John: The Beloved Gospel

*Inspiration has left us with four distinct versions of the life of Jesus, those found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, commonly known as the four Gospels.*

We might think that one version of the gospel story would be enough, as long as it were inspired by God. But the Holy Spirit provided us with four versions, each with its own unique perspective on the life, ministry, teaching, and sacrifice of Christ. The greatness of Jesus is such that no single inspired writer fully could communicate it; hence, there’s more than one account. As Ellen White so succinctly expresses it: The gospel story was given “through different writers, each having his own individuality, though going over the same history.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21. One, simply, wasn’t enough to do it justice.

By using different accounts, God meets a variety of readers where they are. Each Gospel writer “has an experience of his own, and this diversity broadens and deepens the knowledge that is brought out to meet the necessities of varied minds.”—Page 22. In the past century, some literature has taken up the approach of recounting the same story from different perspectives, a move that was deemed new, innovative, and progressive at the time. How interesting that our Lord did the same thing nineteen centuries earlier.

In film and biography (such as the book *The Desire of Ages*, by Ellen G. White), many have sought to share a combined picture of the life of Jesus, based on all four Gospels. These efforts have been a great blessing. People of varied backgrounds and ways of thinking will gain a richer experience with Jesus as they interact with the variety of emphases provided for us in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Much is to be gained, however, by focusing on the unique perspectives of the individual Gospel writers. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, each writer put his own unique perspective on the life and teachings of Jesus. This quarter we look at John’s.

John’s often has been called “the beloved Gospel.” Its author is repeatedly called “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (*John 13:23-25, 19:26, 20:2, 21:20-24*). His book, therefore, was written by one who
was especially intimate with Jesus, in the same way that Jesus was intimate with His Father (compare John 1:18 with 13:23). Out of this deeper understanding came a Gospel that probes the depths of Jesus’ character and mission in a way that its other three counterparts do not.

Also, unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Fourth Gospel seems uniquely designed to speak directly to a generation who had no access to anyone in physical contact with Jesus. Every generation since has faced this same problem, so John speaks directly to us in a way the other Gospels do not. His Gospel was designed, therefore, to answer what may be the most crucial question of contemporary Christian faith: How can I have a living relationship with Someone I cannot see, hear, or touch?

The dual focus of this quarter’s Bible Study Guide, therefore, is on the unique picture of Jesus provided in the beloved Gospel and on the steps that the Gospel provides toward a deeper and more genuine relationship with Jesus. John, with his own unique stamp on the Gospel, has provided a powerful source of encouragement, hope, and faith for the millions who have learned to love our Lord through what the inspired disciple has placed in it.

John Paulien, the author of this quarter’s Bible Study Guide, is chair of the New Testament Studies department at Andrews University Seminary and a recognized expert in the writings of John. Thus, we are privileged to have his insights this quarter as we—who have never met Jesus in the flesh—study the account of someone who did and who shares his life-changing experience with us.

May it change our experience, as well.
How to Use This Teachers Edition

The teachers comments demonstrate different methods of teaching the Standard Bible Study Guide. Five parts make up the teachers comments:

► **Key Text, Lesson Aim, and Outline:** The key text is taken from the standard edition guide. The lesson aim is designed to (a) help class participants understand and know about the lesson material, (b) evoke an appropriate feeling about the lesson material that complements the lesson content and helps to internalize it, and (c) help class participants apply the lesson material to their daily lives. The lesson outline may not always follow exactly the material that appears in the standard guide. It may reflect additional perspectives as it attempts to stimulate class discussion.

► **The Commentary** follows the traditional teaching methods of Sabbath School. It explains Bible passages and provides appropriate information leading to spiritual applications.

► **The Inductive Bible-Study Method** emphasizes careful, methodical discovery of the meaning in a text. The teacher encourages and supports the learner’s investigation and discovery, using distinctive approaches: (a) Study a text thoroughly and systematically before drawing a conclusion. (b) Look for textual meaning carefully and thoroughly; understand the passage in context; avoid misquoting the author. We must not develop opinions without biblical proof. (c) Share insights through group discussion as students examine a Bible passage together. (d) Apply the text to life today. (e) Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to class members during Bible study.

► **The Focus-on-Witnessing Approach** should be used in conjunction with other methods of Bible study to demonstrate how particular passages of Scripture can be used to encourage people to commit their lives to Christ and to nurture spiritual life once it has been awakened.

► **The Life-Application Approach** demonstrates how issues that grow out of Bible study can be shared in a small-group setting. This section uses an approach suitable for discussion in a small group in which interpersonal sharing and dialogue are key elements.

Use a combination of teaching methods. Within one class period it is often possible to draw from all five methods demonstrated in the teachers comments. Some teachers will prefer to focus on one method of teaching, drawing heavily on the material in the teachers comments.
The Unique Purpose of John’s Gospel

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’” (John 20:29, NIV).

Key Thought: The Gospel of John tells us that the absence of physical contact with Jesus is no disadvantage to those seeking a relationship with Him today. Jesus’ word is as powerful as His touch.

Have you ever wished you could have known Jesus in the flesh, as His disciples did? Have you ever wished He lived at your house? Wouldn’t it be great to take your problems directly to Him, face to face? To go to Him and share what’s on your heart and then see Him go to His knees and pray earnestly to His Father for you? Wouldn’t it be easier to have a relationship with Jesus if He lived, breathed, walked, and talked at your house?

But that privilege has not been ours. Yet, the good news is that the Gospel of John helps assure us that we don’t need physical contact with Jesus in order to have a relationship with Him. We don’t need physical contact to obtain all the blessings He is willing and able to give. John even recalls Jesus telling His disciples “‘It is for your good that I am going away’” (John 16:7, NIV). Through the presence of the Spirit, the work of Jesus is enhanced by His absence (John 14:12).

This week we take our first look at this good news.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 3.


Describe the process by which Luke’s Gospel (and presumably John’s, as well) came into existence. Luke 1:2, 3.

From what Luke tells us, “many” individuals had already undertaken to tell the story of Christ. The stories about Jesus and His sayings were remembered and handed down by “eyewitnesses and servants of the word” (Luke 1:2, NIV). The word translated “servants” seems to have been a technical term in the ancient world for professional memorizers who would make it a point to record significant sayings in their minds for future use. It should not surprise us that such individuals might be chosen to memorize the sermons, parables, and deeds of Jesus in order to repeat what the Lord said and did.

The stories and sayings of Jesus were passed along by word of mouth for many years after His ascension to heaven. Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, apparently had talked with eyewitnesses and those who had memorized the sayings and stories of Jesus. Guided by the Spirit, he then selected those sayings and stories that enabled him to put together an “orderly account.” The final result is the Gospel of Luke as we know it today.

Read John 21:25. What does it tell us about the limits of all the Gospels?

John’s point is that most of the Jesus story had to be left out of his Gospel. Each of the four Gospels offers selections of the sayings and deeds of Jesus that fit that particular writer’s purpose. “It is seldom that two persons will view and express truth in the very same way. Each dwells on particular points which his constitution and education have fitted him to appreciate.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 1, p. 22.

Look at the Ellen White quote, particularly in the context of today’s study. What does this tell us about the need to give others some flexibility in their understanding of truth?
Key Text: John 20:29

Teachers Aims:
1. To emphasize that Jesus is available to us in any place or era of history.
2. To understand the Gospel of John both as an individual work and in its relation to the other Gospels.
3. To apply the Gospel of John to our life today.

Lesson Outline:
   A. Jesus is actively concerned about our lives, even though He is not physically present in them.
   B. Jesus’ physical presence was not necessarily an advantage to His contemporaries in their attainment of salvation.
   C. John’s Gospel was written with future generations of believers in mind.

II. A Gospel With Focus (John 20:30).
   A. John did not intend to write a comprehensive account of Christ’s life and deeds.
   B. John self-consciously writes to an audience unfamiliar with Jesus but who needs and wants to know the important points.
   C. John’s Gospel lays special emphasis on faith in the absence of concrete proof.

   A. John’s Jesus often was not addressing His contemporaries but those in the future.
   B. Much of the teaching in John is more easily understood today.
   C. Although we do not have Jesus, we have His complete teaching in the Bible.

Summary: The Gospel of John is unique among the Gospels in that it speaks directly to the generations of Christians who would follow the apostles. John makes us aware that Jesus is with us in as real a way as He was with His contemporaries.

Commentary.
The Gospel of John is the crown jewel of the Gospel narratives. This is because it begins in the very throne room of God the Father (John 1:1-3) as opposed to beginning with Jesus’ human chronology as did Matthew and Luke, or with His human ministry as did Mark. In John, we are not dealing with just the Babe of Bethlehem or the Carpenter of Nazareth but with the very God who became
Selecting With a Purpose

Read John 20:30, 31. Why did John say he wrote what he did about the life of Jesus? In what ways does the whole Bible reflect that same purpose?

Jesus’ ministry from His baptism to His ascension covered about three and a half years (1,260 days!). Out of all the things Jesus said and did during that time, John records incidents that occurred on a total of only 29 days. And in most cases, even these accounts cover only a small fraction of what Jesus may have said and done on those days. More than ninety-seven percent of Jesus’ ministry is left out of John’s Gospel. Led by the Holy Spirit, John chose what was needed to achieve his stated purpose: to convince us to believe in order that we may have eternal life.

Notice for whom John wrote his Gospel. It is for “you” (plural in the original). John wrote so that “you” might believe and that “you” might have life. With the word “you”, he clearly had his readers in mind. But which readers? All of them? Or was there a special focus to this “you” group?

What story provides the lead-in for John’s statement of purpose?

Thomas clearly feels that his faith depends on a hands-on experience with a physical Jesus. Once he had seen Jesus, he had no problem believing. In John 20:24-31, Thomas represents all the disciples, the first generation, those who had seen and touched Jesus.

Jesus’ statement in verse 29, on the other hand, indicates that there is a special blessing reserved for those who believe without seeing. Evidently seeing and contact are not crucial to the development of faith; in fact, they even may hinder it. Verse 29 pronounces a blessing on later generations who have been denied hands-on contact with Jesus and yet believe anyway. We are of those later generations, those who have had no physical contact with Jesus nor with anyone who knew Him in the flesh.

Look up 2 Corinthians 4:18. How does this fit in with today’s study? What message is there for us today, who have not seen Jesus in the flesh?
human flesh. John leaves no doubt about his subject: Christ is God. He was with the Father in Creation, and He is with Him in redemption and restoration. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega (compare Rev. 1:8, 21:6, 22:13) of all that is. John wants Christians of every age to grasp the fundamental truth that Christ is God who became human so “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

In this introductory lesson, we note the authorship, the purpose, and the uniqueness of John’s Gospel.

The author does not mention his name but identifies himself as a disciple of Jesus and an eyewitness to all that his Master taught and did (John 21:24, 25). Moreover, this disciple is one “whom Jesus loved” (vs. 20; compare John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7) and who leaned on His breast at the Last Supper (John 21:20). That should leave us no doubt that John, the beloved disciple, is the Gospel’s author. It was perhaps his modesty, humility, and a desire for self-abnegation (as opposed to the events of Matthew 20:20-22) that led John to forego mentioning himself in this book.

The early church consistently identified the author as John. Irenaeus (c. A.D. 130–200) wrote that John authored the Gospel while he was advanced in age and living in Ephesus.—Against Heresies, 2.22.5; 3.1.1. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp (A.D. 70–155), who was a disciple of John and bishop of Smyrna.

Why did John describe himself as the disciple Jesus loved (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20)? Did Jesus love the other disciples less? The Greek usage of “loved” refers to a process. This is John’s humble way of saying that Jesus continued to love him in spite of his many character defects (Mark 9:38, 10:35-37, Luke 9:54). “Evil temper, revenge, the spirit of criticism, were all in [him].”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 295. Yet, John gratefully recognized he was the object of Jesus’ unfailing love—a love that could come only from One who is God. This recognition caused the apostle to coin Christianity’s defining expression, “God is love,” and to teach us in a special way that this love in all its fullness was manifested in Jesus (1 John 4:7, 9).

And so it was that the youngest of the disciples and the last one to pass from those wonderful days when God walked in space and time to redeem humanity left his legacy by writing the Gospel that underscores the divine-human mystery of Jesus, in whom is eternal life.

John gives the purpose of the Gospel in John 20:31:
“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his
The Occasion of the Gospel (John 21).

According to John 21, Jesus employs a threefold sequence of question and response to confront Peter about his three denials in the high priest’s courtyard a short while before (vss. 15-19). Not only does Peter need to work through his sense of guilt and failure for denying Jesus, but this confrontation probably also gives him the opportunity to regain the confidence of his fellow disciples. Later, as Jesus and Peter walk along the beach, an incident occurs that may have had a large impact on John.

Who does Peter notice is following him and Jesus along the beach? John 21:20, 24. See also John 13:23-25.


Jesus has just explained to Peter the circumstances that would one day surround his death. Peter is curious about whether his experience would be similar to that of the beloved disciple, the one who wrote the Gospel of John (vs. 24). Jesus evades the question with a cryptic “If I should prefer that he remain alive until I come, what business is that of yours?” (principal contributor’s translation).

Jesus’ cryptic comment was misunderstood in the years that followed. People came to believe that the beloved disciple, John, would live to see the second coming of Jesus. As disciple after disciple died, many became excited over the “obvious” nearness of Jesus’ return. As John entered old age and began to approach death, a crisis of confidence loomed: Would John’s death make Jesus appear to be a false prophet? After all, didn’t Jesus say that John would be alive at His return?

Some believe that at this decisive moment, in which the church faced a crisis, the Lord moved upon John to leave the legacy of a written gospel, one that would correct the unfounded rumor regarding the timing of John’s death in relationship to the Second Coming. His Gospel would provide what the next generation of Christians needed to survive his passing. His Gospel would teach us all how to have a living relationship with Someone you cannot see, hear, or touch.

Read again what Jesus told Peter in John 21:22. He never says that John would not die, though that meaning is what some have read into the text itself. In what ways are we in danger of doing the same thing; that is, reading into texts what is not there?
name” (NIV). Theologically, John wanted to show beyond a doubt that Jesus is fully God and fully man (John 1:1-3, 14; compare 1 John 2:22, 23; 4:2, 3). This truth needed to be spelled out, because by the time he wrote the Gospel (A.D. 80–90), there were Gnostic heresies creeping into the church that denied the reality of the Incarnation. (Gnostic teachings were based on the Greek idea that because God is spirit [good], He could not become flesh [evil].)

Redemptively, John wanted to emphasize the thought that belief in Jesus and acceptance of Him lead to eternal life. John uses the word believe about one hundred times in his Gospel to show that saving faith in Jesus is essential to salvation.

Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** John 3:16, 17; 14:29-31; 20:30, 31; 1 John 4:13-16

1. The accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry in the four Gospels differ from one another in a number of ways. Do you find this confusing or helpful? Could these different accounts be construed as mutually contradictory? Explain your answers.

2. It is not uncommon for Christians today to feel that the first disciples had a great advantage in the fact that they knew Christ “in the flesh.” Was this advantage really as great as it seems? Explain your answer. In what sense might those of us who know Christ through His Word and the Holy Spirit have an advantage over His immediate contemporaries? How can we use our imagination when reading the Bible to help us feel closer to Jesus and to feel that we know Him better?

3. What criteria do you believe John used in selecting the events and teachings from the life of Jesus to include in his Gospel? Does his Gospel have a unifying theme? If so, what do you think it is, and why? Provide texts to support your answer.

4. How does the Gospel of John show Jesus’ concern for the generations of believers who would follow the original disciples? What does this concern teach us about Jesus’ regard for us?

5. While the Jesus portrayed in John’s Gospel may seem more remote at first glance, it can also be suggested that John portrays Him as being more intimately involved with His creation than do the other three Gospels. Do you agree with this statement? Why, or why not? Provide texts to support your answer.
Second Generation

In a number of different ways, the Gospel of John expresses an interest in the second generation of Christians.

In the Fourth Gospel, the disciples usually are not gathered directly by Jesus but through the invitation of someone else who knows Jesus. Perhaps this is meant to symbolize how most of the world will come to first know Jesus, not through personal contact with Him but through the witness of another.

Look up the following texts. How do they express the idea that we don’t have to see Jesus in the flesh to first learn about Him?

*John 1:40-42*

*John 13:20*

Today, of course, people learn about Jesus through the witness of others who first tell them about Jesus and, as in the first example above, “lead” them to Him. How crucial, then, that we as professed followers of Christ, as those whom God has chosen to spread the truth to others, be prepared to do just that.

In John 17 Jesus prays for Himself first of all and then for His disciples (vss. 1-19). After this He turns to the second generation, and beyond. His prayer is not for His disciples alone but for “those who will believe in me through their message” (vs. 20, NIV). Most people throughout history have gained a relationship with Jesus not through personal contact but through the writings of those who had such contact. Jesus prayed that the Written Word would be the means of uniting all believers, those who had seen Him and those who had not (vss. 21-23).

Prayerfully read through Christ’s prayer in John 17 (specifically verses 11-19), which He offered in behalf of His disciples. What are the key points He is praying for? On the lines below, write a summary of what Jesus wanted for His followers. What message is in there for us, today, as well?

_____________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________
Witnessing

On December 19, 1923, 12-year-old Myrtle Berry watched as thick black smoke ascended from a burning building one block from her home. She walked down Washington Street to get a closer look at the Dime Tabernacle as the flames consumed it.

At the other end of Washington Street stood 12-year-old Ronald Simpson. Several hours later, Ronald wandered into what was once the first Seventh-day Adventist church in Battle Creek. He went down into the basement and shuffled through the ashes. A loose board flipped over as he stepped on it, revealing the bell that once called worshipers to Sabbath School. The fire had destroyed the bell’s wooden handle. But he took the priceless possession home, cleaned it, and later replaced the handle.

After several years, Ronald Simpson met Myrtle Berry, and they were married. The Simpsons kept the old bell for many years, until Myrtle donated it to the Adventist Museum in Battle Creek. Long after the passing of her husband, 92-year-old Myrtle still lives, by the grace of God, to tell the story of the burning Dime Tabernacle. Many who were not there listen with excitement as she recalls the details of that historic day.

Jesus said, “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29). The author of the Gospel of John was actually there when Christ lived on earth. By faith, we believe that the things he wrote are true, even though we were not there to see for ourselves. And in these last days, the Lord has chosen us to be His witnesses, to lead others to the Word of God, where they, too, can read the firsthand accounts of those who walked and talked with Jesus.
His Word Is as Good as His Touch


By way of contrast, how does Jesus accomplish His miracles in the Gospel of John? John 4:46-54. (See also 2:1-11, 5:1-15, and 11:1-44 for further examples.)

Jesus uses touch in about half the miracles recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. By way of contrast, in John’s Gospel, Jesus is rarely described as using touch in order to accomplish His miracles.

Why the difference?

Perhaps the Spirit moved upon John to select stories in which there is an absence of touching or in which the distance between Jesus and the healed person is emphasized (in John 4:46-54 Jesus is 16 miles away from the individual He heals at the time of the healing), all in order to help express the point that one doesn’t need immediate physical contact with the Lord in order to be blessed, or even healed, by Him. These accounts, where there is no touching, are consistent with John’s theme that Jesus’ word is as good as His touch. This is especially good news for those, such as we, who can have the assurance that although Jesus isn’t here in the flesh, He still can be close to us in all our trials and sorrows, whatever they happen to be. Through these accounts John shows us that heaven is, indeed, closer to earth than we might, on sight alone, believe.

Most miracles in the Gospel of John (but not all) came as a result of Jesus’ words, as opposed to His touch. List the command phrases used in each of the following accounts: John 2:7, 4:50, 5:8, 9:7, 11:43.

What comes through in these scenes is the power of Jesus’ words to overcome barriers of space. Distance is no problem for the Lord, who created the universe. Jesus’ word is as powerful close at hand as at a distance. Though now manifested to us through the printed page, Christ’s Word still retains the power to save and heal. It is through His Word that He ministers to the needs of later generations.

Instead of Jesus in the flesh, we have His Word, the Bible. Why, then, is study of the Word crucial in forming a close relationship with Him? Without the Bible, what could we know about Jesus?
Son relationship, we have in John 14–16 the most exhaustive presentation of the Holy Spirit and His relationship to the saving ministry of Jesus.

Looking from any perspective, from Creation to Redemption, John’s Gospel is unique, and we are blessed for it.

Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** The apocryphal book, The Acts of Thomas, tells this story: After the death of Jesus, the disciples divided the world into regions to which they would take the gospel message. India fell to Thomas, who expressed doubts about going and made many excuses. Then Jesus appeared to him one night and said “Fear not, Thomas, go thou unto India and preach the word there, for my grace is with thee.”

Shrines and monuments in southern India credit Thomas for introducing Jesus to India. If this story were true (and we have no reason to believe that it is), what might it have taken to overcome Thomas’s doubts? What kind of relationship must you have with Jesus to make His word as powerful as His touch?

**Thought Questions:**

1. For Thomas, faith and obedience did not come easily. He was the kind who needed to be absolutely certain of the pros and cons of a situation before making a commitment. Compare Thomas’s need for a hands-on experience with that of Paul’s need for grace alone. What are the similarities and differences? What human elements cause us to yearn for tangible proof of God’s control?

2. Read Jesus’ prayer in John 17:20, 21. Even at a time when His followers are few and the Cross towers before Him, His confidence remains firm. He focuses on a brighter future, on those who would come to believe in Him. From this prayer, what elements of unity do you think Jesus envisions for His church? How do you think unity affects the faith and the works of the church?

**Application Question:**

Monday’s section emphasizes the special blessing reserved for those who believe without seeing. Such blind faith can result only from an intimate relationship with the Savior. What everyday things can you do to cultivate an intimate relationship with your Lord?
Further Study: Note Ellen White’s comments on the process of how the Bible was written (Selected Messages, book 1, pp. 15–23).
Regarding faith in Jesus’ word versus faith in what we can see and touch, Ellen White comments (in the context of John 4:46-54): “The nobleman wanted to see the fulfillment of his prayer before he should believe; but he had to accept the word of Jesus that his request was heard and the blessing granted. This lesson we also have to learn. Not because we see or feel that God hears us are we to believe. We are to trust in His promises.”—The Desire of Ages, p. 200.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read again 2 Corinthians 4:18 along with Hebrews 11:1. Why must our ultimate hope be in things we do not see, at least directly? Is there anything we, now, can see that will last forever, or will everything we now see ultimately, as it now exists, be destroyed?

2. How could different writers portray Jesus from different perspectives? Do these different perspectives make you more or less likely to accept their accounts as truthful? If all accounts said the same thing, would that not tend to make us think they merely were copying one another as opposed to telling the story of Jesus as they, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, understood or even remembered it? Explain your position.

3. What does the gist of this week’s lesson tell us about the importance of witnessing in the mission of the church?

Summary: We often struggle with the issue of how to have a living relationship with Someone we cannot see, hear, or touch. We imagine that faith came more easily to those who walked and talked with Jesus back in New Testament times. But the Gospel of John tells us that Jesus’ word, as ministered in the Gospel, is as powerful as His touch. Through the Spirit and the Word, we may know Jesus even more intimately than the disciples did.
Jesus Is the Best

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: John 1:1-18.

Memory Text: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, NIV).

Key Thought: At the beginning of his Gospel, John describes Jesus as the Word who was God from eternity yet who became flesh. Thus, He alone is worthy of our worship.

Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God. John 1:1-18 functions as a prologue to the story of Jesus in the Gospel. It tells an amazing story. The King of the universe, the eternal Creator, became a human being. The One who walked this earth, who became sweaty, tired, and hungry, was intimate with God before the world began, because He Himself was one with God. Although He became part of the human race and was subject to human limitations, He was the One who created the human race and the world in which it lived. The Creator came to serve the creation, even to the point of death. The prologue to John, therefore, interprets everything that happens in the Gospel in the light of the larger perspective of eternity.

The Creator Himself came down and walked among us, spoke our language, and showed us in human terms what God is like. Through the Fourth Gospel, we escape from a narrow world of limited perception into the vast universe of ultimate reality, a view that revelation alone can offer.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 10.*
The Word as Eternal God (John 1:1, 2).

The prologue to the Gospel of John (John 1:1-18) is beautifully structured in the style of Hebrew poetry, which often uses parallel words and ideas. The simple, yet majestic, grandeur of the language is a fitting complement to the awesome magnificence of the ideas expressed in this section of the Gospel.

How far back in time does “the Word” go? John 1:1. What does the phrase “in the beginning” refer to? Why would John want to link these two concepts? (See also John 1:3.)

The concept of “the Word” would have been readily recognizable to the ancient Greeks, whether or not they ever had heard of Jesus. For centuries the Greeks had conceived that a divine figure they called “the Word” (logos in Greek) was the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the Source of reason and intelligence, and the Mediator between the great God and the creation. In applying the term Logos to Jesus, John was appealing to the Greeks in terms they could understand.

What kind of relationship did the Word have with the Father? John 1:1, 2, 18.

Is the Word fully God or in some sort of subordinate position? John 1:1.

The first words of the Gospel combine “in the beginning” (from the Creation story of Gen. 1:1) with a verb that expresses continuous existence in past time. At the very beginning, at the point when Creation began, the Word was already in continuous existence. He is, therefore, eternal.

But the eternity of the Word is not based on some kind of pre-creation origin in the Father; Jesus was not created by the Father. Instead, from eternity, Jesus, the Word, was distinct from the Father (called “God” in John 1:1 but “Father” in verse 18) but in no sense inferior. “What God was, the Word was” is the brilliantly accurate translation of The New English Bible. The intimate relationship between the Word and the Father was an intimacy of equals. We are not dealing with “Gods” here; there is full unity in the Godhead at the same time that there is intimate relationship among the personalities of the Godhead. (See quotations in Friday’s section.)
Nothing in religious literature introduces its chief Person in such grandeur and in so great a mystery as John’s introduction of Jesus the Christ (John 1:1-18). And rightly so, for who else other than Jesus transcends all that is known and unknown in this universe in both personhood and mission?

Our lesson this week focuses on Jesus the Word, Jesus the Man, and Jesus the Life and Light.

I. Jesus the Word.

John’s narrative of the redemptive story begins with the same words as Moses’ narrative of Creation (Gen. 1:1, John 1:1). Before
How does John make it clear that the preexistent Word was not a created being? John 1:3.

This text is so devastatingly clear that one denomination was forced to change the wording of their own Bible translation (adding the word other—“all other things were made by him”) in order to maintain their beliefs. The clear intention of this text as it reads is to assert that everyone and everything in all creation was made by “the Word.” He is the Source of everything created. If “not a single thing” was made apart from His action, then He is not the result of an act of creation. As John 1:1 points out, before any creation took place, the Word was already in continuous existence.

This teaching may seem academic or irrelevant, but it is extremely important to Christian faith. It establishes the incredible value that God placed on us at the Cross. The Person who died there was not just another part of God’s creation, such as the sun, the moon, or angels; if He were, the sacrifice would not have the same kind of value it does with Jesus as Creator.

This, then, is no minor sacrifice. At the Cross our value is established in infinite terms: The infinite Son of God died in order to save us; that’s how important we are in the sight of God. This fact is the truest and most stable basis for self-worth.

Read Hebrews 1:2 and Colossians 1:16,17. In what ways do they say the same thing as what John says regarding the role of Christ as our Creator?

“‘His name shall be called Immanuel . . . God with us.’ ‘The light of the knowledge of the glory of God’ is seen ‘in the face of Jesus Christ.’ From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was ‘the image of God,’ the image of His greatness and majesty, ‘the outshining of His glory.’ It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world. To this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God’s love—to be ‘God with us.’ Therefore it was prophesied of Him, ‘His name shall be called Immanuel.’”


Meditate on what the full deity of Christ means for us, that God Himself died for our sins. Why does that give us so much hope, as compared to a view of the universe in which there is no God or caring Creator?
anything, God is! Inspiration, not human genius, led John to write that “in the beginning was the Word” (vs. 1). We must not understand this to mean that the Word had a beginning. Instead, it means that long before humans could ever conceive of such things as time and space, long before there ever was a beginning as we understand beginnings, there was the Word, and “the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (vs. 1, NIV). God the Son was “with the Father from all eternity.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 39.

“There never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God.”—Ellen G. White, Evangelism, p. 615. Two distinct Persons of the Godhead are thus identified: the Word and God. They are one in nature, thought, and function. They were revealed to Moses as the Creator and now through John as the world’s Redeemer.

The apostle uses Logos (Word) to communicate the uniqueness of Jesus to his readers who were Jews and Greeks. Logos in the Greek Old Testament was used to convey both the creative (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9; Ps. 33:6) and the communicative (Jer. 1:4, Amos 3:1) attributes of God. For the Jew, the Word was an expression of divine power, character, and will. For the Greeks, Logos symbolized the absolute mind, the supreme reason, that was responsible for the order, pattern, plan, and design of all that exists. It was in Ephesus (where the apostle wrote the Gospel) that the philosopher Heraclitus (c. 560 B.C.) first used the word Logos. The word later became central to Stoic philosophy. “‘The Logos,’ said the Stoics, ‘pervades all things.’”—William Barclay, The Gospel of John (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1977), pp. 34, 35.

John’s usage, however, transcends that of the Stoics. He is not speaking of an absolute mind but of God. This Jesus who walked among us is God. The fact that He was with God the Father makes Him distinct yet equal to the Father. The Word was with God in eternity past, and now in Bethlehem He came to be “God with us” (Matt. 1:23).

Here lies a mystery beyond human comprehension—except to the mind that submits in faith to the revelation of the Scriptures.

II. Jesus, the Word Made Flesh.

Although every chapter in the Gospel of John refers to the divinity of Jesus, it is Jesus, the “Word made flesh,” that John emphasizes as God’s instrument of salvation to human beings. “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Divinity without humanity could not have accomplished salvation. The God who created humans must become a human being, live like one, suffer like one, and at last bear the sins of all. Those who deny the divinity of Jesus deny the origin of salvation; those who deny the humanity of Jesus reject the method of salvation. Only He who is God has the power to save; only when He becomes human and dies for the sins of humanity does He have the authority to save.
January 6

Rejection and Reception (John 1:4-13).

What other function does the Word perform? John 1:4, 5.

In the original Creation, the Word was the Author of physical light. He is the One who uses light (the rays of the sun) as part of the process of plant production that sustains physical life on this earth. But the author of our Gospel has more than physical light and life in mind here. He’s talking about light in the spiritual sense, as well.

Read John 1:10. Summarize, in your own words, the gist of what that text means.

Without the Word, there would be no rain, no sunshine, no air, no life. The amazing reality is, however, that when the Creator and Sustainer of the universe appeared on earth, He was unknown and unrecognized as such. Even His “very own” rejected the One who gave them life. In light of these verses, the actions of so many people toward Jesus in the Gospel of John, including His disciples (John 12:16, 14:6-9), are foolish and tragic.

Yet, the message of this prologue is not all dark.

On what basis is it possible to become children of God? John 1:12, 13? How much human effort is involved?

In the original language of John 1:12, it is the one who “received” (a point in past time) Him and who “believes” (continuous action) in His name who gains the right to become a child of God. This language points to two aspects of becoming right with God. There is the initial point of reception, and there is the ongoing relationship of believing. There is no “once saved always saved” here. Being a child of God has a beginning, but it is also a process that continues as long as a Christian lives.

