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**Editorial Office**

12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904

**Principal Contributor**

Reinder Bruinsma

**Editor**

Clifford R. Goldstein

**Associate Editor**

Lyndelle Brower Chiomenti

**Publication Manager**

Soraya Homayouni Parish

**Editorial Assistant**

Larie S. Gray

**Pacific Press Coordinator**

Paul A. Hey

**Art Director and Illustrator**

Lars Justinen

**Concept Design**

Dever Design

**Key Text, Lesson Aim, and Outline:** Patience Barnes, freelance writer, Mount Pleasant, Pa., U.S.A.

**The Commentary:** Alan Hecht, library director, Rebok Memorial Library, General Conference, Silver Spring, Md., U.S.A., and Gary Krause, communication director for Global Mission, General Conference, Silver Spring, Md., U.S.A.

**The Inductive Bible-Study Method:** Alan Hecht, library director, Rebok Memorial Library, General Conference, Silver Spring, Md., U.S.A.

**The Focus-on-Witnessing Approach:** Tresa Beard, freelance writer, Beavercreek, Ohio, U.S.A.

**The Life Application Approach:** Faith Crumbly, editor, Sabbath School Leadership, Hagerstown, Md., U.S.A.

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

Life is lived in relationships. Some are deep-rooted, others superficial; some are of short duration, others last a lifetime. Some are purely functional, others intensely personal. We relate to all kinds of people: to a partner, to children, to relatives, to friends and neighbors but also to the service-station attendant, to the person with whom we share a shift at work, and to the police officer who stops us for speeding. And we relate to our pastor, to the superintendent of the school in which we have enrolled our children, to our employer, and, yes, to the tax collector.

All this is true for Christians, as well as for non-Christians. The difference between us and our non-Christian counterparts is not that we live in multiple relationships but that there is an important extra dimension to those relationships: our religion.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe in a set of doctrines. Some we share with other Christians; some are unique to us and help mark us as a special people with a unique message and mission. Doctrines are not optional, not if our faith is going to be more than a shallow feeling or a vague awareness of some greater power or transcendent force that somehow relates to us. Doctrines rendered into words—as best as can be expressed within the confines of human language—reveal how we understand the divine self-revelation of God. They help us achieve a clearer sense of who and what God (as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is and what He has done, is doing, and will ultimately do for us as individuals and as a race. We need doctrines to grasp what the implications of our belief in God and His plan of salvation are for our perspective on life and for our daily conduct.

But Christianity—and most definitely Adventist Christianity—is more than a catalog of doctrinal statements. The Christian God is not a distant, impersonal deity who does not get involved in the daily grind of this world and of our existence. Instead, He is a personal God of love who has encountered us in Jesus Christ, in the most personal way possible.

God is a covenant God, One who goes out of His way to establish a close relationship, One who is Love Personified, and One who seeks for a reaction to that love—a response of worship, obedience, and love. Once we have established a relationship with God (or,
more correctly, once we have allowed God to establish a relationship with us), this affects every other relationship we may have.

Once we have gained a glimpse of who and what God is, once we have accepted the Lord Jesus as our Savior and have welcomed the Spirit as our Guide on our pilgrimage through life, we are able to look at the world from a new perspective. No longer is it of prime importance whether or not the people with whom we associate are of the same nationality or ethnicity or of the same political persuasion as we are. The first question we will ask about the people with whom we come in contact is whether they already share with us the knowledge of the good news!

Religion is not work based—in other words, our standing with God does not depend on our achievements. We live by faith through grace. Yet, a religion that does not permeate our daily lives is a dead and meaningless exercise (James 2:17). If our relationship with God does not impact our relationships with fellow humans, we have every reason to wonder whether this bond with God is a reality.

This quarter we will study numerous passages of Scripture with the intention of increasing our awareness of the ways by which our faith impacts our relationship to others—to those who are close to us and those who are afar. We will discuss how we can strengthen those relationships, even restore them if they have somehow broken down. We will discover that, indeed, there is more religion in relationships than many may suspect.

This quarter’s Adult Bible Study Guide was written by Reinder Bruinsma, a native Dutchman and longtime church worker (including six years, from 1995-2001, as executive secretary of the Trans-European Division). He is also the author of 15 books in both English and Dutch. In 2001, he returned to his native Netherlands, where he serves as the president of the Netherlands Union. His pastoral concern about practical Christianity, about how we treat others, comes through in every lesson this quarter.

A religion that does not permeate daily life is dead and meaningless.
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.*
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Exod. 20:2-17, Isa. 1:10-17, 1 Corinthians 13.

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

In today’s world, many people are utterly lonely; they live without meaningful relationships, without a sense of being needed or loved, without a sense of true belonging. Some are married, even have children; yet, in their deepest self, they feel alone. Others appear to have an intense social life but would, nonetheless, in a moment of honest self-assessment, admit to desperate loneliness. Many who share their apartment block with dozens of others and mingle every day with thousands in the metro or the commuter train are incapable of reaching out to those around them.

And, yet, amid all this loneliness is the biblical ideal, which is that we live in community with others—with family, friends, colleagues, authorities, fellow church members, et cetera. The question is, How does God want us to do it?

This week we begin our look at the answers.

The Week at a Glance: What does the Creation account teach us about community? What principles should guide our interaction with others? What does the Bible teach us about love? What did Jesus mean when He talked about us hating our parents? What role does the Cross play in our relationship with others?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 3.
“‘It Is Not Good for the Man to Be Alone’”  

(Gen. 2:18, NIV).

