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DIVISION



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EAQ140101

ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

DISCIPLESHIP

Jan • Feb • Mar 2014

Adult
Sabbath School
Bible Study Guide

Jan | Feb | Mar 2014

Discipleship



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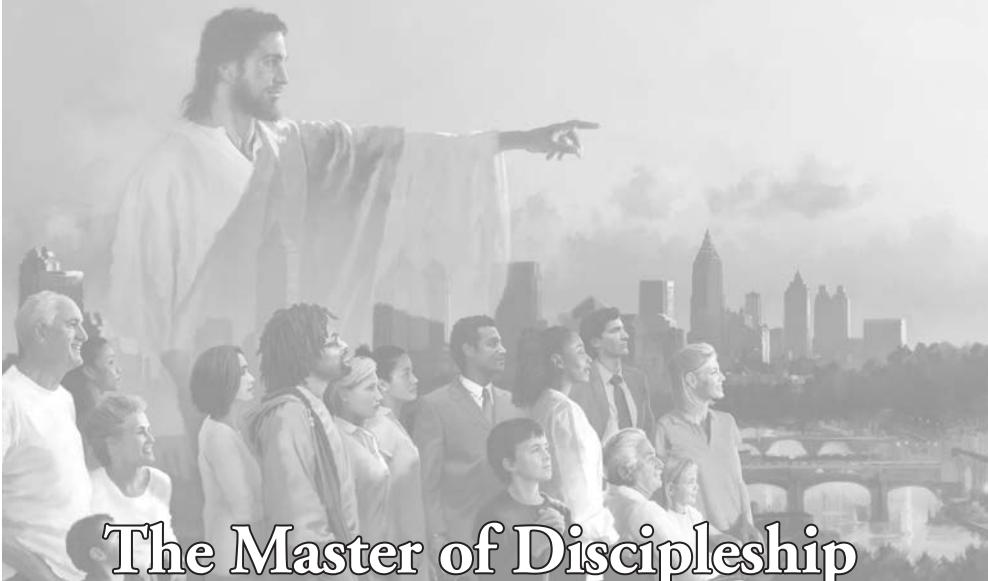
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**Sabbath
School
Personal
Ministries**

The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of the Sabbath School Publications Board, a subcommittee of the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM), publisher of the Bible study guides. The published guide reflects the input of worldwide evaluation committees and the approval of the Sabbath School Publications Board and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).



The Master of Discipleship

In the beginning God created a perfect, sinless world. Human beings enjoyed the privilege of honoring, worshiping, and following their Creator. Life should have continued thus for eternity.

Christ's sacrifice provided our only hope. Calvary's redemption offers us freedom and our only escape from insignificance and meaninglessness. Sinful humans are offered liberty, forgiveness, and the opportunity for restoration to their original state.

God beckons believers everywhere to become heralds of this matchless grace—ambassadors who communicate this divine redemption to those enslaved by Satan, calling them to follow, worship, and praise their Maker. Christ's example of disciple-making must become the model that believers follow in answering the Great Commission (*Matt. 28:19, 20*).

Therefore, the topic of this quarter is discipleship. Though the term has many facets, in this study we will look at discipleship as the process by which we become followers of Jesus and, as such, better soul winners.

After all, Jesus is every Christian's example, especially in the work of soul winning. Is it illogical to suppose that the keys to effective evangelism are discovered in popular psychology, mass-marketing techniques, and elaborate promotional programs, rather than in following the simple example of Christ?

How did Jesus attract His followers? What can we learn from Christ's example that would enable us to more effectively lead others to Him? How can we fulfill the Great Commission?

How did Jesus appeal to such diverse groups: the wealthy and the destitute, the religious and the irreligious, the politically powerful and the powerless? How did Jesus unlock callous hearts, inspire hope among outcasts, gently awaken the child's tender heart, and leap over ethnic and social barriers in order to make disciples? How did He penetrate the fortresses of wealth and power, open the cocoons of spiritually arrogant religious leaders, or revive hope among those fighting terminal illnesses?

These are not merely discussion questions that stimulate intellectual interchange; rather, they are a crucial area of study for Christians whose passionate desire is to follow Jesus' example of guiding lost sheep to the loving Shepherd.

Paul also challenged believers to follow him as he followed Christ. It is unthinkable that believers in the twenty-first century should accept a lower standard than that which Paul established in the first century.

In the end, following Jesus vastly exceeds the limiting view that discipleship equals methods for correcting aberrant behaviors and habits, however important these changes are. A comprehensive understanding of discipleship is incomplete until it incorporates a passionate desire to follow Jesus and, as a supernatural result, a passionate desire to lead others to Christ, as well.

Or, as we have so eloquently been told: "No sooner does one come to Christ than there is born in his heart a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus; the saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart. If we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and are filled with the joy of His indwelling Spirit, we shall not be able to hold our peace. If we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good we shall have something to tell. . . . There will be an intensity of desire to follow in the path that Jesus trod."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 78, 79.

Thus, our subject for this quarter.

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A comprehensive understanding of discipleship is incomplete until it incorporates a passionate desire to follow Jesus and, as a supernatural result, a passionate desire to lead others to Christ, as well.



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(Review and Herald, January 3, 1907).



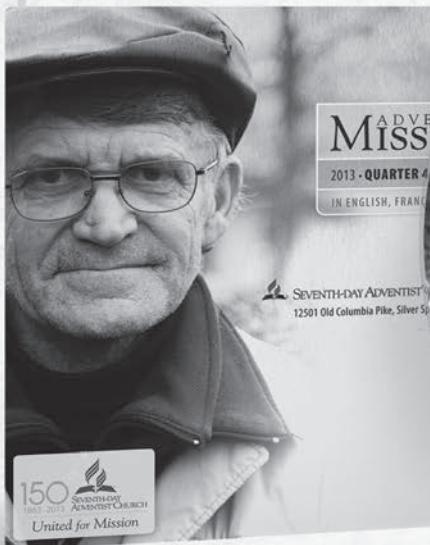
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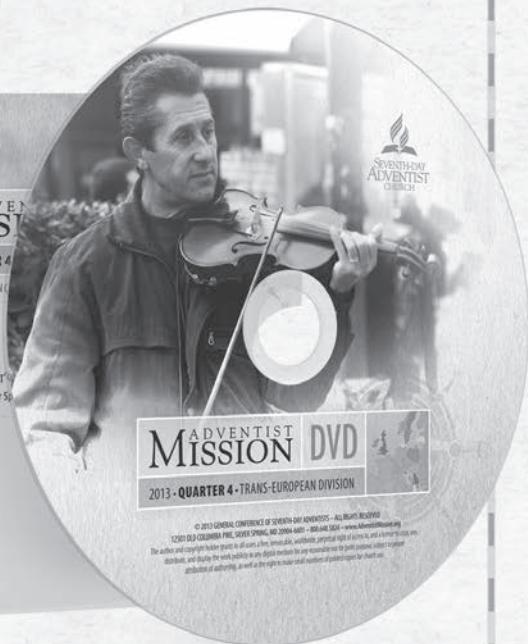
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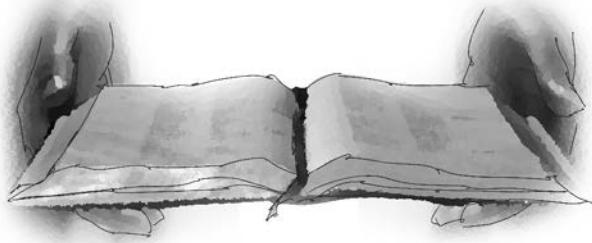
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Disciples *and* Scripture



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 4:1–12, Matt. 12:3–8, Matt. 5:17–39, Luke 24:13–32, Acts 1:16–20.*

Memory Text: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (*John 5:39*).

Using a metal detector purchased from a rummage sale, Englishman Terry Herbert discovered gold-plated Anglo-Saxon weaponry and silver artifacts buried beneath a farmer's field. The estimated monetary value of the find exceeded \$5 million in U.S. dollars.

Like someone seeking treasure in a field of dirt, rocks, and rubbish, we must be careful not to let things get in our way and make us miss the real treasure above: Jesus Christ. Searching for eternal riches, Pharisees and Sadducees alike “excavated” the ancient sacred writings. Ironically, their treasure map, Scripture, had been so radically misread that they missed the point—Jesus—completely.

Explicitly and implicitly Jesus incorporated Scripture into His disciple-making methodology. The ultimate “treasure quest” was rooted in the prophetic writings, which pointed to Him. Thus, to miss Jesus is to miss the mark. All this means, then, is that all our disciple-making endeavors must, ultimately, be about Jesus and that which He has done for us.

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

Jesus and the Bible

Because Jesus is the example for all believers, His level of commitment to Scripture becomes more than a matter of passing interest.

Read Luke 4:1–12 and 16–21. What do these passages suggest about Christ’s attitude toward the Bible?

The narrative of Christ’s wilderness temptations shows that, by quoting Scripture, Jesus rebuffed every satanic challenge and invitation. The Scripture scrolls were not likely available to Christ during this 40-day desert sojourn. This clearly indicates that Christ had committed substantial portions of Scripture to memory. While the Scriptures quoted in the wilderness were taken from the writings of Moses, Jesus quotes elsewhere from the other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures (*Matt. 21:42, 22:44*). Clearly, Christ had a widespread knowledge of Scripture.

Notice, however, that Christ understands that the Scriptures are more than just a tool for overcoming temptation and achieving personal holiness. Jesus recognizes that Scripture points to Him. During the synagogue visit recorded in Luke 4:16–30, Jesus quotes Isaiah and then declares that this text points to Himself as the One anointed to release the oppressed and proclaim freedom. Jesus understood that He fulfilled Messianic prophecy. Thus, Jesus not only understood that the Bible pointed to Him, but early on in His ministry He used the Bible to point others to Him, as well.

Though it’s important to know the Bible, that alone isn’t enough. Some of the biggest-name Bible scholars have not even been believing Christians. Thus, we need to ask ourselves, How can we make sure that our study and reading of the Bible help us to come to a better knowledge of Jesus and what He has done for us? That is, how can we make Bible study something that transforms our lives?

The Authority of Scripture

Read the following texts. What do they tell us about the way in which Jesus viewed the Bible? *Matt. 5:17–20, 12:3–8, 15:3–11, John 10:34–37, 17:14–19, Luke 24:44.*

Whenever Christ debated with the religious authorities, He relied not on abstract philosophy, not even on personal authority, but on the teachings of Scripture. When determining right from wrong, Jesus based His argument on a scriptural bedrock. When opponents challenged Christ's doctrinal purity, He directed them to specific passages within Scripture. When considering practical matters, Jesus referred listeners to divine revelation. Christ understood that His divinely ordained mission was to accomplish that which the ancient prophets had predicted.

Contrast Christ's exalted understanding of Scripture with the prevailing attitude often exhibited among even professed Christians today. Entire denominations have come to deem the Bible as interesting but, basically, unreliable historical manuscripts. Everything—the six-day Creation, the Exodus, even the bodily resurrection of Jesus (much less a literal Second Coming)—has been called into question, or even relegated to the status of myth.

The implications for discipleship are clear. Why would anyone want to give his or her life to a cause based on nothing but myths? Instead, people burdened with real problems need a real Savior. Otherwise, the gospel becomes a tarnished treasure or, metaphorically, plastic coinage covered with simulated gold. From a distance, some might be fooled, but, upon closer examination, the plastic will suffer rejection. The only safe course is to follow Christ's example of exalting, honoring, and obeying the Bible.

Death is no myth, is it? Nor is it just a symbol. It is one of the harshest realities that we all face. Think through the implications, then, of any view of the Bible that treats biblical teachings, such as the resurrection of Jesus or His second coming, as mere symbols or myths. Why must we, individually and as a church, never allow ourselves to get caught up in this satanic trap?

Public Proclamation

Jesus attracted people to Himself in various settings, including public ones. Scripture assumed a prominent role in Christ's public proclamations. Direct quotations and scriptural allusions filled His sermons and public discourse.

Read Matthew 5:17–39. In what ways do these verses show how Christ utilized Scripture for public ministry?

During Christ's earthly sojourn, the ordinary Israelites' relationship with Scripture was apparently highly legalistic. They looked to Scripture for regulations and ethical guidance. Upright behavior was considered the payment for eternal bliss. Jesus, however, overturned their legalistic notions and substituted a heart-based religion for a system of external controls.

Christ-centered religion is rooted in a heart transformation that leads to ethical behavior. Ironically, some of the Pharisees had bypassed having a living relationship with God in their haste to achieve moral perfection. Jesus identified these shortcomings, and as a cure He beckoned listeners to accept Him as Savior and Master. With Jesus as the internally controlling force, behavioral standards were not lowered but elevated. All one has to do is read the Sermon on the Mount to see just how elevated His moral standards were.

“As something strange and new, these words fall upon the ears of the wondering multitude. Such teaching is contrary to all they have ever heard from priest or rabbi. They see in it nothing to flatter their pride or to feed their ambitious hopes. But there is about this new Teacher a power that holds them spellbound. The sweetness of divine love flows from His very presence as the fragrance from a flower. . . . All feel instinctively that here is One who reads the secrets of the soul, yet who comes near to them with tender compassion.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 6.

It's easier than we think to be legalistic, judgmental, and condemnatory, isn't it? How can we protect ourselves from falling into these common practices?

Personal Ministry

Examples of Christ's public ministry abound. Equally fascinating are Christ's personal encounters, both with ordinary and elite members of society. These stories offer unique insights into the centrality of Scripture in Christ's ministry.

Read John 13:18–20 and Luke 10:25–28, 24:13–32. What role did Scripture play in these passages? What purpose did Jesus have for quoting these particular verses? What resulted from these small group encounters with Scripture?

Repeatedly, Christ quotes Scripture in conjunction with His calls to discipleship. This clearly implies that Jesus' authority and credibility rested on Scripture, not merely on personal charisma. This is seen especially in the ways in which Jesus used the Scriptures as He worked with the two disciples who were on the road to Emmaus.

“Beginning at Moses, the very Alpha of Bible history, Christ expounded in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Had He first made Himself known to them, their hearts would have been satisfied. In the fullness of their joy they would have hungered for nothing more. But it was necessary for them to understand the witness borne to Him by the types and prophecies of the Old Testament. Upon these their faith must be established. Christ performed no miracle to convince them, but it was His first work to explain the Scriptures. They had looked upon His death as the destruction of all their hopes. Now He showed from the prophets that this was the very strongest evidence for their faith.

“In teaching these disciples, Jesus showed the importance of the Old Testament as a witness to His mission.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 796–799.

Dwell on Luke 24:32, especially the phrase that their “heart[s] burn[ed] within.” What does that mean? When was the last time your heart burned within you over the truths that we have been given? If it hasn't in a long time, might it be because your heart has grown cold? If so, how can you change?

The Next Generation

Without a doubt, as we have seen, Jesus places a heavy emphasis on the Bible. Never did He question the authority, veracity, or authenticity of a single Bible text. And yet, through the centuries and even today, many people do just that.

Read Matthew 12:15–21, Mark 1:1–3, Acts 1:16–20, 3:22–24, and Romans 10:10, 11. What do these texts tell us about the ways in which the earliest Christians viewed Scripture? What lessons can we take from them for ourselves and how we relate to the Bible?

The earliest Christian writers continued the practice of using Scripture to authenticate the messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth. In effect, they were saying that Christianity was inextricably connected to God's self-revelation through the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jesus Himself had appealed to these sacred writings. Now Christ's disciples were doing the same. Appeals to personal experience, miracles, and other witnesses for Christ were important and had their place; obviously, however, nothing supplanted Scripture as the primary witness for Jesus.

Christ's earliest followers sought guidance from Scripture concerning the church's mission, its everyday practices, and its spiritual discipline. Human speculation and guesswork were minimized; Scripture became preeminent. Prayerful consideration of God's revelation was evident in church councils (*see Acts 15*). Scripture touched every facet of the life of the early church.

How foolish would it be then for us, especially at the end of time, to have any other attitude toward the Bible?

How can we all learn to make the Bible central to our faith and use it to point us to Jesus? What are practical ways in which we can allow the teaching of the Bible to truly impact how we live and how we relate to others?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Bible Teaching and Study,” pp. 190–192, in *Education*; “The Walk to Emmaus,” pp. 795–801, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Thessalonica,” pp. 221–230, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Christ in His ministry had opened the minds of His disciples to these prophecies. . . . Peter in preaching Christ had produced his evidence from the Old Testament. Stephen had pursued the same course. And Paul also in his ministry appealed to the scriptures foretelling the birth, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. By the inspired testimony of Moses and the prophets he clearly proved the identity of Jesus of Nazareth with the Messiah and showed that from the days of Adam it was the voice of Christ which had been speaking through patriarchs and prophets.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 221, 222.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are some practical ways in which you can incorporate Scripture into your daily routine? How can you use the Bible in your personal witnessing?
- 2 Why did Jesus emphasize scriptural interpretation rather than miracles and personal charisma? What happens if music, the health message, social functions, or anything else, replaces the Bible as being central to our faith?
- 3 How dependent on Scripture must today’s Christians become? Evaluate the importance of Scripture in your church’s life regarding the establishment of priorities, the channeling of resources, and faithfulness to mission.
- 4 Dwell on the fact that we have no indication in the Bible of any Bible writers ever calling into question the veracity or authenticity of any other texts. Why should that be so important to us, today, at a time when so many people, including many Bible scholars, seem to have made it their first priority to challenge the truth of the Bible at every level?

Farmer Hildo's Dream

Farmer Hildo arrived in a sleepy town in central Brazil and thanked the man who had given him a ride. He lifted his small bag of clothes and box of herbal medicines from the cargo area of the truck and stepped to the side of the dirt road. Hildo lived far from town and came a few times a year to sell his herbal medicines door-to-door and to share his faith with those who would listen.

Farmer Hildo had become a Seventh-day Adventist several years earlier; although there was no church nearby, he faithfully kept the Sabbath and saved his tithe and offerings until he could attend a church.

During his visits to town, Hildo had met 10 people who either were Adventists or knew something about Adventists. He invited them to meet with him whenever he was in town. One couple owned a cybercafé and offered to meet there to watch Sabbath School and church programs on the Internet. Hildo urged everyone he knew to come.

The small group asked the mission office for a pastor to help them organize and grow into a congregation. The closest pastor already had one church and 13 companies, but he met with the believers. He helped them organize evangelistic meetings and taught them how to visit people and share God's Word with them. The little congregation spent two weeks visiting homes and inviting people to attend the meetings.

Farmer Hildo was thrilled when 150 people attended the evangelistic series and 33 were baptized. The pastor trained the members to follow up on interests, and soon the group of believers could no longer fit in a home. With the help of the mission, they rented a hall in which to meet.

The new family of believers was a dream come true for Farmer Hildo, who had worked and prayed and longed for a church for so long. When the church became a reality, he said, "I've been praying for the church for 16 years."

Farmer Hildo didn't live to see the little congregation worship in its own church, but the believers are working hard to make his dream—and theirs—a reality. Part of a recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is helping

this congregation purchase or build their own simple worship center so they won't have to move whenever the rent goes up. Thank you for helping Farmer Hildo's dream of a church in this once-dark area to become a reality.



Some members of the company Farmer Hildo helped establish in Ruberval, Brazil.

Discipling Through Metaphor



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Sam. 12:1–7, Isa. 28:24–28, Matt. 7:24–27, 13:1–30, Luke 20:9–19.*

Memory Text: “Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: ‘I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.’” (*Matthew 13:34, 35, NIV*).

Christianity is reasonable and logical. Intellect should be cultivated. Intellect alone, however, insufficiently expresses the complete human personality. Unlike robots, which are programmed to process reason and logic, humans are capable of loving, feeling, hurting, crying, caring, laughing, and imagining. Thus, Jesus framed eternal truths in ways that went beyond mere intellect alone. Jesus spoke through concrete pictures drawn from everyday life in order to reach people where they were. Children and adults could understand deep truths delivered through parables wrapped in images and metaphors.

Meanwhile, complex concepts such as justification, righteousness, and sanctification were easily grasped through the Master Storyteller's art. In other words, concepts that are often difficult to grasp in ordinary language can be taught through symbols and metaphors.

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

Old Testament Examples

Read 2 Samuel 12:1–7, Isaiah 28:24–28, Jeremiah 13:12–14, and Ezekiel 15:1–7. How do these parables and allegories expand our understanding of God’s relationship with humankind? Which objects or settings utilized by these prophets later appear in Christ’s parables?

As we can see, Nathan tells a parable in order to disguise the real purpose of his visit. David implicates himself as the transgressor, thereby pronouncing his own sentence. Using a literary device (a parable), Nathan accomplishes something that otherwise might have produced confrontation and, perhaps, even execution (his own!).

