bible in order to come away knowing God better? What are ways to study the Bible and come away not knowing God any more than when we first started reading?

**Summary:** God wants to communicate with us. He does so through nature and by speaking through our conscience. Throughout the ages He has used prophets, and He has made the prophetic gift available even for His church today. The Bible, God’s Written Word, remains the divine Guidebook for our pilgrimage. Its focus is on what God has done for us, most sublimely in entering this world in the Person of His Son, to which all Scriptures testify.

## God's Stubborn Warrior

by SUSAN CASTILLO

David Ramos is a man of humble origins. Born in Cuba, he finished the sixth grade before he was taken from school at age 16 to join the Cuban army. When his commander learned that David was a Seventh-day Adventist, he did everything he could to force David to give up his faith. He was mistreated and punished, denied visits from his family, and kept in solitary confinement. He was subjected to hard labor and was denied proper food. At one time he was denied food for six days while he was forced to work hard at night and in the cold.

After each punishment, the guards would offer him a better education, a good job, and passes to go home if only he renounced his belief in God. But David refused to give up his faith. And his refusal infuriated his superiors, who dealt him more serious punishment and worse treatment. For three years David was persecuted and imprisoned for his faith, but he refused to renounce his Savior.

After leaving the military, David returned home and continued serving God. He was active in his church, giving Bible studies, preaching, and bringing others to Jesus.

He rode his bicycle from town to town to visit people and share God's love with them. One day as he rode along a highway, he was struck by a bus and seriously injured. He endured several surgeries and spent months recovering from his injuries. But instead of feeling bitter, David thanked God for saving his life.

Then an opportunity opened for David to bring his family to America. Their first home was in a refugee-style camp in Florida, where Cuban refugees were housed until they could be processed for immigration. While living in the camp, David continued his work for God and led many fellow refugees to the Savior. He often took his aging mother with him in her wheelchair when he went to study the Bible with someone or to preach.

Eventually David and his family settled in Oklahoma, where he continued his mission to share God's love with his new neighbors. God has blessed his efforts, and David has been instrumental in establishing a Spanish church in Oklahoma City.

David still suffers from the effects of the persecution he received while in the military and the bicycle accident. But he continues working tirelessly to lead others to Christ. He is a stubborn warrior in the army of God.

Your mission offerings help make it possible for thousands to hear the gospel and choose to follow the Savior.

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SUSAN CASTILLO is an X-ray technologist and medical assistant. She and her pastor husband live in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA.

# Sin



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Isa. 14:12–14, Matt. 23:23, 25:45, Phil. 2:6–8, Heb. 1:1–5, Rev. 5:9–12.*

**Memory Text:** “Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men” (*Romans 5:18, NIV*).

The solid optimism of former generations that everything in the world will get better and better no longer rings true today. Even after the cold war, the world is far from being a safe place. The threat of terrorism has made us all feel extremely vulnerable. Science, which was supposed to be the harbinger of a better world, now threatens to wreak havoc on that world. The common sources of energy are being depleted. The icecaps are melting. Crime is a sad fact of life everywhere. Human beings show little, if any, signs of moral improvement over past generations. The gap between rich and poor constantly is widening. Our daily installment of news almost invariably tells us about atrocities and moral decay. No wonder someone once said that the Christian teaching of human sinfulness is one teaching that is easily verifiable. That is, that's one doctrine we don't need to take on faith.

Yet, as bad as sin is, it's not the end of the story. Sure, sin is real, but so is divine grace.

**The Week at a Glance:** Sin, and the results of sin, are a painful reality in human life. Thank God for Jesus, who has made a way of escape for us all.

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

## Sin Is Rebellion

What is the essence of sin? How does the Bible define it? First John 3:4 (*NIV*) states, “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.” The New Living Translation reads, “Sin opposes the law,” while the traditional KJV rendering defines sin as “transgression of the law.” But it is not just any law that humanity has broken—it is God’s law. Humans have rebelled against their Maker, pretending that they themselves are the measure of all things rather than in humble trust submitting to the wisdom and love of God.

**What** do the following Bible passages reveal about the essence of sin? *Gen. 3:1–7, Isa. 14:12–14, Rev. 12:7–9.*

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Why did God punish Adam and Eve for what seemed to be an insignificant matter? It may have seemed unimportant, but there was a crucial principle involved. “There was nothing poisonous in the fruit itself, and the sin was not merely in yielding to appetite. It was distrust of God’s goodness, disbelief of His word, and rejection of His authority, that made our first parents transgressors, and that brought into the world a knowledge of evil. It was this that opened the door to every species of falsehood and error.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 25.

**What** will be a major characteristic of God’s people in the time of the end? *Rev. 14:12.* How does the issue of obedience come into play here?

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God has done for us all that infinite love could. In return He asks of us love and obedience. In a time in which the world is plagued by rampant lawlessness and a relativistic philosophy—which claims that good and evil depend simply on cultural circumstances and communal and personal preferences—there must and will be a people who will staunchly defend God’s standard of holiness, the Ten Commandments.

**We tend to think of rebellion as an outright attack and rejection of authority. Yet, it can come in much more subtle forms. How could you tell if, perhaps, you yourself are harboring some rebellious attitudes toward God?**



## Missing the Mark

The seriousness of sin is often played down. “Ah, we cannot all be perfect!” people say. But sin is serious business. “The full seriousness of sin can only become apparent when we have understood the full potentialities of human existence as created in the image of God.” —John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1966), p. 238.

Sin does not only have to do with wrongfully committed acts. It also includes the desire and the fantasizing about things that we know are wrong (*Matt. 5:28*).

**What** have you fantasized about in the past 24 hours? Would you be ashamed to have those thoughts made public? What should your answer tell you about where your heart is? *See Rom. 8:6.*

There also is a category of sin that usually is referred to as “sins of omission.” This refers to the willful neglect of duty, the conscious refusal to do something one knows ought to be done.

**In** Matthew 23:23 and Matthew 25:45 we find statements made by Jesus that deal with sins of omission. Read these verses in their context. What are the implications of these statements?

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**Also** in chapter 25 of Matthew’s Gospel, we find the parable of the talents (*vss. 14–28*). What happened to the servant who had hidden his one talent? What is the significance of this for our discussion?

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We all have been given certain talents. It is part of the concept of stewardship that we utilize our talents to the full. We must answer to God for what we fail to do with what He has given us. Let us remember the words of the apostle Peter: “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (*1 Pet. 4:10, NIV*).

**Sins of omission, sins of thought—who hasn’t been guilty of them all? Dwell on the promise of forgiveness that we can have in Jesus. Why should this mean so much to us?**

## “Original” Sin

Theologians often distinguish between the sinful acts that we commit and the *sinful nature* that we possess. We all have been corrupted by Adam’s fall; we all are deemed sinners even before we sin. The widespread rite of infant baptism is linked closely with the acknowledgment of this belief. The idea is that a newborn child who dies without having been baptized will be lost eternally because the child is a sinner, and if this sinfulness is not somehow taken care of, the child loses eternal life.

There is no scriptural support for this practice, nor for the idea that a child who dies is automatically condemned to destruction. Now, it is true that the “original” sin of Adam and Eve has had all-pervasive consequences that impact everyone. Sin entered the world through one person, and through this sin death came to “all men” (*Rom. 5:12, NIV*).

**How** does the apostle Paul describe the powerful tendencies toward sinful behavior with which all of us are born? *Rom. 8:7, 8; 7:21–24*. **How** have you experienced the reality of these tendencies in your own life?

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Through the ages some Christians have declared that they achieved a state of perfection. Yet, those who claim perfection delude themselves. It is contrary to the clear words of Scripture. Quoting Psalm 106:6, Paul stated, “‘There is no one righteous, not even one!’” (*Rom. 3:10, NIV*). His fellow apostle John is just as adamant: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves” (*1 John 1:8, NIV*).

“Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, or a day. It is a continual growth in grace. We know not one day how strong will be our conflict the next. Satan lives, and is active, and every day we need to earnestly cry to God for help and strength to resist him. As long as Satan reigns we shall have self to subdue, besetments to overcome, and there is no stopping place. There is no point to which we can come and say we have fully attained.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 947.

**Suppose you reached a point where you truly had victory over sin; that is, you weren’t committing any known sin. More so, you were always kind, loving, generous, and living in accordance with all the light you had. Suppose you “perfectly” reflected the character of Jesus. Why, though, would you still need a Savior whose righteousness alone can allow you to stand with “no condemnation” (*Rom. 8:1*) before God?**

## Corporate Versus Personal Sin?

Ever since the Fall, the world has been tainted by sin. The results of sin are visible in nature. They are visible also in wars, in the evil of slavery and other forms of exploitation, and also in the ways in which we ravage natural resources. The world of the past and of the present is full of materialism, egotism, injustice, and perversion.

These facts raise many difficult questions. Foremost among these is whether we as individuals carry any responsibility for these things and if we should assume any guilt for this corporate state of sinfulness. The following considerations may help us to deal with this dilemma.

1. Consider how corporate wrongs in our world may be seen against the background of the great controversy. “Behind the rise and fall of nations and the play and counterplay of human interests lies the unseen struggle between the Godhead, together with the host of loyal angels, and Satan with his hosts of fallen angels—a struggle that directly impacts all human activity.”—Frank Holbrook, “The Great Controversy,” in Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), p. 995.

2. Consider the totally destructive nature of sin. Sin wants to destroy everything that has any value. Sin and death are synonymous, and they are everywhere. There is, therefore, no hope for this world without divine intervention, because the powers of sin and death far exceed our human abilities to deal with them.

3. But also consider that we all have some influence. We can all make small decisions that at times may increase or diminish, however slightly, the evil in this world. We can work for peace and justice. We can do acts of compassion. We can choose to cooperate with all who want to protect the environment. What do such passages as Ecclesiastes 9:10, Luke 16:10, and Philippians 4:8, 9 contribute to our understanding of this issue?

**It’s so easy just to throw your arms up in despair and say, “The problems are too great. What can little, old me do to help?” Nevertheless, how should the example of Jesus and the good He did healing the sick and comforting the poor (which, considering all the sick and the poor in the world at that time, was comparatively small) influence our decisions to try to make the world a better place?**

## The Only Solution for the Sin Problem

There is no easy or cheap solution to the sin problem. Sin cannot be overcome by human determination and perseverance. Sin is larger than we are. The solution must therefore also supersede our possibilities. There is a lot of confusion among people about the issue of salvation. Many claim there are many different roads to the kingdom. The roads differ, they say, but they all lead to the same destination. But they are wrong.

**What** is the clear testimony of Scripture regarding the one and only road toward salvation? *John 10:7, 14:6, Acts 4:12.*

We do not know who will enter through the gates of the kingdom. Thank God, that decision is in the hands of the One to whom judgment has been given, the One who is love and justice personified. But we do know one thing: Those who receive eternal life do so only because Christ died for them. Some may never have had the privilege of learning about their Savior. But that takes nothing away from the fact that if they are saved it will be through the name of Christ, even if they have never themselves heard that name.

**Why** was Jesus the only One who could save fallen humanity? *Phil. 2:6–8, Heb. 1:1–5, Rev. 5:9–12.*

“The divine Son of God was the only sacrifice of sufficient value to fully satisfy the claims of God’s perfect law. . . . Upon Christ no requirements were laid. He had power to lay down His life, and to take it again. No obligation was laid upon Him to undertake the work of atonement. It was a voluntary sacrifice that He made. His life was of sufficient value to rescue man from his fallen condition.

“The Son of God was in the form of God, and He thought it not robbery to be equal with God. He was the only one, who as a man walked the earth, who could say to all men, Who of you convinceth me of sin? He had united with the Father in the creation of man, and He had power through His own divine perfection of character to atone for man’s sin, and to elevate him, and bring him back to his first estate.”  
—Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up*, p. 24.

**Think of just how bad sin must be that it cost so much, the death of Jesus Himself, in order to atone for it. How can keeping this amazing truth before you help you in your own struggle with sin?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Fall of Satan,” “The Fall of Man,” and “The Plan of Salvation,” pp. 145–153, in *Early Writings*. These three short chapters are about the origin of sin in heaven and on earth and about the first revelation of the plan of salvation.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① As Seventh-day Adventists, we know that the world is not going to get better but worse—much worse, in fact. The question is, How are we to relate to the world’s problems? Do we just shrug them off, saying, “Well, God said that things were going to be bad, and they are, so what can we do about them?” Or do we get so involved in trying to solve the world’s problems that we forget our calling to point people to the only solution: that is, Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and is coming back? How do we strike the right balance?
- ② Should our church be clearer in its condemnation of the corporate evils in this world? Or would this have little impact and only detract from the commission to take the gospel to every individual? At the same time, if we keep quiet about many of these big issues, where is our moral credibility?
- ③ Of all the horrible effects of sin, death has to be the worst. Absolutely nothing we as humans can do can reverse it. Sin has had such devastating effects that only the supernatural intervention of God can solve it. What should that tell us about how important it is that we strive against sin with all our God-given strength?
- ④ As Seventh-day Adventists, central to our understanding of the whole question of sin and evil is the great controversy scenario, the idea that onlooking intelligences from other worlds are watching what is happening here and seeing how God will deal with sin and its consequences. Imagine being a sinless being from another part of the universe who has seen what sin has done to us. What would they see? What would they be thinking? What lessons might they be learning from what they see us going through here? Imagine how incomprehensible and irrational some of our actions must seem to them.

**Summary:** Sin has infected all spheres of life. We are faced with the reality of something that far exceeds our ability to deal with. But it does not exceed the power and the love of God. He has decisively dealt with the sin problem in His Son, Jesus Christ.

## Ministry on the River Bank

by DANIEL JIAO

Brother Chen is 92 years old and a retired piano tuner. But he's not retired from God's work. A few years ago he and his wife moved to her hometown in China. There they began sharing their faith with their neighbors, and a few people started coming to their home to worship on Sabbath, in spite of the government's warning that this was illegal.