The first two chapters of the book of Genesis give us a glimpse of what happened when God created our world. Though much about Creation remains a mystery, all the essential elements we need in order to build a Christian worldview are, nevertheless, revealed there, including the truth that God created humans to be social beings, destined to live in a community.

How does the Creation account emphasize that full human life is experienced in relating to other human beings?  

*Gen. 1:28; 2:18-25; 4:1, 2.*

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It clearly was part of God’s original purpose that human beings would exist in relationship with others. The idea of family—of a partnership between a man and a woman and of a bond between parents and children—was part of the original fabric of Creation. Belonging together in a marriage relationship, and as family, is not one option among many but reflects the original and unchanging design for human happiness. This is not to say a single person cannot live a happy and fulfilling life, but it underlines that, from a biblical perspective, the family is the fundamental building block of a healthy society.

“A family is not a spill-over from our romantic passions, nor a product of society’s requirements that parents provide their offspring with bed and board, nor a little circle of people deriving emotional support from living together. . . . Family is rooted in the Creator’s design for the ongoing nurture of children who bring faith and moral value into the next generation. To undermine, neglect, or replace it is to wreck the core community that makes all other community possible.”—Lewis B. Smedes, *Mere Morality: What God Expects From Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983), p. 81.

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One of the most famous lines in all English literature reads, “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.” The point being that we are all involved with one another, to one degree or another. What does this tell us about how careful we need to be regarding the influence we exert? Make no mistake about it: We all exert an influence on others, either for good or for bad.
Key Text: 1 Corinthians 13.

Teachers Aims:
1. To understand that God created human beings to live in harmony with one another.
2. To show that, without God, successful, happy relationships are impossible.

Lesson Outline:

I. Relationships and Religion.
   A. A Christian’s faith includes a relationship to God and to others.
   B. Living in a world of diversity requires Christians to cultivate sensitivity and skills in relating to others.

II. Building Relationships.
   A. Successful relationships are no accident but are the outgrowth of prayerful, committed effort.
   B. The biblical ideal of harmonious relationships develops from a deep, selfless, loving interest in others.
   C. We must love as Christ loved: selflessly.

III. Agape Love.
   A. God’s love for us is agape love.
   B. Jesus gives us this agape love for others.

IV. Who or What Is Your Priority?
   A. Personal interests must be secondary to loyalty to Christ and devotion to His service.
   B. Putting Jesus first in our lives assures the right relationship with others.

Summary: “Righteousness has its root in Godliness. No man can steadily maintain before his fellow men a pure, forceful life unless his life is hid with Christ in God. The greater the activity among men, the closer must be the communion of the heart with heaven.”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 136.

COMMENTARY

I. Unity in the Community.
   In many ways the Western world worships individualism. We talk about personal freedoms, individual rights, a person’s right to choose. And a lone hero taking on the system—whether it’s a faceless corporation, a corrupt law firm, or even a government bureaucracy—is the stuff of movies and popular novels.
   Of course, it’s also a biblical theme. Think of young David up against Goliath and the Philistines. Or Samson standing alone
Religion Has Social Dimensions (Exod. 20:2-17, Matt. 7:12).

However much our faith rests upon our relationship to God, it cannot be separated from our relationship to others. We live in this world with other people, and our religion very clearly dictates how we are to relate to these other people.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we tend to divide the Ten Commandments into two parts, the first four dealing with our relationship to God, the last six with our relationship to others. Read the first four commandments again (Exod. 20:2-11). How does our obedience, or disobedience, to even these specific commandments impact others?

At times, Christians have so emphasized the social aspects of their religion that they have reduced the gospel of Christ to a horizontal “social gospel,” which leaves little or no place for the vertical aspect of religion: the relationship between us and our heavenly Father through our Lord Jesus Christ. When that happens, our religion has ceased to be Christian. But, at the same time, our faith in God must impact also our relationships with other human beings; otherwise, our religion, likewise, cannot be characterized as truly Christian.

Look up the following texts. What do they tell us about the social aspects of our faith?

Lev. 19:18

Isa. 1:10-17

Hos. 6:6

Matt. 7:12

James 1:27

Summarize in a paragraph the essence of what those texts above are saying; then ask yourself, How well am I doing in that area? What changes might you need to make in order to live out the social dimensions of our faith better?
against the same enemy. (We can also see it in church history with people such as Martin Luther, an individual monk who stood up against the medieval church and set off the Protestant Reformation.)

However, the more dominant biblical theme is that of community—working together, promoting harmony, functioning as a united group. There’s little room for going it alone within the Christian family—unless it’s standing up against wrong. We work together as a family of believers. The apostle Paul likens the church to a body in which each part depends on the other, and all work together for the common good. In fact, he says that when one part of the body suffers, then all suffer (1 Cor. 12:26).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has considered unity so important that in the past few years it has identified and adopted it as one of the church’s three key strategic values (along with growth and quality of life). With more than 13 million baptized members, living in the vast majority of the countries of the world, speaking hundreds of languages and coming from vastly different cultural backgrounds, how do we remain a unified church? It’s certainly not something we can achieve in our own power.

“This unity is not essentially made possible by consensus statements, by agreed formulas, or by policies,” writes Jan Paulsen, General Conference president. “They may all express this unity and serve to keep it functioning, but the unity of the family of God is primarily a product of the creative presence of the Holy Spirit.” —Let Your Life So Shine (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 2003), p. 25.

But we must play our part. Paulsen says that unity is not something that cares for itself, and he quotes the apostle Paul: “ ‘Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit’ ” (Eph. 4:3, NIV). “We owe it to Christ,” Paulsen adds, “whose idea it was that has brought us to where we are today, to be very deliberate and careful in holding the family together.” —Let Your Life So Shine, p. 16.