This “new birth,” however, is not achieved by human effort; it is as much a miracle as the original act of creation. And just as the original act of creation must be sustained by the continual miracle of the Word's watchcare (vss. 4, 5), so the relationship of the child of God with Jesus involves ongoing belief resulting in an ongoing miracle of spiritual life (vss. 12, 13).

In verse 12, John says that those who receive Him become sons of God. Why do some receive Him and some do not? What role does free choice have in the answer? What role does free choice have in the continuation of our spiritual life, as well?
Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** Isaiah 53:4; John 1:14, 3-9, 10, 11; 1 John 2:23; Revelation 14:6, 7

1. John 1 describes how Christ, the Eternal Word, participated in Creation. What connection does this participation have to His role as Redeemer?

2. John’s references to Christ as the Word relate to a similar ancient Greek concept. Was John influenced by the Greeks, or were the Greeks somehow earlier made aware of an aspect of the truth? Explain your answer.

3. We believe that Christ was “begotten,” not created. In human terms, “begotten” usually implies some sort of beginning. In what sense was Christ “begotten” and yet, at the same time, eternally existing?

4. Throughout the history of Christianity, the status of Christ as fully equal to God has often been a source of conflict. Why is it important to correctly understand Christ’s status in the Godhead? Is it possible to have a different understanding yet still be considered Christian? Explain.

5. John notes that Christ was mostly unrecognized for who He really was during His time on earth. Why do you think this was so? Do you think you would have recognized Him if His first coming would have taken place during your lifetime? Explain your answer.

6. The phrase “One and Only” *(John 1:14, NIV)* emphasizes Jesus’ unique role as God’s Son. What does this uniqueness mean to us?

7. John the Baptist’s mission was to introduce Jesus to the world as the Light. Why did people who already had the light of God’s law need to have the Light? Why is it particularly important for Seventh-day Adventists to recognize Jesus as the Light?

**TEACHERS COMMENTS**

Both the power and the authority to save reside in Jesus—God made flesh. Therefore, “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” *(Acts 4:12)*.

**III. Jesus the Light and the Life.**

Having introduced the great truth of the Incarnation, the apostle immediately proceeds to tell us its purpose: “In him was life; and
The Humanity of Jesus (John 1:1, 2, 14).

Compare John 1:1, 2 with what is said in verse 14. While verses 1-5 focus on the divine preexistence of the Word, verse 14 turns to His nature and status as One who walked on earth as a part of human history. These texts express an incredible paradox. A man of a particular ethnic background, living at a particular time in history, subject to human frailty, turns out to be the divine Word, who created the entire universe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eternal (John 1:1)</th>
<th>Earthly (John 1:14)</th>
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<tr>
<td>“was”</td>
<td>“among us”</td>
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<td>“was God”</td>
<td>“became”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“with God”</td>
<td>“became flesh”</td>
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The language here is simple yet profound. In John 1:1 the Word “was.” The Greek tense implies continuous past existence. He always “was.” But verse 14 tells us that at a point in time the Word “became” flesh. The word translated “became” in verse 14 is the same as the one translated “made” in verse 3. When the Word became flesh, it was an act of creation, something added to His ongoing, eternal nature. Though He “was” God, He also “became” flesh. In the process, the Word went from being “with God” to being “with us.” The entire Gospel of John becomes an expression of Jesus’ humanity while He was here on earth. One struggles here to express truth that is simply stated in John 1 yet is so profound that “the whole world would not have room for the books’’ that could be written about it (John 21:25, NIV). In simple language John has articulated the full range of both the Word’s divine and human natures. He is the God-man. He is from heaven yet of earth. He always was, yet He also became. He was eternal, yet He also has a created existence.

Because He is fully God, Jesus could reveal what God is like in the highest sense. Because He became fully human, that revelation is accessible to us at a level we can grasp and follow. “‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father’” (John 14:9, NIV). In the Gospel of John, this difficult but glorious truth is revealed in the prologue but also brought home to our hearts by the Spirit (John 16:13-15).

If possible, obtain some facts on the size of the visible universe. After reading those figures, dwell on the texts and the study for today. How does this help you begin to understand the incredible love that God has for us?
Some cosmetic surgeons use Botox injections to reduce facial wrinkles caused by aging. Botox is a neurotoxin that causes food poisoning or botulism. Small doses of Botox are injected into the facial muscles, causing them to relax and thus smooth out the wrinkles. Botox injections are costly and most often used for wrinkles on the forehead, around the eyes and neck, and on the bridge of the nose. One treatment lasts for about three to five months, at which time the patient may take another dose (or two or three) to look young again.

Many people spend a great amount of time and expense on cosmetics to look their best. Others are more concerned about being physically fit, spending several hours a week getting and staying in shape. Still others believe that good nutrition is the key to longer, healthier lives.

Although we may look and feel younger longer, there is only one way to live forever, and that is through Jesus Christ our Lord. To those seeking long life, we can say that Jesus is the way. He wants us to look better, to feel better, and to live long, healthy lives here on this earth. But even more important, He wants us to live forever with Him in glory.

“O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth” (Ps. 8:1). Excellence denotes superiority or that which is of the highest quality. There is no other name on earth superior to Jesus’ name. There is no other name by which we are saved (Acts 4:12). He is not just the best. He is the only Way to everlasting life.
The Greatest Revelation (John 1:14-18).

**What** did the Word do in order that His glory might be seen on earth? *John 1:14.*

The phrase “made his dwelling” translates from the Greek word for “pitch one’s tent” to mean a reminder of the tabernacle in the wilderness (*Exod. 25:8, 9*). The glory of Jesus that the disciples saw recalls the glory of God’s presence in that tabernacle (*Exod. 40:34, 35*). Things become even more interesting when we discover that in Hebrew the word “to dwell” (*shachan*) and the word for God’s glory in the sanctuary (*shechinah*) come from the same root.

The Old Testament sanctuary was a marvelous source of grace and blessing and continues to instruct us today. But when the Word became flesh, the Old Testament sanctuary was eclipsed by an even greater Source of grace and blessing (*John 1:16*). Jesus is a better revelation of God than even the sanctuary, because in Jesus, God dwelt directly in human flesh, and “we” could behold what was before hidden behind curtains.

**What** did John the Baptist have to say about the Word? *John 1:15.*

What was he referring to when he said that Jesus came “before” him when, in fact, he had been born before Jesus? *See Luke 1.*

In Jesus’ day the two greatest human figures were John the Baptist and Moses. John was revered by many as a contemporary prophet, Moses as the great deliverer of Israel and giver of the Law.

But the prologue makes clear that Jesus is no ordinary human being. He is greater than the greatest men known to the people of the time. He was the best, because He was God made flesh. In His person it became possible for human beings to know what God was like. He came to reveal a world far beyond the ability of our senses to know and comprehend.

Moses was a man given an incredible revelation of God (*Exod. 33:19-23*), and yet, even he was allowed to see God only briefly and from the back. In contrast, the Word came to earth as One who had been in continual residence “at the Father’s side”—the Greek implies continual close communion with God.

Think of the infinite humiliation the incarnation of Christ required. How does that rebuke, in the most powerful way, human pride and arrogance? In light of the truth about Christ and the Incarnation, why are these such horrendous sins?
Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** “When John Knox preached in the days of the Reformation in Scotland it was said that the voice of that one man put more courage into the hearts of his hearers than ten thousand trumpets braying in their ears. His words did things to people. In the days of the French Revolution, Rouget de Lisle wrote ‘Marseillaise’ and that song sent men marching to revolution. The words did things. In the days of the Second World War, when Britain was bereft alike of allies and of weapons, the words of the Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, as he broadcast to the nation, did things to people.”—William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: John I* (Bangalore, India: Theological Publications in India, 1975), pp. 27, 28.

**Thought Questions:**

1. A word is a powerful thing to the Jewish person. It has dynamic energy and the ability to exist independently. And that is why the Hebrew language uses words sparingly. With this in mind, read John 1:14. What pictures of Jesus is John trying to portray by calling Him “the Word”? How do you think the people of John’s time might have reacted to this kind of description of Jesus?

2. God wants more than an ethereal relationship with us, His church. He wants to set up permanent residence in our lives. With this image in mind, study, in 1 Corinthians 10:1-10, the follies of the Israelites on their journey to the Promised Land. How can inviting God’s presence to dwell within us act as a safeguard against repeating these same acts?

**Application Questions:**

1. A grasp of the potency of a word in Hebrew helps us better understand the story of Isaac, who was unable to retract his blessing bestowed on the wrong son. It also helps us understand the power of the Creation story—God spoke the earth into creation. Read Psalms 33, 107, and 147. How can the power of God’s Word as described in these psalms translate into a source of strength in your life?

2. In the context of God’s words having power, how would you interpret biblical phrases such as “‘I am with you always’” (Matt. 28:20, NKJV)? Share with the class other passages in the Bible that give you strength and courage. As God’s children, we are commissioned to reflect Him. In what ways can our lives exude the power of God as “the Word”?
Further Study: “Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore.

“The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father”—Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906.


“The only way in which the fallen race could be restored was through the gift of His Son, equal with Himself, possessing the attributes of God. Though so highly exalted, Christ consented to assume human nature, that He might work in behalf of man and reconcile to God His disloyal subject.”—Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, November 8, 1892.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why did John begin his Gospel with thoughts about Creation, and even before Creation, when all the other Gospels begin with either the birth of Jesus or His adult ministry? What theological point was he making?

2. As we saw this week, John uses sanctuary imagery in referring to Christ (John 1:14). And though the earthly-sanctuary service was ended after Christ’s death, what role did the sanctuary have that is so important in helping us understand just what Christ did for us when He was in the flesh and also what He is doing for us now as our High Priest?

3. How would you answer someone who rejects the Deity or pre-existence of Christ on scientific or logical grounds?

Summary: John 1:1-18 tells us that the King of the universe, the eternal Creator, chose to become a human being. In simple yet profound terms, John expresses the full contrast between the divine and human natures of Jesus. No being in the universe is more divine than Jesus, nor is any more human. In His person He combines everything we need to become children of God. The rest of the Gospel will unpack how this can take place in our lives today.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: John 2:1-22.

Memory Text: “And Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’” (John 2:19, NIV).

Key Thought: No matter where we choose to look in order to find life, Jesus offers something better: better wine, a better temple, even a better birth!

In John 1:1-18 we saw that Jesus was the best revelation of God possible. He was there with God from the beginning (vss. 1, 2). He created the whole universe, placed life in it, and keeps it going (vss. 3-5). In His flesh He embodied the very glory of God (vs. 14). He came to us direct from face-to-face intimacy with God (vs. 18).

The passages in this week’s lesson are a natural extension of the prologue to John’s Gospel. If Jesus is the best, He is naturally better than all substitutes. Thus, it’s unfortunate that people have developed many substitutes for Jesus. They seek to find life by accumulating an abundance of possessions. Others seek life in performance and worldly success. Still others seek life in the esteem of the rich, the brilliant, the beautiful, or the famous. Many, despairing in the failure of these, drown life in drugs, alcohol, and addictive games and habits. Some pursue various mystical religions. But no matter which path people may choose, Jesus offers something better than what they possibly could have apart from Him.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 17.
Living Parables (John 2:1-22).

At first glance there seems to be little spiritual food in this section of the Gospel. There is a simple story about a wedding, during which the drink runs out before the end of the feast. Jesus rescues a couple and their caterer from embarrassment. Then Jesus drives some animals and money changers out of the temple. The stories are well known and offer no surprises. There are few “quotable quotes” that cry out for memorization. Are these stories a digression from the spiritual theology of the Gospel, or is there something deeper going on?

Also, an interesting feature of the beloved Gospel is the absence of parables (see Friday’s section). Because parables were a major basis for Jesus’ teaching, their absence is remarkable. Instead, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, John took actual events from Jesus’ ministry and portrayed them as living parables. Beneath the surface of each historical account, the Lord has placed a deeper meaning that teaches us something special about Jesus.

And, as the first miracle in the Gospel, the wedding-of-Cana story is the first of these living parables.

Read through the story of the wedding feast (vss. 1-11). What do you think the importance of this account is?

______________________________________________________________________________

How would you characterize the interaction between Jesus and His mother? John 2:4, 5.

______________________________________________________________________________

While ancient parallels suggest that Jesus was not speaking disrespectfully to His mother, He clearly differed with her on this occasion. “There was danger that Mary would regard her relationship to Jesus as giving her a special claim upon Him, and the right, in some degree, to direct Him in His mission. . . . As Son of the Most High, and Saviour of the world, no earthly ties must hold Him from His mission, or influence His conduct. He must stand free to do the will of God. . . . The claims of God are paramount even to the ties of human relationship.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 147.

As believers, how do we balance out the commandment to honor our parents when it conflicts with our duty to God?
Key Text: John 2:19

Teachers Aims:
1. To emphasize the futility of seeking substitutes for Jesus.
2. To explore the spiritual meanings of Jesus’ miracles and other acts in John’s Gospel.
3. To demonstrate the Cross’s centrality in Jesus’ and John’s messages.

Lesson Outline:
I. Looking in All the Wrong Places (Ps. 118:22).
   A. Many of the things people strive for are poor substitutes for what Jesus has to offer.
   B. Even “good” things are transitory.
   C. Jesus gives meaning to the good things of life.

II. Miracle and Message (John 5:17).
   A. Jesus’ miracles in John’s Gospel often subtly satirized things that people of the time regarded as important.
   B. Most of these miracles can be seen to directly reference the Cross and Christ’s shed blood.
   C. Christ was fully conscious of His mission.

III. Things to Come (Heb. 10:1, 2).
   A. The religious rituals and observances of Jesus’ time met their fulfillment in the Cross.
   B. In His participation in, and comments on, these observances, Christ attempted to guide His contemporaries to the true meaning of the rituals.
   C. Life’s meaning is found in the Cross and its revelation of God.

Summary: The true meaning of Jesus’ mission is found in the Cross. Without it, we would have remained helpless and hopeless. By dying for us, Jesus enabled us to repair our broken relationship with the Creator of the universe.

Commentary.
Writing some fifty to sixty years after the ascension of his Lord, John had had ample time to think, reflect, and meditate on the great events in Jesus’ ministry. Bent with age but burning with zeal, the apostle knew that Jesus was not just a great teacher, a prophet, or a miracle worker. Every memory of Him was a fresh reminder that Jesus was God in human flesh. So, even behind the miracles and events he recorded, we see great meaning and application.

This week’s lesson teaches us three things about the religion of Jesus: It is happy. It is reverent. It is newness of life.
From Water to Wine (John 2:1-11).

**With what** activity was the water that Jesus used associated?


An interesting point lies just below the surface of this brief Bible study. Changing water into wine symbolized something bigger than a mere physical miracle. The water was not just any water; it was water set aside by the Jews for ceremonial washings. The wine was not just any wine, it was “the best.”

John uses this story as a gentle criticism of a major alternative to the faith of Jesus. Religious people of Jesus’ day were obsessed with washing rituals (see also Matt. 15:1, 2). Washing is good. On a practical level, it is sanitary. As a religious expression, it can remind you to think about God. Water is necessary for life; without it, we could not exist, just as, without God, we could not exist, either.

But Jesus replaces the water of ceremonial washings with something better, the tasty juice of the grape.


**What** do these texts tell us about how important blood is to the whole plan of salvation?

Lev. 17:11

Col. 1:14

Heb. 10:19

The first miracle Jesus does, then, is to turn water into wine, and wine is a symbol of His shed blood, the blood that would be poured out for the sins of the world, the only means of salvation. Though inspiration does not tell us why this was the first miracle recorded, perhaps it was because the Lord wanted right away to present the idea of Christ’s blood. What we see here, then, however faintly, are symbols and an image of what is to come.

If someone were to ask you to explain the meaning of Christ’s shed blood and what it meant to you, what would you say?
I. The Religion of Jesus Is Happy.

Jesus was on the most important mission in the universe: to reveal His Father and to prepare for Golgotha’s war against the evil one. Yet, He took time to attend a simple wedding in Cana, a little-known village near Nazareth. His presence at the wedding feast shows that the religion of Jesus is not a call for social isolation but for wholesome participation in society, whereby a shortage may be corrected, an embarrassment may be averted, or a testimony to the goodness of God may be shared.

The miracle at Cana has other important lessons, as well. First, Jesus functioned according to a divine mandate and schedule. His work on earth could not be tied to any human urging (for example, observe Jesus’ response to Mary’s command in John 2:4), nor could it know haste or delay. “My hour has not yet come,” said Jesus (vs. 4; compare John 7:6, 8; 12:23; 17:1). “Every act of Christ’s life on earth was in fulfillment of the plan that had existed from the days of eternity. Before He came to earth, the plan lay out before Him, perfect in all its details. But as He walked among men, He was guided, step by step, by the Father’s will.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 147.

Second, where Jesus is, there is a better and more abundant sufficiency. At Cana, Jesus not only turned water into wine but a better wine. No one can offer anything that equals or betters what Jesus has to offer—in life, hope, or destiny. And Jesus is all-sufficient. He commanded six jars to be filled to the brim with water—approximately one hundred and twenty gallons (see The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 922) that turned into the best possible wine. A small-village, wedding party, through its midpoint, hardly needed that much wine. That is the point, however. The grace of Jesus is more than we ever need to meet our deficiencies. All in all, the way of Jesus is happy, fulfilling, all-sufficient. “He is able” (Heb. 7:25).

II. The Religion of Jesus Calls for Reverence.

The temple was to be a place of praise and worship, and the Passover was to be a reminder of God’s redemptive activity. Instead, the priests and the merchants turned the temple and its precincts into a camp of exploitation and the Passover celebration as an occasion to fill their greed. Reverence was out. Greed was in. And in the process, the anger of Jesus turned against those responsible for turning His “Father’s house [into] a house of merchandise” (John 2:16, NKJV). The Bible never views the wrath of God in opposition to His love but rather as an outgrowth of it. Holiness and reverence can never be set aside to support selfish greed or materialistic gain, even for a good cause.

In an age that equates entertainment with worship, pandering with praise, a comfortable pew with fervent fellowship, lottery with
**Foretaste of the Cross**

**When** Jesus says “‘My time has not yet come’” (John 2:4, NIV), what does He mean by “my time”? John 7:30, 8:20.

The Greek word translated “time” in all these texts is actually the word for “hour.” “Mine hour is not yet come.” This hour, of course, was the “hour” of His arrest and crucifixion.

**What** does Jesus reveal by His first miracle? John 2:11.


The glory of Jesus and the “hour” of Jesus point to the same thing in the Gospel of John. The hour of His suffering and death is the very occasion in which Jesus is glorified. The Cross is the ultimate manifestation of Jesus’ self-sacrificing divine character. The Cross is the place where the character of God is most clearly revealed. Here we see the glory of God in its fullest manifestation.

The wedding story, therefore, contains a number of indirect references to Jesus’ death and resurrection. The wedding took place “on the third day,” a reference to Jesus’ resurrection (see Matt. 16:21; Luke 24:7, 21, 46; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor. 15:4). Jesus turns water into wine, a symbol of His blood (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25, 26). References to both Jesus’ “time” and His “glory” are pointers to the Cross. And the only two times in the Gospel that Jesus is described as speaking to His mother, He calls her “woman”: in the wedding story here (John 2:4) and later at the cross (John 19:25-27).

In a special way, therefore, this charming wedding story is a “living parable” of the Cross and of the glory of God’s character that would be manifested there. The sign Jesus performs at the wedding feast of Cana is a foretaste of the ultimate sign He performs in submitting to suffering and death. In John 2:11 the disciples’ response to that sign foreshadowed not only their future response to the Cross (John 20:8, 24-29) but also the response of all who would come to believe in Jesus through their word (John 17:20; 20:30, 31).

**How would you explain to a nonbeliever how God’s glory was revealed by the Cross?**
stewardship, and a zealous message with a soothing massage, Christ’s action in the temple is a call to stand up for the way of Jesus—a way in which God is exalted in reverence and praise, and His place of worship is held high as a light set upon the hills.

III. The Religion of Jesus Assures Newness.

The third part of this week’s lesson begins with the typical response of nominal religious leaders to a major event—the cleans-

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:12-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:11, 12-22; 7:18; 1 Corinthians 1:23

1. Every religion or belief system has its founders, prophets, or saints who attempt to validate their divinity through miracles, incredible predictions, etc. John 2:1-22 appears to be just such a case. Why, however, is it different?

2. The story of Jesus cleansing the temple appears in all the Gospels. However, the narrative that appears in John is different from the other accounts in many ways. What are these differences, and how are they significant?

3. People today continue to debate the significance of the biblical temple, its architecture, its role in future events, etc. Does the fact that Jesus refers to Himself as the temple help us in our understanding of these issues?

4. How would you characterize Jesus’ attitude toward the temple? How would it have been different from that of the average person living in that time and place?

5. In condemning the wrong practices taking place in the courtyard of the temple, Jesus taught us that it is proper to speak and act against wrongdoing and injustices. What wrongdoing and injustices is it proper for a Christian to speak and act against today? What are some suitable ways of doing so? How can a Christian lifestyle be one of those ways?

6. It seems obvious that Jesus’ coming sacrifice on the cross is central to most or all of the events and teachings recorded in John’s Gospel in a way that it is not in the other three Gospels. Why, then, do you think its importance eluded people then and continues to do so today?

Read over the account of Jesus in the temple as expressed by John in John 2:13-22. Then answer these questions:

- When does Jesus go to the temple? What is the meaning of that special time? See Exod. 12:24-27.

- How does Jesus respond to those who challenge His authority (John 2:19), and how does that answer fit in with the true meaning of the Passover service? See 1 Cor. 5:7.


The animals being sold in the temple courts were available for sacrifices, making the “marketplace” a genuine and needed service to long-distance travelers. The money exchanging was necessary, because the temple did business only in a unique temple currency.

While other sources suggest that there was a lot of deception and corruption involved in the temple-court sales, that doesn’t seem to be the issue here in John. The problem here is that the activity, though meeting a legitimate need, was located in a place that should have been devoted exclusively to teaching, worship, and prayer.

Thus, what we see here, in this companion story of the wedding at Cana, is the twin theme of “something better,” as well as a foretaste of the Cross. The temple was good, it was ordained by God; yet, Jesus is here offering something even better than the temple: His body. The meaning of the Cross transcends all other expressions of religion.

Think again about the selling of the animals for sacrifice. Though itself not bad, it was the context in which it was happening that made it bad. In what ways can things in our own life, not bad in and of themselves, nevertheless be harmful because of the context in which they appear?
ing of the temple. Instead of turning the event into self-examination and correction, they demanded to know on what authority Jesus sought to rid the temple of what He considered to be pollution and corruption. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” said Jesus (vs. 19). The Jewish leaders jumped to scorn. How could a structure that had taken 46 years to build be rebuilt in three days? Such scorn is what happens when religion is stripped of its mystery only to be loaded with routines and when prophecy is stripped of its divine urgency only to be filled with convenience and compromise. Such scorn is what happens when Jesus does not become our eternal contemporary and perpetual context of worship, prayer, study, work, and hope.

Jesus promised a new temple, built not of human hands but of His own death and resurrection—a prophecy in whose fulfillment lay the hope of all ages. Only through faith can one grasp that new hope and become a part, however small or significant, of that new temple. Without the crucified and risen Jesus, there is no newness.

Witnessing

When Tina married Kenny, a podiatrist, she had no idea how different life would be from what she was expecting. They lived in a quiet community just outside a busy metropolis. Kenny worked at a podiatric clinic in the city, while Tina stayed home with their first child. One evening Kenny sat down with Tina to discuss how things had been going at the office. He began to tell his wife, who was expecting their second child, about the many patients who came to the clinic but did not have adequate health insurance or money for the care they needed. Tina listened intently, waiting to hear how many people had been turned away. Instead, Kenny went on to explain that he had decided to open his own practice right in the heart of the city. He wanted to help the patients who needed care but could not pay. Tina was uncertain as to how they would survive, but she trustingly followed her husband’s lead in relocating the young family to be closer to the business. Over the years, Kenny took on many needy patients who showed their gratitude in various ways, including giving Kenny food and clothing for his young family. Tina looks back with a thankful heart that God led her husband to sacrifice for the needs of others. She now says that life has been better than she ever thought it would be.

The things of this earth may seem good to some: material wealth, successful careers, fame, and financial security. People need to know, however, that what Christ offers is so much better than anything this world offers. We must teach them to seek first the kingdom of heaven and the righteousness of Christ (Matt. 6:33) in order to have a better, more rewarding life.
The Meaning of the Cross *(John 2:21, 22; Gal. 6:14).*

In John’s account of the cleansing of the temple, he uses the story, as he did with the wedding of Cana, as a parable of the Cross. Not only is the Cross superior to the waters of religious ritual, it is superior even to the temple in Jerusalem, which, outside of Christ Himself in the flesh, was the greatest manifestation of true religion.

**Where** does Paul, like John, find “glory”? *Gal. 6:14. What is Paul saying in that verse? In what ways should we have the same experience as he did?*

In John 2:1-22, we see good things getting in the way of the best. It is no different today. Everyone seeks meaning and a sense of value out of life, but few seek it in Jesus. Instead, people try to find “life” by accumulating things, by performing in ways, including religious performance, that bring praise, and by developing relationships with admired people.

Possessions, performance, and people are good things. They are part of the spice of life, but they are not life itself. No matter how many possessions you may have, they are never enough. And those you have rust, rot, break, crash, or become hopelessly scratched up. Athletes become broken and frail, beauty queens grow old and wrinkled, and teachers become mindless and forgetful. Loved ones sometimes leave you, disrespect you, divorce you, and/or die when you are least prepared. Life is frightfully insecure if based on such good things as possessions, performance, and relationships with other people.

To those jaded by a desperate search for life, John offers something better: the Cross. The Cross tells us there is a God who knows everything we have ever done yet loves and values us so much that He gave His life for us. “At the foot of the cross, remembering that for one sinner Christ would have laid down His life, you may estimate the value of a soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 196. “The hand that sustains the worlds in space . . . is the hand that was nailed to the cross for me.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 472. This insight is the source for an incomparable sense of personal worth and satisfaction, no matter the circumstances of daily life.

**Though, as Christians, we know these truths, why do we still allow ourselves to become caught up in earthly things that cannot ultimately satisfy our needs?** *See Rom. 3:10-20. What is the only way out of that trap? See Gal. 6:14.*
Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: When his flustered mother informed him that the wine had run out, Jesus responded, “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” “The phrase, ‘What have I to do with thee?’ was a common conversational phrase. When it was uttered angrily and sharply it did indicate complete disagreement and reproach, but when it was spoken gently it indicated not so much reproach but misunderstanding. It means: ‘Don’t worry; you don’t quite understand what is going on; leave things to me, and I will settle them in my own way.’ Jesus was simply telling Mary to leave things to him, that he would have his own way of dealing with the situation.” —William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible: John 1, pp. 97, 98.

Thought Questions:

1. Jesus’ response to Mary was so reassuring that she left Him to care for the problem. She did not stay to ask Him for details. She simply trusted Him to solve the problem, even when there seemed to be no logical solution in sight. How should the church be like Mary? Why is it difficult to trust when there are no logical solutions in sight?

2. Weddings in Bible times were joyous events that continued for days. Farming and trading halted, and everyone enjoyed fellowship, laughter, and good food. Jesus was no killjoy. The fact that He attended the wedding feast in Cana attests to this. What does this characteristic tell you about Jesus’ philosophy of balance in life? What does it tell you about being God-centered in all situations?

Application Questions:

1. Compare Jesus’ response to His mother concerning the wine shortage with that of a parent’s response to a child’s anxiousness. Note the similarities. What are the differences? Why do you suppose the Bible repeatedly refers to our relationship to God as that of a child to a parent? What are the added advantages of being a child of God?

2. Jesus came to save the world yet performed His first miracle at a common village wedding. This miracle passed unnoticed by the world at the time. Nor did it make international headlines. Why? What does this tell you of Jesus’ interest in your personal life?
Further Study: For those who have not made an in-depth study of the Gospel of John, the absence of parables in the Gospel comes as quite a surprise. There are only two sayings of Jesus that even come close to being classified as parables: the account of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-21) and the description of the vine and the branches (John 15:1-8). But neither of these sayings is called a parable, and they differ from the pattern of Jesus’ parables found in the other three Gospels. Rather than telling a specific story, they are general illustrations of a point. It is interesting to compare these two sayings with the many parables found in Matthew 13 or Mark 4.

“The gift of Christ to the marriage feast was a symbol. The water represented baptism into His death; the wine, the shedding of His blood for the sins of the world. The water to fill the jars was brought by human hands, but the word of Christ alone could impart to it life-giving virtue. So with the rites which point to the Saviour’s death. It is only by the power of Christ, working through faith, that they have efficacy to nourish the soul.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 148, 149.

Discussion Question:

No matter who we are, how much money we have, how great our health, how high our status, death is the inevitable end. Anything that doesn’t answer the problem of death is, ultimately, unsatisfactory. Why, then, can Christ alone be the only satisfactory answer to this, the greatest of all human problems?

Summary: The beloved disciple tells two stories about Jesus in such a way that they become living parables that teach deep insights about Jesus. The main point is that Jesus is better than all human substitutes for what He offers. Jesus replaces the beautiful rituals of a religiosity that leave people short of the fullness of life that He offers. At the heart of what Jesus offers is the Cross. If I am that valuable to God, then it doesn’t matter whether I’m rich or poor, great or small, famous or ordinary, and it doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks of me. I am worth the whole universe to Christ.
Read for This Week’s Study: John 2:23–4:42.

Memory Text: “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV).

Key Thought: The grace of God manifested on the cross plays no favorites. “Whoever believes” will find life in Jesus Christ.

Grace is all-inclusive. In John, chapters 3 and 4, we encounter a pair of living parables in the stories about Nicodemus and about the Samaritan woman. Jesus encounters two individuals who are as opposite as can be. Differing in race, religion, reputation, gender, wealth, location, and behavior, both encounter Jesus away from the crowds. Both find the encounter bewildering and life changing.

In these two stories we see a living parable that unfolds the promise of John 3:16, perhaps the most beloved text in the Bible. God loved the world so much that He gave His beloved Son in order that “whosoever” believes might not perish but have eternal life. In Nicodemus and in the Samaritan woman, we see the opposite extremes of that “whosoever” illustrated. God does not play favorites (see Acts 10:34, 35). No matter who you are, no matter what you have done, no matter what your pedigree, no matter how others treat you, Jesus exhibits a glorious lack of prejudice. He is truly the “Savior of the world” (John 4:42, NIV).

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 24.*
When Miracles Aren’t Enough (John 2:23-25).

On what grounds did many people at the Passover Feast come to have “faith” in Jesus? John 2:23.

Words such as faith can be used in more than one way in the Gospel of John. Faith can refer to the saving faith in Jesus that the disciples gained after He turned the water into wine at Cana (John 2:11). The same disciples attained an even deeper and more lasting faith after the Cross (vs. 22) and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (John 7:39).

But there is another type of faith that is in view in John 2:23-25 and other places: inadequate or superficial faith that is based upon miracles but does not result in a saving relationship with Jesus. In John 2:23-25 Jesus sees right through some followers’ profession of faith and discerns their real motives.