Isaiah’s poetic story draws from the agricultural background familiar to his listeners. Centuries later, Jesus would employ those same settings. Isaiah’s parable teaches about God’s unlimited mercy during times of punishment. The twelfth chapter of Hebrews likewise understands God’s punishments as tools for correction rather than weapons for vengeance. Divine punishments reflected their redemptive purposes; they were sufficient to encourage repentance, revival, and reformation. Nevertheless, when greater stubbornness and rebellion occurred, greater punishments followed.

Jeremiah’s parable is a terrifying illustration of judgment. Whenever human beings frustrate God’s redemptive purpose, God eventually releases them to the consequences that they have chosen. Christ likewise shares judgment parables with His listeners. Ezekiel uses a different symbol to convey a similar message.

What is it about storytelling that makes it such a powerful way to express truth? What are some of your favorite stories, and why do you like them? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Architectural Wisdom

Read Matthew 7:24–27. What do these verses contribute to our understanding of Christian discipleship? Why do you think Jesus used this example from nature to teach such a crucial truth?

Modern literate societies take literacy for granted. However, even today, numerous nonliterate societies exist. Throughout ancient history, literacy was the exception rather than the rule. Ruling classes and literary specialists (scribes) obtained their power through their skill in reading. Thus, Jesus framed His messages within forms that everyday, nonliterate people could understand. (Obviously, literate listeners could also understand them.)

Prior to Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, manuscripts, in most places in the world, were handwritten—a time-consuming process. Relatively few could afford to obtain such valuable commodities. Therefore, oral communication through legends, parables, and similar devices became the standard for the conveyance of information.

God offers salvation for the entire human race. Should it be surprising, then, that Christ used forms of communication that could reach the greatest number of people? Oral tradition, transferred from generation to generation through simple stories, became the currency of redemptive thought.

Read Luke 14:27–33. What lessons can we glean from these stories? How do the metaphors here illuminate our understanding of discipleship?

Building entails preparation. Cost estimates are developed long before actual construction commences. Discipleship likewise involves preparation. Miraculous feedings, spectacular healings, and apparent success could lead prospective disciples to assume that following Jesus was easy. Jesus encouraged His listeners, however, to study the complete picture. Self-sacrifice, suffering, humiliation, and rejection constituted considerable costs. Notice once again that Jesus chose to convey this message using metaphorical language when He could have just offered a checklist of specific drawbacks that His disciples might encounter.

Agricultural Analogies

Read Matthew 13:1–30. What was Jesus teaching His audience about discipleship? What lessons can modern Christians derive from these metaphors?

Christ's parable of the sower is familiar to many readers. The setting for the story was commonplace for an agrarian society, something to which Jesus' listeners could easily relate. The connection with discipleship is obvious. Essentially Jesus is challenging His listeners to evaluate their standing as disciples. Rather than confronting each individual specifically, He speaks through parables, inviting disciples to confront themselves. Looking into their soul's mirror, they can evaluate their materialistic tendencies, review their capacity for perseverance, analyze their worldly entanglements, and choose the lifestyle of uncompromising discipleship.

At the same time, true discipleship places judgment (condemnation) in the hands of the Master, not those of the disciple. Human discernment is incomplete, human knowledge partial. God alone possesses faultless understanding. Jesus warns, too, that satanic infiltration does happen. Disciples cannot surrender their judgment (discernment) to other professed believers because these believers may be weeds, not wheat. Both grow together until harvesttime.

"In Christ's parable teaching the same principle is seen as in His own mission to the world. That we might become acquainted with His divine character and life, Christ took our nature and dwelt among us. Divinity was revealed in humanity; the invisible glory in the visible human form. Men could learn of the unknown through the known; heavenly things were revealed through the earthly."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 17.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus talked about the "deceitfulness of riches." What was He talking about? How can "riches" deceive even those who don't have them?

The Revolutionary's War

Christ's ministry was revolutionary but without common weapons. His tools were infinitely more powerful than were swords or knives. Life-changing words, frequently expressed through parables and metaphors, became His not-so-secret weapons in the fight against evil.

Christ's tactics and strategies caught many leaders off guard; they were ill-equipped to counter the power of His appeal to the masses. Many of His parables contained messages that worked against the leaders. The religious leaders rightly saw that their influence would be largely curtailed wherever Christ's message penetrated the people's hearts.

Read Matthew 21:28–32 and Luke 14:16–24, 20:9–19. What powerful messages come through these parables? Though the parables were often directed to specific people, what principles here apply to us, no matter who we are?

“The parable of the vineyard applies not alone to the Jewish nation. It has a lesson for us. The church in this generation has been endowed by God with great privileges and blessings, and He expects corresponding returns.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 296.

No question, we have been greatly blessed by the Lord: redeemed by the blood of Christ, promised salvation based on His righteousness (not our own), given the assurance of eternal life, and offered the Holy Spirit—we have been provided with so much. It is easy, however, to forget all that we have, to take it for granted, or to even scoff at it. Like the vinedressers in the parable, we might not even realize the implications of that which we are doing. In the end, their ignorance didn't excuse them on Judgment Day. It won't excuse us, either.

How often have you been deceived in the past about your own spiritual state? What have you learned from those experiences that could help you to avoid making the same mistakes again?

Christ's Creative Legacy

After the record of Christ's ministry is completed, the telling of parables seems to have disappeared from Scripture. What explains this phenomenon? Certainly, the largest remaining segment of the New Testament centers around Paul. Fourteen New Testament books have been attributed to Paul, and nearly half of Luke's historical narrative in Acts revolves almost exclusively around Paul, as well. Though he didn't use stories in the way that Jesus did, Paul still made considerable use of metaphors, similes, and other creative devices (*see Rom. 7:1–6, 1 Cor. 3:10–15, 2 Cor. 5:1–10*). Though Paul was no storyteller, his presentations were neither boring nor without color. Stylistic differences between Christ's public discourse and Paul's obviously exist, but both exhibit considerable expressive creativity.

Other New Testament writers demonstrate a somewhat closer affinity to Christ's use of parables. Jesus' brother James wrote, "Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring" (*James 2:2, NIV*) to begin a narrative lesson. Yet, neither Christ's brother nor any other disciple utilized stories as extensively as did Christ. Simile and symbolism, however, are widespread. "He will pass away like a wild flower" (*James 1:10, NIV*). "Take ships as an example" (*James 3:4, NIV*). Peter's vision (*Acts 10*) assumed symbolic form. Symbolic narratives shape significant portions of the book of Revelation. "When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman" (*Rev. 12:13, NIV*).

Select a couple of the following texts and identify the metaphors within them. What are the various messages contained within these verses? What imagery is used to convey the message? *Acts 10:9–16, James 3:3–12, Rev. 12:7–17, 18:9–20, 19:11–16.*

However they are expressed, the principle remains the same: metaphors, similes, parables, allegories, and other examples of creative language enable us to communicate in an understandable manner. Building upon the listener's experiences, Christ and His disciples used comparisons and illustrations that stimulated an understanding of truth. We should, when appropriate, not be afraid to do the same.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Teaching in Parables,” pp. 17–27, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

“Jesus desired to awaken inquiry. He sought to arouse the careless, and impress truth upon the heart. Parable teaching was popular, and commanded the respect and attention, not only of the Jews, but of the people of other nations. . . .

“Again, Christ had truths to present which the people were unprepared to accept or even to understand. For this reason also He taught them in parables. By connecting His teaching with the scenes of life, experience, or nature, He secured their attention and impressed their hearts. Afterward, as they looked upon the objects that illustrated His lessons, they recalled the words of the divine Teacher. . . .

“Jesus sought an avenue to every heart. By using a variety of illustrations, He not only presented truth in its different phases, but appealed to the different hearers.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 20, 21.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, share your answer to Sunday’s question. What can you learn from each other’s stories?
- 2 Jesus used images and metaphors from things with which His hearers were very familiar. What could you use from your own culture that could help convey spiritual truths?
- 3 Though Jesus used metaphors from mostly agricultural settings, much of early Christianity was urban in nature. What “urban” images does one find in the writings of Paul or any of the other New Testament writers?
- 4 Think through the elements that make a good story. What are they? How do they work? How can we learn to use these elements in our witness?
- 5 Read Luke 16:19–31. What kind of story did Jesus use here? What lessons can we take from it about the use of fiction in the conveying of spiritual messages?

Chipo's Choice

Chipo is ten years old and lives in southern Zambia. Her parents didn't practice any faith. But when her neighbors invited her to attend church with them, she went. She loved learning about God and went to church whenever she could.

But Chipo's father became angry when he learned that Chipo was attending the Seventh-day Adventist Church. "Stay away from that church," he warned her. "Or I will punish you." But Chipo loved Jesus and wanted to worship Him. So when her father wasn't home, she would go to church. Her father found out and punished her harshly.

But her father's punishment didn't keep Chipo from attending church and learning more about Jesus, who loves her. Almost every week, her father would punish her.

"Why do you keep going to church when Father punishes you?" Chipo's sister asked.

"God loves me, and I want to be His child," Chipo explained. The next Sabbath Chipo's sister went to church with her. When their father discovered that the girls had gone to church, he followed them and chased them home and punished them. Chipo's sister was afraid to attend church when their father was home, but Chipo went.

Chipo's mother asked Chipo why she continued going to church when her father punished her. "I've learned that Jesus loves me, and I love Jesus!" she added. The next week her mother went to church with Chipo. She wanted to see for herself what was so special. The pastor's sermon seemed to be just for her, and Chipo's mother decided to attend church again. When Chipo's father returned home, her mother told her husband what she had heard. She told him that she wanted to attend church again and invited him to go with her. He refused, but he allowed his wife and the girls to go. Chipo began praying that God would help her father want to join the family at church.

A few weeks later, Chipo's mother again invited her husband to go to church, and he went, though he didn't seem happy. But after church he apologized to Chipo and said he would attend church with the family. A few months later, Chipo's parents were baptized. Now instead of chasing her from the church, Chipo's father walks to church with her.

"God helped me to be faithful, even when Father punished me," Chipo said. "God helped me bring my whole family to Jesus."

Our faithfulness to God in worship, in prayer, and in giving our mission offerings, makes a difference in the lives of others. Thank you for giving to missions to reach others for Christ.

Discipleship *and* Prayer



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Dan. 9:2–19; Matt. 14:22, 23; 26:36; John 17:6–26; Heb. 2:17; 1 Pet. 4:7.*

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

Whatever else we do in the work for souls, whatever outreach programs we create, we are to earnestly pray for those whom we are seeking to reach. This is central to what it means to be a Christian, even more so a disciple-maker. What powerful changes might occur if constant, fervent prayer was central to our methodology in seeking to make and keep disciples!

“Let the workers grasp the promises of God, saying, ‘Thou hast promised, “Ask, and ye shall receive.” I must have this soul converted to Jesus Christ.’ Solicit prayer for the souls for whom you labor; present them before the church as objects for the supplication. . . . Select another and still another soul, daily seeking guidance from God, laying everything before Him in earnest prayer, and working in divine wisdom.”—Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry*, pp. 244, 245.

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

Time-tested Compassion

Frequently, prayer assumes a self-centered posture. Believers present their wish lists before God, hoping to get that which they ask for. Though, of course, we are told to set our petitions before God, sometimes our motives are not pure. After all, are not our hearts corrupt, wicked, and deceitful? Might not our prayers, at times, simply reflect the sinfulness that lies within?

Intercessory prayer, however, focuses on another person's needs, thus removing the likelihood of selfish motivation. Throughout history, intercessory prayers have represented the highest expressions of spiritual discourse. Untainted by the desire for personal gratification, these conversations demonstrate selflessness, compassion, and earnest longing for the salvation of others.

Read Daniel 9:2–19. What burdens Daniel throughout this prayer? What role does confession play within the prayer? Because of his advanced age, Daniel would not likely personally benefit from Jerusalem's restoration. Therefore, what motivated this prayer?

Seventy years have passed since Jeremiah uttered the prophecy that Daniel now considers. After so many years, Daniel's Jerusalem friends have likely already perished. Jerusalem's restoration would not restore Daniel's personal fortunes, either. Nothing in Daniel's prayer suggests selfish concerns. The ancient prophet expressly implores God regarding the future of the exiled Jewish nation and the reputation of Jehovah Himself. Extended confession precedes his requests. In confession, Daniel includes himself among the disobedient. The prophet is unwilling to presume his own innocence. Daniel himself takes responsibility while primarily pursuing restoration in order to benefit others.

Think about your prayer life: what you pray for, why, and for whom. How much death to self is involved in it? How can you learn to be less self-centered in your prayer life? That is, how can your prayers, even the ones for yourself, be less selfish?

Time for Prayer

Think through what prayer really is: fallen, sinful beings, worthy of death, are able, instantly, to have direct communication with the Creator of the universe—our Holy God.

Also, when God in Christ clothed Himself in human flesh, accepting humanity's limitations, He, too, sensed the necessity of prayer. Though not standing before the Father in the same position that we as fallen sinners are, Jesus as a human still saw the necessity for prayer.

Read Matthew 14:22, 23; 26:36; Mark 1:35–37; and Luke 5:15, 16; 6:12, 13. **What characterized Jesus' personal prayer life? Describe the circumstances that surrounded Jesus' praying. What lessons can we glean from the particulars of Christ's prayer life, such as the frequency, location, and timing?**

Christ certainly modeled the prayer life that He enjoined on His disciples. Mornings, evenings, after preaching, before preaching, whenever possible—Jesus prayed. Gardens, mountains, solitary places, wherever distractions subsided—Jesus prayed. Separated from the Father's presence spatially, Jesus united with the Father through prayer spiritually. Christ's spiritual lifeblood came coursing through the spiritual artery of prayer. Should Christ's modern followers—weakened by sinful tendencies, choked by worldly cares, frustrated by failures—settle for something less than Jesus' prayer life?

“Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 93.

Read Mark 11:22–26, Luke 11:13, John 14:12–14. **How are we to understand the promises written here about prayer? How have you experienced what Jesus said here? At the same time, how have you learned to cope when things you have prayed for haven't happened the way that you had hoped?**

Timeless Teaching

Prayer miraculously bonds finite souls with their infinite Creator. Prayer is spiritual adhesive. Bonded with the heavenly Father, believers transcend their earthly natures and sinful tendencies. This transformation separates them from the world. Should Satan successfully recast prayer into a self-centered mold, thus robbing prayer of its potential for our transformation, we might be powerfully compromised and our witness stymied.

Read Matthew 6:7, 8; 7:7–11; 18:19, 20. What do these verses teach us about prayer?

The sincere believer trusts in God’s ability to honor His promises. Never has anyone lodged a request that intimidates God. His authority is unlimited, His strength unmatched. God’s people approach heaven’s portals with trust in the Lord—that He will do what is best for us, even if we can’t see it at the time. Faith is not simply trusting in what we can see; true faith is trusting God when we can’t see the outcome that we want and anticipate (*see Heb. 11:1–7*). No doubt, as long as you serve the Lord, as long as you walk in faith, you will have to trust in God even when you don’t see things working out as you had hoped, or even prayed for. Even a quick reading of the Bible will show you that you will not be alone, either.

Read Matthew 6:9–15, 26:39. What do these verses teach?

Trust should not be confused with arrogance or insolence. Boldly approaching God’s throne involves no sense of entitlement. The believer’s demeanor is characterized by boldness and humility. In Gethsemane, Christ plainly declared His preference but concluded, “ ‘Not My will, but Yours’ ” (*Luke 22:42, NKJV*). In addition to complete surrender, a forgiving spirit is another indication of humility. We ourselves, having been forgiven so much, must do the same to others.

Are you angry with someone, finding it hard to forgive? Take it to the Lord in prayer. Pray for yourself that you will learn to forgive. Pray for that person. Over time, what do you think will happen?

Timeless Compassion

Christ was the embodiment of perfection; that is, all God's perfections were revealed in Him. Thus, was anyone ever more compassionate than Christ? Who possessed a stronger desire than Jesus to alleviate human distress?

We, therefore, ask, What relationship did Christ's compassion and intercession have with discipleship?

Read Luke 22:31, 32 and John 17:6–26 (see also Heb. 2:17). **How did Jesus' identification with humanity influence His intercessory prayers? What are the ultimate objectives of Christ's intercessory prayers?**

Jesus could effectively intercede on His disciples' behalf because He was actively engaged in their lives, thoroughly understood them, and passionately desired their good. Effective intercession today demands nothing less. The twenty-first century disciple-maker will discard time-consuming pursuits that interfere with his or her relationships with lost souls. Making money, achieving fame, even educational excellence must become subservient to the greater goal of the redemption of the lost. This is an important truth that so easily slips from sight, because we are so often caught in the daily grind of living.

Jesus invested Himself in the lives of His disciples. He visited their homes, became acquainted with their relatives, spent leisure time in their company, and worked alongside them. Nothing significant to their lives escaped His notice. Disciple-making today requires more than tract distribution and airtight biblical argumentation. Praying in a sympathetic consciousness of another's distress, and with a passionate desire to alleviate that distress, is still the standard of intercessory prayer in effective disciple-making.

Though it can sound quaint, there's a lot of truth in the statement "People care little about what you know until they know how much you care."

Timeless Compassion Replicated

The sincerest offering of praise is imitation. Christ's earliest disciples imitated their Master's prayer life. Naturally, they prayed for personal safety, for their daily necessities, and for individual spiritual guidance. Nevertheless, intercessory prayer became an important component of their discipleship.

Read Acts 1:13, 14; 1 Timothy 2:1–4; James 5:13–16; 1 John 5:16; Jude 20–22; and 1 Peter 4:7. What role did prayer assume in the early church? What were some of the specific situations for which they prayed? What can we learn from these examples?

Constant prayer anchored the early church. Whenever Paul departed for missionary purposes, he was commissioned through prayer (*Acts 13:3, 14:23*). Even their farewells were clothed in prayer (*Acts 20:36, 21:5*) Frequently their prayers assumed the form of intercession. They prayed for government leaders, fellow believers, and, generally speaking, everyone! Paul interceded for the father of Publius, the chief official who suffered from dysentery. Even when he lay dying, Stephen interceded for his murderers. The centrality of prayer among the earliest believers can hardly be overstated. Scripture says that prayer pleases God because He desires salvation for everyone and seeks the advancement of truth. Through prayer—combined with apostolic teaching, fervent preaching, miraculous wonders, and loving fellowship—the early church rapidly multiplied. Despite vigorous persecution, Christianity enveloped the empire. Thousands upon thousands accepted the gospel. Transformed lives burned as living lights from Caesar's palace to points unknown.

How much time do you spend in intercessory prayer? Think through your answer. Better yet, perhaps the question should be, How much more time should you spend in intercessory prayer?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “A Reformatory Movement,” p. 126, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9; “By Personal Efforts and Living Faith,” pp. 244, 245, in *Medical Ministry*.

“He who does nothing but pray will soon cease to pray, or his prayers will become a formal routine. When men take themselves out of social life, away from the sphere of Christian duty and cross bearing; when they cease to work earnestly for the Master, who worked earnestly for them, they lose the subject matter of prayer and have no incentive to devotion. Their prayers become personal and selfish. They cannot pray in regard to the wants of humanity or the upbuilding of Christ’s kingdom, pleading for strength wherewith to work.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 101.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why does an absence of intercessory prayer stunt the growth of the church? Conversely, how does an active intercessory prayer life stimulate disciple-making activity? What are the keys to effective intercessory prayer? How can the intercessor know what to pray about?
- 2 What should members do on behalf of those for whom they pray that would go beyond their private petitions at home? How can members build relationships with the neighbors, relatives, and coworkers for whom they pray? Why should private prayers for others always be accompanied by sustained efforts to be friends with those same people?
- 3 What steps should twenty-first-century Christians take to experience dynamic prayer lives? What is the relationship between successful disciple-making and the encountering of God’s divine presence through prayer? Can prayer change those prayed for without first changing those who pray for them? How might the subject matter for prayer be altered by having passion for lost souls? What impact does personal holiness and prayer have on the would-be soul winner’s capacity for the sharing of truth?
- 4 What specific things can believers do to expand their contacts with those who have not accepted Christ? What can Christians do to get beyond surface relationships with their peers so that they will know specific needs for which to pray?

Walking by Faith

Rex lay in bed, unable to move his legs. The doctor's words hung heavy in the air. "You'll never walk again," he had said.

What will happen to my family? Rex wondered. Rex knew that his own stubbornness had put him where he was.

Two years earlier, Rex's uncle had offered to pay his daughters' tuition if Rex enrolled them in the Seventh-day Adventist school. Rex agreed. Soon the girls asked to attend Sabbath School. His wife went with them, but Rex said he had to work.