II. Community Is Good for Us.

Over many decades psychologists and sociologists have studied the themes of loneliness and community. Thousands of books and articles have examined these issues from hundreds of different angles. The bottom line is that science supports the biblical idea that human beings were designed for community and provides evidence that loneliness can hurt us psychologically and even physically. Here are just a couple of studies worth discussing:

1. Researchers at Carnegie Mellon University studied the impact of the Internet on 169 people. They found that using the Internet resulted in less communication with family and friends and was associated with more depression and loneliness.—Monitor on Psychology, vol. 31, no. 4 (April 2000).
Building Relationships Takes Effort  
(Matt. 5:9).

Faith in God and reliance on His grace presuppose a commitment to focus on Him and His will for our lives; they demand an intentional turning away from what is evil and negative. They also demand a determination to bring our lives into harmony with God’s will for us. Likewise, harmonious relationships do not happen by accident. We must be intentional about building relationships. As sinners living on a planet filled with other sinners, we are naturally prone toward selfishness, greed, and jealousy, attributes that, if left unchecked, would destroy any fruitful, loving relationships we would seek to have.

**How do harmonious relationships come about?** 1 Pet. 3:11. **What are we supposed to pursue actively?** Rom. 12:18.

The peace we are to pursue in our interaction with others is not a mere absence of strife or disagreement. The biblical ideal of peace is rooted in the Hebrew concept of *shalom*, which stretches far beyond mere tolerance and includes a deep interest in others, expressed in support and affirmation for those around us. Again, we must remember that these things don’t come naturally to us; what comes natural is greed, envy, and the desire for self-supremacy. No wonder we need the Lord working in our lives.

**What basic rule should govern our relationship with others?** 1 Cor. 10:24. **What is that text saying to us? Why is it so opposite of what we, in our essential nature, are?**

To look after others purely for their own good, with no selfish motives, is to reveal Christ, whose love for suffering humanity was premised on nothing selfish. He loved for love’s sake. No selfish motive led Him to do good. On the contrary, Jesus did good, because He loved others and wanted the best for them. What a model, what an ideal for us to seek to follow!

Contemplate the different ways Jesus revealed unselfish love toward others in contrast to how you relate to others. End your contemplation at the Cross, where Christ died to save those who have fallen so short of His example.
2. Dr. James J. Lynch, director of the Life Care Health Center in Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A., says that in the past three decades there has been an explosion of research into the physical effects of loneliness. He says that this “growth in knowledge” has led him to “one inescapable conclusion: Dialogue is the elixir of life and chronic loneliness its lethal poison.” —A Cry Unheard: New Insights into the Medical Consequences of Loneliness (Baltimore, Md.: Bancroft Press, 2000), p. 1.

Of course, the Bible said as much several thousand years ago. At the beginning of time, God said, “ ‘It is not good for the man to be

Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** Matthew 5:40; 25:40; John 3:35; Romans 7:5, 6; Hebrews 13:5, 6; Revelation 20:13.

1. In the midst of all the busy social life that is available to most people today, many are still lonely. List and discuss reasons why a person might be lonely. How might we as Christians be able to address these reasons?

2. God created the human race to exist in relationships. How does even nature exist in relationship to its various parts? What does all this tell us about God and the way in which He exists?

3. It is common for individuals to believe that they are responsible only for themselves and that they are not accountable for their influence on others. In what ways is this true or false? Why can there not be such a thing as a victimless crime?

4. Discuss the following questions. Does doing good works for other human beings fulfill our duty to God? (After all, God sacrificed Himself for the good of humanity, and we are supposed to follow His example, right?) Or is our duty to God separate and distinct from our duty to our fellow humans?

5. If left to ourselves, we can destroy all of our positive relationships and nurture countless destructive ones. How can we fight the natural tendencies that lead us astray? How much of the work is ours, and how much of the work is God’s?

6. It is natural for the unsanctified person to be self-seeking and to think that being so is just plain common sense. From a Christian viewpoint, discuss whether it is ever acceptable to seek our own interests and whether or not Christ means for us to be doormats.
The Basis: Agape Love (1 Cor. 13:1-13).

The New Testament uses several distinct words that all can be translated “love.” One refers in particular to love for friends, while another is mainly used in the context of sexual love. There is nothing inferior about these kinds of love. They are meant to be a vital and enriching part of human life in their proper time and place. But there is one specific term—*agape*—which refers to the kind of love that God has for us. And this is the love we also must cultivate in our lives as the foundation of all our dealings with others, a disinterested love that puts the good of others before ourselves, the kind of love revealed perfectly in the life of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, the word for “love” all the way through comes from *agape*. Read the chapter over as many times as you can and then write out what you believe the Lord is telling you with these words.

From what Paul writes here, what is he saying love is? How does it differ from much of the world’s concept of love?

Look at some of the attributes of love as expressed in 1 Corinthians 13. Which ones might you find the most difficult to reveal in your own life? Perhaps you tend toward impatience, toward pride, or toward evil surmising—or even all these things. How can you be changed? Look up John 15:5. What is Jesus saying here that offers us the hope that we, too, can reflect *agape* love in our own lives?
The Savior’s final commission for His disciples was to go “and teach all nations” (Matt. 28:19). In essence, He was telling them to be witnesses to all people. If you continue in His Word, then you also are His disciple (John 8:31), and this commission then is for you too.

The Creation story teaches us that God intends for us to be social beings. He expects us to interact with others. Witnessing calls for interaction and communication. Communication is the sending and receiving of messages between two or more individuals. And the message in witnessing is that God loves us and wants to save us.