Brother Chen spent his own money to print some tracts and pamphlets. Every day he sits on a stool on the walkway beside the river that runs through his town. He chats with people who pass by and gives those who seem interested a tract or a pamphlet. If the person responds to the literature or to Brother Chen's testimony, he invites them to his small apartment on Sabbath to worship.

Mae had seen Brother Chen sitting beside the river every day. One day she stopped to talk to him and soon learned that he was a Christian, and she wanted to know more. After several conversations, she accepted Chen's invitation to visit his house group, and eventually she was baptized.

Another couple met him at the river and began listening to his testimony. They were moved by God's love, and soon they too were baptized. Eventually this couple became Global Mission pioneers. Today they are helping to establish the church that meets in the Chens' home.

When the little group grew too large for the tiny apartment Chen and his wife were renting, Brother Chen found a larger apartment, one that would seat 50 people. He wanted to buy it, but all he had was the money he had saved for his funeral. He stepped out in faith and bought the apartment.

Chen's money was not enough to pay for the apartment, so a business friend responded by paying a large sum toward the apartment, and a newly baptized couple sold a family heirloom and donated the money to purchase the apartment-church. Together the believers were able to pay for the apartment. Brother Chen, concerned that upon his death the apartment would be taken from the church, registered the apartment in the church's name instead of his own.

Currently some twenty people worship in the apartment-church each week. And Brother Chen still sits on a chair on the riverside ready with a smile and a tract and a few words about his friend Jesus. And the Global Mission pioneers who work with him follow up on interests Brother Chen meets during his riverside outreach.

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DANIEL JIAO is a director of Chinese Ministry in Southwest China.

# 20 QUESTIONS GOD wants to ask YOU

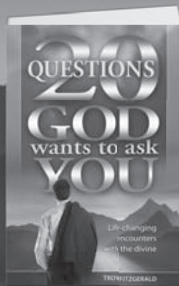
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# Grace



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 25:8; Isaiah 53; Rom. 5:18, 19; 2 Cor. 3:16–18; Eph. 2:4–10; Titus 2:11–14.*

**Memory Text:** “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (*Romans 5:8*).

**D**uring a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of returns from death. The debate went on for some time until Christian writer C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. “‘What’s the rumpus about?’ he asked and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity’s unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, ‘Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.’” —Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), p. 45.

Last week we were confronted with the dreadful phenomenon of sin, the “secret power of lawlessness” (*2 Thess. 2:7, NIV*). In the final section we saw that through divine intervention a solution has been provided. What that intervention was, and what it accomplished for us, will be the focus of this week’s study.

**The Week at a Glance:** What are some of the images God uses to teach us the plan of salvation? What is atonement? How central is the concept of substitution to our understanding of the Cross?

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

## God Provides Salvation

The story of how Abraham’s loyalty was tested is well known. God asked him to sacrifice his son Isaac. Unaware of what God had told his father to do, and thinking that they were simply going to offer a sacrifice somewhere, Isaac asked why they had not taken an animal with them. Abraham then replied with the prophetic words that found their echo throughout the pages of the Old, as well as the New Testament: “ ‘God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering’ ” (*Gen. 22:8, NIV*).

**What** was the prophetic significance of Abraham’s words to his son?

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**Where** else in the Old Testament do we find texts that point to the redemption that was to come through Christ? What are those texts, and what do they say? See, for example, *Gen. 3:15, Exod. 25:8, Isaiah 53*.

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Jesus Christ is the center of the Old Testament. Indeed, the whole purpose of the earthly sanctuary service was to point to the coming of the Messiah (*see Hebrews 8, 9*). Everything prior to His entrance into the world was a mere prelude to the Cross. God waited until the right moment. Then, when “the time had fully come” (*Gal. 4:4, NIV*), Christ came to live among us.

“Through every age, through every hour, the love of God had been exercised toward the fallen race. Notwithstanding the perversity of men, the signals of mercy had been continually exhibited. And when the fullness of the time had come, the Deity was glorified by pouring upon the world a flood of healing grace that was never to be obstructed or withdrawn till the plan of salvation should be fulfilled.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 37.

**Think how many long centuries had passed between the promises of the coming Messiah and His coming. What should that tell us—beings who usually live only eighty short years or so at best—about patience, about trusting in God though things seem to take so long?**

## Pictures of the Miracle of Grace

How do you explain to a three-year-old child what electricity is? How do you explain to those deep in the African jungles, who have never traveled more than 25 miles from where they live, what traffic lights are for and how an elevator works? How can a physicist ever hope to explain Einstein's relativity theory to a person whose education remained limited to elementary school? God faced a communication gap that went far beyond these examples of human communication barriers. The divine love demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus Christ cannot be captured fully in human words. Yet, God wanted us to have an adequate idea of what is involved in His plan of salvation. God inspired the authors of the Scriptures to use a number of different word-pictures, each of which gives us further insight into the mystery of His grace. None of these images should be used in isolation from the other perspectives. Taken together, however, they will leave us with a sense of wonder and immense gratitude.

**What** is one of the most prominent word-pictures God used to help us catch some profound glimpses of the mystery of grace? *Isa. 53:7, John 1:29.*

**What** other symbolism is used to illustrate a further dimension of the truth of the atonement? *Matt. 20:28, Acts 20:28, 1 Cor. 6:20.*

We must be careful not to use one particular symbol to the exclusion of other word-pictures. When we combine everything that is said about the atonement, we arrive at as full a picture as we finite human beings can absorb. Nevertheless, the image of a ransom, of a high price paid for us, is a powerful one. "Christ redeemed us from sin, that is, He bought us back from sin. . . . What the metaphor intends is that (a) the means of our salvation is costly and that (b) we have passed from one state to another—from the state of slavery to the state of nearness to God. A redemption means the passing over of ownership at a cost."—Edward W. H. Vick, *Let Me Assure You* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1968), p. 33.

**Dwell on the implications of this idea that the Creator of the universe, the One who made all that is (*John 1:1–3*), voluntarily went to the cross as the only means of saving us from eternal ruin. Why should the reality of this truth heavily influence how we live? Think how foolish it is to let anything earthly turn us away from the Cross.**

## What Happened at Calvary?

There is a lot of discussion among theologians about the doctrine of atonement. Two main concepts are promoted. Some opt for an objective view of the atonement while others defend a subjective view. What does this mean? The first school of thought emphasizes that something actually occurred at a historical point in time on a hill just outside of Jerusalem, a concrete, historical event that provided the basis for our salvation. Other theologians underline the fact that our response to the demonstration of Jesus' love and self-sacrifice on the cross is the crucial point: We are changed when we contemplate a love so great! Both perspectives are true and, understood together, complement each other.

**How** does the Bible explain the relationship between what Christ did for us and what we as sinful beings, in fact, deserve? *Isa. 53:4, 5; Rom. 5:18, 19.*

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The idea that Jesus Christ died in our place, so that we will not suffer eternal death but become partakers of the life that He offers, is usually referred to as the concept of substitution. To many this is an abhorrent idea. They do not like the legalistic language often used or the concept of divine wrath against sin. But whatever we may like or dislike, the grandiose truth is that God has dealt with the sin problem in the way He decided was suitable. Being just, He could not ignore sin; being love, He could not abandon the sinner. We should have paid the penalty of eternal death ourselves because we are the guilty ones. But Jesus was willing to take our place! That's what happened at the cross. This actual event, that of His substitution in our stead, became the basis for our redemption.

Then, as a result of what Christ has done for us, as a response to His substitution in our place, we are drawn to Him, we respond to Him, we change our attitude toward Him and other humans beings, as well. This is the complementary, subjective side to the plan of salvation (*John 12:32, Rom. 5:1*).

**Think about all the bad things you have done and (perhaps) might still do. Then realize that Jesus, at the cross, suffered the punishment that you deserve for those actions. How do you feel, knowing that He suffered in your stead? What should your response be, knowing what Jesus went through on your behalf?**

## A Change of Heart

The unparalleled manifestation of divine compassion and grace on Calvary has changed millions of hearts. From the very moment He hung dying on the cross, people were changed by beholding the love of Christ. One of the criminals crucified with Him noticed that Jesus was someone special, with a future beyond this ignominious death (*Luke 23:39–43*). And even the Roman centurion noticed that Jesus was no criminal (*vs. 47*).

**How** should our lives be changed by beholding Jesus and what He has done for us? *2 Cor. 3:16–18; Heb. 12:2, 3.*

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“Let the repenting sinner fix his eyes upon ‘the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29); and *by beholding, he becomes changed*. His fear is turned to joy, his doubts to hope. Gratitude springs up. The stony heart is broken. A tide of love sweeps into the soul. Christ is in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. When . . . we behold Him in Gethsemane, sweating great drops of blood, and on the cross dying in agony—when we see this, self will no longer clamor to be recognized. Looking unto Jesus, we shall be ashamed of our coldness, our lethargy, our self-seeking. We shall be willing to be anything or nothing, so that we may do heart service for the Master.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 439, 440; italics supplied.

**How** well do her words reflect your own experience with Christ? What could be holding you back from a deeper experience with Him? How much time do you spend contemplating Calvary?

Theologians propose various theories of the atonement. But when everything is said and done, there is no one theory or combination of theories that will do justice to the marvel of God’s grace (*see 1 Cor. 1:20–25*). It is good to talk together about the passages of Scripture that reveal different aspects of Jesus’ sacrifice. But what Jesus did for us should be not only a topic of debate but prayerfully contemplated and experienced. Though there’s much we can’t understand, we have been given enough so that we should marvel at what God has done for us in Christ.

## Christ Our Salvation

It's easy for Christians to get sidetracked. For some, the focus of their faith is either on the Bible, or on the church, or on the traditions or doctrines of their church. While all these have their role, they can be very problematic if they turn us away from Jesus, who alone is the Source of our salvation.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we often refer to the “truth” as the focus of our faith. There is nothing wrong with that, as long as we do not reduce our concept of truth to a list of doctrines to which we intellectually ascribe. Our faith should find its center in the truth as we find it in Jesus. We believe in a Person who has revealed our God to us, who has come to redeem us, who presently is our heavenly Mediator, and who will return to take us home. This must be of primary importance to us.

**What** do such passages as Ephesians 2:4–10 and Titus 2:11–14 teach us about the centrality of Christ in our faith?

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Ephesians 2:4–10 is an extraordinarily rich passage. It underlines several times that we are saved by grace. This grace is described as “incomparable riches” (*vs. 6, NIV*), which issue from God’s “great love for us” (*vs. 4, NIV*). This grace is *gratis*, free. It cannot be earned. Our works do not bring us eternal life. If they did, we would have reason to boast about our own goodness. It is God’s grace that will bring visible changes in our daily lives and that will enable us to do “good” works (*vs. 10*). But even these good deeds are, essentially, God’s work in us.

**What** magnificent description of the centrality of Jesus Christ to our faith do we find in Paul’s words as recorded in Acts 17:28? See also *Gal. 2:16–20*.

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**How should the doctrines we have as Adventists help us better understand what Christ has done for us? Suppose, for instance, that you believed in eternal torment in hell. How would that, or other false teachings, impact your understanding of Christ? Why then are correct doctrines so important in helping us come to know Jesus better?**

**Further Study:** The book *Seventh-day Adventists* will almost automatically refer to when asked about the atoning work of Christ is Ellen G. White's *The Desire of Ages*. Chapters 78 and 79 (pp. 741–768) are particularly relevant in the context of this week's study. Note the statement on page 751: "As Jesus, crucified with the thieves, was placed 'in the midst,' so His cross was placed in the midst of a world lying in sin. And the words of pardon spoken to the penitent thief kindled a light that will shine to the earth's remotest bounds."

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Some people are offended by the idea that God demanded the life of His Son as a "payment" for the sins of humankind. That, though, is one of the images used by the Bible, so we must take it for what it says. What should the image tell us about the seriousness of sin and how costly our redemption was?
- 2 If there is one doctrine many contemporary people object to, it is the atonement. Many do not accept the idea that our problem should be solved by an intervention from the "outside." Should not each person accept responsibility for what he or she has done? How do you explain the need for divine intervention to such people? Also, ask these people about the problem of death. How is that problem going to be solved if not by divine intervention?
- 3 Those who are saved by grace must also show grace to those around them. How do we as individuals show that our lives are embedded in grace? How does a church model this divine grace?
- 4 Why is the "subjective" side of the Cross so important, as well? That is, how should the realization of Christ's death for us change us? What should it teach us about forgiveness, about humility, about patience, about love for the unlovable? What are some concrete and practical ways we can reveal the reality of what the Cross means to us?

**Summary:** Theologians have developed many theories about the atonement. Most are deficient or at least one-sided. They may be compared with pictures taken from different sides of the Himalayas. They all show the mountains but do not provide a complete picture. The miracle of grace must not be reduced to a formula to which we give intellectual assent. It is the ground of our faith. Christ died for us so that we can have eternal life. Without Him, we are lost. With Him as our Savior, our future is secure.

## Ooha's Fervent Faith

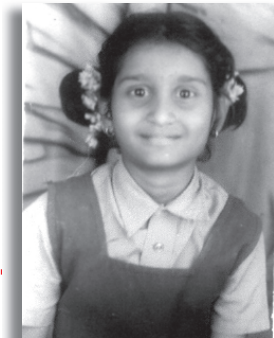
by Y. S. METHUSELAH

Eight-year-old Ooha looked longingly out the door of her grandmother's small house in the village of Venkatapuram, in southeastern India. She scanned the empty plot of land across the road and then closed her eyes in prayer. Ooha, like the other new believers in her village, has a wish. No, it's more than a wish; it's a passion. She wants to worship God in a church, a real church.

