

East-Central Africa

DIVISION

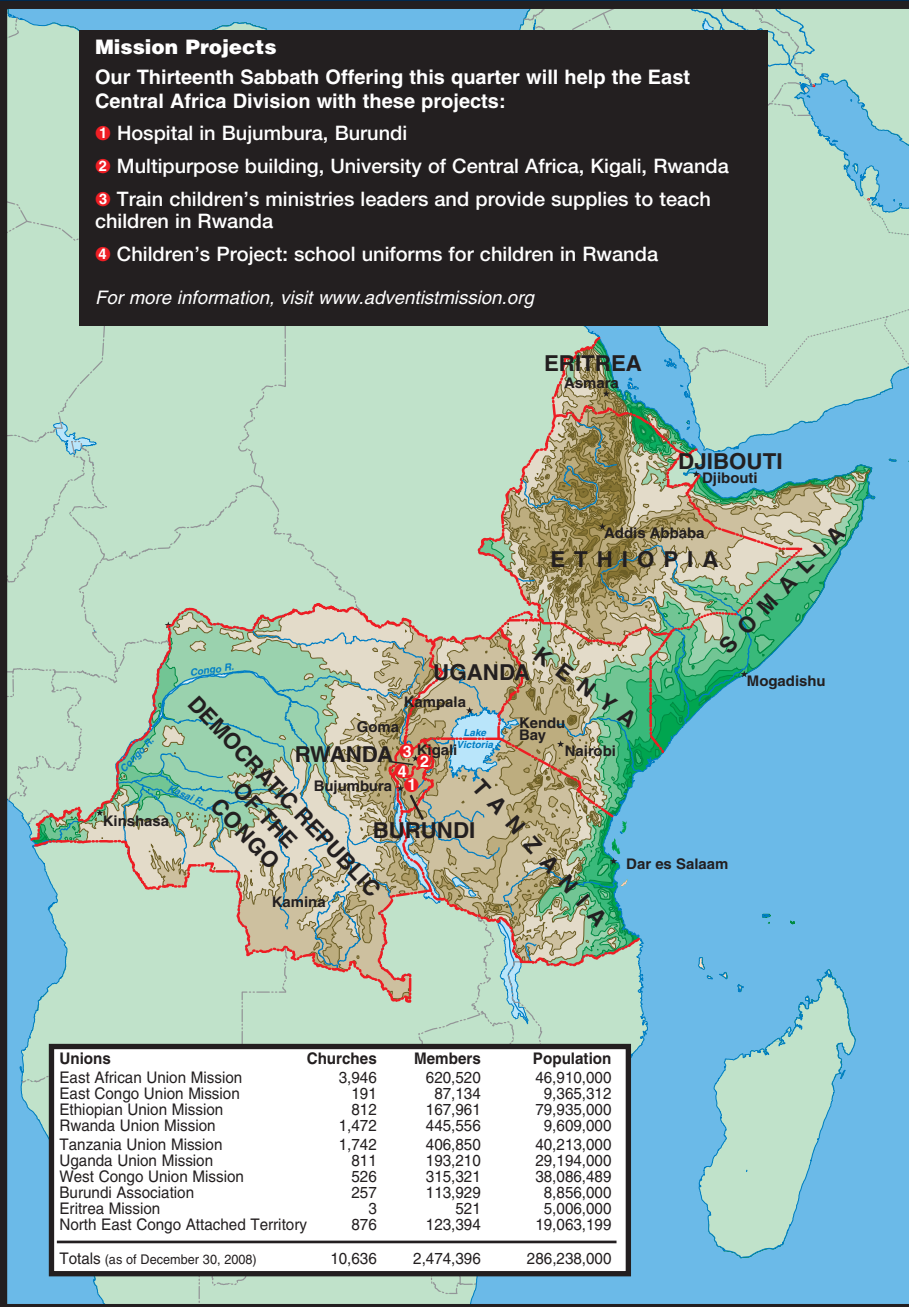
ADULT
SABBATH SCHOOL
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE
Jan • Feb • Mar 2010

Mission Projects

Our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help the East Central Africa Division with these projects:

- 1 Hospital in Bujumbura, Burundi
- 2 Multipurpose building, University of Central Africa, Kigali, Rwanda
- 3 Train children's ministries leaders and provide supplies to teach children in Rwanda
- 4 Children's Project: school uniforms for children in Rwanda

For more information, visit www.adventistmission.org



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.



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ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Jan • Feb • Mar 2010

The Fruit of the Spirit



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH



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THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS . . .

Awoman, driving her vehicle, was pulled over by a few squad cars, and, when the police came out, they had their guns drawn. The woman was shocked. What had she done?

“You were weaving in and out of traffic,” one officer said, “making obscene gestures to other drivers and cursing them.”

“For that,” she replied, “you pull out your guns?”

“Well,” the officer said, “we saw the bumper sticker, which said you were a Christian, and we just assumed the car had been stolen.”

This silly story brings out an important point: Christians, by their very profession, are held up to a high moral standard. After all, look at the One whom they profess as their model, Jesus Christ.

How, then, should Christians live? How should we act in public and at home? The key is found in Galatians 5:22, 23, the subject of this quarter. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

We are going to look at this “fruit of the Spirit”; that is, we are going to look at what happens to those whose lives are surrendered to God and who thus allow the Holy Spirit to work in them. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (*John 3:6, NKJV*). The fruit of the Spirit is what grows in us when we are born of the Spirit; it is what happens when we are born-again.

Notice, Paul says that “the fruit of the Spirit is . . .” He’s talking in the singular. Paul is not talking about separate traits that operate independently of one another but about a single reality. The fruit of the Spirit is what the Holy Spirit creates within us; it defines the type of person we are to become in Jesus.

The fruit of the Spirit is like a precious jewel with many facets. Each facet is a characteristic of Jesus and represents a quality that He wants to produce in our lives. This is the heart of the matter. God’s purpose is to make us like Jesus, and He has sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us to make that change happen.

You will see as we study these lessons that the fruit of the Spirit is not a theory, though we have made it a study. It is not a lifestyle, though a person who is cultivating the fruit of the Spirit will not live as he or she did before. Instead, the fruit of the Spirit is a change of being. “Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). The fruit of the Spirit is the “new” in the life of a person who has passed from death unto life (1 John 3:14) in Christ.

The purpose of this quarter’s lessons is not to focus on how we can become more patient or more loving or more gentle or more faithful but on how we can let the Holy Spirit make us more like Jesus, who is patience, love, gentleness, and faithfulness personified.

You will be challenged to cultivate the graces of the fruit of the Spirit at all times, but especially at home. We will see that the key is surrender, a willingness to die to self and live for God and for others. Finally, we will see that all that we do, we must do under the realization that we are sinners in need of the covering grace of Christ, who loves us whether the harvest seems plentiful or sparse. We must never forget that the fruit of the Spirit is just that—the “fruit,” the result of salvation, not the means. The means is always Jesus and what He has done for us, which we claim by faith.

We can let the Holy Spirit make us more like Jesus, who is patience, love, gentleness, and faithfulness personified.

Pastor Richard O’Ffill, an author and speaker, has worked for the church on three continents, including seven years at the General Conference headquarters. He now resides in Orlando, Florida.

Got Questions?

Sabbath School University *has answers!*

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www.hopetv.org



In the tiny central African country of Burundi the Adventist Church is growing. But most of the church members live outside the capital city. Few of the nation's leaders know much about Adventists.

One way to reach the people is through the medical work. The one small Adventist clinic in Bujumbura is making a difference. Imagine how much good the church will accomplish when the proposed Adventist hospital is completed in the heart of the capital city.

The hospital will provide more than just health care; it will provide soul care as well. I want to help share the gospel of Jesus with the people of Burundi. I can see how much this hospital is needed and the good it will do, and I'm glad that our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help make this hospital a reality. For me it's personal.

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“By Their Fruit . . .”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Luke 13:7–9, John 11:4, 12:28, 15:1–10, 2 Tim. 3:5.*

Memory Text: “Therefore by their fruits you will know them”
(*Matthew 7:20, NKJV*).

One of the most thrilling promises of the Lord is that if we will abide in Him and allow Him to abide in us through His Spirit, we actually will be different. Our lives will be changed, even radically.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (*2 Cor. 5:17, NKJV*).

This quarter we will study various facets of the fruit of the Spirit. The wonderful plan of salvation assures us that “we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (*2 Cor. 3:18, NKJV*).

Those who abide in Jesus always will bear fruit of the Spirit. Do you sometimes wonder if that promise really could be for you? The answer is a resounding Yes. We can be confident of this very thing, that He who has begun this good work in us will finish it (*Phil. 1:6*). Remember His words: “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you” (*John 15:16, NKJV*). And the best news yet is that the good work the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives is not just for now but for eternity.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 2.*

“ ‘Every Tree Is Known by Its Own Fruit’ ”

(Luke 6:44, NKJV)

Has anyone ever asked you if you have received the Holy Spirit? Usually this is a way of discovering whether you speak in “tongues.” For them, tongues-speaking is the determining factor for whether or not you demonstrate the indwelling of the Spirit. Jesus, though, warns us about looking at certain outward signs and miracles as proof of anything. Read His clear warning in Matthew 7:21–23 (*see also Rev. 16:14*). Jesus says plainly that undeniable miracles will be performed in Jesus’ name, but that does not prove that these people are His faithful followers.

In fact, we are told that in the last days professed followers of Jesus would have a form of godliness but would deny the power thereof (*2 Tim. 3:5*).

Read 2 Timothy 3:5. How do we see this truth manifested today?

“ ‘For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush’ ” (*Luke 6:43, 44, NKJV*).

Jesus said we can know a tree by the fruit it produces. A person reveals himself or herself not so much by what he or she professes but by what he or she is. The gifts of the Spirit are given to the church for ministry. The fruit of the Spirit is given to the child of God so that his or her life might be changed.

Being a true Christian and bearing good fruit place the emphasis on being. A good actor can play the part of Mahatma Gandhi, but he can never be Mahatma Gandhi. We can look good, sound good, and even appear to do good. But unless the Holy Spirit gives us a new heart, we never can be good.

Dwell more on this distinction between doing good and being good. First, what do we mean by “good”? Second, can a person do good and not be good? Or, can a person be good and not do good? Work through your answers and bring them to class on Sabbath.

“ ‘Without Me You Can Do Nothing’ ”

(John 15:5, NKJV)

Two young boys were using a fruit tree to climb out of their second-story bedroom window and go to the swimming hole without their parents' permission. One day they heard their father say he was going to cut the tree down because it was dead. Fearing they would lose their escape route, they went to the store and bought artificial apples, which they tied to the branches of the dead tree. The next morning their father expressed amazement that apples seemed to have grown overnight, especially since the tree was a pear tree!

Read John 15:1–5 and answer the following questions:

Jesus declared Himself to be the True Vine. Why do you think He emphasized “true” vine? *(See also Matt. 24:24.)*

According to John 15:5, what does Jesus say we are? What does that mean on a practical level; that is, what does it tell us about how we should live?

Verse 4 explains that a branch cannot bear fruit unless it is connected to the vine. This is a crucial point, one that we should not miss.

Picture a branch that has fallen off an apple tree. Suppose that branch had several apples just reaching maturity. What soon happens to the branch? To the apples? Would it make any difference if we painted the apples a deep red? Suppose we watered the branch or put fertilizer on the ground around it? Would the branch continue to bear more apples if we stuck the stem into the ground? Why, then, is being connected to the trunk (the vine) essential to the branch?

How do you abide in Jesus? What does that mean? What would you have to change in your life to make this a daily experience? What practices and habits are you cultivating that make it more difficult to abide in Him?

“ ‘By This My Father Is Glorified’ ”

(John 15:8, NKJV)

“ ‘By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples’ ” *(John 15:8, NKJV)*. **What does this text mean?**

You have no doubt heard the saying, “It is possible to do the right thing for the wrong reason.” If this is true, is it possible to attempt to abide in Jesus for the wrong reason? Abiding in Jesus is not a means to an end; rather, it is an end in itself. The result of abiding in Him will be that we bear fruit, not to glorify ourselves but to glorify God. In other words, the fruit of the Spirit is not to make us look good but to make the Father look good.

Christ’s ministry, which included many miracles and good works, had a definite driving force. **What was that force, and how should this idea influence what our motives should be?** *(John 11:4, 12:28)*.

Perhaps your church is looking for ways to do things in the community that will enhance the image of the church. And that’s good. At the same time, we need to be careful about what our motives and purposes are. What’s our ultimate goal in these endeavors? Is it to glorify self or to glorify God? How can we learn to make a distinction between the two? In many ways, it can be easy to mix these things, covering even the most self-aggrandizing actions under the false veneer of “glorifying” God.

Read Matthew 5:16 and 1 Corinthians 10:31. How can we create good will and give the glory to our Father in heaven at the same time? Bear in mind that it is possible to create good will and leave the Father out, taking the credit for ourselves. Examine your own heart and ask yourself what really motivates some of your actions. How might you be fooling yourself?

“ ‘That It May Bear More Fruit’ ”

(John 15:2, NKJV)

“ ‘Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit’ ” (John 15:2, NKJV). What is this pruning process all about? How have you experienced it yourself? When that specific process ended, in what ways were you different from before it began?

At the end of every season, the farmer goes back into the vineyard and prunes away most of the vine. The farmer must be careful, however, because next year's crop is directly dependent on which parts remain. The key to pruning is the balance between the crop and vine. One is grown at the expense of the other. If you overcrop by not cutting enough away, the following year's growth will be weak and the fruit inferior. The skillful art is to find the right balance.

“God brings men into trying places to see if they will trust in a power out of and above themselves. He sees not as man sees. He often has to break up human connections and change the order which man has mapped out, which is perfect in his estimation. What man thinks is for his spiritual and temporal interests may be altogether at variance with the experience he must have in order to be a follower of Christ. His idea of his own value may be far out of the way.

“Tests are placed all along the way from earth to heaven. It is because of this that the road to heaven is called the narrow way. Character must be tested, else there would be many spurious Christians who would keep up a fair semblance of religion until their inclinations, their desire to have their own way, their pride and ambition, were crossed. When by the Lord's permission sharp trials come to them, their lack of genuine religion, of the meekness and lowliness of Christ, shows them to be in need of the work of the Holy Spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 266.

Have you ever had a trial that severely tested your faith, even to the point where you wondered if you really even had faith? Looking back, what lessons should you have learned from that experience? Most important, did you learn them?

“ ‘ “And If It Bears Fruit, Well. But If Not . . .” ’ ” *(Luke 13:9, NKJV)*

Between 1730 and 1745 the American colonies from Maine to Georgia experienced a religious revival known as the Great Awakening. Jonathan Edwards was a leader in this movement of spiritual renewal. In July of 1741 he preached a sermon entitled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” which for some has become a symbol of the bleak, cruel, and hell-bent outlook of many Christians. However polemical, this sermon did express the truth about the awful weight of sin, the attitude of an infinitely holy God toward sin, and the surety of a day of judgment.

Read John 15:1–10. What balance does Jesus present here in the context of bearing fruit?

Notice how, on one hand, He said that if we would abide in Him we would bear much fruit, which is a product of being saved by Him. That is, if we abide in Him, by faith, we are assured of salvation because of His righteousness, which is credited to us. At the same time, He warns that if we do not abide in Him we will not bear fruit, and those who do not bear fruit will wither and at last be cast into the fire to be burned (*see 2 Pet. 3:9*).

What is the lesson to be learned from the parable Jesus told in Luke 13:7–9?

The point here is not salvation by bearing fruit, which would be just another manifestation of salvation by works. We’re not saved by bearing fruit; our fruit reveals the reality of the salvation we already have in Jesus, through faith in Him. Bearing fruit is an expression of salvation; it is not a means to attaining it. It is crucial that we understand this distinction. If not, we are sooner or later going to either become proud of what we deem our wonderful fruit, or we’re going to give up in despair at what seems to be a very paltry crop.

Further Study: “‘By their fruits ye shall know them’ (Matthew 7:20), the Saviour declared. All the true followers of Christ bear fruit to His glory. Their lives testify that a good work has been wrought in them by the Spirit of God, and their fruit is unto holiness. Their lives are elevated and pure. Right actions are the unmistakable fruit of true godliness, and those who bear no fruit of this kind reveal that they have no experience in the things of God. They are not in the Vine. Said Jesus, ‘Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the Vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing.’ John 15:4, 5.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 329.

“All who join themselves to the church but not to the Lord will in time develop their true character. ‘Ye shall know them by their fruits.’ Matt. 7:16. The precious fruit of godliness, temperance, patience, kindness, love, and charity, does not appear in their lives. They bear only thorns and briars. God is dishonored before the world by all such professors.”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 90.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** As a class, go over your answer to Sunday’s question. What is the distinction between “being” good and “doing” good?
- 2** Read carefully Ellen White’s statement about how all those who join themselves to the church but not to the Lord will soon reveal their true character. What does that mean? Why should we each ask ourselves in which category we truly belong? How can we know for sure the answer?
- 3** Imagine two folk: One is a Seventh-day Adventist who knows and believes all the doctrines—state of the dead, Second Coming, 1844, and so on. This person, however, is mean, harsh, judgmental, and unloving. There’s another person who, while professing faith in Christ, has rejected all these teachings, accepting what we would deem as theological error. Yet, this person is kind, forgiving, loving, and nonjudgmental, everything the “orthodox” Adventist isn’t. Though, of course, we don’t know hearts, if you had to guess which one was closer to the kingdom of God, whom would you choose, and why? What does your answer imply about what you deem is important in Christianity?

Wyan's Lessons in Faith

Wyan [WHY-ann] is 11 years old and lives in Pennsylvania, U.S.A. He loves God and was thrilled when his mother enrolled him in a Seventh-day Adventist school near their home.

Wyan liked his new school, especially his Bible class where his teachers answered his questions about God in ways that he could understand. Wyan invited his mother to attend a seminar the school held, and there they learned that the Sabbath was God's special day. Wyan wanted to go to Sabbath School, but his mother explained that Saturday was the busiest day at her shop. "I can't afford to close my shop to attend church," she said. Wyan prayed about it, and in time his mother decided they should trust God. She closed her shop and went to church with Wyan.

The church announced a mission trip to Central America, and Wyan wanted to go. He asked his mother to go with him, but again she explained that she didn't have the money to go and couldn't afford to close her shop for the three weeks they'd be gone.

"God will work it out," Wyan said. "We just have to trust Him." Wyan soon learned that some members were raising money so that he and his mother could go on the trip. Convinced it was God's will, Wyan's mom closed her shop and went with Wyan on the trip.

While in Central America, church members held evangelistic meetings for the adults and the children. Wyan spoke at the children's meetings, and at the end of the meetings 23 children gave their hearts to God.

But all during the mission trip Wyan's mother worried about her business. When they returned home, God had a surprise for her. In the first week that she was back in her shop, she earned enough to make up for the three weeks the shop had been closed. "And her business just keeps growing," Wyan says.

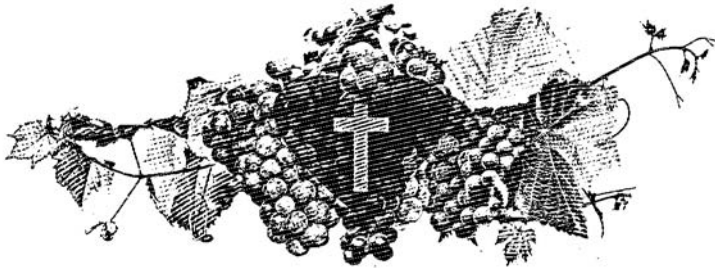


Wyan's faith helped his mother trust God too. When Wyan asked to be baptized, his mother decided to be baptized too. And to their surprise, Wyan's grandmother decided to join them.