Because Christ is our example, we show others the way to salvation by loving them. Healing, helping, feeding, teaching, comforting, clothing, visiting, and showing kindness in simple ways are all manifestations of God’s love.

So, whom do we love? To whom do we witness? Love your neighbor (Gal. 5:14). And who is our neighbor? Luke 10:25-37 teaches us that our neighbor is anyone in need. It could be the man or woman who lives next door, the cashier at the check-out counter, or maybe the person driving the car that cut in front of you to steal the parking space for which you were waiting. Each day we cannot help but meet many of our neighbors, because we are a neighbor to whomever we meet. We are neighbors to one another. God wants us to love one another. He wants us to witness to one another. What does the parable of the good Samaritan teach us about how to witness?
God Always Comes First *(Luke 14:26).*

Living as a Christian is a matter of getting our priorities right. A life in which we and our own interests come first is not a Christian life but a pagan existence. We will need to remember this constantly during the coming weeks as we study various interhuman relationships.

**In what provocative way did Christ emphasize the need to prioritize our relationships?** *Matt. 10:37, Luke 14:26.* What do you believe that Jesus was telling us with these words?

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What does it mean that we are to *hate* our loved ones for the sake of Christ? “Scripture usage makes it clear that this is not ‘hate’in the usual sense of the word. In the Bible, ‘to hate,’ often should be understood simply as a typical Oriental hyperbole meaning ‘to love less’ *(see Deut. 21:15-17).* . . . Whoever has personal interests that take precedence over loyalty to Christ and devotion to His service will find it impossible to meet the requirements Christ makes of him. At all times and under all circumstances the call of the kingdom must take precedence.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary,* vol. 5, pp. 811, 812.

In one sense, there seems to be almost a contradiction here: In a study on how we should relate to others, we bring in Jesus’ statements that, on the surface, seem to downplay interpersonal relationships. Yet, that’s only on the surface. The point is that in order for us truly to have the kind of relationship with others the Lord wants for us, we need to keep Him first and foremost in our lives. Only from our relationship with Him can we then act toward others as He would have us do. Because of what Jesus has done for us at the Cross—by reestablishing the bond between heaven and earth—can we have a relationship with Him.

A young woman, severely damaged by an abusive father, has found it all but impossible to develop long-lasting and meaningful relationships with anyone now. Why must she go to the Cross to begin the healing process? What would tell her she would find healing there?
Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Myrmecology, the study of ants, teaches us their value as positive work examples (Prov. 6:6). Alone, even a large ant can be snatched up for food by a swarm of smaller ants. Ant teams fight in order to monopolize a food source. Some ants will move away if defeated. This behavior suggests that they prefer to keep their nests apart in order to live peacefully.

What could these bits of myrmecology add to a discussion on community within families, neighborhoods, and churches? What does Romans 12 add to your position?

Thought Question:
A church worker, who travels through hills and mountains, marvels at the people who live in the houses randomly dotting the landscape amid the trees, mountain peaks, and deep valleys. She notes that even though the people who live in these houses are miles from their neighbors, they maintain a strong sense of community through their churches, social clubs, and family interactions. Generally, they have more frequent and more intimate interactions than do people who live in thickly populated areas, huge apartment complexes, and sprawling housing developments. Are the people living in isolated areas naturally more loving and friendly, or could their geographic isolation have led them to value social interactions more highly? What are the signs that people have taken community for granted? What reminds you to value community with family? With neighbors? With God?

Application Questions:
1. How does this lesson broaden your understanding of Psalm 122:1?

2. How does being glad in the house of the Lord transcend the pews, flooring, lighting, music, proper temperature, appropriate attire, etc.?

3. Are we to be “glad” despite of or because of the types of people in our worship community, including the stuffy ones, the loose and lax ones, and the difficult members and guests? What is the formula for being truly glad in the church community?
**Further Study:** Read from Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, pp. 29–41.

“It is only by an unselfish interest in those in need of help that we can give a practical demonstration of the truths of the gospel. ‘If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.’ ‘And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.’”—*Welfare Ministry*, p. 32.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. In today’s world ethnic diversity often appears to be a source of hatred and conflict or seems to lead to an unhealthy kind of nationalism and sense of superiority. Has ethnic bias ever influenced your thinking in a negative way? How can ethnic identity be a positive force, both in society and in the church? Or is it always negative?

2. As much as time allows, read through the Gospels and see how much emphasis Jesus placed on how we should relate to others. What do the Gospels tell us about how important this topic is for those who claim to be His followers?

3. Read Ephesians 2:11-18. How do these verses help us better understand the closeness we can now have with the Lord, a closeness that will impact how we relate to others?

**Summary:** Religion has social dimensions. It is important to recognize that people have been created for community and are destined to live in relationships with others. We must remember that serving God has both vertical and horizontal aspects. We do well to reflect regularly on whether we allow God to have priority in our life and whether all our interactions with others fit into the larger framework of our relationship with Him.
**LESSON 2**  *July 3-9*

“*Honor Your Father and Your Mother*”

**SABBATH AFTERNOON**


**Memory Text:** “Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:2, 3).

As Seventh-day Adventists, we point to the seventh-day Sabbath as one of our core beliefs. And rightly so. It is part of the Ten Commandments, which encapsulate the basic principles for humanity. But to “‘honor your father and your mother’” (Exod. 20:12, NIV) is also one of the foundational principles for a healthy society. It is interesting to note that these two principles—keeping the Sabbath and honoring our parents—are singled out and mentioned together: “‘‘Each of you must respect his mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths’’” (Lev. 19:3, NIV).