When Adventist lay workers held evangelistic meetings in Ooha's village, hundreds of people attended. And when they were invited to follow Jesus, many left their other gods and accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Their faith is fervent, and their determination to be true to God's commandments is strong. Every Sabbath and often during the week they gather in homes to worship and pray, for they, like many congregations throughout India, have no church in which to worship.

The church members are farmers. They don't earn a lot. But they give what they can to buy bricks for the church that one day will stand in the empty lot. Progress is slow, and others in their village—mostly non-Christians—urge the new believers to find a stronger god, for their God must not be very powerful if He cannot provide a temple in which to worship Him. The believers understand how their neighbors think, but it stings to hear the words, "Your God must not be strong."

Ooha hears the words too. She has no money to add to the church's building fund, but she is doing her part. Ever since the missionaries told them about Jesus, Ooha has prayed for a church. Every Sabbath she fasts and prays for the church that she is sure God will provide. She refuses to miss a single Sabbath, and she plans to continue fasting and praying until the church becomes a reality and is dedicated. So on Sabbath, while other children run after morning worship, Ooha fasts and prays that God will provide a way for them to have a church in which to worship and bring their friends to meet God.



Your mission offerings have helped lead thousands of people in India to the Savior. Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offerings have helped build hundreds of churches there, as well. Thank you for sharing so that others may meet Jesus.

Ooha (left). Y. S. METHUSELAH is director of the Northwest Andhra Region in southeastern India.



# Rest



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 2:2, 3; Deut. 5:12–15; Isa. 58:12–14; Ezek. 20:12; Heb. 4:9–11.*

**Memory Text:** “Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.’” (*Mark 2:27, 28, NIV*).

If there is anything in the Christian faith relevant for people living at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is the Sabbath. It is the medicine badly needed by millions in societies plagued by stress, heart problems, and burnout. It offers escape from the never-ending pressures of modern life. It provides a possibility to recharge our empty batteries and to refocus on the real priorities in life. The Sabbath tells us that there is a time to close the door of our home and our mind to the clutter and noise of the world and to come into the presence of the One who made us and who knows what we need.

“If there is any command hurried and hassled modern people need, it is the Sabbath. We are so busy trying to create meaning in our own life and serving ourselves that we forget that God is the only One who can give meaning to our lives. We show our ‘resting’ in Him by resting on His day.”—Jon L. Dybdahl, *Exodus*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), p. 186.

**The Week at a Glance:** Why is the Sabbath so important for us? Why did God institute the Sabbath? What is holy time? Who or what makes the Sabbath holy? How can we make Sabbath keeping a delightful and meaningful experience?

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

## God's Gift for Busy People

Two basic institutions for all humankind date from the first week of earth's history: marriage and the Sabbath. They are an intrinsic part of the divine program for human happiness. No wonder that both have, through the ages, been so much under attack from the evil one. God knew what humanity would need, and He therefore created time with a perfect cycle of six "normal" days plus one extraordinary day: the Sabbath. And ever since, those who have respected this divinely instituted rhythm have been blessed by it.

**Why** did God Himself rest on the seventh day after the creation of the world? *Gen. 2:2, 3.*

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**With** what term does the prophet Ezekiel refer to the Sabbath? What do you think that means? *Ezek. 20:12.*

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"After resting upon the seventh day, God sanctified it, or set it apart, as a day of rest for man. Following the example of the Creator, man was to rest upon this sacred day, that as he should look upon the heavens and the earth, he might reflect upon God's great work of creation; and that as he should behold the evidences of God's wisdom and goodness, his heart might be filled with love and reverence for his Maker.

"God saw that a Sabbath was essential for man, even in Paradise. He needed to lay aside his own interests and pursuits for one day of the seven, that he might more fully contemplate the works of God and meditate upon His power and goodness. He needed a Sabbath to remind him more vividly of God and to awaken gratitude because all that he enjoyed and possessed came from the beneficent hand of the Creator."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 47, 48.

**What is your experience with the Sabbath? Do you enjoy it? Do you come to a deeper appreciation of God through contemplating the marvels of His creation? If not, what changes could you make that could help you have a more fulfilling Sabbath experience?**

## Holy Time

The word *holy* occurs in the Bible in different settings. People are sometimes referred to as holy; so are objects or time periods. The core meaning is “to set aside for a specific use.” Priests were *holy* people because they were singled out for service in the sanctuary. They handled *holy* vessels and instruments, which were withdrawn from secular use for a specific ritual purpose. Similarly, *holy* days are marked by God for a specific purpose. Once they have been singled out as *holy*, they are no longer available for common use, because they have been destined for a higher purpose. The activities on such *holy* days must correspond with the purpose God has attached to such days.

**We** must “remember” to keep the Sabbath holy. Do we or does God make the day holy? What difference does that make? *Gen. 2:3, Isa. 58:13.*

“The Sabbath is a powerful testimony to the sovereignty of God. Only he can create, and only he can make something holy. This is why Adventists object so strongly to the change from Sabbath to Sunday as the Christian day of rest and worship. Without a clear divine mandate, such a development is nothing less than an affront to God.” —Richard Rice, *The Reign of God* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1997), p. 403.

**How** does the weekly holy seventh-day Sabbath impact those who choose to obey the command to keep the Sabbath according to God’s appointed day of holy time? *Exod. 31:12, 13.*

Keeping the Sabbath combines internal with external aspects. When our Sabbath keeping is only a matter of external behavior, following a list of rules, we have missed its true meaning. But, at the same time, our Sabbath keeping is visible to others. It tells other people that we are separate and different. It is a sign of our loyalty to our Creator and Redeemer.

**God wants His people to be “holy”; that is, He wants people who have consciously separated themselves from the things of this world. How should keeping the Sabbath help you in a concrete way to be “separate” from the world? How should the reality of the approaching Sabbath each week serve as a reminder to you when facing temptations during the week, that we are supposed to be a holy people, a people separate from the defiling things of the world?**

## Experiencing the Joy of the Sabbath

When we talk about the Sabbath commandment, we usually refer to the version we find in Exodus 20. There the commandment is anchored in the Creation of the world. Every Sabbath we are reminded that God is our Creator and that we are His creatures, with all that this glorious truth implies. But in the version of the Ten Commandments in the book of Deuteronomy we discover an additional aspect. The weekly Sabbath is also a commemoration of Israel's delivery from Egyptian bondage and thus, by extension, of every kind of slavery from which God's grace has set humanity free.

**Read Deuteronomy 5:12–15 carefully and compare it with Exodus 20:8–11. What do they add to each other? How do they complement each other? Are there possibly still other things we ought to “remember” in our Sabbath keeping? If so, what might they be?**

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The Sabbath is a sign not only of creation but of redemption. It points us to the salvation we have in Jesus, who not only re-creates us now (*2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 6:15*) but offers the hope of an eternity in a new heaven and a new earth (*2 Pet. 3:13*). In fact, the Jews have seen the Sabbath as a symbol of the “world to come”; that is, the new heaven and the new earth. It's a weekly foretaste of what we will have for eternity and should serve as a special reminder of what we have been given in Jesus.

On a more practical level, Sabbath helps to free us from the slavery of the clock and the calendar. Many are slaves of computers and mobile phones also. For many people it has become incredibly difficult to separate work time from leisure time. It seems that modern life requires that we can always be reached and always must be ready to switch into our work mode. The Sabbath is the perfect antidote to this disease, which threatens every form of true rest, both physical and spiritual.

“Setting aside a holy Sabbath means that we can cease our productivity and accomplishments for one day in every seven. The exciting thing about such a practice is that it changes our attitudes for the rest of the week. It frees us up to worry less about how much we produce on the other days. Furthermore, when we end that futile chasing after wind, we can truly rest and learn delight in new ways.”—Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), p. 19.

## Modeling Sabbath Rest to the World

**Read** Isaiah 58:12–14. What principles can we take away from these verses about Sabbath keeping that help us better experience the blessings God has for us if we remember the Sabbath properly?

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It is an extremely unfortunate reality: Many Adventists do not truly enjoy God’s Sabbath. Some remember with utter frustration the ways in which the Sabbath was kept in their parental home. Even in Adventist institutions, Sabbath keeping can leave much to be desired. Rules and regulations are supposed to ensure that the Sabbath is kept “holy.” Some of these rules are based on biblical principles, but many have, in actual fact, more to do with tradition and culture than with a “Thus says the Lord.”

The Sabbath never must be a day mainly associated with prohibitions and restrictions. If we are looking for a model to follow, we must let ourselves be inspired by the example of Jesus.

**Look** carefully at the following passages and discover how Jesus, our ultimate Example, kept the seventh-day Sabbath “holy.” *Mark 2:23–3:6, Luke 4:16, 6:1–11.*

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“Heaven’s work never ceases, and men should never rest from doing good. The Sabbath is not intended to be a period of useless inactivity. The law forbids secular labor on the rest day of the Lord; the toil that gains a livelihood must cease; no labor for worldly pleasure or profit is lawful upon that day; but as God ceased His labor of creating, and rested upon the Sabbath and blessed it, so man is to leave the occupations of his daily life, and devote those sacred hours to healthful rest, to worship, and to holy deeds. The work of Christ in healing the sick was in perfect accord with the law. It honored the Sabbath.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 207.

**Try to imagine what the “perfect” Sabbath would be like. How would you keep it? What would be available to you that you could not have during the workweek? Bring your description to class on Sabbath.**

## The Sign of Rest

As Sabbath keepers we often are accused of trying to work our way to heaven by keeping the Sabbath. We hear that all the time. How should we respond?

Read again the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20. What does it tell us to do? It tells us, as well as our sons, our daughters, our servants, our animals, and even the strangers among us to rest. It's all about rest.

Now, a simple question: How is it that the one commandment devoted to rest, the one commandment that specifically expresses rest, the one commandment that gives us a special opportunity to rest—how has this been turned into the universal “New Covenant” symbol of works? The only commandment that, by its nature, is all about rest has become, for many, the metaphor for salvation by works.

What's wrong with this picture?

Indeed, far from being a symbol of works, the Sabbath is the Bible's eternal symbol of the rest that God's people have always had in Him.

**Read** Hebrews 4:9–11. What is the message to us here about the Sabbath?

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From the pre-Fall world of Adam and Eve's Eden to the New Covenant rest that God's followers have in Christ's work of redemption for them, the Sabbath is a real-time manifestation of the rest that Christ offers to all. In Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus calls us to rest in Him. He will give us rest, and that rest finds one expression in His universal Sabbath day. Anyone can say that they are resting in Christ: anyone can say that they are saved by grace. But the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath is a visible expression of that rest, a living parable of what it means to be covered by His grace. Our weekly rest from our secular, worldly works stands as a symbol of our rest in the completed work of Jesus for us.

Our obedience to this commandment is a way of saying, “We're so sure of our salvation in Jesus, we're so firm and secure in what Christ has done for us, that we can—in a special way—rest from any of our works because we know what Christ has accomplished for humanity through His death and resurrection.”

Sabbath is a very real, very expressive, very visible expression and manifestation of the rest that we have in Jesus and what He has done for us. We don't have to say it; we can express it in a real way, a way that those who don't keep the Sabbath can't.

**Further Study:** Read the comments made by Ellen G. White on the giving of the Ten Commandment law in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 303–310, and on the story about Jesus’ Sabbath keeping together with His disciples in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 281–289.

A rich source for additional information is, Walter F. Specht, “The Sabbath in the New Testament,” in Kenneth A. Strand, ed., *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1982), pp. 92–113.

Note in particular this passage: “In Mark’s account (chap. 2:27), Jesus then raised the issue of the purpose of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was not an end in itself. . . . It was designed to be a blessing to man, a day of physical rest, but also a day devoted to spiritual exercises. The Pharisees treated the day as though man were created to serve the Sabbath, rather than the Sabbath meeting the needs of man. R. Shim’on ben Menasya about A.D. 180 made a similar statement [to the statement made by Jesus]: ‘The Sabbath is given over to you but you are not surrendered to the Sabbath.’ ”—Page 96.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① In class, compare your descriptions of what a “perfect” Sabbath would be like. What can you do to come as close as possible to that ideal?
- ② Earlier in the week it was suggested that some of the rules and restrictions we apply to the Sabbath are rooted more in tradition than in the Word of God. As a class, discuss what these human-made rules might be, as opposed to what the Bible says. How can we know the difference?
- ③ Dwell more on the idea expressed in Thursday’s lesson. How can we better show the world that the special rest that we enjoy in Jesus through the Sabbath reveals the reality of Christ’s grace in our lives? What things might we have done that give others the wrong impression?

**Summary:** The Sabbath is God’s gift to humanity. It is the perfect antidote for today’s restlessness and stress. It is a very specific weekly amount of time that God has made “holy” for us. The day can, if approached with the right attitude, be a source of physical and spiritual rest and a time of great joy. The ultimate Example of true Sabbath keeping is Jesus, who referred very significantly to Himself as the Lord of the Sabbath.

## The Attack That Saved a Life

by SILILE FEIN MAZIBISA

It was Saturday evening, and Thabani was walking home from choir practice with his friend, Thomas. Thomas wasn't an Adventist, but he enjoyed spending time with Thabani.

As the teenagers walked down the quiet street in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, they heard footsteps behind them. But they paid little attention, for they were in a safe neighborhood—they thought. Suddenly four men raced toward them and attacked Thabani. Three grabbed him while the fourth searched his pockets for valuables.

Thomas ran shouting for help, but no one would open their door. Thabani tried to shake off the men and run, but his attackers held him tightly. In the struggle, one of the assailants stabbed Thabani behind his ear. Finally Thabani broke away and stumbled toward Thomas, who had found someone to help them. When the assailants saw another man coming to help the boys, they ran away.