Wyan loves to share God's love with others and urges others to do the same. "If God tells you to tell someone about Jesus, do it. Don't be afraid; just trust God, and He'll help you say the right words."

WYAN (left) lives with his mother and grandmother in Pennsylvania, U.S.A.

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Love



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Deut. 6:5, Matt. 5:43–48, Matt. 7:12, 22:39, Luke 10:25–37, 1 Cor. 13:4–7.*

Memory Text: “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (*1 Corinthians 13:13, NKJV*).

It is no accident that Paul's list of the character traits that identify the fruit of the Spirit begins with love. Love is the paramount virtue for Christians because it is the trait that most characterizes God. It was love that motivated God to create us, to sustain us, to make Himself known to us, and to give us His Son in order to redeem us.

John says it so plainly and simply—“God is love” (*1 John 4:16*). Because love is so central to His character, love must be central to ours, as well. “He who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (*vs. 16, NKJV*).

Unfortunately, the word *love* is used very loosely today. We often say that we love the weather, we love our favorite food, we love our dog. But these kinds of love do not pass the test of true Godlike love (*see 1 Corinthians 13*). It's something altogether different, something that impacts our entire existence, our way of life, our way of relating to others. The ingredients of love are a package, not a list from which we select those most appealing to us while we disregard the rest. That's not, as we'll see this week, what true love is all about.

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

Love Is Multidimensional *(Deut. 6:5)*

“Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ ” *(Matt. 22:37–39, NKJV; see also Deut. 6:5)*.

Bible translations, as with all written works, differ in word choice. For instance, “The bird was little” might read in one translation, “The bird was tiny,” or in another, “The bird was small.” And all these descriptions would be correct. Therefore, to study the fruit of the Spirit, it is helpful to define meanings by going to the original language of the word. In Deuteronomy 6:5, the Hebrew word for love is *ahabta*, which refers primarily to love exhibited by the will, mind, and actions rather than love exhibited by feelings or emotions. It is the highest kind of love, for it motivates one to do what is right and noble no matter how one feels. Thus, the love Jesus speaks of in the greatest commandment is the noblest, purest, and highest form of self-sacrificing love and is that which each person is commanded to have toward God.

The Jewish people already knew that the number-one command was to love God with their whole heart, soul, mind, and, as Mark adds, strength *(see Mark 12:30)*. In pointing out all four aspects of the human being, Jesus simply is calling together all that a person is. He is saying, “You need to love God with your entire being.” His intent is not to sort out the individual sense of each word; however, much could be gained by studying these four aspects.

Read Matthew 7:12 and Matthew 22:39. What’s the important point these texts make? How is this essential to the whole concept of love?

To love your neighbor as yourself means to love all people with your whole heart. The love spoken of in this “second commandment” is the same as in the “first commandment.” It is love in action, involving the will and intention. To love our neighbor as ourselves means to take care of someone else the same way you would take care of yourself.

It’s easy to talk about loving others as yourself; what’s not easy is doing it. How well do you do in this area? How can you learn the hard lessons of death to self in order to minister to the needs of others?

What Love Does *(1 Cor. 13:4–8)*

“Love suffers long and is kind; . . . thinks no evil; . . . rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” *(1 Cor. 13:4–8, NKJV)*.

Love defined is the first step; love applied is the next. We must be careful not to glibly say we love; but rather, we need to analyze carefully how we live and how well we apply the principles of love as expressed in the Bible.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. Look at each individual aspect of what love is and ask, **How can I apply these principles in my own home?**

Think for a moment of what our homes would be like if by God’s grace we consistently practiced the qualities of true love. Imagine the blessing of living in an environment where the family members are positive and affirming of each other. Perhaps you can’t get others to do this, but if you were to apply these principles, you might just see how powerful an impact they could make on others. You can’t argue against love; it’s the most powerful force in all of creation. People can argue against your theology, your lifestyle, your beliefs, your faith—everything. But what argument can they use against unconditional love, the kind of love revealed to the world through Jesus, the kind of love that we can, through His grace, manifest to others?

Which characteristics of biblical love do you find the most difficult to implement in your own life? How can you make a concentrated effort through God’s grace to cultivate more of this aspect of love? Why is it important that you do so?

What Love Doesn't Do

Go back over 1 Corinthians 13:4–8, only this time look at it from a different perspective. Look at what love does not do. Though these are stated in the negative, they are actually other positive characteristics of love.

Go through each one of the “negatives” in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 and write down their equivalents in positive terms. Also, as you do, ask yourself how well or poorly you manifest these aspects of love and how you might be able to do better.

Does not envy = _____

Does not parade itself = _____

Is not puffed up = _____

Is not rude = _____

Does not seek its own = _____

Is not easily provoked = _____

Thinks no evil = _____

Does not rejoice in iniquity = _____

As we contemplate the meaning of love detailed in the love chapter (*1 Corinthians 13*), we are able to appreciate the character of our heavenly Father, who is the personification of love. We also are able to see that the word *love* as used in the popular culture falls far short of a correct understanding of the love of God.

The Test of Love *(Matt. 5:43–48)*

Read Matthew 5:43–48 and then paraphrase in your own words what Jesus said. What’s the main point Jesus is telling us about love?

If we are to love our enemies, we had better discover who exactly are our enemies. If an enemy is only the one who threatens your life, you may think this text doesn’t apply to you, inasmuch as you probably have not had your life threatened lately.

But by definition, an enemy is an opponent, a rival, a competitor, a challenger, a contender. An enemy is one who hates you or who mistreats you. It might even be a spouse or another member of the family. There may be times when a family member isn’t very loving. He or she may even look for ways to irritate you—or worse. When that happens, it is easy to get caught in the trap of retaliation and pettiness.

Sometimes you may experience conflict on the job, and those you have worked with side by side over the years may begin to think of you as an opponent. An enemy could be someone you have cared a great deal for or even may be someone in your church.

We need to realize that the enemy Jesus referred to is not limited to someone who would threaten our lives but is anyone who causes us enough consternation to tempt us to retaliate.

Read Proverbs 15:1, 25:21, and 1 Peter 3:9. How do these texts help us understand this important principle regarding love?

Loving our enemies? Many folk have a hard time showing love to their friends, much less their enemies. How can we learn to follow Jesus’ example here? How can our hearts be changed so that we can love our enemies? How might praying for them play a large role in helping us reach this Christian ideal?

Love in Action *(Luke 10:25–37)*

A seminary professor set up his preaching class in an unusual way. He scheduled each of his students to prepare a sermon on the story of the good Samaritan. One by one they were to go from classroom to classroom, preaching love and compassion for others. There was only a short break between classes, which forced the would-be preachers to rush in order to meet the schedule. Each of the preacher students had to walk down a certain corridor and pass by a beggar who had been deliberately planted there by the professor.

What happened was a powerful lesson! The number of would-be preachers who stopped to help this man was extremely low, especially those who were under the pressure of time. Rushing to preach their sermon on the good Samaritan, almost all walked right past the beggar at the heart of the parable!

In yesterday's lesson, we talked about the question of **Who is my enemy? Today the question is, Who is my neighbor? How does Jesus, in Luke 10:25–37, answer that for us? How does this parable tie into the whole question of what true love is? Also, as you read this parable, ask the question, Why did Jesus specifically place religious people, even religious leaders, in the role of the “bad guys”? What lesson is there for us, as well?**

Consider these words: “I was hungry, and you formed a humanities club to discuss it. I was imprisoned, but you complained about the crime rate. I was naked, and you debated the morality of my appearance. I was sick, and you thanked God for your health. I was homeless, and you preached to me about the shelter of God’s love. You seem so holy and so close to God; but I’m still hungry, lonely, cold, and in pain. Does it matter?”

Be honest. What kind of lifestyle changes should you make so that you can become a good Samaritan to others? Whom do you know right now who is at this moment on the other side of the road in the world of hurt? How much death to self will it require for you to treat this person as a “neighbor”?

Further Study: Scientist Arthur Zajonc filled a box with light. But he did it so that none of the light reflected off any internal surface. Inside the box was light, and light alone. Now, if you looked inside, at the light, what would you see? What does light look like?

Pure darkness, that's what you'd see. Unless reflecting off of something, or unless you stare directly into it, light is invisible.

Zajonc then took a rod and moved it through the darkness of the box. The rod itself, on the side from which the light entered, was illuminated. It looked as if a thin light was shining on just the rod, nothing else, even though light was everywhere in the box (as if filled with water). Only when it reflected off from something (the rod) did it become visible. Otherwise, the light was darkness.

On earth, sunlight pouring down on the sky turns it blue, gray, or red, depending upon the weather and time of day. On the moon, no matter how much sunlight pours down, if you looked up you'd see what you'd see in Zajonc's box, pure darkness, the darkness of empty space. And that's because the moon has no atmosphere, no air, no moisture, and none of the gases and fumes that, reflecting sunlight, turn it into the panoply of color that reigns overhead here.

Light, unless reflected from something, appears as pure darkness.

Discussion Questions:

1 What spiritual lessons about love might we be able to draw from what was written above about the nature of light? *See 1 John 1:5, 2:9–11, 4:8, Luke 11:35.*

2 Luke 23:34 says, “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’ ” (*NKJV*). Do you pray for your enemies? It is difficult to have the right attitude toward those who hate us, mistreat us, or persecute us. But praying for our enemies has a way of changing our hearts and attitudes toward them. When we pray for our persecutors and those who hate us, we will begin to see them as people in need of God's grace just as much as we need it. It will give us the power and the desire to bless them when they curse us and do good to them when they hate us. How can we cultivate the attitude of praying for those whom we would really rather curse?

3 A person saw someone with a broken-down vehicle. He pulled over, offering to help, and for his trouble was beaten and robbed. “That's it,” he said. “I'll never go out of my way to be a good Samaritan again.” How would you respond to this person?

Breaking the Chains

Niyara [Nee-YAH-rah] sighed heavily and looked around the gloomy room. She was in a hospital for drug addicts in Central Asia. Only 29, she felt old and tired. She wandered through life with no purpose and no hope.

She had liked the feeling of forgetfulness she experienced when someone first gave her drugs, and she quickly became addicted. She lost interest in work and family, and her life spiraled into her own private hell. Her parents took her daughter from her and told her to get out. With no place else to go, she moved in with her addicted friends. She wanted out, but she didn't know how to escape.

A man entered the hospital room to visit another patient. Niyara listened as they talked. "God will help you overcome your addictions," the man, Sergey, said. "Ask Him for help and trust Him to deliver you."

Niyara wondered if it was true. She didn't know this God Sergey spoke about. What did He think of her and her life? Could He forgive her? Would He help her? Sergey saw her interest and gave her a Bible. She searched it for answers to questions that plagued her and for assurance of forgiveness.

Niyara was released from the rehabilitation center and met a woman she knew from her addict days. Niyara was amazed at the change in her and asked what had happened. The woman told her that she had become a Christian and had joined a group of former addicts who met to help one another. "Come with me," she urged. Niyara attended the meetings and found hope that she, too, could truly overcome her addictions. Niyara surrendered her life to Christ.

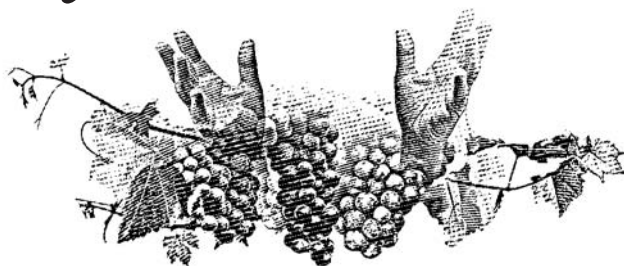
A month later the group's leader left the city and asked Niyara to take over the group. Niyara feared that she couldn't do it. She cried to God for help, and felt an overwhelming love for God and for her fellow addicts. While helping others, she found victory over alcohol and drugs and assured the other women in the group that they, too, could live a sober and happy life.

Niyara knew that former addicts need to live away from the temptations of drugs and alcohol, a place where they can find strength and support to reestablish their sober life. But where could she find such a place? Niyara asked God for help, and He is answering her.

Niyara has learned that with Christ as the center of her life, life can be beautiful without drugs and alcohol. Today her goal is to help others learn that God is the secret to living a fulfilling life free of drugs. Pray for Niyara and for those seeking freedom from the chains of addiction throughout the world.

NIYARA has been baptized and shares her faith in Uzbekistan.

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Joy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Psalm 139; Luke 15:4–24; John 15:10, 11; Heb. 11:16.*

Memory Text: “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (*John 15:11, NKJV*).

Joy and happiness are not necessarily the same thing. Happiness is the result of favorable circumstances; joy, in contrast, is the result of being—as in being connected to Jesus, the True Vine.

In Psalm 4:7, joy and happiness are contrasted: “You have given me greater joy than those who have abundant harvests of grain and new wine” (*NLT*). The “greater joy” comes from knowing and trusting God; happiness is a result of pleasant circumstances, such as an abundant harvest. Inward joy is steady as long as we trust God; happiness is as unpredictable as a harvest. Inward joy defeats discouragement; happiness covers it up. Inward joy is lasting; happiness is temporary.

Joy is a delight in life that runs deeper than pain or pleasure. This type of joy stems from an awareness of God's presence in one's life, allowing us to rise above circumstances and focus on the goodness and love of God. At the core of Christian joy is the fact that God has acted and is acting to save those who trust in Him.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 16.*

The Command to Rejoice *(Phil. 4:4)*

Many believers allow themselves to be victimized by their circumstances and consequently vacillate between spiritual highs and lows. For them, to rejoice seems unreasonable, even impossible. That is why the command is to rejoice “in the Lord” *(Phil. 4:4)*.

We can’t always rejoice in our circumstances or in other people, because both of these elements may be negative. However, we can rejoice in the Lord, because He is always good, and He never changes.

Our spiritual stability is directly related to our knowledge of and commitment to God. Knowing Him helps us live above our circumstances and provides stability. That’s why the psalms were written in poetic form and meter and set to music—so the people of Israel could memorize Scripture and sing hymns in order to deepen their knowledge of God. Knowing Him makes everything else seem less significant.

Read Psalm 139; Romans 8:28; and 1 Peter 1:8, 9. What reasons are given there for us to rejoice? How can we learn to rejoice in these promises of God?

Do you need other reasons to rejoice? How about because God saved us, adopted us, and promised to give us an inheritance in Jesus Christ *(Eph. 1:1–11)*? When Christ returns, we will enjoy His presence and the heavenly place prepared for us *(John 14:2, 3)*. Until that time, it’s a joy to know that God has promised to supply all our needs *(Phil. 4:19)*. Furthermore, we have the privilege of serving the One we supremely love. That includes sharing the good news with the lost and encouraging fellow Christians to increase their love and service for Him. It is also a joy knowing we can pray to God at any time *(Heb. 4:15, 16)*. Finally, we can rejoice knowing that death does not have the final word *(1 Cor. 15:54)*.

Despite these promises, and despite all the reasons we have to rejoice, we all struggle with sadness, discouragement, and pain. These are the “facts of life” here and now. No matter our circumstances, how can we learn to find the joy that’s offered us in Christ? What choices are we making that can greatly impact whether or not we avail ourselves of the joy that could be ours?

The Joy of Christ

To understand fully a Christian’s joy, we must look at the joy-filled lifestyle of Christ. Where did His joy come from? What were the principles by which He lived?

What role does joy have in three of the most popular parables Jesus told? What’s the common element in all three stories?

The Lost Sheep (*Luke 15:4–7*)

The Lost Coin (*Luke 15:8–10*)

The Prodigal Son (*Luke 15:11–24*)

These three parables give us insight into the heart of God. It is a heart that is willing to celebrate. It is the pure joy of God, the joy of reaching the lost. No wonder that, despite His trials and suffering, Jesus was anointed with joy, for He knew that—because of what He would accomplish—many people would be saved.

Consider the significance of the words recorded in Hebrews 12:2, 3. Prayerfully contemplate the words: “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” (*NKJV*). Write some of the thoughts that come to your mind as you meditate on the meaning of these words. What was the joy that was set before Him? Why would the salvation of lost souls be so important to God?

How would you reconcile the idea that Jesus was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (*Isa. 53:3, NKJV*) yet at the same time was a man of joy? Pick a specific problem in your life that causes you sorrow and grief. How, despite this sorrow, can you experience for yourself the kind of joy that Jesus experienced?

Joy in Obedience *(John 15:11)*

Read John 15:10, 11. What is Jesus linking joy to? How, in a practical sense, does this work; that is, why should this lead to joy?

“But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night” (*Ps. 1:2, NKJV*).

“I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart” (*Ps. 40:8, NKJV*).

There is no greater joy than the joy of being obedient to the will of God. While it may seem to some that an emphasis on obedience to the law of God simply serves to exacerbate an already guilty conscience, the fact is that obedience to the will of God is liberating. Remember, it was disobedience that brought war to heaven and sin and death to this planet. All human pain and suffering are the result of humans stepping outside the will of God. It will be, then, obedience to the will of God through faith that helps restore joy.

Read Psalm 19:8, Jeremiah 15:16, and Matthew 7:21–27. How do they link obedience with joy?

However clear the Bible is that we are not saved by works, it’s also clear that works are an inseparable aspect of what it means to have salvation. Works reveal to the universe the reality of our salvation, the reality of our commitment to God. To call someone a legalist merely because that person is adamant about obeying God’s will is, in a real sense, to fall into the trap that Isaiah warned about: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (*Isa. 5:20*).

How have you experienced for yourself the joy that comes from obedience? Or to ask the question negatively: How have you experienced the pain and suffering that come from not obeying the Lord?

Joy in Tough Times *(John 16:33)*

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’ ” *(John 16:33, NKJV).*

A long-held belief suggests that if a person is passing through difficulties it is because either that person must be doing something wrong or does not have enough faith. What a crude and cold view of God! Jesus said clearly that in this life we would all have troubles, both the believer and the nonbeliever. However much we love the story of Daniel in the lions’ den, the fact is that most of the Christians thrown to the lions were torn to shreds by the beasts. The same with the three Hebrews who survived the fiery furnace; most Christians tied to the stake were, indeed, burned there!

Read Galatians 6:9, James 1:2–4, and 1 Peter 1:6. What hope, what promises can we take from these verses that could help us during painful times?

Consider the possibility that many believers today do not have joy simply because they are self-centered. However real our problems, by focusing solely on them, we only make them worse in our own minds. In reality, we do have reasons to rejoice, not in ourselves but in God.

After all, doesn’t God say that “the very hairs of your head are all numbered”? *(See Matt. 10:30.)* Think of the promise inherent in those words. If, knowing our security is in Jesus, we would reach out and minister to someone else during our times of trial, we would know that self-pity can be turned to joy by a simple act of the will. “And the Lord restored Job’s losses when he prayed for his friends” *(Job 42:10, NKJV).*

No matter what you might be struggling with now, reach out to someone who is, perhaps, going through something hard, as well. Surely you know someone who needs help, encouragement, and support. How can bearing someone else’s burdens lighten your own?

Joy That Lasts *(Heb. 11:24, 25)*

“By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin” *(Heb. 11:24, 25, NKJV)*. **What principles of the Christian life are found in these verses?** *(See also Luke 9:23, Acts 14:22, Phil. 1:29.)* **How can we link those above verses with the promise of joy?** *(See Heb. 11:16, 1 Pet. 1:6–8).*

Moses’ decision to turn his back on the throne of Egypt was definitely not politically correct. He might have decided to stay in Egypt and become the next Pharaoh. He might have rationalized such a move to be God’s will for him. After all, it might not have been that hard to do, because there are often so many “good” reasons to make a wrong decision.