This week we’ll take a look at just this specific concept, of how children, or even how adults, should relate not only to their parents but to those who are older, in general. Because, in almost all cases, no matter who we are or how old we are, we come in contact with those who are even older.

**The Week at a Glance:** What does the Bible say about how we should relate to older people? How do we honor our parents? Can obedience to our parents ever interfere with our obligations to God? What kind of examples does the Bible leave regarding parent-and-child relationships?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 10.*

17
Respect for “Gray Hair” (1 Pet. 5:5).

Over the past few decades, in a large part of the world, a youth culture has developed, teaching that the secret of successful living is to remain young and beautiful. Detection of a first wrinkle can cause a minor, or even not so minor, trauma for someone who embraces the ideals of the youth culture. But this youth culture goes far beyond the way we look. Children and young people have become important markets for manufacturers of clothing and sport shoes and for all kinds of gadgets. They are specifically targeted by the entertainment industry, as well as by fast-food chains. Parents are made to feel guilty if their offspring cannot get the latest fads or follow the latest fashions.

Just as worrisome, if not more so, is a parallel trend: In many modern homes in many parts of the world, the younger members of the family tend to set the domestic agenda and to determine the value system by which the home operates.

What basic rule does the apostle Peter refer to as a guiding principle in any relationship between older and younger persons? 1 Pet. 5:5. How was this same principle regarding the relationship between young and old already embedded in the Mosaic law? Lev. 19:32. How do we apply this principle in our dealings with older people?

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Showing respect, and being submissive, does not mean accepting everything without comment or complaint; nor must we obey everything anyone older than we are tells us to do. These principles need to be understood in the larger context of all God’s commandments.

At the same time, however, this principle does underline the basic concept that age and experience count and that respect is due those who are older than we are, whatever our age. Indeed, we can honor and respect those who are older than we are, even if we don’t necessarily agree with what they say or believe.

On a purely practical level, why does it make good sense to honor and respect our elders? What justification, outside the Bible imperatives, do we have for such an attitude?
**Key Text:** *Ephesians 6:2, 3.*

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To show that honoring your father and your mother is a principle that extends beyond your parents to other people.
2. To understand that society generally follows in the footsteps of the family.
3. To explore the parent-child relationship.

**Lesson Outline:**

**I. Respect for “Gray Hair.”**
   A. Children and youth are targets of the manufacturers of clothing, shoes, and food.
   B. Children are setting the value systems for some homes.
   C. Respect for those older and more experienced is a principle that needs to be rightly understood.

**II. Honor and Obedience.**
   A. Our obligation to our parents never ceases.
   B. Children honor their parents by showing them love, care, and respect.
   C. Godly obedience in the parent-child relationship is what Heaven has always intended.

**III. Parents and Children.**
   A. Sadly, not all family relationships are healthy: Abuse and violence exist.
   B. The Bible gives many examples of parent-child relationships for our study.
   C. Despite cultural differences, biblical principles remain the same.

**Summary:** “Believing parents, you have a responsible work before you to guide the footsteps of your children, even in their religious experience. When they truly love God, they will bless and reverence you for the care which you have manifested for them, and for your faithfulness in restraining their desires and subduing their wills.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 533.

**COMMENTARY**

**I. Worthy of Kabad.**

“Honour thy father and thy mother” *(Exod. 20:12, KJV)* is one of the best known commandments (possibly because many parents have found it a timely text to quote to their children). The word *honor* in this verse derives from the Hebrew *kabad*—which literally means to “give weight” to something or someone. In some parts of the world people jokingly refer to important people as “heavies,” and that’s not too far from the truth of this text. To give
Honoring Our Parents *(Exod. 20:12).*

How we relate to our parents is clearly an important issue. One of the Ten Commandments specifically addresses the parent-and-child relationship.

**Read** *Exodus 20:12.* How does this principle inform us about our relationship to our parents? For instance,

1. What does honoring mean?

2. Is honoring the same as being obedient? If not, how do these two concepts differ?

3. Is it possible to honor parents whose lifestyles we disapprove of? Can children honor parents even if the parents are abusive?

“Our obligation to our parents never ceases. Our love for them, and theirs for us, is not measured by years or distance, and our responsibility can never be set aside.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 360.

**Read** *Proverbs 19:26.* What further light does this text shed on how we should relate to our parents? Does it mean children have a duty to support their parents materially?

In many societies, aging parents have to rely on the material support of their children. Often elderly parents live in the home of one of their adult children and form part of their *extended* family. In other countries, this is no longer the case. One pays taxes and contributes to social-security systems and expects to be cared for by society when one no longer has regular income from work or can no longer live independently. But, whatever the social system under which we live, children must continue to care for their parents; if not in material ways, certainly in immaterial ways. Few things are more abhorrent than the neglect of aging parents by children too busy to spend time with them.

**Why do you think the Lord placed this commandment in the law? What does this commandment tell us about the importance of caring for those (not only of family) who need help?**
weight to people means you don’t treat them lightly—you consider them as an authority, worthy of respect.

In the Bible, true kabad is directed only to people and things of importance. For example, God is worthy of kabad (Ps. 22:23), the Sabbath is worthy of kabad (Isa. 58:13), and parents are worthy of kabad.

In Daniel 11, the prophet predicts that a certain king would “exalt himself” and “magnify himself” and “speak marvellous things against the God of gods” (vs. 36, KJV). This king would also “honour [kabad] the God of forces” and will kabad “a god whom his fathers knew not” with “gold, and silver, and with precious stones, and pleasant things” (vs. 38, KJV).