Thabani was bleeding from his head wound, so Thomas helped him walk the remaining block to his house. His brother drove them to the nearest clinic. At the clinic the medical personnel directed him to go to a hospital, but in their panic the brothers had locked the car keys in the car. While they tried to decide what to do, a physician approached them. He had just finished his shift at the clinic and offered to take them to the hospital. They arrived at the hospital, and the physician led them to a room where he treated Thabani's injuries. He then told Thabani that he could return home.

The boys thanked the doctor and explained that they had no money to pay him. The doctor told Thabani not to worry, that he would not charge for the care. Thanking the man once more, the boys returned home.

When Thabani's parents returned home, he told them what had happened. The family tried to locate the doctor who had treated their son at no charge, but no one at the clinic or the hospital knew of a doctor that fit Thabani's description. "Perhaps you were treated by an angel," his mother said reverently.

Thomas was deeply impressed that God had cared for his friend in such a remarkable manner. Although he attended a church that focused on healings and miracles, Thomas began to worship with Thabani at the Adventist church. Recently Thomas was baptized, and the two friends sing God's praises together as brothers in faith.

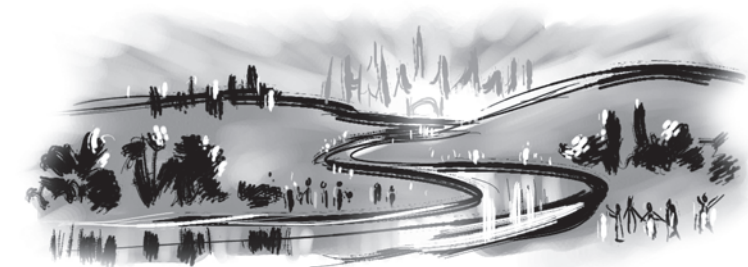
Your mission offerings reach virtually every country in the world with the message of God's love and salvation. Thank you!

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*SILILE FEIN MAZIBISA is Thabani's sister. They are the children of an Adventist pastor in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.*



# Heaven



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Eccles. 9:5, 6; Col. 1:10–14; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; Rev. 21:1–4, 8.*

**Memory Text:** “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. . . . I will come back and take you to be with me” (*John 14:2, 3, NIV*).

For many the word *heaven* has become meaningless, a concept that belongs to the realm of fairy tales. We delude ourselves, they say, if we think there is some kind of life beyond this earthly existence. Some go so far as to say that it is positively wrong to tell people that there is a heaven. They argue that it keeps people from putting all their efforts into what they could achieve in life here and now.

Even many Christians struggle with the concept. They are not so sure that heaven is a real place. Should *heaven*, rather, be interpreted as a *state of mind*? On the other hand, there are many who believe that at death the soul is released and enters heaven to live with God. They are confident that their father, mother, husband, wife, or child—who has preceded them in death—is now with God in heaven and that a few years at most separate them from a reunion with their loved ones.

What’s the truth on this important topic?

**The Week at a Glance:** Why is the promise of heaven so important to us? What will life be like there? How can we experience a foretaste of it now? What destiny awaits those whose choices exclude them from heaven?

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

## When Do We Get to Heaven?

It is quite astonishing that the idea of an immortal soul—which is separable from our physical body and which ascends to heaven right at death—has become so dominant among Christians. Satan cleverly used the ideas of the Greek philosophers to repeat his lie in Eden: “‘You will not surely die’” (*Gen. 3:4, NIV*).

**What** do the following passages teach us about the true nature of death?

- 1 Kings 11:21
- Ps. 13:3
- Eccles. 9:5, 6
- 1 Cor. 15:51

When we die, we enter into a state of unconsciousness that the Bible compares to sleep. Unaware of what happens in the world, we await the morning of the resurrection. Only then will the great multitude of the redeemed enter heaven to join the very few, such as Enoch and Elijah, who have preceded them! But it is not going to be a long wait. The moment we close our eyes in death, the next thing we know will be Christ at His second coming. In other words, as far as those who die in Christ are concerned, it will make no difference whether it was 3,000 years ago or the day before Christ returns. They close their eyes in death, and the next thing they are conscious of is Jesus returning to get them. It will seem, to them, instantaneous.

**What** is the glorious truth about our future entrance into the heavenly realm? *John 14:1–3, 1 Thess. 4:13–18*.

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“In the New Testament the blessed hope never focuses on individual death, but always on the return of Christ and the resurrection and translation of the saints to meet Him together, at the same time. It is in this future, and not what happens at death, that saints can find comfort.”—Norman Gulley, *Christ Is Coming* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1998), pp. 293, 294.

**Why is the promise of heaven so important to us? If there were no heaven and this life were all there was, then what hope does anyone have at all?**

## Heaven or Hell?

Not all people will be saved. Some will be eternally lost. Human beings have been created with a free will. Someone once expressed it like this: There are just two kinds of people—those who say, “Lord, Your will be done,” and those to whom the Lord says, “I have to respect your choice; your will be done!” In the end, no one asked to be born. We’re here only because we’ve been created without our consent. God offers us the hope of eternal life, if we choose it. If we don’t, then we will go back to the nothingness out of which we came. It’s, in the end, our own choice.

**All** humanity awaits one of two ultimate destinies. What are they? *Matt. 25:46; John 5:29; Rev 21:1–4, 8.*

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Heaven is a reality. It is a place. It is where God lives together with the other Members of the Godhead and a host of unfallen angels. It also is where we will live if we remain on God’s side. When Christ returns and the first resurrection takes place, the resurrected saints will accompany their Lord to heaven, where they will remain for a thousand years (*Rev. 20:4–6*). After the thousand years a series of events will take place, culminating in the creation of a “new heaven” and a “new earth” (*Rev. 21:1*), where the redeemed will then live forever.

But hell also is a reality. The popular belief in a place where sinners will be tormented and burn for all eternity does not have biblical support. But neither has the popular idea that in the end all people are going to be saved. Those who reject the good news of salvation and refuse to be obedient to God will be judged and condemned and will face a death from which there is no resurrection ever. Those who believe that all people will be saved argue that a God of love will not allow anyone to lose out on eternal bliss. They have a point to the extent that God is, indeed, love personified and wants to save all men and women. But tragically, not all people want to be saved. Christ could not have expressed it any clearer: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned,” but He also added that “those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (*John 5:24, 29, NIV*).

It remains our choice. Heaven can be ours if we choose to believe in God and are willing to become disciples of His Son, Jesus Christ.

## The Kingdom—Now and Then

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, we enter into a new kind of existence. Although still subject to the results of sin—aging, sickness, and the temporary “sleep” of death—we have already, in a very real sense, received eternal life. It is important never to lose sight of that crucial fact. We have been born again and have a new life “in Christ.” Those who have declared their allegiance to Christ are “children” of God (*1 John 3:2, NIV*). They have “‘crossed over,’” Jesus declares, “‘from death to life’” (*John 5:24, NIV*). They have become citizens of the kingdom of God as they have incorporated the kingdom values into their lives. They now have a different Master, and their ultimate focus is no longer on the things of this world but on the eternal city.

**How** did Jesus express the reality of the citizenship of the kingdom for His followers even in this world? *Luke 17:21, John 14:27.*

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**What** confirmation of this truth do we find in the words of Paul? *Rom. 14:17, Col. 1:10–14.*

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But this is not where it stops. What we experience of the reality of the heavenly kingdom while we are still on earth is only a foretaste of the “inheritance” that is to come. It makes us long for more. When Jesus comes in His glory, “all the nations” will be gathered before Him (*Matt. 25:32, NIV*). “‘Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world’ ’” (*vs. 34, NIV*). That is the moment God’s children have been waiting for. They will be home at last!

“Better than all the friendship of the world is the friendship of Christ’s redeemed. Better than a title to the noblest palace on earth is a title to the mansions our Lord has gone to prepare. And better than all the words of earthly praise will be the Savior’s words to His faithful servants, ‘Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’ *Matt. 25:34.*”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 374.

**Go back over the texts for today. How have you experienced the reality of what is promised in them? What choices are you making that could be hindering you from truly enjoying what Christ offers you even now?**

## Beyond Our Wildest Expectation

Have you ever wondered how it will be in heaven and on the new earth? Will we recognize each other? Will we have eternal youth? What will we do when there? Will we have our own occupations? Or will we only sing God's praises? Will we travel to other places in the universe? How much will we remember of our earthly existence? We are not the first ones to ask such questions!

**What** did the Sadducees want to know about the life in the hereafter?  
*Matt. 22:23–28.*

**What** did Jesus reply? *Matt. 22:29, 30.*

The statement of Jesus that is recorded in Matthew 22 was part of a discussion with the Sadducees. They were a group of Jewish leaders who denied the possibility of a bodily resurrection. It is clear that it was not Jesus' intention to give a full description of the conditions of eternal life. The context makes clear that Jesus wanted to emphasize that death has been conquered. He points beyond the reality of death and resurrection. Those who die are safe in His memory, and He can therefore still be called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Nonetheless, Jesus' remark also clearly indicates that, in spite of all continuity, we will be raised with the unique identity that we had in this temporary life; there also will be plenty of discontinuity.

**What** are some of the things we will no longer experience in the earth made new? *Rev. 21:1, 4, 22–27; 22:5.*

Those of us who love vacationing on the seaside may be disappointed to learn that the sea will be "no more." However, to the people who first heard these words, the sea was a threat. Israel never was a seafaring nation. For good reasons, it feared the dark depths of the oceans. And we know from several Gospel stories that even crossing the Sea of Galilee could be a scary experience. John the revelator tells us that in the new world that God will create, everything that could possibly be a threat to us will have been removed and everyone who could present a danger to us will be absent. We will be eternally secure!

**Try to imagine a world without sickness, death, fear, loss, a world in which we only keep growing in knowledge and love. What things here give us hints at what it will be like there? Let your imagination seek to grasp what this new existence will be like. What are you especially anticipating?**

## Meeting the Lord of Heaven

We have every reason to believe that on the new earth we will be able to recognize those we knew in this life. Our resurrection bodies will resemble that of the risen Lord. When He appeared to His followers after His resurrection, He clearly was recognizable to those who had been with Him prior to His death. What an inexpressible joy it will be to be reunited with those we lost in death. But the supreme experience will be to meet the Lord of the universe. Our songs will come true: “Face to face shall [we] behold Him, far beyond the starry sky!” What a privilege it will be to stand before the Alpha and the Omega of the universe.

**What assurance do we have that we will meet the Lord of lords?** *1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 21:22, 23.*

We cannot yet imagine what it will be like to meet our Savior. How many questions will we want to ask! The why question, which has so often been on our lips, finally will receive its definitive answer. We will at last understand why God permitted particular trials and temptations into our earthly existence. Never again will we doubt God’s wisdom and goodness. All distrust will dissipate as we learn why God allowed certain things to take place. And only then will we realize fully how we have been protected from all kinds of dangers.

**What will be a dominant aspect of eternal life?** *Rom. 14:11, 1 Tim. 1:17, Rev. 5:13.*

Eternal life is singing eternal praises and worshiping the King. Why? Because He is worthy of our adoration. “That the Maker of all worlds, the Arbiter of all destinies, should lay aside His glory and humiliate Himself from love to man will ever excite the wonder and adoration of the universe. As the nations of the saved look upon their Redeemer and behold the eternal glory of the Father shining in His countenance; as they behold His throne, which is from everlasting to everlasting, and know that His kingdom is to have no end, they break forth in rapturous song: ‘Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His own most precious blood!’ ” —Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 651, 652.

**What will it be like when you meet Jesus face to face? What do you think you will say to Him, and why? What do you think He’ll say to you?**

**For Further Study:** Ellen G. White has written a lot about heaven and our entrance into the heavenly kingdom. The final chapters of *The Great Controversy* are a sublime description of what will be ours. But the compilation *The Story of Redemption* also captures this topic admirably. See the last four chapters, pp. 418–433.

“‘And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.’ Rev. 21:1. The fire that consumes the wicked purifies the earth. Every trace of the curse is swept away. No eternally burning hell will keep before the ransomed the fearful consequences of sin. One reminder alone remains: our Redeemer will ever bear the marks of His crucifixion. Upon His wounded head, His hands and feet, are the only traces of the cruel work that sin has wrought.”—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 430.

## Discussion Questions

- 1 How do we deal with the question of salvation for those who have never heard the name of Jesus? How should the fact that Jesus died for the sins of all humanity, even those who never heard of Him, help us trust that God has not forgotten those folk either?
- 2 The Bible describes death as a sleep, a state of unconsciousness. How can one then explain “near-death” experiences in which people claim to have seen heavenly beings in a dazzling light or dead friends and relatives? How can we help these people realize that what they experienced might not be what they are judging it to be? In other words, how can we help them realize that what they saw couldn’t be what they think it was, no matter how real it seemed to their senses?
- 3 How have people abused the promise of eternal life in ways that allowed them to manipulate others for personal or political gain? What are some ways we might be guilty of doing the same thing, if on a less dramatic scale?

**Summary:** We are people with a destiny that extends far beyond our short existence in this present world. We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom. This kingdom is both present and future. It already is with us but will be realized fully in all its glory when Christ returns to take us home. Then eternal life in God’s presence will be ours.

## The Secondhand Church

Pamela Obero sat beside her mud house in Kenya and listened to the preacher's sermon over the loudspeaker. She was curious about the Seventh-day Adventist meetings being held on a nearby vacant lot, but she belonged to another church.

The messages touched Pamela's heart, and at times she felt that the speaker talked directly to her. So, on Sabbath morning she took her five children to the meetings instead of to her own church. When the pastor invited those who wanted special prayer to come forward, Pamela took her children to the front. Her husband had died, and she was the sole support of her family. Life was difficult.

Pamela had been an ardent member of the charismatic church to which she belonged. She had donated the land on which the church members built their mud-brick house of worship. So, when she did not attend church for three weeks, some church members visited and asked why she was no longer attending. "I have found truth that I never knew before," she told them simply. "And I am learning how to properly raise my family."