Think upon the last time you made a wrong decision based on “good” reasons. What hard lessons did you learn?

While joy comes from knowing we are within the will of God, the immediate consequences often may be difficult and painful. To believe that when we accept Jesus and obey His Word all our problems will disappear can lead to disillusionment. Becoming a committed Christian is no assurance of money, fame, and influence. Each year thousands are persecuted, some even martyred, for their faith.

In the end, our hope, our salvation, everything has to depend upon something greater than this world, greater than what this world offers. How crucial that, no matter what we are going through, we focus on what Jesus has done for us and what He has promised us. Otherwise, we have nothing else but what this world in and of itself offers, and as we all know, what it offers can at times be very bitter.

Further Study: “It is the duty of Christians to convince the world that the religion of Christ disrobes the soul of the garments of heaviness and mourning and clothes it with joy and gladness. Those who receive Christ as a sin-pardoning Saviour are clothed with His garments of light. He takes away their sin and imparts to them His righteousness. Their *joy* is full. . . .

“Who have better right than Christians to sing songs of rejoicing? Have they not the expectation of being members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King? *Is not the gospel good tidings of great joy?* When the promises of God are freely and fully accepted, heaven’s brightness is brought into the life.”—Ellen G. White, *A Call to Medical Evangelism and Health Education*, p. 26, emphasis supplied.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Go through the Bible and focus on the lives of a few well-known characters. How much joy do you think they experienced? How about Noah or Abraham or Joseph? What about Daniel or David or Jeremiah? Or Paul or John the Baptist? What can we learn from their experiences, both the good and the bad, about what Christian joy is really about?
- 2** What are some worldly ways we can be “happy”? How well do these things work? What have you learned about worldly ways of achieving happiness? Are they all bad, or can and should they have their place in our lives?
- 3** How much happiness or even joy could or should we expect in this life, even as Christians who live with the knowledge of God’s infinite love? That is, when all around us we see sickness, suffering, and death, and when we know that many souls are going to be eternally lost, how much happiness should we have? Isn’t it kind of selfish to rejoice in our good fortune while we know that others will perish?
- 4** Why is it that the more self-centered we are, the more miserable we tend to be?
- 5** Why is the hope and promise of eternal life in a whole new earth so crucial to our whole Christian experience? What would we have without it? How important, then, is it that we keep that hope always before us? After all, even if we have it good here in this world and in this life, it’s not going to last, so how ultimately satisfying could it be?

Searching for Truth

by TUNJI ADEEKO

I grew up in a region of Nigeria that included several religions—idol worshippers and animists, Muslims and Christians. I wondered which faith contained the truth. I observed and took part in several religious ceremonies, but still I wondered.

One day some friends and I passed an Adventist church. Someone in our group made fun of Seventh-day Adventists saying they worshiped on Saturday. Everyone else laughed, but I wondered. Do some Christians really worship on Saturday?

I couldn't get to the church to learn about the Sabbath, so I read the Bible looking for answers. I searched for the word *Saturday*, but I couldn't find it. I understood *Sabbath* to mean Sunday, so I didn't find a satisfactory answer there either.

Then I found a tract about the Sabbath and read that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. As I studied the Bible texts, I became convinced that the Sabbath was God's creation, and Sunday was man's tradition. It made perfect sense.

I began to sense that God was someone I could relate to, someone who created me and wanted a relationship with me. As I continued studying I understood how God so wanted a relationship with us that He stepped into human history and shared what He wanted humans to know about Him.

I found the Bible text that tells us to obey the commandments and have the faith of Jesus. I realized that Jews accepted the commandments but do not accept Jesus. Most Christians accept Jesus but don't keep all the commandments. I just knew God had a church that had the faith of Jesus and kept all the Ten Commandments.

I realized that to worship God in spirit and in truth I had to keep the Sabbath. I remembered the Adventist church I had seen on the road that day and found an Adventist church near where I was studying. I began attending worship services there.

When I went home for vacation I visited the Adventist church I had seen months earlier. My sister was upset when she learned that I was attending the Adventist church, but I knew that I had to find my salvation in Christ, not through any other person. I would sneak away to church as often as I could.

I praise God for showing me the truth. He used a simple church building, my sister's ridicule, a Bible, and a tract to lead me to Him. Your mission offerings help provide the materials that lead people such as me to the Savior. Thank you.

TUNJI ADEEKO *lives in western Nigeria.*

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Peace



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Lesson: *Matt. 8:23–27; 11:28, 29; Rom. 5:1–11; 12:9–21; Heb. 12:14; Col. 3:13–15.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid’ ” (*John 14:27, NKJV*).

As a champion of peace, Paul wrote, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (*Eph. 4:3, NKJV*). The Greek word translated “endeavoring” is an imperative, excluding any passivity, any “wait and see” attitude. We must be proactive. If we fight and bicker in our homes, if we fall into factions at church, if we refuse to love and honor others, then we are denying the peace of God in Jesus Christ, which He established on the cross.

How ironic that you have to fight for peace. Eleanor Roosevelt, in a *Voice of America* radio broadcast, said, “It isn’t enough to talk about peace; one must believe in it. And it isn’t enough to believe in it; one must work at it.” The peace that Christ won for us also requires effort, hard work, and constant self-examination.

As we study this week, we should ask ourselves: Have I availed myself of the peace that Jesus won for me on the cross? How can I cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He engrafts that peace into my daily life?

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 23.*

Peace With God *(Rom. 5:1)*

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” *(Rom. 5:1, NKJV)*.

To have peace with God is more than to feel comfortable in His presence. It means that we, who once were “alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds” (*Col. 1:21, ESV*), have been reconciled and restored to fellowship with God. Once we were at war with God, but by His death on the cross, Jesus has made it possible for the hostilities to cease and for us to be God’s friends and not His enemies.

In one sense, this peace is not something we grow in, as in starting out with just a little bit of peace. Rather, we are reconciled to God, once and for all, by the cross of Christ. It is an accomplished fact. There is another sense, though, in which we do grow in peace with God. The more clearly we see God’s ways and walk in them, the more we appropriate His power to live as His sons and daughters. In this sense, peace with God is indeed a fruit of the Spirit. As we grow to maturity as children of God, we experience more and more the blessings and benefits of living in His kingdom until we can say, “Great peace have those who love Your law, And nothing causes them to stumble” (*Ps. 119:165, NKJV*).

Colossians 1:20–22 reveals that sin did not cause God to be merciful and pardoning; rather, it revealed that He has been that way from eternity. The plan of salvation demonstrated that God loved us and was willing to forgive even from the beginning.

Read Romans 5:1–11 and summarize what you believe the crucial points are here.

Dwell on this idea that only because of what Jesus has done, because of His perfect life credited to you by faith, can you stand pardoned, forgiven, and accepted before God, regardless of your past. Why is this teaching so important to us if we are truly to know peace?

Finding Peace: Part 1 (Matt. 11:28, 29)

On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 is very peaceful, 10 is very anxious), how would you rate your life? People are increasingly frustrated in their search for personal peace. In Matthew 11:28, 29, Jesus makes an invitation. Though He doesn't use the word *peace*, He does use a word that means "to give rest, to refresh, to give one's self rest, to take a rest."

Read the following verses: “ ‘Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls’ ” (Matt. 11:28, 29, NKJV). **What is Jesus saying to us here? How can we experience for ourselves the reality of this wonderful promise?**

From what Jesus is saying in these verses, is He proposing to give us peace as a gift, or does He mean to show us how to obtain it? Is not Jesus teaching that personal peace is a result of some cause and inviting us to learn that cause from Him?

“It is the love of self that brings unrest. . . . Those who take Christ at His word, and surrender their souls to His keeping, their lives to His ordering, will find peace and quietude. Nothing of the world can make them sad when Jesus makes them glad by His presence. In perfect acquiescence there is perfect rest. The Lord says, ‘Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee.’ Isa. 26:3.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 330, 331.

How does love of self lead to personal unrest and unhappiness?

How can we learn to die to self and to rest in Jesus? What choices can we make, every day, that can help make the promise of peace in Christ real? That is, what things are we doing, or not doing, that keep us from having the peace that Jesus offers us?

Finding Peace: Part 2 *(John 14:27)*

The story is told of two painters. Each painted a picture to illustrate his concept of rest. The first chose for his scene a still, serene lake among the far-off mountains. The second painted a thundering waterfall with a fragile birch tree bending over the foam; at the fork of a branch, almost wet with the cataract's spray, a robin sat on its nest.

Which best portrayed the essence of rest? It is not often in this world of turmoil that we find the rest of a lone mountain lake. More often we must find our rest amid the turmoil of real life.

Read the story recorded in **Matthew 8:23–27 of Jesus and His disciples on the Sea of Galilee.** *(See also Mark 4:35–41, Luke 8:22–25.)* **However unique the situation, what can we take away from this account for ourselves; that is, what is the message for us, and how can we apply it to our lives, regardless of our situation?**

Why do you think Jesus was concerned that His disciples have peace? Jesus left us with a beautiful promise about peace: “ ‘Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you’ ” *(John 14:27, NKJV)*. How does the peace the world is trying to give differ from the peace Jesus offers?

One thing we mustn't do is equate peace to a life without problems. Rare is the person, even the most faithful Christian, who goes through life without trials, pain, and suffering. Indeed, some folk have, it seems, more than their share of suffering. Peace, though, has more to do with how you handle these situations than with the situations themselves. Peace has to do with the deepest trust in a loving and caring God who knows what you are going through and has promised not to forsake you, no matter what comes your way.

What types of things upset you? Talk to God about your deepest fears. Call them by name. Ask the Lord to help you get in touch with the fear and identify it. Then take time to allow Him to begin to speak peace gently to those fears.

Peace at Home *(Heb. 12:14)*

“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” *(Heb. 12:14)*. **“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men”** *(Rom. 12:18, NKJV)*. **What can we learn from the life and example of Jesus that can make these admonitions real in our lives? What are we doing (if anything) that makes them difficult, if not impossible, to become real for us?**

Strange as it may seem, the most difficult place to be a Christian is at home. How tragic, when home should be the one place in all the world where we all should have peace.

Two young men were in a battle during the days of the Vietnam War. The bullets were flying, and the bombs were exploding. All of this didn't seem to faze one of the soldiers. When his friend asked how he could be so calm, he replied that it reminded him of home!

Study Romans 12:9–21. **Identify verses in the passage that, if implemented, would help to bring peace to the home. Give a practical application for the verses you chose.**

As Christians, we are called to follow an incredibly high standard, the standard presented by Jesus Himself. All of us have fallen short of that goal. That being said, it doesn't mean that we can't still reflect the principles revealed in the life of Jesus, principles of love, self-sacrifice, and an uncompromising attitude toward evil and sin.

Imagine what our homes would be like were we to, indeed, reflect these principles! Imagine what it would be like if we would learn to think of others before ourselves; imagine if we showed others unconditional love, even when folk didn't deserve it. Imagine if we forgave those who hurt us. Imagine if we were as concerned about the well-being of others as we were about our own selves. Though implementing these principles wouldn't solve all our family problems, no doubt they would greatly help!

Peace in the Church *(Matt. 5:23, 24)*

“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” *(Matt. 5:23, 24, NKJV)*. What basic principle is Jesus teaching us with these words? Why do we find it so hard to implement this principle in our lives?

It is evident that Jesus takes more seriously our relationships with one another than we do. It is not uncommon for bitterness and resentment to exist for years between members of a church. Imagine how different things would be if we all followed this teaching.

Identify a characteristic of the children of God as recorded in Matthew 5:9. What does it mean?

According to Colossians 3:13–15, what are three ways we are to relate with one another as fellow members of the church? What does each one mean?

Notice the flow of Christian graces in James 3:17: “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” *(NKJV)*. What would our churches be like if we would allow the Holy Spirit to nurture these qualities in our fellowship? What things would be noticeably absent?

Think about the last time you had a problem with a fellow church member. Did you follow Christ’s words in Matthew 5? If not, analyze your reasons why you chose the “easy,” worldly route as opposed to the path that would have required humility and self-denial. How can you learn to do what Jesus calls us to in such situations?

Further Study: *Pss. 4:3, 119:165, Isa. 26:3, Rom. 8:6, Phil. 4:7.*

“Shortly before His crucifixion Christ had bequeathed to His disciples a legacy of peace. ‘Peace I leave with you,’ He said, ‘My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.’ John 14:27. This peace is not the peace that comes through conformity to the world. Christ never purchased peace by compromise with evil. The peace that Christ left His disciples is internal rather than external and was ever to remain with His witnesses through strife and contention.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 84.

“Strife for the supremacy makes manifest a spirit that, if cherished, will eventually shut out from the kingdom of God those who cherish it. The peace of Christ cannot dwell in the mind and heart of a workman who criticizes and finds fault with another workman simply because the other does not practice the methods he thinks best, or because he feels that he is not appreciated. The Lord never blesses him who criticizes and accuses his brethren, for this is Satan’s work. Manuscript 21, 1894.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 102.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** What are ways you can work in your local church to help keep peace among members when inevitable tensions and disagreements arise?
- 2** What are the common situations we face in our daily lives that threaten our peace? What Bible promises can we claim when each one arises?
- 3** Of course, it’s always easy to talk about trusting the Lord no matter our circumstances and from that trust deriving peace. And that’s true. At the same time, what concrete and practical steps can we take to change the circumstances that make peace difficult? In other words, how often might our unease and fear be the result of choices that we make?
- 4** What practical things can we do to help others through circumstances that make peace difficult to achieve?
- 5** How much peace should we realistically expect to have in a world filled with such strife, chaos, suffering, and turmoil?

God's Man

by MAYRA CASTANEDA

I grew up in a family that considered itself Christian, but we seldom attended church. When I was 19, I met a young man who was very different from most men I knew.

I had seen him passing my house from time to time, sometimes waving. Then one day he stopped to talk. His name was David, and he said he was a Seventh-day Adventist. I had heard of Adventists, but I knew nothing about their beliefs. David asked me whether I would like to know more about God.

“I don’t believe in God,” I said. “He is an invention of people who needed a crutch in life.” I felt confident in my answer because I had visited a number of churches in the area, and they all seemed phony.

David was polite but persistent, and while still standing outside my house, we began talking about God. I asked many questions about God and science and was impressed that each of his answers was backed up with Bible texts.

David returned often, but my father wouldn’t let him inside the house, so we sat outside. David shared his faith and loved Bible texts, and I asked questions. We became friends, and soon I became convinced that God was real and that David knew Him personally. During one of David’s visits I accepted Jesus as my Savior.

My parents noticed I was changing, that I was reading my Bible and praying. My father warned me about getting serious with a man who had a strange religion.

Whenever we were together, our conversations always turned to God, for God was such an important part of David’s life. He invited me to some evangelistic meetings at his church. I went when I could and realized that the Adventist Church was where I belonged. It was real; the people were real; their faith was real. I told David that I wanted to become an Adventist. We already had studied the doctrines, so one Sabbath I slipped away to church and was baptized.

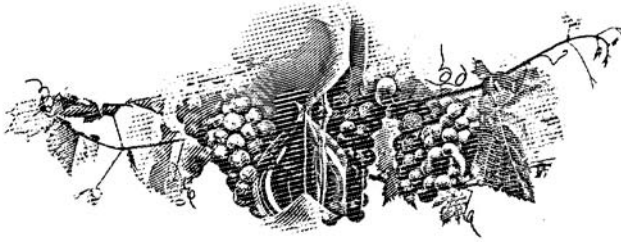
When my father learned I had been baptized, he told me to leave home. I was stunned. I stayed with my grandmother until my parents gave her trouble and I had to find another place to live.

I don’t regret my decision to follow Christ, even though my parents won’t let me near my sister for fear I’ll contaminate her. And I probably would.

Please pray that my family’s hearts will be softened and that they will accept Jesus into their lives. And thank you for supporting mission, which made it possible for me to meet Christ.

MAYRA CASTANEDA lives in Oaxaca [whah-HAH-kah], Mexico.

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Patience



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 6:3; Exod. 34:6; Mark 4:26–29; Rom. 15:5; Eph. 4:1, 2; James 1:2–4.*

Memory Text: “For you have need of endurance [patience], so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise” (*Hebrews 10:36, NKJV*).

In the Greek, two words express the meaning of “patience,” another fruit of the Spirit. The first is *hupomone*, translated “endurance, steadfastness, and fortitude” in circumstances that cannot be changed. The second word, *makrothumia*, means “great” or “long tempered.” It is the opposite of short-tempered, impatient, and easily frustrated. In general, it means to stick with things and not to be derailed by adversity. The word is usually applied to having patience with people.

A patient person is mild, gentle, and constant in all circumstances. The real test of patience is not in the waiting but in how one behaves while waiting. “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (*James 1:4, NKJV*).

Reaching this point in one's life takes practice, takes God's grace, and takes a willingness to put aside self and to surrender to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The good news is that if we learn patience, we are in a position to receive many other blessings from God, as well.

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

Patience Is an Attribute of God *(Exod. 34:6)*

“And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth’ ” *(Exod. 34:6, NKJV)*.

One of the many Bible stories illustrating the patience of God was His dealing with Nineveh. The prophet Jonah recognized God’s patience: “ ‘Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm’ ” *(John 4:2, NKJV)*.

Note some of the other qualities that patience is combined with in Exodus 34:6. God’s grace, mercy, lovingkindness, goodness, and truth protect and sustain even the most hardened sinners in order to give them the maximum time and advantage to turn their lives around. If God struck out at people as quickly as humans frequently do, we’d all be dead.

Why is God patient with sinners? *(See 2 Pet. 3:8, 9.)* **How** have you seen the reality of this truth manifested toward yourself or toward others?

If someone were to ask you how you picture God in your mind, how would you describe Him? This is revealing, because how a Christian thinks of God has a lot to do with his worldview and how we treat others. If we see God as angry and quick to punish, how would we likely treat others in the church and in our homes?

How can we learn to do what the Lord calls us to do in Romans 15:5?

Patience Required *(Eph. 4:1, 2)*

Read Ephesians 4:1, 2. Look at the elements Paul presents for those who are to “walk worthy” of the Lord. Among them is patience. How is patience linked with the other attributes presented? That is, how do they feed into each other?

The church is made up of a mixture of people from various backgrounds and cultures. It also includes people who are on different rungs of the maturity ladder. Patience is necessary to be able to get along where there are so many differences. It is a temptation for those who are mature to be impatient toward those less so. In spite of the fact that it took years for them to arrive at their present level of knowledge, often the mature are unwilling to give the immature the same amount of time and study to reach their level of knowledge and understanding.

What is Paul’s counsel on how we are to deal with those who may be weak in faith? Rom. 14:1, 15:1.

Patience in the church is one thing. But what about patience at home? What are some of the things that make us impatient with other members of our family? How long should we pray for family members who are out of the faith? Have you ever known anyone who had to pray for a loved one for many years before the person gave his or her heart to the Lord? What are practical ways in which we can learn to cultivate patience with family members? Why is death to self so important here too?

Also, if we can be patient at home, with those who are always “in our face,” then we likely will be patient with others, as well.

Think about how patient the Lord has been with you. How does keeping that reality constantly before you help you learn to show patience with others? If the Lord treated you as you treated others, what do you think would be your fate?

Patience in the Gospel *(2 Tim. 4:2)*

Preaching and teaching the gospel is one of the most difficult areas in which to exercise patience. Most of us are too impatient with people who don't know the truth or who don't seem to care about it. But in a world full of false doctrine and prejudice against truth, we must be longsuffering as we seek to lead people to Christ. It is too easy to shake our head and say, "Why don't they understand? The truth is so plain."

The truth always is plain to the person who is not looking at it through glasses tinted by false doctrine, tradition, family, and so forth. We must be patient as we seek to open minds and untie the tentacles of prejudice and false teaching that bind them to error and tradition.