Offering expensive things to false gods is a misdirected kabad, but true kabad to parents is shown the same way—by giving our best, not just through financial support but also by showing kindness and love.

Quoting from Isaiah 29:13, Jesus says, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth [kabad] me with their lips; but their heart is far from me” (Matt. 15:8, KJV). God asks us to give far more than just lip-service kabad to our heavenly Parent and our earthly parents. He asks us to give kabad from our hearts.

In the Bible kabad is not just some sort of intellectual theory. It’s not about just having warm feelings toward God or our parents. It’s a practical concept, which is shown in concrete actions. In the Old Testament, kabad to God was shown through sacrifices (Isa. 43:23), by keeping the Sabbath (Isa. 58:13), by paying tithes and offerings (Prov. 3:9), and by having mercy on the poor (Prov. 14:31).

Similarly, kabad for parents has tangible applications. In Calvin’s Catechism, for example, three specific behaviors are mentioned. The master asks, “What meaning do you give to the word honour?” The scholar answers: “That children be, with modesty and humility, respectful and obedient to parents, serving them reverentially, helping them in necessity, and exerting their labour for them. For in these three branches is included the honour which is due to parents.”—Catechism of the Church of Geneva (www.ccel.org), cited 1 July 2003.

An intriguing concept also contained in the Old Testament is that God Himself promises to honor us if we honor Him. Isaiah quotes God as saying “them that honour me I will honour” (Isa. 2:30) and the psalmist says, “He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him” (Ps. 91:15).

II. Honor Our Parents If . . .

Are any conditions imposed on honoring our parents? Are there any circumstances under which we shouldn’t honor them? Among

Many people have a problem with authority. They want either too much or too little. Authoritarian people are a problem to themselves and to others, ruining relationships as they bully their way through life. Those who do not want to exert any authority and/or do not accept any authority are, likewise, a source of trouble. This is true in general but in particular in the parent-child relationship. Parental love does not exclude the concept of discipline and obedience, and the love of children to their parents finds concrete expression in accepting parental authority.

What aspect of the relationship between generations is singled out in Paul’s list of last-day conditions? 2 Tim. 3:2.

Paul’s catalogue of elements of godlessness that will be rampant in “the last days” is frightening. It is significant that he mentions disobedience to parents as one of the terrible conditions of the time of the end. This reveals a general moral breakdown that reaches into the inner sanctum of the family, as well. And if the family is falling apart, there’s little hope for society as a whole.

How does the Bible stress the importance of the acceptance of parental authority? Eph. 6:1, Col. 3:20.

The obedience the Bible demands is not blind obedience, and respect for parental wishes cannot simply be enforced but must, to a significant degree, be earned. Parents may make demands, but these must be reasonable, consistent, and always with the best interest of the child and, most important, not contrary to other biblical principles.

Do children ever reach an age when their parents may no longer expect respect, if not necessarily obedience, from them? If so, when? When the children leave the home? Or when they become legal adults? Can we show our parents respect and honor while not obeying them? If so, how?
Christians there has been division on this question. Early church father Jerome wrote, “‘Honour thy father,’ the commandment says, but only if he does not separate you from your true Father. Recognize the tie of blood but only so long as your parent recognizes his Creator.”—Letter LIV to Furia, author’s emphasis (www.newadvent.org), cited 30 June 2003.

Inductive Bible Study


1. While the Bible and most traditional societies teach respect to elderly people, modern societies emphasize youth. What motivates this emphasis? How can we reject this trend while still respecting the rights and needs of the young?

2. Many societal ills are traced to dysfunctional family relationships, particularly those arising from poor child discipline. Why is discipline so difficult, and why does there seem to be a lack of effective discipline? How does a parent’s example play a role in dysfunctional families? God is our heavenly Parent. What examples of discipline did Jesus give us, and how can we incorporate them into our families?

3. We often hear that the family is the basis of a healthy society. Why is this true? How do today’s families differ from the families we read about in the Bible? Are today’s family relationships worse because of these differences? How are today’s families similar to the families in the Bible? What can we learn about today’s families based on these similarities?

4. Popular culture in some lands portrays parents and other older people as weak and foolish. How can we prevent our own relationships from being warped by such false messages?

5. It is certain that our family relationships will fall short of the ideal. How can our mistakes in this area be corrected or atoned for? How much must come from our effort, and how much can we leave to God?

6. How can elderly people who have been Christians for most of their lives be of service to the church in general and to youth in particular? Arrange for such a person to share with your class why he or she has remained true to God.
Parents and Children: Part 1

The Bible is, in many ways, a family history. All through its pages, we are shown the lives of families, often revealed in the context of parent-and-children relationships. Some of these relationships are quite healthy; others aren’t. Yet, all are placed in the Bible for reasons, because all can teach us something. The culture back then was radically different from our culture today, but basic principles remain.

Look up the following texts. What can we learn from them about how we should or should not relate to our parents?

Gen. 22:1-14

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Genesis 27

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Lev. 20:9

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Deut. 21:18-21

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2 Sam. 15:1-12

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Matt. 8:21, 22

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Luke 2:41-52

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John 19:26, 27

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When babies are born, they are completely dependent on their parents to meet their life-sustaining needs. Newborns left to themselves would die within days or hours after birth. Infants are not yet fully aware of themselves. In fact, their first glimpse of their Creator is the face of their parents. The Lord tells us to honor our fathers and mothers. They are the individuals God has chosen to teach us about Him. However, because parents are not perfect, they falter in their instruction. Many adult children blame the mistakes their parents made in raising them for the way their lives are now. It is true that some mistakes made by parents in raising their children have life-long consequences. Still, the Bible commands us to honor our parents.