Rex went to special meetings at church after work, and he became convinced that what Adventists taught was the truth. But he resisted the invitation to surrender his life to God. He smoked and he drank, and he wasn't sure he could quit. But he did agree to study the Bible with a believer during his lunch hour.

When Rex's wife wanted to be baptized, Rex urged her to do so. "I may follow one day," he'd said.

Then after months of studying the Bible, Rex agreed to be baptized. He hoped that baptism would change him. But it didn't. He was the same man he had been before. He didn't let God rule his life.

Then the accident changed everything. Rex had tried to solve his problems himself. Now he was helpless. The pastor and church members visited Rex and encouraged him to trust God. Rex prayed for forgiveness, and again he surrendered his life to God. But this time, he meant it. Rex asked God for healing and promised that no matter what, he would put his faith in God and attend church as soon as he was able.

During his months in bed, Rex spent hours praying and reading his Bible. As he grew spiritually, he felt his body grow stronger. A year after the accident, Rex took his first wobbly steps. Six months later, he could walk without pain.

Rex kept his promise and attended church with his family. He praised God for every degree of healing. He found work. It didn't pay as much as his old job, but Rex found that even after returning tithe and offerings, the money went further.

"The accident that crippled me brought healing to my soul," Rex says. "I'm grateful that God used the Adventist school to help my family find salvation in Jesus."

Our mission offerings support schools, medical clinics, and many other outreach services in India and around the world. Thank you for giving to missions.

REX and his family live in southeastern India.

Discipling Children



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 127:3–5; Deut. 6:6, 7; Luke 2:40–52; Matt. 18:1–6; 10–14; Mark 10:13–16.*

Memory Text: “‘Do you hear what these children are saying?’ they asked him. ‘Yes,’ replied Jesus, ‘have you never read, “From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise”?’ ” (*Matthew 21:16, NIV*).

In our desire to preach to the world and to make disciples from every nation, we must not forget a whole class of people—children. Christian studies regarding children and youth differ about many things. Nevertheless, across denominational lines one thing seems consistent: the majority of Christians have committed their lives to Christ at a relatively young age. Fewer converts come from the older populace. Many churches apparently miss this important fact in their evangelistic planning, directing the greatest proportion of their resources toward the adult population. Christ's earliest disciples also seem to have underestimated the value of children's ministry. Jesus rejected that attitude and made room for children, even giving them priority.

Hence, we must do the same.

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

The Hebrew Child's Advantage

Hebrew children enjoyed special treatment when compared with their ancient counterparts from surrounding nations. Child sacrifice as divine appeasement had permeated many cultures. Otherwise, children's value was often measured by their economic contributions to society. Work productivity, not intrinsic worth, defined their relationship with the adult world. It is painful to say that some of these attitudes, especially when it comes to economic worth, are found even in our present world. Truly, the day of wrath must come.

Evidently Israel's apostasy affected the population's estimate of children. Manasseh's dalliance with witchcraft and other national religions induced the sacrificing of his sons (*2 Chron. 33:6*). Nevertheless, Manasseh's reign was the exception rather than the rule; under more spiritual leadership, Israelites greatly valued their offspring.

Read Psalm 127:3–5; 128:3–6; Jeremiah 7:31; Deuteronomy 6:6, 7. What do these texts suggest about God's estimate of children? How might a proper understanding of Scripture affect our relationships with children?

Education, birthright, and many other cultural practices clearly demonstrated how valuable children were in the ancient Hebrew culture. Not surprisingly, Christ expanded the already exalted position of children, as compared with surrounding cultures, to new dimensions. After all, children are human beings, and Christ's death was for every person, whatever their age—a point we should never forget.

It's hard to believe that there are adults so corrupted, so evil, so degraded that they hurt children, sometimes even their own. How can we, in whatever situation we are in, do everything we can to love, protect, and nurture the children within our sphere of influence?

Jesus' Childhood

Had Jesus bypassed childhood, arriving as a full-fledged adult on planet Earth, serious questions might be raised regarding His ability to identify with children. Christ, however, developed as all children must, skipping none of the developmental stages associated with growth and maturity. He understands teenage temptations. He underwent the frailties and insecurities of childhood. Christ encountered those challenges that, in their own sphere, all children face. His experiencing childhood was another crucial way in which our Savior revealed His true humanity.

Read Luke 2:40–52. What does this teach about Jesus' childhood?

“Among the Jews the twelfth year was the dividing line between childhood and youth. On completing this year a Hebrew boy was called a son of the law, and also a son of God. He was given special opportunities for religious instruction, and was expected to participate in the sacred feasts and observances. It was in accordance with this custom that Jesus in His boyhood made the Passover visit to Jerusalem.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 75.

According to the texts, Jesus acquired wisdom. God bestowed grace on Him. From Christ's boyhood temple encounter during the Passover visit, we can see that Jesus had deep scriptural wisdom. Rabbinical teachers were markedly impressed by Jesus' questions and answers.

God surely used multiple childhood experiences to shape that attractively flawless character. Perhaps the discipline of learning carpentry skills, the attention of devoted parents, regular exposure to Scripture, and His interactions with Nazareth's townspeople formed the foundation of His early upbringing. In the end, however remarkable a child Jesus was, He had still been—as we all have been—a child.

“The child Jesus did not receive instruction in the synagogue schools. His mother was His first human teacher. From her lips and from the scrolls of the prophets, He learned of heavenly things. The very words which He Himself had spoken to Moses for Israel He was now taught at His mother's knee.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 70. Dwell on the incredible implications of those words. What do they teach us about the humanity of Christ?

Healing the Children

Read the following passages: Matthew 9:18–26, Mark 7:24–30, Luke 9:37–43, John 4:46–54. Whose children were restored in these stories? How are these children’s backgrounds similar? What differences might you detect? What lessons can we learn from these texts that can help us today?

In all these stories, one overwhelming similarity is that, in each case, a desperate parent came to Jesus, seeking help for a child. What parent cannot relate? What parent hasn’t felt pain, anguish, fear, and outright horror when a child was very sick, or even dying? For those who have been there, there’s nothing worse.

And though Jesus Himself had not been a parent, He related enough to them in His humanity that He healed their children. In each case, the healing came. He turned no one away. Thus, His love, not just for the parents but for the children, came through clearly.

Of course, this leads to a whole host of questions regarding cases when praying and pleading parents call out to Jesus and, yet, their children are not healed. There is, perhaps, no sadder experience than burying children. Death should be reserved for older generations. The unnatural order of parents mourning their children’s deaths makes the heart revolt. During these funerals, nearly every parent asks, “Shouldn’t it have been me?”

Mourning physical death and observing spiritual decay may be equally painful. How many parents have agonized about children overwhelmed by drug addiction, by pornography, or adolescent indifference? Whatever the affliction, we must learn to trust in the Lord and His goodness and love, even when things do not turn out so happily, as they did in the biblical stories listed above. Ellen G. White, a prophet, buried two children. Our world is a rough place. Our God, though, is a loving God, and that truth is what we must cling to, no matter what.

A Fearsome Warning

Analyze the following texts: Matthew 11:25, 26; 18:1–6, 10–14. What truths, not just about children but about faith in general, can we learn through these stories? Think about just how harsh Jesus' warning was here. Why should we tremble before it?

There exists a unique genuineness within children that Jesus frequently appealed to when illustrating His kingdom. Their genuineness, humility, dependency, and innocence somehow capture the essence of Christian living. We should all long for that simplicity and trust in living out our faith.

Modern disciple-makers need to learn another lesson: children need never leave their childlike dependency behind. Properly educated, children may carry their trusting innocence into adulthood. Certainly, as children mature and get older, they will question things, they will have struggles and doubts and unanswered questions, as we all do. But a childlike faith is never unfashionable. As parents, or as adults in general, we should do all that we can to instill in children a knowledge of God and His love, and nothing can do that more than by revealing that love to them through our lives, our kindness, our compassion, and our care. We can preach and sermonize all we want; in the end, as with adults, the best way to disciple children is to live out before them the love of God in our lives.

In cold, fearsome, and stark contrast, criminal acts against children—especially during church-sponsored activities—can destroy a child's confidence about the church and, usually, about the God of the church. What wrath must justly await those who perpetrate such actions and those who protect the perpetrators. Christ and His message awaken confidence and trust. How dare any human organization compromise that childlike faith through lack of vigilance?

What is your church doing not only to nurture its children but to make sure that they are protected in every way possible? Think what it means when Jesus said their angels "do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (*Matt. 18:10*). Why should that make anyone who hurts a child tremble?

Suffer the Little Children

Read Mark 10:13–16. How does Christ’s acceptance of children facilitate their acceptance of Him? How should His rebuke of the disciples be understood? What must we take away from this account for ourselves and how we relate to children?

Surely Christ’s disciples were well intentioned, although ignorant. They attempted to protect His valuable time, preserving His energy for more “important” matters. How greatly they misunderstood what Jesus wanted them to know.

Imagine being forsaken by gruff adults only to be embraced by the loving and caring personage of Jesus. No wonder children embraced Him. In this story, we have been left with an invaluable example regarding the ways in which children should be treated by those who profess to be disciple-makers.

“In the children who were brought in contact with Him, Jesus saw the men and women who should be heirs of His grace and subjects of His kingdom, and some of whom would become martyrs for His sake. He knew that these children would listen to Him and accept Him as their Redeemer far more readily than would grown-up people, many of whom were the worldly wise and hardhearted. In His teaching He came down to their level. He, the Majesty of heaven, did not disdain to answer their questions, and simplify His important lessons to meet their childish understanding. He planted in their minds the seeds of truth, which in after years would spring up, and bear fruit unto eternal life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 512–515.

How often have we met adults who suffer through so much pain, so much turmoil, so much heartache over things that happened to them in their childhood? What should this tell us about how gently, carefully, prayerfully, and lovingly we should treat children?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Blessing the Children,” pp. 511–517; “The Temple Cleansed Again,” p. 592, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Baptism,” pp. 93–95, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6; “Bible Teaching and Study,” pp. 185, 186, in *Education*.

“It is still true that children are the most susceptible to the teachings of the gospel; their hearts are open to divine influences, and strong to retain the lessons received. The little children may be Christians, having an experience in accordance with their years. They need to be educated in spiritual things, and parents should give them every advantage, that they may form characters after the similitude of the character of Christ.

“Fathers and mothers should look upon their children as younger members of the Lord’s family, committed to them to educate for heaven. The lessons that we ourselves learn from Christ we should give to our children, as the young minds can receive them, little by little opening to them the beauty of the principles of heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 515.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why do you think it’s true that many who accept Christ do so when younger rather than when they are older? Skeptics could argue that it’s because they are too naive and ignorant to realize the silliness of what they are doing. On the other hand, could it be because they have yet to be so hardened and tainted with cynicism and skepticism as are many adults? That is, their innocence and openness make them more susceptible to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Discuss.
- 2 How can today’s church organize to become more Christlike in its appeal to children? What can each member personally do to be friendlier toward youth who may experiment with bizarre fashions, unusual musical tastes, and sometimes outlandish behavior? How can the church become more energetic, thus attracting active youth?
- 3 What steps may members take to prepare themselves to respond to interested youth who desire baptism and a life-changing commitment to Christ?
- 4 Dwell more on the attributes of children that caused Jesus to say “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (*Matt. 18:3*). What does that text mean? At the same time, what does that not mean?

Jonathan's Wish

Jonathan is a quiet boy with a shy smile. He lives in a small village in southern Mexico.

One day his neighbor, Tia Maria, invited Jonathan to go to Sabbath School with her. Jonathan had never been to church before. His mother said he could go, so he agreed.

On Sabbath, Jonathan and Tia Maria walked to church. He liked Sabbath School, especially the mission story about children from far-away lands.

When he returned home, Jonathan told his mother what he learned. He told her the Bible stories and recited the Bible text. His mother listened with interest. But when Jonathan asked her to go to church with him, she said No. She said she had to work or take care of Jonathan's baby brother. Jonathan kept inviting her, but she kept saying No.

"Mama, Jesus wants you to come to church, and I want you to come," Jonathan pleaded. "All the other children sit with their parents, but I must sit alone." Still his mother refused to go.

When the pastor announced evangelistic meetings, Jonathan hurried home to invite his mother to go with him. To his surprise, she agreed to go. Every night Jonathan and his mother walked to the meetings together. And when the pastor asked those who wanted to follow God in baptism to stand, Jonathan stood. The pastor visited Jonathan's mother and explained that Jonathan wanted to be baptized. But his mother said that he could not be baptized, because she was not a member of the church.

Jonathan was disappointed, but he was determined to follow Jesus. He often talked to his mother about Jesus, pleading with her to give her heart to God.

She thought about how happy Jonathan was since he started attending church. And he loved to read his Bible lesson and sing. She wanted the same joy and decided to attend church with her son.

On Sabbath, Jonathan was surprised when his mother said she was going to church with him. They walked to the little church together. Jonathan showed his mother to her class. And during church Jonathan was glad that he didn't have to sit alone.

When the pastor announced an upcoming baptism, Jonathan again asked his mother to let him be baptized. This time she said Yes. Then she told the pastor that she wanted to be baptized too. Jonathan and his mother were baptized together.

Our mission offerings help introduce people such as Jonathan and his mother to Jesus. Thank you for sharing God's love through your mission offerings.

Discipling *the* Sick



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 53:4, Matt. 8:17, Mark 2:1–12, Phil. 4:4–9, 1 John 3:20–22, John 11:37–44.*

Memory Text: “Large crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel” (*Matthew 15:30, 31, NIV*).

During His ministry, Jesus devoted more time to healing the sick than to preaching. His miracles testified to the truth of His words, that He came not to destroy, but to save. Wherever He went, the tidings of His mercy preceded Him. Where He had passed, the objects of His compassion were rejoicing in health and making trial of their new-found powers. Crowds were collecting around them to hear from their lips the works that the Lord had wrought. His voice was the first sound that many had ever heard, His name the first word they had ever spoken, His face the first they had ever looked upon. Why should they not love Jesus and sound His praise? As He passed through the towns and cities He was like a vital current, diffusing life and joy.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 19, 20.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 1.

The Healing Messiah

Read Isaiah 53:4, Matthew 8:17, John 9:1–3. In what way are we to understand these texts? What questions do they raise? What hope do they offer us?

In antiquity, sickness was considered the result of sinful actions. (And even today, who hasn't at times—even if only for a moment—wondered if illness, either one's own or that of a loved one, wasn't brought on as a punishment for sin?) In the book of Job, Job's friends suggested that his misfortunes, which included personal illness, resulted from hidden faults; the implication was that somehow his sinfulness caused his predicament. Similarly, Christ's disciples understood blindness as the punishment for someone's sinfulness. This suggests that sickness required not diagnosis or medication but atonement. Matthew references Isaiah's Messianic prophecy, stating that Christ fulfilled this prediction and that healing can be found in Him.

Various ancient pagan traditions included healing deities; none, however, proposed that gods actually took the infirmities upon themselves. Isaiah foretold a Redeemer who would assume our sicknesses and sinfulness. Other ancient traditions made provision for substitutionary atonement in order to benefit royalty. Substitutes were sacrificed in the king's place in order to satisfy divine designs against a king, thus transferring evil's punishment from one individual to another. Nowhere, however, were there traditions of kings dying as substitutes for their subjects.

This, however, is exactly what Isaiah said, and what Matthew confirmed: heaven's Royalty suffering human sicknesses. Interestingly enough, the word translated as “griefs” in Isaiah 53:4 comes from a Hebrew word that means, basically, “sickness” or “disease.”

Jesus recognized that His mission was both to preach deliverance and to heal the brokenhearted (*Luke 4:17–19*). He attracted many through the power that came from His love and character. Others followed Him because they admired His easily understood preaching. Still others became disciples because of how He treated the impoverished. Many, however, followed Christ because He had touched and healed their brokenness.

We all have our broken places. How can we learn to disciple others through sympathy in their own brokenness—a brokenness that we can understand so well because of our own?

Healing the Body

Study Mark 2:1–12. What can we learn regarding the connection between physical sickness and sinfulness? What lessons should we not take from this story, as well?

Contrary to biblical doctrine, ancient Greek philosophy separated the spiritual (soul) and physical (body) dimensions of human existence. Believing that human souls were immortal, many Greeks devalued the importance of their bodies. Because bodies were temporal, passing away with time, they were considered less valuable than was the enduring soul.

In fact, in one of the most famous texts from antiquity, Plato depicts his teacher Socrates, who is about to face death, as waxing long and eloquently on how corrupt and evil the body is, and that at death his immortal soul will finally be free to do all the things that the body has hindered it from doing.

The Bible, of course, teaches something radically different. Human bodies are the direct creation of God, who fearfully and wonderfully made them (*Ps. 139:14*). Furthermore, bodies are not separate from souls. Body, mind, and spirit are merely differing aspects of human personality or existence, not independently existent entities. Consequently, whatever affects the body affects the mind and spirit—the other interrelated aspects of personhood. Thus, whenever Christ healed, He was not merely eradicating cancer or curing heart disease; He was transforming the physical, mental, and spiritual human experience.

Jesus healed more than just bodies. Christ always healed whole persons. His holistic approach recognized that physical health was inseparable from spiritual health. Through physical healing, He effected spiritual transformation. That was, to a great degree, the whole purpose. After all, why heal people who in the long run will die anyway and face eternal destruction at the end of time?

Though sickness can result directly from sinful practices, so often people, even infants, get sick for no obvious reason other than that we are all victims of a fallen world. Why is it so important to keep this sad truth in mind when seeking to minister to anyone who is sick or who is agonizing over a sick loved one?

Healing the Mind and Body

Through physical healing and mental restoration, Jesus made disciples. Often Christ's patients suffered both mental and physical diseases. Physical restoration itself was never the final objective. The ultimate goal was always discipleship. Healing could provide twenty, fifty, perhaps seventy-five additional quality years. Discipleship offered eternal life with Christ.

In Luke 8:26–39, the demon-possessed man from the Gerasene region begged to accompany Jesus. Instead, Christ commissioned him to evangelize his family and townspeople. Having been so miraculously delivered, he could be a powerful witness for Jesus.

Study Matthew 6:19–34, 1 Peter 5:7, 2 Corinthians 4:7–10, Philippians 4:4–9, 1 John 3:20–22. How might the principles taught in these verses relieve the anxiety, guilt, and shame that underlie many mental illnesses?

Physical sickness is sometimes caused by mental stimuli. The relationship between mind and body is well established by medical science. Anxiety predisposes some to stomach problems. Worry causes sleep disorders. Uncontrollable anger factors into heart disease. Teaching people about mental-health principles should highlight the importance of trusting God, naturally leading them toward personal spiritual commitment and full discipleship.

“Each day has its burdens, its cares and perplexities; and when we meet how ready we are to talk of our difficulties and trials. So many borrowed troubles intrude, so many fears are indulged, such a weight of anxiety is expressed, that one might suppose we had no pitying, loving Saviour ready to hear all our requests and to be to us a present help in every time of need.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 121.

Though a close walk with the Lord is no guarantee of good health, there's no question that the peace of mind that comes from knowing the Lord can have a positive impact on us, even physically. What are some practical ways in which we can learn to take the principles taught in today's lesson and apply them to ourselves, especially if we are prone toward worry?

The Resurrection and the Life

In a world where death always has the final word, at least for now, what great hope is found in these verses? *Luke 7:11–17, Mark 5:21–43, John 11:37–44.*

Politicians, entertainers, and athletes must necessarily offer something to generate a following. Politicians utilize hypnotic rhetoric and incredible promises. Entertainers use their abilities to generate emotion and audience identification. Athletes amaze throngs with their physical skills. Envious onlookers follow, wishing they possessed such prowess.

What does Jesus offer? Reduced unemployment? Fatter paychecks? Amazing ball-handling skills? Incredible vocal range? Tear-jerking performances? Instead, Jesus offers something no one else in the world can: eternal life in a new world. In contrast to that, what else matters?

While television shopping networks insult our intelligence with their too-good-to-be-true offers, Jesus seemingly exceeds their excesses with His deal of a lifetime: eternal life priced for nothing with absolutely no shipping and handling charges! Skeptics would doubtless scoff about such an unprecedented offer. Competitors would manufacture cheap imitations (such as Satan's immortal-soul concept). Potential buyers would cautiously investigate the claims. So, Jesus provided three known demonstrations to counter the skeptics, expose imitations, and satisfy genuine seekers. Jairus's daughter, the widow's son, and, finally, Lazarus proved that this too-good-to-be-true offer was authentic. Disease and accidents might initially prevail, but eternal life would ultimately conquer. Healing would not happen every time it was requested, but everlasting life was guaranteed to all who made Jesus their Savior.