Read Mark 4:26–29. **What are some practical lessons from this parable about patience in the area of soul winning?**

We are prone to think that when someone studies a particular Bible doctrine and doesn't accept it immediately, it must mean the person has rejected the truth. That, however, is not necessarily the case. The fact is that conversion can be a long, complicated process that could take years in some instances. Though many of us might be eager to see the immediate fruit of our labors, it doesn't always happen that way. What's important is that, in our zeal, we don't become a hindrance to someone; that is, we must not push so hard that the person gets turned off. Most important, we never must condemn or judge someone who doesn't make a commitment to the truths that we love and care so deeply about at the precise time that we think the person should. Your labors, your work for the person, could very well be an important step in a process that might not bear fruit for years. You just don't know. The crucial thing is not to ruin it all by being condemnatory or judgmental.

What crucial point found in 1 Samuel 16:7 should we always keep in mind in this context (and in all contexts, really)?

Patience Has Its Limits (*Gen. 6:3*)

No greater demonstration of patience can be found than that shown by God toward humans. But we must understand that even God's longsuffering has a limit.

The longsuffering of God lasted for 120 years in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared (*1 Pet. 3:20*). But the time came when the stubbornness of the people exhausted the longsuffering of God, and He destroyed the earth with a flood.

Read Genesis 6:3. What important principle is seen there?

In the cases of Sodom and Gomorrah, Israel in the wilderness, and the Babylonian captivity, what attitude on the part of the people prompted the consequences that the people suffered? *Deut. 31:27, Ps. 95:8, Jer. 17:23*.

It might be argued that, inasmuch as God ran out of patience, this gives us permission to do the same. But when we study the history of God's longsuffering, it becomes evident that His patience was not for a day, a week, or even a year. Often generations would pass before His longsuffering would be exhausted, which, of course, is not an option open to us.

Is there a point where our patience legitimately can run out when dealing with folk in a difficult situation? It depends on what that means. We might decide that we've had enough of a certain situation and conclude that it has to end. But that's not the same thing as being judgmental, unloving, or cruel in the process. It might be time to take action, but that action never must be out of harmony with the principles of kindness, love, and caring.

Dwell on situations in which your patience ran out legitimately and illegitimately. What was the difference between the two? What have you learned from these experiences? If you had to do them over again, what would you do differently?

How to Develop Patience *(James 1:2-4)*

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” *(James 1:2-4, NKJV)*. What has been your own experience with the reality of these verses? What have you learned from the various trials you have faced that, in the end, have made you a better person, one who better reflects the character of Jesus?

The Greek word for “trials,” sometimes translated “temptations,” is the word *peirazo*, which has the broader significance of “proving” or “testing.” The devil tries us or tempts us to do evil. The tests and trials that God allows to come into our lives are for the purpose of developing our characters.

“The trials of life are God’s workmen, to remove the impurities and roughness from our character. Their hewing, squaring, and chiseling, their burnishing and polishing, is a painful process; it is hard to be pressed down to the grinding wheel. But the stone is brought forth prepared to fill its place in the heavenly temple. Upon no useless material does the Master bestow such careful, thorough work. Only His precious stones are polished after the similitude of a palace.”
—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 10.

This doesn’t mean, however, that every trial is in God’s providence. Often we bring suffering upon ourselves through disobedience; often, too, trials and suffering are just the results of what it means to live in a fallen, sinful world where we have an enemy who hates us (*1 Pet. 5:8*). What this does mean, however, is that through a complete surrender of ourselves to the Lord, to grasping hold of Him in faith and obedience, no matter what we go through, we can come out better or more refined if we allow God to work in us. No one said it will be fun. Life here often isn’t fun, but we are given this wonderful promise: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (*Phil. 1:6*).

Further Study: “In His dealings with the human race, God bears long with the impenitent. He uses His appointed agencies to call men to allegiance, and offers them His full pardon if they will repent. But because God is long-suffering, men presume on His mercy. ‘Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.’ The patience and long-suffering of God, which should soften and subdue the soul, has an altogether different influence upon the careless and sinful. It leads them to cast off restraint, and strengthens them in resistance. They think that the God who has borne so much from them will not heed their perversity. If we lived in a dispensation of immediate retribution, offenses against God would not occur so often. But though delayed, the punishment is none the less certain. There are limits even to the forbearance of God. The boundary of His long-suffering may be reached, and then He will surely punish. And when He does take up the case of the presumptuous sinner, He will not cease till He has made a full end.”
—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, p. 1166.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** To say that God is patient is not the same as to say that He is tolerant. What is the difference between patience and tolerance, and why is it easy to confuse the two?
- 2** As we look at the life of Christ, how does He reveal what patience means? What are some powerful examples that He gives of patience? What examples does He give, if any, of situations in which patience was no longer appropriate?
- 3** Dwell more on the question of trials and character. Sure, trials can make our character better in many cases. At the same time, what happens when trials embitter people, turn them away from God, and make them cynical and doubtful? Have you ever seen that happen to someone? If so, what can you learn from that experience?
- 4** Besides trials, what are other ways the Lord can teach us patience? How have you learned (or are still learning) the lesson of patience?
- 5** Is there someone you need to apologize to because of your lack of patience? Why not humble yourself and make the apology and do whatever else it takes to make things right? Isn't that what being a Christian is all about?

Pray for Me

by BENJAMIN SCHOUN

In some places in the world it's illegal and often dangerous to share one's faith with others. Sometimes radio and television signals may be the only means to reach people with the gospel. New believers risk their lives to follow Jesus.

Not long ago Adventist World Radio received the following e-mails from a young man living in one of these difficult areas. We share his messages with you, for through your mission offerings, you help make these broadcasts possible.

"My name is Amin.* I am 19 years old and live in [an unnamed country]. Please help me to learn more about Christianity and Jesus Christ. I'm eager to know. May I have a Bible? Please, pray for me. [He was sent a link to an Internet Bible.]"

Two months later

"I have received Jesus Christ as my personal Savior, and my life has changed. Every day I read the Bible on the Internet, and I'm learning more. God's Word makes my heart come alive. It's true what He said, 'I am the light of the world.' 'I'm the way, the truth, and the life' [John 8:12, John 14:6]. I wish I could share the Word of God with someone and pray with them."

Two months later [Amin's family has learned of his new faith.]

"Every day they abuse me. My father tore up my Christian books and said, 'If I see one more book like those in your hands, I will bury you.' I know that Jesus said, 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you.' I pray and read the Bible every day, but I can't receive any letters because my father will read them."

A few days later

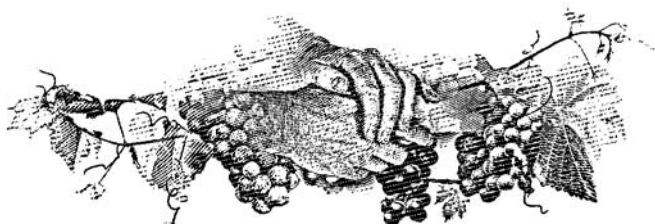
"They've taken my computer, and I must go to the cyber café. Yesterday, two policemen came to our house and threatened me, calling me a terrorist for being a follower of Jesus Christ.

"I'm sure I'll be taken to prison soon. I'm not asking for help. No one can help me but the Lord. I don't know what will happen to me. Maybe this e-mail will be the last one. I love Jesus, and am ready to die for Him."

Note: This was the last message received from Amin. Pray for him and for thousands like him who face persecution and death for their faith.

Amin is not his real name. BENJAMIN SCHOUN is president of Adventist World Radio.

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Kindness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Sam. 9:1–13; Prov. 15:1–5; 25:11–15; Matt. 5:43–48; Luke 6:35, 38; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12–14.*

Memory Text: “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering” (*Colossians 3:12, NKJV*).

When Paul illustrated how love behaves, patience came into his mind first: “Love suffers long” (*1 Cor. 13:4, NKJV*). Immediately after patience, he wrote that love “is kind,” showing that love and kindness so belong together that without kindness no act is truly done in love!

Patience, we saw, is love forbearing. Kindness, on the other hand, implies a more active expression of love. Often patience might be manifested by doing nothing; kindness, in contrast, is manifested by what we say and do and, more important, by how we say it and do it and, even more important, why we say and do it.

Kindness is not beyond the reach of any, although it may require the sacrifice of time and energy. Kindness is a verb that reveals itself in numerous ways. And like its close cousin “love,” kindness contains incredible power; it is a witness in and of itself of what our God is like.

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

The Model of Kindness *(Matt. 5:43–48)*

Jesus clearly illustrates in the Sermon on the Mount the kindness and goodness of God. Read Matthew 5:43–48 and answer the following questions:

- To what high standard is Jesus calling us here?

- What reason does Jesus give for calling us to this standard?

- Notice Christ’s use of the word *perfect* in verse 48. What is the meaning of *perfect* here, and how can the use of the word here help us understand what it means to be perfect like “our Father in heaven” is perfect?

God’s gracious gifts are just that, gracious gifts. They are unearned and unmerited by all human beings, all of whom have willingly sinned against Him and either ignored or neglected Him. In this sense the greatest sinner is in the same boat as the holiest saint: neither deserves the kindness and goodness that God gives to us all.

With these verses, Jesus is calling us to be “perfect,” even as perfect as God is. How so? By loving our enemies, by praying for those who mistreat us, by being kind to those who have not been kind to us. This is how Jesus defines being “perfect.” Try to imagine what our church would be like and what our homes would be like were we to die to self so that we actually could live this way! We would have a power and a witness against which the gates of hell could never prevail. What’s the only thing stopping us? Nothing but our sinful, vengeful hearts, which, more often than not, cause us to act like “publicans.”

What painful and deep changes must you make if you are going to follow Christ’s words in these verses?

Kindness to a “Dead Dog”

Read 2 Samuel 9:1–13. How did David show kindness here? How did he, by this act, reveal the character of God?

“Through reports from the enemies of David, Mephibosheth had been led to cherish a strong prejudice against him as a usurper; but the monarch’s generous and courteous reception of him and his continued kindness won the heart of the young man; he became strongly attached to David, and, like his father Jonathan, he felt that his interest was one with that of the king whom God had chosen.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 713.

David’s kindness to the house of Saul reveals that he sought to use God as the pattern for what he wanted to do for Saul’s house. He recognized that he, a sinner like all of us, had received undeserved mercy and kindness from the hand of God and was going to reflect that kindness to others.

Before we can pass on God’s kindness to others, what must we first recognize? See *Luke 7:47*. What crucial principle is found here that can play an important role in helping us understand the whole question of kindness to others?

Think for a few moments about the goodness and kindness of God toward you. Do you deserve it? Is it something that’s owed you? Are your thoughts, your deeds, your words so selfless, so holy, so loving and accepting that God is merely doing to you as you have done to others? Most likely the answer is No. And herein is a crucial point. When we realize how much God has forgiven us, when we realize that God loves us despite what we are and what we have done, then we truly can understand what it means to be kind and loving to those who don’t deserve our kindness or our love. How important, then, that we keep the Cross and what it means to us, individually, before us at all times.

What things has God forgiven you for over the years? How should that realization help you treat those who have done things to hurt you?

Kind Words (*Eph. 4:32*)

Ephesians 4:32 begins with the words, “And be kind to one another” (*NKJV*). Look at how this verse fits in perfectly with what we saw yesterday, about treating others as God has treated us!

Kindness is to mark the Christian at all times. But there are at least three specific needs that call for three specific kinds of encouragement.

First, we are to show kindness to spiritual babies. “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children” (*1 Thess. 2:7, NKJV*).

Second, we are to show kindness and encouragement to the weak. “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (*Rom. 15:1, NKJV*).

Third, we are to serve as a nurse to the spiritually sick (*2 Tim. 2:24, 25*).

A businessman was once heard to say, “I can’t wait to get home at night—I get so tired of being kind all day!” What a sad attitude to have toward human life.

Kindness, especially in our homes, is crucial. And one of the most important ways we can manifest kindness, especially in our homes, is in the way we talk to each other. The atmosphere of the home largely is determined by the words we speak. So many problems, so many hurts, so many tensions and outright fights could be avoided if we were careful not only with what we say but how we say it. Oftentimes one could say something and not hurt or offend, or one could say the exact words to the same person and greatly hurt and offend. The key is how we speak. Human speech is more than just the meanings of words themselves; tone, facial expression, body language, and stress are all part and parcel of conveying our thoughts, emotions, and ideas to others.

Read Proverbs 15:1–5 and Proverbs 25:11–15. What important principles about what you say and how you say it are revealed in these texts? As you read them, ask yourself about your use of words when talking to others. In what ways could you be kinder in your verbal communication with others?

Kindness Returned *(Luke 6:38)*

“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” *(Luke 6:38, NKJV)*. What is Jesus saying here? What principle of life is He talking about?

So often, how we treat others comes back on ourselves. That is, when we are kind, it's so much likelier that others will be kind to us. It works the other way, too: be mean to others, and others will be mean to you, as well.

Of course, it doesn't always happen that way. (Look at Jesus and how He was treated!) But whether it does or doesn't, in one sense it doesn't really matter. As Christians, we always should be kind, even if that kindness is not given back to us. In fact, as we have read, being kind to those who are unkind to us is a hallmark of being a true follower of Jesus. In general, however, how we treat others will impact how we ourselves are treated. “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” *(Matt. 7:12, NKJV)*.

Read Luke 6:35. How does this fit in with what we've been talking about all week?

It's always easy to be kind to someone who could be of benefit to you down the road. Anyone will do that. What's harder, however, is to be kind, especially when it costs you something, to those who can never do anything for you in return. That's the real test.

Examine yourself. Is your kindness motivated by selfless and self-sacrificial love, or is it motivated even slightly by a desire to look out for number one? If it's the latter, how can you change?

Put on Kindness (Col. 3:12–14)

Read Colossians 3:12–14 and then rewrite it in your own words. In what ways do these verses reveal the essence of what it means to be a follower of Christ (notice the use of the term *perfect* or *perfection*)? Also, think about how powerful our witness to the world would be were we to put these words into practice.

Alexander Maclaren, noted London clergyman of the late nineteenth century, wrote, “Gentleness is the strongest force in the world. You take all the steam hammers that were ever forged and battle at an iceberg, and except for the comparatively little heat that is developed by the blows and melts some small portion, it will still be ice, though pulverized instead of whole. But let it move gently down to the southward, there the sunbeams smite the coldness of death, and it is dissipated in the warm ocean. Kindness is conquering.”

As Seventh-day Adventists, we have very powerful scriptural evidence to back up our positions. (If we don’t, then what are we doing here?) And that’s, of course, important. But we need more than just correct teaching, don’t we?

“If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 189.

When we teach the doctrines of the church, we include the Sabbath, the state of the dead, the origin of sin, and other defining beliefs. But are we as careful about emphasizing the importance of kindness and the other fruit of the Spirit, along with the Sermon on the Mount and 1 Corinthians 13? Knowing that the Sabbath is the seventh day or that the dead sleep until the resurrection or that Christ’s righteousness covers us now and in the final judgment is all fine and important. But having knowledge alone isn’t the same thing as knowing the truth as it is in Jesus (*John 14:6*), for the truth sets us free (*John 8:32*); that is, the truth changes us and makes us more like Christ. Could one then ask, Do we really have the truth if the Truth, Jesus, doesn’t have us?

Further Study: “From every Christian home a holy light should shine forth. Love should be revealed in action . . . showing itself in *thoughtful kindness*, in gentle, unselfish courtesy. There are homes where this principle is carried out—homes where God is worshiped and truest love reigns. From these homes morning and evening prayer ascends to God as sweet incense, and His mercies and blessings descend upon the suppliants like the morning dew.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 37, emphasis supplied.

“There are many who regard the expression of love as a weakness, and they maintain a reserve that repels others. This spirit checks the current of sympathy. As the social and generous impulses are repressed, they wither, and the heart becomes desolate and cold. We should beware of this error. Love cannot long exist without expression. Let not the heart of one connected with you starve for the want of *kindness* and sympathy.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 107, emphasis supplied.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, go over the final question at the end of Thursday’s study: “Do we really have the truth if the Truth, Jesus, doesn’t have us?” What are the implications of your answer?
- 2 “Love cannot long exist without expression.” What does that mean, and why does it represent a principle that’s so important for us as a church?
- 3 Review the texts this week that talked about us being “perfect.” How should we understand what this idea means? What are the common problems and misconceptions that we as a church have struggled with over the use and meaning of this term?
- 4 Trace in your own experience how the attitudes of other Adventists have affected you and your faith. That is, were folk kind to you and, if so, how did that kindness impact you? On the other hand, were folk unkind to you and, if so, how did that impact you? Share your stories with others in the class. What can you take away from these experiences that can help the class better understand how important kindness is in our witness?

The Unseen Bodyguard

Abraham Oril lives in the central Philippines. He operates a small grocery store to support his family, but his passion is sharing Christ.

Abraham hosts a radio program that is aired locally. Every Sunday morning he rides to the radio station to produce his live program. On one of his broadcasts, he discussed the Sabbath. One listener became angry at what Abraham was saying. When the program ended, Abraham left the station, got on his motorbike, and headed home. Along the way he noticed another motorbike approaching from behind. When the second motorbike pulled up beside him, Abraham saw a gun.

The two men on the second motorbike sped on ahead of Abraham and stopped in an area where there were no houses. The man with the gun got off the bike and pointed the gun at Abraham as he approached.

“God, save me if it’s Your will,” Abraham prayed as he neared the two men. Abraham rode past the two men without harm and arrived home safely.

The next Sunday’s radio broadcast was a continuation of the previous week’s message on the Sabbath. When Abraham finished the program, he and his friend Carlito walked out of the station. The same two men he had seen the previous week stood near his motorbike. And Abraham could see the glint of metal in the sun. But this time the men were armed with knives. As the two men moved toward Carlito and Abraham, Carlito raised his hand to block the attack. One of the men raised his knife to attack, but fell down before touching Abraham or Carlito. In the fall the attacker broke his arm. He struggled to his feet, and the two men ran away, leaving Abraham and Carlito standing alone.

The story of the thwarted attack spread quickly throughout the area. The brother-in-law of the man who had tried to attack Abraham told people, “Surely these are men of God. Why else would angels defend them when they were attacked?” Abraham learned that the two men who had tried to attack them intended to kill him, but an unseen force had prevented the men from harming Carlito and Abraham.

Abraham continued broadcasting the radio programs, and at least two young men were baptized as a result of Abraham’s radio broadcast and his testimony of God’s protection.

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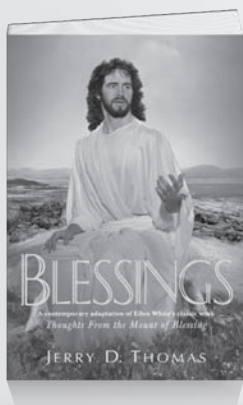
ABRAHAM ORIL *continues to share his faith in the mountains near Dumaguete, Philippines.*

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The Fruit of the Spirit Is Goodness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 51:10, 11; John 14:9; Rom. 3:12–20; 7:7–12; Titus 2:14; Heb. 1:2, 3.*

Memory Text: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (*Ephesians 2:10, NKJV*).

In Scripture, “goodness” involves not only exhibiting right behavior but also avoiding its opposite, evil. Goodness is holiness put into practice. Goodness is what we do; otherwise, it’s not “goodness” at all.

The word translated “goodness” (*agathosune*) in Galatians 5:22 denotes an active, even aggressive, goodness. More than an excellence of character, it is character energized, expressing itself in good deeds.