We can be witnesses even to our parents. Parents, whether old or young, also need forgiveness and need salvation. A loving, respectful attitude toward a parent who has done wrong may be all that is needed to change that parent’s heart. However, honoring our parents is not just for their benefit. It is for our own benefit, as well. Psalm 50:23 tells us that “whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God” (NKJV). When we show respect to our parents in the way we treat them, speak to them, and in our attitude toward them, we are conducting ourselves in a way that is pleasing to God and in a way that follows the path of salvation.
Parents and Children: Part 2

Yesterday’s study provided us with some powerful and dramatic examples of parent-and-children relationships, particularly in the context of how children should relate to their parents. The hard question is, How do we apply those examples to us, today, such as those in Deuteronomy, where rebellious children who don’t obey their parents should be taken out and stoned? Or what do we do with the Abraham and Isaac story (obeying and honoring your parents is one thing, but this . . .)?

Again, keeping in mind the time and culture in which these incidents occurred, what universal principles can you draw from these stories that help us understand how we are to relate to our parents while, at the same time, keeping our first loyalty to the Lord?

It is clear from some of these accounts that there can be a conflict between obeying parents and obeying the Lord. Read Genesis 27:8 for one example. Or look at the situation in Matthew 8:21: What could be more basic and honorable than burying one’s own father?

Read Ephesians 6:1. What does this say that helps us better understand our obligations to our parents in light of our walk with the Lord?

Notice in Ephesians 6:1 that Paul not only tells children to obey their parents “in the Lord” but gives the reason why they should: “for this is right.” And why is it right? The next verses give the reason: Because it is a commandment of God.

A young woman had grown up in a home of abusive, drug-addicted, even violent parents whose shameful treatment of her as a child left the woman an emotional cripple. Eventually, she became a follower of Jesus. How is she supposed to honor her father and mother?

The Talmud, the collection of ancient Rabbinic writings, says, “though every man must fear—i.e., reverence and obey his parents—his duty to God overrides his duty to them. The verse [Leviticus 19:3] is, therefore, rendered thus: *Ye shall fear every man his mother and his father; nevertheless* (should they order you to desecrate the Sabbath), *ye shall keep my Sabbaths, because I am the Lord your God.*”—“Baba Mezi’a” in *The Babylonian Talmud Seder Nezikin* (London: The Soncino Press, 1935), vol. 1, pp. 198, 199.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** In a Chicago suburb, at least fifty people drove past an elderly pedestrian who had just suffered a heart attack. A young couple, however, turned their car around to help. The woman, who administered CPR, without the benefit of a breathing shield, explained her actions: “Although he was not of my culture, he was my neighbor in that we both live in this area. I had never seen him before, but we’re both Americans. I’ve been acutely aware of that tie since 9/11. And if one of my parents is ever in that man’s place, I hope that age and culture won’t matter either—that someone will help.” She explained that her insurance would not pay for the tests she had to take because she had not used a breathing shield.

Does honor have nonmonetary costs?

**Thought Questions:**

1 What is so great about humility? Apply Ephesians 5:1, 2 to this discussion.

2 Is dishonoring parents the same as stealing from them or murdering them? Apply James 2:10 to this question.

What does honor look and sound like in the relationship of a goal-oriented parent and an “easy-going” child? Apply James 1:19.

**Application Question:**

A young Christian mother expressed her desire to administer justice to the ten-year-old bully who had bloodied her five-year-old son’s lips and loosened his front teeth. Through swollen lips, her son lisped, “We should pray for her, Mommy.” Was the little boy, who voiced a course of action in direct opposition to his mother’s action, dishonoring her? Why, or why not?
Further Study: “Isaac believed in God. He had been taught implicit obedience to his father, and he loved and reverenced the God of his father. He could have resisted his father if he had chosen to do so. But after affectionately embracing his father, he submitted to be bound and laid upon the wood.”—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 82.

“Said one of her mother, ‘I always hated my mother, and my mother hated me.’ These words stand registered in the books of heaven to be opened and revealed in the day of judgment when everyone shall be rewarded according to his works.

“If children think that they were treated with severity in their childhood, will it help them to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, will it make them reflect His image, to cherish a spirit of retaliation and revenge against their parents, especially when they are old and feeble? Will not the very helplessness of the parents plead for the children’s love? Will not the necessities of the aged father and mother call forth the noble feelings of the heart, and through the grace of Christ, shall not the parents be treated with kind attention and respect by their offspring? Oh, let not the heart be made as adamant as steel against father and mother!”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 362.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read again Exodus 20:12. What qualifications, or exceptions, if any, does it place on the commandment to honor our mother and father?

2. What do you think it means to honor your parents “in the Lord”? How does that help us better understand what is said in Exodus 20:12?

Summary: In today’s society, the rights of children are very much emphasized. And rightly so. But we should not lose sight of the fact that older people are also important and that they have the right to be respected by the youth. The commandment to “honor” our parents applies to the young and to the not so young. Our parents deserve our support and respect and, above all, our love. Families cannot function adequately if there is no respect for authority.
Parenthood—Joys and Responsibilities

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Ps. 127:3; Prov. 13:24; 23:13, 14; 29:15; Eph. 6:4; Phil. 4:9.

Memory Text: “[Sons and daughters] are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from Him” (Psalm 127:3, NIV).

Is it more difficult to be a parent today than it was a few decades ago? Or are people today simply more conscious of the demands of parenthood than they were in the past? Has it become more difficult to find the time to be a good parent? Is it becoming more and more difficult to lead children in the right direction, in this age of television and Internet, than it was when life was less hectic, when we were not bombarded with fast-paced commercials and sentimental soaps?