It's the same with us today. As we know, many times the healing we want just simply does not come in the way that we want it. People linger, even for years, from debilitating and painful diseases that, far from being healed, sometimes get worse. Others die from disease, despite anointing and prayer. We have no answers as to why, in some cases, healing comes now, and in others it doesn't.

What we do have, though, is something so much better than even a miraculous healing, and that is the promise of the resurrection to eternal life at the end of the age, when Jesus will come and "the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever" (*Dan. 7:18, NKJV*).

Why is this promise—the promise of eternal life—so crucial and so important to us? Where would we be without it? What hope would you have for anything, anything at all, without it?

Christ's Healing Legacy

Review Acts 3:1–19, 5:12–16, 9:36–42, 20:7–10, 1 Corinthians 12:7–9, 28–31, James 5:13–16. How should modern Christians evaluate the importance of healing ministry to the New Testament church?

First-century disciples witnessed firsthand Christ's promise of seeing "greater things than these" fulfilled (*John 1:50, compare John 5:20, 14:12*). Miraculous healings and resurrections attended the ministries of early Christianity's most prominent disciples: Peter and Paul. These events figured significantly in the early church's growth. God's eternal presence, signified by miraculous healing, influenced thousands of religious leaders to accept Christ. Their flocks often followed.

Sometimes new disciples misunderstood the divine purpose. Simon attempted to purchase miraculous power, revealing self-centered motivations (*Acts 8:9–25*). Most, however, recognized that the significance of these miraculous wonders rested in the fact that they revealed God's presence among them. These displays of divine power proved that God existed and that He was worthy of their praise.

Although Christ had ascended to heaven, throngs still followed Him through the ministries of His disciples. They furthered the mission Jesus had started. They were fulfilling the vision Christ had shared.

Clearly, health was an ongoing concern and a healing ministry an ongoing function of Christ's church. Healing was listed among the spiritual gifts. Instructions for ministering God's healing grace to those afflicted by sickness were recorded in Scripture. These gifts would benefit believers until Christ's second coming, when His personal presence would render them unnecessary. Church history chronicles the dedication of believers to health ministry during many different time periods. Certainly, relieving human suffering was an important motivation. Others, however, recognized healing as the first step toward coming to know the complete gospel.

Further Study: Read Luke 18:35–43; 13:10–17; 14:1–6; John 6:1, 2; Mark 6:5–7, 6:54–56; 7:31–37; 8:22–26; Matthew 8:1–17; 12:15–23. Ellen G. White, “Our Example,” pp. 17–21; “Healing of the Soul,” pp. 73–85, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “The Divine Plan in the Medical Missionary Work,” pp. 25–29, in *Medical Ministry*.

“The paralytic found in Christ healing for both the soul and the body. He needed health of soul before he could appreciate health of body. Before the physical malady could be healed, Christ must bring relief to the mind, and cleanse the soul from sin. This lesson should not be overlooked. There are today thousands suffering from physical disease who, like the paralytic, are longing for the message, ‘Thy sins are forgiven.’ The burden of sin, with its unrest and unsatisfied desires, is the foundation of their maladies. They can find no relief until they come to the Healer of the soul. The peace which He alone can impart would restore vigor to the mind and health to the body. . . .

“In the home of the paralytic there was great rejoicing when he returned to his family, carrying with ease the couch upon which he had been slowly borne from their presence but a short time before. . . . Glad thanksgiving went up from that home, and God was glorified through His Son, who had restored hope to the hopeless and strength to the stricken one. This man and his family were ready to lay down their lives for Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 77, 79.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How can healing ministries open hearts and minds otherwise closed to the gospel? How can Christians guard themselves against the error of thinking that healing is an end in itself?
- 2 How can churches that are not connected with hospitals participate in healing ministry? How can Christians involved with healing ministry avoid association in the public’s mind with so-called faith healers?
- 3 What do we say to those potential disciples who, reading about the healings in the Bible, come to our churches or hospitals in search of a healing that does not happen? What answers do we have for them? What answers do we have for ourselves as we seek to understand these situations? What answers are found in the Bible that can help us at times like these?

Claiming God's Promise

Mama Nerea lay on her thin mattress in her humble home in western Kenya. Her family suspected that her suffering was the result of witchcraft—a curse that someone had put on her. They visited several witchdoctors, seeking to have the curse removed, but Mama Nerea continued to languish. The illness had left her unable to stand or walk and had taken her voice, as well. Even she was sure she would die.

Mama Nerea's life had been filled with trouble. Her husband had gone to seek work in a nearby town, leaving her to care for her children alone. Desperate to make money, she began brewing and selling local beer. Soon she was addicted to her own brew. When her husband returned from town, he drank with her.

Then she became ill.

One day as Mama Nerea lay on her bed, she saw three men surround it. One man wore a white robe. He spoke her name and comforted her. Then he told her that she would be saved the next day.

"Koa kanye, koa kuom ng'a?" Mama Nerea asked. "Saved from what and where?" The man in the white robe told her that the next day she would meet two men who would lead her out of her bondage and pain and into the light of Jesus. "You must never go back into the darkness again," he said.

Mama Nerea nodded.

Mama Nerea's daughter was startled to hear her mother's voice. "Who are you talking to?" she asked her mother.

"Jesus has visited me," Mama Nerea said.

The next day, two young men came to visit Mama Nerea. They told her that God had told them to come and pray with her. The young men were holding evangelistic meetings. They came regularly to pray with Mama Nerea and her family.

Soon after this, Mama Nerea's daughter found her mother standing in the door of the hut. Over the next few months, Mama Nerea's health returned, and she began visiting the small Seventh-day Adventist group in their settlement. Her husband, Johana, stopped smoking and drinking and gave his heart to the Lord.

Mama Nerea and Johana became strong supporters of God's work and led many to Christ in their village. Recently, Johana died, and Mama Nerea is getting old. But their testimony and their example live on in the lives of many who have found Christ in a small town in western Kenya.

Our mission offerings help support the work of Global Mission pioneers and lay evangelists throughout the world.

VICKI NAKABAYASHI met Moses, the son of Mama Nerea, on a mission trip to Kenya.

Discipling *the* “Ordinary”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Luke 2:21–28; Matt. 15:32–39; 16:13–17; Luke 12:6, 7; 13:1–5; James 2:1–9.*

Memory Text: “Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him” (*Mark 1:16–18*).

Christ’s death was the great equalizer: it showed that we all are sinners in need of God’s grace. In light of the Cross, ethnic, political, economic, and social barriers crumble. Sometimes, though, in our soul winning, we forget that crucial truth, and we especially seek to win those who might be deemed “honorable” or “great” in the eyes of the world.

Not so with Jesus, who saw the meaninglessness and emptiness of worldly greatness and honor. In fact, in many cases, it was the most “successful” people—the favorably positioned Pharisees, the wealthy Sadducees, and the Roman aristocracy—who troubled Him the most. In contrast, the “ordinary” people—carpenters, fishermen, farmers, housewives, shepherds, soldiers, and servants—generally thronged and embraced Him.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 8.

Humble Beginnings

Read Luke 2:21–28, Mark 6:2–4, Leviticus 12:8. What do these verses tell us about the economic class into which Jesus was born? How would that class have influenced His ministry?

Joseph and Mary’s purification offering clearly indicated their economically poor background. This tradition sprang from the Mosaic legislation recorded in Leviticus 12:8, and it required that a lamb be brought for this offering. However, a compassionate exemption had been provided for impoverished people. Turtledoves or pigeons could be substituted because of humble circumstances. Thus, right from the start—from His birth in a stable to the offerings given by His parents—Jesus is portrayed as having assumed His humanity in the home of poor and “ordinary” people. In fact, archaeological evidence also seems to indicate that the town of Nazareth, where Jesus spent His childhood, was a relatively impoverished and unimportant town, as well. And though carpentry is an honorable trade, it certainly didn’t place Him among the “elite.”

“The parents of Jesus were poor, and dependent upon their daily toil. He was familiar with poverty, self-denial, and privation. This experience was a safeguard to Him. In His industrious life there were no idle moments to invite temptation. No aimless hours opened the way for corrupting associations. So far as possible, He closed the door to the tempter. Neither gain nor pleasure, applause nor censure, could induce Him to consent to a wrong act. He was wise to discern evil, and strong to resist it.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 72.

The Creator of all that was made (see John 1:1–3) entered humanity, not just as a human being, an infant, which would have been astonishing enough, but by way of the home of a relatively impoverished family! How are we to respond to something so incredible? What is the only way to respond?

Transforming the “Common”

Read John 2:1–11 and Matthew 15:32–39. How did Jesus use simple, everyday desires and needs to make disciples and transform lives?

“Ordinary” people share natural physical, emotional, and social desires. They want physical nourishment, personal significance, and friendship. Jesus understood these characteristics, placing Himself in social situations that provided opportunities to reach people through these universal desires.

Whether Jesus was changing water into unfermented wine from the fruit of the vine, or turning fishermen into preachers (*Mark 1:16–18*), He specialized in transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary. Onlookers frequently questioned Jesus’ personal credentials (*Mark 6:3*). They questioned the absence of ostentation. Because they longed for the extraordinary, they overlooked that which they considered to be ordinary and did so at what was potentially an eternal loss.

So often Jesus sought people who were considered to be ordinary because, lacking self-sufficiency, they were prepared to trust God completely for their success. People who are enamored by their talents, abilities, and accomplishments cannot often sense their need of something greater than themselves. What a horrible deception! Many among Christ’s contemporaries possessed superior academic training, social position, or personal wealth. Nevertheless, their names have long been forgotten. Remembered, however, are ordinary people—farmers, fishermen, carpenters, shepherds, potters, housewives, domestic servants—who were transformed into extraordinary witnesses for Christ.

We all tend to be a little enamored by the very successful and the very rich, don’t we? How much of that attitude do you see in yourself? How can you learn to keep before yourself the value of all people, regardless of their status, fame, or wealth?

A Flawed Fisherman's Calling

In the New Testament, Peter stands out as one of the most influential of all the disciples. In fact, he ended up being one of the most influential people in all human history. Talk about changing the “ordinary” into the extraordinary!

Read the following texts. How do they help us to understand how Peter was so radically changed, despite tremendous faults?

Luke 5:1–11. What did Peter say here that showed that he was open to his need of Jesus? Why is this trait so crucial to cultivate in our own lives?

Matthew 16:13–17. What do these verses tell us about Peter and openness to the Holy Spirit?

Matthew 26:75. What do we also see here that gives us insight into Peter and how God was able to use him?

Jesus, no doubt, spent a great deal of time with Peter, and Peter had many powerful experiences with Him. Though only an “ordinary” fisherman with plenty of faults, through his time with Jesus, Peter was radically converted—even after making some grievous errors, including denying Jesus three times, just as Jesus told him he would.

Though many points emerge from the story of Peter, the moment he first caught a glimpse of who Jesus was, he was aware of his own faults and admitted them. Hence, through patience and forbearance, Jesus was able to turn Peter's flawed character into someone who helped to change history.

Why must we be so careful about making judgments about those whom we might not deem as “savable”? Why is that so easy to do?

Heavenly Evaluation

An evangelist once celebrated (perhaps bragged about) the attendance of quality upper-class people at his seminars. (One would hope he equally celebrated the attendance of the more “ordinary” types, as well.)

With Christ, however, no class distinctions existed; no one was “ordinary”; everyone was an exception. Not surprisingly, Jesus reached the masses with commonplace illustrations and straightforward speech. Nothing about His manner suggested that anyone was excluded from His concern. Modern disciple-makers must likewise carefully guard against giving the impression that they regard some more highly than they do others in terms of outreach.

Read Luke 12:6, 7; 13:1–5; Matthew 6:25–30. What do these texts teach us about the worth of every person? Of course, it is easy for us to say that we believe this, but in what ways might we be guilty of harboring the kind of distinctions that the universality of the Cross has eradicated forever?

The cheapest birds in the temple marketplace were sparrows. Pairs could be purchased for an *assarion*, the smallest, least valuable copper coin. Nonetheless, commonplace, insignificant sparrows were not forgotten in heaven.

How much more is this the case with human beings, the ones for whom Christ died? Christ died for us, not for birds. The Cross proves, in ways that we cannot begin to fathom, the “infinite worth” (to borrow from a phrase that Ellen G. White used a lot) of every human being, regardless of his or her status in life—a status that is often nothing more than a human concoction based on concepts and attributes that are meaningless in heaven, or even contrary to the very principles of heaven itself.

Ellen G. White wrote that “Christ would have died for one soul in order that that one might live through the eternal ages.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 73. One soul! Dwell on the implications of this incredible concept. How should this influence the ways in which we view not only others but ourselves, as well?

A Classless Society

Perhaps the most socially attractive feature of primitive Christianity was the absence of class distinctions. Dividing walls had crumbled beneath the gospel's weight. The common person triumphed through Christ. Christ transformed the ordinary into the extraordinary. Carpenters, tax collectors, stonemasons, queens, domestic servants, priests, Greeks, Romans, men, women, the wealthy, and the destitute all became equals within Christ's kingdom of grace. In reality, the Christian community was to be a "classless society."

What do each of the following texts teach about our common humanity? Considering the cultural background of the time, and of the Bible writers themselves, why might it not have been so easy for them to grasp this crucial concept?

Gal. 3:28, 29 _____

James 2:1–9 _____

1 Pet. 1:17, 2:9 _____

1 John 3:16–19 _____

Read Acts 2:43–47, 4:32–37. In what ways did early Christians apply, in practice, the principle of universal acceptance? How did the notion that God loves ordinary, everyday people enable the explosive expansion of primitive Christianity? At the same time, we need to ask ourselves, How well do we, individually and collectively, apply these principles to the ways in which we minister to the world? What kinds of things hold us back from doing better in this important area?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Lifework,” pp. 269, 270, in *Education*; and “Laboring for the Middle Class,” pp. 564–566, in *Evangelism*.

“In this closing work of the gospel there is a vast field to be occupied; and, more than ever before, the work is to enlist helpers from the common people. Both the youth and those older in years will be called from the field, from the vineyard, and from the workshop, and sent forth by the Master to give His message. Many of these have had little opportunity for education; but Christ sees in them qualifications that will enable them to fulfill His purpose. If they put their hearts into the work, and continue to be learners, He will fit them to labor for Him.”
—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 269, 270.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why was Jesus so effective in making disciples among the common people? Why was His message not as readily received among the wealthy and socially elite? How might Jesus’ humble upbringing have contributed to His effectiveness in reaching the hearts and minds of ordinary people? How effective in reaching the average person might Jesus have been if He had come as a royal prince or a wealthy landowner?
- 2 Read 1 Corinthians 1:26–29 in class together. What are the key points? Read carefully where Paul wrote that God chose “the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty” (*NKJV*). What does that mean? How, in the context of being a Christian, are we to understand this fascinating idea? In what ways do these verses show just how twisted and perverted the ways of the world are? How can we make sure that we ourselves don’t get caught up in these corrupted ways?
- 3 What can our Bible study groups do to become more user-friendly for ordinary people? How might that affect our choice of Bible translations? Why should disciple-makers concentrate on practical subjects rather than theoretical ones, especially when first reaching out to people who are hurting and in need of help?

Just in Time

Megy groaned as another contraction tore through her body. She had been in labor for 18 hours, and her baby hadn't arrived yet. Four men carried Megy on a stretcher toward the river several miles away, where they hoped to meet a public vehicle that could take Megy to the government clinic.

Storm clouds gathered on the horizon and threatened heavy rain. If the men couldn't reach the river before the rains swelled it, they couldn't cross. Megy's life and the life of her unborn baby hung in the balance.

Megy and her husband live in a large village in eastern Papua New Guinea. Most women give birth at home or in the simple birthing center in the village. But the birth attendants aren't equipped to handle complicated births. If they can't cross the rain-swollen river, women and their infants often die en route to help.

The men hurried on as large drops of water began pelting them. They reached the river and carefully picked their way across the swirling waters. Once on the other side, the men scrambled up the rocky shore to the place where public vehicles stopped. Soon a vehicle came, and Megy's husband helped her into the back.

The vehicle bumped along the rough road, drawing more groans from Megy. Thirty minutes later, the driver stopped at the government clinic, and Megy's husband helped her down. Soon she was inside, where the government nurse could help her safely deliver her child.

The next day, Megy and her husband rode another public vehicle back to their village with their new son. Megy survived because she made it to the government clinic in time. Other women in her village weren't so fortunate. Megy yearned for the day when her own village would have a decent clinic.

Thousands of people who live in and around Megy's village in Papua New Guinea are rejoicing today because the Seventh-day Adventist Church has built a government-certified clinic in their village. The villagers don't know much about Adventists yet, but they do know that Adventists care for them enough to meet their medical needs and teach them how to live more healthful lives. The Adventist nurse at the clinic has the equipment to deliver their babies and the medicines to treat their illnesses.

A recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is helping to build more clinics in Papua New Guinea. The people are eager to hear about the God that Adventists worship because they see God's love through the Adventists who care for them. Thank you for helping save lives and leading people to Jesus in Papua New Guinea and around the world.

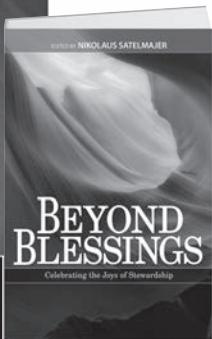
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HOPE AND A FUTURE



Less than half the children in Benin, a country in western Africa, can read and write. Instead of attending school, many children spend their days helping their parents work the family's garden to raise enough food to keep them alive.

Parakou, a city in central Benin, is largely Muslim. Most of the people who live there want their children to receive an education, but there aren't enough schools to meet their needs.

An Adventist school in this area will light the

path to a better future for thousands of children while bringing the message of God's love to entire families.

I'm glad our church cares for the people of Benin. I'm glad our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help provide them with tools to have better lives and hopes for the future through Adventist education.

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Jesus *and the Social Outcasts*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 21:28–32, John 8:1–11, Mark 5:1–20, John 4:5–32, Matt. 9:9–13.*

Memory Text: “The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, ‘Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’ ” (*John 4:28–30, NKJV*).

A young woman—having come from an unbelievably sad and horrible background (which included two out-of-wedlock children by the time she was fifteen years old)—sat in prison, awaiting trial for having murdered a social worker who had come to take away her baby, the only person from whom she ever felt any love.

Without a mother, father, husband, any relative, or even a friend, she faced the forbidding future alone. Through the visits of a pastor, however, this hopeless young woman learned that—despite all the mistakes, despite the desperateness of the situation, and despite whatever loomed on the horizon—Christ loved and forgave her. No matter how society viewed this young girl, she knew, for herself, God’s eternal love. This social outcast discovered meaning and purpose in her Lord, whose love and acceptance transcended all societal norms and mores, even the “good” ones.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 15.

Bottom Dwellers

Societies establish hierarchies. Wealthy or well-educated people usually acquire the highest positions.

Good moral citizens, the “ordinary” people, normally occupy the middle rungs on the social ladder. That leaves the bottom dwellers, those such as prostitutes, substance abusers, criminals, the homeless, and others. During Christ’s time, that list also included lepers and tax collectors.

Read Matthew 21:28–32 and Luke 15:1–10. What do these passages teach regarding Christ’s attitude toward social outcasts?

What happened that propelled the social outcasts ahead of the self-righteous? What did the bottom dwellers discover that the social elite often missed? Why was Jesus apparently more effective in reaching the bottom strata than He was with the upper echelons?

Although hardened by sinful pleasures, and sometimes encased in self-constructed tough exteriors, the social outcasts were, and still are, easier to reach than the prideful, haughty, and self-righteous elite. Often, beneath the outcasts’ bravado lies emotional emptiness characterized by poor self-worth. Frequently, especially during the teenage years, such people openly rebel, frantically trying to establish a personal identity to compensate for the insecurities felt within. That identity is, purposefully, established in opposition to the wishes of whoever serves as the authority figure (often parents) for that person.

Jesus wasted no effort damaging the outcasts’ already diminished sense of self-worth. Instead, He created a renewed sense of personal value. He established that foundation by consistently loving and accepting the outcasts, whose hearts were often melted by the warm and loving receptions that they had received from Christ.

What is your own attitude toward those whom your society deems to be social outcasts? Be honest: in a lot of cases, don’t you feel a certain sense of superiority? If so, dwell on the implications of those feelings.

“In the Very Act”

Read John 8:1–11. What does this text teach us about Jesus and social outcasts?

Having refreshed Himself spiritually at His Mount of Olives retreat, Jesus returned to the temple. Crowds gathered. While Christ taught, the Pharisees dragged an adulterous woman before Him. They questioned Jesus regarding Moses’ legislation concerning adultery, which prescribed execution. Jesus recognized that this questioning was insincere. The purpose was entrapment, not truth-seeking. Capital (death penalty) jurisdiction had been withdrawn from Jewish courts. Jewish leadership reasoned that Christ’s patriotic Jewish following might be compromised should He publicly reject stoning the woman. Conversely, should He endorse execution, their accusation would be that Christ had violated Roman authority.