As a result of His miracles, many people came to believe in Jesus. Are miracles alone, however, enough for someone to have a saving faith in Him? See also Luke 16:31. Explain your answer.

People sometimes think that if they could see miracles, they would have more faith. But miracles are no cure for superficial faith; they even can get in the way of true faith, hindering us from perceiving the deeper aspects of a relationship with Jesus.

Even with all the miracles Jesus had performed throughout His ministry, many still refused to accept Him, and many turned away when they saw that He wasn’t going to do everything they expected Him to do. (See John 6:51-66 and Ellen G. White, “The Crisis in Galilee,” in The Desire of Ages.) What this should tell us is that while a personal experience with Jesus is crucial for a saving faith, faith needs to go beyond mere experience; it needs to be rooted and grounded in a living knowledge of who we are, what our condition is, and what Christ has done in order to spare us from the fate that our condition would otherwise bring to us.

Look at your walk with the Lord. On what is it based? Miracles, experience, reason, emotion? Is your faith grounded in a reality deeper than mere emotions or experience alone? Write out a paragraph describing why you believe what you do.
Key Text: John 3:16

Teachers Aims:

1. To demonstrate how God’s grace is given freely to all.
2. To examine our motives in our relationship with God.
3. To view others as God, as seen in Jesus, views them.

Lesson Outline:

I. Indiscriminate Grace (John 1:12).
   A. The stories of Nicodemus and of the Samaritan woman at the well reveal
      the universal human need for divine grace.
   B. Human self-sufficiency or merit is an illusion.
   C. Religion itself can often be a source of unwarranted self-confidence.

II. At the Core (John 5:39, 40).
   A. What we may view as trust in God may really be trust in self.
   B. Only a new birth can allow us to follow God in a true sense.
   C. This new birth is the most important—and perhaps the only—faith-
      building miracle.

III. Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner? (John 4:23).
   A. Jesus explicitly rejected the ethnic chauvinism of His day, even that which
      seemed religiously based.
   B. Jesus’ message is to the world, not any particularly favored portion of it.
   C. The universality of the message was central to its meaning.

Summary: Central to John’s message is the emphasis on the fact that Jesus came
to save everyone in the world who would accept Him. The only requirement was
a willingness to experience the new birth. Next to this new birth, other religious
phenomena are unimportant.

Commentary.

The saving grace of Jesus knows no race, nationality, gender, language, status, or caste. Its requirement is as simple as it is
dynamic: “‘Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have
everlasting life’” (John 3:16, NKJV). All who accept Christ’s re-
demptive work on the cross shall have eternal life.

This week’s lesson shows that eternal life is born of the Spirit, a
result of the Cross, and an experience all can have.

I. Eternal Life: Born of the Spirit.

Nicodemus was a soul in struggle. As a ruler of the Jews, a
member of the Sanhedrin, and a Pharisee who loved the law, he
knew the rudiments of religion and the routines of its practice.
He Came by Night (John 3:1-21).

In the Gospel of John, the narratives become living parables of the spiritual realities offered in Jesus. In Nicodemus (“a witness of the scene when Jesus drove out the buyers and the sellers”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 168), we see a living example of a person who, though a highly esteemed religious leader, had inadequate faith.

**On what basis does Nicodemus consider Jesus a teacher who has come from God?** *John 3:2. See also John 2:23-25.*

When Nicodemus says “We know,” he represents those in the previous passage (John 2:23-25) who saw what Jesus did in the temple but came to have inadequate faith as a result. “His [Nicodemus’s] words were designed to express and to invite confidence; but they really expressed unbelief.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 168.

The Greek word for “night” in this verse comes in a form that emphasizes not so much the dark part of the day as the quality of darkness, the darkness in Nicodemus’s soul at the time he comes to Jesus. He has seen what Jesus did in the temple, but he doesn’t perceive the real truth about Jesus, that He is the Word made flesh.

**Read** John 3:3-10, Christ’s immediate response to Nicodemus. Why does Nicodemus’s response reveal just how little this religious leader knew of crucial spiritual truth?

This story shows Jesus reading the heart of another human being (see John 2:25). Nicodemus cannot hide his spiritual ignorance behind the veneer of religiosity, of forms and customs, at least not from Jesus.

In the Nicodemus story, John continues the themes emphasized in chapter 2. Jesus replaces Nicodemus’s religious ideas with the truth about the new birth, with the Cross as the ground for everything that Jesus offers. The kingdom of God is entered not by physical birth but by a personal decision that everyone, even a leader of the Jews, such as Nicodemus, has to make.

**We might be very religious, faithful in all the forms and traditions of our faith, but according to today’s study, what is the one thing we must have? Ask yourself which category you fall into. If it is not the right one, what must happen for you to be changed?**

January 19
However, a void within drove him to Jesus. Nicodemus came by night, perhaps out of caution or fear; but it is better to come to Jesus at night than not to come at all, for coming may make all the difference between eternal loss and eternal life. Were it not for that interview between a cautious Pharisee and a loving Lord, we may not have inherited the beauty and the promise of John 3:16, and our Lord’s broken body may not have received the reverent and decent burial it did (John 19:39).

Nicodemus did not ask the question. But Jesus gave the answer just the same. He “knew all men” (John 2:24) and could read the cry of Nicodemus’s heart. That cry was more than the cry of an individual. It is the pang of humanity. Jesus at once revealed to Nicodemus and us the basis of salvation and eternal life: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

A transformed life, the essence of the born-again experience, is the basis of eternal life. Salvation is not a commodity to be purchased by one’s wealth or achieved by one’s good works. In a single stroke, Jesus toppled the foundation of every religion’s approach to salvation and proclaimed to weary souls everywhere that eternal life is based on a grace made possible by Him who alone can transform the old into new. The psalmist was right: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10).

Eternal life does not come from biology or psychology, science or art. It must ever be “born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

“The Christian’s life is not a modification or improvement of the old, but a transformation of nature. There is a death to self and sin, and a new life altogether. This change can be brought about only by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 172.

II. Eternal Life: A Result of the Cross.

“For God so loved the world,” says the Bible’s favorite passage. If God’s love conceived the plan of salvation, the execution of the plan was a result of the second part of that passage: “that He gave His only begotten Son” (vs. 16, NKJV). The uniqueness of God’s gift was not that He gave His Son but that He gave Him to die for our sins. Jesus knew this way ahead of the Cross itself: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14, 15). Without the Cross, there could be no forgiveness of sins nor eternal life. The Cross distinguishes the way of Christ from every other way. All other ways may be philosophically brilliant, logically adequate, intellectually stimulating, but woefully inadequate in providing what the human heart needs most: forgiveness. For that, one must come to the Cross, or else there is only chaos. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).
The New Birth (John 3:3-8).

The name Nicodemus means “leader of the people.” He was undoubtedly a pious man, an example of the best that Judaism could offer. As a Pharisee, he took the Scriptures and his faith seriously. He no doubt would have made a good neighbor. Jesus’ response to this good man, this faithful and godly man, is, therefore, somewhat surprising.

**What** do even “good” and pious people need in order to enter the kingdom of God? John 3:3, 5. What do you understand this to mean?

If Nicodemus had been part of the delegation of Pharisees who questioned John the Baptist (John 1:24-28), he would have been aware of John’s claim that baptism by water heralded the coming of the One greater than John—of the Messiah. As good and pious as Nicodemus was, he needed a new birth that could come only from the Messiah through baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Water and Spirit are closely related in Jesus’ teaching (John 4:10-14, 23, 24; 7:37-39). And the concept of being “born from above” is related to the ministry of John in John 3:22-36. So Jesus’ statement here suggests the need for a double baptism, an outward one by water and an inward one by the Holy Spirit.

**Read** again what Jesus says to Nicodemus. In what ways do His words show us the utter futility of saving ourselves and our entire dependence upon God for salvation? See also Isa. 25:9, Titus 3:5, Heb. 9:12.

Though we saw in Sunday’s section how experience alone (such as witnessing miracles) isn’t enough for a saving faith, Christ’s words to Nicodemus show at the same time just how crucial experience is to the Christian. A new birth is, indeed, nothing if not an experience. Jesus is telling Nicodemus, and us, that a knowledge of forms, customs, even correct doctrine, isn’t enough. We must experience, personally, His saving power in our lives.

If someone asks you, Have you been born again? what would you answer? And if the answer is Yes, what grounds do you have for saying so?
As in Jesus’ time, people today struggle with accepting others from different backgrounds, etc. Some even use the Bible to justify such attitudes. Yet, the inclusiveness of Jesus’ message seems obvious. How and why might people dodge this inclusiveness?

Most people have faith in something and sometimes in a number of things at once. John 2:23-25 suggests that faith can be faith yet still not be adequate. What is the difference between saving faith and lukewarm faith? How can we be sure we have the saving variety?

Read Romans 3:28 and James 2:18, 19. At first, these passages seem to contradict each other. Why, however, do they not? What texts support your answer?

While belief in miracles and “peak experiences” may not substitute for genuine faith, few people would deny that such events have value. What is this value?

In Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, Nicodemus expresses ignorance about what seems to us to be fundamental spiritual principles. Was Nicodemus being intentionally ignorant? If so, why? What lesson is there for us in Nicodemus’s reaction?

What do you think John was trying to say by demonstrating how much more receptive the Samaritan woman was to Jesus’ teaching than were the “religious” people? What does it say to those for whom Christianity itself is just another way to be “religious”?

Discuss the differences that existed between the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus. What are the differences and the similarities in the way each responded to Jesus? In the way Jesus responded to them? What does this teach us about how we should approach others with the gospel?
**Wednesday** January 21

**She Came by Day** (John 4:1-42).

Read over the entire account of Jesus with the woman at the well and then answer these questions:

- How does the woman at the well react to Jesus at first? *John 4:9, 11, 12.*

- What makes the woman believe that Jesus is a prophet? *John 4:17-19, 29.*

Put yourself in the place of this woman: Here is this stranger, someone from a rival religion, in fact, who quickly reveals that He knows some of her darkest, most personal secrets. No wonder she had a change of attitude! Thus, it is not the physical presence of Jesus that convinces the woman that He is the Messiah (His physical appearance apparently meant nothing to her)—it is His word. Here, again, John underlines the theme that Jesus’ word is as good as His touch.

Read carefully John 4:21-24. What point is Jesus making to her? What is He seeking to lead her toward?

John 4:23, 24 recalls the cleansing of the temple in chapter 2. Jesus has come to earth to restore the proper worship of God. A localized temple favors one people over another; worship in spirit, however, is universal. It is not tied to any geographical place or particular people. Jesus brings out that the location of worship is not nearly as important as the attitude of the worshiper. It is not so much where we worship as whom we worship.

In the story of the Samaritan woman, John continues the themes of chapters 2 and 3. For one thing, Jesus knows all about the Samaritan woman. He reads her heart and her history, as He did with Nicodemus. This knowledge gives her the confidence to proclaim Him. In return, Jesus replaces the worship of the Samaritans with a more adequate faith based on Spirit and truth.

Notice something not explicit in this story: Jesus exposes the woman’s darkest sins, and yet when she leaves, she tries to get others to come to Jesus. Why did she not keep quiet about this Man who could do her much harm? What does her attitude about Jesus tell us about how Jesus must have treated her, despite her sin? What lessons are here for us in how we deal with sinners?
only at Nicodemus and this woman. Yet, Jesus built a bridge between the Jew and the Samaritan, between women and men. This bridge is open to all who believe that Jesus is the Redeemer. Neither the self-righteousness of the Pharisee nor the sinfulness of the Samaritan could block the working of God’s love or hinder the power of His transforming grace. Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth must fall prostrate at the feet of Him who linked earth and heaven together forever by a Cross.

“No circumstance of birth or nationality, no condition of life, can turn away His love from the children of men. To every soul, however sinful, Jesus says, If thou hadst asked of Me, I would have given thee living water.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 194.

**Witnessing**

Alfred Bernhard Nobel, a Swedish inventor, provided in his will for the establishment of funds that would be awarded annually to five different individuals or institutions for their achievements in designated fields, including medicine and international peace. Nobel indicated that only those who were most worthy should receive the awards, regardless of nationality. It did not matter to him what the financial status was of those receiving the money, what country they were from, or what ethnic group they belonged to—only that they were the ones who had made the greatest contributions to the fields he had selected.

The intangible things of God seem to have no boundaries. Love has no color, shape, nor size. Neither does joy, honor, nor peace. Each of these attributes is genderless. None are limited by time or space, and anyone can possess them. God’s gifts are free to all. So it is with God’s grace. It is “all-inclusive.”

God’s grace was all-inclusive for Nicodemus, a well-known religious leader with hidden sins. Christ told Nicodemus he must be born again, thus giving him the opportunity to experience new life (new birth) in Himself. His grace was for an unknown Samaritan woman who was living in open sin. To her, He also wanted to give new life in Himself, the Living Water.

As we witness to others, we, too, should be “no respecter of persons” (*Acts 10:34*). We can share the message of the gospel with all those with whom we come in contact: children and adults, friends and strangers, those of other races, those of other religions, those we like, and those we may not like. “Go ye therefore, and teach all . . .” is our great command (*Matt. 28:19*).
The Attraction of Opposites.

As a result of the woman’s testimony and of their own encounter with Jesus, what do the Samaritans come to believe about Jesus? John 4:42. Also, what was it about Jesus that causes them to believe?

“‘Savior of the world’” means that salvation is no longer bound by ethnic or geographic considerations. In Jesus all peoples, including despised groups such as the Samaritans, can claim the fullness of God’s favor. For the scorned and rejected, this kind of salvation comes as a great and welcome surprise. To those who oppress and exclude, this great salvation comes as the shattering of a world in which everyone knows his or her “place.”

What are all these texts telling us? Acts 10:28, 17:26, Col. 3:11, 1 John 2:2.

It is said that in relationships opposites attract. The stories about Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman portray these two in stark contrast to each other. Nicodemus is a man, the Samaritan a woman. He is a Jew, a Pharisee no less, she a lowly Samaritan. He comes by night; she comes at noon. He is rich (John 19:39); she is poor (or she would not have been fetching her own water in the heat of the day). He is highly educated (“the” teacher of Israel [John 3:10]); she is, as a woman in first-century Palestine, probably illiterate. He is pious (a Pharisee), she an adulteress. He is highly respected; she is (probably) despised and rejected, even by her own Samaritan neighbors. He has a great name, known from ancient writings outside the Bible; she is anonymous. He lives in the holy city, Jerusalem; she lives in Sychar, (which means “drunkenness”). He is open to believe yet slow to accept; she is suspicious at first yet quick to embrace Jesus when she realizes who He is.

In these two stories, we see a living parable of John 3:16. God sent His Son so that “whoever believes” might have eternal life. In these two individuals we see the opposite extremes of that “whoever.” No matter who you are, your station in life, or your sinful condition, you are welcome to receive Him. He is truly the “Savior of the world” (John 4:42 NIV). See the quotation in Friday’s section.

Considering what we have studied today, why is racism so offensive in the sight of God?
Icebreaker: “The verb to lift up is hupsoun. The strange thing is that it is used of Jesus in two senses. It is used of his being lifted up upon the Cross; and it is used of his being lifted up into glory at the time of his ascension into heaven. . . . There was a double lifting up in Jesus’s life—the lifting on the Cross and the lifting into glory. And the two are intrinsically connected. The one could not have happened without the other. For Jesus the Cross was the way to glory; had he refused it, had he evaded it, had he taken steps to escape it, as he might so easily have done, there would have been no glory for him. It is the same for us. . . . It is an unalterable law of life that if there is no cross, there is no crown.”—William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible: John 1, pp. 134, 135.

Thought Questions:

1. The Cross and the crown show no discrimination. They are both manifestations of God’s grace to humanity, be we sinners or saints. Study the ways grace distinguishes Christianity from other world religions. How could you use “grace” to introduce someone to Jesus?

2. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. To be a Pharisee meant to be part of a brotherhood, an elite sect, who devoted their lives to the observance of every detail of the law. No one matched a Pharisee when it came to such diligence. Yet, Nicodemus came to Jesus looking for a better life. In what ways can the church be so caught up in the rituals of religion that it loses sight of the better life?

Application Questions:

1. John 3:16 is often referred to as “everybody’s text.” How do Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman illustrate this? From your personal life, give illustrations that are a testimony to this verse.

2. As Nicodemus did, take an inventory of your life. In what ways are you a closet Pharisee? What are the “laws” you observe just because such behavior is expected of you? How could making time at least once a week to do something that focuses on your love for God and others serve as a way to break the chains of legalism that bind you?
Further Study: “Jesus had begun to break down the partition wall between Jew and Gentile, and to preach salvation to the world. Though He was a Jew, He mingled freely with the Samaritans, setting at nought the Pharisaic customs of His nation. In the face of their prejudices He accepted the hospitality of this despised people. He slept under their roofs, ate with them at their tables—partaking of the food prepared and served by their hands—taught in their streets, and treated them with the utmost kindness and courtesy. . . .

“Those who call themselves His followers may despise and shun the outcast ones; but no circumstance of birth or nationality, no condition of life, can turn away His love from the children of men. To every soul, however sinful, Jesus says, If thou hadst asked of Me, I would have given thee living water.

“The gospel invitation is not to be narrowed down, and presented only to a select few, who, we suppose, will do us honor if they accept it. The message is to be given to all.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 193, 194.

Discussion Questions:

① How can we gain a clearer insight into the deceitfulness of our own hearts? In what type of setting are you most willing to confess your mistakes to others? How can the church help to create such settings?

② To what degree is it possible for Christians today to have the kind of discernment of others’ thoughts, motivations, and feelings that Jesus had? If we can’t, what should that fact tell us about why we need to be very careful not to judge the hearts of others?

Summary: The penetrating gaze of Jesus changes everything. Self-assured people become uncertain. Despised people find new life. Comfortable churches learn to shun business as usual. The Spirit blows where it wills. So it should not be surprising that when Christians become more like Jesus they shake things up too. As was the case also for Jesus, this “shaking” will not be greeted everywhere with joy. Both inside and outside the church, many prefer the comfortable security of a life that is undisturbed by the troublesome wind of the Spirit. These oppose the freedom of the Spirit with every fiber of their being.
The Struggle to Be Real

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: John 4:43-54.

Memory Text: “Jesus replied, ‘You may go. Your son will live.’ The man took Jesus at his word and departed” (John 4:50, NIV).

Key Thought: When we encounter Jesus, He challenges us to re-evaluate everything in our lives, even our own self-understanding.

In this lesson we encounter a man whose faith in Jesus is sufficient to propel him to journey 16 miles uphill in order to find Jesus and ask Him to heal his son. If we had observed him, we would have called him a man of faith. Yet, Jesus labels the man’s faith as the kind that’s merely seeking after miraculous signs and wonders. Jesus exposes his faith as something other than what it seemed to be.

The human heart is deceptive by nature (Jer. 17:9). Even at our best we sometimes deceive ourselves and others. But John tells the story of One who not only sees past our image building to the true need of the soul but helps us to a fuller and deeper knowledge of both self and God through His Word.

In this lesson we will examine a living parable of the One whose word is as good as His touch. In the process, we will gain a deeper insight into a more authentic Christian faith.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 31.
No Honor at Home (John 4:43-45).

This passage forms the transition between the story about the woman of Samaria and the story about a royal official in Galilee who approaches Jesus in behalf of his son. It is a startling passage in which, at first glance, two separate assertions seem to contradict each other.

**What** saying does Jesus have in mind as He approaches His home province? John 4:43, 44. What do you think that means?

**How** do the Galileans react upon Jesus’ arrival, and why? John 4:45.

As Jesus approaches Galilee, He is mindful that “a prophet has no honor in his own country”; yet, the Galileans welcome Jesus. In the original language, the word *then* occurs at the beginning of verse 45, suggesting that verse 45 is somehow the natural result of verse 44, “A prophet has no honor in his own country. When Jesus arrived in Galilee, therefore, the Galileans welcomed Him!” The welcome of the Galileans is somehow “without honor” to Jesus.

**Read** carefully John 4:45, as well as John 2:23-25. How do these verses explain what is happening here?

The welcoming response of the Galileans is just like that of the Judeans, who showed faith in Jesus because they had seen miracles and signs. The Galileans thought they were welcoming Jesus in a positive way. But enthusiasm for Jesus that is based on miracles only is no honor. The Galileans prove to be a people who are awed by miracles and spectacular works but who are slow to believe in Jesus’ words. Their excitement about Jesus is based more on selfishness than on faith in who He was.

In probably all of us, there are some selfish motives in our faith (after all, Why do we want salvation, if not to gain something for ourselves?). Must our motives always be pure in our walk with the Lord? Can the Lord still work with those whose motives might not be exactly what they should be?
Key Text: John 4:50

Teachers Aims:
1. To distinguish the characteristics of true faith.
2. To show the correct relationship between faith and works.
3. To give students the tools necessary for nourishing their own faith.

Lesson Outline:

I. Faith and Doubt (Mark 9:24).
   A. What appears to be faith often may be merely a reaction to favorable circumstances.
   B. While doubt is the opposite of faith, it is not completely foreign to faithful people.
   C. Doubt can become an occasion to increase one’s faith.

II. Faith and Works (James 1:22).
   A. There is no contradiction between faith and works, because faith is shown in action.
   B. Works are meant to reinforce one’s faith.
   C. Like faith itself, acts based upon faith may not always seem justified by apparent reality.

III. Acting As If You Had Faith (John 4:49, 50).
   A. Faith is a gift from God; to receive it, one must have contact (prayer, Bible study) with the Giver.
   B. To nourish faith it is necessary to have a realistic assessment of one’s own spiritual state and a willingness to trust God to “fix” it if necessary.
   C. Fellowship with other Christians is also important to a living, growing faith.

Summary: Faith, essentially the belief in things we cannot see, is a gift of God. We cannot simply will ourselves to have faith. But once we have received that gift, we must make an effort to keep it alive. This requires daily submission to the will of God.

Commentary.
Faith is essential for quality of life. Relationships are enhanced, decreased, or disappear, depending on the faith that exists between the persons involved. How much more so in our relationship with God!
This week’s lesson portrays the struggle of faith as it outlines three types of faith: the curious, the conditional, and the genuine.

I. Faith That Is Curious.
The turning of water into wine at Cana was so dramatic a miracle that it produced different responses: (1) “his disciples
It Is Hard to Be Real (John 4:46-49).

As is so often the case in John’s Gospel, this new story functions as an acted parable, demonstrating the truth of the earlier statement. The problematic, Galilean welcome of Jesus (John 4:43-45) is illustrated with a story about a royal official who believes in Jesus yet struggles in his expression of that faith.

**What** problem does the royal official bring to Jesus, and what does he want Jesus to do? *John 4:47, 49.*

**Where** did both Jesus and the royal official live? *John 2:12, 4:46.*

Jesus and the royal official had probably spent some time as neighbors in a very small town (Capernaum was little more than one hundred meters across). The man’s combination of faith and doubts well illustrates a prophet’s difficulty in finding honor at home.

**What** does Jesus say in response to the royal official’s first request? *John 4:48.* What did Jesus mean by this statement? Was not part of the problem the fact that they saw signs and wonders and yet still did not have true faith?

Jesus’ initial response indicates that the man, like Nicodemus before him, was an example of inadequate faith. It seems that the Galileans on the whole welcomed Jesus outwardly but did not really believe in Him (*John 4:43-45*). The miracles Jesus performed actually may have become stumbling blocks to the people on their way to a true appreciation of Jesus.

A Galilean himself, the royal official is confronted by the reality of his partial, inadequate faith. He is not relying on the word of Jesus but requires physical evidence before he would believe. He is startled to discover that he could not hide his unbelief from Jesus (remember the theme of *John 2:23-25: Jesus knows!*). Realizing that he might lose all on account of unbelief, he finally throws himself at the feet of Jesus in desperation.

**What are some helpful ways of dealing with doubt?** Is doubt always a negative thing, or can it sometimes play a positive role in a Christian’s experience? Why?
believed on him” (John 2:11), leading them to a close relationship with Jesus and His mission; (2) many in Jerusalem believed (vs. 23), perhaps wondering whether at last they had found the deliverer who would liberate them from Roman tyranny; and (3) “the Galileans received Him” (John 4:45, NKJV), perhaps expecting more miracles.

What is the difference between the disciples’ faith, the faith of the Jerusalem crowd, and the faith of the Galilean patriots? The disciples were to see in the miracle of Cana the launching of a divine mission whereby Jesus would quench the eternal thirst of the human soul. That faith—however dim at first—grew until after the Resurrection. The disciples would be able to proclaim the central quality of that faith—a saving relationship with Jesus. However, the faith of the Jerusalem crowd and the Galileans was one of curiosity. Could this Jesus be the promised Deliverer? Even if He were, they saw in Jesus a deliverer from the Romans, not a Redeemer from sin. The difference between saving faith and curious faith is motive. Is faith motivated by a desire to be saved from sin or by some other good that benefits oneself?

II. Faith That Is Conditional.

The miracle at Cana had an impact in Capernaum, 16 miles northeast (25.6 kilometers). There a nobleman was agonizing over his child who was “at the point of death” (John 4:47). The One who can turn water into wine can also turn death into life. At least that much faith must have urged the nobleman toward Jesus. But that is still not faith enough. “Come and heal my son,” was the nobleman’s plea. Yet, it was made not so much out of faith as it was out of love for his son. That is conditional faith. Unconditional faith, however, reverses the order: faith in Jesus, regardless of how much one loves something or someone else. Such a faith says, “I believe in Jesus because of who He is, not because of what He can do. And I know that whatever He does will be for my good.” It is that kind of faith that characterized the young men who faced Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace: “ ‘If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if He does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up’ ” (Dan. 3:17, 18, NIV). They “were pressured to deny God, but they chose to be faithful to Him no matter what happened! They trusted God to deliver them, but they were determined to be faithful regardless of the consequences. If God always rescued those who were true to Him Christians would not need faith. . . . We should be faithful to serve God whether He intervenes on our behalf or not. Our eternal reward is worth any suffering we may have to endure first.”—Life Application Bible, p. 1481, Daniel 3:16-18.
The Path to Faith (John 4:50-54).

What does Jesus say in response to the man’s second and more desperate request, and how does the royal official react? John 4:50.

“The nobleman left the Saviour’s presence with a peace and joy he had never known before. Not only did he believe that his son would be restored, but with strong confidence he trusted in Christ as the Redeemer.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 198, 199.

The shocking word that Jesus speaks to the man is that He does not need to travel to Capernaum; Jesus can heal at a great distance. This is a living parable of the Gospel’s message to the second generation of Christians that Jesus’ word is as good as His touch. He does not need to be present physically to meet any need.

The second statement of Jesus is the final piece that brings faith to the royal official. He grasps the word of Christ, and he believes. But belief brings with it a test. Would he act on that newfound faith? Would he head home believing that his son will live, or would he continue to beg Jesus to come to his home and heal his son with a touch? His actions demonstrate his newfound faith.

What do these texts say about the relationship between faith and works? Isa. 58:1-12, John 15:5, James 2:22.

It was about one o’clock in the afternoon when the royal official encountered Jesus. If he had hurried downhill (Cana is some six hundred meters higher than Capernaum, twenty-five kilometers away), he could have made it back to Capernaum that night (see Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 199). One would think that he would have hurried home to find out whether his son were, in fact, healed. Instead, the fact that the servants were sent out to look for him the day after he met Jesus indicates that he took his time heading home, stopping somewhere for the night. The man not only headed home at Jesus’ command; he did so in a manner that indicated he had fully accepted Jesus’ word. The evidence of faith is action. If the only reason to hurry was worry about his son, his deliberate journey was the living expression of his confidence in Jesus’ word.

Though we are not saved by works, how do works manifest and express our faith? In your own experience, how have works strengthened your faith in the Lord? What is it about good works that strengthens faith? Also, in your experience, how do sinful works weaken faith and add to doubt?
Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: Matthew 10:30, 31; 12:39; Mark 9:24; Romans 5:5; Ephesians 4:14; Jude 4

1. Many times in the Gospels, and especially in John, we see examples of Jesus' omniscience. Does the thought of a God who knows everything about you comfort you, frighten you, or both? How does knowing that God is omniscient influence the way you live your life?

2. Why do you think it is easy for people to believe in miracles yet not make needed changes in their lives that such a belief would entail? For example, how can people believe in angels yet ignore God?

3. Faith is usually partially contaminated by impure motives. What, if anything, can we do about this? How can God help us overcome the problem?

4. Even though Jesus could heal the nobleman’s son from a distance, the nobleman still felt the need to travel to Jesus. Is it a sin to need “props” for our faith? Explain your answer.

5. How did Jesus respond to the nobleman, and why? What does Jesus’ response tell us about His attitude toward our frailties?

6. After Jesus told the nobleman his son would live, what did He tell the nobleman to do? How did the nobleman respond? Why is such a response significant to the Christian life?

7. The story of the nobleman teaches us how faith grows. List four steps that this story suggests are involved in this growth process (John 4:46-53). How does obedience help faith to grow? Why do you think the nobleman’s household believed?

8. How did the nobleman exhibit humility, faith, submission, and gratitude? In what modern situations should we show these same characteristics, and how?
The Solution to Life’s Problems (Rom. 10:17, Hebrews 11).

According to Paul, how does faith come to a person? Rom. 10:17.

Faith came to the royal official by hearing Jesus’ word from His own mouth. For the second generation of Christians, faith comes when the word of Christ is grasped in written form or in the oral presentations of those who bring that Written Word to us.

Under the surface of the story in John 4 lies the divine solution to life’s problems. The story begins with a point of need. The royal official’s son lay dying. When the official heard that Jesus was accessible, he did not linger at home hoping that something good might happen; he brought his problem directly to Jesus. He assumed that if Jesus accompanied him back to Capernaum, His touch would banish the illness that threatened the life of his son.

Instead, Jesus speaks the shocking word that He does not need to travel to Capernaum; He can heal at a great distance. His word is as good as His touch. The man not only takes Jesus at His word; his actions from that time on are a bodily demonstration of his faith in Jesus’ word.

Read Hebrews 11. How does this chapter fit in with these issues regarding the exercise of faith?

How can we apply this faith lesson to our problems today? Four steps seem to emerge: (1) Acknowledge the problem. This is not as simple as it sounds but will be discussed further in the next day’s study. (2) Take your problem to Jesus in prayer. (3) Receive the word that your need has been met. The words of Jesus to us are found in the Bible. If we want to hear those words, we need to know the Word. That is why continual Bible study is important. (4) Speak and act out God’s answer. It is not enough simply to hear the Word. The Word becomes real to us when we act on it and when we tell others about our faith. Genuine belief results in corresponding action.

But what if we are like the royal official? What if our belief is mixed with unbelief? What if we have doubts? This story suggests that the doubts need to be confronted with words of faith and action. Take God at His word. Do what the Bible says, and faith will come.

Why is the actual practice and exercise of faith so important for maintaining faith?
tion to taste the joy of eternal life. We see this love at work in Nicodemus, the Syrophoenician woman, the thief on the cross, and the nobleman.

“The Saviour cannot withdraw from the soul that clings to Him, pleading its great need.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 198.

Jesus tested the nobleman’s faith with this command: “Go. My word is enough.”

Would the nobleman go, rejoicing that the Commander of Life had turned the shadows of death into the bright beams of life? Or, like Naaman of old, would he become angry that Jesus did not recognize his power and position within the world (2 Kings 5:1-12)?