Pamela and her children joined the nearest Adventist church, which was three miles (five kilometers) from her home. Then she learned that the charismatic church to which she had belonged had abandoned the mud-brick church they had built on her land.

Pamela invited the church leaders to hold Branch Sabbath School in the abandoned building, and the church accepted her offer.

When Pamela's friends from her former church ask her questions about why she left, she shares with them new truths she has learned and invites them to worship in the new Adventist church—their former building. So far three of her friends have joined the Adventist group that worships in the mud-brick church.

The little congregation of 25 met in the mud-brick church for a year before it deteriorated to where it was no longer safe. The church members decided to rebuild with more permanent materials.



Pamela sells porridge and buns that she makes to provide for her children. Her home is poor, but she shares with those in need when she can. When her friends laugh at her poor house, she smiles and tells them, "My God is my husband and my provider. He is so good to my family; I cannot thank Him enough."

Your mission offerings reach searching hearts like Pamela around the world. Thank you.

PAMELA OBERO (left) shares her faith in Kendu Bay, Kenya.



# Discipleship



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 18:13–27, Matt. 4:19, 9:9, Mark 3:13–19, 8:31–38, Rom. 8:18.*

**Memory Text:** “‘This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.’” (*John 15:8, NIV*).

It is important that we use our intellectual capacities to grasp as much as is humanly possible of what God has revealed to us. Yet, perfect knowledge of all doctrine is not a prerequisite for salvation. We are, though, commanded to do all the things that we have been instructed to do. To be a disciple is to be a lifelong learner and follower of the Master.

What is a disciple? *The SDA Bible Dictionary* defines it, basically, as “one who, as a student or adherent, follows the teaching of another, especially of a public teacher. In the NT ‘disciple’ is the translation of the Gr. *mathētēs* . . . which is related to *manthanō*, ‘to learn,’ hence means ‘a learner,’ ‘a pupil,’ ‘an adherent.’”—Page 288. Let’s look a little closer at what it means to be a disciple.

**The Week at a Glance:** A disciple is a lifelong learner. When Christ calls us, we are to follow, wherever He leads and no matter the suffering involved, for it will involve suffering if for no other reason than it must involve sacrifice. In human terms the rewards for discipleship seem rather meager. But when the true dimension of life in Christ is discovered, we realize it’s worth suffering for, no matter the cost here and now.

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

## Followers and Leaders

**Read** Exodus 18:13–27. What principles of leadership can be found in these verses? What can we learn from them about leaders and followers?

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Although all people are fundamentally equal in the eyes of God, there are major differences in the manner in which they function. Some have the gift of leadership. Our society, and every organization within society, would soon collapse if there were no leaders. Even in heaven there appears to be a distinct differentiation in roles: There are, for instance, angels and archangels! When God called His people out of Egypt, He appointed leaders. When He organized a sanctuary service, He made sure there would be adequate leadership. God worked through judges, prophets, kings, and so on.

But leaders are useless without followers who are willing to accept their leadership. In particular, they need a group of close associates who are willing to learn from their leader and to assist in the realization of the goals of their leader.

**Jesus** called 12 disciples. Read Mark 3:13–19 for a condensed version of His selection of 12 men. What other examples of teachers who surrounded themselves with disciples do we find in a Gospel story? See Mark 2:18.

There was nothing extraordinary in the fact that Jesus had a group of disciples. It was customary for teachers to have a following of “interns.” What was remarkable, however, were the kind of men Jesus chose. Jesus saw a potential in these men that most of us would not have discerned! What also is remarkable was their instant willingness to leave their daily business and follow this Carpenter from Nazareth. They apparently saw something extraordinary in this Man that even most of His own relatives had not discovered yet.

It should, however, be noted that although the Twelve are a very special group, there are also many others referred to in the Gospels as “disciples.”

**There tends to be in some societies an antileadership attitude; in contrast, in some societies people all but blindly follow their leaders. What’s the tendency in your society, and how do you strike a proper balance?**

## Marks of Discipleship: Obedience and Loyalty

Jesus did not just share knowledge with His disciples, although it must have been a tremendous privilege to constantly hear Jesus explain the Scriptures and answer the numerous questions with which the spiritual leaders of His day bombarded Him. They quickly noticed what others also perceived. He taught with an authority that surpassed the scholars of His day. He separated lifeless traditions from the real-life issues that God's Word addresses. However, there was more the disciples needed to learn. They also needed to learn to make their own will and desires subject to the will of the Almighty.

**What** principles of discipleship can we find in the following texts? *Matt. 4:19, 9:9, Mark 8:34.*

“Yes, follow Him through evil as well as through good report. Follow Him in befriending the most needy and friendless. Follow Him in being forgetful of self, abundant in acts of self-denial and self-sacrifice to do others good; when reviled, reviling not again; manifesting love and compassion for the fallen race. He counted not His life dear, but gave it up for us all. Follow Him from the lowly manger to the cross. He was our example.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 178.

**How** did Peter react when many followers deserted Jesus? *John 6:60–70.*

Not all disciples stayed with Jesus. Many turned away. Peter spoke for the disciples when declaring their allegiance. With the exception of Judas, they eventually did prove to be faithful followers, and they became leaders in the early church, even though they had moments of grave doubt and disillusionment when their Master was taken prisoner and crucified. Their experience gives us great comfort. Many of us have had moments when our resolve to be disciples was at low tide, but as in the case of the apostles, this does not mean that we cannot overcome our temporary lapse.

**If someone were to ask you, “How loyal are you to Jesus?” how would you respond, and why? What outward evidences do you give of your loyalty to Him?**

## Sacrifice

Most of us like to be with important people. Meeting a head of state or a government minister or a celebrity provides us with a much-coveted conversation topic. Knowing someone important, or even knowing someone who knows someone important, somehow seems to endow us with a halo of glory. It seems a natural desire to climb up the social ladder rather than remain near its base. Jesus' disciples were no exception to this unfortunate human trait.

**How** did some disciples (and their relatives) hope that following Jesus would enhance their status? What was Jesus' reply? *Matt. 20:20–23, Mark 10:35–41. What does this attitude remind you of? Isa. 14:12–14.*

Rather than promising His disciples material prosperity and social status, Jesus prepared them for a different kind of reality: Following Him is a costly business.

**Read** Mark 8:31–38. What do you learn in this passage about the cost of discipleship?

In his famous book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the young German theologian who was martyred by the Nazis in 1945, emphasizes that divine grace does not come cheap. And following Christ is not an easy thing to do. It inevitably will involve suffering. Just as Christ said that He “must suffer,” so must we. If we want to identify with Him in His life, we must also do so in His suffering and death. “To endure the cross is not a tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ. When it comes, it is not an accident, but a necessity. . . . Only a man . . . totally committed in discipleship can experience the meaning of the cross. The cross is there, right from the beginning, or he has only got to pick it up; there is no need for him to go out and look for a cross for himself, no need for him deliberately to run after suffering. Jesus says that every Christian has his own cross waiting for him, a cross destined and appointed by God.”—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1965), p. 98.

**What is the cross that God has given you to bear? What has following Christ cost you? If your answer is “Nothing, really,” maybe you need to take a closer look at how closely you are following the Master.**

## The Rewards of Discipleship

Jesus left His disciples with no doubt that following Him would require sacrifice. He was totally up front with them in regard to what they should expect.

**What** did Jesus promise as far as immediate or short-term reward for following Him as a disciple? *Luke 9:57, 58; John 15:18–25*. What specific “promise” did Jesus have for Peter? *John 21:15–18*. What does this tell us about the cost of following Christ?

The disciples, except Judas, eventually became the apostles. From the first chapters of the book of Acts, it is clear that these men had learned many lessons. They had been with Jesus, and now, with the power of the Spirit, they were able to deal with opposition and persecution. Although we cannot be sure about the details, there is good reason to believe the strong traditions from the early church era which say that all apostles eventually suffered martyrdom. All supposedly suffered a violent death, except John, but his imprisonment on Patmos was not a luxurious vacation either. He also was a “brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus” (*Rev. 1:9, NIV*).

**What** aspect of discipleship outweighs all suffering that might come our way as we follow Christ? *John 10:10, Rom. 8:28–39*.

Those who follow Christ will face numerous challenges. If they stay focused on their Master, they will be able to deal with whatever happens. They will have something that is precious beyond words. He gives them His peace, which is unlike the imperfect and transient kind of peace the world offers (*John 14:27*). It is the peace that transcends all understanding (*Phil. 4:7*). That peace is the hallmark of the abundant life that Christ gives to His disciples (*John 10:10*). In spite of all trials and temptations, this is the kind of life that satisfies at a level beyond the reach of those who choose to live without Christ.

And yet, even more so, faithful followers of Christ have the assurance of eternal life, the assurance that whatever they struggle with now can't be compared with the promise of eternity that awaits them.

**Read Romans 8:18. What hope and comfort can you draw from this promise for yourself? Why should it tell you to never, never give up?**

## The Lordship of Jesus Christ

Being a disciple implies the recognition of having a master, of allegiance to someone we are willing to follow and serve. Our relationship to others usually finds expression in the manner in which we address them.

**What** was one of the titles given to Christ by His followers? *John 20:28, 1 Cor. 16:22.*

The New Testament uses a variety of names for Jesus. He is called “the Son of God” but also “the Son of Man” or “the Messiah.” Hundreds of times Jesus is referred to as “the Lord.” This word, which initially was quite general in its application, became a highly significant term for the early Christians. The Roman emperor claimed divinity and wanted to be addressed as “the Lord.” To confess that Christ was their ultimate Lord rather than the Roman Caesar was not just expressing an opinion. It literally could be a matter of life or death. Those who lived in the Roman realm should only have one *Kyrios* (lord), and to apply this title to any person other than the emperor could well end in torture and death.

Thus, it required faith and dedicated discipleship to call Jesus “Lord.” But today it also is no small thing to call Jesus our Lord and truly mean it. If He is our Lord, He is the Sovereign over our whole life, over all that we say and do.

**What** is the key element that reveals how genuine we are in calling Jesus “Lord”? *Matt 7:22, 23; Luke 6:46.*

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It’s one thing to call Jesus our Lord and our God and to profess faith, love, and allegiance to Him. It’s quite another to truly live it. Jesus was clear: Our fidelity to Him will be manifested by our obedience to Him and to His commands. In fact, the word for “iniquity” in Matthew 7:23 means “lawlessness.” No question, a true follower of Jesus, a true disciple, will obey His commandments (*John 14:15*).

**Try to imagine how different our church would be if everyone who professed to follow Christ were truly disciples of Jesus. What differences would we see? While you can’t change others, what difference could you make were your life one of true conformity to Jesus’ will?**

**Further Study:** For comments on the calling of the disciples, read Ellen G. White, “‘We Have Found the Messiah,’” pp. 132–143, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“It was not enough for the disciples of Jesus to be instructed as to the nature of His kingdom. What they needed was a change of heart that would bring them into harmony with its principles. Calling a little child to Him, Jesus set him in the midst of them; then tenderly folding the little one in His arms He said, ‘Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ The simplicity, the self-forgetfulness, and the confiding love of a little child are the attributes that Heaven values. These are the characteristics of real greatness.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 437.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, go over the question of what it costs to be a true follower of Christ. Ask those who are willing to discuss it, what it costs them to follow the Lord. Ask, too, why they believe it is worth it.
- 2 What can we do to help the new believers among us become better disciples of Christ? Why is being a disciple so much more than just intellectually consenting to a number of doctrines, or even more than believing that Jesus died for your sins?
- 3 We are called to be disciples of Jesus. But on the human level, we also have role models. Is it legitimate to consider ourselves also disciples of a human leader we respect and consider a role model? If so, how could we do this while at the same time not forgetting to whom we owe our ultimate allegiance?
- 4 How can we fight the sinful human desire for more self-glory, more adulation, more power and prestige? Why are such desires so contrary to all that it means to be a disciple of Christ?

**Summary:** To be a disciple of Christ is no small thing. It requires a lot of conviction and stamina and a willingness to follow the Lord, regardless of the suffering involved. To be a disciple of Christ means to live by faith, to trust God even in the hardest of times. It means to be willing to die to self and live for the good of others and for the glory of God.

## The Kettle Failed Not

by RUSS DAWIS

A colleague and I climbed the mountains of Southern Mindanao in the Philippines to survey a possible site that a tribal chief had donated for an Adventist high school for the Higaonan people. While in the area, we were invited to stay in the home of Pangga Landagan.

The man received us warmly, made us comfortable, and offered us food. I knew the family wasn't well-to-do and asked why he felt so generous toward the SULADS missionaries.

"It is my blessing and joy to take care of you," our host said. "For when we care for His children, God blesses us even more abundantly." Then he explained his remark. "When two SULADS missionary teachers came to the village, they seemed shy and hesitant to visit the homes in the village. I knew that their small stipend would not be enough to buy food, so my wife and I invited them to eat with us so that they would have good food while they worked for our people.

"One day we had just enough rice for one meal for two people. But our missionaries hadn't eaten that day, so I whispered to my wife, 'Let's feed the missionaries first. She agreed and cooked the rice and served the missionaries.

"While they ate I slipped out to look for food, but I came back empty-handed and hungry. I checked the kettle in the kitchen, expecting only a handful of leftovers. To my surprise, the kettle was full!

"I whispered to my wife, 'Haven't you fed the missionaries yet?'"

"'Yes, they've eaten,' she said. 'And I've eaten too.'"

"'But the kettle's full!' I said.

"'That can't be!' my wife protested. I showed her the kettle, still full of rice. 'It's an Elijah miracle,' I whispered.

"Together we thanked God for providing for our needs and those of the missionaries too. The constant rain made it impossible for our missionary guests to leave for the next village as they had planned, so that evening my wife reheated the rice and we ate from the full pot. Again we let them eat first, and then I looked at the pot. It was still full!