Caught amid the leaders’ political intrigue was this helpless and guilty woman. Unfamiliar with Jesus’ ministry, she could not have known His merciful nature. Ironically, He appears to pronounce her death sentence; however, He prefaced His statement with those unforgettable words, “He that is without sin . . .”

Those words leveled the playing field. Sinless people might be authorized to mercilessly execute punishment. Yet, sinful people were, in a sense, obligated to be merciful. But, with the exception of Jesus, there were no sinless people present. Gradually the religious leaders dispersed, and this social outcast, guilty as she may have been, received grace.

“In His act of pardoning this woman and encouraging her to live a better life, the character of Jesus shines forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness. While He does not palliate sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, He seeks not to condemn, but to save. The world had for this erring woman only contempt and scorn; but Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 462.

Though Ellen G. White does give more details about the intrigue regarding this woman, the woman, nevertheless, was an adulteress, caught “in the very act.” The scheming of the leaders didn’t change that fact. And yet, she was still forgiven. How do we learn to show grace, even to the guilty, while still not “palliating” sin?

The Lowest of the Low

Read Mark 5:1–20. Compare this man’s situation with the plight of modern homeless people. Compare his description with that of mentally ill patients. What similarities and differences exist? How does modern society treat people who suffer from mental illness? What explains Christ’s admonition to publicize the event, though He consistently counsels others to maintain secrecy?

From the perspective of many of us today, it’s hard to imagine someone in such a horrific state, living in a cemetery even. Though some argue that this man was merely insane, the text teaches otherwise. (Besides, how does that idea fit with what happened to the pigs?)

A crucial point for us in this story is that no one, no matter how deranged—whether from demon possession, mental illness, drug use, whatever—is to be ignored. In some cases, professional help is needed and should be given when possible.

As Christians, we must remember that Christ died for everyone, and even those whom we might deem to be beyond our help still deserve as much mercy and respect and kindness as possible. Besides, who are we to judge anyone to be a hopeless case, to be beyond the power of God? From our perspective, things can look bad, but from God’s perspective every human being is of infinite worth. Were it not for the Cross, all our cases would be hopeless, a point worth remembering as we confront every disturbed and damaged people.

Dwell on some of the people you know who are truly in bad shape, whether mentally, spiritually, or physically, and for whatever reason. Try to view them in the way that you think our unconditionally loving God views them. Besides praying for them, what can you do, in any way, to minister to their needs and show them something of the love of God?

The Woman at the Well

Study John 4:5–32, and then answer the following questions:

1. What social conventions did Jesus break, and why? What should this tell us about social conventions and the way in which they should be regarded when they interfere with witnessing? What social conventions might be hindering your witness to others?

2. In what way did Jesus confront the woman about her sinful life? What lessons could we take from His approach?

3. What does this story reveal about the prejudices of Jesus' disciples? Again we have to ask ourselves, in what ways are we guilty of the same thing?

4. Though obviously impressed by the fact that Jesus knew she had been sexually promiscuous, what did the woman say in her witness that showed she still had some questions about who Jesus was? What lessons can we draw from this about our own need for patience when it comes to the making of disciples?

Publicans and Sinners

It's hard to imagine what our world would have been like had not sin intruded. The beauty of nature, even after millennia, still testifies to the majesty and power and goodness of God. Our sin-darkened minds can barely grasp what humanity and human relations would have been like had our world not fallen. One thing we can be sure of is that the class distinctions, prejudices, and cultural and ethnic boundaries that impact every society and culture would not exist.

Sad to say, too, it's hardly feasible that before Christ returns these boundaries are going to vanish. On the contrary, as our world gets worse, there is no doubt that these barriers will, as well. As Christians, however, we must do what we can in every way possible to seek to transcend these barriers that have caused so much heartache and suffering and pain in our world, especially to those whom society rejects as the greatest outcasts.

Read Matthew 9:9–13. In what way is the essence of true Christianity revealed here, not just in what Jesus said but in that which He did? Focus especially on His words, taken from the Old Testament: “ ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’ ” (*Hosea 6:6, NKJV*). Especially given the context, why must we be so careful that we do not become guilty of possessing the attitude that Jesus is so powerfully condemning here—especially when we are all to some degree creatures of our particular societies, and thus influenced by the prejudices and social barriers that are inherent in every society?

“The Pharisees beheld Christ sitting and eating with publicans and sinners. He was calm and self-possessed, kind, courteous, and friendly; and while they could not but admire the picture presented, it was so unlike their own course of action, they could not endure the sight. The haughty Pharisees exalted themselves, and disparaged those who had not been blessed with such privileges and light as they themselves had had. They hated and despised the publicans and sinners. Yet in the sight of God their guilt was the greater. Heaven's light was flashing across their pathway, saying, ‘This is the way, walk ye in it’; but they had spurned the gift.”—Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1088.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “At Jacob’s Well,” pp. 183–195; “Peace, Be Still,” pp. 333–341; “Among Snares,” pp. 460–462, in *The Desire of Ages*; and “Helping the Tempted,” pp. 164–169; “Working for the Intemperate,” pp. 171–182; “Help for the Unemployed and the Homeless,” pp. 183–200, in *The Ministry of Healing*.

“The one class that He would never countenance was those who stood apart in their self-esteem and looked down upon others. . . .

“The fallen must be led to feel that it is not too late for them to be men. Christ honored man with His confidence and thus placed him on his honor. Even those who had fallen the lowest He treated with respect. It was a continual pain to Christ to be brought into contact with enmity, depravity, and impurity; but never did He utter one expression to show that His sensibilities were shocked or His refined tastes offended. Whatever the evil habits, the strong prejudices, or the overbearing passions of human beings, He met them all with pitying tenderness. As we partake of His Spirit, we shall regard all men as brethren, with similar temptations and trials, often falling and struggling to rise again, battling with discouragements and difficulties, craving sympathy and help. Then we shall meet them in such a way as not to discourage or repel them, but to awaken hope in their hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 164, 165.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What personal attitudes might need to be changed in order for you to become an effective witness to social outcasts? What congregational practices should be altered to make your church more effective? How should modern Christians establish reasonable expectations when working for those who are deemed to be the hardest and most difficult cases?
- 2 How did Jesus avoid both excusing sins and condemning sinners? In what ways did Christ utilize trust, encouragement, and confidence in reversing the downward spiral of social outcasts? Since social outcasts were generally suspicious of religious leaders, how did Christ make these potential disciples comfortable with Himself?
- 3 What barriers stand between social outcasts and your church? How can those barriers be overturned?

The Godfather's Son

Mitia [*MEE-tyah*] was the son of a crime syndicate godfather. His father was rich and powerful, and Mitia admired him. Mitia quit school and started his own criminal business with his father's guidance. Soon Mitia was enjoying the riches of crime, just as his father did.

Then two of Mitia's employees were arrested. They named Mitia, and police went to arrest him. But someone warned Mitia, and he fled before the police arrived. He hid in a neighboring country to wait until it was safe to return home.

While in hiding, someone gave Mitia some Christian literature. It spoke of a life based on love, forgiveness, and obedience. Mitia wondered if such a life could be possible.

The literature referred to the Bible, and Mitia searched for one. He found one in a pile of old books in a market. Once he began reading, he couldn't put the Bible down. Who was this Jesus, whose life had changed so many people—people like him? As he read, his former life no longer appealed to him. He yearned for the peace, the hope, and the love he saw in Jesus.

Mitia wanted to tell his family what he had discovered. But as soon as he arrived home, he was arrested. His two former employees had been sentenced to death, and Mitia knew that he faced the same fate.

In prison, Mitia found comfort in reading his Bible and sharing God's message of forgiveness with the other prisoners. To his surprise, he was released from prison.

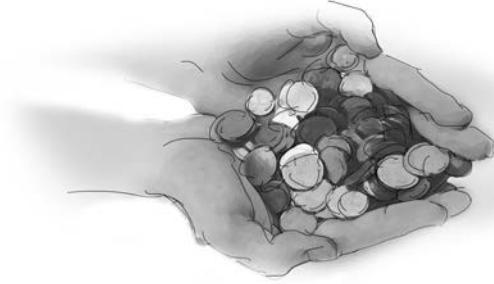
Mitia remembered a Christian neighbor and went to ask her questions about God that puzzled him. She recognized Mitia and had reason to fear him, but she invited him into her home. Soon they were reading Bible verses that answered Mitia's questions. She invited him to join a small group of Christians who worshiped in a house on Sabbath. Mitia went and was amazed to realize that the Seventh-day Adventists taught everything he had read in the Bible.

When Mitia's former friends invited him to party or take drugs, Mitia responded, "I'm done with those things. I have a new life now centered in God." Indeed, God's love so transformed Mitia's life that many who knew him listened as he told them that Jesus wants to be their Lord, as well.

Today, Mitia spends his time leading others to Jesus. One piece of literature changed his life. Our mission offerings help provide literature that can lead thousands like Mitia to God. Thank you for helping to tell the world that God loves them.

MITIA ISMAILOV *lives in Kazakhstan.*

With *the* Rich and Famous



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Deut. 8:17, 18; Gen. 13:5, 6; John 3:1–15; Luke 19:1–10; Mark 4:18, 19; Matt. 19:16–26.*

Memory Text: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (*1 Timothy 6:10, NKJV*).

People,” it has been said, “spend money they don’t have, for things they don’t need, in order to impress people they don’t like.” How much truth that statement contains is debatable; what isn’t debatable, however, is that money can have a powerful influence over all of us. Because personal financial habits comprehensively represent an individual’s values, money is actually a spiritual matter. No doubt that’s why the Bible spends a lot of time talking about it.

Also, fame frequently accompanies wealth. Motion picture stars, outstanding athletes, and national politicians often possess both. Famous people exercise influence, which is one form of power. Jesus, however, was not impressed by anyone’s wealth or power. He simply sought to reach these wealthy people for the same reason that He tried to reach everyone else: He wanted them to have the kind of riches that money cannot buy.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 22.

Richly Blessed

As fallen human beings, we are subject to jealousy, especially toward those who have more money than we do (regardless of how much money we ourselves might have already). The Bible, however, does not unconditionally disparage wealth or the wealthy. As with so much else in life, problems arise not from things themselves but from the way in which we relate to them.

What counsel regarding wealth does Scripture offer? *Deut. 8:17, 18; Gen. 13:5, 6; 41:41–43; Job 1:1–3; Dan. 4:28–31.* Why was it so important for Israel not to forget where its blessings came from?

There is no question that people such as Abraham, Joseph, Mordecai, Esther, Hezekiah, Josiah, and Jehoshaphat were wealthy and spiritually minded, as well. Nebuchadnezzar's example, however, shows the danger that comes from making wealth an idol, which is so easy for anyone to do. Conversely, for ancient Israel, acknowledging God's generosity in this supplying of wealth brought spiritual and material blessings. They were specifically warned not to forget from where those blessings came. (A good lesson for all of us, is it not?)

In short, riches themselves do not indicate spiritual poverty or indifference. There have been some very pious and faithful rich people and some pretty nasty and evil ones, as well. Either way, we should not turn a desire for money into an obsession, nor should we despise those who are wealthy. They need salvation as much as everyone else does.

What are your own attitudes toward the rich? It's easy to be jealous, is it not? How can you learn to move beyond those feelings and to see wealthy individuals as we all are, as souls in need of a saving knowledge of Jesus?

Nighttime Rendezvous

Wealthy, well-positioned famous people did not intimidate Jesus. Christ neither resented nor revered the social elite. The Savior recognized that financial prosperity could not supply peace, personal contentment, meaningful relationships, or deep-seated purpose. The wealthiest magnate could easily be lonelier, emptier, and angrier than the simplest, poorest, and most humble Christian believer.

Analyze Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus (*John 3:1–15*). Which events probably stimulated Nicodemus's interest in Jesus' message? (*Hint: review John 2:13–25.*) What significance does the darkness play? What is Christ's central message for Nicodemus?

Nicodemus had witnessed God's power and authority as revealed through Jesus' ministry and thus sought to meet with Him, but in secret. Jesus might have refused this secretive overture, but, unwilling that any should perish, He readily accepted this opportunity to bring Nicodemus another step closer to the kingdom. Nicodemus's poverty was spiritual not material. Enriched with worldly goods and an elevated social position, he was, nonetheless, spiritually starving.

Instinctively, Nicodemus rebelled against any suggestion that knowledgeable Israelites like himself should require conversion. Jesus, however, persisted, presenting Nicodemus with the eternal choice between judgment and salvation. Fearing denunciation and ridicule, Nicodemus refused to accept Christ's invitation. The interview had apparently failed. That spiritual seed, however, lay buried, slowly germinating beneath his heart's soil.

“After the Lord's ascension, when the disciples were scattered by persecution, Nicodemus came boldly to the front. He employed his wealth in sustaining the infant church that the Jews had expected to be blotted out at the death of Christ. In the time of peril he who had been so cautious and questioning was firm as a rock, encouraging the faith of the disciples, and furnishing means to carry forward the work of the gospel. He was scorned and persecuted by those who had paid him reverence in other days. He became poor in this world's goods; yet he faltered not in the faith which had its beginning in that night conference with Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 177.

Rich and Infamous

Respectability does not always accompany wealth. Though many do earn their wealth honestly through hard work, industriousness, and the blessings of God, others are outright crooks. Even worse, some make their money legally but immorally, for not everything immoral is illegal, as we all know so well.

Compare Matthew 9:10–13 with Luke 5:27–32, 19:1–10. What motivated the criticism that Jesus faced? What does His reaction to the criticism teach us about grace?

Jericho, Zacchaeus's residence, had become a significant commercial center and housed the Herodian palace. Because of its geographical location, it maintained a customs gathering station. Zacchaeus could have easily enriched himself *legally* as the chief regional customs officer. The narrative, however, suggests that greed induced him to overstep legal boundaries. Zealous patriots despised even honest customs collectors, seeing them as tools of their Roman oppressors, but they greatly disdained dishonest ones such as Zacchaeus. Matthew (Levi) occupied a similar position in Capernaum, under Herod Antipas. Essentially having assumed the role of Roman governmental agents, they were viewed as traitors, or worse yet, thieving traitors.

Nonetheless, Christ was not deterred. Defying social constraints, Jesus dined with them, drawing intense criticism from priests and commoners alike. And, by Jesus' interaction with them, these despised men were eventually won to the gospel. (For example, Matthew not only became one of the Twelve but also an author in the New Testament!)

Again, we should be careful about the kind of spiritual judgments we make about people. Though not all sins are of the same magnitude, and some are certainly socially worse (and with good reason) than others, all of us are equal before God in that we are all in need of the righteousness of Christ.

Think of some well-known but despised (and perhaps understandably so) personage in your culture. Imagine what it would be like if you had a chance to witness to that person. Would you even want to? What would you say?

Gold-plated Message

Analyze the following passages: Mark 4:18, 19; Luke 1:51–53; 6:22–25; 12:16–21; 16:13. What practical advice do these verses contain? What spiritual warnings are found here? How might these Scriptures be utilized by believers to make disciples among the wealthy?

It has been said that we don't own our things; our things own us. How easy it is to be consumed by material possessions; hence, Jesus warned above about "the deceitfulness of riches."

Think through just how easy it is for money, or the pursuit of it, to blind our spiritual priorities. How crucial that we keep this truth in mind as we seek to reach those whose wealth might have already blinded them.

At the same time, we all need a reality check. Some people live as if the one question that they will be asked on Judgment Day is, How much money did you make?

Christ reverses our misplaced priorities. While possessions are not forbidden, they must be placed in perspective. Material goods are God's instruments designed to benefit humanity. They become blessings when shared rather than when hoarded. When hoarded, they become curses.

Materialistic persons, whether rich or poor, are in danger of sacrificing their eternal well-being for temporal pleasures. Eternal satisfaction is exchanged for passing fancies that deteriorate and become outdated. Humans serve God or money, never both. Everyone, rich or poor, needs to be reminded: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (*Mark 8:36*).

This warning about materialism is important for all believers, not only for their own souls' sakes but for outreach as well. After all, how can we warn the wealthy about the potential spiritual dangers contained by their wealth when we ourselves are caught up in the same thing?

Terms of Endangerment

Study Matthew 19:16–26. What spiritual dangers are revealed in this passage? How might believers benefit today’s “rich young rulers”?

He possessed credentials, qualifications, abundant material resources, unquestioned morality, and unlimited self-esteem! The youthful disciple-candidate earnestly requested the Master’s formula for salvation. Should Christ have been flattered? “Finally we’re converting the upper classes!” Apparently no such exhilaration polluted Christ’s thinking. Had this petitioner expected commendation, he was sorely disappointed. Instead, Christ established the Ten Commandments as the minimum standard of obedience. Perhaps the young ruler had congratulated himself. By his self-measurement, he surpassed the first hurdle. Christ, however, had elsewhere demanded righteousness that exceeded that which other religious leaders possessed. Would that standard be lowered to accommodate this candidate? Judas would have been ecstatic. Whoever handled public relations would have been overjoyed. Think what having wealthy supporters aboard could mean image-wise.

Spiritual deficiencies, however, cannot be overlooked nor minimized, for the mission of Jesus is sacred. Compromise cannot be tolerated. Every selfish indulgence must be surrendered. Christ outlined the three-step process: sell your possessions, furnish the poverty-stricken, follow Me. This was spiritually dangerous territory. Although young, the would-be disciple had accumulated a sizable fortune. Luxurious houses, beautiful vineyards, productive fields, fashionable clothing, jewelry collections, servants, livestock, perhaps speedy customized chariots—all these might have flashed through his mind. God’s terms were inflexible. Neither bargaining nor negotiating could reduce the price: everything for Jesus; worldly greatness exchanged for heavenly treasure.

“How many have come to Christ, ready to cast their interests in with his, and, like the rich young ruler, earnestly desiring to inherit eternal life! But when the cost is presented to them—when they are told that they must forsake all, houses and lands, wife and children, and count not their lives dear unto themselves—they go away sorrowful. They want the treasures of heaven, and the life that measures with the life of God, but they are not willing to give up their earthly treasures. They are not willing to surrender all to obtain the crown of life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 19, 1898.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Nicodemus,” pp. 167–177; “Levi-Matthew,” pp. 272–280; “ ‘One Thing Thou Lackest,’ ” pp. 518–523; “Zacchaeus,” pp. 552–556, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Ministry to the Rich,” pp. 209–216, in *The Ministry of Healing*.

“Much is said concerning our duty to the neglected poor; should not some attention be given to the neglected rich? Many look upon this class as hopeless, and they do little to open the eyes of those, who, blinded and dazed by the glitter of earthly glory, have lost eternity out of their reckoning. Thousands of wealthy men have gone to their graves unwarned. But indifferent as they may appear, many among the rich are soul-burdened. ‘He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase.’ He that says to fine gold, ‘Thou art my confidence,’ has ‘denied the God that is above.’ ‘None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever).’ . . .

“Riches and worldly honor cannot satisfy the soul. Many among the rich are longing for some divine assurance, some spiritual hope. Many long for something that will bring to an end the monotony of their aimless lives. Many in official life feel their need of something which they have not. Few among them go to church; for they feel that they receive little benefit. The teaching they hear does not touch the heart. Shall we make no personal appeal to them?”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 210.

Discussion Questions:

- ① **Wealthy converts played important roles in financially sustaining the infant Christian movement. Though exceptions existed, sacrificial giving characterized the well-to-do believers. God’s kingdom consists of honest-hearted people from every social class. Christians should be neither intimidated nor enamored by wealthy people but should fearlessly proclaim God’s revelation that they may be saved. Understanding that we should never compromise theology and principle, what practical changes can your church make so that wealthy people will find it easier to find fellowship there? How is your church’s evangelistic strategy addressing the need to make disciples among the well-to-do? What specific things can your church realistically do to reach the rich?**
- ② **Look at the Bible verses that Ellen G. White used in the statement in Friday’s study. What is the essence of what they are saying? How can we help those who think that their happiness will be found in wealth and material possessions to realize that they are on the wrong track?**

A Flame for Jesus

Daniel Santay is a shining star for Jesus in Cambodia. He says, “Ever since I can remember, I’ve loved Jesus.”

Daniel’s father was the example that inspired the boy to share God’s love with others. “When I was seven years old,” Daniel says, “I told my dad I wanted to be like him and preach someday. He told me, ‘You don’t have to wait. Start now; share Jesus with your friends now.’”