The nobleman “believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him” (John 4:50) and went his way. The difference between curious and conditional faith and genuine faith is one’s belief in the Lord’s

**Witnessing**

Video technology has the capability of making people appear as though they are speaking words they are not really saying. The software, created by researchers at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has changed the face of artificially animated human faces. Animated human faces will no longer appear jerky and cartoonlike. They will look natural. Although researchers fear the software could be misused, they believe also the new technology can have positive applications in speech therapy and the entertainment industry.

The world we live in today is far more advanced than it was just 20 years ago, but, in reality, we are living in a world marred by sin, a world that is dying. In many places, war is commonplace, and pestilence abounds. Even in more developed countries, millions are homeless or live in poverty, and financial instability threatens the economy. Many people are fearful of what the future holds.

To those living in fear and uncertainty we can offer hope—hope that can be found in the Word of God. However, simply reading the Bible is not enough. We must have a real experience with Christ and encourage others to experience Him for themselves. The nobleman of John 4 had heard of Jesus’ miracles and maybe even had witnessed some of them, but it wasn’t until he had a personal experience with the Lord that he and his household truly believed.

We should encourage those to whom we witness to study God’s Word themselves; to commune daily with Him in prayer, bringing before Him every aspect of their lives; and to seek and pray for a personal experience with Jesus. Only when this happens will He be real to us.
**Thursday**

January 29

Steps to Authenticity

**What** is the natural condition of the human heart? *Jer. 17:9.* What is Laodicea’s fundamental problem? *Rev. 3:17.* How do these two factors work together against us?

“Like a flash of light, the Saviour’s words to the nobleman laid bare his heart. He saw that his motives in seeking Jesus were selfish. His vacillating faith appeared to him in its true character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages,* p. 198.

The royal official did not know the depths of his unbelief until confronted directly by Jesus. We, too, are often unaware of our sinfulness and unbelief. We are like Laodicea, the church in Revelation whose self-concept is not confirmed by reality (*Rev. 3:17*).

How can you bring a problem to Jesus when your heart is deceiving you, when you do not even know that you have a problem?

The most effective path to true authenticity before God is a devotional encounter with Him.

1. **Through Bible study** we discover that God works with real people who make mistakes, such as David and Peter and Nicodemus. We do not have to be afraid to confess sins and problems to Him; He already knows them. And we find out that He does not give up on people who make mistakes. So, we gain the courage to get real with God.

2. **Through prayer** we seek to be real with God. God prefers that we be totally honest with Him in prayer. Jesus certainly was. “Why have You forsaken Me?” If Jesus could be that honest with God, it cannot be a sin for us! The Lord wants to hear our deepest needs, our deepest feelings, yes—even our anger.

3. **Through journaling** (a spiritual diary) we can bring both our Bible study and our prayers into sharp focus. The writing process draws out depths of self-understanding that often go untapped without it. The writing process can help us develop a deeper understanding of our need for God in specific areas of life.

4. **Accountability to others** can enhance our accountability to God. Authentic Christians usually can point to specific people who understand and love them yet can share frankly regarding the quality of their behavior.

Through exercises such as the ones above, we can gain a more accurate awareness of the barriers we set up against God in our lives.

**If we know our own hearts are corrupt, if we know our own motives are not pure, if we know we are sinners to the core, why must we place our whole hope only in what Christ did for us at the Cross?** *See Rom. 5:8, Col. 1:14, 1 Tim. 1:15, 2:6.*
word. “So He has said, and so it shall be.” It is not for us to ques-
tion how and where.

“Not because we see or feel that God hears us are we to belie
ve. We are to trust in His promises. When we come to Him in faith,
every petition enters the heart of God. When we have asked for His
blessing, we should believe that we receive it, and thank Him that
we have received it. Then we are to go about our duties, assured that
the blessing will be realized when we need it most.”—Ellen G.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: God has equipped the swordtail, a popular
aquarium fish, with an unusual way to preserve itself. If the male,
or males, die off, leaving only females, one of the remaining
female swordtail can grow an elongated tail fin, or sword, and
change into a male. This is a pretty remarkable feat for a four-
inch animal. Many of us yearn to radically change things about
ourselves from the superficial to the spiritual—everything from
our noses to our jobs to our pasts. Unlike the swordtail, however,
which can switch its identity to preserve itself, we lack the power
to transform our characters or remove our sins, apart from Christ.

Thought Questions:
1. What God enables the swordtail to do in order to preserve
itself from extinction is amazing, but it doesn’t even begin to
compare to the way Christ transformed into a human baby to pre-
serve our race from certain extinction. By this stunning act, He
forged an unbreakable bond with every person in the human race.
How does His truth inspire faith in us that no sin, once confessed
and forsaken, can ever force us apart from Him? What impetus
does this give our spiritual walk with Him?

2. In the context of His relationship with the universe, God refers
to Himself as the “I AM.” Why? How has modern culture and its
emphasis on the “individual” affected the biblical foundation of
relying on the great “I AM”?

Application Question:
Is it possible for 100 percent reliance on God to cause a lack of
self-confidence? Why, or why not? Explain how dependence on
God builds a highly motivated, secure, and self-confident indi-
vidual. What are the elements of today’s culture that encourage us to
believe that all the potential for success lies within us? What can
the church do to safeguard our youth from such beliefs?
Further Study: Many people are troubled by the idea of accountability. They suggest that we should take everything to God in prayer (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 119). While Ellen White makes statements that support such a concept, she also underlines the importance of being accountable to other Christians.

“It is your duty to counsel with your brethren. This may touch your pride, but the humility of a mind taught by the Holy Spirit will listen to counsel, and will banish all self-confidence.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 315.

“When men’s hearts are softened and subdued by the constraining influence of the Holy Spirit, they will give heed to counsel; but when they turn from admonition until their hearts become hardened, the Lord permits them to be led by other influences.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 425.

“There are souls perplexed with doubt, burdened with infirmities, weak in faith, and unable to grasp the Unseen; but a friend whom they can see, coming to them in Christ’s stead, can be a connecting link to fasten their trembling faith upon Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 297.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Hebrews 11:6. Why is it impossible, without faith, to please God? What does that mean, to “please God”?

2. How does the attitude of the Galileans toward Christ compare with that of the Samaritans in the same chapter? What lessons should that comparison have for us?

3. If faith is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8), why is the exercise of faith so important? Why does the Lord not just keep renewing the gift, regardless of what we do?

Summary: Jesus returns to Galilee and finds a people who express faith in Him that is based on His ability to do miracles. Using the example of the royal official, the author of the Gospel both exposes the emptiness of such faith and points the way to true faith. Through the words of Jesus, we gain a more authentic understanding of our own sinfulness and of the barriers we erect to avoid intimacy with God. But when faith is actively expressed in words and actions, it enables us to take hold of the solutions to life’s problems that God offers to us through His Word.
Putting the Past Behind You

**SABBATH AFTERNOON**

*Read for This Week’s Study:* John 5.

**Memory Text:** “Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, ‘See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you’” (John 5:14, NIV).

**Key Thought:** Jesus is not satisfied to heal only physically or spiritually. He wants to restore the entire person. Genuine faith involves every part of life: mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual.

New life in Christ includes “putting the past behind you.” In John 5 we read a story about a man who had sunk as low as a human being could go and still be alive. Paralyzed in body, sin-stricken in mind and heart, he doesn’t even appeal to Jesus for healing. Jesus chooses to make the man a Sabbath-day example of His awesome power to bring life to those as good as dead. Not only does He restore the man physically, He challenges the man to cooperate in extending that healing to his whole person.

When confronted by the religious leaders regarding His “desecration” of the Sabbath, Jesus reveals the Godlike nature of His action. In healing the man at the pool on the Sabbath, Jesus offers stunning testimony with regard to His divine origin and mission. He is more than just a man, more than even a Messiah; He is the creative Life-Giver Himself. So, the story of the healing at the Pool of Bethesda becomes another living parable of the divine Creator who became flesh and dwelt among us.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 7.*
Read the first four verses of John 5. In what ways is this scene symbolic of fallen humanity? What is the condition of these people, and where are they looking for help?

The name Bethesda may be interpreted as “House of Mercy,” so Jesus shows mercy at the place where people looked for mercy. The Pool of Bethesda was located just north of the temple complex. The pool was fed by an intermittent stream, which may explain the troubling of the waters from time to time.

What happens at the pool? John 5:3, 4.

Your answer to this question may depend on the version of the Bible you use. In English, many older translations, such as the King James Version, state that an angel of the Lord stirred up the healing waters, but the more ancient biblical manuscripts leave out that element of the story (hence, no verse 4 in many translations). Although Ellen White generally used the King James Bible, she apparently rejected the implication that angels were involved in the troubling of the waters. “At certain seasons the waters of this pool were agitated, and it was commonly believed that this was the result of supernatural power; and that whoever first after the troubling of the pool stepped into the waters, would be healed of whatever disease he had.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 201 (emphasis supplied). If the traditional reading were to prove correct, it certainly would be a strange thing for God to arrange a healing mechanism in which the least sick are favored over the truly needy. In direct contrast, Jesus enters a place of merciless mercy and picks out the least-likely candidate to achieve healing along the lines of the popular tradition.

All around us we see vast multitudes similar to those at the Pool of Bethesda, sick, damaged, hurt by the warfare of life, and waiting in vain for help from sources that really cannot give it. As Christians, what is the one thing that we, perhaps just as damaged, have been given that they need, as well? See Rom. 8:24, Col. 1:5, Titus 2:13.
**Key Text:** John 5:14

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To emphasize that as God, Jesus is the only Being who can give new life.
2. To demonstrate that to have this new life it is necessary for us to turn our backs on certain aspects of the old life.
3. To show how the new life Jesus gives to His believers is an important evidence for His claims.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. New Life in Christ *(John 3:5-7)*
   A. Christ as Creator is constantly in the act of creating. Creation was not a one-time, finite event.
   B. People who are, in one way or another, cut off from Christ are also cut off from life.
   C. People who reestablish their connection with Christ are renewed.

II. “Be Not Conformed to This World” *(Rom. 12:2)*
   A. Sin establishes itself primarily in our attitudes and thoughts.
   B. A change in attitudes, habits, and so forth is necessary to cause sin to release its grip, even after having accepted the new life offered by Christ.
   C. Sanctification is a lifelong process.

III. Life and the Life-Giver *(John 5:17)*
   A. In claiming the right to heal on Sabbath, Jesus was claiming the prerogatives of God.
   B. Jesus’ claim was verified by the fact that He not only claimed the right to renew life but He actually did renew it in full view of His contemporaries.
   C. Even though Jesus is not physically present among us today, His acts in our lives are equally indicative of His divinity.

**Summary:** Christ, according to the Gospel of John, created all things. As such, He is the only Being who can keep things alive or grant new life. He does this every day, in both a physical and spiritual sense, and the renewed spiritual vitality in the lives of Christians is a visible sign of His presence.

**Commentary.**

This week’s lesson begins with a miracle and ends with the affirmation of the greatest miracle: Jesus is God. Bethesda (“the House of Mercy”) reveals not only the Lord of mercy who has come down from heaven to save sinners but One “who is over all” *(Rom. 9:5)*. Here, we meet human infirmity, Christ’s sufficiency, and the basis of that sufficiency.
**Monday**

*February 2*

**Healing the Paralytic (John 5:5-15).**

**Review** the story of Jesus healing the paralytic, as presented in John 5:5-15. Summarize the essence of what happened, dwelling specifically on what this story tells us about the character of God.

Several aspects of this story cry out for attention. First of all, Jesus healed the man arbitrarily. He picked one man out of a whole crowd of people—a man who had not sought Jesus out, a man who did not even know Him, a man who expressed no faith in Him before being healed. His only claim to Jesus' attention may have been that he was the most pitiful of all the cases present.

How typical of God to act this way! To act in this way at decisive points in our lives, God's hand often is felt in ways we have not asked for and do not deserve. God does things such as this, not to excuse sin but so we can experience His grace, which reminds us of our total dependence on Him.

A second startling aspect to the story is that Jesus chose to heal the man on the Sabbath. The rabbis allowed for special acts on the Sabbath in emergencies, but this was no emergency. After all, the man had been crippled for 38 years; surely a day's delay for the sake of the Sabbath would not have made a major difference. Jesus was deliberately making a point here. "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath," Jesus had said in Matthew 12:12 (NIV). What was said there is acted here. "The Sabbath is not intended to be a period of useless inactivity. . . . The work of Christ in healing the sick was in perfect accord with the law."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 207.

The story in John 5 became a living parable illustrating the truth of John 5:21: "The Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it" (NIV). Jesus can give life to anyone He wishes, because there are no limits to His life-giving power.

**After healing the paralytic, Jesus tells him not just to arise and walk but to take up his bed, as well, knowing that this action would arouse the indignation of the religious leaders. What do you think Christ's motives were in that command, and what message could that have for us, we who take the Sabbath command seriously?**
I. Human Infirmity.

Around the pool of Bethesda lay shattered pieces of helplessness. Each suffering human was longing for the stirring of the waters. The first person in at the precise moment—the person who had friends or connections with the powerful—seems to have been made whole. That was the order of Bethesda. However, Jesus’ visit changed that order, for where Jesus is, there is change and newness. The man He chose to inaugurate this newness of life was a “case of supreme wretchedness.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 202.

How wretched was he? First, he was sick for 38 years. That is a long time to lie by a pool hoping that somehow the impossible would happen.

Second, he was friendless. At the time of the Passover, when visitors, perhaps even some from his village, thronged the city, there was no one to be his friend. Furthermore, where were those who wore the robes of religion? To this lonely man, Jesus offered to be a friend.

Third, he was a man of hope. “Never give up” was his motto. That type of stubbornness met its answer in the Man who asked him, “Wilt thou be made whole?” (John 5:6). The man of infirmity had at last found the Man of all-sufficiency.

II. Christ’s Sufficiency.

Christ’s question seems cold and cruel. What other wish would a man have who had been waiting for 38 years to be healed? Yet this question had an eternal purpose: to let humanity know that Christ is at once the question and the answer. The question Jesus asks has an obvious answer. However, because He is a God of choice, He will not force the obvious. God will not violate an individual’s free will. Willingly, we must come to Him, face His question, and accept His answer. He is the solution to all our problems. Paul understood this when he wrote, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:9).

Because the man of Bethesda chose to place His trust in Christ, he experienced the divine sufficiency that meets all human infirmities. The same power is available today: “Put your will on the side of Christ. Will to serve Him, and in acting upon His word you will receive strength.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 203.

III. The Basis of Christ’s Sufficiency.

The Bethesda miracle helped a man who had lain helpless for 38 years to dance in the streets and rejoice at what God had done for him. It was the Sabbath, however, and the custodians of the law were enraged. Instead of rejoicing that the Sabbath’s promise
Dealing With Sin and Its Consequences

(John 5:14).

**What** does Jesus tell the former invalid when He meets him later in the temple? *John 5:14.*

When Jesus tells the man to “stop sinning” (*NIV*), He implies, first of all, that the man’s illness was caused by sin in some sense. Continued sin might result in a relapse of the paralysis.

There is, however, an even deeper element here. The form of the word translated “sinning” is extremely continuous. Jesus commands the man to stop something that he had been doing continuously, right up to the time of this encounter in the temple. This implies that the man had somehow been continuing in sin, even in a paralyzed state. What kind of sin was Jesus talking about? A paralyzed man cannot rob banks, commit adultery, or kill anyone. Jesus must have been referring to sin of the mind—his thoughts, his attitudes, his imagination.

**After** extending grace to the paralytic, Jesus tells him to “sin no more.” Look up the following texts: How do they reveal the same principle manifested in Christ’s words to the healed man? *John 8:10, 11; Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 2:16, 17.*

But while the healing of the man’s body was totally an act of grace on Jesus’ part, there was a part for him to play in his recovery, as well. Sin not only separates us from God; it produces ongoing consequences that eventually destroy the quality of all aspects of a person’s life.

The consequences of sin include not only physical injuries and disease; there are emotional, spiritual, and psychological effects, as well. All these can and should be addressed by a relationship with Jesus. All other things being equal, a genuine walk with Jesus brightens the facial expressions, soothes the emotions, warms the heart, and brings renewed energy to the body. This is why Seventh-day Adventist Christianity is so concerned with things such as diet, exercise, and attitude. Genuine faith involves every part of life—mental, physical, and emotional—as well as spiritual.

Nevertheless, most Christians readily acknowledge that their inner lives, particularly the emotional aspect, can be quite unstable even after conversion. This passage tells us we have an active role to play in cooperating with Jesus in our recovery from sin and its effects on our life.
In Inductive Bible Study, one can explore the significance of texts for discovery: Matthew 5:44, 45; John 3:19; 5:39-42; Romans 5:1, 2; Hebrews 10:19-23.

1. Some translations of John 5:3, 4 state as fact the common belief of the time that an angel stirred the waters of Bethesda, thus bringing about a limited number of miraculous healings. Can we safely say that this was not true? Why, or why not?

2. The paralytic Jesus heals in John 5 is an almost totally passive recipient of grace. What did the paralytic “do” in order to be healed? Why was this important? Why does what he did not negate righteousness by faith? Use texts to support your answer.

3. In healing on Sabbath, Jesus followed the example of God, who continues to sustain life even on this holy day. What does it say about the religion of the time that they found this Godlike behavior to be the most scandalous of all? Do we face the same danger today? Explain your answer.

4. In telling the former paralytic to stop sinning, Jesus seemingly contradicted other passages in the book of John where He questioned the conventional belief that sickness equals sin. Was He in fact saying the paralytic’s illness was the result of his sin? In what sense is it possible to stop sinning? Explain your answers.

5. In John 5:45-47, Jesus states that the leaders who accused Him disbeliefed in Moses. This would have come as quite a surprise to them, since they believed they were basing their lives on Moses’ teachings. What were they missing? Are we in danger of missing the same thing? Why, or why not?
Jesus, the Life-Giver (John 5:16-30).


In response to the persecution He experienced, Jesus says He is simply following the example of His Father, who is “always” at work on the Sabbath. God’s action provides the model for human activity on the Sabbath.

Jewish writers of the time recognized that God’s work on the Sabbath could be detected in births, deaths, sunshine, rain, and the continued flowing of rivers (see William Barclay, The Gospel of John [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975], vol. 1, p. 183). The Jews, therefore, recognized that Jesus was claiming the same privileges on the Sabbath that God has claimed. By healing on the Sabbath, Jesus was claiming equality with God.

“Should God forbid the sun to perform its office upon the Sabbath? . . . Must the wheat and corn stop growing, and the ripening cluster defer its purple bloom? . . . In such a case, men would miss the fruits of the earth, and the blessings that make life desirable. . . . He will not be held guiltless who neglects to relieve suffering on the Sabbath. God’s holy rest day was made for man, and acts of mercy are in perfect harmony with its intent. God does not desire His creatures to suffer an hour’s pain that may be relieved upon the Sabbath or any other day.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 206, 207.

List the various ways John 5:16-30 portrays Jesus as equal with the Father.

In John 5:19-30 Jesus demonstrates that He is doing the same work as His Father, the work of giving life (vss. 20, 21, 26, 28, 29) and the work of judging (vss. 22, 27, 30). By doing what His Father says on this earth, He not only shows that the Father is life but demonstrates the truth of His own claim to divinity (vss. 19-23). He does not leave anyone the option of believing in the Father while ignoring His claims about Himself (vs. 23).

Here is Jesus, who performs an incredible miracle; however, so caught up in their own religious forms and customs, the leaders focus, instead, on the “minor” things, missing the bigger picture. In what ways could we be focusing on “minors” while missing the important principle unfolding before our eyes?
Teachers Comments

Second, the basis of Christ’s all-sufficiency is His own divinity. In John 5:17-47, Jesus affirms His deity by claiming five times His equality with God: (1) As a person, He equates Himself with the Father (vs. 17), and there is no distinction between the two as far as divine status is concerned. Because the religious leaders understood that, they “sought the more to kill him” (vs. 18). (2) Both the Son and the Father are one in work (vss. 19, 20). The Son does what the Father does. In healing the man, Jesus claims to have done the will and work of the Father. (3) As the Father is the originator of life, so is the Son (vss. 21, 24-29). Thus, Christ established that He is the Creator. (4) Because the Father has given the work of judgment to the Son, so the Son is due all honor, even as the Father is (vss. 22, 23, 30). (5) The Father has chosen to reveal through the prophets both who Jesus is and what He came to
do.

Witnessing

Spiritual healing involves change in every aspect of life. The old man becomes a part of the past. “Forgetting those things which are behind” we reach for the things ahead (Phil. 3:13). Change, of course, does not come easily. In fact, it’s hard to forget. On the other hand, it can be just as difficult to remember. Why do we seem to remember things we should forget and forget things we want to remember? “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Rom. 7:19).

One of the techniques used for forgetting is referred to as interference. There are two types of interference. Proactive interference occurs when that which was previously learned hinders an individual’s ability to learn something new. Retroactive interference is when new information blocks the memory of previously learned material. Our goal as Christians should be retroactive interference.

When speaking to others about changing old behaviors, we can explain how the new lifestyle in Christ should take control so the old lifestyle can be forgotten. One way to accomplish this is to reinforce in one’s mind (or memory) the new information learned from the Word of God. “Keep my commandments . . .” and “bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart” (Prov. 7:2, 3).

We should read God’s Word daily, repeating Bible verses and promises, putting them on our doorposts and hanging them on our walls (Deut. 6:9). We can make the atmosphere of our homes, offices, or wherever we spend our time such that we constantly will be reminded of our new life in Christ. What a witness doing so would be.
The Greatest Witnesses to Jesus (John 5:31-47).

In yesterday’s study, we saw that Jesus made some powerful claims about Himself, claims that would ring false in the mouth of every other human being who ever lived. Jesus, obviously, saw the need to justify the kind of testimony He gave about Himself.

List all who offer a testimony in favor of Jesus in John 5:31-47. Which of these witnesses does Jesus seem to consider the most important?

Jesus acknowledges that uncorroborated testimony about oneself is inadequate (5:31). One of the fundamental principles of Judaism is that truth can be established only in the mouths of at least two witnesses (Deut. 19:15; see also Rev. 11:3-13). So, Jesus adds to His own testimony the testimony of John the Baptist, His works, His Father, and the Scriptures, thereby doubling the minimum testimony needed to establish truthfulness within Judaism (John 5:31-40).

Read John 5:38. What powerful rebuke is Jesus giving to those leaders?

When it is clear the religious leaders are not willing to accept the testimony of these witnesses (vss. 43, 44; see also 8:13, 14), Jesus calls forth the ultimate witness within Judaism, Moses. Moses had served as an intercessor with God in behalf of Israel (Exod. 32:7-14). But in the mouth of Jesus, Moses is transformed into a judge (John 5:45-47). The words of Moses will condemn those who reject Jesus, because Moses wrote about Jesus and prepared the way for Him. Jesus closes with the parting shot, “Since you do not believe what [Moses] wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?” (vs. 47, NIV).

With this encounter, the battle is joined between Jesus and some of the leaders of Israel, a battle that continues in the Gospel until Jesus is arrested, suffers, and dies on the cross. In the hostility of these people, John portrays the hostility of all who reject the gospel, regardless of their background.

How is your perception of Jesus shaped by the attitudes of believers whom you know and admire? How would your life be different if you did not know these people? And what about the people who admire and look up to you? How do your attitudes toward the Lord impact their lives?
accomplish in this world: to bring eternal life to all people (vss. 37-47).

Jesus is not only the ultimate revelation of God's will and work. He is God Himself in human flesh. Thus, Christ is all-sufficient to minister to every human infirmity brought about by sin. Therefore, "whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** “Hesiod, the Greek poet, said that when a man was about to ford a river, he should pray and wash his hands, for he who wades through a stream with unwashed hands incurs the wrath of the gods. When the Persian king Xerxes came to the Strymon in Thrace his magicians offered white horses and went through other ceremonies before the army ventured to cross. Lucullus, the Roman general, offered a bull to the River Euphrates before he crossed it. To this day in south-east Africa some of the Bantu tribes believe that rivers are inhabited by malignant spirits which must be propitiated by flinging a handful of corn or some other offering into the river before it is crossed. . . . The people who waited for the pool in Jerusalem to be disturbed were children of their age believing in things of their age.”—William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible*: John 1, pp. 178, 179.

**Thought Question:**

The healing of the man by the pool of Bethesda is a prime example of how Jesus worked in and around the beliefs and superstitions of His day. Being “God,” He could have scoffed at their foolish thinking. Instead, He allowed compassion for one sinner’s suffering to override everything else. How should the church respond to the obvious erroneous points of view of others? Give specific instances from Christ’s life that serve as examples of how we should deal with differences in opinion, theology, and lifestyle?

**Application Question:**

The story of the invalid at the pool clearly shows us that Jesus is more interested in developing a relationship with us than He is in keeping a record of our sins. The relationship He seeks is one of partnership. Jesus asked the man to take up his bed and walk. The power of God does not make our effort disposable. What do you have to offer God? Do you think a partnership with God is really necessary to spiritual growth? Explain.
Further Study: As pointed out in Tuesday’s section, most Christians readily acknowledge that their inner lives, particularly the emotional aspect, can be quite unstable, even after conversion. Christians, as well as others, struggle with unhappy memories, flashes of anger, and unmentionable thoughts. The story of the paralytic at Bethesda tells us that Jesus cares at least as much about the inner life as He does about the outward circumstances.

Unwelcome thoughts and emotions can revolve around both things we have done and things that have been done to us. Things we have done cause feelings of remorse, regret, and failure. Things others have done to us can cause feelings of anger, grief, and deep resentment. Fullness in Christ involves dealing with issues of the past such as these. For practical suggestions about the process of mental and emotional healing, see chapter 6 in the companion volume by the author of these lessons.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do many Christians believe that accepting Jesus should put an end to all emotional difficulties? To what degree do you think this idea is true?

2. Forgiveness is a major component in dealing with sin and its consequences. Why, then, do most people find it so hard to forgive?

3. The paralytic evidently suffered as a consequence of his own sinful actions. What do you think Jesus would have told the victim of rape or of abuse? What would He say to one who causes others to suffer?

4. Jesus violated human-made rules about Sabbath keeping to heal a man. To what degree are your personal rules for living God-made or man-made? How can you know the difference?

Summary: Jesus came to this earth to show how God would act within the human context of this world. By healing the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, Jesus demonstrated that He is not limited by time or by the quality of the material He has to work with. He also showed that He is not satisfied to heal only the physical or spiritual side of a person. He wants to restore the entire person.
The Sacred and the Common

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: John 6.

Memory Text: “‘The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life’” (John 6:63, NIV).

Key Thought: In Christ all of life, even the common things, can bring us into a closer communion with Christ.

Throughout John, chapter 6, the people relate to Jesus on a material level. They are not searching for spiritual food; rather, they want their physical needs satisfied. They want to see more miracles such as the feeding of the 5,000. In spite of that awesome event, when the people looked at Jesus, they saw a common everyday human being like themselves, not Someone who came down from heaven. They were unable to see the sacred shining through the common.

In chapter 6, Jesus tries to direct their eyes away from the common toward spiritual things, the food that endures to eternal life. Life is not found in miracles and in the things of this world. Life is found by accepting the claims Jesus makes about Himself. One of the secrets of the devotional life is to learn how to see the presence and the power of Jesus working in the common things of everyday life, to sense that He is there with us, even though we cannot see, hear, or touch Him.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 14.*
The Miracle of the Fish and Loaves
(John 6:1-13).

Read John 6:1-13, the feeding of the 5,000. What lessons can you see in this account? What does this story say to you personally? What’s in it that speaks to your needs? What kind of hope does it offer? What does it tell you about God?

Notice, too, the timing of this account: It took place around the time of Passover (John 6:4), when the Lord worked a mighty deliverance for His people. Though the feeding of the 5,000 certainly was not as dramatic as the Exodus from Egypt, it was still a powerful manifestation of God’s power in behalf of His people, even in their spiritual ignorance. John makes it clear that many of those who had followed Christ did so only because of the miracles they already had seen (vs. 2) and not because of any deep, spiritual conviction that this Man was the Messiah or that He could bring them spiritual freedom.

Nevertheless, the Lord still worked in their behalf. In other words, though He knew their hearts were still not right, He ministered to them anyway. How grateful we can be that our God is like that. What does that tell us about how we should act toward those who aren’t where they should be spiritually?

Though Christ multiplies the fish and the loaves (the miracle), He does not miraculously deliver them to the crowd. How was the food distributed and gathered? What lesson is in there for us? John 6:10-12.

Though Jesus ministers here to their physical needs, is that an end in itself or a means to an end? After all, a few hours later, all those people would be hungry again. What is Jesus doing with that miracle? In what ways are we called to do the same thing?
What is the nature of Christian discipleship? John 6 tells us that discipleship is (a) mending the body, healing the soul; (b) continual surrender to Christ; and (c) abiding in Him until the end.
Read the story in John 6:16-21 of Jesus walking on the water. Compare it to the miracle of the fish and the loaves. What are the differences?

It is interesting that Christ would perform such a powerful miracle, especially after what just happened on the mountain with the multitude, who did not respond in a positive manner to the miracle He had performed there. (Read John 6:14, 15: They wanted to make Him a king, by force; Christ did not come to allow Himself to be set up as King. Their reaction caused Him to leave the area.)

What reason, then, would Jesus have for doing this miracle? Hint: Who are the ones who witness it?

In the story of the disciples on the sea (John 6:16-21), Jesus accomplishes a deed similar to those done by the God of the Exodus (see Exod. 14:20-22). To people schooled in the Old Testament, therefore, Jesus' ability to walk on water and to control wind and wave was a powerful affirmation of His divinity, something the disciples needed after their disappointment with Christ's refusal to be made king.

In The Desire of Ages, Ellen White writes that the disciples are eager for Christ to be crowned the Davidic King, and when He forbids it, they become upset. “The disciples had long hoped for a popular movement to place Jesus on the throne; they could not endure the thought that all this enthusiasm should come to nothing. . . . “Unbelief was taking possession of their minds and hearts. Love of honor had blinded them. They knew that Jesus was hated by the Pharisees, and they were eager to see Him exalted as they thought He should be.”—Pages 379, 380.

By performing the miracle of walking on the water, Jesus strengthens the faith of His disciples. But do we always need miracles to have our faith strengthened? What are some things that have happened in your life that have helped your faith grow yet would not necessarily be called “miracles”?
I. Discipleship: Mending the Body, Healing the Soul.

John 6:1-14 records the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 when the Creator turned a boy’s five barley loaves (the food of the poor) and two fish into a vast cafeteria. Jesus well knew that “man shall not live by bread alone” (Matt. 4:4), but He also was sensitive to the fact that bread is essential to life. Stanley Jones said that a stomach starved all day long does not prepare a mind to comprehend the mystery and glory of John 3:16 during the evening service.

This does not mean, however, that the gospel must be turned into a social revolution in which the imperatives of the body and its environment take priority over the needs of the soul. Just as the body cannot live without bread, neither can the soul live without Christ, the Bread of Life (John 6:35). Christian discipleship, therefore, must care for both physical and spiritual hunger.