"In the morning the kettle was still full, and again my wife reheated it for breakfast before the missionaries left on their journey.

"From that day on, I see that any visitor in our village receives the best we can offer. And as always we see that our food containers and kettle fail not."

"Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing" (*Psalms 34:10, NIV*). As we support world mission with our offerings, we will see that God will provide all our needs.

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RUSS DAWIS is the coordinator of SULADS, the student mission program in Northeastern Mindanao Mission in the Philippines.



# Stewardship



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Deut. 8:18; Ps. 50:12; Matt. 24:46; 25:14–30; Luke 4:16; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20.*

**Memory Text:** “Everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance.” (*Matthew 25:29, NIV*).

Stewardship is not limited to caring for financial resources and to making sure that God gets His 10 percent. Though that's certainly part of it, so much more is involved.

“The term *steward* is misunderstood and even foreign in our society. We do not have any terms in our modern vocabulary that carry the richness of this term. *Caretaker* fails to capture the responsibility laid on the steward. *Manager* seems inadequate to describe the relationship between the owner and the steward. *Custodian* is too passive a term. *Agent* is too self-serving in our day. *Ambassador* is too political, and it lacks the servant aspect. *Warden* is too administrative and loses the sense of the personal. *Guardian* is too closely tied solely to parental responsibilities.”—R. Scott Rodin, *Stewards in the Kingdom* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 27.

**The Week at a Glance:** How do I use my talents, my time, my material resources, all the things that God has given me stewardship over? How do I truly live my responsibilities toward my Maker and Redeemer? This is what stewardship is all about.

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

## Talents

If there were a prize given for the clearest explanation of an all-encompassing profound concept, Jesus would have easily won it with His parable of the talents.

**Read** Matthew 25:14–30. What basic message about stewardship do you take from Jesus’ words here?

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*Reality number one: We all have talents.* Note in the parable that all the servants receive one or more talents. No one is left without some talent. That is the first truth Jesus wanted to impress upon His disciples.

*Reality number two: We do not all have the same number of talents.* It is a fact of life that we will have to accept. Some people are gifted in many ways while others are not so multitalented. Those who have several talents should never look down upon others who have fewer talents. Jesus’ point is clear: The quantity of our talents is not the most important; what we do with whatever we have been given is what matters.

*Reality number three: Some refuse to use their talents.* Some never recognize the talents they have. Sadly, no one reminded them of their gifts. Or they did realize their gifts but, for a variety of reasons, refused to invest any energy in developing them.

*Reality number four: Not using your talents is a serious business.* The “worthless servant” gets no second chance. He is thrown “ ‘into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ ” (Matt. 25:30, NIV)—the symbolic description of the utter nothingness of eternal death. Not using what God has entrusted to us not only impairs us in this life but jeopardizes our eternal life. This means that the issue of being faithful stewards is not something that belongs to the periphery of our Christian experience—it is the vital characteristic of discipleship.

**What are your gifts? Even more important, what are you doing with them? Are you using them to serve only yourself and your own desires, or are you using them also in service to the Lord? Why is this question so important?**

## Time

There is a plethora of books and courses on the subject of time management. They have helped millions of people make better use of their time. Many Christians would do well to read some of these books or attend a good seminar. But there are aspects to a Christian use of time that one will learn only by reading the Bible and, in particular, by studying the life of Jesus.

**What** do we learn from the Gospels about Jesus' use of His time? What are some of the elements to be noted, apart from His busy schedule of preaching and healing? What other passages can add further information?

*Matt. 4:23* \_\_\_\_\_

*Mark 1:29–31* \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 4:16* \_\_\_\_\_

*John 2:1–11* \_\_\_\_\_

*John 12:2* \_\_\_\_\_

In today's stressful world, the example of Jesus is as refreshing as it is worth imitating. Jesus worked hard and was fully committed to His mission. But He made sure that He did not miss the blessings of the Sabbath. The Gospels make it abundantly clear that He had time for His Father, for His friends, for relaxation, and for a good meal. This type of time management (or rather, time stewardship) will prove a blessing for all who practice it.

The Bible does not praise workaholics, nor does it have any commendations for those who always take it easy. As always, there is a balance, one in which we get done the things we need to get done, while at the same time we don't burn ourselves out emotionally or physically. God has the first claim on our time. We manifest this in our keeping of the Sabbath and our daily time for prayer and worship. Our loved ones also are entitled to a fair share of our time. Then there is time for work, for leisure, and for a host of other things. The church also claims a substantial part of our time. But there must always be a balance so that we don't fall into one trap or another.

**Where do you lean, toward doing not enough or toward doing too much? How can you live a more balanced life in regard to the stewardship of your time? Why is it important that you do?**

## Stewards of Our Body

In the secular world, most people regard their bodies as their own property. They have total say over what happens to it. This applies not only to vast numbers of women who claim that they should be free to decide whether or not they will have an abortion but also to all who feel they have the right to harm their bodies by the use of illegal substances or by eating large quantities of junk food or by having sexual relationships with as many partners as they choose.

**Read** and pray over 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20. What do these verses tell us about how we use our bodies? What are practical ways we can put these words into effect?

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The immediate context indicates that the apostle Paul was, in particular, referring to the abuse of our body through sexual immorality. Unfortunately, this is as relevant today in many parts of the world as it was in ancient Corinth, a city known for its perversities.

But the basic idea is that we should not “sin against our body,” because we are not our own. First, we have been created by God through Jesus Christ. He is our Maker, and we therefore are responsible to Him for all we do. Second, He is our Redeemer, the One who has bought us “at a price.”

Stewardship of our bodies implies taking good care of our health, too. It has to do not only with what we eat but also with the amount of rest we take and with keeping fit through adequate exercise. And there can be no question of using substances that are addictive or otherwise harmful.

Yet, again, there is need for balance. “Health itself is not to be a preoccupation. It should be a part of the Christian pattern of life and rather automatic in operation. An overriding preoccupation with health can be a form of idolatry that gets in the way of a satisfying relationship with God. Health is to enable service to God, but is not an end in itself.”—Leo R. Van Dolson and J. Robert Spangler, *Healthy, Happy, Holy* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1975), p. 43.

**Take a good look at all your health habits, not just diet. What do you need to improve on? What changes can and should you make? What holds you back from doing what you know is right?**

## Our Material Possessions

Christian stewardship is emphatically *not just* about money. But, just as emphatically, it *also is* about money. Money is an essential part of our lives and does play a central role in stewardship.

**Read the following texts:** *Lev. 27:30, Deut. 8:18, Ps. 50:12, Mal. 3:8–10, Matt. 6:31, Matt. 23:23.* **What lessons do you draw from them? Compare your answers with what follows below.**

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*Fact number one: Everything begins with God.* God owns everything. And He gives us the strength to work and make a living. Those who say, “It is all my own hard work,” forget a vital truth, which is that it was God alone who enabled them to earn what they did.

*Fact number two: God takes first place in all we have and do,* including our use of money. Before you spend any part of your money, make sure you have set aside your tithes and offerings. Then spend the rest responsibly, always aware that stewardship extends to the use of whatever money you have been entrusted with.

*Fact number three: God expects His people to return to Him at least 10 percent of their wealth.* That was the rule in the Old Testament, and that principle has never been rescinded. In Old Testament times the tithes were received by the priests and used for the support of the sanctuary services. Likewise, today our tithes are received and used for financing the worldwide gospel commission that God has entrusted to His church.

*Fact number four: The more we give, the more we are blessed.* Try it, and you’ll see for yourself the truth of the words that “ ‘it is more blessed to give than to receive’ ” (*Acts 20:35, NIV*).

**There’s an old English saying, “Let him put his money where his mouth is.” The idea is that people can talk about how much they believe in something, but unless they are willing to put some of their money into it, the talk is meaningless. How does the act of giving tithes and offerings reveal where our heart really is? What does your giving reveal about your faith?**

## While We Are Waiting

There is an important dimension in the parables about the talents and the pounds that we must not miss. In Matthew 25 “the master” (vs. 19, *NIV*) went on an extensive journey and returned after a long time to settle the accounts with His servants. In Luke 19 we are told that the “man of noble birth” (vs. 12, *NIV*) went to a distant country. While on His mission, He was made King and then “returned home” (vs. 15, *NIV*).

Jesus clearly referred to Himself. He wanted His disciples to know that He was going away and that it would take a while before He would come back. But when He returns He will ask for an account of what was done with what we have been given.

**What** should characterize our waiting for the second coming of Christ? *Matt. 24:42–46*. **What** do these verses mean for us in the practical sense of how we live?

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While we wait, we live with a purpose. It is not a waiting in idleness, but we wait as dedicated disciples who are keen stewards over all we have been given. “We are to be vigilant, watching for the coming of the Son of man; and we must also be diligent; working as well as waiting is required; there must be a union of the two. This will balance the Christian character, making it well developed, symmetrical. We should not feel that we are to neglect everything else, and give ourselves up to meditation, study, or prayer; neither are we to be full of bustle and hurry and work, to the neglect of personal piety. Waiting and watching and working are to be blended. ‘Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 23.

We are waiting for the Owner of everything to return. Soon He will come and will want to know what we have done with our gifts, our time, our physical strength, and our material resources. The fact that He comes to inspect the results of our faithful stewardship should not in any way frighten us. The accusation of the servant who had buried his talent and refused to employ it usefully, that the master was a “hard man” who wanted to harvest where he had not sown, was totally false. Note that the servants who had been faithful stewards did not share this negative view. Every effort they had put into their stewardship assignment was fully worth it when they heard their master say, “Come and share your master’s happiness” (*Matt. 25:21, NIV*).

**If Jesus came back next week, what do you think He would say to you regarding what you have done in the past week with the things He entrusted to you?**

**Further Study:** A mine for further explorations on the topic of stewardship is the compilation *Counsels on Stewardship*, in which Ellen G. White’s comments on this issue have been assembled. See, in particular, Section VIII, which deals with the right motives for giving (pp. 195–206).

“The Lord will not require from those who are poor that which they have not to give; He will not require from the sick the active energies which bodily weakness forbids. No one need mourn because he cannot glorify God with talents that were never entrusted to him. But if you have only one talent, use it well, and it will accumulate. If the talents are not buried, they will gain yet other talents.”—Ellen. G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1100.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 How are we to understand the whole question of stewardship and accountability to God in the context of salvation by faith alone? Are we saved by what good stewards we are? Or does our stewardship reveal the reality of our faith? And even if we make mistakes here, why should we not give up in despair?
- 2 What’s wrong with what’s been dubbed the “health and wealth gospel,” the idea that if you live right, God will give you lots of money and good health? How is this a perversion of true principles of stewardship?
- 3 Discuss the following statement: “The greatest, most gifted people are useless if they don’t make themselves available to be used by God. In short, *availability* is more important than *ability*.”—Mike Nappa, *The Courage to Be a Christian* (West Monroe, La.: Howard Publishing Co., 2001), p. 164.
- 4 What advice do you give to a church member who, struggling through hard financial times, says that he or she just can’t afford to pay tithe, much less give offerings? What various approaches could or should be taken with this person?

**Summary:** We all have been given one or more talents. We have been entrusted with resources. As stewards we are expected to “manage” these resources to the best of our ability, in grateful recognition that all we have, in fact, comes from God. Stewardship should not be a hard duty but a joyful prioritizing in all aspects of our lives.

## From Shopkeeper to Shepherd

*Told to* JOHN K. MCGHEE *by* RAM\*

I am Ram.\* I live in the Himalayan region of northern India. I was doing pretty well running a little shop in the mountains. I earned enough money to keep my parents fed. But I sensed that something was missing from my life. I was sure that there was more to life than working, eating, and sleeping. I looked forward to the day when I would marry and have children, but often I wondered, Will a family fill the void in my life?

I love to read, and I've studied the mystics and various philosophies, trying to understand the cosmos. But I sensed that I was missing something. Then one day I bought a book that cost just four rupees (about 10 cents US). As I read it, I discovered it was the most valuable book in my library. The book was full of exciting stories and told me how the world began. It described a God unlike any I had ever known.

I told friends about this marvelous book, the Bible. But few had ever heard of it. However, some of my more educated friends urged me to stop reading it immediately. "It's a book for foreigners," they said. "They try to force people to change religions."

Curious, I decided to find out for myself if their accusations were true. I asked around and learned that no missionaries lived in our town. Then one day some strangers walked past my store. I asked one if he was a missionary.

"Yes, I am," he replied. He introduced himself as Pastor Ravi.\* I told him that I was searching for the truth about reality. And although he lived in another mountain valley several miles away, he offered to return so we could talk about the truth. Pastor Ravi came often to see me and soon became my teacher and my friend.

I was eager to share with others what Pastor Ravi was teaching me, so as soon as I could I closed my shop and shared what I was learning with my family and neighbors. I told Pastor Ravi that I wished I could share the wonderful truths he was teaching me with others. He has provided me with a small stipend so I can close my shop and learn how to make disciples for my new friend Jesus. I am now shepherding a small group of new believers in a nearby village.

Your mission offerings have brought God's Word to my village. Thank you! Now I share that wonderful message with everyone I meet.

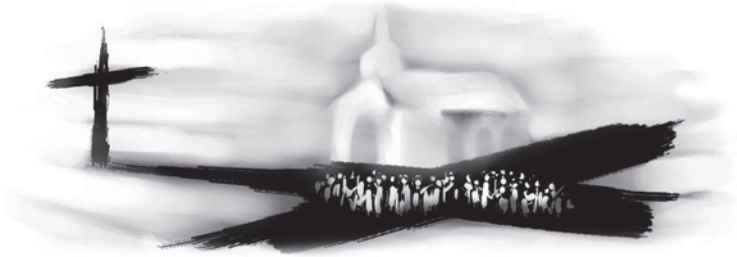
*\*Names have been changed.*

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DR. JOHN K. MCGHEE is vice president for Community Health and Lifestyle Medicine of the Adventist hospital system in the Southern Asia Division (India and Nepal).