Daniel accepted his father’s challenge and began sharing God’s love with his friends. “I felt God’s power through the Holy Spirit working in me,” Daniel said. “He is working in my heart and helping me share my love for Jesus with other children.” Daniel began traveling with his father and teaching the children while his dad taught the adults.

Then his father became ill. Before long, he was too sick to travel or preach. He became too weak to work at his government job. One day he gathered his family around him and told them he wasn’t going to get well. He challenged them to stay close to God and to continue sharing God’s love with everyone they met. He promised his family that one day they would be together again when Jesus comes. They would never have to say goodbye.

Daniel’s father died when Daniel was just eight. “Some days I miss him so much,” Daniel says. “But I have hope that I will see him soon in heaven. Then I will tell him that I kept my promise to preach to others.”

Daniel and his three siblings and their mother continue sharing their faith in Cambodia. His mother works hard to provide for the children and keep them in a Seventh-day Adventist school.

Daniel helps his mother around the house and enjoys reading. He knows that God is calling him to be a pastor, just like his father. “I want to keep telling others about Jesus,” he says, “to help them know Christ.”

Daniel remembers asking his father when Jesus will come again. His father told him, “Jesus will come when everyone has had a chance to hear God’s message of love through Jesus.” Daniel continues telling others that God loves them and that Jesus died for them. He can’t wait until Jesus can come so he can see his father again, and together they can meet their heavenly Father for the first time.

Our mission offerings help support the Adventist school that Daniel and his siblings attend; this is one way we can help share God’s love in Cambodia and around the world.

DANIEL CHOTAL SANTAY *is helping people prepare for Jesus’ coming in his homeland, Cambodia.*

Discipling *the* Powerful



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 13:1–7, Mark 2:23–28, Matt. 8:5–13, 26:57–68, 27:11–14, Acts 4:1–12.*

Memory Text: “The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” (*Acts 6:7, NRSV*).

The disciples were not endowed with the courage and fortitude of the martyrs until such grace was needed. Then the Saviour's promise was fulfilled. When Peter and John testified before the Sanhedrin council, men ‘marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.’ *Acts 4:13*. Of Stephen it is written that ‘all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel’ [*Acts 6:15*]. Men ‘were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.’ [*Acts 6:10*]. And Paul, writing of his own trial at the court of the Caesars, says, ‘At my first defense no one took my part, but all forsook me. . . . But the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me; that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.’ *2 Tim. 4:16, 17, R. V.*—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 354, 355.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 1.

Respecting Authority

Over the long centuries, people have struggled to understand the role and function of government and how citizens should relate to it. What gives rulers the right to rule? What is the best form of government? Should people always obey their governments? If not, why not? These are just a few of a host of questions that we still wrestle with to this day.

Read Romans 13:1–7. What important message is in there for us? How, though, can these texts and the message they teach be abused? What examples do we have in history of that happening? How can we as a church learn from these mistakes, even in our own history, as well as from the mistakes of the Christian church in general?

Oppression and brutality characterized the Roman Empire during Christ's time. Roman legions terrorized and subjugated civilized nations, forcibly bringing them into the empire. Hundreds of thousands were dispossessed, imprisoned, and murdered. Puppet governments permitted by Rome were probably worse than Rome itself. Yet, interestingly enough, Jesus never advocated any kind of rebellion against this government, or even the withholding of taxes from it (*see Luke 20:25*). Jesus' singular act of civil disobedience—overturning the money-changers' tables—demonstrated the revulsion He felt regarding priestly abuses. It was not against the Romans, *per se*.

“The people of God will recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment and will teach obedience to it as a sacred duty within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, the word of God must be recognized as above all human legislation. ‘Thus saith the Lord’ is not to be set aside for Thus saith the church or the state. The crown of Christ is to be uplifted above the diadems of earthly potentates.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 402.

“Have You Not Read . . . ?”

Unfortunately, some of the most powerful and influential people with whom Jesus dealt were the religious leaders of His time, many of whom were openly hostile to Him.

Yet, even in His encounters with them, Jesus always sought to be redemptive. He wasn't seeking arguments; He was seeking the salvation of all people, even of those powerful and influential people who would eventually condemn Him to death.

Read Mark 2:23–28, 3:1–6, Matthew 12:1–16. How can we see, in these encounters, that Jesus—despite the overt hostility against Him—was trying to reach these men? What did He say and do that should have touched their hearts, were they not so closed?

It's interesting that, in dealing with these people, Jesus referred to the Scriptures and even sacred history, sources that should have touched the religious leaders. Jesus was appealing to what should have been common ground between them. For instance, He quoted the Bible when He talked about the importance of mercy over ritual. By so doing, He sought to bring the leaders to a deeper meaning of the law that they claimed to cherish and uphold so fervently and devoutly.

In His discourse about pulling an animal out of a pit on the Sabbath day, Jesus then appealed to their most basic notions of decency and kindness, something that these men all should have related to. The problem, however, was that their bitterness and hatred toward Jesus clouded even that.

Finally, the miracles themselves should have spoken loudly to these influential leaders about the extraordinary Man among them.

It's easy, from our position today, to look back in wonder at the blindness and hardness of these men. How, though, can we make sure that we ourselves, when seeking to protect something that we don't want to give up, don't close ourselves to more light from God? Why is that easier to do than we might think?

The Centurion

While several of Christ's encounters with powerful people ended acrimoniously, there were notable exceptions, such as with Nicodemus. Another constructive meeting involved a Roman centurion (ranking military officer).

Read Matthew 8:5–13 and Luke 7:1–10. What can we learn from these accounts about witnessing to people in power?

When the centurion learned that Jesus was approaching, he dispatched several friends to dissuade Christ from coming. Deeply respecting Jewish worship and Jesus' spirituality, he felt undeserving of Christ's personal attention. Finally, just before Jesus arrived, he ventured to approach Him. He explained the situation, expressing faith that Christ's declaration alone could restore the servant. Drawing on military experience, he understood authority. He obeyed his commanding officer, and his subordinates obeyed him. How amazing that this man of power and influence (and a Roman, as well!) could show such deep faith when many who had so many more spiritual advantages spurned Jesus.

Honest self-examination is profitable here. We need to ask ourselves whether we have become complacent and are merely espousing correct doctrines instead of experiencing living faith. Have newer, lesser-equipped believers nevertheless expressed deeper faith than those raised within Christianity? Have our spiritual advantages become occasions for self-dependency? Have spiritual opportunities escaped unnoticed? Whenever we answer affirmatively, Christ is the answer. Anyone can enjoy the centurion's experience. This story should encourage those evangelizing among people in powerful positions. How many twenty-first century centurions are there? May their faith inspire and strengthen ours.

There is a power to a selflessness and self-abnegating ministry that can touch anyone of any rank or class. What of these traits do we manifest in our own lives and witness?

Judgment Day

Read Matthew 26:57–68, 27:11–14, Luke 23:1–12, John 18:19–23, 31–40, 19:8–12. What can we learn from Jesus’ witness to these powerful men?

Within these final scenes of Jesus’ earthly sojourn, Christ’s followers glimpse the painful price of unflinching faithfulness. From arrest until crucifixion, Christ bears witness before the most powerful in the land: monarchs, governors, priests. Person by person He studies those intoxicated with worldly authority. Apparently, they control Him. Soldiers shuffle Jesus between their courtrooms, their councils, their palaces, and their judgment halls, unaware that ultimately this is His world. Whatever judgment they pronounce against Christ is ultimately the judgment they pronounce against themselves.

While Christ witnessed to make disciples, sometimes the outcome was vastly different from what He Himself would have wished. How Jesus would have rejoiced had Pilate, Caiaphas, Herod, and others surrendered their hearts and repented. Stubbornly, they refused His entreaties, callously bypassing their final invitation to salvation.

Likewise, Christ’s twenty-first-century followers should recognize that while they witness to make disciples, the outcome often appears vastly different from what they would wish and pray for. Measurable success may not always attend their efforts. This should neither discourage them nor inhibit further witnessing. The genuine disciple is, like Christ Himself, faithful until death, not faithful until disappointed. Calling listeners to a decision separates wheat from chaff. The wheat is celebrated. The chaff is mourned. The harvest continues. Notwithstanding Christ’s apparently unsuccessful witness before these powerful men, something marvelous happened, for, according to Acts 6:7, not only did the number of disciples multiply, but “a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (*NKJV*). God alone knows how many of those priests were there, listening and watching Jesus in those final hours.

The Early Explosion

Christ's earliest disciples energetically advanced the gospel throughout the civilized world. Houses, synagogues, public stadiums, judgment halls, and royal palaces became stages for kingdom proclamation. Jesus, however, prophesied arrests, trials, and hostile royal audiences for those disciples (*Matt. 10:16–20*). Unfortunately, those saturated with earthly power were slowest to receive Christ.

Read through as much of Acts 4:1–12; 13:5–12, 50; 23:1–6; 25:23–26:28 as you can. Though one can get the idea that so many people were instantly converted out of nowhere, that's not what happened. These dramatic results were the visible product of underlying circumstances. Seedtime precedes harvest. Christ had faithfully proclaimed the gospel. Missionaries had witnessed throughout Judea. Early converts no doubt helped to carry the message. When Christ personally conquered death, confirming His message, thousands of fence-sitters leaped into the kingdom. They had secretly followed Him. Their hearts had responded to His invitations. Cultural factors, job security, and family pressures had slowed their overt responses. Christ's resurrection destroyed the fence, forcing a decision.

Then, of course, the apostle Paul entered the picture. His witness, however, was not universally appreciated. Sometimes prominent men and women persecuted and expelled him. He was stoned, flogged, imprisoned, and otherwise mistreated—often at the instigation of powerful people. Political motives were frequently the foundation for their anti-Christian sentiments.

Governor Felix imprisoned Paul in order to placate religious opposition to Paul. His successor, Festus, was more fair-minded but lacked the political willpower to release Paul. During an official visit, King Agrippa and his sister, Bernice (descendants of Herod's dynasty), requested an audience with Paul. Unfortunately, like their ancestors before them, they rejected his invitation to salvation. Although facing similar rejection and persecution, Christ's twenty-first-century disciples must likewise persevere.

How can disciple-makers working among worldly and religious authorities avoid the discouragement of frequent rejection? Whenever Christ's followers labor for powerful people, who else might be affected by their witnessing?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Centurion,” pp. 315–318; “Before Annas and the Court of Caiaphas,” pp. 698–715; “In Pilate’s Judgment Hall,” pp. 723–740, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Ministry to the Rich,” pp. 209–216, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Almost Thou Persuadest Me,” pp. 433–438, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“It is by no casual, accidental touch that wealthy, world-loving, world-worshiping souls can be drawn to Christ. These persons are often the most difficult of access. Personal effort must be put forth for them by men and women imbued with the missionary spirit, those who will not fail or be discouraged.

“Some are especially fitted to work for the higher classes.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 213.

Discussion Questions:

❶ Whenever Jesus witnessed to powerful people, others noticed. Some were in powerful positions, others not. Like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, many among the educated priestly class came to faith gradually. Some bystanders who witnessed Christ’s confrontations with religious leaders likewise believed. Volcanic turbulence usually lies hidden beneath the mountain’s crust. Visually gauging intensity is impossible. Accurately measuring activity requires special instruments. Similarly, the explosive potential of Jesus’ movement remained hidden during His earthly ministry. Following His resurrection, however, the kingdom erupted, evidenced by massive conversions, even among those in influential positions. The faithful planting was finally yielding its abundant harvest. What should these facts tell us about how important it is that we not get discouraged when our witness doesn’t appear as effective as we would like it to be, especially among the powerful elite?

❷ Ellen G. White wrote in the statement above that some were especially fitted for the work of reaching the powerful. What might some of those qualifications be? At the same time, why must we be careful to not limit those who we might think are not qualified?

God's Surprising Answer

I wanted to attend a university after high school, but I didn't score high enough on some of my exams to qualify for the public university. So I decided to work parttime while I studied to retake the exams.

My employers were Seventh-day Adventist Christians. They suggested that I apply to study at Valley View University, the Adventist university in Ghana. My father said that he'd heard good things about the school, so I applied and was accepted.

My roommates were fine Christian women. I saw the difference their faith made in their lives, and I wanted to know what Adventists believe. I asked lots of questions about the Bible, which they answered most willingly.

During the school's Week of Spiritual Emphasis, I became convinced that Adventists are not a cult; they are Bible-following Christians. I asked to join the Adventist Church.

My parents were disappointed to learn that I wanted to join the Adventist Church and threatened to transfer me to the public university. But I asked the pastor and my friends to pray that God would help me to stay at Valley View. My father eventually agreed.

However, the devil had other ways to cause trouble. My father lost his job and couldn't support me in school. Some members of my family accused me of joining a cult and using witchcraft to make my father lose his job. I couldn't do anything but pray for them and for my future at Valley View. I found part-time work and sold books during vacations to pay my school bills. Friends, pastors, and the school faculty helped me stay in school.

When my father found another job, he again paid my school fees. He even asked me to give up the scholarship I was receiving so that someone more needy could benefit from it.

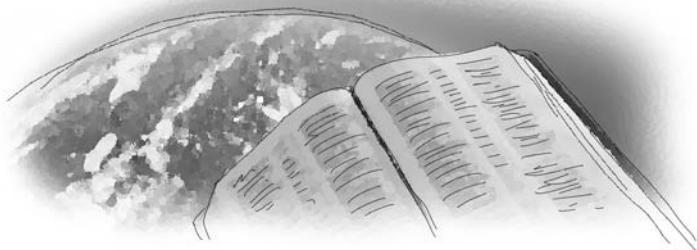
My whole family attended my graduation. I had a chance to introduce them to people who had made a difference in my life. Dad was so glad that the school had helped me complete my education when he couldn't help.

My family doesn't mock my faith now. They listen when I share my beliefs with them. I pray that they will continue to grow in the knowledge of God, as I did while at Valley View University.

Your mission offerings help sustain and expand Valley View University, which has a reputation for excellence in education and faithfulness to God's principles. Thank you.

GLORIA OFOSU-AIKINS *lives in Ghana, West Africa*

Discipling *the* Nations



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 56:6–8; Matt. 11:20–24; John 12:20–32; Rom. 15:12; Acts 1:7, 8.*

Memory Text: “‘For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’ ” (*Isaiah 56:7, NKJV*).

Christ's message, from its inception, was destined for everyone everywhere. Early on, the gospel went worldwide, because it is universally applicable. Doubtless, this concept challenged the disciples' thinking. Their initial reaction, for instance, to Christ's conversing with the Samaritan woman illustrates this challenge. They thought that Jesus as the Messiah was merely the fulfillment of Jewish prophecies and hopes. Somehow they had missed or misinterpreted the prophets, especially Isaiah, whose message encompassed all peoples. Jesus, the Desire of all nations, was not to be limited to a single group. Salvation might be of the Jews, but it was for everyone. Christ's followers would transcend national boundaries, international conflicts, language differences, and other difficulties, because He had established the pattern of cross-cultural evangelism.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we especially see this call in Revelation 14:6—“Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*NKJV*).

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 8.

The Prophets Foretold

Ancient prophets foretold the conversion of non-Jewish people (Gentiles) to a scripturally based faith. Heathen deities, pagan worship, and destructive lifestyles would be toppled by uncompromising submission to, and faith in, Jehovah. Israel's enemies would stream into Jerusalem begging for admission, thirsting for spiritual knowledge. Israel's commission was to broadcast God's universal invitation to the surrounding nations.

Unfortunately, Israel's missionary passion was derailed by earthly concerns. The grand vision was buried beneath complacency. Christ's coming resurrected that vision, at least for some.

Read Isaiah 56:6–8; Micah 4:1, 2; Jonah 3:7–10; 4:1. What do these verses teach about universal outreach, and about how limited some in Israel were in understanding it?

Israel was to be the light of the nations. Seeing the wonderful advantages that the Israelites had, heathen nations would inquire about the Israelites' monotheistic faith, and thus many of them would be converted to the true God.

Unfortunately, that's not how things generally turned out, as Israel became so inwardly focused that it lost sight of its larger purpose and, often, the God who had offered it so much.

Modern Christians face a similar challenge. Will they sacrificially invest in furthering the gospel, or will they become inwardly focused, forgetting their larger purpose? It's an easier trap to fall into than we realize.

“In the name of the Lord let us lift up our voices in praise and thanksgiving for the results of work abroad.

“And still our General, who never makes a mistake, says to us: ‘Advance. Enter new territory. Lift up the standard in every land. ‘Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.’”

“Our watchword is to be: Onward, ever onward. The angels of God will go before us to prepare the way. Our burden for the ‘regions beyond’ can never be laid down until the whole earth shall be lightened with the glory of the Lord.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 28, 29.

Woe Unto Thee!

Read Matthew 11:20–24, Luke 4:25–30, 17:11–19, John 10:16. What crucial message comes from these texts? How can we take what is written here and apply it to ourselves, in our own time and context? What principle is revealed here that we have to be very careful about?

Christ wanted His own people, those who had so many advantages, to wake up to what their true calling and purpose was as a people. He wanted them to see that salvation, even for the chosen nation, was not something that a person is born into. It's not passed on in the genes or by a birthright. It was something that requires a conscious choice to accept, a choice that even those who weren't of Israel could, and did, make.

Athletic coaches sometimes challenge their athletes by comparing them with competing schools or organizations. "If you'd practice as faithfully, energetically, and intensely as they do, you'd enjoy success." The coach's obvious motivation is to inspire, to build up desire rather than diminish it.

In the same way, Jesus wanted His own people to share the fullness of salvation as some non-Jewish people were already doing. No doubt His words scandalized some because He preached something that they didn't want to hear, however much these truths should have already been known and understood by them.

Some people might indeed have many spiritual advantages that others don't have, but those who have these advantages must realize that, whatever they have been given, they are all gifts from God, to be used for His glory and not their own.

What about us? What about all the advantages that we, as a people, have been given by God? Why is it important, first, to recognize those advantages; then, second, humbly to realize the responsibilities that come with them?

“We Would See Jesus”

Read John 12:20–32. How is the universality of the gospel message revealed in these verses?

Jerusalem was buzzing with rumors. Christ’s triumphal entry had just occurred. Hosannas, though, were quickly replaced by questions. What was going to happen next? Would Jesus be crowned king?

Among the crowd assembling for Passover were Greek worshippers. Notice their words to Philip, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” In other words, they wanted to see Jesus. They wanted to be with Him. They wanted to learn from Him. What a testimony to the universal character of Christ and His message! How sad, too, that those who should have said the same thing were the very ones who wanted to be rid of Him.

The Greeks probably approached Philip because he carried a Greek name. Coming from Bethsaida, a commercial fishing center—hence, a cultural melting pot—he probably spoke their language too. The text suggests that Jesus was not immediately present. Perhaps He worshiped nearby in places reserved for Jews.

However, then joining His disciples and the Greek interviewers within the outer court, Jesus granted these men their wish. Notice what He said to them: “If any man,” meaning any man, woman, Jew, or Greek, wanted to follow Him, they could, but it would come at a cost.

What was that cost? How do we understand the meaning of this? See *John 12:25*.

Then, with these foreigners still present, heaven thundered a confirming message of judgment and conquest. That Voice was heard, Jesus said, not for Him but for them, Jew and Greek, that their faith could be strengthened. Christ’s words immediately affirmed that His death was to be for all the world.

Breaking Down Barriers

Read John 7:35, 8:48, Luke 10:27–37. In what way do these verses show why regional, ethnic, and other barriers should have no place among Christians as they seek to make disciples among all nations?

Some of the leaders' contempt for Jesus knew no bounds. Again, the terrible irony was that those who should have been in the forefront of receiving Him and His message were the very ones who fought against Him the hardest. Priests of Israel scorned the Son of God when those not of Israel accepted Him as the Messiah. What a powerful and sobering lesson is here for those who deem themselves (perhaps with some justification) spiritually advantaged!

When condemning Christ, they not only labeled Him as having a devil, they made it worse by calling Him a Samaritan, as well. They even mocked Him for His witness among the Greeks, showing obviously their contempt for those not of their own nation and faith. Israel's leaders found it unthinkable that Jesus would consider teaching Greeks. Jesus countered this by emphasizing character above ethnic origin.

How interesting, too, that He used the true story of a Samaritan in order to teach a powerful spiritual lesson about what it meant truly to fulfill God's law. Religious leaders, doubtless restrained by their twisted understanding of Levitical law and defilement, had earlier bypassed the wounded man. The despised foreigner, a Samaritan, had conscientiously defied ethnic prejudice, saving the stranger's life. What a stinging rebuke to all those who spurn and scorn someone in need only because the person is not of their own ethnic, social, or cultural background.

Think of the last time you perhaps did not help someone in need. What justifications did you use not to help? Looking back now, what should you have done differently?