It does seem, though, that emphasis on physical hunger often provides a push up the social ladder. The untouchables in India, the underprivileged in parts of Asia, the illiterate in Africa, and the marginalized in the United States seem to achieve an upper mobility when they turn to Christianity. This trend has coined the term “rice Christians.” It is not a new trend, for soon after the 5,000 were fed, multitudes followed Jesus, hoping for another free-food miracle. Jesus was the first to sense this (vs. 26) and to thereby express the principle that materialism cannot be the basis of true evangelism (vs. 27). His kingdom is not of this world. Neither is He the king of the material (vs. 15).

II. Discipleship: Continual Faith in Christ.

John 6:28-59 provides three essentials in Christian discipleship. First, a disciple is one who does the “works of God” (vs. 28). “ ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent’ ” (vs. 29, NIV). Nothing or no one can compete with Jesus. He demands of His followers all or none at all. There is no middle course.

Second, the relationship between Jesus and His disciples transcends all else. Take, for example, Israel’s experience with manna (vs. 31, 32). Manna was indeed a miracle, but it pales before the miracle of the Bread from heaven. “I am the bread of life” (vs. 35, 41, 48, 51), Jesus declares. This is the first of the great “I AM” metaphors Jesus uses to describe Himself and to assert His uniqueness as God in human flesh (John 8:12: 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; and 15:1, 5).

This uniqueness demands of Jesus’ disciples absolute allegiance. Just as bread is eaten and becomes part of the body, so must Jesus be a part of the person’s body, mind, and soul, so that whatever the person is and does comes under the exclusive ownership and service of Jesus. Without such exclusiveness, there can be no discipleship.
Bread From Heaven (John 6:22-35).

After that stormy night (John 6:16-21), the crowd crosses the lake and finds Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum, where all the preaching and the dialogue of the rest of the chapter take place.

**How** do the ancient Israelites survive in the desert, and what does that have to do with the feeding of the 5,000 earlier in the chapter? Exod. 16:33-35, John 6:27-31.

A consistent theme in the background of John 6 is the Exodus from Egypt. The feeding of the 5,000 recalls the original Passover when the Israelites escaped from the immediate grasp of the Egyptians. Then the storm episode (vss. 16-21) recalls the perils the Israelites faced at the Red Sea. Now comes a reference to God’s guiding of their experience in the desert of Sinai. As with the Israelites in the desert, the hearers of Jesus react to miracles they can see or touch, but their faith remains inadequate. Jesus directs their attention away from the manna the Israelites received in the desert to the spiritual bread He has come to offer them.

**Read** prayerfully and carefully John 6:32-35. What point is Jesus making here? What is He telling us about Himself? What do these words mean to us? Why does He use the bread analogy?

The clear implication of the sermon is that seeing Jesus and believing in Him is what produces real life in the spiritual sense now and in the fullest sense “‘at the last day’” (vs. 40; 5:21). Just as food constantly must be eaten in order to sustain physical life, so it is necessary to invite Jesus into our daily experience in order to sustain spiritual life. “Believing” in the Gospel of John (see also John 1:12, 6:47) always has a continuous sense. It must be an ongoing and daily experience.

**Read in verse 35 of John 6 where Jesus says that those who come to Him and who believe in Him will never hunger nor thirst. How have these promises been manifested in your life? If they have not, then you need to ask yourself, How can I come to Jesus and believe in Him?**
Third, because of this exclusiveness, Jesus can say: “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:53, 54, NIV). Jesus is saying in this passage that discipleship is not possible until a person accepts Him in all areas of life.

Inductive Bible Study


1. John emphasizes the extent to which people followed Jesus for self-centered, materialistic reasons. So, why do you think He continued to perform such miracles as the feeding of the 5,000?

2. Jesus’ miracles as recorded by John all have a deeper spiritual meaning and, in some cases, a connection to earlier sacred history. Do you think the significance of these miracles went completely over the people’s heads? If so, what purpose did the miracles serve?

3. In all Jesus’ teachings, He Himself was, to some degree, the message. What did His miracles tell us about Him and His true nature?


5. Although we are used to the idea in a religious/biblical context, the eating and drinking of someone’s body and blood (John 6:51) is, at first glance, an extremely strange and off-putting concept, as Jesus’ hearers noted. Why do you think Jesus chose such a shocking image? In what ways do we “eat” Jesus’ body and “drink” His blood?

6. Clearly, most people listening to Jesus in John’s Gospel did not “get” Him. Why, then, did He continue to explain Himself to them?
Talking to Deaf Ears (John 6:36-50).

**Why** do many people in the following text have a hard time accepting Jesus' claims? *John 6:41, 42.* How do the words of the people here reflect the words of Nicodemus in John 3:4?

**How** do many of Jesus' own disciples react to His teachings in this chapter? *John 6:60, 66.* Why would they react this way?

Throughout this chapter the crowds relate to Jesus on a material and physical level. They want to see more miracles such as the feeding of the 5,000. When Jesus refuses to accommodate them, they all too quickly conclude that Jesus is a common everyday human being like themselves, not Someone who came down from heaven. The common keeps them from seeing the sacred. The very physical presence of Jesus becomes a stumbling block to them.

Like the second generation of Christians, we think that we would be better off knowing Jesus in the flesh instead of struggling to have a relationship with Someone we can't see, hear, or touch. But the physical presence of Jesus caused the first generation not to take Him as seriously as they certainly should have.

Who really was Jesus? He was much more than just a good man who grew up in Nazareth with Joseph and Mary. But what kind of man would claim to be the Son of God who came down from heaven? To make such a claim, he would have to be either crazy, a deceiver (in neither case would people designate him a “good man”), or exactly what he claims to be. There is no middle ground; we must either accept Him and all that He stands for or reject Him as insane, or even worse, the perpetrator of the greatest scam of all time. The foolishness of the people in this story is that they insist on seeing Jesus as just a good man. This is not really an option as far as Jesus is concerned.

It is crucial, therefore, that people recognize exactly who Jesus is. He brings from heaven a revelation of God and about God that is of life-and-death importance to the human race. To partake of Jesus as bread, flesh, and blood is a graphic way of expressing that only through an intimate relationship with Jesus—as close as food that has been eaten is to the body—can one gain the eternal life that He promises.

In what ways might we be in danger of doing the same thing as the crowds in John 6; that is, not distinguishing the sacred from the common? For example, do our attitudes toward the church, its leaders, or our message reflect this same spiritual principle?
Then that person can say, like Paul: “‘I no longer live, but Christ lives in me’” (Gal. 2:20, NIV).

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

III. Discipleship: Abiding Until the End.

Genuine discipleship continues through ups and downs, rain and shine, work and worship, until the end. There may be hard sayings difficult to believe, testing times almost beyond endurance, and faith on trial—but in the midst of it all, Jesus will always hold first place. John 6:60-70 speaks of two perils and one promise in this call for continued discipleship. Some would defect to the enemy

Witnessing

There is a popular children’s storybook entitled The Runaway Bunny, written by Margaret Wise Brown. The story unfolds as a little bunny mischievously tells his mother that he’s going to run away from home. The mother, not wanting anything to happen to her little bunny, tells him that she will follow him to make sure he is always safe. The bunny then tells his mother that he will become something else in his determination to get away. Each time the bunny imagines himself to be something new, his mother also becomes something new, so she can keep him safe. In the end, the bunny decides he will just be a bunny and stay home.

Although this story was intended for small children, it has some spiritual implications. Just like the runaway bunny, many people are determined to get away from God. But no matter where they go, they cannot escape His blessings. It is impossible for even the wicked to live without Him. “In him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). If God were not actively involved in each of our lives, we would cease to exist.

The story of the little bunny is simplistic, but the Lord can use the simple, ordinary things of life to direct our thoughts to Him. This week’s lesson speaks of how we can have a more fulfilling devotional life by seeing God work through everyday things. We can be more effective witnesses by doing the same. We will be able to point many souls heavenward by sharing Bible truths using practical everyday experiences as examples.
The Sacred and the Common (John 6:51-71).

Read John 6:51-58. What does Jesus mean by saying we must eat His flesh and drink His blood? Summarize in your own words the essence of what you believe He says to us with these startling words.

Time and again in the Gospel of John symbols are drawn from everyday experiences, symbols such as bread, water, and light. These symbols help us to connect Jesus’ words with things in the context of our everyday lives. No matter how ordinary our lives may be, our relationship with Jesus will deepen and grow as we learn to remember Him in the course of everything we do. As the Bread of Life, Jesus brings us a foretaste of eternal life, which makes physical food and drink seem insignificant by comparison.

As the body craves food and drink and sunlight, so the soul craves the presence of Jesus (whether or not one is aware of that), and if Jesus is not allowed to be present, human beings will go to all kinds of ridiculous lengths to fill the gap with something else.

What are some of the things people resort to in order to fill their innate spiritual needs?

When we sit down at a table to eat, we can remember that rain, life, and sunshine, and the food production that they make possible, would all have ceased with sin were it not for the Cross of Jesus. When we lift up a glass to drink, we can remember the Water of Life. When we get dressed in the morning, we can think about the robe of Christ’s righteousness. One of the keys to a living relationship with Jesus is recognizing His sacred touch at work in common things, to make all the ordinary events of our lives reminders of the words and actions of Jesus.

Read again the text for today. Time and again Jesus talks about life and living. What, ultimately, has Jesus promised those who eat His flesh and drink His blood, and why is this promise so important to us?
(vs. 66). Some would choose denial, as Judas did (vs. 70). The enduring one, however, will grasp Christ’s promise of eternal life (vs. 44) and will shout from the soul’s inner depths, as Peter did: “‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God’” (John 6:68, 69, NIV). Distance, however small, is unknown between Christ and His disciples.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: “In the years just after A.D. 60 the luxury of Roman society was unparalleled. It was at this time that they served feasts of peacocks’ brains and nightingales’ tongues; that they cultivated the odd habit of taking emetics between courses so that the next might taste better. . . . It was at this time that Pliny tells of a Roman lady who was married in a robe so richly jewelled and gilded that it cost the equivalent of 432,000 [British pounds]. There was a reason for all this, and the reason was a deep dissatisfaction with life, a hunger that nothing could satisfy. They would try anything for a new thrill, because they were both appallingly rich and appallingly hungry.”—William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible: John 1, p. 212.

Thought Questions:

1. The happenings recorded in chapter 6 of John focus on the needs of people around Jesus for personal, not spiritual, satisfaction. Even after the miraculous feeding of the 5,000, the people wanted more. Greed clouded their vision; they could not see that Jesus held the answer to all their needs. What are the issues in our church today that cloud our minds from recognizing Jesus as the panacea for our spiritual ailments?

2. Many Jews of Jesus’ day thought in terms of good works. Living a life filled with good works, they believed, earned them favor with God. What is the danger of this kind of thinking?

Application Question:

Consider the need for thrills in today’s world. Television shows scramble to find ways to take viewers to more exciting entertainment levels: shows about a hidden camera on cheating spouses; about daring contestants to do the unimaginable; and even airing a live execution. Compare the need for thrills today with that in the days of Christ. What are the differences? The similarities? What are the elements in your life that help you justify your need for thrills? How can you let God fulfill your need?
Further Study: Carefully compare the accounts in John 6:16-21 with Matthew 14:22-27 and Mark 6:45-52. Note all the parallels and contrasts between John’s account and the other two, including omissions. How does this comparison illuminate the point the Holy Spirit was making with the story? In what ways do Matthew and Mark, moved by the Holy Spirit, use the story?

For additional spiritual insights into this marvelous chapter, see Ellen White’s comments in *The Desire of Ages*. John 6:1-21 is covered on pages 364–382, and pages 383–394 are devoted almost exclusively to John 6:22-71.

Discussion Questions:

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: “It is only because He became like us that we can become like Him” (*The Cost of Discipleship* [New York: Collier Books, 1963], p. 344). What do you think that means? Do you agree or disagree, and why?

2. Why was Jesus’ teaching in John 6 so hard for the listeners to accept? Could it be because they had preconceptions about what they expected from a divine Deliverer? If so, what does that tell us about the danger, as Christians, of having certain ideas about what God should or should not do? What happens when those expectations are not met?

Summary: In John, chapter 6, Jesus struggles to communicate His mission in the face of continual misunderstanding. He feeds the 5,000 in order to demonstrate that He is the One who can bring them the bread of divine spiritual life. They, instead, see someone worthy to run the national economy (vs. 14). In stilling the storm, Jesus sought to show His disciples that He is as capable as the God of the Exodus to supply their needs and free them from fear. But they seem at the same time too fearful and too self-confident to seek His help.

At Capernaum He uses bread, flesh, and blood as analogies to illustrate the need for the spiritual life He offers. Most of those who hear Him there, however, react with disgust and abandon Him. Taken together, the three events chronicled in this chapter teach us the need to differentiate between the sacred and the common, to learn how to have a living relationship with One who makes Himself real to us in the course of everyday life.
Read for This Week’s Study: John 7:1–10:21.

Memory Text: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11, NIV).

Key Thought: As the Good Shepherd, Jesus offers everything we need for an abundant life.

Our life springs from His death. At the direction of His Father, Jesus belatedly attends the Feast of Tabernacles at the temple in Jerusalem. He comes as the living Presence of the great I AM. He offers Himself as the embodiment of the water and light that the feast celebrated (John 7:37-39, 8:12, 9:5), but He is largely rejected by those in attendance. Having failed to make a positive impact at the heart of the religious system, He reaches out to a blind man, an outcast of that system, and creates a living parable of the Good Shepherd, who cares for even the outcasts. In reaching out to the blind man, Jesus “showed the contrast between His own character and that of the leaders in Israel.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 477.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus offers life to those who have struggled to find it elsewhere. He promises that His sheep will “know his voice” (John 10:4, NIV). Those who commit everything to Jesus receive the privilege of a deep and intimate relationship with Him. He is the caring Friend who will never leave us nor forsake us. He will guide us in our thoughts and impressions. And He will provide life to the full, an abundance of meaning, joy, and fulfillment.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 21.
The Feast of Tabernacles (John 7 and 8).

In John 7–10 Jesus participates in the Feast of Tabernacles at the temple in Jerusalem. His presence at the feast draws Him into repeated confrontations with the religious leadership. These confrontations are recorded in the Gospel of John, because they offer the opportunity for Jesus to clarify His mission.

In Palestine there are two basic seasons of the year, an extremely dry summer of four to five months (virtually no rain) and a rainy season of equal length spanning the winter. The Feast of Tabernacles comes at that time of year when the summer drought is usually ending (our months of September and October). The winter grains are planted and the harvest of summer fruits is celebrated.

The Feast of Tabernacles commemorated the Exodus and the time of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness (Lev. 23:43), when God provided Israel with water and light (Exod. 13:21, 22; 17:1-7). So two major themes of the feast were water (a water ceremony was a major feature of each day’s festivities) and light (torchlight processions at night). People lived outside in temporary structures, tents made from palm branches, reminding them of God’s watchcare in the wilderness. They were to remember that just as God provided water, light, and food to Israel in the wilderness, so He can provide for the needs of the present, as well.


According to Jesus, what did the theme of light at the feast represent? *John 8:12.*

By His announcements at the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus made it clear that He is what the feast was all about. The mighty acts of God celebrated at the Feast of Tabernacles become present realities in the Person and teachings of Jesus. God is willing to do so much more for us than merely provide food, water, and natural light. In Christ the mighty power of the Exodus becomes real in our lives through the divine presence of the Holy Spirit. More than this, Spirit-filled Christians are enabled to pass the Spirit on to others.

Christ made statements concerning Himself (*John 7:37-39 and 8:12*). If someone asked you what it means to do the things Jesus said here, what would you answer? How have you experienced these statements and promises in your own life? How has your life been changed by them?
**Key Text:** John 10:11

**Teachers Aims:**

1. To ascertain how Jesus’ “I AM” statements point directly to His divinity.
2. To acknowledge that the kingdom of God to which Jesus refers is, to some extent, here now.
3. To trust that, in Jesus, we now can receive some of the benefits of living in the kingdom of God.

**Lesson Outline:**

**I. The Good Shepherd (John 10:11):**

A. In the Old Testament, “I AM” statements were always the prerogative of God.
B. In making such statements, Jesus was not only claiming to be God; He was claiming to be the fulfillment of God’s promises in the Old Testament.
C. Unlike many others before and since, Jesus’ divine words are matched by divine acts.

**II. The Kingdom Is Among You (Luke 17:21):**

A. God, in the form of Jesus, is directly available to us.
B. The kingdom is not always found in, or with, religious people or places.
C. Jesus is not a way to the kingdom but the Way.

**III. Hearing His Voice (John 10:3, 4):**

A. We must learn to distinguish Christ’s voice from the many other voices competing for our attention.
B. Some people who claim to speak for God speak mainly for themselves.
C. The spirit of Christ needs to be shown in actions and attitudes, as well as in speech.

**Summary:** The Gospel of John teaches us that Jesus was not just a historical figure; nor is He someone who is going to come back sometime in the distant future. Jesus is here with us now and is waiting for us only to ask Him into our lives.

**Commentary.**

Who is Jesus? This week’s lesson approaches the answer to this question by examining (1) Jesus’ self-conscious assertion of who He is and (2) His three “I AM” sayings (“I AM the Light of the World”; “Before Abraham was I AM”; and “I AM the Good Shepherd”).

**I. Jesus: His Self-Consciousness.**

During the encounter with religious leaders at the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus stated clearly that He was conscious of who He was. “Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not
The Great “I AM” (John 8:24, 28, 58).

In John 7 and 8 Jesus engages in a number of debates with His brothers, with the religious leadership, and with various segments of the crowd. One of the major features of this section is the presence of a number of special “I AM” statements on the part of Jesus.

**How important does Jesus consider the “I AM” concept? What promise is found in those words? What is Jesus telling us with that claim? John 8:24, 28, 58.**

The words “‘the one I claim to be’” in the NIV represent a helpful interpretation supplied by the translators; the original simply says “I AM.”

In the Old Testament, “I AM” statements are applied to God. In the Gospel of John, Jesus applies the “I AM” statements of the Old Testament to Himself. The future salvation that was promised in the books of the Old Testament prophets has become a present reality in Him. He is the Good Shepherd revealed in Ezekiel 34 (John 10:11). He is the divine One (John 8:24, 28, 58) who knows the future (Isa. 46:9, 10; John 13:19).

In Jesus’ “I AM” statements we see an assertion of His divinity. He is the Yahweh of the Old Testament, come down to shepherd His people just as He promised through the prophets. He is fully and truly God in the highest sense, even while walking on earth clothed in human flesh. He has preexisted throughout eternity (John 8:58).

In Christ’s “I AM” statements is the assertion that the future has become present in Christ. He can deliver the promised glories of the Old Testament future kingdom to those who believe in Him now. To be in relationship with Jesus is to have the abundance of the future kingdom now by faith. In a real sense, we are already living in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6). In Old Testament times God did mighty things on earth from time to time. But on account of the Cross and through the work of the Spirit, God’s mighty acts are now available everywhere to everyone who is in Christ.

Look up each of the following texts. What are they telling us about Christ? Isa. 9:6; Mic. 5:2; John 3:13, 31, 32; Col. 1:16. What does this truth mean to us? What does it tell us about our God?
know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me’ “ (John 7:28, 29, NIV; compare vss. 33, 34). These words reveal Jesus’ divinity. He cooperates completely with the Father, so that what the Father is, He is. The Father sent Him to the world for a specific mission. Jesus’ mission was to rescue a planet in rebellion. His hearers may not recognize it, but that does not defeat the mission. When He accomplishes this mission, He will return to the Father.

John 7 reveals several attempts to sidetrack Jesus’ mission. Some said He was good. Others said He was a deceiver (vs. 12). Some marveled at the power of His teaching. Others questioned His educational authority (vss. 14, 15). Some said He was the Christ, while some wondered how a Galilean could be the Christ (vss. 40-42, 52). The leaders wanted to kill Him, but they dared not lay their hands on Him (vss. 44-46).

One of the things Jesus did at the Feast of the Tabernacles was to say that the water ceremony used to cleanse the altar symbolized the abundant water of life He had come to offer (vss. 37, 38; compare 3:14). Jesus’ explanation of this water is perhaps the first time He promised in public that the Holy Spirit would bring the Pentecostal harvest, which would occur after the accomplishment of His redemptive mission (vs. 39; Acts 2).

II. Jesus: I AM the Light of the World.

In using the expression “I AM,” Jesus is equating Himself with the Yahweh of the Old Testament. In John’s Greek text, this I AM appears 23 times. Jesus says, “‘I am the light of the world’” (John 8:12), against the context of the ceremonies of candles in the Feast of Tabernacles. The candles symbolized the pillar of fire, which led Israel through the wilderness (Exod. 13:21, 22). Thus, He says He was that pillar of fire and assures His followers that just as He gave the Israelites protection, guidance, and direction, so He will guide us on our march to heaven. He also claims that “‘he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life’” (John 8:12, NKJV).

Light always has been a symbol of divine presence. The first act of Creation was to create light (Gen. 1:3). The same Christ who, as Creator, dispelled darkness by flooding the earth with light now in His incarnate state announces that He is the Light of the world—a Light that has come to dispel the moral, mental, and spiritual darkness that has overtaken the world as a result of sin. See Psalm 27:1 and 2 Corinthians 4:6. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

III. Jesus: Before Abraham Was, I AM.

When the Hebrew people and the Pharisees prided themselves in their Abrahamic lineage and questioned Jesus’ paternity, He said,
John 9:1 through 10:21 continues John’s description of events during Jesus’ visit to the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. Jesus heals a blind man and then uses the experience as a living parable to illustrate His life and teachings.

Describe the healing and its investigation by the Pharisees in John 9:1-34. What are a few spiritual lessons we can learn from this story? In what ways can we see ourselves in the Pharisees?

By healing the man, Jesus offered a living parable to illustrate His earlier statement, “‘I am the light of the world’” (John 8:12, NIV; 9:5). As the Light of the world, Jesus brings physical sight to a man who was born blind. But there is a deeper meaning behind this story.

The healing creates a serious dilemma for the Pharisees. On the one hand, the healing points to the work of a man approved by God. But by a nonemergency healing on the Sabbath, Jesus appears to be acting like a false prophet (Deut. 13:1-5). The humor of the story lies in its biting irony. The man who was blind sees more and more clearly that Jesus represents the true God of Israel. On the other hand, the Pharisees, who see clearly in the physical sense, and who are supposed to be the guardians of the faith of Israel, become more and more blinded to the truth about Jesus.

How does Jesus apply the living parable of the blind man’s experience to the Pharisees? John 9:39-41.

The Pharisees’ rejection of the healing symbolizes their rejection of the truth about God, which Jesus brought into the world. Their rejection was rooted in their willful blindness with regard to the claims of Jesus.

Even today, few people reject Jesus out of a lack of evidence. Usually they reject Him out of an unwillingness to let Him “tamper” with their lifestyle. It is easy to find excuses not to believe when we are protecting some cherished sin or attitude (John 3:20, 21). The root reality of the unbeliever is unconfessed and unforsaken sin. These things “blind” one to the truths about Jesus. How do you help someone who seems to be in this spiritual trap?
“‘Before Abraham was, I am’” (John 8:58). Not I was, but I AM. There never was a time when Jesus was not. When He claimed the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses (Exod. 3:14), the people understood that He was referring to His preexistence and equality with Yahweh. Jesus is thus not only our Creator but our Redeemer. This Jesus, whom God blessed forever, became one of us in order to rescue us from sin. Therein lies our only hope.

IV. Jesus: I AM the Good Shepherd.
   One of the tenderest titles that describes Jesus’ love and concern for us is found in John 10:11: “‘I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.’”

Inductive Bible Study


1. If Jesus is the Good Shepherd, we must be His sheep. While this is not the most flattering metaphor, how might it be accurate? What makes us sheeplike? What positive aspects are there to being like sheep, and why are these aspects positive when it comes to being disciples of Christ?

2. Even though it was quite clear that Jesus had virtually irrecocilable differences with the religious establishment, He appears to have honored the religious observances of His time and culture. Why? What lessons does this present for us?

3. Jesus’ “I AM” statements are powerful allusions to His own divinity, hearkening back to God’s revelation to Moses. Yet, unlike the Old Testament’s Yahweh, Jesus elaborates on just what He is. What does this suggest about the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament?

4. The Pharisees and others had what they regarded as legitimate objections to certain of Jesus’ actions and teachings. Was there any sense in which these objections really were legitimate? At what point did these objections become willful blindness to the truth? What objections exist today, both inside and outside our denomination, to certain of God’s truths? Are any of them legitimate or willful blindness? Explain your answer.

5. Why were the people who should have been most familiar with Jesus the least likely to accept His claims? What is John saying to us by emphasizing this?
Jesus, the Good Shepherd  *(John 10:1-21).*

**Read** John 10:1-21; in your own words, describe what Jesus is telling us here. As you read, ask yourself the following questions: (1) How many ways of salvation does Jesus present? (2) How is the great controversy illustrated here? (3) What distinguishes the shepherd from the hireling?

Verses 35-41 of chapter 9 set the stage for the Good Shepherd discourse of John 10. Jesus cares for the outcasts. When the leaders of a religious system cast people out on the basis of the leaders’ enmity for Jesus, they demonstrate their own blindness *(John 9:39-41)* and give Jesus the opportunity to collect these outcasts for Himself.

John 10:1-21 is made up of two parts. First, there is the story of shepherds and their sheep *(vss. 1-5)*, the closest thing to a parable in the Gospel of John. Then, Jesus reflects on the meaning of the story in verses 7-21.

**What** is John 10:17,18 referring to? Does that act qualify Him as the Good Shepherd, or will this happen because He already is the Good Shepherd? Explain your answer.

Sheep pens in ancient Palestine were usually natural caves. The sheep would be led into the cave in the evening, and the shepherd would take his position at the entrance to the cave and sleep there. Any robber or wild animal that physically sought access to the sheep would have to get past the shepherd to do it. Where caves were not available, a fieldstone enclosure would be built with an opening at one end just big enough for the shepherd to block with his body as he slept. So, when Jesus described Himself as the Good Shepherd and as the gate for the sheep, listeners would have recognized that these concepts were two different ways of describing the same activity.

When Jesus describes Himself as the Gate through which the sheep must pass in order to be saved, He is replacing all other methods of salvation. There is no other way into the sheepfold, except by the Gate.

**Read** John 10:1-5. How do the sheep know the voice of the shepherd? How do you know the voice of your Shepherd, as opposed to the voice of a stranger, a hireling, or a wolf?
As the Good Shepherd, “Jesus knows us individually and is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He knows us all by name. He knows the very house in which we live, the name of each occupant. He has at times given directions to His servants to go to a certain street in a certain city, to such a house, to find one of His sheep. “Every soul is as fully known to Jesus as if he were the only one for whom the Saviour died. The distress of everyone touches His heart. The cry for aid reaches His ear.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 479, 480.

Witnessing

In *Christ’s Object Lessons*, Ellen White speaks of how the rabbis were displeased with the way Jesus associated with sinners. “Why was it that one who claimed so lofty a character did not mingle with them and follow their methods of teaching?” She continues, “It angered these guardians of society that He with whom they were continually in controversy” sympathized with “social outcasts.”—Page 185. The rabbis here referred to as “the guardians of society” were the religious leaders, the shepherds of the flock. It was their job to guide the people of God in their spiritual walk. They were to lead the people down the path of righteousness. However, these leaders fell far short of their high calling. They were misguided and, therefore, could not lead the people in the true way of righteousness. The scribes and Pharisees rejected Jesus, and He is the only way to righteousness (right-living) and salvation.

Sheep follow the shepherd’s lead. If a sheep loses its way, it would not even know it was lost. The shepherd would have to go find it and lead it back to the right path.

There are many lost sheep today following the wrong path in life, led astray by false teachers. Some are being led by the deception that wealth and material gain can bring happiness. Others are deceived by the lust of the flesh and other temporal pleasures. And millions follow the direction of false religion. We must be guided by the Holy Spirit to lead others to the true path of righteousness found only in Jesus.
Hired Hands and Thieves (John 10:1, 5, 10-13).

**What** do the thieves and robbers do to the sheep? What do the hirelings do to the sheep? Contrast this to what Jesus promises to do to the sheep.

Jesus contrasts the Good Shepherd with two other types of people who relate to sheep. One type is the thieves and robbers. These invest nothing in the sheep; they are interested only in what they can gain for themselves. Jesus probably had in mind the chief priests of the temple who put on a show of piety in order to receive the offerings and fees the worshipers brought to the temple with them.

The other contrasting type is the hired hand, who does not own the sheep, and, therefore, has no personal concern for them. He watches them only to make a living. When a wild animal comes, he protects the only thing that really matters to him, which is himself. Jesus probably had in mind the Pharisees of chapter 9. Although more involved in the needs and concerns of the people than the chief priests were, they did not truly care for the sheep. They did not know them intimately nor were they willing to lay down their lives, nor even their reputations, for the sheep.

**Do** we see these types of people manifested in the Christian church today? If so, how are these characteristics manifested?

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus claimed the outcasts of the religious leaders for Himself (John 9:34-38). The Good Shepherd story was a rebuke to those who, in their rough handling of the man born blind, betrayed their true character as hired hands (John 9:40).

Jesus invites us to have the same kind of caring concern for others as the Good Shepherd has for His sheep. The one who truly cares about family, neighbors, and friends will never be pushy and abusive (as the Pharisees were in John 9) but will seek to act out of caring concern for the benefit of others. The world is full of sorrow, crying, pain, and dying. There is a bottomless need for people who, out of the strength they have received in Christ, will reach out to build up and encourage others. Such undershepherds will find, in this work, abundant life for themselves, as well.

**Maybe we are not pastors, but in what ways can we act the part of a shepherd?** How can we guard against, even unwittingly, becoming either a thief or a hireling?
**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** “H. V. Morton tells of a scene that he saw in a cave near Bethlehem. Two shepherds had sheltered their flocks in the cave during the night. How were the flocks to be sorted out? One of the shepherds stood some distance away and gave his peculiar call which only his own sheep knew, and soon his whole flock had run to him, because they knew his voice. They would have come for no one else, but they knew the call of their own shepherd. An eighteenth century traveller actually tells how Palestinian sheep could be made to dance, quick or slow, to the peculiar whistle or the peculiar tune on the flute of their own shepherd.” —William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: John 2*, p. 57.

**Thought Questions:**

1. In most Western countries, sheep are raised for killing, for meat. In Palestine, sheep are raised for wool. So, Palestinian shepherds have a long-term relationship with their sheep; they even name them. It was in this context that God is referred to as our Shepherd. How does this insight help you appreciate God as your Shepherd? What modern metaphors, or imagery, can you use to describe the role God plays in your life?

2. At a time when the people commemorated the Exodus and the wandering in the wilderness, Jesus made a statement about Himself. He said He was the ultimate Source of everything they needed. This was said to a people awaiting the Messiah to free them from “bondage.” How did their expectations of a Messiah blind them to the reality of Jesus? What are the things that may blind us to the second coming of the Messiah?

**Application Questions:**

1. The word *pastor* (see Eph. 4:11, NIV) is the Latin word for shepherd. Is the function of shepherding limited to the pastor? Explain. What are your expectations for your pastor? What role should every church member play in discipling the sheep?