We often hear that someone has a “good heart” or that someone is a “good soul.” However problematic that idea is theologically (*see Jer. 17:9*), it’s even more so in reality. A “good heart” or a “good soul” in and of itself means nothing. Instead, a “good heart” is revealed in good actions, good deeds, in concrete, practical acts of goodness that benefit others. Good intentions, good thoughts, good motives are fine and have their role, but in the end, goodness is to do good. We fool ourselves into thinking otherwise.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 13.*

God Is Good

In the Bible the most profound and absolute sense of “good” is predicated on God alone. Thus, although the term *good* is used freely in many circumstances, although there are good and bad individuals (*Matt. 5:45*), although it is possible for Christians to do good works (*Eph. 2:10*), although everything that God created He pronounced very “good” (*Gen. 1:31*), Jesus declares that God alone is “good” (*Mark 10:18*). Only God’s goodness is absolute. All others have degrees of goodness as measured against this absolute standard.

What do the following texts reveal about how the goodness of God can be revealed in our lives? *Exod. 33:19, Pss. 25:8, 86:5, 107:21, Nah. 1:7, Rom. 8:28.*

God, however, doesn’t just tell us that He is good; He has revealed that goodness to us in numerous ways.

We can see the goodness and love of God in creation. Even in a fallen world, even with sickness, pestilence, and natural disasters, the goodness of God is still revealed in nature.

Think of human relationships, love, concern, caring for others. We are capable of these wonderful and good things only because God created us with the potential for this, and He did so because He is good.

Human sexuality, though, of course, having been perverted in horrific and unimaginable ways, nevertheless at the core reveals the goodness of God and His love for human beings.

What is the greatest revelation of God’s goodness given to humanity? *John 14:9; Heb. 1:2, 3.*

Write down all the ways in which you yourself have come to understand the goodness of God. That is, despite whatever trials you have gone through, how have you come to know for yourself the goodness of our Lord? How can God’s goodness be reflected in your own life? Share your answers with the class on Sabbath.

All Have Sinned

Read Romans 3:12–20. How do we see the reality of these words manifested all around us? How do you see it manifested in your own life?

One of the sad facts of life is that there can be some very gifted and talented people, charming people, charismatic people, people of great skill and insight whom we often label as “good” when, in fact, they are rotten to the core. The word *good* can, like the word *love*, be so readily and cheaply thrown around that it loses its true meaning. When we keep the idea of God’s goodness before us, we can much better understand what human goodness is really, and ideally, about.

How often we hear non-Christians say that they don’t understand all this Christian talk about humans being naturally sinful and so forth. Aren’t there, after all, people who do good things, who express kindness, selflessness, and unconditional love? Haven’t we all seen people who are like that? How would you respond to this kind of argument?

Years ago, Russian writer Feodor Dostoevsky wrote a book about his time in a Siberian prison camp, where some of Russia’s worst criminals were incarcerated. Among the prisoners were those who had committed some of the most vile and heinous crimes imaginable. Yet Dostoevsky wrote about how, at times, these men were capable of doing some of the gentlest and kindest acts. The point is that even the worst people can do kind deeds. And at the same time, who hasn’t seen really good people, when pushed, do some pretty bad things?

What about yourself? Are you not capable of doing some very kind and loving deeds? Are you not capable of doing some very cruel and evil ones too? What do your answers tell you about yourself and your need of Jesus?

God's Law and Goodness

Read Romans 7:7–12. What point is Paul making about the law here? Why does he stress that the law is good?

The problem some have with the law of God is a misunderstanding of its role in the plan of salvation. When we go to the doctor with an ailment, there must first be a diagnosis before there can be a treatment. The problem comes when folk confuse the diagnosis with the treatment. The law of God not only serves as the standard, it also occupies a diagnostic role in the salvation process. Paul states simply that without the law he would not have known what sin was. The law, then, diagnoses us all as sinners. Without this diagnosis, there is little incentive to come to Jesus for healing.

In the plan of salvation, the law of God is indispensable, because without the law there is no sin, and without sin there is no need for a Savior.

In Psalm 40:8, David writes, “I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart” (NKJV). Why, then, might some people believe that keeping the law is a burden?

We sometimes think of law as a prohibition—a “thou shalt not.” And there is some truth to that. Yet, at the same time, there are infinitely more things that we can do than we cannot do. Think, too, of all the practical benefits of keeping God's law. Think of the ways it improves the quality of our lives here and now. Shouldn't we trust in God's goodness enough to know that if He forbids it, then it must not be good for us?

Do you find keeping the law to be a burden? If so, why? If the Bible says that keeping the law is a delight, what are we doing wrong if it's a burden to us?

Walking in Goodness

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (*Jer. 13:23*).

The text above makes a simple point about human nature, which is that we don't change easily, especially the bad aspects of our character. (Ask most married folk about how easy it is to change a spouse!) With this thought in mind, we can perhaps better understand why the scriptural concept of goodness is immensely deeper and its use much more restricted than is commonly used in the world. The fruit of the Spirit that is goodness is more inward, touching on every thought, word, and action of the godly person. This demands that motives be right before we call any action “good.” It means that the good person is one from whom righteousness (right doing) flows from inward devotion and love toward God.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (*Ps. 51:10, NKJV*). **“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word”** (*Ps. 119:9, NKJV*). **What is the message of these texts in regard to how we can become “good”?**

Compare those texts to what Paul says in Romans 7:18. How are all these texts related?

In chapter 7 of Romans, Paul expresses his disappointment that in spite of his best intentions he has no strength within himself to do good (*vss. 18, 19*). But in chapter 8, verses 1–4, he reveals the Christian's secret to overcoming this dilemma. What is the secret? Discuss what it means to “walk in the Spirit.” How is this done?

It's one thing to acknowledge that we are sinners, in need of grace, and that our good works cannot save us. At the same time, why must we be careful not to use this teaching as an excuse to live in the flesh? Do you find yourself doing just that? If so, why is that attitude treading on very dangerous ground?

Goodness Expressed

While it cannot be said that we are saved by works, it can be said that, as blood-bought sons and daughters of God, we are saved in order that our lives might manifest good works. Jesus pointed out that as a tree is known by its fruit, we will be known by the kind of lives we live. Jesus carries the importance of good works a step further when He declares that those whose lives lack in good works will not be allowed to enter the kingdom of heaven (*see Matt. 25:41–46*).

Read Ephesians 2:10 and Titus 2:14. What common message exists in both these texts, and why is that message so important for anyone who professes the name of Christ?

As human beings we are sinners; we have violated God’s law; we all need a Savior. But at the same time, we have been given promises in the Bible that if we surrender to Jesus, if we choose to live in the Spirit and not in the flesh, we can overcome and live a life that reflects the goodness of God. We can live in what Paul calls the “newness of life” (*Rom. 6:4*), because just as we have been by faith “buried with” Christ “by baptism into death” (*vs. 4*), we can “likewise reckon” ourselves “to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (*vs. 11*).

We can be “good” in the biblical sense of the word, not “good” as if we deserve salvation but “good” in the sense that our hearts, our motives, our deeds reveal to the world the reality of the God whom we profess to serve. Sure, it will take dying to self, it will take a willingness to serve others, it will take a daily struggle with the flesh, and it will take a humble heart of contrition and repentance when we fail, but we can and must live out the faith that we confess.

How well are you availing yourself of all the promises of a victorious Christian life? What is holding you back from claiming what’s yours, what’s been offered to you at such a great price?

Further Study: “It is not only by preaching the truth, not only by distributing literature, that we are to witness for God. Let us remember that a Christlike life is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Christianity, and that a cheap Christian character works more harm in the world than the character of a worldling.”
—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 21.

“The badge of Christianity is not an outward sign, not the wearing of a cross or a crown, but it is that which reveals the union of man with God. By the power of His grace manifested in the transformation of character the world is to be convinced that God has sent His Son as its Redeemer. No other influence that can surround the human soul has such power as the influence of an unselfish life. The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** In class, read and discuss your answers to the question in Sunday’s study about how God has revealed to you His goodness.
- 2** What are some practical ways in which we as individuals or as a church can express and reveal the goodness of God to others? Is your church doing good in the community where it is located? If your church were to move, would the neighbors miss it?
- 3** The Bible says that God’s law is good. And we know that it is. How, though, can it be used as something bad? What are ways that the law can be misused, and what are the sad consequences of such a misuse?
- 4** Ponder this age-old philosophical question: Is something deemed good because God says it’s good? Or does God deem it good because it already is good?
- 5** In class, discuss Luke 18:18, 19. What was Jesus saying here? How are we to understand His words?
- 6** In class, stage a discussion. Have half the class argue the point that human beings are basically good at heart; let the other half take the position that humans are basically bad. Argue your positions, not from the Bible but from what you see in the world as a whole.

Turning Tragedy to Joy

An interview with MARLENE AND ENRIQUE TAVARES DA SILVA

“We were devastated when we received word that our son, Emerson, a medical student in Bolivia, was diagnosed with schizophrenia,” his mother, Marlene, said. “We brought him back to Brazil and took him to the best doctors, who confirmed that Emerson has the most serious type of schizophrenia. The doctors explained that even with medicines, Emerson never would lead a normal life.

“Our son was a promising medical student, but now he can hardly be left alone,” his father said. “He worries about us when we are gone, even for a little while, and he doesn’t do well in public places. His life is largely confined to home except for Sabbath morning when we take him to church.”

The couple had looked forward to a retirement filled with ministry, but when Emerson became ill, Marlene took early retirement from her career as a teacher to care for him. “I prayed that God would show me how He could use our son’s illness to bring glory to His name,” Marlene said. “And God has answered that prayer in marvelous ways.

“Emerson has always loved God,” she adds. “He loved to lead out in worship, and I decided to invite people into our home for small-group worships and Bible study. Most of the people are doctors from the nearby hospital; some are teachers, and others are neighbors. It’s working. Emerson is blessed by these small gatherings, and we can reach out to people who don’t know Christ. We’ve lost count of how many people have been led to Christ through our small-group ministry.”

“We know that God didn’t make my son sick. But He turned our tragedy into a blessing by giving us a ministry at home. Currently we host two groups—one on Sabbath afternoon and one Monday night,” Enrique says.

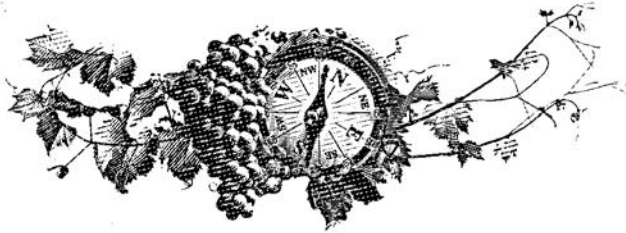
Enrique prefers to let Marlene lead out in the Bible studies. He feels that her years of teaching experience make this her special gift. He focuses on making people feel welcome and contributing to the conversation.

“People don’t stop coming once they are baptized,” Marlene explains. “They continue to come and help lead out in the group. They bring their friends who are having problems or who don’t know Christ. It’s a busy and happy place.”

Enrique and Marlene urge everyone to find a ministry that suits their life and their talents. Small groups are an effective and important ministry in many countries.

MARLENE AND ENRIQUE TAVARES DA SILVA *share their faith in Belen, Brazil.*

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Faithfulness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 25:1–13; Luke 16:10; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24; 2 Tim. 3:1–5; Hebrews 11.*

Memory Text: “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (*Galatians 6:9, NKJV*).

The fruit of the Spirit known as “faithfulness” could also be called “fidelity.” It speaks of endurance, a firmness of purpose, especially when the going is tough.

Faithfulness implies steadfast adherence. Synonyms include *loyalty*, implying undeviating allegiance; *constancy*, suggesting freedom from uncertainty; *staunchness*, implying such a strong allegiance to one’s principles or purposes that they cannot be turned aside; and *resoluteness*, stressing unwavering determination.

“Faith” and “faithfulness,” though closely linked, are not the same thing. Faith is that indefinable power, a gift from God, through which we can believe in a reality that yet remains unseen. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (*Heb. 11:1*). Faithfulness, in contrast, is the working out of this inner-belief system. When we have faith in God, we act in faithful ways. Acts of faithfulness are a demonstration of our faith, and such acts are the threads holding our belief and behavior system together.

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

God Is Faithful

“O Lord God of hosts, Who is mighty like You, O Lord? Your faithfulness also surrounds You” (*Ps. 89:8, NKJV*).

As with all the fruit of the Spirit, God Himself is the model we must study for examples of faithfulness. God is as faithful now as He was three trillion years before creating the earth. He will be just as faithful three trillion years into the future as He was when He set the decrees in eternity past. Nothing will deter Him or alter His course.

Note some of the attributes of God’s faithfulness:

- God’s faithfulness is far-reaching in its extent—“Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds” (*Ps. 36:5, NKJV*).
- God’s faithfulness is sure—“Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail” (*Ps. 89:33, NKJV*).
- God’s faithfulness is great—“Great is Your faithfulness” (*Lam. 3:23, NKJV*).
- God’s faithfulness is set in heaven—“For I have said, ‘Mercy shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens’ ” (*Ps. 89:2, NKJV*).

Identify the blessings that come to us as a result of His faithfulness:

1 Cor. 10:13

1 Thess. 5:23, 24

2 Thess. 3:3

Heb. 10:23

Why is the faithfulness of God so important to the Christian’s life? Recount a time in your life when knowing that God was faithful brought you through a crisis. On a day-to-day basis, which of the blessings of God’s faithfulness listed above is the greatest help to you?

Faithlessness: A Sign of the End

Read Luke 18:8. What is implied in Jesus' question here?

The apostle Paul writes that “evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (*2 Tim. 3:13, NKJV*). People today are like what they were when Moses wrote the Pentateuch or Paul his epistles. One could argue, however, that our society today makes it easier to sin, that it all but encourages it. In other words, our environment grows ever more amenable to sin, and our fallen human natures naturally will take advantage of it. Self-centeredness constantly is promoted. Advertising hammers away at us to gratify ourselves: why wait, why deny ourselves, why sacrifice, why not go along with everyone else? Constantly we hear, “Indulge yourself because you deserve it” or the like.

Read 2 Timothy 3:1–5. What is the first characteristic found there? How do we find it so overtly manifested today?

While this generation is hardly the first to be selfish, it is unique in that selfishness actually is recommended. “Look out for number one,” “Love yourself first,” is the cry. Self-centeredness has spawned another phenomenon, which is irresponsibility. This generation could well be the one of which it was written, “There is a generation that curses its father, and does not bless its mother. There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness” (*Prov. 30:11, 12, NKJV*). It would seem that everything wrong with everyone is now laid at the foot of someone else, most often the parents.

How has the mass media contributed to unfaithfulness, even among church members? Be honest with yourself: how has it affected your thinking? Try to step back and ask yourself, How might the things I read, watch, and listen to be negatively affecting my own faithfulness to God?

Models of Faithfulness *(Hebrews 11)*

Read Hebrews 11, the list of characters who are given as examples of faithfulness. Pick three characters and write down how their faithfulness was revealed, even amid struggles, trials, and temptations. That is, what did they do that revealed their faithfulness? At the same time, what were their struggles, their trials, their temptations? More so, in what ways, however different the variables, are the principles involved the same for us today as they were for the characters in Hebrews?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Think how easy it could have been for some of these people to have become discouraged. Think of Joseph in the dungeon or Sarah waiting and waiting and waiting for the promised child or Moses tempted with the riches of a kingdom as opposed to suffering “affliction with the people of God” (vs. 25). We sometimes tend to look at these people as if they were larger than life, kind of superhuman, and yet, they were just as real as we are, just as prone to sin, just as prone to question and to fear and to fall. Despite all their own weaknesses and mistakes, however, they showed faithfulness, they acted out the faith they professed, and they were able to be used by God to do remarkable things.

What are the things that challenge you in your desire to be faithful? Put them into two categories: (1) the things you can do nothing about and (2) the things you can remove from your life.

Faithfulness in Daily Living

“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much” (*Luke 16:10, NKJV*). How have you seen this principle manifested in your own life? After all, if we are not faithful in the little things, why should we think we would be in the larger ones?

“The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 57.

The following words are some of the components of faithfulness:

Dependability—Dependability means people can count on you. When was the last time someone let you down? Do you remember how that made you feel? What does it say about your character if you lack dependability?

Honesty—Honesty is truthfulness. It means you are not going to lie or cheat or steal. Honesty is a cardinal building block of a strong character and should be in play every day of our lives.

Integrity—Integrity is like a code of honor. If you have integrity, you have certain values and beliefs that you live by. It also means you respect the values and beliefs of others. Integrity is also one of the building blocks of character.

Loyalty—Loyalty is allegiance. It means standing by someone even when times get tough. Loyalty is an important part of friendship. But does loyalty include doing something wrong for a friend? Does loyalty have limits? How might someone take a good thing, loyalty, too far?

Take a closer look at these elements. How well do you fare in these different categories? Where can you do better? Most important, what changes do you need to make in order to be more faithful to what you know is right? How can you make the needed changes?

Faithful Until the End

Could it be that we are suffering another Great Disappointment? Not that we fixed another date for the coming of Jesus, but something just as real, if more subtle, and that is a diminished emphasis on the Second Coming, if for no other reason than that we expected it to have happened by now.

Read Matthew 25:1–13. Notice that everyone who was waiting for the bridegroom went to sleep. When the bridegroom finally arrived and all awakened, it was too late for five of them. In what ways could we, in the twenty-first century, be in danger of doing the same thing?

Read Matthew 24:44–50. Notice how the evil servant changes his lifestyle when he becomes convinced that his master is not coming back as soon as he had expected. What is the message to us who feel there has been a delay in the coming of Jesus?

Things have not happened as soon as we expected, but we take comfort from the promise in Galatians 6:9, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (*NKJV*).

The issue that confronts God’s people in the twenty-first century is not “Will God be faithful?” We should know by now that He is faithful to all that He has promised. The crucial issue is, “Will I be faithful until the end?”

In many ways the answer to the question about the future (“Will I be faithful to the end?”) can be found in the present. What is the basic trend of your spiritual life now? Are you daily committed to the Lord, growing in grace and faithfulness, or are you slowly, bit by bit, easing up, growing more accustomed to the world and its ways? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your walk with the Lord?

Further Study: “But like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, *God’s purposes know no haste and no delay*. Through the symbols of the great darkness and the smoking furnace, God had revealed to Abraham the bondage of Israel in Egypt, and had declared that the time of their sojourning should be four hundred years. ‘Afterward,’ He said, ‘shall they come out with great substance.’ Gen. 15:14. Against that word, all the power of Pharaoh’s proud empire battled in vain. On ‘the self-same day’ appointed in the divine promise, ‘it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.’ Ex. 12:41. So in heaven’s council the hour for the coming of Christ had been determined. When the great clock of time pointed to that hour, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 32, emphasis supplied.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** What are some of the things in your own culture that present challenges to those who want to be faithful to Jesus? How can we meet those challenges? How can we help one another in this struggle?
- 2** Dwell on the things that you have read, watched, or listened to for the past twenty-four hours. Were they the kind of things that could encourage you in your faith, or were they things that worked against it? What are the implications of your answer?
- 3** Look at the question of loyalty. In what contexts is loyalty good? Is it always good? When might being loyal to someone mean being disloyal to God?
- 4** What kind of danger, if any, could arise from being overtly obsessed with faithfulness? That is, in what ways could it be taken too far?
- 5** What are practical ways that we can keep alive in our churches and in our homes the reality of the Second Coming? It is true: The longer it takes, the easier and easier it gets to forget about it and fall into wrong habits and patterns of thought. How can we instill, especially in those who have been in the church a long time, the importance of keeping the reality and promise of the Second Coming passionately before us?

God Made a Way

by BENSON CHILUMPHA

I know firsthand that God is the answer when there is no answer. He has guided me through many obstacles so that I could study at Malawi Adventist College.