The Great Commission

Read Romans 15:12; Acts 1:7, 8; John 11:52, 53; Matthew 28:19, 20.
What's the essential message here, and how does this message fit in so well with the three angels' messages of Revelation 14?

God's final work is incomplete until the eternal gospel expressed in the message of the three angels found in Revelation 14 has crossed every racial, ethnic, national, and geographical boundary. Without divulging the precise timing, Scripture unequivocally states that this gospel will reach around the world. God's triumph and its proclamation are assured.

The nations' acceptance of that message is prophesied. This must happen, but who will offer themselves as God's channels of grace? Who will join Christ in the overturning of the racial, ethnic, and language barriers that impede the gospel's progress? Who will empty their wallets and pocketbooks? Who will sacrifice earthly comforts and family associations in order to advance heaven's cause? These are the questions that we all must ask ourselves. What are we doing to reach out to others, whoever and wherever they are? How unfortunate that some believers allow racial stereotypes, cultural prejudices, and satanically designed social barriers to dissuade them from vigorous gospel proclamation when their fellow believers are scattered across the globe, willingly yielding their lives that the gospel might be preached.

"Our missionary success has been fully proportionate to our self-denying, self-sacrificing effort. God alone can estimate the work accomplished as the gospel message has been proclaimed in clear, straight lines. New fields have been entered, and aggressive work has been done. The seeds of truth have been sown, the light has flashed upon many minds, bringing enlarged views of God and a more correct estimate as to the character to be formed. Thousands have been brought to a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. They have been imbued with the faith that works by love and purifies the soul."
—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 28.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Great Commission,” pp. 25–34; “Pentecost,” pp. 35–46, in *The Acts of the Apostles*; “In the Outer Court,” pp. 621–626; “The Good Samaritan,” pp. 497–505, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“A certain Samaritan, in his journey, came where the sufferer was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him. He did not question whether the stranger was a Jew or a Gentile. . . .

“Thus the question, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ is forever answered. Christ has shown that our neighbor does not mean merely one of the church or faith to which we belong. It has no reference to race, color, or class distinction. Our neighbor is every person who needs our help. Our neighbor is every soul who is wounded and bruised by the adversary. Our neighbor is everyone who is the property of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 503.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What does our financial support of the church’s worldwide mission indicate about our real commitment to the gospel commission? Why must our involvement reach beyond mere financial support? In what ways can funds presently allocated to church preservation be channeled into cross-cultural evangelism?
- 2 “We are not to feel that the work of the gospel depends principally upon the minister. To every man God has given a work to do in connection with His kingdom. Everyone who professes the name of Christ is to be an earnest, disinterested worker, ready to defend the principles of righteousness. Every soul should take an active part in advancing the cause of God. Whatever our calling, as Christians we have a work to do in making Christ known to the world. We are to be missionaries, having for our chief aim the winning of souls to Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 427. In class, dwell on the meaning of what is written here and, as a class, ask what more you could do to help finish the work that we have been called to do.
- 3 Dwell more on what Jesus said in John 12:25. What does it mean to “hate” our life “in this world”? In what ways are we to express this “hatred”?

A Louder Voice

The Central Sofia Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bulgaria had a vision to record Sabbath School lessons and sermons to upload on the Internet for anyone to watch. They had purchased the camera and other basic equipment to operate the studio, but they needed a few more pieces of equipment. Where would they get the money to buy the needed equipment? They prayed and they searched, but they hadn't been able to complete the studio.

Then one Sabbath after vespers, a Bulgarian couple from abroad found Lena and told her, "We've heard about your recording studio, and we want to help you. What do you need?"

Lena's breath caught in her throat. *This is it!* she thought. *God is doing what He has promised.* "We need an air conditioner to protect the equipment from the heat," she said.

"Make a list of what you need," the man said. Lena and the pastor gave the man a list of equipment needed to complete the studio. The cost was about \$15,000 in U.S. dollars. As they gave the list to the couple, the pastor said, "Choose what you'd like to help us with. Only the air conditioner is urgent."

The man and his wife agreed to buy all the equipment, and soon the Internet station was up and running.

Word of the Adventist Internet site spread quickly, and people began watching.

An old woman called the church to say that her church in a small Bulgarian village had only a handful of aging Adventists with no pastor. They felt they had no option but to close the church. Then the woman's son brought a computer and set it up in the church so the members could join the believers in Sofia via the live video feed through the Internet. "Not only did the church not close," the woman said, "but ten new people are coming to church to watch the video worships."

A man reported that he is a sailor aboard a ship. He isn't an Adventist, but he was searching for an inspirational Web site on the ship's computer. The only Web site he could pick up was the Sofia church's. None of the 30 crew members are Adventist, but they like the programming and watch regularly. "Now when we're in port, I visit an Adventist church and several other sailors come with me," he said.

In the three years that the Web site has been operating, the church has seen ample evidence of how God can use such resources to reach searching souls for Jesus. Our mission offerings help implement creative ministry around the world.

LENA DYUKMEDZIEVA manages the Internet studio at the Adventist church in Sofia, Bulgaria. See it at www.bg.

Discipling Spiritual Leaders



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 6:12–16, John 16:7–14, Luke 6:20–49, Jer. 50:31, Isa. 57:15, Acts 1.*

Memory Text: “Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles” (*Luke 6:12, 13, NKJV*).

While Jesus was ever active in making disciples, He recognized that His earthly sojourn was short. Therefore He invested Himself in the training of disciples to continue the work after He left. He was both their Master Teacher and their Master Trainer. While teaching and training are obviously related, *teaching* usually connotes the impartation of knowledge, whereas *training* suggests formation or qualification through practice and discipline.

The disciples' preparation for leadership certainly involved the receiving of knowledge, but spiritual growth was uppermost. They needed an experience in the things of God, of faith, of hardship, of sanctification, and of self-sacrifice, along with an intellectual understanding of doctrine and theology. Knowledge alone was insufficient preparation for the rigorous challenges ahead. Jesus gave them both.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 15.

Leadership Starts Here

Christ's earthly sojourn was relatively brief. Therefore, the training of disciple-makers was imperative. Whom should He select? How many should He choose? Jesus' disciples doubtless numbered in the hundreds. Should everyone undergo mass education? Christ understood that leadership was cultivated effectively within small groups, not mass-produced through lectureships. Limited numbers would be chosen for Christ's initial graduating class.

Study Luke 6:12–16. What did Jesus do before He chose His disciples, and why was this so important?

Choosing effectively required advanced wisdom. Jesus approached His heavenly Father through prayer to acquire this wisdom. Likewise, prayer should precede the selection of leadership candidates in twenty-first-century disciple-making. Since Christ apparently believed that He needed extensive prayer in order to obtain the wisdom required, how much more should today's Christians petition for divine wisdom when choosing those charged with overseeing the progress of the Great Commission?

Having chosen twelve, Jesus designated them apostles—His commissioned representatives invested with spiritual authority. The larger group of disciples witnessed this ordaining or commissioning with no apparent jealousy or negative feelings. Later, Jesus would commission a larger group of seventy-two and, perhaps, others not recorded within Scripture. The twelve apostles, however, retained the identity of those most closely associated with Jesus; they shouldered the largest responsibilities and, therefore, required the most extensive training and commitment. This arrangement clearly implies intentional organizational structure among the earliest Christians. Christ spiritually invested the leaders within that organization with capabilities and education commensurate to their assigned tasks.

Think through the implications of how much time Jesus spent in prayer. What should this tell us about our own prayer lives? What does prayer do for you?

Knowledge and Experience: Part 1

Information was an irreplaceable component of Jesus' message. Information alone cannot transform, but every transformation includes information. Certainly, concepts possess no inherent power for initiating change; God's Spirit, however, working through human hearts, constitutes the irreplaceable element necessary for conversion.

Read John 16:7–14. What is Jesus saying here that helps us to understand how limited intellectual knowledge is, in and of itself, in the understanding and experiencing of true Christianity?

Biblical knowledge coupled together with God's Divine Spirit form the spiritual combination that transforms individuals and societies. The disciple-maker must strive for both of these in faith and study.

Christianity highly regards intelligence, thinking, and imagination. The existence of reasoned thought throughout Scripture, the tremendous respect afforded teachers within Judaism, and the priceless attention that scribes devoted to preserving ancient writings all testify to the importance of knowledge.

Christianity is not an irrational faith. Nevertheless, certain elements within Christianity have elevated emotion, feeling, and experience above knowledge. This mind-set declares that what people believe is relatively unimportant because experience alone is meaningful. Obedience and adherence to specific truths are deemed relatively unimportant; emotion and religious excitement become the measuring stick for spiritual genuineness.

Scripture's very existence counters this mindless fascination with experience. Experience without knowledge becomes a supercharged missile without direction. Conversely, knowledge without experience becomes lifeless and oftentimes legalistic. True Christian leaders understood the need to cultivate both of these elements, not only in themselves but in those they disciple.

Think through all the good reasons that you have for your faith. At the same time, what role has experience played? Why do we need both?

Knowledge and Experience: Part 2

Read Luke 6:20–49. In what ways are both knowledge and experience revealed in these texts? That is, how are they blended here in a way that shows why both are needed, not only in our own walk with the Lord but in disciple-making as well?

Spiritual knowledge is indispensable for spiritual transformation. Christ Himself was regarded as the Master Teacher. In open classrooms bordered by seashores, mountains, and God’s created wonders, Christ disseminated transformative knowledge. The Holy Spirit awakened previously seared consciences to accept these truths. Disciple-making is incomplete without experience, but experience must be directed by knowledge.

Twenty-first-century disciple-makers must thoroughly acquaint themselves with Scripture, the source of authentic spiritual information. Likewise, they should disseminate doctrine and teachings without regard to popularity or convenience. God expects seasoned believers to withhold nothing, patiently guiding infant converts into an ever-expanding understanding and appreciation for the wonderful, life-changing truths of Christianity—especially the present truth of the three angels’ messages.

In the context of making disciples, what does Jesus say in Luke 6:39 that everyone who seeks to make disciples must keep in mind? How can we be sure that we are not like that which Jesus is warning about here?

In the end, a combination of knowledge and experience that produces unselfish love will be the most potent force for any disciple-maker to possess.

The Early Leaders

It is of no small interest and importance that in choosing leaders, Jesus picked from among the humbler, less-educated class of people. Christ did not choose the learning or eloquence of the Sanhedrin. Passing by the self-righteous teachers, the Master Worker chose humble, unlearned men to proclaim the truths that were to move the world. These men He purposed to train and educate as the leaders of His church. They in turn were to educate others and send them out with the gospel message. “That they might have success in their work they were to be given the power of the Holy Spirit. Not by human might or human wisdom was the gospel to be proclaimed, but by the power of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 17.

What do the following texts tell us about why Christ chose the ones He did to lead His church, as opposed to those whom many might deem as having the qualities needed for leadership? *Zeph. 2:3, Matt. 11:29, Jer. 50:31, Isa. 57:15.*

We must be careful, though, to not make wrong assumptions about why Jesus chose the ones that He did. Jesus was not against the educated or learned class; He Himself displayed, at a young age (*Luke 2:46, 47*), a great deal of knowledge. It’s just that so often those with the most education, wealth, or power aren’t ready to humble themselves in the way that people, especially leaders, need to in order for the Lord to be able to use them. This is not always the case, of course; the Lord did use such men (think of Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea; see also *Acts 6:7*). It just means that so often these types tend not to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19 and Philippians 2:3. What traits are expressed here, and why are these traits so crucial, not just for a leader but for anyone who professes the name of Christ? How can we learn to possess these traits in our own lives?

What Jesus Left

Future generations testify regarding the success of previous efforts. Whenever those efforts generate lasting results, the principles underlying those accomplishments should be studied and replicated. Did Christ's disciple-making methodology produce significant outcomes?

Of course it did. It changed the world. None of us, in fact, would be reading this Bible study guide more than two thousand years later, were it not for Christ's success in His training of the early church leaders.

Read Acts 1. What does this first chapter in the formation of the early church show us about the need for God-ordained leaders? What were they looking for in a leader? (See vs. 22.) What can we take away from this need for ourselves as we seek the right leaders?

Jesus established His kingdom and exemplified the principles that would perpetuate its growth. Pioneering the pathway through darkness to sunrise, Christ selected leaders whose weaknesses were overshadowed by His strength because they completely depended upon Him. Although lightly esteemed by the religious leaders and academically deficient, they outshined the Pharisees where it counted: transparency, humility, dependence, and authenticity. How crucial that all of us, whatever our positions in the church, display such characteristics. Over time, those who possessed a substantial formal education and an elevated social standing became part of the church.

“As Christ's representatives the apostles were to make a decided impression on the world. The fact that they were humble men would not diminish their influence, but increase it; for the minds of their hearers would be carried from them to the Saviour, who, though unseen, was still working with them. The wonderful teaching of the apostles, their words of courage and trust, would assure all that it was not in their own power that they worked, but in the power of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 22, 23.

What do you look for in church leaders? Why? What are the top three things that you want to see in them? Bring your answers to class on Sabbath and compare answers.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The First Evangelists,” pp. 349–358; “The Last Journey From Galilee,” pp. 488–496; and “The Sermon on the Mount,” pp. 298–314, in *The Desire of Ages*. “The Training of the Twelve,” pp. 17–24; “The Great Commission,” pp. 25–34; and “The Seven Deacons,” pp. 87–96, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“All over the field of Christ’s labor there were souls awakened to their need, and hungering and thirsting for truth. The time had come to send the tidings of His love to these longing hearts. To all these the disciples were to go as His representatives. The believers would be led to look upon them as divinely appointed teachers, and when the Saviour should thus be taken from them they would not be left without instructors.

“On this first tour the disciples were to go only where Jesus had been before them, and had made friends. Their preparation for the journey was to be of the simplest kind. Nothing must be allowed to divert their minds from their great work, or in any way excite opposition and close the door for further labor.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 351.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, discuss your answer to Thursday’s final question. What can you learn from each other’s answers?
- 2 Read Acts 6:1–6. Why does the incident here reveal one of the reasons as to why the church needs good leaders?
- 3 Dwell more on this idea of a balance between experience and knowledge in the Christian life. Is it possible that different people will need different balances; that is, some people will put more of an emphasis on experience than they do on knowledge, while others will focus more on knowledge than they do experience? If so, how can we learn to be sensitive to these differences in our efforts to make disciples? How can we learn that perhaps what we need isn’t exactly what others will need? Also, look at this text: “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom” (*1 Cor. 1:22*). How does this text reveal the differences between knowledge and experience?

Mission Possible

Sister Xiang was riding on the train when a woman had a health emergency. Another woman hurried to help the sick woman, praying over her and crying, “You should believe in God.” The woman’s words remained with Sister Xiang, even after she left the train.

She searched for a Christian church and found a house church. There she met Jesus and found a peace and a joy she’d never known. But the house church was far from her home, so she organized a house church closer to home and invited people to worship there. She became passionate about sharing God’s love with others.

Then she met some Seventh-day Adventists who showed her from the Bible that the Sabbath was not Sunday, but Saturday. She read the Bible texts again and again until she was convinced that the Sabbath was indeed God’s holy day.

Sister Xiang eagerly told her fellow believers and friends what she had discovered. One by one, they joined her in worshiping on Sabbath. Sister Xiang begged the Adventist church in the nearby city to send them a teacher. The church sent a layman to study with them. They had few Bibles and no hymnals, so they copied Bible texts and songs to use.

The small group of believers quickly grew to more than the house could hold. They divided and continued to grow. In three years, they established five churches and several house churches, all led by Sister Xiang.

The government ordered Sister Xiang to stop the religious meetings. Day after day, Sister Xiang and another believer went to the government office of religion and prayed silently for permission to worship together. Finally, the governor allowed the Adventists to build a church.

The believers in the area swarmed to help build the church, which was completed in three months. Several daughter house churches continued to meet. Within two years, the believers had built five more churches with congregations from 50 to 500 people.

Sister Xiang attended lay training classes held in the mother church in the area. Today, with nine churches, nine house churches, and 800 members, she says that the greatest need continues to be for trained lay leaders and lay evangelists to help reach the people in neighboring communities and introduce them to Jesus. “It’s how we grow,” she says. “They are hungry, but they don’t know that Jesus can fill their every need. We must tell them.”

Please pray for the believers in China and around the world; and continue giving your mission offerings that make mission outreach possible.

XIANG shares God’s love with people in northern China.

The Harvest *and the* Harvesters



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 1:40–46, 4:28–30, Luke 24:47–53, Acts 1:6–8, Matt. 9:36–38, Luke 15.*

Memory Text: “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (*John 15:8*).

In many respects this week's study is a continuation of the previous lesson. Christ established spiritual leaders for the distinct purpose of proclaiming the kingdom of God. The principles and methodology that Jesus employed must remain the spiritual foundation for the Christian's preparation today.

In other words, modern leadership development theories must never supplant the foundation that Christ Himself laid. Whenever hype and publicity take precedence over spiritual growth, the results are shallowness and spiritual sterility. Whenever proselytizing displaces repentance, conversion, and spiritual transformation, the mission falters. Training leaders to conduct membership drives, media blitzes, and public relations campaigns instead of preparing them for spiritual warfare is courting disaster. True evangelism and disciple-making are centered around (1) the acknowledgment of our sinfulness, (2) genuine heartfelt contrition, (3) our unreserved spiritual surrender, and (4) the irrepresible compulsion to disseminate God's divine message to others.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 22.

Beggars' Bread

Nearing His earthly departure, Christ's concern focused upon His disciples, whom He had selflessly served and deeply loved. They would not be abandoned. Although Jesus Himself had to return to heaven, the Holy Spirit was commissioned to supply the spiritual intimacy that the disciples had enjoyed in His presence. Christ's instruction regarding the Spirit's work was so valuable that John devotes several chapters to its preservation. One defining element was the Spirit's testimony concerning Christ, even though the Spirit would not testify unaided. Accompanied by the Spirit, Christ's disciples would likewise testify concerning Jesus' ministry. God could have commissioned angels, unassisted by human beings, to broadcast the gospel. Instead, He elected to appoint sinful, erring, unpredictable humans for this sacred calling.

Read John 1:40–46; 4:28–30; 15:26, 27; 19:35, 36. What do these texts teach us about the ways in which the human and divine work together in the winning of souls?

Evangelism has been defined as “beggars telling other beggars where to find bread.” Andrew certainly excelled here. The writings of his brother Peter were to be included in Scripture one day, Peter's ministry was chronicled in Acts, and Christ included Peter among His three closest associates. Those honors never attended Andrew. Nevertheless, he received special recognition for following Christ's simple instruction to lead people to Jesus.

How many of God's chosen vessels—prolific leaders in evangelism, administration, and leadership—have been introduced to Christ by faithful disciples whose identities, humanly speaking, have long been forgotten? Although these people were not prominent themselves, think how crippled God's work might have been had they not faithfully witnessed about Jesus. Christ prepared His disciples for greater tasks by first offering simple assignments well within their reach. The Samaritan woman, Philip, and Andrew demonstrate the power of simple testimonies and heartfelt invitations. We all are called to do likewise.

When Jesus Urged Patience

Read Luke 24:47–53, Acts 1:6–8, 16:6–10. Why was waiting for the Spirit necessary? What was the Spirit’s role in the evangelistic outreach of the primitive church? What encouragement might modern believers draw from Paul’s experience when facing frustration? What lessons regarding patience and waiting for God’s timing are suggested within these passages?

Through discourse and example, Jesus taught His disciples patience. Facing bigotry, ignorance, misunderstanding, and outright conspiracy, Christ nonetheless patiently persevered. Such perseverance was anchored by Christ’s complete dependence upon God’s divine Spirit. Jesus understood that unless these disciples should likewise experience this dependence, the kingdom’s advancement was seriously jeopardized. Conversely, should they learn this lesson at the outset, their future ministry would be destined for heavenly attainments. Therefore, His departing command was “Wait.”

Christ desires that modern believers master that lesson also. Well-intentioned but self-confident Christians, when unwilling to patiently await the Spirit’s guidance, can embarrass themselves and God’s kingdom.

The apostle Paul drafted ambitious plans for entering Bithynia; but even headstrong Paul was sensitive to God’s leading and accepted rather than resisted the Spirit’s interference. The apostle willingly received the Spirit’s directive that sent him to Macedonia instead. Numerous miracles attended his efforts there. Had Paul rushed headlong with his designs, the European mission might have stalled indefinitely.

How can our anxious spirits be calmed to wait patiently for the Spirit’s leading? What practical things should modern believers do in their attempts to cultivate such patience? What does patient, prayerful trust indicate regarding our relationship with God?