2. What else, besides “water,” does Jesus compare Himself to? Why do you think He uses so many analogies, or comparisons? What application does this have in your personal life?

3. List the many problems in the secular world and in the church today. Against each, write a characteristic of Jesus as Savior and Shepherd that can solve the problem. Finally, as a class, write down a mission statement that will motivate you to share Jesus as the true Solution to all life’s problems.
Further Study: “The Pharisees had just driven one from the fold, because he dared to bear witness to the power of Christ. . . . In this they had shown themselves ignorant of the work committed to them, and unworthy of their trust as shepherds of the flock. Jesus now set before them the contrast between them and the Good Shepherd, and He pointed to Himself as the real keeper of the Lord’s flock.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 477.

Compare John 10:1-21 with two other sheep-and-shepherd stories in the Gospels (Matt. 18:10-14 and Luke 15:3-7). Note both the similarities between all three passages and the unique features of each. Who plays the role of shepherd in each of these other accounts, and how do the lessons of Matthew and Luke compare with the lesson of John 10?

Discussion Questions:

1. How do we get the kind of discernment needed to be able to tell the difference between the true Shepherd and hirelings or even thieves?

2. Compare what happens to the sheep when the hireling or the thief gets hold of them. What’s the difference?

3. In what ways are sheep like or unlike human beings? Which aspect of sheep behavior is most likely to have caused Jesus to draw the analogy He did?

4. Is your church a friendly place for “outcasts”? Are some types of people in your church more “acceptable” than others? Why is that so?

Summary: “Many of those who heard Jesus [at the Feast of Tabernacles in the temple] were mourners over disappointed hopes, many were nourishing a secret grief, many were seeking to satisfy their restless longing with the things of the world and the praise of men; but when all was gained, they found that they had toiled only to reach a broken cistern, from which they could not quench their thirst.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 454.

To those who have been bruised and battered by the world, the Gospel offers Jesus as the key to an abundant life (*John 10:10*). He is the Water and the Light, the Gate, and the Good Shepherd.
A Devoted Soul and an Impending Cross

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: John 11:1–12:50.

Memory Text: “‘I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds’” (John 12:24, NIV).

Key Thoughts: In the death and resurrection of Lazarus, John provides a foretaste of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is the impending Cross that draws out of Mary the full measure of devotion.

We love Him because He first loved us. In John 11 and 12 the author of the Gospel begins a transition from the earthly ministry of Jesus to the events associated with the Cross. The two main incidents in these chapters occur in Bethany, just across the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem. In Jesus’ raising of Lazarus from the dead and His anointing with perfume by Mary, John prepares the reader for the tragic but necessary events to follow shortly in Jerusalem.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead provokes contradictory reactions. For the Sanhedrin, it is seen as a threat to their own self-interest. As a result, they begin plotting the death of Jesus. In contrast stands Mary’s glorious act of devotion. Her devotion was well timed. “As [Jesus] went down into the darkness of His great trial, He carried with Him the memory of that deed, an earnest of the love that would be His from His redeemed ones forever.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 560.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 28.
The Raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-44).

Read John 11:1-44 and then answer these questions:

1. Why does Jesus wait so long before going to Bethany? See verses 15-17, 37, and 39. How did the delay make what He does even more miraculous?

2. Read what Jesus says in verses 25, 26. How does the act of raising Lazarus help prove the truth of those words?

3. Read what Jesus says in verses 41, 42. What do they reveal about the source of Christ’s power? See also verse 22.

4. Read verse 27. What is so important about this confession of faith, particularly in regard to the time in which it was expressed?

The bottom line of Christian faith is that there is real power in the gospel. The power that raised Lazarus from the dead is real, and it is still available today. While tragedies always are not reversed in this life, the resurrection power of God will bring meaning and comfort to our souls if we allow it to.

We will all have the John 11 experience at one time or another; that is, death, betrayal, and destruction leave behind a real sense of loss that cannot be explained away. We are troubled by the sense that Jesus could have intervened to prevent them but did not. We struggle to understand what “glory to God” might possibly come out of tragedy. At low points such as these, we can remember that the God who raised Jesus from the dead is still able to create something out of nothing. Even when all seems hopeless, we still can place our trust in Him. We have to, for what else is there? Fortunately for us, we have accounts such as this in the book of John that can give us even more reasons to trust in God.

Read verse 37. Who has not found himself or herself thinking a similar thing in the face of personal tragedy? What is the only answer we can give?
Key Text: John 12:24

Teachers Aims:
1. To show that Jesus’ life and teachings make sense only in light of His death.
2. To understand that Jesus’ death is the only Source of divine power for our lives.
3. To stress that the proper response on our part to Jesus’ sacrifice is a willingness to surrender our lives to Him.

Lesson Outline:

I. A Single Kernel of Wheat.
   A. Lazarus’s death and resurrection prefigured Jesus’ own (John 10:11).
   B. The resurrection of Lazarus, in a way, sealed Jesus’ fate.
   C. Lazarus can be seen to represent all of us in relation to Jesus.

   A. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead should inspire hope, even in seemingly hopeless situations.
   B. God’s means of addressing our problems may not be immediately clear to us.
   C. It is inevitable that our faith will be mixed with doubt, but we should not allow those doubts to blind us.

III. Because He First Loved Me (John 12:3).
   A. Mary’s act of anointing Jesus with extremely expensive perfume is the model for the boundless gratitude we should feel toward Jesus.
   B. The leaders’ intensified hostility toward Jesus indicates that they did not realize, or chose to ignore, their need for what He had to offer.
   C. Judas’s objection to Mary’s action was important evidence that he, too, failed to appreciate the depth of Christ’s mission and message.

Summary: Without Jesus’s sacrifice there would be no Christianity and no salvation, for that matter. In His crucifixion, Jesus not only saved our lives; He showed us how we should live.

Commentary.

John’s narrative is fast approaching the closing scenes of Jesus’ earthly ministry. To help us understand those scenes, John 11 and 12 record four great events: (1) victory over death, (2) vicious hatred, (3) vindication of genuine love, and (4) a voice of confirmation.

I. Victory Over Death: Lazarus.
   The name Lazarus means “God is my help.” And that is exactly what happens in the hour of Lazarus’s greatest need (John 11:1-45). Although Jesus already had resurrected two other people (Matt. 9:18-26, Luke 7:11-16), Lazarus’s resurrection is the most signifi-
Mary and Martha.

What is the first thing that both Martha and Mary say to Jesus when they first approach Him? How do those words reveal both faith and doubt at the same time? See John 11:21, 32.

For Mary and Martha, the death of Lazarus itself was not the worst thing. The worst part about the situation was the delay of Jesus! The two sisters seem to have had a very different reaction to Jesus. When news of Jesus’ arrival outside of town comes, Martha goes out to meet Him, but Mary stays at home until Martha comes and gets her. While both sisters are upset and distressed, Martha combines her statement of frustration (vs. 21) with strong statements of continued faith in Jesus (vss. 22, 24, 27). In response to her expressed faith, Jesus offers one of the most magnificent descriptions of His life and mission: “I am the resurrection and the life” (vss. 25, 26, NIV).

What do you understand the statement of Christ’s in verses 25 and 26 to mean? What hope is implicit in those words for us?

When Mary finally goes out to meet Jesus, she repeats Martha’s complaint but without any affirmation of continued faith. She receives no revelation from Jesus, and He draws no expression of faith from her (compare verses 32, 33 with verses 22-27). Jesus has come to invite them to behold the Resurrection and the Life, but their minds are fixed on their loss instead.

Beneath the surface of this story, it is not hard to catch a glimpse of the inner life of these sisters. Their hearts were a raging sea of turbulent emotions. The pain of sudden loss has all but crushed them. The actions of Jesus have piled doubts on top of their sorrows. While Martha seems to have been more successful at maintaining a semblance of emotional stability, even she did not grasp in advance what Jesus had come to do (vs. 39).

This story has a happy ending, of course. What hope do you find in this account for deaths that do not, at least for now, end as this one does?
The miracle of Lazarus’s resurrection has other timeless lessons. First, trusting in Jesus is never fruitless. Disappointment may come as an interlude, but for the trusting soul, disappointment turns into appointment with the Almighty.

Second, the divine schedule knows neither haste nor delay. Jesus came to Lazarus’s tomb four days after he died, not to weaken faith but to bring glory. Waiting in hope for the Lord never goes without an answer.

Third, for a disciple of Jesus, death is just a sleep (Job 14:11; Pss. 6:5; 115:17; 146:4; Eccles. 9:5, 6, 10) to be awakened by eternal life.

Fourth, Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life—both to awaken us from present death in sin and to resurrect us in the final victory. Where Jesus is, there is life.

Fifth, Jesus empathizes with us, as seen in His tears at the tomb (John 11:35, 36).

Sixth, even in the midst of pain, anguish, and grief, we must do our part. “ ‘Take ye away the stone’ ” was the Lord’s command (vs. 39). What we can do, He will not do. Divine grace does not turn us into lazy, spoiled children but empowers us to do good.

Seventh, the resurrection of Lazarus came second. His faith in, and friendship with, Jesus came first. This order is crucial if we would not be legalistic in our obedience.

II. Vicious Hatred: Christ’s Enemies.

It was before God’s throne that Lucifer became Satan. So it should be no surprise to us that Lazarus’s resurrection spurred satanic powers to convene the Sanhedrin and cause Caiaphas, the crafty high priest, to pronounce: “ ‘It is better . . . that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish’ ” (John 11:50, NIV). What an ironic prophecy! The way to the Cross is about to be flung open in order that Jesus may die rather than the nation, indeed the whole world, perish!

III. Vindication of Genuine Love: Mary.

Jesus’ impending death and rumors of priestly plots toward that end provided the moment for which Mary had long waited. John 12:1-8 and the parallel passages of Matthew 26:1-13 and Mark 14:1-9 tell us that Mary, in gratefulness to what Jesus did to reshape her life, brought “an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head” (Mark 14:3, NIV). John says she anointed His feet and wiped them with her hair (John 12:3).
The Plot to Kill Jesus (John 11:45-57).

Read John 11:45-57 and then answer the following questions:

1. Did the leaders believe that Jesus had really performed this miracle, or did they think it was a trick? Explain the importance of the answer.

2. What justification did they give for having to stop Jesus? Does that argument not make sense?

In these texts we see the reactions of the religious leaders to the resurrection of Lazarus. Instead of the unlimited possibilities the resurrection of Lazarus would seem to open to the human race, the religious leaders can focus only on the threat to their own position and interests.

With delicious irony, John uses the leaders’ own words against them. They plot to kill Jesus, because they fear that if they allow Him to continue His ministry, “everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation” (vs. 48, NIV). To the first readers of the Gospel, the foolishness of this statement would have been plain. The very thing the religious leaders sought to prevent, the death of Jesus brought about: worldwide belief in the teachings of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Even their leader, Caiaphas, prophesies that they “know nothing at all” (vss. 49-52, NIV). The council determines that, although Jesus has done nothing to deserve death, His death is the only way to maintain their position and the security of their nation.

However dramatic their example, the religious leaders here symbolize the danger we all face: rationalizing our actions, even those that fly in the face of what we know is right, for personal expediency. How have you done the same thing in your own life? What can we do to stop ourselves from falling into this common, but deadly, trap? Some verses that might help are Matthew 16:24, Philippians 2:4, and 1 Peter 4:1.
This selfless act of gratitude immediately brought stern rebuke: “‘Why this waste ...? It could have been sold for more than one year’s wages’” (Mark 14:5, NIV). It has gone to waste. How many poor could have been helped? But the surge of the heart cannot be understood by the marketing forces of the mind. Love’s expression knows no cost, and Jesus readily accepted Mary’s ministry (vss. 6, 8).

Judas held on to his cash box. Mary, however, broke her alabaster box. The transition from one to the other is the mark of

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** John 11:1-4, 45-50; 12:8; 1 Corinthians 2:6-8; James 1:27; 5:16

1. Raising Lazarus from the dead would seem to be irrefutable proof of Jesus’ divinity. Many so-called wonder workers have claimed to be able to raise the dead, but how many have done it before witnesses? Why, then, do you think the religious leaders continued to oppose Jesus?

2. All too often we regard prayer and faith in God as something to try when all else fails. By then we think the situation is truly dismal. However, is this attitude warranted if we truly believe in the reality of divine power?

3. Why did Jesus seem intentionally to take His time in attending to Lazarus? How did Mary and Martha feel about this? What are the parallels with our own attempts to depend on a God who sometimes seems slow to act?

4. According to basic Christian doctrine, Jesus had to die for the sins of the world. So, then, were the leaders and others who helped Him to that end playing a predetermined part? Are they morally responsible? Explain your answers.

5. In John 12:1-8, we learn much about three people in particular: Mary, Martha, and Judas. Discuss the attitude of each of these people. In what settings might each attitude be appropriate? Have you ever been in a situation where you thought certain expenditures or extravagances were uncalled for? If so, what can we learn from Jesus’ response?

6. What does Jesus mean when He says, “‘The poor you have with you always’” (John 12:8, NKJV)? Should we shrug off such suffering? What does the context tell us?
Mary of Bethany (John 12:1-8).

The anointing at Bethany probably took place on Saturday night, the week before the Crucifixion (John 12:1). Bethany was located about two miles east of Jerusalem, on the other side of the Mount of Olives.

Read John 12:8. Imagine yourself in the position of someone there who, not knowing about the impending death of Christ, witnessed the reaction of Jesus and Judas to Mary’s act. What reasons might such an eyewitness have for, perhaps, thinking Judas was right? What lesson exists here regarding how we can not always judge actions by what we see?

The heart of the narrative at the beginning of John 12 lies in the deliberate contrast between Mary’s wholehearted faith in, and love for, Jesus and the coldhearted calculations of Caiaphas (at the end of chapter 11) and Judas. Mary’s anointing of Jesus’ feet is motivated by unselfish love and sacrifice. The opponents of Jesus, on the other hand, are motivated by greed and self-interest.

In this scene we see Mary’s total devotion of soul. Whatever doubts she may have had before the resurrection of Lazarus are gone now. Every emotion trembles with gratitude to the One who raised her brother and who is about to die for her. The perfume she pours on Jesus cost her a year of hard work, but it represents her whole life, gratefully offered to Jesus. Such total devotion is rarely popular, as Judas’s reaction makes clear. “What a waste,” people say. “You could have done great things with your life, but you chose to waste it on Jesus!”

Judas’s reaction is normal and human. Mary’s action does seem a waste. What church board would approve such an expenditure? To human reasoning, Mary seems emotionally disturbed. But notice again how Jesus feels about it, this time as recorded in Mark 14:6-9: “‘She has done a beautiful thing to me. . . . She did what she could. . . . I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her’” (NIV).

Look at the reaction of Judas to Mary’s anointing of Christ. In what ways can we be guilty of doing the same thing; that is, hiding our own spiritual weaknesses and defects behind a veneer of piety and self-sacrifice?
spiritual beauty and maturity. In one moment of eloquent self-denial, Mary lifted gratitude to a priceless pinnacle of love. Genuine love vindicates itself in such self-abandonment as it places itself at the Master’s feet.


While the Hebrew religious leaders plotted the death of Jesus and Lazarus (John 11:49-51, 12:10) in order to stop Jesus’ mission (vs. 11), a new door of opportunity opened. The Greeks visiting Jerusalem told the disciples that they wanted to see Jesus (vss. 20, 21). At His birth, the wise men from the East came to worship Him. Now at the close of His ministry, the Greeks from the West came to see the close of that ministry. In the case of one, a star in the sky guided them. In the case of the other, a voice from heaven gave its approval of His mission, and the people heard it like a thunder (vss. 23-29). To the Greeks, as to Nicodemus, Jesus revealed His impending death on the cross (John 12:32). “In these strangers He saw the pledge of a great harvest, when the partition wall between

Witnessing

At the end of the funeral ceremony, the young widow walked solemnly toward the casket. She carefully pulled up the satin blanket that covered her deceased husband and neatly tucked in the sides. Those who had come to pay their respects watched curiously. Finally, the widow tenderly kissed her husband's cold brow before returning to her seat. What an act of faith! This young woman knew that her husband was only asleep and would one day awaken to the loving call of the Savior. She not only believed her husband would live again; she acted as though he would.

Life comes with many disappointments, tragedies, and losses. But God's Word is filled with promises of hope and deliverance. Although we have heard and read these promises again and again, many of us cannot see the blessings they hold. We cannot see their fulfillment, because we are too focused on our trials.

Jesus promised to save us from our sins, and He will. Just as He keeps that promise “He that shall come will come” (Heb. 10:37). And we can be sure that until that day He will keep His word and fulfill every promise He has given.

Let us speak of God’s promises in our witnessing to others. We can tell them of His assurance to supply every need (Phil. 4:19). We can point them to His commitment to direct us in life (Prov. 3:6). Then there is His pledge to grant us wisdom (James 1:5). Living by God’s promises will strengthen our devotion to Him.
The Impending Cross \((\text{John 12:9-27})\).

John portrays three main reactions to the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead.
- The religious leaders want to kill Jesus and even Lazarus for fear of what will happen to them if they do not \((\text{John 11:47-53})\).
- Mary, on the other hand, responds with gratitude and devoted, self-sacrificing love \((\text{John 12:1-9})\).

At the same time, a third reaction occurs. What is it? See \(\text{John 12:9-11, 17-19}\).

Of the three reactions, Mary’s is clearly the one the author of the Gospel wishes the reader to see as the great model of response to Jesus and His miraculous signs.

What is Jesus’ answer to the request of the Greeks? \(\text{John 12:20-27}\). What is He specifically telling us there about what it means to follow Him? How did Mary’s act in anointing Christ’s feet manifest what Jesus is telling us here?

John 12:26 shows that to follow Jesus is to disown self-centeredness. When our lives are filled with striving for advantage, security, and pleasure, we do not experience the fullness of life Jesus offers. In fact, what Jesus seems to be saying in verse 25 is that the only way we can truly follow Christ is to disown ourselves; this has to be a full, complete death to self. This, of course, is something only the Lord can do for us, if we allow Him, if we make the choice to follow Him; and to do that we must, like the kernel of wheat, first die. There is no other way. Judas, the leaders of Israel, and the crowd that came to Jesus as He entered Jerusalem all represent, to one degree or another, those who (at least at that point) did not make the full surrender.

Of those whom we have looked at in today’s study, only Mary seems to have understood this, an understanding clearly made manifest by her works.

How would you explain to a non-Christian that what Jesus is saying in John 12:25 is to our immense advantage? How could you express it in a way to help him or her understand this in a positive manner?
Jew and Gentile should be broken down, and all nations, tongues, and peoples should hear the message of salvation. The anticipation of this, the consummation of His hopes, is expressed in the words, ‘The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified’ [John 12:23].”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 622.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: The raising of Lazarus from the dead is not mentioned in the other three Gospels. Some scholars conclude that Lazarus must have been in a coma. Others have suggested that the story is an allegory written to solidify Jesus' saying “I am the Resurrection and the Life.” “Renan suggested that the whole thing was a deliberate fraud arranged by Jesus and Martha and Mary and Lazarus.”—William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible, John 2, p. 101.

Thought Questions:
1. The Gospels are filled with many miracles performed by Jesus—some more impressive than others. Why do you think that the raising of Lazarus from the dead has caused so much controversy? What are the elements of the miracle that raise doubts? Why are some miracles easier to accept than others?

2. Consider Mary’s act of anointing Jesus’ feet, the cost of the perfume, and the place where the act was done. What do they tell you of Mary’s devotion to, and love for, Christ? Now consider the church as Christ’s bride. What might we do as an expression of our devotion to, and love for, Christ?

Application Questions:
1. Life is sweetened with miracles every day. Most of these miracles are casually disregarded as lucky happenings or coincidences. Why is it easier to attribute an unusual turn of events to luck and not to the sovereign hand of God? Is there any danger of claiming everything to be a miracle? Explain.

2. Monday’s study tells us that for Mary and Martha the death of Lazarus itself was not the worst thing! The worst part about the situation, for them, was the delay of Jesus in coming to their aid. Compare and contrast this with your personal spiritual life. What lessons can be learned from how Mary and Martha waited for Jesus?
Further Study: “Had Christ been in the sickroom, Lazarus would not have died; for Satan would have had no power over him. ... Christ knew that as [the suffering sisters] looked on the dead face of their brother their faith in their Redeemer would be severely tried. But He knew that because of the struggle through which they were now passing their faith would shine forth with far greater power.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 528.

“The Saviour understood the plotting of the priests. He knew that they longed to remove Him, and that their purpose would soon be accomplished. But it was not His place to hasten the crisis, and He withdraws from that region, taking the disciples with Him. Thus by His own example Jesus again enforced the instruction He had given to the disciples, ‘When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another.’ Matt. 10:23. There was a wide field in which to work for the salvation of souls; and unless loyalty to Him required it, the Lord’s servants were not to imperil their lives.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 541.

Discussion Questions:

1. If you had a year’s worth of salary or a year of time to use to honor Jesus, how would you use it? How would your friends be likely to react?

2. Read John 12:26. How do those words debunk the notion that Jesus wants us only as friends, not as servants? Why must we be both?

3. Look up these texts: Matthew 19:29, Mark 8:36, Galatians 6:14, Philippians 3:8. How do they express the same idea that we see revealed in Mary’s actions? What must happen in our own lives so we can have that kind of devotion?

Summary: In this lesson we have seen how the kindness of Jesus provokes contradictory reactions. His kindness in raising Lazarus from the dead and in showing acceptance to Mary draws out the full depth of her devotion to Him. On the other hand, the same actions lead to the murderous plots of the religious leaders, the greedy complaint of Judas, and the misguided praise of the crowd. The author of the Gospel would have us ponder our own reactions to the greatest kindness of all, Jesus’ sacrifice for us on the cross.
True Greatness

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: John 13:1-30, chapter 17.

Memory Text: “‘I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you’” (John 13:15, NIV).

Key Thought: Instead of becoming self-absorbed as He approaches His great humiliation, Jesus, in John 13–17, expresses His loving concern for His disciples.

True greatness is to follow Jesus in the path of service and humility. For many, greatness consists in the accumulation of wealth, fame, and power. To such, the opportunity to “wash feet” represents the ultimate humiliation. Jesus here does the opposite of what seems natural to human experience.

With chapter 13 the entire tone of the Gospel of John is transformed. Instead of public ministry, Jesus retires to an unspecified place to quietly instruct His disciples at great length.

This lesson and the next cover John 13–17, the portion of the Gospel that deals with the “upper-room experience.” Because of space limitations, we will deviate from the order of the Gospel here. In this lesson we highlight the common elements of chapters 13 and 17, where Jesus’ concern for His disciples is expressed in the foot washing (John 13) and in a marvelous prayer (John 17). In the next lesson, we cover chapters 14–16, where Jesus’ concern for His disciples is expressed in the gracious provision of the Comforter.

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

Read John 13:1-11 and then in your own words write down what you think this account means and why the Holy Spirit directs John to include it in his Gospel. Focus on what you believe is the key message to us here.

It was the custom in New Testament times for people to bathe themselves before attending a feast. Upon arrival, they would not need to bathe again; they needed to have only their feet washed. The washing of the feet, then, was like a ceremony that preceded entry into the house where they were to be guests. In this case, however, something so much greater was going on.

Read John 13:10-12. What does the text reveal? Why does Jesus, nevertheless, wash the feet of Judas? How does that act, in its own way, symbolize what foot washing is all about?

The full-body bath represents the complete cleansing that a person receives at the beginning of the Christian life (baptism). Foot washing, on the other hand, represents the Christian’s ongoing need to deal with the soiling that comes from daily contact with the sinful world and its contamination. The foot is the part of the body that in ancient times came in regular contact with the earth and, therefore, needed continual cleansing.

The beautiful lesson that comes through in Jesus’ action is that our daily shortcomings as Christians do not call our original cleansing into question. It is not necessary to be rebaptized or to start all over every time we make a mistake. One who has bathed needs only to wash the feet again! We are secure as long as we do not choose to turn away (see also John 10:27-29).

The image of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples represents His forgiveness of sins committed after baptism. The image of the disciples washing one another’s feet signifies our willingness to forgive those daily irritations and transgressions that threaten the unity in love that Jesus purposed for His disciples (see also John 13:34, 35).

What does it mean to “wash feet” in the context of everyday life? How can we be willing to “wash” one another’s feet? What does it take to be able to do that?
**Key Text:** *John 13:15*

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To contrast Jesus’ idea of greatness with the worldly concept of it.
2. To study Jesus’ example as it relates to our relationships with one another.
3. To understand Jesus’ will for succeeding generations of believers.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **True Greatness** (*Phil. 2:5-7*).
   A. In a worldly sense, greatness is measured in tangibles: wealth, power, popularity.
   B. Jesus’ greatness was shown in humility, without concern for the trappings of greatness.
   C. Jesus’ view of greatness was quite incomprehensible to His contemporaries, especially to Judas, and remains so for many today.

II. **Washing Feet** (*John 13:5*).
   A. Jesus’ washing of His disciples’ feet represented leadership as service.
   B. Foot washing was a ceremony of unconditional welcome.
   C. It is difficult to be arrogant and self-serving when washing someone’s feet.

III. **Jesus’ Vision of the Future** (*John 17:21*).
   A. Jesus wanted to be known to future generations through the goodness and greatness of His church.
   B. Love was to be the major identifying feature of the church.
   C. This love was to result in unity.

**Summary:** Jesus’ ideal for His followers is not only vastly different from that of the world; it runs counter to it. He calls us to be servants of one another and of humankind and to ignore the desire for self-aggrandizement, which comes naturally to us and often is considered a necessity for worldly success.

**Commentary.**

With the Cross only a day or so away, Jesus has a heart-to-heart talk with His disciples and prays for them. This week’s lesson covers John 13 and 17, as it outlines three of Jesus’ concerns in developing discipleship: (1) the pattern of leadership, (2) the perils of power, and (3) the power of prayer.

I. **The Pattern of Leadership: Be a Servant.**

   Even as the disciples were preparing for the Last Supper, they were arguing about who among them would be the greatest (*Luke 22:24*). Jesus’ answer is unique in the history of leadership. A pharaoh, a Nebuchadnezzar, a Caesar, a Katherine the Great, or a
True Greatness (John 13:12-17).

What is Jesus’ further purpose in washing the feet of the disciples? John 13:12-17.

True greatness is the King of the universe walking over to the corner of a room, picking up a towel and a basin of water, and stooping down to wash the feet of an unstable disciple such as Peter and a traitor such as Judas. True greatness does not need to brag or assert itself. It takes true greatness to exercise self-control or to act the role of a slave. It takes true greatness to do the right thing when everyone laughs at you or despises you in his or her heart.

True greatness is to have the same attitude as Jesus (Phil. 2:5), who was “in very nature God” (vs. 6, NIV) yet took “the very nature of a servant” (vs. 7) and “humbled himself” (vs. 8). True greatness is to “consider others better than yourselves” (vs. 3). True greatness is to follow Jesus in the path of service and humility.

In contrast, if our first thought in any situation is of our own advantage and self-interest, we are pursuing a false greatness. If our first reaction to any situation is to nag, belittle, criticize, and complain, we are exhibiting the opposite of humility and true greatness. Putting other people down says “I am better than you.” Considering others as better than yourself causes you to uplift, encourage, and praise.

How can we develop true greatness? How can we learn to love a life of service? John 13:12-17, 15:4-8, 2 Cor. 3:18.

Does the way your local church practices foot washing capture the spirit of Jesus’ command? If not, how can you change that situation? Does your local church carry out Jesus’ example in its relationships with people inside and outside the church body? How can the foot-washing service become a more meaningful part of our Christian experience?
Genghis Khan sees leadership in terms of power and authority over others. But the Lord of the universe reversed the definition of leadership: “‘Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’” (Matt. 20:26-28, NIV).

A true leader is first and foremost a servant. Servant leadership is difficult to understand and even more so to practice. The life of Jesus, however, is an example of continuous service—from Cana to the Cross, from Nicodemus to the paralytic at Bethesda. At the Last Supper, when Jesus “took a towel, and girded himself” to wash the disciples’ feet (John 13:4-15), He taught yet again that fulfillment comes not from power but service. That is why He commanded, “‘Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you’” (vss. 14, 15, NIV).

“Be like Me,” Jesus is saying. “Serve like Me. Love like Me. Live like Me.” It is not enough to take the title of deacon or deaconess, elder or pastor, bishop or president. Take the towel instead. Without becoming a servant, there can be no leadership in ministry. A ministry of servanthood is based on the underlying principle of all God’s commandments—the principle of love. When such a pattern of leadership is followed, the world will take note of its power (vss. 34, 35).

II. The Perils of Power—Beware of Self.

If authoritarianism is one danger to Christian leadership, self-assertion to the point of setting aside the Lord is another. Judas is the perfect example of the latter. One of the saddest statements in Scripture is this: “Satan entered into [Judas]” (vs. 27). Self-dominated Judas so much that arrogance, accusation, pride, avarice, and even betrayal did not seem inappropriate to him. Even being Christ’s disciple was just an avenue to achieve self-glorification.

Such a goal blinded Judas to the true meaning and intent of following the Lord. Thus, when a devout follower of Jesus anointed His feet with a costly ointment, Judas denounced the act as a foolish waste (John 12:1-8). Judas weighed life in terms of the cashbox he carried with him. But Jesus pointed out that true living is in self-abandonment. That was a bitter pill for treachery to swallow, and Judas succumbed to the perils of power and sacrificed the privilege of discipleship.

III. The Power of Prayer—Be a Prayer Warrior.

With the Cross staring Him in the face, Jesus gave His disciples the key to victorious living: prayer. John 17, the longest recorded prayer of Jesus, has three parts: (1) a prayer for Himself, (2) a prayer for His disciples, and (3) a prayer for the church.
TUESDAY

March 2

Judas: The Other Path to “Greatness”


What purpose does Jesus have in predicting His betrayal? In what way does the principle shown here work all through prophecy?

John 13:18, 19.

How does the knowledge of His coming betrayal affect Jesus?

John 13:21-26. Why should it have hurt Him so much? What do these texts tell us about God’s feeling toward even the worst sinners?


But Judas chose to follow a different path to “greatness” than that exhibited by Christ in the foot-washing service. On this particular point he considered himself wiser than Christ. Surely it was obvious to anyone that greatness came from power, wealth, and the esteem of others! But his logical course of action led only to personal destruction.

“...” —Pages 718–721.

Judas failed to realize that anybody can act great or demand to be treated as great. Anybody can spend money or command others, given the opportunity. It takes true greatness to act the part of a servant and do tasks that others should have done. It takes true greatness to put others first, to treat others as better than yourself.

Is the typical view of greatness in today’s world more like that of Jesus or Judas? How can one best present the message of Jesus to people who are used to a different kind of greatness?
For Himself, He makes two petitions (vss. 1-5): (1) that He will be able to meet the agony of the cross so that the Father’s love and justice for this rebellious planet might be vindicated and (2) that through Him, eternal life would be available to all who come to Him.

For His disciples, Jesus prays that they will be protected by the power of God’s name in order to remain united (vs. 11, NIV). He also prays that “they may have the full measure of [Jesus’] joy within them” (vs. 13, NIV). Christ intends for His people to be

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Mark 16:16; Luke 22:42; John 13:14; 14:22-24; Revelation 5:9, 10

1. Foot washing is, among other things, a reaffirmation of our commitment to Jesus, in contrast to a complete rebaptism. Yet, in the church today, we have examples of people being rebaptized. When might there be instances where rebaptism is justified?