I had been a primary school teacher for 14 years and wanted to return to college to earn my bachelor's degree in education. I had to retake my high school leaving exams, and I scored high. But I was not offered admission to attend the university. I took the tests again the following year and again scored high. Again I was disappointed when I was not invited to enroll in the university.

Disappointed, I knelt and asked God, "Why me? Why am I overlooked when others with lower scores have been admitted to college?" I heard God whisper, "Wait. I have a plan."

So I waited. Then I learned that Malawi Adventist College was broadening its degree program and would offer degrees in education and business management. I applied. While I awaited word on my application, I dreamed that I was sitting in a class. I could see the lecturer standing before the class asking questions. Soon after this I received a call from my pastor saying I had been accepted to study at the Adventist college.

I was overjoyed. But I had no money for school fees. So I went back to God. "God, you are the source of all answers," I prayed. "You have given me a place in this school, so now I turn to you to provide the school fees I need."

I applied for a scholarship from a national organization in Malawi and was accepted. The scholarship would pay half my fees. I knelt and thanked God for providing this scholarship and asked where I should look for the rest of my fees so that Satan would not triumph. After praying, I remembered an organization that had helped me when I was in college 14 years earlier. I was not sure they would even get my letter, but I wrote, and they responded in the affirmative. They would pay the remainder of my school fees. God provided for my school fees, and I trust Him to provide the money my family needs for food and clothes and the children's school fees. I can trust God, for, as you can see, He has not let me down.

Part of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is helping to build a women's dormitory at Malawi Adventist College, making it possible for more students to receive a quality Christian education for service to the Master. Thank you!

BENSON CHILUMPHA *lives in southern Malawi.*

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Meekness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 50:20; Matt. 5:5; 11:29; Rom. 12:3; Gal. 6:1; Phil. 2:2, 3; 1 Pet. 3:4.*

Memory Text: “‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth’ ” (*Matthew 5:5, NKJV*).

Meekness is a fruit of the Spirit that seems very much lost in our aggressive, self-centered culture. Because people associate it with weakness, most do not admire others for being meek. Yet, it is what we are called to be.

What is meekness? It's an attitude of humility toward God and gentleness toward people—when we recognize that God is in control and that we can trust Him, even when things don't go the way we would like, which is so often the case (Is it not?). To be meek, one needs confidence, not in oneself but in the Lord.

Although weakness and meekness may look similar, they are not the same. Weakness is due to negative circumstances, such as lack of strength or lack of courage, hardly the words to describe Jesus, who said, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (*Matt. 11:29*). Meekness, rather, is the result of a person's conscious choice to trust in God and lean on Him, as opposed to pushing for one's own ways. Thus, meekness arises out of strength, not weakness.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 27.*

Meek and Lowly in Heart

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (*Matt. 11:29*). **What is Jesus telling us here? How can being meek and lowly in heart bring rest to our souls?**

Meekness is the absolute ceasing to fight for our agenda and believing that God will fight on our behalf for His. Meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God’s goodness and control over the situation. The meek person is not occupied with self (*see Luke 22:42*)—an attitude that’s key to the promise of finding rest for our souls. After all, aren’t our turmoil and agitation so often due to seeking only for ourselves and what we want? In the truest sense, then, a meek person is one who has learned to die to self, and that takes faith, courage, and perseverance, not necessarily traits the world would associate with meekness.

Read Romans 12:3. How is the idea of meekness represented here? In what ways is this the key to being meek?

Ephesians 4:2 is another text that helps us understand what meekness is. Notice how it’s related to Romans 12:3, in that both texts emphasize in their own way why arrogance and selfishness are contrary to the Christian’s walk. After all, why should any Christian be arrogant about anything? Are we not all sinners? Would we all not be doomed to eternal destruction were it not for Jesus? Are we not all utterly dependent upon God for every breath, every heartbeat? Does not every gift and talent we have come from God? What then do we have to be proud about? Nothing! Indeed, considering all that it cost to save us, Christians should be the meekest and humblest folk on earth.

Think about how utterly dependent you are upon God for everything. Where, then, does that pride and arrogance in your heart come from, and how can you get rid of it?

Models of Meekness

Remember the crisis that Abraham faced in deciding with his nephew Lot how to divide up the land? (*See Gen. 13:8, 9.*) In view of the fact that God had promised to make of his descendants a great nation, what might have been Abraham's justification in taking the best for himself? Instead, Abraham allowed Lot to choose first, saying that he would take what was left over. How was this action a characteristic of meekness?

Most everyone knows the story of Joseph being sold as a slave into Egypt by his brothers. Read again the story of their coming to him, now second in command in all Egypt, and begging to be able to purchase food (*Genesis 45*). How did Joseph's meekness determine how he treated his brothers? Had he not been meek, what would he probably have done? How is Genesis 50:20 an example of the worldview of those who are meek?

As a young man David had been anointed to be the next king of Israel. King Saul became insanely jealous and for years pursued David and his men with the intent to kill him. On two occasions David had an opportunity to kill Saul (*1 Sam. 24:3–7, 26:7–12*). If David had not been meek, what might have been his rationalization for killing Saul? Why is it so easy for us to use a spiritual excuse for doing something that is in our own interest?

In Numbers 12:3, Moses is described as the meekest man of his time. Yet, his decisive actions do not seem to fit the popular concept of meekness. His demand to Pharaoh to let Israel go was forceful and followed up with action. When Israel worshiped the golden calf, his "anger burned," and before it was over he had taken the calf that they had made, burned it with fire, ground it to powder, and made the children of Israel drink it (*Exod. 32:19, 20*). How are we to understand the meekness of Moses?

Jesus, of course, is the greatest of all models of meekness (*Matt. 11:29*). What are some of the examples of His meekness? How, for instance, was His meekness revealed in John 18:21–23? Or how about Matthew 26:39? At the same time, we find examples of Jesus doing things that don't appear to be meek, such as when He drove the money changers out of the temple or all the times He confronted the Pharisees and others regarding their hypocrisy. How do these examples help us understand that meekness can be manifested in some very bold ways?

What can you find in common among these examples of meekness? What can you learn from them that could help you understand what meekness is and isn't?

The Importance of Meekness

“Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger” (*Zeph. 2:3, NKJV*). Meekness is the opposite of pride. There is much emphasis today on the importance of having self-esteem. When does self-esteem go over the edge and become pride?

Meekness is necessary for receiving God’s Word. “Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (*James 1:21, NKJV*). A person who does not have a humble spirit cannot receive God’s Word because there is a conflict of interest. Why is this so?

Meekness is necessary for effective witnessing. “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (*1 Pet. 3:15, NKJV*).

“Our influence upon others depends not so much upon what we say as upon what we are. Men may combat and defy our logic, they may resist our appeals; but a life of disinterested [unselfish] love is an argument they cannot gainsay. A consistent life, characterized by the meekness of Christ, is a power in the world.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 142.

Meekness gives glory to God. First Peter 3:4 says, “even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.”

“It is right to love beauty and to desire it; but God desires us to love and seek first the highest beauty, that which is imperishable. No outward adorning can compare in value or loveliness with that ‘meek and quiet spirit,’ the ‘fine linen, white and clean’ (Revelation 19:14), which all the holy ones of earth will wear. This apparel will make them beautiful and beloved here, and will hereafter be their badge of admission to the palace of the King. His promise is, ‘They shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy.’ Revelation 3:4.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 523, 524.

How does putting emphasis on external beauty potentially conflict with the development of the fruit of the Spirit, particularly with the fruit of meekness? As the fruit of meekness grows in you, how should your life be different from what it was before? In the area of meekness, what changes have you seen in your life since you’ve accepted Christ? What attitudes might you be harboring that make it difficult for you to be meek?

Practicing the Fruit of Meekness

Meekness will be manifested in how we relate to others. That is, it's something that is active, something that will reveal itself in our words, attitudes, and actions. You might think that you are meek, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you are. To be meek is to manifest meekness.

How do the following texts show us how meekness is to be revealed in our lives? Why is meekness so important in these situations?

Matt. 5:39 _____

Matt. 18:21, 22 _____

Gal. 6:1 _____

2 Tim. 2:24, 25 _____

Titus 3:2 _____

Phil. 2:2, 3 _____

As we've been saying all along, meekness is wrongly associated with weakness. It is anything but. In fact, go back over the verses we've looked at today. Can you not see how it takes strength, moral and spiritual strength, to reveal meekness in most of these situations?

Of course, if meekness is a fruit of the Spirit, it's something that comes to us from God and not from ourselves. Nevertheless, we need the daily surrender to the Lord, the daily willingness to obey in faith, in order for meekness to be made manifest in our lives.

The Reward of the Meek

E. D. Hulse said, “Humility is a strange thing. The minute you think you’ve got it, you’ve lost it.”

A small town wanted to recognize and reward its meekest citizen. A survey was taken of their small community, which eventually identified the person. In a ceremony attended by all the important people, the meekest citizen was presented with a ribbon on which were inscribed the words, “The Meekest Man in Town.” However, the next day they had to take the ribbon away from him, because he was wearing it!

How do you understand the promises and rewards mentioned in the following texts?

Ps. 22:26 _____

Ps. 25:9 _____

Ps. 37:11 _____

Ps. 147:6 _____

Isa. 29:19 _____

Matt. 5:5 _____

These verses are comforting because there are times when the meek are taken advantage of. But we have learned in this study that a meek person isn’t concerned with lifting himself up before men but rather lifting God up. As a result, God promises to exalt the one who is meek. The rewards can be experienced now and, most surely, in the new heaven and new earth of eternity.

Further Study: “Christ is not to be hid away in the heart and locked in as a coveted treasure, sacred and sweet, to be enjoyed solely by the possessor. We are to have Christ in our hearts as a well of water, springing up into everlasting life, refreshing all who come in contact with us. We must confess Christ openly and bravely, *exhibiting in our characters his meekness, humility, and love*, till men shall be charmed by the beauty of holiness. It is not the best way to preserve our religion as we bottle perfumes, lest the fragrance should escape.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, p. 400, emphasis supplied.

“The peace of Christ, the peace of Christ—money cannot buy it, brilliant talent cannot command it, intellect cannot secure it; it is the gift of God. The religion of Christ—how shall I make all understand their great loss if they fail to carry its holy principles into the daily life? *The meekness and lowliness* of Christ is the Christian’s power. It is indeed more precious than all things which genius can create or wealth can buy. Of all things that are sought, cherished, and cultivated, there is nothing so valuable in the sight of God as a pure heart, a disposition imbued with thankfulness and peace.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, p. 403, emphasis supplied.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 God promises to increase joy in the lives of those who are meek. Why do you think meek people can be joyful? Give several reasons. How will cultivating the fruit of the Spirit that is meekness improve your everyday life?
- 2 What are ways in which meekness can be misconstrued as weakness?
- 3 All this talk about meekness raises an important question: are Christians never to stand up for their own rights? Do we allow ourselves to be doormats, constantly stepped on without doing anything in our own defense? Is there a balance here, and, if so, how do we find it?
- 4 Nietzsche argued that Christianity was a religion born from those who were weak, who didn’t have power, and thus who took traits such as humility and meekness and made them appear like something good, something to strive for. How would you respond to such an argument?

God's Thousand Ways

by JUNKO ASANUMA

I live in Japan where fewer than 2 percent of the people profess any form of Christianity. While studying at the university, I lived with my parents and large family. We weren't Christians, but we were happy.

I met a young man at the university, and we began dating. One day he invited me to attend a Christmas program at a church. He said he had been studying the Bible with someone there, but I knew nothing about church or about Christians.

After we graduated from the university, he went on for further education while I took a job in a private high school in another city. I got my own apartment closer to the school, and I liked my work. But I missed my family terribly. I spent my evenings surfing the Internet and e-mailing my boyfriend.

But we were too far apart to maintain a relationship. I was devastated when we broke up. My life was so empty and lonely that sometimes I thought of committing suicide. I often cried while talking to my friends, so I stopped calling them.

In the midst of my despair I remembered the church that my boyfriend had invited me to attend. If God was real, as my former boyfriend said, could God really save me? Could He help me solve my problems? I found the little Seventh-day Adventist church my boyfriend had taken me to, and with a heart heavy with burdens, I opened the church door.

The pastor greeted me warmly and saw to it that I sat with a friendly person. After church he invited me back and offered to study the Bible with me and help me find the answers I was searching for. In the Adventist church I discovered a world of hope and love. The pastor e-mailed me often, answering my questions, sending me copies of sermons I had missed and inspirational articles. My bruised heart began to heal. I felt a new purpose, a new hope in life. I committed my life to God and accepted His invitation to become His child through baptism.

I praise God for finding ways to shed His love on my wounded heart. He used so many different ways to show me His love: through the Internet, friendly church members, Bible studies, and many others. I thank God for the generosity of church members around the world who give mission offerings liberally to lead me to Christ.

JUNKO ASANUMA lives in Japan with her husband and two children.

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Self-Control



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Judges 13–16; 1 Cor. 9:24–27; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:1–10; Heb. 12:1, 2; 1 John 2:15, 16.*

Memory Text: “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (*1 Corinthians 9:27, NKJV*).

Though listed last by Paul in Galatians 5:22, 23, “self-control” (sometimes translated “temperance”) is surely not the least of the fruit of the Spirit. It could easily have been first, because it plays a major role in the maturing of other spiritual fruit. It might be said that self-control is the glue that holds all the other qualities together.

Like other fruit of the Spirit, self-control is a gift of grace. It has been called “disciplined grace”: grace because it is free, disciplined because there is something for us to do.

Self-control may sound negative, but it is an integral part of grace itself. If we don't control ourselves—our feelings, our appetites, our drives—then they control us. Thus, it's either self-control under the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, or it's being controlled by someone or something else. We, ultimately, decide.

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

The Paradox of Self-Control (*Phil. 2:12, 13*)

Synonyms for *self-control* include *self-discipline*, *strength of mind*, and *willpower*. This fruit of the Spirit extends far beyond simply restraining Christians from doing what's prohibited but includes enabling us to do what's good.

First John 2:15, 16 admonishes us to stay away from three lusts. What are they, and, more important, how could they be manifested in our lives if we aren't careful?

Philippians 4:8 lists items that should be the focuses of the Christian life. What are they, and how can doing what Paul says here protect us from the dangers listed in 1 John 2:15, 16?

There are obviously dos and don'ts in the Christian life. There is a constant struggle with self, with the flesh, with the ways of the world. Paul shares this dilemma in Romans 7:15–18, when he talks about the struggle between what he knows he should do and what he's tempted to do. However, in Romans 8:1, he gives us the answer: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (*NKJV*).

He's talking about walking in the Spirit. A life without the Spirit is incapable on its own of developing the fruit of the Spirit. Though we have the will, Paul speaks for all of us when he says that we don't have the power. The answer to the dilemma of Romans 7 is not when can we overcome but how. And the how is found through faith in Jesus. We give ourselves to Jesus, we claim His righteousness, we are no longer condemned, and we surrender ourselves to Him and choose to walk in the Spirit, choose to follow His will, claiming His promises of victory. The key is holding onto the promises; here's where the power comes from. We cannot do it alone. We have to make the conscious choice to overcome in His name. The struggle is as much vertical (reaching up in faith) as it is horizontal (battling the clamors of the flesh). We need to do both.

Joseph and the Immediate Results of Righteousness

Betrayed by his own family, sold into slavery, Joseph had very good reasons to doubt the love and care (even the existence) of the God that he had been taught about since childhood. That's not, however, what he did.

Read Genesis 39:7–20. In these verses, where do we find the key to why Joseph acted as he did?

How was Joseph “rewarded” for his refusal to yield to temptation? *Gen. 39:20*. He was falsely accused and thrown into prison. Is that what he gets for being faithful?

This is an important point to remember. Can we expect that our determination to do what is right, no matter the cost, will mean that things will turn out OK for us in the short term? What about folk who have lost their jobs, their spouses, their families, indeed, even their lives because they refused to compromise with sin? We have examples of this in the Bible, and perhaps you know people who have gone through something similar. Or perhaps you have gone through it yourself. In the end, suppose Joseph had spent the rest of his life rotting in jail? Had he still done the right thing?

“For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (*Gal. 6:8, NKJV*). What is this text telling us? What is placed in contrast to what? What is at stake? Why, then, is the issue here of paramount importance? How does what Paul writes here help us to understand why, no matter the immediate results, Joseph did right?

Samson and the Fruits of Failure

In Judges 13–16, the Bible gives us the story of Samson. Read through the texts (as much as time allows), keeping in mind the idea of self-control and temperance. There are plenty of powerful lessons we can learn from Samson’s example. How tragic that someone with so many gifts and so much promise could get so easily sidetracked.

“Samson in his peril had the same source of strength as had Joseph. He could choose the right or the wrong as he pleased. But instead of taking hold of the strength of God, he permitted the wild passions of his nature to have full sway. The reasoning powers were perverted, the morals corrupted. God had called Samson to a position of great responsibility, honor, and usefulness; but he must first learn to govern by first learning to obey the laws of God. Joseph was a free moral agent. Good and evil were before him. He could choose the path of purity, holiness, and honor, or the path of immorality and degradation. He chose the right way, and God approved. Samson, under similar temptations, which he had brought upon himself, gave loose rein to passion. The path which he entered upon he found to end in shame, disaster, and death. What a contrast to the history of Joseph!”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1007.

Read Judges 13:24, 25. Considering what we know about Samson, what important message, and warning, is found in those two texts?

Despite his great promise, Samson allowed his passions and lusts to overcome everything good. Who hasn’t struggled with the reality of this conflict? The great controversy isn’t just a symbol; it depicts the battle between Christ and Satan that is waged, not simply as some cosmic conflict in the heavens but in every human being, as well. Though Christ paved the way for all people to share in His victory, the battle for our hearts and flesh is being fought, indeed, in our hearts and our flesh. Sure, Christ won it all for us. But we have to choose to claim His victory all the time and, by the choices we make, we are deciding for one side or another in the great controversy.

How are you experiencing the reality of the great controversy in your own heart and flesh? What choices are you making? What do these choices tell you about which side you really are on?

Paul's Long Race

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:24–27, NKJV).

Read prayerfully and carefully Paul's words here to the Corinthians. Notice how much in this he talks about himself and his struggles. We should find comfort in seeing that even a faithful Christian such as Paul, one of the true giants of faith, had to struggle with self, with sin, with the flesh. We are not alone in our battle. Heaven is going to be filled with people who knew the clamors of the flesh.

Based on the texts above, answer the following questions:

• What analogy does Paul use to help us understand the battle with self and sin that we all struggle with? What are the crucial differences, though, between the analogy and the reality he's referring to?

• How confident was Paul regarding the race he was in? Where did his confidence come from? Why should we have the same confidence?

• Though Paul shows confidence, he's also aware of the possibility of failure. How does he describe it, and what is his solution? How does his answer fit in with the theme this week?

How to Grow in Self-Control

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (*Heb. 12:1, NKJV*). Paul here again uses the race analogy that we saw earlier. What are some of the “weights” that you find are holding you back?

Read Colossians 3:1–10. These verses give us rules for holy living as new persons in Christ. From these verses we learn several important things we must do to grow self-control in our lives. What do you find listed there, and how can you apply them to your own life and in a way that they will help get victory over the sin that so easily encumbers us?

Every skill has to be practiced. Self-control doesn’t come in a day. It comes in hits and misses, in successes and failures, as we try to practice it day after day. “Fight the good fight of faith” (*1 Tim. 6:12, NKJV*); “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me” (*Phil. 3:12, NKJV*).