Exercising Authority

Compare the following passages: *Mark 6:7–13, Matt. 16:14–19, 18:17–20, 28:18–20, John 20:21–23*. **What do these verses tell us about the kind of authority that Jesus’ disciples had? What does this mean for us today?**

“Peter had expressed the truth which is the foundation of the church’s faith, and Jesus now honored him as the representative of the whole body of believers. He said, ‘I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’

“ ‘The keys of the kingdom of heaven’ are the words of Christ. All the words of Holy Scripture are His, and are here included. These words have power to open and to shut heaven. They declare the conditions upon which men are received or rejected. Thus the work of those who preach God’s word is a savor of life unto life or of death unto death. Theirs is a mission weighted with eternal results.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 413, 414.

As the Father commissioned Jesus, so Christ commissions His disciples. Through the Spirit, the Father invested Christ with divine power. Through the Spirit, Jesus likewise invests His disciples with divine power commensurate with their earthly assignments. No follower should fear that Christ has shortchanged them. Every necessary skill, talent, capability, and strength has been supplied.

Sometimes human leadership fails to recognize the principles involved. Whenever leaders assign tasks without extending commensurate power, failure is predictable. Often leaders’ insecurities surface through controlling behaviors that subjugate the thoughts, God-ordained creativity, and individuality of others. Thus emasculated, the subjugated disciple fails to be effective. Such behavior would look like a conductor attempting to play every instrument simultaneously instead of conducting a symphony.

Jesus’ example speaks volumes here. If anyone ever possessed the right to withhold authority and dictate behavior, Christ certainly did. Instead, He invested others with authority, commissioned them to labor outside of His presence where His only influence would be His instruction and examples and sent them to minister and witness.

Laborers for the Harvest

“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:36–38). What important message can we take from these verses for ourselves, today, and for the task ahead of us?

The spiritual harvest overflowed, but harvesters were scarce. The heart soil had been prepared, the spiritual seed had been planted; germination, plentiful moisture, and abundant sunshine spurred unbelievable growth. Ripened souls awaited harvesting, but where were the harvesters? Utilizing simple, easily understood word-pictures, Jesus sought to inspire contagious zeal.

Sometimes Christians covet their fellowship with other believers and cluster together, blindly bypassing worldly seekers who are ripened for harvest. Perhaps not realizing their divine accountability for perishing souls, they busy themselves with church engagements, civic responsibilities, building maintenance, and other worthwhile projects dedicated to preserving the status quo. These are doubtless good things. Well-intentioned members sometimes question the value of evangelism or express this sentiment: “Pastor, this evangelism stuff is all right, but don’t we need programs for people who are already in church?”

This is a fair enough question, though one must also ask, “When did Jesus ever lament the shortage of grain preservers?” Instead, “more harvesters” was His prayerful plea.

How can we find the right balance between ministering to the needs of those in the church and at the same time not neglecting outreach?

Lost and Found

Through teaching and personal example, Jesus taught His disciples to associate with sinners, even notorious ones such as prostitutes and tax collectors. How else would they disciple the whole world? His teaching often focused on these sinners. His characterization of them as “lost” demonstrates how merciful Christ was. He might have characterized them as “rebellious” (they certainly were) or “depraved.” Instead, He chose “lost.”

Lost doesn’t carry the same negative connotations that are contained in those other words. Rather than castigating fallen souls, we should follow Christ’s example. *Lost* is a generous description, because the responsibility is placed upon the finders. Disparaging remarks drive lost people away. Neutral language conveys acceptance and the possibility for relationship. We therefore must be careful not only about the language we speak, but even about the words we think, because our thoughts will greatly impact our attitudes toward others.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus encourages believers to become finders. He wants us to love and to reach out to the lost, regardless of the kind of people they are or the kind of lives they live.

“This is the service that God has chosen—‘to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke, . . . and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh.’ Isa. 58:6, 7. When you see yourselves as sinners saved only by the love of your heavenly Father, you will have tender pity for others who are suffering in sin. You will no longer meet misery and repentance with jealousy and censure. When the ice of selfishness is melted from your hearts, you will be in sympathy with God, and will share His joy in the saving of the lost.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 210, 211.

Study Luke 15. What essential message comes through in all these parables? What should this message say to us about the way in which God views the lost and what our responsibility to them is?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Last Journey From Galilee,” pp. 488–496; “Who Is the Greatest?” pp. 436–440, in *The Desire of Ages*; “The Training of the Twelve,” pp. 17–24; “The Great Commission,” pp. 25–34; “Pentecost,” pp. 35–46; “The Gift of the Spirit,” pp. 47–56, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“The disciples felt their spiritual need and cried to the Lord for the holy unction that was to fit them for the work of soul saving. They did not ask for a blessing for themselves merely. They were weighted with the burden of the salvation of souls. They realized that the gospel was to be carried to the world, and they claimed the power that Christ had promised.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 37.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What principles from Christ’s training methodology should modern teachers of disciple-making utilize? Imagine what such training would look like in your church.
- 2 In Thursday’s study, we looked at the question of language and the way in which language is used. Think through the kind of words that we, as Seventh-day Adventists, often use. Though we might view the words in a certain way, think about how others who are not familiar with our terms might understand those words. In what ways might we need to be more careful about our choice of words, especially with those whom we are seeking to reach?
- 3 Dwell more on the image we saw earlier about “beggars telling other beggars” where to get bread. How does this so accurately depict that which witnessing and outreach are all about? Why is it important that we do not forget that image and what it means?
- 4 What about your local church? Is it more focused on itself and its own needs or on outreach? How can a focus on outreach help the church? Or, to express it another way, if your church were more focused on witnessing and outreach, might it be less concerned about its own needs? How might outreach itself solve those needs?

Don't Be Ashamed

"If you insist on joining another church, you will no longer live with me," my auntie told me firmly.

After my parents died, my brother and I lived with our aunt. She had sent us to a Seventh-day Adventist school so we'd have a Christian education. But she didn't expect me to become an Adventist. I tried to explain that I was following God's command. But she said, "Not as long as you live in my house!"

When I told the Bible teacher what my aunt had said, he responded, "Following Jesus must be your own decision." I asked if I could be baptized in secret so my aunt wouldn't know, but he gently said, "Baptism declares to the whole world your decision to follow Jesus. A secret baptism means that you are ashamed of your faith."

He was right. I realized that I didn't have to fear. That night I told my aunt that I planned to be baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

My baptism was a joyful service. But when I returned home after church, my aunt asked, "Were you baptized today?" I told her Yes, hoping her heart had softened. "Then why did you come back here?" she asked.

On Monday I asked the school principal what to do. Exams were coming up, and I needed to focus on doing well. The principal arranged for me to stay in the dormitory at school so I could finish my year and take the exams. But when school was over, I again had no place to live.

I stayed with some friends for a few days while I looked for a solution. The pastor suggested that we talk to my aunt. But when the pastor tried to talk to her, she wouldn't listen. She blamed him for my situation. "Get out of my house! Both of you!" she shouted.

The pastor and his wife invited me to live with them. What a blessing! They have shown me so much about God's love. I'm so glad I decided to follow Jesus and be baptized. While it was difficult, it has been worth it. I pray that Jesus will touch the lives of my aunt and my brother and that they can find the same happiness I have found.

I'm grateful for the Adventist school where I learned to love and obey Jesus. Your mission offerings make a difference every day in thousands of lives. Thank you!



CHRISTINE MUKAHIRWA *lives in Rwanda.*

The Cost of Discipleship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 12:49–53; Deut. 21:15; 1 Cor. 9:24–27; Matt. 18:8, 9; John 14:1–3; Heb. 11:32–12:4.*

Memory Text: “Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort” (*2 Corinthians 1:7, ESV*).

Throughout history, nameless millions willingly sacrificed their lives for Christ. They were imprisoned, tortured, even executed. Millions have foregone employment, suffered ridicule, endured expulsion from family, and persevered through religious persecution rather than forsake Christ. Only God knows the full extent of the suffering that His faithful ones have endured.

Of course, Paul forewarned, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (*2 Tim. 3:12, ESV*). And Peter said, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (*1 Pet. 2:21, ESV*).

Despite the promises of the so-called “prosperity” preachers, luxurious automobiles and financial gain are not automatic embellishments afforded to believers.

In the end, we can be sure that whatever the cost of discipleship is, considering the ultimate reward, that cost is cheap enough.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 29.

Calculating Cost: First Priority

Study Luke 12:49–53; 14:25, 26; Matthew 10:37. In what way are we to understand these strong words? What is Jesus telling us here?

Modern television newscasters would have concocted a prominent scandal from these words: “Today, celebrated religious leader Jesus of Nazareth advocated familial hatred during His afternoon address. Analysts are comparing these current pronouncements with previously released statements that promoted loving relationships with neighbors and enemies. Informed commentators wonder if this indicates recent policy shifts. Other unconfirmed quotations suggest selling everything and turning the proceeds over to the Jesus movement. Stay tuned for further developments.”

A closer study of the Bible and the way in which the word *hate* is used helps to clarify what Jesus meant. Deuteronomy 21:15 contains Mosaic legislation regarding men with multiple wives. The King James Version, following the natural sense, translates thus: “one beloved and another hated,” concerning those wives. Moses’ point is that if the husband favors one wife above others, he cannot deprive those less favored. The New Revised Standard Version and Modern Language Bible change the terminology rendering *beloved* with *loved* and *hated* with *disliked*. The Tanakh (Jewish Bible) and the New American Standard Bible (Protestant) settle on *loved* and *unloved*. Clearly, the intended understanding was relative affection. *Hatred* in this context may indicate “loving less.” Matthew 10:37, the parallel passage, certainly lends credibility to this suggestion.

Jesus’ point is simple yet full of deep implications. Whenever family receives precedence and Christ becomes secondary, Jesus relinquishes lordship. Serving multiple masters is impossible. Christ certainly supported strong family connections. Such connections, however, receive strength from unshakable foundations. That foundation means loving God unreservedly, first and foremost. God disallows every barrier, interruption, or distraction. Discipleship exacts the supreme price: undivided loyalty to Christ.

How do we, on a daily, practical level, put Christ before everyone, including family? What does it mean to do just that, and what could be some of the consequences?

Bearing Our Cross

“And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (*Luke 14:27*).

Discipleship means accepting Christ as Savior and Lord. Following Jesus means that you are ready to undergo the same suffering that Christ did. Thus, we must be honest in the way in which we present our message. Certainly the glorious truths of righteousness by faith, Christ’s forgiveness, Jesus’ imminent return, heaven’s incomparable wonders, and God’s unmerited grace should be taught.

But should believers desire to proclaim God’s complete message, they cannot overlook cross-bearing. Sadly, some believers erroneously think that preaching any message whereby human beings are called into action is legalistic. “Divine grace has accomplished all,” they proudly exclaim, “and the human race does nothing except receive it.” Jesus, however, disagrees.

Read Matthew 16:21–25; Luke 21:12–19; John 15:17–20; 16:1, 2. **What should we take away from these texts about the cost of following Jesus?**

Before baptism, every candidate should understand that Christ Himself has assigned him or her a cross, without which they absolutely cannot become His disciple. Does this dampen the joy of conversion? Would unrealistically promising them carefree lives somehow increase this joy? Conversion releases believers from the burdens of sin, not from the responsibilities of discipleship. By taking the name of Christ and by publicly revealing that choice through baptism, every believer must be aware that discipleship comes with a cost. What, though, does this world offer that makes what Christ offers not worth it? Nothing.

When was the last time that you took up your cross? What was the experience like? What did you learn from it that could help someone else struggling with a similar challenge?

Disciplined Response

Analyze the following passages: *Luke 14:31–33, 1 Cor. 9:24–27, Heb. 12:1–4, 2 Pet. 1:5–11*. What are these texts telling us about the life of a disciple? How have you experienced the reality of what the Bible tells us here?

The cost of discipleship involves discipline. Every impulse, every imagination, every ambition, and every desire *must* be submitted to Christ. Every possession, physical or invisible, every talent and ability, and everything of value must be under Christ's command. What we don't surrender to Him can, and inevitably will, become an idol, with the potential to lead us astray.

Christ indeed offers us the power to overcome our character defects. Every appetite, emotion, and intellectual inclination can be under the guidance of His Spirit.

Notice the athletic example that Paul used in some of the texts for today. No athlete conspires to run slower, jump lower, or throw shorter. No believer should look backward either, especially when that which is at stake in the "race" is something that's eternal, as opposed to whatever prize an earthly runner might win as a result of all his or her diligent effort and training.

"The runners put aside every indulgence that would tend to weaken the physical powers, and by severe and continuous discipline trained their muscles to strength and endurance, that when the day of the contest should arrive, they might put the heaviest tax upon their powers. How much more important that the Christian, whose eternal interests are at stake, bring appetite and passion under subjection to reason and the will of God! Never must he allow his attention to be diverted by amusements, luxuries, or ease. All his habits and passions must be brought under the strictest discipline. Reason, enlightened by the teachings of God's word and guided by His Spirit, must hold the reins of control."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 311.

Comparing Costs

Corporations explore the viability of proposed projects through cost-benefit analysis. Do specific proposals contain the ingredients necessary for bringing successful returns on investments? Does the benefit outweigh the outlay? Another frequently used measurement is durability. Does the proposal offer sustainable returns?

The rewards of discipleship may likewise be measured through comparison with the costs. Those costs may include emotional suffering, social rejection, physical torture, financial deprivation, imprisonment, and death itself. Everyone who undertakes discipleship should first consider carefully the investments involved.

What do the following texts tell us about some of the costs of discipleship? *Matt. 18:8, 9; Luke 6:35; Phil. 2:3.*

What do the following texts say about the benefits? *Luke 18:28–30, John 14:1–3, Rev. 22:1–5.*

There is no question that the cost of following Jesus can be high, perhaps the costliest thing that anyone can do. Indeed, we should question the reality of our faith and our commitment if following Christ hasn't cost a lot, maybe even everything.

But one thing is sure: whatever we gain in this life, whatever we accomplish, whatever we make for ourselves, it is only temporary. It is something that will not last. It will vanish and vanish forever.

In contrast, what we gain through Jesus—eternal life in a new heaven and new earth—is by far worth more than anything and everything that this world could ever offer us.

Think through all the pleasures, all the joys and good things of this world here and now. What are they in comparison to eternity with Christ? How can we learn always to keep this contrast before us? Why is it important that we do so?

A Better Resurrection

Read Hebrews 11:32–12:4. What do these verses say to you, personally, about the cost and the reward of discipleship?

What a powerful concept this passage reveals, especially in the verse that says: “Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection” (*Heb. 11:35, NKJV*).

In a sense, being both a disciple and disciple-maker can be boiled down to one thing: “a better resurrection.” We follow Christ because we have the promise, the hope, of redemption, of a new life in a new world, one without sin, suffering, and death. At the same time, because we have been given this hope, this promise—made certain by the life, death, resurrection, and high-priestly ministry of Jesus—we seek to point others to the same hope, the same promise. In the end, before the great controversy is over, we will either face the first or the second resurrection. We know, for sure, which is the better one. What else matters other than not only being in that resurrection ourselves, but doing whatever we can to lead others to it, as well?

The harvest has ripened; millions await the call to discipleship. We have been blessed not only with the gospel but the gospel in the context of the “present truth”—the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14, God’s last warning message to the world.

What are we going to do with these truths that we love so much? Thus, we ask, Where are the reapers? Where are those willing to come alongside Christ and share the risks? Will you accept God’s invitation not to only be a disciple but to make disciples, regardless of the cost to yourself?

Think through the implications of the first resurrection and of the second resurrection. In light of these options, what else matters other than being in the better one and helping others to get there too?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “In the Regions Beyond,” pp. 219, 220; “Berea and Athens,” pp. 241, 242, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Fire comes down from God out of heaven. The earth is broken up. The weapons concealed in its depths are drawn forth. Devouring flames burst from every yawning chasm. The very rocks are on fire. The day has come that shall burn as an oven. The elements melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein are burned up. Malachi 4:1; 2 Peter 3:10. The earth’s surface seems one molten mass—a vast, seething lake of fire. It is the time of the judgment and perdition of ungodly men—‘the day of the Lord’s vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion.’ Isaiah 34:8.

“The wicked receive their recompense in the earth. Proverbs 11:31. They ‘shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts.’ Malachi 4:1. Some are destroyed as in a moment, while others suffer many days. All are punished ‘according to their deeds.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 672, 673.

Discussion Question:

❶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose Christian faith led to his death, wrote a famous book called *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Collier Books, 1963). Below are some quotes from the book. How do these fit in with what we have studied this week?

“The old life is left behind, and completely surrendered. The disciple is dragged out of his relative security into a life of absolute insecurity (that is, in truth, into the absolute security and safety of the fellowship of Jesus).”—Pages 62, 63.

“If we would follow Jesus we must take certain definite steps. The first step, which follows the call, cuts the disciple off from his previous existence.”—Pages 66, 67.

“The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. . . . When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”—Page 99.

The Carpenter's Tools: An Allegory

Some tools lived together in a carpenter's shop. They were having some problems getting along, and some complained that others were not doing their share of work. They met to discuss their issues.

The Hammer spoke first, for he served as the chairman. "Brother Drill," he began, "you and your family are so noisy. And you seem to spin in circles, but go nowhere."

The Drill quickly spoke up. "It's true that I go around in circles, and my work makes noise. But at least I'm sharp. Pencil is small and often so dull that he makes a bad impression. He needs to be sharpened a bit if he expects to be of any use around here."

Pencil felt defensive and spoke up. "Yes," he began, "I am a little blunt at times, but it's because I work hard at my job. At least I'm not rough like Sandpaper here. It seems all he does is rub things the wrong way!"

That remark made Sandpaper really angry. "Hey, what about Ruler here? He measures others by his standards, as though he is the only one right around here."

Ruler surveyed the group and said, "I'll go if I have to, but then so must the Screwdriver. He's so annoying, always tightening here and loosening there."

Screwdriver angrily spat out, "Fine with me! I'll go, but Plane must go, too. His work is superficial; there's no depth to it!" he said.

To this, Plane leveled his terse reply, "Saw's cuts hurt. She divides instead of unifies."

Saw rose up to answer these accusations when suddenly a noise at the door stopped all conversation.

The Carpenter walked in, ready to begin the day's work. He put on His tool belt and stepped to the workbench. He picked up the pencil and ruler. Carefully he measured and marked the wood before him. He sawed along the marks and then planed the cut edges of the wood to smooth the rough edges. He hammered joints into place and drilled holes for screws to make the piece sturdy. Then he sandpapered the wood to a silky smoothness. All day long He worked, using first one tool and then another.

At the end of the day, He gave a hearty blow and blew the dust from the finished product. And then He said, "Beautiful! I couldn't have done it without my tools. Each one had an important role to play. No one tool could have done all the jobs. They're all important."

When we work together, going, praying, and giving, we are the Master's tools to finish His work.

Love rests on freedom, and freedom rests on law. Hence, the core of God's government—the foundation of that government, a government of love—has to be His law. The attack on the law is an attack not just on Christ's character but on the moral order of the creation itself.

The topic for the second quarter 2014 is *Christ and His Law*, written by Keith Burton. We will study the law, especially the question of why so many Christians have fallen into the trap of denying the continued validity of the Ten Commandments and thus, unwittingly, have helped in the attempt to “overthrow” the law. The Bible, though, is clear: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” (1 John 5:3). The link between our loving God and keeping His commandments is stronger than we realize. We love God because we live in a universe where love can exist. And it can exist because the universe is moral, and that morality is based, at least for us as created beings, on God's moral law, the topic of our study for second quarter.

Lesson 1—Laws in Christ's Day

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Roman Law** (*Luke 2:1–5*)

MONDAY: **Mosaic Law: Civic** (*Heb. 10:28, Deut. 17:2–6*)

TUESDAY: **Mosaic Law: Ceremonial** (*Lev. 1:1–9*)

WEDNESDAY: **Rabbinic Law** (*Luke 14:1–6*)

THURSDAY: **The Moral Law** (*James 2:8–12*)

Memory Text—*Romans 2:14, NASB*

Sabbath Gem: Various laws functioned in the community during the time of Christ and the early church. These laws will be examined only in the context of helping to set a foundation for the law that will be the focus of the quarter, God's moral law, the Ten Commandments.

Lesson 2—Christ and the Law of Moses

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Circumcision and Dedication** (*Luke 2:21–24*)

MONDAY: **Jewish Feasts** (*John 5:1*)

TUESDAY: **Jesus in the Temple** (*Luke 2:41–52*)

WEDNESDAY: **Taxes** (*Matt. 17:24–27*)

THURSDAY: **Law Enforcement** (*John 8:1–11*)

Memory Text—*John 5:46, NRSV*

Sabbath Gem: Throughout His life, Jesus remained faithful to a system that He knew would be fulfilled through His death and resurrection, and ministry in heaven.

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