2. In the world, status is symbolized by the types of tasks one is expected to perform. In the context of John’s Gospel, we are not shocked by Jesus’ choice to wash the feet of His disciples. How might we react, however, if we saw present-day leaders performing such low-status tasks? How is it possible for our own expectations to interfere with our perception of what is really important?

3. What theological truth does foot washing reflect? What principle of the Christian faith did Jesus reflect as He washed His disciples’ feet? Through this ritual, what did He teach us about how we should relate to strangers who mingle among us?

4. Judas apparently felt his way was better than Christ’s. He might have even felt that Christ would come around to his way of thinking if He understood the situation as well as Judas did. In what circumstances do we try to do God’s thinking for Him?

5. In Jesus’ final prayer with His disciples (John 17:1-19), He prays for Himself and for the courage to do what is necessary. Why do you think He needed to pray this prayer?

6. Jesus prays for the church to achieve an ideal. Has the church ever met that ideal? Did Jesus expect it to do so? Is there a sense in which at least some parts of the church throughout history have achieved this level of spirituality? Explain your answers. What is our role as individuals in helping the church reach this ideal?
Jesus Prays for His Disciples (John 17:1-19).

Read carefully John 17:1-19, focusing on the question: For whom does Jesus pray here, and why?

The farewell gathering of Jesus and His disciples (John 13–17) draws to a close with an intercessory prayer in three parts. In John 17:1-5 Jesus prays for Himself. In verses 6 to 19 His attention turns to His disciples and to their need for support in the absence of His physical presence (the third part we’ll look at tomorrow).

The initial goal of Jesus’ prayer is for help in completing the task of glorifying the Father on earth (vss. 1-5). This task will be accomplished on the cross. There never has been a clearer picture of the character of God than that exhibited by Jesus in His humiliation and death. But Jesus prays for strength to complete this task, not to benefit Himself or His Father only but for the sake of all who will believe in Him. When Jesus and His Father are glorified on the cross, eternal life becomes available to those in relationship with Jesus (vss. 2, 3). So, even in His prayers for Himself, Jesus’ ultimate goal is the glory of His Father and the benefit of others.

Jesus then focuses His prayer directly in behalf of His disciples, who soon will have to learn how to live without His physical presence among them. He does not pray for the world but only for those who have renounced the world (vs. 9). He prays for His disciples, because they will have to remain in the world when He goes away, and they will become the object of the world’s evil attention. As in chapter 13, Jesus’ coming humiliation does not draw out concern for Himself; rather, it directs His attention to the consequences of His “going away” for His disciples.

Read verse 14. What does it mean to be “‘not of this world’”? In what ways should we, as Christians who are in this world, be “‘not of this world’”? How could we know whether we are or are not?
TEACHERS COMMENTS

happy. He further prays that God will not take His disciples out of the world but that He will protect them from Satan (vs. 15, NIV). The world is the object of our mission, not the master of our souls. Finally, Jesus prays that His disciples will be sanctified by the truth—God’s word (vs. 17, NIV).

For the church of all ages, Christ prays for unity (vss. 20-26). So essential is Christian unity that Christ links it to the abiding purpose of His incarnation—“that the world may know that thou hast sent me” (vs. 23). To bring about division within the community of the faith is to deny the Incarnation and the Cross!

“Unity with Christ establishes a bond of unity with one another. This unity is the most convincing proof to the world of the majesty and virtue of Christ, and of His power to take away sin.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 1148.

Witnessing

“Go to the ant . . . consider her ways, and be wise” (Prov. 6:6). Ants are referred to as social because they live in colonies. Each ant in the colony has its own role in working for the benefit and survival of the whole colony. Worker ants search for food, feed the young, and defend the colony against intruders. The queen ant spends her life propagating the colony. The sole purpose of the winged male ants is to mate with the queen. Though small in size, the ant can be considered one of the greatest creatures on earth because of its selfless purpose in life.

We have as our example men and women in the Bible who were great, not so much because of who they were but because of the One they represented. They represented Christ, who lived a life of service. They, too, are remembered by what they did for others.

As a slave, Joseph worked diligently and remained faithful to the Lord. Because of his faithfulness, Pharaoh exalted him to second in command of Egypt. But even in this position, he worked hard for many years for the well-being of others.

Esther was queen. Yet, she gave no thought for her own life when given the opportunity to save the lives of her people. She used her status not for her own benefit but for the benefit of others.

Let us seek greatness not by earthly gain or recognition but by serving others. In reaching out to meet the needs of others, we will discover many avenues for winning souls to Christ.
“But for Them Also Which Shall Believe”  
(John 17:20-26).

**Whom** else does Jesus pray for in John 17?  
*John 17:20.*

**What** does He pray will be the common experience of both the disciples and the second generation of Christians?  
*John 17:21-24.*

In the last part of Jesus’ prayer, He turns to the second generation of Christians. In the fullest sense, this second generation includes all Christians who have never had an encounter with Jesus in the flesh.

When the love that Jesus prays for produces unity in the church, the world will come to know that Jesus is truly the One who represents the character of the Father on earth *(see also John 13:34, 35).* On the other hand, the world never will be seriously attracted to Christ through the instrumentality of a church that is bitterly divided.

In Jesus’ prayer we catch a glimpse of one reason prayers do not get answered. Every provision has been made for the church’s unity. But the evident disunity of the church in general shows that even Jesus’ prayers can be frustrated by the stubborn and self-serving human spirit. There are many things God would long to do for the church if only His people were willing to allow Him to do them.

Another remarkable thing about this chapter is the idea of Jesus praying for His disciples and for us. With all the power Jesus displayed in the course of His ministry on earth, He still saw great value in praying for others. Prayer for others accomplishes things in this world that never would happen otherwise.

For most Christians, however, prayer for others can be an up-and-down experience. So, it helps to have a regular time set aside for prayer. It also can be helpful to make a prayer list, as long as the list is not so long that it becomes unmanageable. But most important of all, it helps to have some kind of accountability in the prayer life, a prayer partner or a prayer group that encourages one to keep on when the going gets tough.

Look carefully at John 17:26. Jesus prayed that the love the Father had for Him would be in us, we who claim to follow Jesus. **What is that love? Would it not be the most perfect love possible? How, then, can we manifest that love in our lives? Is perhaps the lack of unity among Christians one manifestation of this lack of love?**
Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** “There is a legend of St Francis of Assisi. In his early days he was very wealthy; nothing but the best was good enough for him; he was an aristocrat of the aristocrats. But he was ill at ease and there was no peace in his soul. One day he was riding alone outside the city when he saw a leper, a mass of sores, a horrible sight. Ordinarily the fastidious Francis would have recoiled in horror from this hideous wreck of humanity. But something moved within him; he dismounted from his horse and flung his arms around the leper; and as he embraced him the leper turned into the figure of Jesus. The nearer we are to suffering humanity, the nearer we are to God.”—William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: John 2*, p. 138.

**Thought Questions:**

1. Have you ever watched someone care for a loved one who is ill? The person will stoop to do the most menial services, the most repulsive chores—chores as vile as cleaning up vomit! Yet, in situations where love is not the motivating factor, we may feel contempt for doing such humble acts and scorn to lower ourselves to do tasks we consider beneath us. What lessons of humility did Jesus teach when He stooped to wash the dirty feet of His disciples?

2. Abraham Lincoln had many enemies. But when he died, even his enemies acknowledged his greatness. So it was with Jesus. True greatness is immortal. The title of this week’s lesson is “True Greatness.” Make a list of the characteristics you think the Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to possess in order to exhibit true greatness.

**Application Question:**

Jesus knew where He came from, why He was on earth, and where He was going. Everything He did was centered around who He was. Ask yourself: Who am I? What am I here for? Where am I going? How does such self-awareness help spiritual growth? On the cross, Jesus cried out to His Father “Why hast thou forsaken me?” How did separation from His Father affect His spirit? Why is it important for us, as humans, to be continually connected to our heavenly Father?
**Further Study:** Read some of the great “farewell speeches” of the Bible outside the Gospel of John (Gen. 47:29–49:33; the whole book of Deuteronomy; Joshua 23, 24; 1 Chronicles 28, 29; Acts 20:17-38; 2 Tim. 3:1–4:8). What are the common elements in all these discourses? To what degree does Jesus in John 13–17 conform to a common literary pattern? In what ways does He deviate from earlier examples? If you were to give a farewell discourse to your family and friends that was based on the biblical model, what would you say?

In John 17 Jesus talks about “glorifying” His Father and being glorified Himself (vss. 1, 4, 5). This concept of glory is a central theme in the Gospel of John (John 1:14; 2:11; 7:18; 8:50; 12:23, 24; 14:13; 15:8; 17:10; 21:19; in some texts translators may substitute words such as honor). It is also a significant component of the first angel’s message in Revelation (Rev. 14:6, 7). What do these texts imply about the word glory? How does the reading of these texts impact your life? How can we “glorify God” in our lives today?

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What kind of unity was Jesus praying for? Is it possible to have unity of faith without unity of doctrine or belief? How wide a difference in belief can there be before disunity appears?

2. Why is knowing Jesus the key to eternal life? When Jesus talks about eternal life in John 17:3, is He thinking in terms of quality of life now, or is He thinking only of heaven?

3. Read carefully John 17:17. What is Jesus saying there that shows how crucial the Bible is to our spiritual life?

**Summary:** The key point of this lesson is that true greatness is not found in power, wealth, or fame; it is found in following Jesus along the path of service and humility. Jesus demonstrated this path when, in full awareness of the Cross He was about to experience, He nevertheless was more concerned for the impact of the coming events on His disciples than He was for Himself. In washing the feet of His disciples and in praying for them, as well as for us, Jesus did the opposite of what comes naturally to the human spirit. In so doing, He set for us an example of true greatness.
The Spirit “Replaces” Jesus

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: John 13:31–16:33.

Memory Text: “But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7, NIV).

Key Thought: Life without a sense of Jesus’ presence is empty. When He left earth, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to fill the place that He had held in the lives of His disciples. As hard as it was for His disciples to grasp, this arrangement was better for them than His physical presence had been.

The Spirit was sent to continue and enhance Jesus’ work on earth. After the foot washing, the shadow of the Cross began to hang over the room where Jesus and His disciples were reclining. Christ’s last moments with them had come. They began to realize that Jesus was about to leave them. In John 13 to 16 Jesus delivers a farewell speech to His disciples in which He teaches them how to live without His physical presence, just as the second generation of Christians would have to live without the physical presence of the disciples.

How important for us, many generations removed from the time of Christ, to realize that the physical absence of Jesus is no handicap to us or to our walk with Him. We can be all He wants us to be, here and now, even while He is not among us as He was among the disciples. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, Jesus’ word is still as good as His touch.

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

Jesus waited until the departure of Judas (John 13:28-30) to begin His farewell speech to His disciples. What followed was spoken for their encouragement—and ours.

**What problems are Jesus and His disciples facing at this time?** John 13:33, 36.

**What impact does Jesus sense this would have on His disciples?** John 14:18.

Jesus is going away, and the disciples are feeling abandoned. How can they possibly continue without Him? But Jesus makes it clear that His going away to the Father will benefit them.

**What is one way in which the disciples are better off when Jesus goes to the Father?** See John 14:12-14. **What is Jesus saying here?**

A key to understanding how the departure of Jesus would benefit the disciples is found in the statement that the disciples would do greater works than Jesus did (John 14:12). At first glance this statement seems preposterous. How could anyone do greater works than Jesus did? Yet, the earthly Jesus was subject to human limitations. He could be only in one place at a time. When He was with the disciples, the Father could be seen only in His person (vs. 9). But when He went to the Father, those specific limitations were left behind. Through the Spirit (vss. 16, 17), His disciples could represent the character of God throughout the world.

Because Jesus went to the Father and sent the Spirit, millions of disciples have extended Jesus’ work. And through the works and the writings of the disciples, Jesus has become real to millions around the globe. In a sense, the disciples of Jesus took His place in the world. The words and actions of believers may be the only picture of Jesus some people will ever see.

**Think of those with whom you have been in personal contact in the past 24 hours. Was your influence on them such that they would have been more interested in knowing the God whom you profess to serve, or would you have turned them off? Be honest with yourself.**
Key Text: John 16:7

Teachers Aims:
1. To realize that, even though He is not physically here, Jesus is no less present in the world today; He may, in fact, be more so.
2. To appreciate the nature of the Holy Spirit in relation to Jesus.
3. To grasp how the Holy Spirit performs His function in the world.

Lesson Outline:

I. In His Presence (John 15:26, 27).
   A. In His final words to His disciples, Jesus taught them how to live in His physical absence.
   B. Jesus, as a human being, was limited in ways the Holy Spirit is not.
   C. In the absence of Jesus the Man, the disciples and succeeding generations became His representatives.

II. Another Counselor (John 16:13).
   A. The Holy Spirit is intimately connected to Jesus but is not Jesus.
   B. The Holy Spirit is a Person.
   C. The Holy Spirit is primarily defined by His interaction with other beings, such as Jesus or believers.

III. The Paraclete (John 16:7).
   A. The Holy Spirit comforts believers with the continued promise of Jesus’ presence.
   B. The Holy Spirit brings people to correct knowledge of Jesus’ person and message.
   C. The Holy Spirit gives the church the means to spread the message of Jesus.

Summary: The Holy Spirit is not merely a force or a catalyst for mysterious supernatural phenomena. The Holy Spirit, like the Father and the Son, is God. He exists for the purpose of comforting believers and aiding the church in spreading the good news.

Commentary.

Because the disciples were worried that Jesus would be leaving them, they were anxious for the future. So He assures them that He is returning to the Father (John 16:6, 22) and that He will return to take them home (John 14:3, 16:22). What will happen in the meantime? Jesus’ answer in John 14–16 presents the Christian life in four parts: (1) its core, (2) its inheritance, (3) its perils, and (4) its empowerment.

   The parable in John 15:1-8 provides the central dynamic of the Christian life. By accepting Christ as their Savior, Christians link...
Remaining Connected to Jesus (John 15:1–16:33).

In John 15:1-8, Jesus gives the beautiful analogy of the vine and the branches. How does one “remain in the vine”? John 15:6, 7, 9, 10.

The relationship of Jesus with the Father is the model for the disciples’ relationship with Jesus. Jesus loves the disciples the way the Father loves Him (John 15:9). On the other hand, the disciples are to obey His commands just as He obeys the commands of His Father (vs. 10).

How are the disciples to cope with the loss of Jesus’ personal presence? John 15:26, 27; 16:7.

The relationship of Jesus with the world is paralleled in the relationship of the disciples with unbelievers (John 15:18). The world’s hatred of the disciples is rooted in its hatred of Jesus (vss. 22-25). The values of the world are often the opposite of God’s values; at times, they are in direct conflict. Thus, the disciples need to be ready to face the hostility of the world.

For the disciples, the negative experience of hatred and persecution (vss. 18-25, 16:1-4) is counterbalanced by the benefits that will come because Jesus has gone to the Father and has sent His Spirit (John 15:26, 27; 16:7-15).

Why was it better that Jesus was going away? (1) He would send the Holy Spirit, who would not be subject to human limitations. (2) Through the efforts of the disciples, the work of Jesus would be spread throughout the world and would impact every people and place. (3) The love they would have through the Spirit (John 15:12-15) would have convincing power in the world (John 13:34, 35). (4) Coping with the absence of Jesus would enable the disciples to provide a solid foundation for those who followed their generation (John 15:1-8).

Read John 14:21, 23 and 15:10-14. What link does the Lord show between love and the commandments? In your own experience, how have you seen the inseparable link between love and the commandments? How are these linked with “remaining in the vine”?
themselves with the Father and the Son. The Father is the husbandman, Christ is the vine, and the Christian is the branch. The sap of God’s grace and love flows into the Christian as long as she or he is attached to the vine. “Abide in me, and I in you... He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit” (vss. 4, 5). When that abiding is continuous, the Christian receives a promise in addition to bearing fruit: “‘My [Christ’s] Father will love him [the Christian], and we will come to him and make our home with him’” (John 14:23, NIV). (Compare Rev. 21:3.)


Meanwhile, Jesus gives His disciples a rich legacy. This includes Christian imperatives that have impacted the course of human history and have assured victory in the great controversy. Some examples of that inheritance are: the new commandment of love (John 13:34); a home in heavenly mansions (John 14:2); Jesus as “the way, the truth, and the life” (vs. 6) so we can walk without stumbling, know without doubt, and live without fear; the ability to expect great things from God and to do great things for Him (vs. 12); the assurance of answered prayer (vss. 13, 14; 16:23, 24); the empowering of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 17); peace, love, and enduring joy (vs. 27; 15:9-11; 16:33); divine friendship (John 15:14); and victory over the world (John 16:33).


The Christian life is not without peril, but we are assured that Jesus has obtained victory (vs. 33) and that by abiding in Him, we can claim that victory to be our own. The “prince of this world” will come with his weapons (John 14:30), but he cannot really hurt Christ’s friends (John 15:14). Discipleship will call sin by its right name and command the evil one to flee.

Perils to faith also may come in the form of hatred and persecution (John 15:18-21; 16:1-4, 33). But Christian courage will turn hostility into an opportunity for partaking in Christ’s suffering (2 Tim. 1:8). “Of all the gifts that heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor.”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 478.


The most wonderful promise in the New Testament is that of the Holy Spirit. “‘I will not leave you comfortless,’” says the Savior (John 14:18). “‘I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth’” (vss. 16, 17, NIV).

The word counselor translates the Greek “paraclete,” which also can be rendered as “someone called to help, to plead,” such as an advocate in a court of law. In John 14–16, six passages speak of the Paraclete and identify His work as related to what Christ did.

There are eleven passages in the Gospel of John that refer either directly or indirectly to the nature and work of the Holy Spirit. Five of these passages are located in the narrative section of the first half of the book. These passages mention the Spirit only in passing. It is as though John were using these passages to plant seeds in the reader’s mind that would sprout only in the fertile soil of Jesus’ farewell speech (John 13–16).

What can we learn about the work of the Spirit from John 1:32, 33; 3:5-8; 4:23, 24; and 7:37-39?

Although the Spirit makes several appearances in the first half of this Gospel, there is little information about Him. The Spirit makes it possible for the Baptist to identify Jesus at the Jordan (John 1:32, 33). He is an essential part of human participation in the kingdom of God (John 3:5, 6). Although His work cannot be controlled by human beings, His effect on people can be seen (vs. 8). Worship is no longer tied down to specific locations or temples, nor is it limited to any particular people (John 4:23, 24). He is available in every place and to anyone of any background through the words of Jesus (John 6:63).

The exact nature of the Spirit’s work would become manifest only in the context of the Cross (John 7:39). So, John 7:37-39 is a transitional passage, preparing the reader for the clearer, more-detailed information about the Spirit’s work that comes in the farewell discourse of John 13–16. John 20:22 (“And . . . he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” [NIV]) shows that the promise of John 7:39 in fact began to be fulfilled right after Jesus’ “glorification” on the cross.

In John 14–16, the title given to the Spirit is a Greek noun that can be translated as “Comforter” or “Counselor.” The root meaning of paraclete is a person who is called alongside to help someone. So the word can be used in the legal sense of a defense attorney at a trial who appeals in behalf of another or as one who comes to comfort someone who is overwhelmed with grief at a time of loss. Both meanings fit well into the context of John 14–16.
**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Matthew 5:11, 12; John 14:7, 25-28; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Revelation 19:10

1. Many Christian groups and denominations today attribute a variety of spectacular activities to the Holy Spirit. According to the New Testament, however, what is the true mission of this entity?


3. Does the interdependent relationship among the Members of the Godhead parallel the relationship that should exist among members of the church? If so, how will such a relationship work on the church level?

4. Jesus implies that being hated and misunderstood is a likely result of following Him. What is the attitude we should take toward this, and why? Also, why might it be possible to see hatred and persecution where none exists?

5. Some believe that Jesus became the Holy Spirit after His death. This theory is called modalism. How can we prove by the Bible that modalism is not true?

6. In John 15:1-17, we find one of the Bible’s greatest metaphors. List and discuss ways in which Jesus is like a vine. Also, list and discuss ways in which our relationship with Christ is like the relationship of the branch to a vine.

7. What fruit do we bear when we remain connected to the True Vine? John 15:7, 11, 12; Galatians 5:22-24; 2 Peter 1:5-8. Discuss specific examples of how we see this fruit growing in the Christian community today. Which fruit might need a bit more cultivating?

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**Teachers Comments**

Counselor is given in order that Jesus may abide with us forever (vs. 16). As the Spirit of truth, the Paraclete dwells in us, empowering us to do God’s will (vs. 17). The second passage (vss. 25, 26) provides us the assurance that the Spirit will teach us all things, and will enable us to reflect on Jesus’ teachings. The third saying (John 15:26, 27) presents the Spirit of truth as the One who testifies to the
Read carefully John 14:15-21, focusing specifically on verses 15 and 21. What are they saying? How do they relate the Spirit to the commandments? Why would these two truths be so closely connected? What does one have to do with the other?

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit “‘another Counselor’” (John 14:16, NIV). This means the Holy Spirit is not the only Counselor (or Comforter); He is another Counselor. The original language emphasizes the similarity between Jesus and the Spirit. The Spirit is another Counselor just as Jesus is. Jesus is also the Counselor.

The disciples are feeling depressed. Jesus has said that He is going away, and they are distressed (John 13:33, 36; 14:2-5). So, Jesus assures them they will not be left as “orphans” (John 14:18, NIV). Through the Spirit, He will continue to be with them. The Spirit will do for them the same things Jesus did when He was physically on earth. The ultimate targets of this message, of course, are those who have come after, those who have come to believe through the words of the written Gospels, not through physical contact with Jesus or with anyone who knew Jesus in the flesh.

“Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally. Therefore it was for their interest that He should go to the Father, and send the Spirit to be His successor on earth. No one could then have any advantage because of his location or his personal contact with Christ. By the Spirit the Saviour would be accessible to all. In this sense He would be nearer to them than if He had not ascended on high.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 669.

Jesus also calls the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:17). The person and work of the Spirit are authentic and real; they can be trusted. The Spirit will not guide us contrary to the truth about Jesus nor about ourselves. Truth can be painful to hear but is necessary to spiritual growth. Only those who are committed to truth, as manifested in obedience to the truth they already know, will receive the Spirit (vss. 15, 16, 21). And how can we understand obedience apart from the commandments?

Look again at John 14:21. Jesus says that those who keep His commandments are those who love Him and that to these He will manifest Himself. How have you experienced this manifestation of Christ in your own life?
authenticity of the Person and mission of Christ. “Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world’s Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

John 16:5-15 also speaks of the Spirit’s function as convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, within the context of Christ’s revelation. Only the Holy Spirit can accomplish such a mission on a global scale. Hence, Jesus told the disciples, “‘It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you’” (John 16:7, 8).

John 14–16 presents a mosaic of redemptive mission, with the entire Godhead; one in thought, action, and purpose (vs. 13). Contradiction is absent in divine function. Hence, how careful we ought to be if someone speaks in the name of the Spirit contrary to what is in God’s Word.

**Witnessing**

Distance learning has become a prominent tool for continuing education. Many people throughout the world obtain degrees by using this tool. Such educational programs allow teachers and students to interact with each other through computers, television broadcasts, satellites, videos, telephones, and email. Thus, limited academic resources can reach larger numbers of students.

While on earth, Christ’s human nature limited His ability to reach people. Before returning to heaven, Jesus said to His disciples, “‘As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you’” (John 20:21). Then “he breathed on them” saying, “‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost’” (John 20:22). Just as He breathed physical life into Adam, the Lord gave spiritual life to His disciples. He gave them power to receive His Spirit, enabling them to reach more people than He could through His physical nature.

The Bible compares the Spirit of God to the wind. We cannot see the wind, but we can see its effects. The wind also can be felt all over the world. In Acts 2:3, the Holy Spirit is represented by tongues of fire. In the same way that fire spreads rapidly, the gospel spreads rapidly by word of mouth (tongues) and other means of communication. The Lord says to His disciples today, “‘As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you’” (John 20:21). We can open our hearts to receive the Holy Spirit, so that we, too, can have the power to win souls to Christ.

What task of the Spirit is recorded in John 15:26?

In what three areas does the Holy Spirit bring conviction? John 16:8-11. What two features of the Spirit’s work are highlighted in John 16:13? Also, how do the commandments, as seen in the text for yesterday, fit in here? How are they all related?

Jesus does not need the Holy Spirit to glorify Him in His person; the Father did that when He exalted Jesus to His right hand at the Ascension. The role of the Spirit is rather to exalt and glorify Jesus in the estimation of humanity here on earth. There are no revelations from the Spirit except those that exalt and glorify Jesus. As valuable as the work of the Spirit is, therefore, attention to the Spirit is not healthful if it directs our attention away from Jesus.

The Spirit is Christ’s Successor and Representative with the disciples and to the world. It is in this sense that the Holy Spirit can be said to “replace” Jesus. The Spirit extends the presence of Jesus to the new generation that never knew His physical touch. The instruction that Jesus no longer could give in the flesh, the Spirit would do everywhere in His behalf. The witness that He would no longer bear, the Spirit would bear in His behalf. Through the Spirit, Jesus would continue to be glorified.

On the other hand, as Jesus brought judgment and conviction to all who were exposed to His light, so the Holy Spirit has a ministry also to the world, to bring conviction of sin, the offer of righteousness, and a warning of judgment to come. The world rejected Jesus and still does so today. But in spite of the world’s continued rejection, the Spirit continues to convict, and people hear Jesus’ voice through the voice of the Spirit.

Above all else, therefore, it is through the Spirit that the presence of Jesus is made real in our lives, even though we cannot see Him or touch Him. Although others may not share our experience, the Spirit changes the lives of those who enter into relationship with Jesus and yield themselves to the guidance and comfort of the Holy Spirit.

If someone were to ask you how the Holy Spirit has touched your life, what would you answer? What does your answer say to you about the state of your walk with the Lord? What changes might you need to make?
Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** “The word that John uses of the work of the Spirit is the word elegchein, translated convince by the Revised Standard Version. The trouble is that no one word can translate it adequately. It is used for the cross-examination of a witness, or a man on trial, or an opponent in an argument. . . . It is, for instance, sometimes used by the Greeks for the action of conscience on a man’s mind and heart. Clearly such cross-examination can do two things—it can convict a man of the crime he has committed or the wrong that he has done; or it can convince a man of the weakness of his own case and the strength of the case which he has opposed.”—William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: John 2*, p. 192.

**Thought Questions:**

1. Part of the Holy Spirit’s job description is both to convict and convince. What does the Holy Spirit convict us of? What does He convince us of? How did the Holy Spirit replace the presence of Jesus in the lives of the disciples? Is it the same or is it different for us today? Explain.

2. Compare Judas and Peter. Both betrayed the Master. The difference in the betrayals lies in the deliberate nature by which one betrayal was committed. Compare and contrast the heart of Judas with that of Peter. How was the response of each man to the Holy Spirit connected to his feelings for Jesus?

**Application Questions:**

1. Spiritual awareness is not always a lightning bolt that strikes us full of comprehension and understanding; it is usually a progressive process. Complete understanding comes with time. In your spiritual life, what are the barriers to the progressive understanding that the Holy Spirit brings to you? What are the elements that aid this process?

2. Jesus’ analogy of the vine and the branches draws our attention to two types of branches—one that bears fruit and one that does not. Compare Peter and Judas to the vine and the branches. Next, compare the vine to the church. What types of pruning need to be done to preserve the life of the church? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in pruning?
Further Study: “As the works of God are studied, the Holy Spirit flashes conviction into the mind. It is not the conviction that logical reasoning produces; but unless the mind has become too dark to know God, the eye too dim to see Him, the ear too dull to hear His voice, a deeper meaning is grasped, and the sublime, spiritual truths of the written word are impressed on the heart.”—Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 24.

“It is one thing to assent in a general way to the agency of the Holy Spirit, and another thing to accept His work as a reprover calling to repentance. Many feel a sense of estrangement from God, a realization of their bondage to self and sin; they make efforts for reform; but they do not crucify self. They do not give themselves entirely into the hands of Christ, seeking for divine power to do His will. They are not willing to be molded after the divine similitude. In a general way they acknowledge their imperfections, but they do not give up their particular sins. With each wrong act the old selfish nature is gaining strength.”—Page 48.

Discussion Questions:

1. When Jesus said “‘I will do whatever you ask in my name’” (John 14:13, NIV), how do you think He defined “whatever”? How would you interpret John 15:7 in this regard?

2. What happens to Christians when they lose a major spiritual leader or mentor? What can one do to find new sources of spiritual strength? How much weight should we put upon anyone, no matter how much of a spiritual encouragement he or she has been?

Summary: In John 13 to 16 Jesus taught His disciples how to live without His physical presence, just as the second generation of Christians would have to live without the physical presence of the disciples. As followers of Jesus manifest their desire for the truth through prayerful obedience to Jesus’ commands, the Spirit of truth comes to them. That Spirit reminds us of Jesus’ words and teachings (John 14:26), guides us into all truth, tells us what we need to know about the future (John 16:13), and glorifies Jesus on this earth (vs. 15). But to those who have rejected or ignored Jesus’ commands, the Spirit brings conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment (vss. 8-11).
Jesus Lays Down His Life for His Friends

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: John 18:1–19:42.

Memory Text: “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13, NIV).

Key Thought: It is by contemplating the Cross of Jesus that we experience both His glory and our own value as human beings.

The Cross forever establishes the value of the human soul. Human beings have experimented with a variety of ways to establish a sense of worth and meaning in their lives. But, ultimately, there is only one place on earth where human value and meaning are forever established. And that place was on a hill called Calvary (Golgotha).

Here, in a way unseen or even unimagined (except within the Godhead), the worth of human beings before God was forever revealed to human beings, angels, and the onlooking universe. Here, more than anywhere else in the universe, the true nature and character of our Creator are revealed.

The story of Jesus’ crucifixion in the Gospel of John begins and ends in a garden (John 18:1, 19:41). The story itself falls into three parts. First, there is a section describing the betrayal, arrest, and indictment of Jesus (John 18:1-27). The central section of the story is concerned with the trial before Pilate (John 18:29 to 19:16). Finally, the Crucifixion itself and then burial of Jesus are described in John 19:16-42.

Let us take a look at the greatest event in all cosmic history.

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

Read John 18:1-11. What does John say that shows how Christ was fully in control of events that happened there? What does Jesus do to show that He allowed Himself to be taken prisoner?

In John 18:1-11, the main point seems to be that Jesus is in full control of the situation, in fulfillment of John 10:18: “‘No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord’” (NIV). Although about to be murdered, Jesus is not a victim; all this had to happen. See John 3:14. If Jesus had wanted to avoid arrest, He could have simply gone somewhere else other than the Garden where Judas would look for Him. He leads His disciples to the Garden, even though He knows what is coming. He does not wait for the mob to come to Him; He moves forward and addresses them, capable of intimidating them fully should that have served His purpose. His death is voluntary. They could not have arrested Him had He not allowed it.