Don’t constantly put yourself in places where your weaknesses will be tested, where your most-difficult-to-control drives will be out on the firing line of temptation. We must avoid even the appearance of evil (*1 Thess. 5:22*). “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (*Rom. 13:14*).

What are some areas of your life where self-control is definitely lacking? Why is it sometimes easier to get “victory” over dessert than to get victory over a spirit of bitterness and resentment? What changes can you make that will help you have more self-control?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Samson,” pp. 560–568, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The divine promise to Manoah was in due time fulfilled in the birth of a son, to whom the name of Samson was given. As the boy grew up it became evident that he possessed extraordinary physical strength. This was not, however, as Samson and his parents well knew, dependent upon his well-knit sinews, but upon his condition as a Nazarite, of which his unshorn hair was a symbol. Had Samson obeyed the divine commands as faithfully as his parents had done, his would have been a nobler and happier destiny. But association with idolaters corrupted him. The town of Zorah being near the country of the Philistines, Samson came to mingle with them on friendly terms. Thus in his youth intimacies sprang up, the influence of which darkened his whole life. A young woman dwelling in the Philistine town of Timnath engaged Samson’s affections, and he determined to make her his wife. To his God-fearing parents, who endeavored to dissuade him from his purpose, his only answer was, ‘She pleaseth me well.’ The parents at last yielded to his wishes, and the marriage took place.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 562.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** G. Gordon Liddy was one of the infamous Watergate conspirators. Liddy ended up serving more jail time than anyone else in this scandal, which rocked the United States in the 1970s. One time, when trying to recruit a young woman for criminal activity, Liddy invited her to a restaurant. During the discussion, she asked how she could trust him; that is, suppose he were caught, how could she know that he would not turn her in? In order to prove to her his self-control, Liddy placed his finger over a lit candle at the table, and held it there long enough for his flesh to start burning before he removed it. His point was to show her just how much self-control he had. How does that kind of self-control compare with the fruit of the Spirit we have looked at this week? Can we find something noble and worth emulating in that kind of self-control? Are self-control and discipline always necessarily good?
- 2** In what ways might self-control become a means to fanaticism? How could we avoid the danger of making self-control a form of legalism?
- 3** Do you know someone who is suffering because of principle; that is, when tempted, they exhibited self-control like Joseph did and are now suffering some difficult consequences? How can you, either as a class or as an individual, help this person through his or her difficult time?

My Brother's Prayer

by U. K. RAO

I live in a village on the eastern coast of India. As a teenager I got involved with a gang and began drinking. The gang was known for its violence and law breaking, but I stayed away from those activities.

My younger brother, Simon, isn't like me. He has a heart for God. Even though our village doesn't tolerate Christians, my younger brother became a Christian. This caused trouble in my family, and my parents sent him away.

One night I was at home drinking when Simon sneaked into the house. He came into my room and began praying. I remember saying, "Brother, pray for me." And he did. As he prayed for me, I felt the desire for alcohol leave my body. "What power is in you that when you pray to your God, I become sober?" I asked him.

"God has told me to pray for you," Simon answered. "His power will help you." He invited me to attend church with him, and I agreed to go. On Saturday morning I heard a voice so real that I turned to see who was talking. The voice said, "Go to the church." I started toward the church when I met some of the gang members and invited them to come with me. They laughed and made fun of Jesus. But I was determined to go.

My brother's prayers were changing me. Whenever I craved alcohol, that voice whispered, "Simon is praying for you; Jesus can deliver you." Soon I was alcohol free, and six months later I was baptized.

My conversion stirred up people in my village. Some wanted to learn about God, but others were furious. Non-Christians don't want Christians near them. They wouldn't let them draw water from the well or even breathe the same air. New believers were fined or forced to leave the village. I was warned not to talk about God or Jesus to other villagers.

Then the lay evangelist who was working with the new believers in our village suddenly died. The field president asked me to prepare to take his place. People who knew my background of drinking and gangs wondered at the change in me. I told them that the living God saved me and took away my desire to drink.

Because they saw the change in my life, some listened and began to worship with us. Now we have 50 people worshipping in a small room each Sabbath. These people want God's power in their lives. And my greatest joy is to lead them to Jesus.

U. K. RAO is a Global Mission pioneer in Orissa State, India.

LESSON 11

*March 6–12

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Righteousness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 23:25–28, Rom. 3:28, 8:4, 10:3, Gal. 3:6, 1 John 2:3–6, 5:1–3.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled’ ” (*Matthew 5:6, NKJV*).

Last week we finished our study on nine branches of the fruit of the Spirit (*Gal. 5:22, 23*). The next two weeks we will study two more: “for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth” (*Eph. 5:9, NKJV*). In this verse, Paul repeats the reference to “goodness” while he adds righteousness and truth. This week we look at what this “righteousness” is.

We understand righteousness in two ways. First, there is the imputed righteousness of Christ, which is what Jesus has done for us, the righteousness that covers us and that is our title to heaven. Second, there is the imparted righteousness of Christ, which is what He does in us, through the Holy Spirit, to mold us into His image. Thus understood, righteousness has two inseparable components, even though it's all really one righteousness—the righteousness of Christ, without which we would have no hope of salvation.

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

The Necessity of Righteousness

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (*Rom. 3:28*). “For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright” (*Ps. 11:7, NKJV*). “The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but He loves him who follows righteousness” (*Prov. 15:9, NKJV*). “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (*1 Pet. 2:24, NKJV*). “That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (*Rom. 8:4, NKJV*). “ ‘But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you’ ” (*Matt. 6:33, NKJV*). “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him” (*1 John 2:29, NKJV*).

Referring to the texts quoted above, respond to the following questions:

If we cannot be justified by the law, how then are we justified?

Although we know that God hates sin but loves sinners, what wrong conclusions must we avoid?

What does “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us” mean? Can we ever keep the law well enough to fulfill it? Or does Paul mean something else? If so, what?

How should our lives be changed when we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness?

What does it mean “to do righteousness”? Can we be righteous without doing righteousness? Justify your answer.

Do-It-Yourself Righteousness

“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (*Rom. 10:3, NKJV*). What do you think Paul was writing about here? About whom was he writing, and how might these folk have tried to establish their “own righteousness”? Given human nature, why is that impossible anyway?

A “do-it-yourself” activity is one in which a person does or makes something (as in woodworking or home repair) without professional training or assistance. In its broadest sense it is an activity in which one does something oneself or on one’s own initiative. We sometimes refer to a particularly successful person as a self-made man or woman. According to the Bible, however, a “do-it-yourself” approach to true righteousness is impossible. There is nothing that we can do of ourselves, no matter how hard we try, to be righteous before God. Our righteousness is as “filthy rags” (*Isa. 64:6*). In fact, seeking to make ourselves righteous often leads to the opposite result.

Read Matthew 5:20 and 23:25–28. How does Jesus here pinpoint the problem that comes from those who seek to make themselves righteous?

The crucial thing for Christians to understand is how utterly dependent they are upon Christ for their righteousness. What makes them holy before God is what Christ has done for them, not what they do. The moment someone loses sight of that truth, it’s so easy for self-righteousness to rise up, along with pride and inner corruption. The scribes and Pharisees were prime examples of how that happens. So concerned with their outward deeds of piety, they lost sight of what really matters.

In what ways might you be guilty of the same sin as the scribes and Pharisees? How might this trap be more subtle than we think?

Christ Our Righteousness *(Rom. 5:17)*

Read Romans 5:17–19 and summarize in your own words what Paul is saying here. How are we condemned, and how do we become righteous?

If the righteousness of Jesus is a gift, how do we obtain it? *Gal. 3:6, James 2:23.*

In Romans 5:19, notice the emphasis on disobedience and on obedience. One man’s disobedience, Adam’s, led to all of us becoming sinners. This is basic biblical teaching. Adam’s sin brought the downfall of the human race. We’re all, each of us, every day of our lives, living with the results. No one is immune.

The same verse, however, also talks about obedience. Whose obedience? Of course, the obedience of Christ, who alone has the righteousness needed for salvation, the righteousness given to all those who will “receive the abundance of grace.” Indeed, in that same verse Paul says that those who receive this grace get “the gift of righteousness.” Notice, it is a gift. As a gift it must be unearned and be undeserved. The moment it’s earned, or deserved, it’s no longer grace (*Rom. 4:4*).

Yet, it’s not a blanket gift. The righteousness of Christ isn’t automatically bestowed on everyone (*Rom. 5:17, NASB*). Paul is clear. It comes to those who will receive it; that is, it is given to those who claim it by faith—such as Abraham, who believed God, and it was “accounted to him for righteousness” (*Gal. 3:6*).

Do you really understand what it means to be saved by faith? How well do you grasp the idea that it’s only the righteousness of Jesus, credited to you by faith, that allows you to stand righteous and justified before God? What can you do to better grasp this wonderful provision, the foundation of the gospel?

Righteousness and Obedience (1 John 2:29)

Though we are covered by the righteousness of Christ, that righteousness must be revealed in our lives. Righteousness isn't just a legal declaration. It also becomes a reality in the life of the person who has it.

How carefully we should heed John's words: "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous" (1 John 3:7).

What might we be deceived about in regard to what it means to be righteous?

Righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit that is connected to obedience. To some people, obedience is inconsistent with salvation by faith. On occasion one might hear, "Now that you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, won't you accept Him as the Lord of your life?" The implication seems to be that our obedience to the will of God and our salvation are separate issues. That's a radical misinterpretation of what salvation is. John wrote that living a righteous life is a verifiable indicator of those who have salvation.

Read 1 John 2:3–6. What's John's point there?

When the subject of obedience is raised, it is not unusual for someone to point out that we are not saved by works. While there can be no doubt that Lucifer's obedience to the will of God did not put him into heaven, we must bear in mind that it was his disobedience that caused him to be expelled. The same can be said for Adam and Eve. Their obedience did not put them into the Garden of Eden, but their disobedience to the will of God resulted in their being put out of the garden.

"Righteousness is right doing, and it is by their deeds that all will be judged. Our characters are revealed by what we do. The works show whether the faith is genuine."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 312.

How well do you manifest the fruit of righteousness in your life? What practices might you need to give up that are hindering the fruit of righteousness in your life? (Be careful not to try to rationalize them away!)

The Righteous Life

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:1–3).

How does John tie in the love of God with the love other fellow believers have and with keeping the commandments? Why would he link all these together?

“The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. *The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God.*”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 97, 98, emphasis provided.

And what better way to inspire a desire to be loyal to God than through contemplation of His incredible sacrifice in our behalf on the cross? There’s no power in telling people that they have to keep the law. The power comes in pointing people to Jesus and to His substitutionary death in our behalf. The power comes from letting sinners know that their sins can be forgiven through Jesus, and they can stand perfect before God in the robe of Christ’s righteousness.

Love of God, and not the fear of hell and condemnation, should be the power that motivates our lives, and nothing will cause us to love God more than focusing on the Cross and the riches and promises that are ours through it.

Do you really love God? If so, how do you know? (Might you be deceiving yourself?) What do you do or say that reveals the reality of this love? In other words, what evidence is there that this love is real?

Further Study: “It is not enough for us to believe that Jesus is not an impostor, and that the religion of the Bible is no cunningly devised fable. We may believe that the name of Jesus is the only name under heaven whereby man may be saved, and yet we may not through faith make Him our personal Saviour. It is not enough to believe the theory of truth. It is not enough to make a profession of faith in Christ and have our names registered on the church roll. ‘He that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us.’ ‘Hereby we do know that we know Him if we keep His commandments.’ 1 John 3:24; 2:3. This is the genuine evidence of conversion. Whatever our profession, it amounts to nothing unless Christ is revealed in works of righteousness.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 312, 313.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How can we avoid the trap of legalism, that of thinking that our works will save us or that of cheap grace, thinking that our works have nothing at all to do with our salvation? How do we strike the right balance here? Which ditch do you tend to lean more toward, cheap grace or legalism?
- 2 What is the inherent danger of having our lives driven by the desire to do good works? What can this lead to, and how can we avoid it?
- 3 Think of a person you know who seems to be “righteous.” What is this person like? How does he or she act? How does he or she treat people? What does this person talk about? What can you learn from this person?
- 4 We tend to think of righteousness in individual terms, which is correct. But is there not a community element, as well? Can our church community be “righteous”? If so, how? What would a “righteous” church community look like? How does yours compare with the ideal that you’ve come up with?
- 5 If salvation by faith means more than merely making a profession of faith in Christ and having our names registered on the church roll, then what does it really mean? What is “faith” in the biblical sense of the term?

A Child's Song

by MAYE PORTER

Asap peeked into the hospital ward in her hometown of Kavieng, Papua New Guinea. The doctor wasn't there, so she slipped inside. She knew that the doctor didn't want her to be around sick people, but Asap was on a mission. The patients looked so sad, and she wished she could do something to cheer them up.

Sing! A voice seemed to whisper. So Asap walked from bed to bed singing songs she had learned in Sabbath School.

One old man, Salatiel, smiled as Asap approached his bed. "What church do you attend, Girlie," he asked teasingly.

"The Adventist church," she answered.

"What day do you attend church?" he asked.

"On Sabbath, the seventh day," she said innocently.

Her simple answer surprised him. He gave her his Bible and said, "Show me a verse that says that Saturday is the Sabbath."

Five-year-old Asap couldn't read, but she opened the Bible and pointed to a verse. "Here," she said to the man. "Read this."

Salatiel read the verse Asap had pointed to. He blinked and read it again. "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord" (*Exod. 20:10*).

"Go get your father," he told Asap. "Hurry!"

Asap scampered from the hospital and soon returned with her father. "I want you to see this miracle," Salatiel said, pointing to the verse Asap had shown him. "Surely the Sabbath is the Lord's day of worship!" he said.

Asap's father studied the Bible with Salatiel, and by the time the old man was well enough to return to his village, he had accepted many new Bible truths. "How am I going to explain this to my pastor and others in my village?" Salatiel asked. Asap's pastor offered to go with him to help him.

Many people listened as Salatiel and the pastor explained the Sabbath and other Bible truths, and soon several asked to be baptized. The pastor invited Asap and her family to attend the baptism, and when it was Salatiel's turn to be baptized in the sea, little Asap took his hand and led him to the water. Today a new group of believers worship in a little bamboo church in their village—all because a little girl obeyed when the Holy Spirit whispered, "Sing!"

Someone needs your help to find the Savior today. And every day your mission offerings help to share your faith with people you may never meet.

MAYE PORTER and her pastor-husband have served as missionaries throughout the South Pacific Division. Currently they share their faith on Norfolk Island, off the coast of eastern Australia.

The Fruit *of the Spirit* Is Truth



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Chron. 25:2; Ps. 51:17; Jer. 29:13; John 7:16, 17; 14:6; 17:3; Heb. 5:14.

Memory Text: “And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (*Jeremiah 29:13, NKJV*).

The Greek word for truth, *aletheia*, has two meanings. One is objective truth (actual facts, verity, or principle), and the other is subjective truth (truth as a personal excellence—a candor of mind that is free from affectation, pretense, dissimulation, falsehood, and deceit). Truth, then, is what we know, the objective “facts on the ground,” as it were. But there’s the subjective element of truth, as well, which entails how we individually respond to what we learn. When both of these are real in our lives, we will manifest truth as a fruit of the Spirit.

That’s why both elements are crucial to the Christian walk. We need to know the basic objective truth as it is found in Jesus, and then we need the personal subjective experience of having our lives changed by that truth.

Look at Judas. He was with Jesus for more than three and a half years. Judas had all sorts of truth revealed to him. He saw things the rest of us only can read about. And yet, in the end, look what good it did him.

May we all take heed.

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

“I Am . . . the Truth”

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’ ” (John 14:6, NKJV). Write out a short paragraph explaining what you think this text means.

On one level, this text radically challenges the relativism (the idea that truth is only subjective and personal) so current in much of the world today. Jesus’ words leave no ambiguity: There’s none of this “Each finds his own path to God,” and so forth. With these words, Jesus establishes the reality of objective truth. Here is Truth. Period. Few verses in the whole Bible are more contrary to the sentiment of relativism than this.

At the same time, there’s a whole other element, as well. The Truth is a Person. You come to truth through a relationship with a Person. This is a radically different idea from the notion of truth being only a group of facts. Jesus, a human being, is the Truth; thus, if you want to know truth, you have to know Jesus.

How does what’s written above help us understand Christ’s words in John 17:3?

We have to be careful, however, with this notion that all our religion means is having a relationship with God. Everyone lives in a relationship with God, one way or another. Folk who deny His existence live in relationship with God. Pilate had a relationship with Jesus; so did Caiaphas. Even the devil has a relationship with Jesus—he hates Him. The gospel is not a call to have a relationship with Jesus but to make a commitment to Him. Nicodemus, for instance, had a relationship with Jesus, one in which he eventually committed his life and all that he had to Christ. That’s the kind we all need!

No question, you have a relationship with Jesus. The questions you need to ask yourself are, What kind do I have? And, How can I make it better?

The Spirit and Truth

“ However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth’ ” (*John 16:13, NKJV*).

In view of what we learned yesterday, it is obvious that the work of the Holy Spirit is to point us to Christ and to help us abide in Him. “ But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me’ ” (*John 15:26, NKJV*).

Look at this powerful insight: “The preaching of the word will be of no avail without the continual presence and aid of the Holy Spirit. This is the only effectual teacher of divine truth. Only when the truth is accompanied to the heart by the Spirit will it quicken the conscience or transform the life. One might be able to present the letter of the word of God, he might be familiar with all its commands and promises; but unless the Holy Spirit sets home the truth, no souls will fall on the Rock and be broken.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 671, 672.

What emphasis is Ellen G. White placing on the work of the Holy Spirit here?

What we see in the work of the Holy Spirit is both the objective and subjective aspect of Truth. The Spirit comes, and He testifies of Jesus and reproves “ the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment’ ” (*John 16:8*). These are hard facts about the world, about God, about reality.

At the same time, the work of the Holy Spirit doesn’t end simply with teaching us these truths. Our lives need to be changed by our understanding of them. These objective and eternal truths will do us no good unless our lives are transformed by them, and part of that process (perhaps even the most important part) is for us, as she wrote, to be broken on the Rock (*see Ps. 51:17*).

How were you broken (or were you ever)? What happened? What changes came? What did you learn about life, about suffering, about God from that experience? What other lessons might you still need to learn?

“With All Your Heart”

“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (*Jer. 29:13, NKJV*).

“With all your heart” means “sincerely,” true in word and act. The word *sincere* comes from two Latin words—*sine* (without) and *cera* (wax). Apparently in the past, less-than-honest sculptors would secretly fix the flaws and cracks in their work by plugging them with wax, which, of course, doesn’t hold. Hence, *sincerity* means being real and genuine, not artificial. It means speaking or acting “from the heart” and meaning it.

Read 2 Chronicles 25:2. What is that text saying? What important point is being made about what’s inside us?

The Hebrew word translated in some versions as “perfect” comes from the root *slm* (from which *shalom* is derived). It means, basically, “full,” “complete,” or “at peace.” Thus, we have here a king who did the right thing but not with a heart that was in the right place. He wasn’t sincere in his actions. This raises the possibility that a person could be doing the right things for the wrong reasons. Though we may be able to fool some of the people some of the time, and ourselves all the time, we can’t fool God any of the time. How interesting that when David prayed for his son, the first thing he wanted him to have was “a perfect heart” (*1 Chron. 29:19, NASB*).

Sincerity is important because the one who isn’t sincere, the one whose heart isn’t committed to what’s true and right, is someone with a divided heart. There surely is something else pulling on such a person, and as long as he or she doesn’t let go, as long as this person still allows those other allegiances a place, the heart cannot be *slm*, complete, or perfect before God. The key, then, is complete surrender to the Lord, a complete letting go of self. It’s not easy; in a real sense, to have that happen, you need to be, as we saw yesterday, broken on the Rock.