# Community



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 11:1–4, 12:1–3, 1 Cor. 12:12–27, Eph. 4:1–13, Rev. 22:1–6.*

**Memory Text:** “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (*1 Corinthians 12:27, NIV*).

Humans are social beings. God could have created a hundred million perfect human beings as “stand alones” who would each pursue his or her own independent goals. Instead, He first created one male and one female and stated that it would not be good for man to be alone. The first couple was to complement each other. And they were to multiply and create a community of family members and eventually larger social units.

One of the most important social units to which people can belong is their church. Unfortunately, many people no longer recognize the social benefits of church membership. Of course, the church is more than a club for men and women who happen to share a certain interest. The church is a community of believers who share in the ultimate experience of salvation and recognize Christ as their Lord.

**The Week at a Glance:** *Believing and belonging are closely linked. God wants us to be part of the community that He has initiated. It is a privilege to belong to that community, but it also carries responsibilities. We all have our unique contribution to make to the body of Christ.*

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

## God Wants a People

In Genesis 11 we find the record of an experiment in community building that did not meet with God's approval. When, after the worldwide Flood, the descendants of the original survivors decided to stick together and build a city with a huge tower in the southern part of what is now Iraq, God was extremely displeased. This was not what God had intended. Yet, in the following chapter—Genesis 12—the idea of community building is once again brought into focus, but now in a very positive sense. God told Abraham (who at that time was still called Abram) that He wanted to form a people whom He would call His own.

**What** was the major difference between the Tower of Babel initiative at community building and God's plan to make Abraham and his posterity into His people? *Compare Gen. 11:1–4 with Gen. 12:1–3.*

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From the story of the calling of Abraham onward, the Old Testament centers on the experiences of the people of God, their failures and their triumphs. The people of Israel had the mission of making their covenant-God known to all other nations. They were to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. We know how, as a people, Israel failed to accomplish its task. When the Messiah came, He was rejected and killed as a criminal by certain leaders who should have welcomed Him as their Redeemer. At the same time, many remained faithful to the Lord and formed the nucleus of what was to become the Christian church.

**Read 1 Peter 2:9, 10. What's the message to us today?**

God's New Testament people consist of Jews and Gentiles, of men and women from every nation, tribe, and linguistic group. Like Israel in Old Testament times, they now have the responsibility of teaching others about divine grace. Like Israel of old, they, too, belong to a special community of believers.

**What parallels can you draw between ancient Israel and the church of today? What lessons should we learn from them? What mistakes should we avoid?**

## The Privilege of Belonging

Laurence J. Peter, an American educator and author, once said, “Going to church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than going to the garage makes you a car!” Truly *belonging* to Christ’s church is more than having one’s name on the church’s record book. It implies a realization of what the church is and of one’s own role in the church.

In numerous places Paul refers to fellow believers as *saints* (*Eph. 1:1, Phil. 1:1, Col. 1:2*). This word has today acquired a meaning that it did not have in Bible times. Saints are not perfect or holy people; they certainly are not people who have been declared to be “saints” after a long and complex ecclesiastical procedure long after they die. “For Paul [and for other Bible writers], the term saint had none of the stained-glass window connotations that it has for us. A saint was not some ancient, larger-than-life, perfect Christian, but anyone called and set apart by God who became part of the community of faith.” —John C. Brunt, *Romans*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1996), p. 42.

**What major role is given to those who belong to the church—the “body of Christ”? How should each “saint” relate to all others?**  
*1 Cor. 12:12–27.*

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A church member is not to be reduced to a statistic. Every member of the church has a unique role to play and a particular contribution to make. No one can be missed without causing at least a measure of dysfunction of the body. At the same time, no member can claim that his or her contribution is far superior to that of someone else. The metaphor of the body with its many members sublimely illustrates this truth. Some parts appear to be more vital than others. The heart, the brain, the lungs, and the stomach may seem among the most prominent parts, but the functioning or malfunctioning of some minor gland often also proves to be a matter of life and death.

**How do you fit in with your local body? Are you content with the role you play? Are you jealous of someone else’s role? Are you a dead, lifeless organ? Or maybe you are trying to take on more than you need? How can Paul’s words help you better understand what your role should be?**

## The Responsibility of Belonging

Belonging to the body of Christ is a great privilege. Another figure of speech underlines this great truth: We all are part of God's family. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1, NIV). But privileges always are accompanied by responsibilities.

**What** does the image of the church as the body of Christ, and of each of us being members of that body, imply as far as our personal responsibilities are concerned? *Eph. 4:1–13.*

"All must move like parts of a well-adjusted machinery, each part dependent on the other part, yet standing distinct in action. And each one is to take the place assigned him and do the work appointed him. God calls upon the members of His church to receive the Holy Spirit, to come together in unity and brotherly sympathy, to bind their interests together in love."—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 276.

**What** are some other key responsibilities for all church members? *1 Cor. 16:2; 1 Thess. 5:14, 17, 25; Heb. 10:25; 1 Pet. 3:15.*

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Many people live in consumer societies and, as a result, tend to bring this consumer mentality into their church. The first question often is, *What is in it for me?* rather than, *How can I contribute with my talents and gifts?* When John F. Kennedy was inaugurated in 1961 as president of the United States, he spoke these immortal words: " 'Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.' " These words also are applicable to our attitude toward the church. Even though the church can and does do a lot for those who faithfully attend and join in its many activities, we should first of all constantly ask ourselves, How can I serve better? How can I encourage others? How can I be a role model for our youth? How can I contribute to making my local church into a spiritual home in which many can find the inner peace and nurture they need?

**Ask yourself these questions and honestly look at your answers: What is my main motive for going to church? What I can get, or what I can give?**

## Unity in Diversity

Many Christians strive for greater unity among the many denominations. They speak of the “scandal” of division and disunity and remind us that Christ repeatedly called for unity among His followers. Unity also is a key theme for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which is threatened by fragmentation and polarization from within. But the unity Adventists seek cannot be reduced to mere organizational unity or uniformity in worship styles and other traditions. It must go much deeper.

**What** are key qualifications for true Christian unity? *John 14:6; Eph. 4:3, 13.*

To be united in Christ means to be united in the truth. Christ defined Himself as the Truth. That is not to say that there cannot be true unity between people who differ with regard to certain theological views or in the interpretation of certain passages. But true unity does require a common commitment to the Scriptures as the Word of God and to its fundamental teachings, and a common desire to practice what the Word teaches. It does not require, however, that all members think alike and worship in exactly the same way. It does not annul the wonderful cultural diversity that so much enriches our worldwide church community.

**How** does the description of the New Jerusalem illustrate the rich diversity that characterizes God’s people? *Revelation 21 and 22:1–6; in particular, 21:12–14, 19, 26, and 22:2.*

The New Jerusalem refers to something concrete and real that God creates for His people, even if the description is highly symbolic. What strikes us as we read it is the emphasis on diversity. No wonder, because the redeemed will come from “every tribe and language and people and nation” (*Rev. 5:9, NIV; cf. Rev. 7:9*).

The peoples who will enter the gates of the New Jerusalem and will populate the new earth are like the many branches that issue from the same vine. “In the branches of a vine there is diversity, and yet in this diversity there is unity. Every branch is united to the parent stalk. Every branch draws its nourishment from the same source. When we are branches of the true Vine, there will be no quarreling among us, no strife for the supremacy, no disparaging of one another.”—Ellen G. White, *General Conference Bulletin*, April 25, 1901.

**If there is to be such diversity in heaven, why is there ethnic strife in our churches today? Why do we tend to want to congregate with those of our own ilk as opposed to others? What kind of message are we sending by doing this?**

## The Church's Foundation: Jesus Christ

We often speak of our church. We have many reasons to be proud of our church. On the other hand, we realize that our church is not perfect. We have invested a lot of ourselves, of our talents, time, energy, and money in the church and have good reasons to have a clear sense of ownership. However, in the final analysis, the church is not ours. It is God's. And that makes a decisive difference.

**What** did Christ Himself state in answer to the question about to whom the church belongs? *Matt. 16:18.*

The statement by Christ about the rock upon which God's church was to be built has been grossly misunderstood by many. When the full context and all other biblical evidence is taken into consideration, there is no ground for suggesting that Peter was the rock upon whom the church was founded and that special authority was transferred from him to the future bishops of Rome. Peter's confession of Christ as the Son of the living God (*Matt. 16:16*) was the rock upon which God founded His church.

**Consider** the meaning of some other symbols used to underline the same truth, that is, that the church is built on Jesus Christ and that it is His church rather than ours. *Eph. 2:20; 4:15, 16; Rev. 1:12–16, 20.*

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Like so many passages in the book of Revelation, the description of Jesus Christ in 1:12–20 is full of Old Testament imagery. Christ is presented as walking in the midst of seven lampstands, clothed as the High Priest. Our mind automatically goes back to the symbol of the lampstand in the ancient tabernacle that proclaimed God's presence among His people. Before the book of Revelation goes into detail about "what must soon take place" (*1:1, NIV*), it makes sure that we see everything from the right perspective. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, our heavenly High Priest, who is not some distant, static deity but the One who walks in the midst of His church.

**If, ultimately, the church belongs to God, what is our role in it? Are we, then, not stewards of it? What kind of responsibilities does this place on us? How well are you living up to this responsibility? What can you do better?**

**Further Study:** For a thorough Adventist study on the nature of the church, see R. Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), pp. 538–581. See also chapter 45 of Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 410–418.

“Jesus answered Peter, saying, ‘Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven’ [Matt. 16:17, KJV].

“The truth which Peter had confessed is the foundation of the believer’s faith. It is that which Christ Himself has declared to be eternal life. But the possession of this knowledge was no ground for self-glorification. Through no wisdom or goodness of his own had it been revealed to Peter. Never can humanity, of itself, attain to a knowledge of the divine. ‘It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?’ Job 11:8. Only the spirit of adoption can reveal to us the deep things of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 412.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Is church membership a necessary condition for salvation? Or do we join the church for other reasons? If so, what are they? What great advantages do we have being part of a body? At the same time, what things must we be careful of and watch out for?
- 2 Some people say, “I have stopped going to church. When I attended, it left me empty. When I go out in nature, I have a deeper religious experience than when I listen to an uninteresting sermon.” What would you reply to such a person?
- 3 Dwell more on the questions raised in Wednesday’s lesson regarding ethnic diversity in our church. Why, of all people, should Christians be the most accepting and loving of others, regardless of ethnic differences? What could be done to help us better live up to what we know the Lord would have us do regarding the important question of racial and ethnic harmony?

**Summary:** The church is a divine initiative. It is God’s church rather than our church. We are members of the body of Christ—each of us with our own distinct function—but must always remember that He is the Head. We are not called to uniformity but must do all we can to maintain true unity in Christ.

## Onward Christian Soldiers

by PAUL CLEE

Tomas Repsys was an officer in the Lithuanian military when he met the Savior a few years ago. He was touched by the warm fellowship and Bible teachings of the Adventist Church and felt God urging him to share his faith with fellow soldiers. But he was unsure how to go about it.

Repsys studied the Bible and other Christian literature to ground himself in his faith so that he could answer questions others might ask. But he found that few people wanted to hear about God. He prayed for wisdom and for direction regarding those with whom to share his faith.

After much prayer Repsys was assigned to work in the military headquarters, a position he knows that God provided so that he could minister to those with whom he came in contact.

He learned of a Christian organization called ECHOS (European Christians Home Organization for Soldiers) that had just been established. Its goals were similar to his own, and he joined their group. He began inviting soldiers to lectures on subjects ranging from home and family to personal health and Christian principles. This opened the door to invite soldiers to Bible studies, as well.

Leaders of ECHOS provided multimedia equipment, Christian books, Bibles, and a lot of moral support to Repsys as he ministered to those who came. For moral support he invited church members as well as fellow soldiers he knew well. And he shared the lecture series with pastors, laypeople, and a few fellow soldiers.

Besides holding lectures and weekly Bible studies, the ECHOS group organizes outings every second month for the soldiers. They visit historic locations or places of natural beauty. During the outing Repsys or one of the other Christian soldiers gives a short worship. As many as 25 soldiers attend the meetings or go on the outings.

This outreach provides opportunities to identify soldiers who are open to spiritual things. Repsys has invited soldiers to his home to talk about God on a deeper level.

Military service is short in Lithuania, but through the efforts of Tomas Repsys and fellow Christians, they are making this time count for Christ in the lives of young soldiers who often are away from home for the first time.

Lithuania was once part of the Soviet Union. Today about one thousand Seventh-day Adventist believers—or 1 person in every 3,400 Lithuanians—worship in 17 churches. Our mission offerings support various outreach programs in Lithuania and around the world. Thank you for giving.

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PAUL CLEE is *Communication director for the Trans-European Division.*



# Mission



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:46, 47; John 14:6; Eph. 4:11–15; 2 Pet. 2:1–3; Rev. 14:6–12.*

**Memory Text:** “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15, NIV).

**M**ission is not an old-fashioned word associated with tropical helmets and six-year terms in isolated places around the world. The term *mission* refers to a core aspect of the Christian life. “The words *mission* and *missionary* come from Latin words meaning send and one sent. . . . The English Bible usually uses the noun *apostle*, which also comes from the Greek word that means one sent. . . . Thirty-nine times the Gospel of John says that Jesus was sent by God. Thirty-nine times, then, Jesus is defined in that book alone as a missionary or apostle.”—Jon L. Dybdahl, “Missionary God—Missionary Church” in Erich W. Baumgartner, ed., *Re-Visioning Adventist Mission in Europe* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1998), p. 8.