How does Peter react to the situation? Why is that so typically a human reaction?

Under these circumstances, the reaction of Peter is almost comical. Although Jesus is fully in control of the situation, to Peter things look totally out of control. He whips out his sword and tries to protect Jesus, but Jesus tells him to put the sword away. Jesus must go to the cross, or God’s plan of salvation would fail. The very actions by which Peter sought to gain control of the situation only would have moved things truly out of control. In fact, Peter’s rash action in the Garden jeopardizes the validity of Jesus’ appeal to Pilate later in the chapter (John 18:36).

Jesus knew the future, knew what was going to happen before it did. He does today, as well. What kind of comfort does that give you, knowing that nothing that happens, even in your own life, takes God by surprise? At the same time, what kind of troubling questions does it raise?
Key Text: John 15:13

Teachers Aims:
1. To grasp the value of the human person to God, as exemplified by the sacrifice on the cross.
2. To understand that God is in control, even when the opposite seems the case.
3. To perceive God's ultimate purpose for humanity, as revealed in the Crucifixion.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Value of Life (Rom. 8:39).
   A. Human life finds its true value in relationship with God.
   B. God’s character is revealed in His regard for His creatures.
   C. God's will is found in the ultimate well-being of His creatures.

II. God in Control (John 16:28).
   A. The Crucifixion was not an unfortunate accident but rather Jesus’ purpose, without which the rest means nothing.
   B. Jesus was not only in control of His own fate but that of His followers.
   C. Human nature, as exemplified by Peter, finds it hard to recognize divine order working in chaos.

III. The Meaning of the Cross (Gal. 6:14).
   A. The Cross honors both the justice and the mercy of God.
   B. The Crucifixion exposes the falseness of Satan’s view of reality.
   C. The sacrifice of Jesus, who is God, testifies to the infinite value of each human person.

Summary: God values His creation more than we can imagine. He shows this not only by His choice to bring us into being but also by the sacrifice of His infinitely worthy Son, Jesus Christ.

Commentary.
To some, it is foolishness or scandal. To Nietzsche, a German philosopher, it is weakness at its worst. To the Christian, it is the “power of God” unto salvation (1 Cor. 1:18). The Cross is the great divider of history: between life and death, faith and unbelief, the god of self and the God of eternity.

At the foot of the Cross stood a divided humanity. Treachery, religious bigotry, and political opportunism had a field day. Struggling faith, search for meaning, and quiet acceptance of a great victory were slowly emerging. The Man on the cross revealed the “why” of the greatest event in divine-human history.
Before Annas and Pilate (John 18:12-40).

Only in the Gospel of John does more than one disciple follow Jesus into the high priest's courtyard (John 18:15, 16). Presumably, the girl at the door knew that John (the “other disciple”) was a disciple of Jesus but didn’t challenge him because he had privileged access.


Jesus is quite assertive in His encounter with Annas (John 18:20-23, NIV). He challenges both the secretiveness of His arrest (“I said nothing in secret”) and the legal procedures being followed (“Why question me?”). He even tosses in a dash of ironic humor (“If I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?”). In this instance Jesus does not follow an extreme interpretation of “turning the other cheek” (Matt. 5:39). He protests His opponent’s abuse of authority (John 18:23). There is sometimes a fine line between being humble and taking abuse.

After being taken to Caiaphas, Jesus is brought before Pilate, the central figure of this part of the narrative. At the time, Pilate was in a position of considerable political weakness. A series of blunders had repeatedly offended the Jews. He was unpopular, therefore, and his fitness to rule even had come under suspicion in Rome. One more major conflict with the religious leaders, and he probably would be out of office. This made him extremely vulnerable to blackmail.

In approaching Pilate, the priests first formulate their charge against Jesus in the political terms that a Roman governor could appreciate. Jesus must be executed, because His kingship is a threat to Caesar. But Jesus’ statement “My kingdom is not of this world” and the supporting evidence (vs. 36, NIV) make it clear to Pilate that Jesus’ claim to kingship is no political or military threat to Rome. He determines to free Jesus and at the same time provide the Jewish leaders a face-saving way out, offering to release Jesus on the basis of a traditional prisoner release rather than a judgment of innocence.

Read what Jesus says to Pilate in John 18:36. How do you understand what Jesus means when He says that His kingdom is not of this world? What implications do His words have for you, if you claim to be part of His kingdom? Write out your answer in a short paragraph. Be prepared, if willing, to share it with your Sabbath School class.
This week, we will consider the primary cast of the Calvary drama.

I. Around the Cross: Treachery in the Open.

Judas is an example of Satan taking over when one’s commitment to God is weak or rooted in self-centeredness. So, the serpent found Eve; Esau lost his birthright; Saul lost his moorings; and Ananias and Sapphira were killed by their own words. With Satan taking control of Judas (John 13:27), one of the most brilliant disciples became a child of darkness (vs. 30) and treachery.

Annas and Caiaphas were the religious leaders of the temple, guardians of the law and mediators between people and God. But they preferred position and power over justice and truth (John 11:48-51), and they sought a Messiah for their own convenience. To them, Jesus was a nuisance who needed to be put away. Treachery has no need for honesty.

Herod, a coward and a Roman stooge, sacrificed his soul at the altar of curiosity. Instead of seeking to know Jesus, he sought for signs, equating the Messiah with a magician. Such indifference to matters of spirit is treachery indeed.

Pilate had power but no conviction. Power without conviction to do what is right turns one into a coward. Hence, the governor of Jerusalem had Jesus scourged, passed the buck to Herod, found an innocent Man guilty, found a guilty man innocent, and finally washed his hands of the entire mess. But the washing of hands without cleansing the soul could not save the governor from treachery.

II. At the Cross: Faith, Search, and Acceptance.

Peter’s faith in Jesus was genuine but struggling. He accepted Jesus as the Son of God (Matt. 16:16, John 6:68) and pledged his life to defend Him (John 13:37). At Gethsemane, he even drew his sword to prove it (John 18:10). Self-confidence has its virtues, but it also has its limits when it comes to fulfilling God’s plan. God has His own way, and self must subordinate itself to that way. Courage is good, but it must not be allowed to misread one’s strength. Walking on rough seas, swearing that he is beyond the capacity to deny, or drawing a sword show that Peter had a long way to go to maturity. But the crowing of the rooster, the loving look of Jesus, and the remorse of His broken heart turned Peter into a man of faith.

John and Mary, the mother of Jesus, stood by the cross. Grief stricken, but not broken, Jesus paid them special attention. A new relationship, so typical of what the Cross is meant to establish, emerged. At the Cross, family and community take on new meaning.

Nicodemus and Joseph openly accepted the call of the Cross (John 19:38, 39). The amazing love Jesus exhibited brings closure.

Read John 19:1-16. What irony exists in the actions of the soldiers (vss. 2-4)?

Things get complicated for Pilate when the Jewish leaders reject his offer to release Jesus on terms favorable to them. They want Jesus dead at any cost. That means Pilate either must persuade them against their set opinion or release Jesus in the face of their wrath, which would cost him his job. Pilate was caught in a dilemma between justice and self-interest.

Pilate seeks, therefore, to engage his opponents’ sympathy by flogging Jesus and presenting Him before them. But they refuse to be moved. Sensing that Pilate’s self-interest has weakened him, the religious leaders start playing dirty; they argue that Jesus should die because He has broken their religious law. They know that Pilate cannot afford to be seen as acting against their religious interests.

Read verses 7 and 8. Why was Pilate made even “more afraid” (NIV)?

What does Pilate ask Jesus (vs. 9), and why would he ask Jesus such a question? What does that question reveal?

Pilate seems to realize at this point that indecision has been his weakness. He cannot save both himself and Jesus. He determines finally to save himself at Jesus’ expense. He will consent to the religious leaders’ request, but they will pay dearly for it. He condemns Jesus in exchange for a public confession of their obligation to serve Caesar: “We have no king but Caesar.”

Earlier Caiaphas had insisted that one Man had to be sacrificed so the nation might not be destroyed (John 11:48-52). Now Pilate is ready to sacrifice the nation in order to destroy one Man. The religious leaders reject Jesus’ kingship with such passion that they now rejoice in a king whom they always have hated. Pilate intends to hold them to that pledge in the future. They will have no more power over him. From this point on in the Gospel story, Pilate is unmovable. In one of the Gospel’s fascinating ironies, the death of Jesus makes Pilate strong!

Look at Pilate, doing what he knows is wrong, all for personal gain. What can we learn from his example in order to spare us from making a similar mistake when confronted with a similar dilemma, that of being pressured to compromise on a moral issue?
to the internal struggle of undeclared believers. Silence breaks forth into singing, and faith turns into discipleship.

III. At the Cross: The Great Why.
While treachery and faith, mockery and acceptance, observed the events of the Cross, the only Person who fully understood what was

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: Luke 24:46, 47; John 16:17; 18:17, 18, 36; Romans 5:8

1 How do you explain the contrast between Peter’s impulsiveness in John 18:10 and his willingness to deny Jesus later in John 18:17, 18? When, in our time, do we see people protecting God on the one hand yet denying Him on the other?

2 Even at this late date, Jesus’ disciples apparently had failed to grasp Jesus’ mission. This was something they shared with people such as Judas and the religious leaders. Were they also following Jesus for the wrong reasons? Why and how were they different? What lessons are in this for us?

3 John and the other Gospels repeatedly emphasize the way in which Jesus’ life and death follow Old Testament prophecy. But was it necessary that His sacrifice happen precisely that way? Can you imagine it being different if the human actors had made other or better choices? Explain your answers.

4 The events of John 18 and 19 take place in darkness. Consider the following people who took part in those events: Judas, Peter, the high priest, Pilate, the crowds. What do their actions show us about the dark nature of sin and motives? How are this nature and the motives manifested today?

5 Christ’s sacrifice was necessary to fulfill the law of God. Would God want to forgive humanity without a sacrifice? If so, is God bound by His own law? Why could He not change His law?

6 The Cross is both good and bad news to the human ego. On one hand, we are infinitely valuable to God. On the other, everyone else is just as valuable. The desire to distinguish oneself from the herd is a core motivation of many admirable human actions. What other sources of motivation exist? How valuable are they in the process of becoming a mature Christian?
Humiliation, Death, and Burial (John 19:16-42).

Crucifixion was used by the Romans to intimidate potential opponents. In order to breathe, victims had to push up with their feet to raise their bodies. Death came by suffocation when they were too weary to raise themselves anymore. Death was, therefore, slow and agonizing. Breaking the legs would hasten the process, when that was for the executioner’s convenience. An additional element of torture was shame and exposure, being hung naked in front of family and friends.

What significance is found in the words of the sign that Pilate had written and placed over the cross? John 19:19. Why do you think he had them placed there? Guilt? Arrogance? Fear? A mixture of all three?

In these verses we see a stronger, bolder version of Pilate, energized by the sacrifice of Jesus. The wording he chose for the inscription placed on the cross made the crucifixion of Jesus symbolic of Rome’s dominance over Palestine and its native religion. With the inscription he turned the Crucifixion into a blow against the prestige of the Jews and their religious leaders.

What major theme of this passage occurs four times? John 19:24, 28, 36, 37.

Although Pilate now feels in control of matters, there are repeated reminders in this part of the text that everything is happening according to the predictions placed in the Scriptures. God is in control, even when human beings feel they are. Jesus’ death is voluntary, purposeful, and according to the Scriptures.

In John 19:30, Jesus says, “‘It is finished.’” But what exactly was finished at the Cross? The particular emphasis in chapter 19 seems to be that the Cross is the fulfillment of the Bible prophecies pointing toward the Messiah. Prophecy was fulfilled down to the minutest detail of just what type of garment was divided, what type was wagered for (vss. 23, 24), and just how the body of Jesus was handled after His death (vss. 35-37). The Cross makes it clear that even when bad things happen in our lives things are not out of God’s control. Followers of Jesus do not need to live in fear of what they cannot control.

What did Christ finish, in your behalf, at the Cross? See also Mark 10:45, Heb. 9:26, 1 John 2:2.
happening was the One suspended between heaven and earth (18:37).

All through the Gospel, John portrays Jesus as being conscious of the fact that His death was part of God’s redemption plan. (For example, see John 1:29, 36; 2:4; 3:14, 15; 6:51-57; 7:6, 8, 8:20, 28; 10:11, 18; 12:27, 31-33; 13:1; 15:13; 17:1; 18:32.)

Thus, to the beloved apostle, the question, Why did Jesus die? had only one answer: He died for the sins of the world that whoever believes in Him shall have eternal life. And the cry “It is finished” (John 19:30) had only one meaning: The Son of God had accomplished the redemptive mission for which the Father had sent Him (4:34). Satan stood defeated. Victory over sin was assured.

The Cross is thus the center of the gospel message and the hope of the believer. “He who beholds the Saviour’s matchless love will be elevated in thought, purified in heart, transformed in character. He will go forth to be a light to the world, to reflect in some degree this mysterious love. The more we contemplate the cross of Christ, the more fully shall we adopt the language of the apostle when he said, ‘God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ’ [Gal. 6:14].”—Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers, p. 29.

Witnessing

The Lord confused the language of Babel when the people tried to build a tower to heaven. He stopped fiery flames from consuming His three faithful servants. He caused Peter to walk on water. He opened sightless eyes and quickened lifeless bodies. He who had the power to do all this, and more, could have saved Himself from the hands of those who came to crucify Him. But He freely gave His life for His friends. That is the only way they could have taken Him.

When Jesus knew His prosecutors were approaching, He went to them and asked, “‘Whom are you looking for?’” They replied, “‘Jesus of Nazareth.’” “‘I am He,’” He responded. At that moment they fell backward to the ground (John 18:4-6). “Jesus made this inquiry that they might witness His power and have evidence that He could deliver Himself from their hands if He would.”—Ellen G. White, The Story of Redemption, p. 211. However, even after this revelation, they did not understand that Christ had the power to free Himself but chose not to.

The world often determines what people are worth, based on their wealth or earthly possessions. But what is the real value of human life? Jesus paid the price of His own life for ours. In our witnessing, we can tell others how much the Lord values them. When they understand and accept the value He has placed on them, they will be more inclined to change their lifestyle and live for Him.
In Search of the Cross (John 12:20-32).

John offers additional interpretations of the Cross in other parts of the Gospel.

**How** does John turn the words of Caiaphas into a theology of the Cross? *John 11:49-52.*

What is so special about the Cross that Paul refused to glory in anything else (*Gal. 6:14*)? Through the words of Caiaphas, John expresses that in some sense the death of Jesus stands in place of every other human being.

According to Paul, at the Cross the wages of sin (*Rom. 6:23*) were placed upon Jesus as the Representative of the sinful human race. If the law of God could have been changed, humanity could have been saved without a cross; thus, in the truest, most dramatic sense, the Cross affirms the perpetuity of the law. The Cross condemned human sin in the person of Christ (*Rom. 8:3; 1 Pet. 2:24*); the resurrection of Christ paves the way for our resurrection at the end of the world (*1 Cor. 15:12-23*).

**How** does Jesus Himself express the significance of the Cross? *John 12:24, 31-33.*

Jesus expresses the “one in place of many” theme in terms of seeds. Then in verses 31-33 He shows that the Cross results in the condemnation of Satan and of sin in a mighty act of judgment. The Cross also becomes a wonderful magnet of attraction that draws “all men” (*vs. 32, NIV—in the original, the implication may include the entire universe*) to Jesus.

What is so attractive about the Cross? Above all else, the Cross affirms the incredible value of the human person. “One soul is of infinite value; Calvary speaks its worth.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers,* p. 184. God so loves every human being that Jesus would have died for even one (*John 3:16*).

As Creator of the entire universe, Jesus possesses in His Person infinite value. In dying for you and for me, Jesus testified to the infinite value He places on every one of us. And the value we have in the Cross is a value that does not change, no matter what we do or whom we become. If we should, in the end, choose to reject the Cross, our value in eternity will be measured by the pain of our absence that is felt in the heart of God.

**What should the Cross do to our pride, self-sufficiency, and arrogance—and why?**
Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: “Jesus did not only choose us for a series of tremendous privileges. He called us to be his partners. The slave could never be a partner. He was defined in Greek law as a living tool. His master never opened his mind to him; the slave simply had to do what he was told without reason and without explanation. But . . . Jesus has given us the honour of making us partners in his task. He has shared his mind with us, and opened his heart to us. The tremendous choice laid before us is that we can accept or refuse partnership with Christ in the work of leading the world to God.”—William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible: John 2, pp. 178, 179.

Thought Questions:
① Barclay continues the thought introduced in the “Icebreaker” by saying that Jesus has chosen us to be ambassadors and advertisements for Him. List some tangible ways that your class can do this for the One who laid His life down for each of us.

② Paul says that the closer he comes to God, the more sinful he sees himself. If this is the effect of the grace and glory of God, can we truly be friends with Him? Will not our awareness of our wretchedness cause us to feel unworthy of His friendship? Explain.

Application Questions:
① Jesus has invited us to be His friends. List the things that you do with your very best friend that make your friendship so closely knit. Then ask yourself if you have the kind of relationship with Christ that gives this intimacy with Him. What is the ammunition that Satan uses to make us lose confidence in our Friend? How can we guard ourselves from Satan’s insinuations?

② Had Peter, like the other disciples, fled when Jesus was arrested, he may not have been stuck in a situation where he felt he had no choice but to deny his Lord. Similarly, one day your love for Christ may lead you into the pit of faith testing. What can you do now to prepare yourself for that time? For this preparation, what role do you expect the church to play in your life? What role do you expect your family or your friends to play?
Further Study: Read *The Desire of Ages*, pages 758–764, where Ellen G. White offers a powerful theology of the Cross, without any direct reference to the Gospel of John, except for the words of 19:30, “‘It is finished.’” List the main themes of her presentation in that chapter. Then list the main ideas of John’s theology of the Cross as expressed in the lesson and in any other passages of the Gospel that may address the issue in some way (*such as John 2:1-11, 6:50-59, and 16:7-11*). Compare and contrast the respective emphases of Ellen White and John. In what ways does she deepen and broaden the concept of “One in place of many”?

“Without the cross, man could have no union with the Father. On it depends our every hope. From it shines the light of the Saviour’s love, and when at the foot of the cross the sinner looks up to the One who died to save him, he may rejoice with fullness of joy, for his sins are pardoned. Kneeling in faith at the cross, he has reached the highest place to which man can attain.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 209, 210.

“Paul saw that the character of Christ must be understood before men could love Him or view the cross with the eye of faith. Here must begin that study which shall be the science and the song of the redeemed through all eternity. In the light of the cross alone can the true value of the human soul be estimated.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 273.

Discussion Question: In the first Ellen White quote above, why does all our hope rest on the Cross? What happened there that gives us such hope?

Summary: The Cross is the place where human value and meaning are established. “Christ paid an infinite price for us, and according to the price paid He desires us to value ourselves.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 498.

When we gain a sense of our value in the Cross, we can begin to avoid the ups and downs that come when our self-worth is based on performance or on the fickle opinions of others. When we see ourselves in the light of the Cross, we develop the strength to overcome sin, the confidence to defeat Satan, and the joy that comes from knowing who we are. No wonder Paul said, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Gal. 6:14, NIV*).
SABBATH—MARCH 20

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S STUDY: John 20:1–21:25.

MEMORY VERSE: “But these [words] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ [Savior], the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his [Jesus’] name” (John 20:31, NIV).

IMPORTANT THOUGHT: Jesus’ resurrection gives us proof that Jesus’ claims are true. Jesus’ resurrection is also a living parable\(^2\) of God’s great power in our lives today.

THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION IS REAL. John 20 brings us to a very important point in the book of John. We sense that the story is finished with Jesus’ death on the cross (John 19:30).

But we also sense that the story is not finished. There would be no Christian church if Jesus had stayed in the tomb. His resurrection turns defeat into victory. His resurrection is a powerful act of God, equal to God’s acts of the Creation and the Exodus.\(^3\)

The New Testament tells us that eleven times Jesus appeared to His followers after His resurrection. Four of these times are in John 20 and 21. Three of these times are in John 20 (John 20:10-18; John 19–23; John 24–29). Perhaps the most important message here is one that we have seen all through the book of John: A true Christian experience comes not by seeing and touching but by believing Jesus’ words. It does not matter whether Jesus has spoken these words directly to us or if the disciples have written Jesus’ words for us to read.

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

\(^1\)resurrection—return to life.

\(^2\)living parable—a story of things that really happened. We use a living parable to teach a truth.

\(^3\)Exodus—the escape of the people of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 14:5-31).
The many people who saw Jesus’ resurrection help us to believe that the stories about His resurrection were not “invented” by the disciples to cover up a big lie. As long as these people lived, their stories could be compared and checked out (Luke 1:1-4).

But for the second generation of Christians the greatest proof of Jesus’ resurrection was the empty tomb. The empty tomb is a very important point of John’s book. Why else would the tomb have been empty if Jesus had not risen from the dead? Did Jesus’ enemies remove His body from the tomb? Did the disciples steal Jesus’ body to fool people into thinking He had risen? We will see in tomorrow’s lesson that Jesus’ body was not stolen by anyone. The best explanation for the empty tomb is that Jesus really was raised from the dead.

Read John 20:3-10. Focus on John 20:9. How could these disciples fail to understand that Jesus had been resurrected after He had told them He would be? Matthew 12:40; Matthew 27:63; Mark 9:30-32; Mark 10:32-34; John 2:19.

How did Mary Magdalene understand the empty tomb at first? How did she come to understand that Jesus was alive? John 20:10-16.

Mary was with Jesus in person. But Mary’s eyes were so blinded by tears that she had no idea Jesus was with her. Jesus being there as a person was of no use to Mary until she gave attention to His word. We too have that word, through the book of John.

Look at the first reaction of the people who found the empty tomb.

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4 compared—to have seen how things are the same.
5 second generation of Christians—Christians who were not living before Jesus was crucified.
Lesson 13

Jesus had taught these people everything. But they thought someone had taken away His body. With all the miracles they had seen Jesus do, their first reaction was to doubt Jesus’ words about His resurrection. How do we sometimes doubt Jesus’ words even though He blesses us so often?

**MONDAY—MARCH 22**

**IN THE UPPER ROOM**

(John 20:19-29).

How did the rest of the disciples come to know Jesus was raised from the dead? John 20:19, 20. How did Thomas learn about the Resurrection? John 20:24-29. What do their actions tell us about their faith? Did they really have “faith” before seeing Him? How much faith does it take to believe in what you see, hear, tell, and touch?

The first Christians were very slow to believe. They had the proof of the empty tomb and the witness of Mary, but they wanted to see Jesus for themselves before they could forget other reasons why the tomb could be empty. Only the beloved disciple (John) believed without seeing Jesus first (John 20:8). He showed the kind of faith the second generation of Christians would have to show. Believing without seeing is the kind of faith Jesus can bless.

What is Jesus saying in John 20:29? What do His words mean to us?

How did the tomb become empty? Certainly Jesus’ enemies had no reason for stealing His body. If they had stolen His body, why did they not show it to prove He had not risen?

It is clear that the disciples could not have stolen Jesus’ body. The dis-

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6upper room—the place where Jesus spent a quiet time with His disciples before He was crucified. After Jesus’ death, the disciples secretly met in the upper room.

7witness—what Mary saw and heard.
The disciples did not believe Jesus would let Himself die. Jesus had warned them often that He would die. If the disciples had stolen Jesus’ body, we cannot explain their later behavior. Who would want to suffer and die for Jesus later in their lives if He had not been raised from the tomb?

God and the Bible have given us reasonable and historical proof to help us believe in Jesus’ resurrection. If Jesus rose from the dead, then there is no other miracle He can fail to do. Anything we could possibly ask Jesus to do can be done if it is according to His will. Our own resurrection is also made sure by His resurrection. It is God’s power that raised Jesus from the dead. The same power can bring life and healing into even the most hopeless situations.

All of us have at some time experienced some struggle with faith. How can our faith be made stronger by focusing on the Cross and Jesus’ resurrection?

### TUESDAY—MARCH 23


What were some other things that happened to the disciples after Jesus’ resurrection? John 2:22; John 7:37-39; John 12:16.

Paul wrote, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection” (Philippians 3:10, NIV). Jesus’ resurrection was the most powerful event8 of all time. With all our knowledge of science, we still have no way of bringing people to life after they have died. Anyone who has the power to raise a dead person would have the power to do anything else we might need to have done.

The story about Jesus’ return to life is the cornerstone (basis) of Christian faith. The power of Jesus’ resurrection is the basis for the powerful acts of God in the lives of Christians (2 Corinthians 5:14-17). The power of Jesus’ resurrection is the basis for limitless power in the lives of Christians today. Why, then, do we not see these limitless powers in most churches? Why is it so hard to see the powerful hand of God in today’s world?

One of the important themes of the Old Testament is connected with remembering and forgetting. Every time the Israelites forgot the powerful things God had done for them, they lost the sense of His power. When they remembered what He had done for them in the past, the power of the original action came back to their lives. In fact, the important part of Old Testament spiritual life was remembering the powerful acts of God in their past history.

How does Deuteronomy 26:1-12 show the importance of remember-
Lesson 13

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 24

The Power of Jesus’ Resurrection

Lesson 13

ing how God has acted in the past?
Also read Psalm 66:1-6 and Psalm
78:1-55.

When the Israelites told of the
powerful acts of God in their past his-
tory, they experienced the power of
those acts once again in their lives
(2 Chronicles 20:1-30).

What was true in the Old Testa-
ment was also true in the New Testa-
ment. The greatest, most powerful
acts of God are the acts He did at the
Cross and the resurrection of Jesus.
There is power in remembering again
and again. That is why sharing our
faith is such an important part of the
Christian experience. If we do not talk
about God’s powerful acts again and
again, we will have no power. But
telling what God has done brings re-
newed faith and change for the bet-
ter. The power of Jesus’ resurrection
turns a person’s faith into a living and
powerful faith!

How has remembering God’s ac-
tions in your past helped to make
your faith stronger?

GONE FISHING (John 21:1-14).

the event in John 21:1-11 so right for
what Jesus would have the disciples
do after He is gone? Compare this

John 21 tells the story of how the
disciples met Jesus in Galilee after His
resurrection. Jesus helped the disciples
catch many fish (John 20:1-6). He fixed
breakfast for the disciples (John 20:7-
14). Then He had a serious conversa-
tion on the beach with Peter (John
20:15-23).

From the book of John, we get the
impression that Jesus appeared sev-
eral times to the disciples and other
people rather unexpectedly. Mary, the
ten disciples, Thomas, and these seven
disciples were all surprised by Jesus’
sudden appearances. The ministry
(work) of Jesus to His disciples was
really finished in the upper room (John
13–17). The Bible reports that Jesus
said very little to them after His resur-
rection. The purpose of His resurrection
was to teach them and us that His res-
urrection was real.

What had Jesus been doing on
the shore? John 21:9-13. What spiri-
tual meaning can you find in Jesus
inviting the disciples to eat with Him?

Breakfast that morning was rather
quiet. (Ellen G. White, The Desire of
The disciples did not seem to know what to do with Jesus since they had been with Him in the upper room. On that day, the disciples experienced the same uncertain (unsure) feelings and thoughts the second generation of Christians would experience when John died. The disciples were with Jesus in person. But His being there seemed to give them no faith. Only the coming of the Holy Spirit would give them solid faith.

Try to imagine that Jesus is with you and that His being with you gives you no faith. What would that tell you about the kind of faith you had? How can you keep from having that kind of faith?

THURSDAY—MARCH 25

GETTING PETER BACK ON THE RIGHT PATH (John 21:15-23).

Read the conversation between Jesus and Peter in John 21:15-17. Compare their conversation with what happened in Luke 22:55-62. What was Jesus doing with Peter?

John 21:15-17 describes a question-and-answer conversation that is repeated three times. Jesus' method might seem rude. But the result was to make Peter look deeply into himself, even if it cost him some pain. This conversation slowly removed Peter's faith in himself, until he was left with nothing. But Peter was certain of one thing: Jesus knew his heart and would be fair in His treatment of Peter.

There is something about pain, loss, poverty, and emotional suffering that helps people grow spiritually. Sometimes, as in Peter's case, Jesus Himself causes that pain. The same as a loving surgeon, Jesus hurts people so that He might help them heal. Jesus does not settle for quick and easy answers. He wants to get down to our true feelings and motives.¹⁰

Peter's experience shows that any relationship with Jesus will be an up-and-down experience. The four steps below will help you know that Jesus accepts you no matter what you have said, thought, or done.

1. **Know what kind of God you are dealing with.** God loves sinners! This does not mean that sin does not matter. But no matter what we have done in the past, we can start anew today. When you feel worst is when you have the greatest claim on God's mercy!¹¹

2. **Tell the truth about yourself.** Telling the truth about yourself is called confession. Confession means accepting who you are and being honest with God about who you are. Confession can be hard, because our natures rebel against confessing who we are. But if we believe that the Cross gives us self-worth, we will experience

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⁹motives—the reasons why we do things.
¹⁰mercy—kindness we do not deserve.
Lesson 13  

The Power of Jesus’ Resurrection

less suffering than if we were not to confess!

3. Ask for forgiveness. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify [cleanse] us from all unrighteousness [sins]” (1 John 1:9, NIV). God does not require a whole list of conditions before He is willing to forgive us. The conditions were already met in Jesus.

4. Plan to stop that sin forever. How can you do this when many sins seem tempting? List some of the results of continuing sin. Read the list to yourself every time you are tempted.

Think about these four steps. How well have you done with each step? What changes must you make in your own life to better do each step?

FRIDAY—MARCH 26

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Several times, Jesus had tried to open the future to His disciples. But they did not care to think about what He said. So His death had come to them as a surprise (shock). Later, as they reviewed the past and saw the result of their unbelief, they were filled with sorrow. When Jesus was crucified, they did not believe He would be resurrected. Jesus had announced plainly He was to be resurrected on the third day. But they were puzzled by what He meant. This lack of understanding left them very helpless when He died. They were very bitter and disappointed. Their faith did not go above the shadow Satan had thrown in their way. All seemed unclear and mysterious to them. If they had believed Jesus’ words, they would have avoided (escaped) much sorrow!”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 25, 26.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Are there times when it is good to show doubt as Thomas did? How do we know when it is the right time to doubt something?

2. How do we know when God is letting pain happen in our lives to teach us something? Or do we need to know? Is it not enough to just ask God, If the pain does not go away, could You let me learn from the pain?

3. If someone asked you to give proof of Jesus’ resurrection, what would you say?

SUMMARY: The power of Jesus’ resurrection makes us believe that the story of Jesus is true. It also makes us aware of sin and gives us the reason for a strong, living relationship with Jesus. There is nothing like the peace

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11conditions—what we must do for something to happen.
12apostles—leaders of the Christian church after Jesus’ return to heaven. Peter, James, and John were some of the apostles.
that comes from being totally faithful to His will. There is nothing like the joy that comes when your conscience\textsuperscript{13} is clean. Christianity has lasted 2,000 years. Why? Nothing can compare with the kind of life that comes when you have a strong living relationship with Jesus. It is not possible to become a Christian without experiencing a strong, living relationship with Jesus. He is the greatest and the best! Why accept less?

\textsuperscript{13}conscience—a knowledge or sense of right and wrong with an urge to do what is right.