How sincere are you in your faith? We’re not talking about occasional doubts, or having deep unanswered questions (everyone at times has doubts, and all have deep unanswered questions), nor are we talking about struggling with sin. Instead, we’re talking about your heart. Is it fully committed to God, “complete” before Him, or is it divided between God and something of the world? If it is the latter, what choices must you make?

A Conscience Seared

Last week we saw how Jesus had sharp words for the fake “righteousness” of the scribes and the Pharisees (*see Matt. 23:27*), calling them “hypocrites.” The word *hypocrite* in the original language (*hupokrites*) means “actor.” Jesus was letting them know that He could discern their inner feelings and secret sins. It was as though He was telling them, “You act one way but inside you are another, as though you were acting in a play. Cannot you be real?” Another time Jesus said, “ ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me” ’ ” (*Mark 7:6, NKJV*). His meaning is obvious.

Read 1 Timothy 4:2 and Titus 1:15. What important point is Paul talking about here? Our conscience is the place where the Holy Spirit makes contact with us. What can happen to us if we constantly are doing wrong?

No question, the more we continue in evil, and the more we do what we know is wrong, the more defiled our conscience becomes and the further from the Truth we get. Again, you can have more than enough head knowledge to be saved. The final fires will, unfortunately, have way too many folk who knew more than enough objective truths to be saved. But, as we are saying, objective truth alone is not a fruit of the Spirit. Truth lived out in our life, that’s the fruit we need to bear.

Read Hebrews 5:14 and John 7:16, 17. How do these texts help us better understand the idea of truth as a fruit of the Spirit?

What’s your own experience of a “seared conscience”? How long did it take until the act that had, at first, seared your conscience barely touched it at all? Why did that happen, and why is it so spiritually dangerous?

Walking in Truth

“I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father” (2 John 4, NKJV). “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1 John 1:6, NKJV). What important point is being made in both these texts regarding what it means to have a saving relationship with Jesus?

Truth, as a fruit of the Spirit, isn't just what we know—it's what we do. Living in God's light means more than just knowledge. Look at how John explains what walking in darkness is like: “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:9–11).

Thus, walking in the light, walking in the truth, is more than just keeping the Ten Commandments, at least according to the letter of the law. In the end, when all is said and done, isn't living in the truth basically manifested by how we deal with people and how we treat them? If we are sharp, cross, unforgiving, vengeful, hateful, unsympathetic; if we treat people as means rather than as ends, if we are trampling upon others in an attempt to advance ourselves, then we are walking in darkness, no matter how strictly we keep the Sabbath, no matter how faithfully we adhere to the health message, no matter how much we profess faith in Jesus, pay tithes, and go to church. In one sense, it's often a lot easier to learn correct doctrine and theology than it is to be kind, selfless, and giving to others, is it not?

Think about your interactions with folk in the past twenty-four hours. How have you treated them? What kind of words did you use? How comfortable would you be if your attitudes and actions toward them were made public (one day they will; see Matt. 10:26). What does your answer tell you about what changes you need to see made in your life?

Further Study: “It is not the length of time we labor but our willingness and fidelity in the work that makes it acceptable to God. In all our service a full surrender of self is demanded. The smallest duty done in *sincerity and self-forgetfulness* is more pleasing to God than the greatest work when marred with self-seeking. He looks to see how much of the spirit of Christ we cherish, and how much of the likeness of Christ our work reveals. He regards more the love and faithfulness with which we work than the amount we do.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 402, emphasis supplied.

“The service rendered in sincerity of heart has great recompense. ‘Thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly.’ By the life we live through the grace of Christ, the character is formed. The original loveliness begins to be restored to the soul. The attributes of the character of Christ are imparted, and the image of the Divine begins to shine forth. The faces of men and women who walk and work with God express the peace of heaven. They are surrounded with the atmosphere of heaven. For these souls the kingdom of God has begun. They have Christ’s joy, the joy of being a blessing to humanity. They have the honor of being accepted for the Master’s use; they are trusted to do His work in His name.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 535.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Is there any sense at all in which truth could be relative; that is, it may not apply all the time to every situation? If not, why not? Are there certain truths, perhaps, that could be relative while others aren’t?
- 2** Dwell more on this idea of what it means to be sincere in your faith. However crucial sincerity is, why is that not enough? After all, folk who strap bombs to themselves and blow themselves up are, it would seem, sincere. What else is needed?
- 3** Why is spending time in the Word so important if truth is more than head knowledge? What are ways in which we can learn to study our Bible so that the Truth in there can impact and change our lives for the better?
- 4** How can you help someone whose conscience has been so hardened in sin that they don’t feel their need of help?
- 5** In class, discuss this question: What’s better, to do the right thing for the wrong reason or the wrong thing for the right reason?

In Difficult Times: Part 1

by RICHARD LASU

My partner and I arrived in Kajo Keji, a small town in southern Sudan, to plant a church. We knew no one and had no place to stay, so we prayed for God's leading.

We found a Protestant pastor's home, and he invited us to stay with him that night. The next day was Sabbath, and we spent time explaining to the pastor who we were and what we believe. He invited us to preach in his church the next day, which is a custom in our region. We gladly accepted.

We chose to speak on the Second Coming, for we knew the people would rejoice to be reminded that Jesus is coming again. After church many of the members stopped by the pastor's house where we were staying to visit with us. The next morning we thanked the pastor for his hospitality and went in search of a hut in which to live.

We met a woman in town who said that she had been at church on Sunday. When we told her that we were looking for a place to stay, she suggested that her husband had several huts he wasn't using and was willing to introduce us to him. Her husband agreed to give us a hut at no cost because we were pastors. We thanked the couple and moved in.

That evening the woman gathered her neighbors at the hut to worship with us. For three days we worshiped with these neighbors in the morning and again in the evening. But the woman's husband lost interest and stopped coming.

The next evening as I sat in the hut, I heard feet running on the dirt path. Suddenly our landlord burst into the hut with a gun. "Why are you making my hut a place for worship?" he demanded.

Before I could answer the man, his wife, who had heard the shouting, ran to my hut. Then a soldier entered and pointed his gun at me. He thought I was robbing the man, and he tried to stab me. The landlord's wife cried out, and the soldier realized his mistake.

The landlord ordered us to leave his compound and throw our things outside. We picked up our things and wondered where to go. It was ten o'clock at night, and we had no place to go. Soldiers had imposed a curfew, and it was dangerous to be out. We didn't know what to do.

(Continued next week)

LESSON 13 *March 20–26

The Fruit of the Spirit: The Essence of Christian Character



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 6:33, John 15:8, Rom. 3:20–26, 14:17, 1 Tim. 6:11, 1 John 2:15.*

Memory Text: “To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (*Colossians 1:27, NKJV*).

When Moses asked God to show him His glory, it was then that the Lord revealed to him His character as merciful, gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth (*Exod. 34:6*). And so when “we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, [we] are changed into the same image from glory [character] to glory [character], even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (*2 Cor. 3:18*).

“By believing in Christ, the fallen race he has redeemed may obtain that faith which works by love and purifies the soul from all defilement. Then Christlike attributes appear: for by beholding Christ men become changed into the same image from glory to glory, from character to character. Good fruit is produced. The character is fashioned after the divine similitude, and integrity, uprightness, and true benevolence are manifested.”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 54.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 27.*

Seek First the Kingdom of God

So often our prayers are more about what we can get as opposed to what we should become. Think about your own prayers, or about the prayers that you hear others pray. No matter how legitimate the concerns are, what category do most of them fall under: What can I get, or what can I become? How do we understand this tendency in light of what Jesus says to us below?

“ ‘But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you’ ” (*Matt. 6:33, NKJV*). **What does Jesus mean when He tells us to seek “first” the kingdom of God? Why seek that first?** *See Matt. 16:26.*

How does Romans 14:17 help us understand what the kingdom of God is?

Notice that righteousness, peace, and joy are the fruit of the Spirit. Therefore, we should seek first the fruit of the Spirit before anything else. In the end, we can have everything the world offers, but what does that mean if we don't have righteousness, peace, and joy?

If someone were to ask, “But does this mean that Jesus isn't interested in my physical or financial well-being?” How would you answer in the light of Christ's command to put the fruit of the Spirit before physical or material needs?

A concerned mother said, “Pastor, please pray for my boy. He is out of the faith, and he has lost his job. Pray that he will find work.” Was this concerned mother seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness for her son? Keeping in mind that the priority of the Christian life is not to get but to become, what should her request for her boy have been?

What are your main concerns as revealed not just by your prayers but by your life in general: getting what you want for yourself or becoming what God wants you to become? What does your answer tell you about your priorities?

Other Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22, 23 and Ephesians 5:9 are not the only texts that list the fruit that constitute the essence of Christian character. Many of the fruit are repeated in 1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Timothy 3:10, and 2 Peter 1:5–7, where qualities are added, such as godliness, virtue, and knowledge. It is interesting to note that 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 echoes the qualities of love and states many of them using the negative word *not*: “does not envy; . . . does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity” (*NKJV*).

It should be clear by now that there is not one official checklist when it comes to the fruit of the Spirit. There are many different aspects and nuances of Christian character. What the apostles do in each case is to list those that are especially applicable to their readers. What led Paul to the enumeration in Galatians was doubtless his pastoral knowledge of the particular needs of the congregation to which he was writing.

The fruit of “godliness” is mentioned in 1 Timothy 6:11. In the original language, the word *godliness* means “reverence, respect, and piety toward God.” Romans 5:4, 5 mentions the quality of “hope.” What role does hope play in the Christian character? When all is said and done, our Christian faith offers us nothing if not hope.

Second Peter 1:5–7 is a list of qualities, among them “virtue,” which is not mentioned in the list in Galatians 5:22, 23. Virtue is associated with moral goodness as are modesty and purity. Why is this quality indispensable in the Christian life? How does this quality relate to the seventh commandment?

Second Peter 1:5, 6 adds “knowledge” to the list. Though the word that is used, *gnosis*, signifies general knowledge and understanding as fruit of the Spirit-filled life, what role would knowledge play? How would knowledge relate to, for instance, the gift of discernment?

Peter did not call his list in 2 Peter 1:5–7 the fruit of the Spirit, but essentially that’s what the qualities listed are, because they reveal what kind of people we should be as followers of Jesus.

How well are these characteristics manifested in your own life? If you are discouraged by what you see, what’s your one hope? What’s the only place you can flee to, and what can you find there?

Perseverance in Faith

Yesterday's discussion question brought up the question of how well we are doing in cultivating the fruit that is our privilege to bear for the honor and glory of God. No doubt, as one looks at all these qualities of character and then compares oneself to them, it would be easy to get discouraged. After all, shouldn't we be bearing more fruit than we are?

That's a fair question, one that we should all seriously think about. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (*2 Cor. 13:5*). We need to take stock of ourselves, of how we are living and of what kind of witness we present to the world.

At the same time, too, we can face a danger. As Christians, we have the example of Jesus, the only sinless human being who ever lived. As we compare ourselves to Him, how easy it could be to get discouraged. How easy to see His sinlessness and perfection in contrast to our sinfulness and weaknesses. We do have a perfect standard to follow, a perfect law to obey, and a perfect Savior to emulate. As we all know, we often fall far short of that standard, of that law, and of that Savior. How easy it can be, too, after falling and falling, after not seeing the kind of growth we would like, to get discouraged, even to the point of giving up, thinking, "Why bother? I just can't do it."

Here, though, is where we need to understand fully what salvation by faith is about. Here is where we need to understand where our salvation lies, and here is where we need to understand what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross.

Read Romans 3:20–26. What message is there for us about salvation? Why is this truth so important to cling to, especially when we feel discouraged about the state of our own fruit?

No matter how earnestly we seek to live the Christian life and fight the battle against sin and self, as long as we keep before us, every day, every moment, the reality that our acceptance with God is found in Jesus and His righteousness, which He worked out for us and which He credits to us by faith, we will never give up. Why should we? Our salvation remains secure, not in ourselves but in Jesus.

The Challenge of the World

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15, NKJV). What is this text saying? Does it mean that God doesn’t love those who love the world, or that those who love the world don’t love God? Explain.

“At times the longings of the soul go out for holiness and heaven; but there is no time to turn aside from the din of the world to listen to the majestic and authoritative utterances of the Spirit of God. The things of eternity are made subordinate, the things of the world supreme. It is impossible for the seed of the word to bring forth fruit; for the life of the soul is given to nourish the thorns of worldliness.”
—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 51.

While we must be aware of the dangers of legalism, ancient Israel always backslid when it tried to contemporize itself and become like the nations around it. First John 2:15 warns that love of the world makes impossible a heartfelt love for God. How careful we need to be as a church in making sure that, in our attempts to reach the world, we don’t become enamored by it and swept into it, all in the name of the Lord!

How can a person know when his or her love for the world has superseded his or her love for God? What signs should we look for?

The danger of loving the world more than God takes on new meaning in James 4:4: “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (NKJV). Why would James use the metaphor of adultery for church members who are swept up with the world? Notice, too, how in 1 John 2:15 John leaves no room for compromise. It’s either God, or it’s the world.

What aspects of the world do you struggle with the most? What things do you find alluring? How can you learn to fight the fight of faith and not get swept up in something that, in the end, cannot satisfy and will destroy you?

How to Grow the Fruit of the Spirit

(John 15:8)

Although we cannot make a seed grow, there are definitely things we can do that will facilitate growth until it bears fruit. So it is in the Spirit-filled life. While the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer is a part of the great mystery of life itself, Scripture has given us definite instruction on how to encourage that growth so that we may fulfill Jesus' desire that we bring forth much fruit to the glory of the Father (John 15:8).

What follows below are some ways to encourage the growth of the fruit of the Spirit:

Through study of the Word of God. What does 2 Timothy 3:16 declare that the Scripture is profitable for? As a result, what will be accomplished in our lives? (See vs. 17; see also Ps. 119:105.)

Through prayer. "Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is the secret of spiritual power. No other means of grace can be substituted, and the health of the soul be preserved. Prayer brings the heart into immediate contact with the Well-spring of life, and strengthens the sinew and muscle of the religious experience. Neglect the exercise of prayer, or engage in prayer spasmodically, now and then, as seems convenient, and you lose your hold on God. The spiritual faculties lose their vitality, the religious experience lacks health and vigor."—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, pp. 254, 255.

Through the right kind of thoughts. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8). How can we learn to keep our mind on elevated thoughts?

Through our Christian witness. The man that Jesus healed of demons requested to go with Him. Jesus denied his request and rather asked him to return to where he lived and tell what the Lord had done for him (Mark 5:18–20). How does sharing our faith contribute to the growth of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives?

The fruit of the Spirit isn't going to happen on its own. Your own choices will determine your destiny. What changes do you need to make in your lifestyle, in your associations, in anything and everything you do that can better allow for your spiritual growth?

Further Study: “God bids us fill the mind with great thoughts, pure thoughts. He desires us to meditate upon His love and mercy, to study His wonderful work in the great plan of redemption. Then clearer and still clearer will be our perception of truth, higher, holier, our desire for purity of heart and clearness of thought. The soul dwelling in the pure atmosphere of holy thought will be transformed by communion with God through the study of the Scriptures.

“ ‘And bring forth fruit.’ Those who, having heard the word, keep it, will bring forth fruit in obedience. The word of God, received into the soul, will be manifest in good works. Its results will be seen in a Christlike character and life. Christ said of Himself, ‘I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart.’ Ps. 40:8. ‘I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me.’ John 5:30. And the Scripture says, ‘He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.’ 1 John 2:6.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 60.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** As a church, with a mission to spread the three angels’ messages to the world, we often struggle to find ways to make ourselves and our message relevant to the culture around us. What inherent dangers do we face when we do that? History shows that more often than not, the church through the centuries ends up getting converted to the ways of the world, as opposed to the world getting converted to the ways of the church. What about us, as Adventists? Do we fool ourselves into thinking that this isn’t happening to us, or that it can’t happen to us? Do we see evidence of this already happening? And, if so, what can we do?
- 2** In the twenty-first century, in your own culture, what are some of the greatest challenges to growing the fruit of the Spirit? What specific aspects of the culture must you unflinchingly fight against?
- 3** Why is the Cross so central to the whole question of the fruit of the Spirit and character development? What does the Cross offer us that’s indispensable in character development? After all, without the Cross, what would even be the purpose of bearing this fruit?
- 4** Why do our character development and good works bring glory to God? What’s that all about?

In Difficult Times: Part 2

by RICHARD LASU

We were trying to plant a church in Kajo Keji, southern Sudan, but Satan was angry. A few days after we started work, our landlord threw us out. Soldiers patrolled the streets, and it was dangerous to be out. But we didn't know where to go.

We knelt and placed our lives in God's hands. Then we started walking. We reached a home behind a large fence. I knocked, and a security guard answered. The man knew we were pastors and told the owner, who invited us to sleep in his sitting room. The next morning this man told us he was a soldier and was being transferred to another area. He invited us to stay in his house and care for it for as long as we needed it.

Nearby we found a big mango tree. We cleared the debris from under it and started holding worship services there. Two days later the woman who had befriended us found us and asked for Bible studies.

One Sabbath we were worshipping with five other people when a soldier came saying he had a warrant to arrest our former landlord's wife. I asked the soldiers to wait until our worship was over, but he refused, saying he must take her immediately. Finally he agreed to allow us to pray with her before he took her away.

Just as the soldier and the woman disappeared around a curve, a plane flew over and dropped bombs on the town center. The soldier fled the scene, and the woman returned to worship with us. Our prayer service turned into a praise service.

Within a few months 30 people were worshipping with us, and 11 people were preparing for baptism. Other churches in the area weren't happy about our work and tried to break up our new congregation. But we fasted and prayed, and God worked on our behalf. The woman who had befriended us became a leader in the church.

It isn't easy to plant a church among opposition. But God blessed our efforts. The war in southern Sudan has disrupted the lives of millions of people, but peace has come, and the people are returning to their villages. The church in Kajo Keji is growing again.

Your mission offerings help advance the work in difficult places around the world. Thank you!

RICHARD LASU *pastors several church groups and works with Adventist World Radio in Arua, Uganda.*

Next quarter's Bible study guide will look at the wonderful truths God has given to the Adventist health movement. The Lord revealed these principles because He loves us and wants what is in our best interest. This quarter's lesson on healthful living written by the General Conference Health and Temperance Ministries Department was produced with the goal of helping us to achieve as healthful a lifestyle as possible until the Lord provides "the redemption of our bodies" (*Rom. 8:23, NIV*).

Lesson 1—Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow!

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Our God of Love (*2 Tim. 1:9*)

MONDAY: God of Grace (*Eph. 2:8, 9*)

TUESDAY: A Love Relationship (*Matt. 22:37, 38*)

WEDNESDAY: Praising the Lord (*Rev. 21:4*)

THURSDAY: A "Reasonable Service" (*Rom. 12:1*)

Memory Text—*Psalms 103:1, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: The same God who created the universe is the One who in the Person of Jesus bore the sins of all humanity. With this truth before us, how could we not offer God our very best praise and worship?

Lesson 2—The Power of Choice

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: The Reality of Freedom (*Gen. 2:16, 17*)

MONDAY: The Consequences: Guilt and Fear (*Gen. 3:7–13*)

TUESDAY: Choices: Good and Bad (*Heb. 11:8–10*)

WEDNESDAY: Choice and the Next Generation (*Deut. 30:10–19*)

THURSDAY: Choice and Chance (*Ps. 87:5, 6*)

Memory Text—*Daniel 1:8*

Sabbath Gem: God gave us the power of choice. With those choices, however, come consequences.

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.