We, as followers of Christ, are fellow missionaries with Jesus. As He was sent to this world, so we are sent to represent Him and to preach the three angels’ messages to every person. The longer we are here, however, the greater the danger of our becoming inward-focused, seeking to maintain our structures and institutions at the expense of what we are called to do, which is to preach to the world the present-truth message that God has given us.

**The Week at a Glance:** Mission is the heart of the church. The destiny of people, far and near, is at stake. Mission is not one among many programs of the church. It is the very reason for its existence. Each Christian is called to be a missionary.

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

## People Will Be Lost, Unless . . .

Theologians through the ages have debated whether or not God eventually will save all people. Some say God’s love guarantees that, eventually, no one will be lost. Others say that people who have never heard of Christ will get an opportunity to come to believe after death. Others again defend various alternative theories. The problem with theories, however, is that often they try to explain everything when, in fact, we must simply be content with what God has revealed to us. There are questions to which we do not know the answers. But we know that He is totally just in what He does and, at the same time, is limitless in His love. He also has made clear that people have a free will and that it is possible to be lost. In the end there will be a separation between those who are saved and those who will face eternal death. And we know also that the gospel must be preached as quickly as possible to as many people as possible.

**What** do the following texts tell us about the importance of preaching the gospel to the whole world?

- *John 14:6* \_\_\_\_\_
- *Acts 4:12* \_\_\_\_\_
- *1 John 5:11, 12* \_\_\_\_\_

John 3:16 is one of the best-known texts in the Bible. “ ‘God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’ ” (*NIV*). The text speaks about the love of God, which found expression in the *sending* of His Son to this earth. It promises eternal life to all who believe in Him. But it also clearly points to the alternative. Those who do not listen to the gospel call and refuse to accept Christ will perish. The decision as to who will perish and who will receive eternal life is not ours. We may be in for some real surprises when we see the roll call of the saved. Without overriding people’s will, God will do everything possible to reduce the number of those who will perish. And—amazingly enough—He has, in His wisdom, given us a role in that process.

**What is your own role in the church’s mission? How seriously do you take the call to reach others with the gospel? What more could you do?**

## The Great Commission

The command to take the gospel to the entire world is found in all four Gospels, as well as in the book of Acts. They show, of course, clear parallels, but there are also some significant differences. One needs to read all versions to form a complete picture of everything that is implied in the Great Commission.

**Read** the passages in which the Great Commission is recorded and note how they complement each other. What are the specific details in each of these passages?

*Matt. 28:19, 20* \_\_\_\_\_

*Mark 16:15, 16* \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 24:46, 47* \_\_\_\_\_

*John 20:21* \_\_\_\_\_

*Acts 1:8* \_\_\_\_\_

The gospel is to be preached “to all nations.” According to General Conference statistics, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is now proclaiming its message in more than two hundred countries. This means that there are only a few countries in which our church does not have an official presence. Among these are several large ones: North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen; most of the others are small, with less than one million inhabitants. So, one would be tempted to conclude that the Adventist Church almost has “finished the work.” That, however, would be false. For even though we must give thanks to our Lord that our church continues to grow rapidly in many parts of the world and that many new territories constantly are being entered, the challenge is still enormous. When the New Testament speaks about “nations,” it uses a word that would be more correctly translated as people groups or “ethnic groups.” Our work, therefore, is not completed until all people groups have been reached. There is considerable debate about how many such people groups exist. The number quoted by specialists varies between some twelve thousand to more than twenty thousand, depending on the definition one uses. But, whatever definition is used, several thousand of these people groups have not yet been reached.

**Think about all the unreached people in your own community, whatever their ethnic background. What difference has your existence made in reaching them? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your role in the mission of the church?**

## A Witnessing Church

**What** special message is to be proclaimed by God’s people in the time of the end? *Rev. 14:6–12*. What is your understanding of that message? Paraphrase it in your own words.

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The passage in which we find the messages of the three angels is found in a context that clearly focuses on the end of time. It is immediately preceded by a vision of the “firstfruits” (*vs. 4*) of the redeemed and followed by a vision of the “harvest” (*vs. 15*) of all the saved. It is important to know what these messages entail. But also we need to understand who these “angels” are that bring this “eternal gospel” (*vs. 5, NIV*). The fact that the word *angel* in prophecy is a symbol for human messengers, leaders, and church members is also underscored by Ellen G. White: “The angels are represented as flying in the midst of heaven, proclaiming to the world a message of warning, and having a direct bearing upon the people living in the last days of this earth’s history. No one hears the voice of these angels, for they are a symbol to represent the people of God who are working in harmony with the universe of heaven. Men and women, enlightened by the Spirit of God, and sanctified through the truth, proclaim the three messages in their order.”—*Life Sketches*, p. 429.

Just as in the Great Commission, we find in the opening statement of the three angels’ messages a strong emphasis on the challenge to take the gospel to every person on earth. Yet, a great danger that we face, especially the longer we are here, is shifting from the missionary mode to the maintenance mode. We can easily lose sight of our mission to witness to the world and focus more on protecting and sustaining our own institutions. When that happens to us, or the churches or institutions we represent, then we are losing the reason for our existence.

**Think about this potential problem, that of focusing more on self-preservation than on mission. How does this happen? How can we recognize when it does, and what can we do to keep from falling into this trap?**

## Personal Witness

It is not so difficult to agree with the statement that the church must be mission-minded. But who is the church? The church is not primarily an organization; rather, it is individuals who are, without any exception, called to be witnesses.

**Why** should we be confident that we can be witnesses of our faith? *1 Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11–15.*

Not all of us have the gift of preaching or teaching. But we all have been gifted in some way so that we can be what we are called to be—disciples always prepared to talk about the hope that is ours (*1 Pet. 3:15*).

**What** is the ultimate resource for those who are willing to witness of their faith? *John 14:26; Acts 1:4, 8; 2:1–4.*

The fact that Christ has promised the presence of the Holy Spirit to His followers and that we can receive spiritual gifts does not mean that it is not necessary to make any preparations or to undergo any training. The apostles were disciples who for more than three years underwent the most intensive training possible. Likewise, disciples today must be intentional about receiving training for Christian witness, and the church must make it a priority to constantly prepare relevant training materials and opportunities to equip the members for their task. But training alone will prove insufficient. God’s people today need the presence and endowment of the Holy Spirit if they want to be successful in their outreach to others.

One simple truth, however, will always remain: You cannot give what you do not have. Unless we make sure that we have a living relationship with God, we cannot hope to lead others to that same experience.

**What** is a vital condition for all who want to be witnesses of their faith? *2 Pet. 3:18.*

A church that responds to its calling will be a growing church. But growth should not be limited to numerical growth. Individually and corporately we must be “growing in grace” if our witnessing truly is to be productive.

**What’s your understanding of what it means to grow in grace? How can you tell if you are? What criteria do you use? Share your answers in class on Sabbath.**

## Sharing the Lord

There is no doubt that sharing the message of the crucified and risen Christ, who is now our Intercessor with His Father, also implies a faithful teaching of the important doctrinal truths that God has revealed in His Word.

**How important is it to teach and adhere to sound doctrine?** *Titus 2:1, 2 Pet. 2:1–3.*

If we want to believe in the God of the Bible and have decided to follow Christ, we will want to know as much as we can about Him, about His character, and about what He expects from us. We try to summarize what we learn in the Bible in a series of doctrines and teachings. To some people, doctrinal statements are no more than irrelevant mental baggage. That is a tragic misunderstanding. Without sound doctrines our faith soon will become unfocused and shallow. Rather than growing in our faith, we eventually will discover that our faith becomes less and less meaningful. Unsound doctrines often will point us away from Christ, to ourselves or to something else that supposedly can contribute to our salvation. When we fail to ground our faith in sound biblical teaching, we are in grave danger of straying from the center of our faith: Jesus Christ our Lord.

**What is to be the centerpiece of all our preaching and witnessing?** *1 Cor. 1:23, 2:2.*

The stress on the importance of sound doctrine must be complemented with the unconditional determination to anchor all we say in Jesus Christ. Everything we believe and state as doctrine must be related to the One in whom we are assured of our eternal salvation. If there is no connection with Jesus Christ, a doctrine will be no more than a piece of technical information, which may be interesting and intellectually challenging, but nothing more. But if rooted in Jesus Christ, a doctrine will help us better understand the plan of redemption and will enhance our relationship with our Lord.

**Think about some of the false teachings that exist in the Christian world: eternal torment in hell, the predestination of some people to be saved and others to be lost, the belief that Jesus Christ was not divine but merely a great man. How could these and other false teachings negatively impact our understanding of God and the plan of salvation?**

**Further Study:** For various aspects of the mission challenge for Seventh-day Adventists, individually and corporately, see Jon L. Dybdahl, ed., *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1999). See also Ellen G. White, “God’s Purpose for His Church,” in *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 9–16.

“The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to ‘the principalities and powers in heavenly places,’ the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① As a class, talk over your answer to the final question on Wednesday. What are the different perspectives of what it means to grow in grace?
- ② Take a good look at your local church. Where is the main emphasis? Is it on the church itself and ministering to the needs of the congregation itself, or is it on mission and on witnessing? How do we strike the right balance; that is, how do we disciple those who have joined us, while at the same time not neglect the call to reach all people? Where does your church stand on this topic, and in what ways can you help the church improve where it needs to?
- ③ How do we as a church protect ourselves from many of the dangerous theological trends that constantly are seeking to infiltrate and pollute our teachings? At the same time, how do we remain open to growing and advancing in new light that can help us better understand our Lord and our mission?

**Summary:** The gospel of Jesus Christ must be preached in all the world. This is the responsibility of all who call themselves disciples. All of us have received certain relevant gifts, and all of us have the promise of the Spirit to further equip us. The preaching of the gospel should be based on sound doctrine, but everything we proclaim must be rooted in the One whom the gospel is all about.

## Determined to Serve

by SETH A. LARYEA

Nyuma stopped shoveling gravel and straightened his back before he answered the question I'd just asked. "I work hard and press forward in spite of difficult circumstances, for I want to fulfill God's purpose in my life and serve Him." And Nyuma is doing that. In spite of financial hardships, he presses toward his goal of completing his education at Valley View University in Ghana.

This day Nyuma is working at the construction site of the new church on the university campus. The church, a recipient of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, will seat 2,500 worshipers and be the center of the university campus. Nyuma works to see the church finished as well as to make his personal dream of an education a reality.

Nyuma grew up in Sierra Leone. He and his friends walked 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) to school and back every day. When he completed primary school, his guardian sent him to work on the farm instead of continuing his studies. When his father learned that Nyuma was not studying, he took the boy to a secondary school in another part of the country.

There Nyuma learned about Seventh-day Adventists and eventually was baptized. His life took on a new direction, and he realized that God was calling him to become a pastor. He continued studying until his father retired. Then Nyuma had no money to continue his studies. He found work doing menial jobs to raise money to continue his studies and finally completed his secondary education when he was 21 years old.

Then the country was thrown into a bitter civil war in which thousands were maimed or murdered. "But God saved me to serve Him," Nyuma said. For the next six years he worked as a lay evangelist in Sierra Leone.

At last he made his way to Valley View University in Ghana to study theology. He completed two years of study before he was forced to leave classes to earn money to complete his education. But Nyuma does not waste time feeling sorry that he cannot study. He offered to work on the church construction team, which is hard work, for he is determined to move toward his calling to be a minister. "Through these difficulties," he says, "God is strengthening me for His service."

Nyuma's determination encourages others to achieve their goals too. He will make a good minister in his Master's service.

Your mission offerings support schools at all levels in nearly two hundred countries. And your Thirteenth Sabbath Offerings make possible projects such as the church at Valley View University. Thank you.

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SETH A. LARYEA is *president of Valley View University near Accra, Ghana. Nyuma Kondorfili Mustapha continues his ministerial studies at the university.*



This quarter, instead of studying John's Gospel (his own inspired eyewitness account of Jesus) or the book of Revelation (which he also wrote), we're going to study his three letters. Though addressed to certain churches and individuals in his time, they deal with issues relevant to us today, issues such as false doctrine, sin, love, apostasy, and obedience. But most important of all, they deal with Jesus Christ, the One through whom we were created ("How did we get here?"), the One who gives our existence meaning and purpose ("Why are we here?") and the One who promises to come again and raise us to eternal life ("Where are we going?"). In short, in Jesus we find the answers to the most important questions.

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## Lesson 1—Jesus and the Johannine Letters

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: From Whom and to Whom—Author and Recipients  
(*1 John 1:1–3; 3 John 1, 13, 14*)

MONDAY: What—The Content of the Epistles (*2 John 1–13*)

TUESDAY: Why—The Purpose of Writing These Letters (*1 John 1:4, 2:12–14*)

WEDNESDAY: Jesus in the Johannine Epistles (*1 John 1:1, 2:1, 5:20*)

THURSDAY: Jesus' Ministry in John's Epistles (*1 John 1:7*)

**Memory Text**—*1 John 4:14*

**Sabbath Gem:** John's Epistles focus on problems in the early Christian church but also point to God the Father and the Son and portray who They are and what They have done for us. When we ponder these truths, we need to consider what our response must be.

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## Lesson 2—Experiencing the Word of Life

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: The Introduction to John's First Letter (*1 John 1:1–4*)

MONDAY: First John 1 and John 1 (*1 John 1:1–5, John 1:1–5*)

TUESDAY: The Word of Life (*1 John 1:1, 2*)

WEDNESDAY: Eyewitnesses (*1 John 1:1–4*)

THURSDAY: Fellowship of the Saints (*1 John 1:3*)

**Memory Text**—*1 John 1:3*

**Sabbath Gem:** Just as eyewitness accounts are taken seriously in a court of law, we should realize the power behind John's account, which is based on his personal experience with Jesus, and be willing to witness as to how Christ is working in our lives.

**Lessons for the Visually Impaired** The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.