Also, however ideal the biblical notion of a two-parent family (mother and father) is, the world is not an ideal place; many other types of families exist. But whatever the type, the Bible offers us inspired principles on how to be the best parents possible.

This week we will look at some of the key factors in responsible Christian parenting. The Scriptures convey a clear message: To be a parent is not only meant to be a great joy and honor but also an enormous responsibility.

The Week at a Glance: What is expected of a good parent? What does the Bible say about discipline? Who ultimately is responsible for the spiritual decision children make when they get older? How important is our example to our children?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 17.
Fruit of the Womb (Ps. 127:3).

The attitude of most people toward starting a family has changed drastically. In the past, people were usually expected to have children fairly soon after marriage. In many cultures, having a child before nine months of married life raises eyebrows or worse. On the other hand, not having children in the first few years after getting married would be a reason for wonder or pity.

Attitudes today have greatly changed. The question for us, as a people who seek to follow the Lord, is What should our attitudes about children be?

Read the following texts. What point do they seem to be making about who does and does not have children? Gen. 29:31; 30:2, 22; 1 Sam. 1:5, 6, 19, 20; 2:21; Luke 1:7, 13-25.

These texts show that God worked miracles in order for these women to conceive. Yet, we must not assume that every barren woman is barren because God has closed her womb. Although there is no question that, when all is said and done, God is the Giver of life, we need to be careful not to jump to conclusions regarding fertility problems. Sin has brought physical damage to all of us, in one form or another. In the end, whatever our situation, we need to trust in the Lord. Those who do have children, however, must realize what an awesome responsibility they have been given.

What does the psalmist have to say on this topic? Ps. 127:3.

In ancient biblical times, as in some cultures today, not being able to have children was often the cause of great shame. Having a son to ensure the family would not die out was of particular value, and having many sons would usually bring enormous prestige. Against this background, the statement of the psalmist that children are “a heritage” or even “a reward” from the Lord becomes extra meaningful. But, in a more general way, the text emphasizes a truth many modern people are inclined to forget: God is the Giver of children. Even today, in an age of sexual enlightenment and fertility treatments, children are a divine inheritance!

In what ways is having children parallel to the act of Creation as depicted in Genesis 1:26,27? What should these parallels tell parents about their responsibilities toward their children?
Key Text: Psalm 127:3.

Teachers Aims:
1. To show that God intends for parents to model Jesus before their children.
2. To understand the role that discipline occupies in training a child.
3. To understand that each child personally must decide to accept Jesus.

Lesson Outline:
I. Parenting.
   A. In ancient cultures (as well as in modern times) children were considered to be a heritage from the Lord.
   B. Christian parenting is more than providing the basic necessities of food, clothing, and shelter.
   C. The duty of children is to honor and obey their parents.
   D. The responsibility of parents is to love and discipline their children without provoking them to anger.

II. Discipline and Decisions.
   A. Discipline is described as training and punishment.
   B. Corporal punishment should, if possible, be the last resort.
   C. Children, like adults, must make their own decision to follow the Lord.

III. What You Do Speaks Louder Than What You Say.
   A. Your family knows you best.
   B. Walk sincerely and humbly before your family and before God.

Summary: “Everything leaves its impress upon the youthful mind. . . . Children must see in the lives of their parents that consistency which is in accordance with their faith. By leading a consistent life and exercising self-control, parents may mold the characters of their children.”—Ellen G. White, The Adventist Home, p. 322.

COMMENTARY

I. The Tragedy of Eli.
   Eli the priest is a tragic figure. Despite his devotion to God, Eli had failings that proved terribly costly. We first see him watching Hannah praying earnestly in the tabernacle. He misjudges her manner of prayer and falsely accuses her of being drunk (see 1 Sam. 1:12-16).

   Ironically, it may have been Eli’s experiences with his own sons that led him to think he was witnessing the symptoms of drunkenness. Although Eli may have meant well, it was a brutal accusation against a pious woman who, unable to have a child, was going through an emotionally painful time.
What Is Expected of a Good Parent? *(Deut. 4:9; 6:6, 7; Eph. 6:4).*

No one ever said that raising children was easy; and all of us know that babies do not come into the world with instruction manuals. Paul reminded Timothy of the duty we have to *provide* for our relatives, and that, of course, applies, when we are married, first of all to our partners and, when we have children, also to our offspring *(1 Tim. 5:8)*. We are supposed to know what is good for them and to provide them with these good things *(Matt. 7:11)*. But there is more to Christian parenting than giving children food, clothing, and shelter.

**What** is to be a key element in the upbringing of children? *(Deut. 4:9; 6:6, 7; Ps. 78:5-8; Prov. 22:6).*

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**Read** Ephesians 6:1-4. What is this telling parents about how they should relate to their children?

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Ephesians 6:1-4 looks at the parent-and-child relationship from two perspectives: that of the parent, as well as that of the child. The child has the duty to obey and honor the parent, but the parent cannot treat a child in any manner he or she wants to. Parents must be careful not to discourage their children by continuous criticism and rebuke or by the wrong kind of discipline. Order is essential, but unnecessary regulations and endless petty rules may do more harm than good and may well “embitter” children *(Col. 3:21, NIV).*

“The parent-child relationship is not one-sided. It is a feature of Paul’s treatment of these domestic categories that the stronger have obligations to the weaker. The gospel introduced a fresh element into parental responsibility by insisting that the feelings of the child must be taken into consideration. In a society where the father’s authority . . . was absolute, this represented a revolutionary concept.”—*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1978), vol. 11, p. 81.

**What do you think it means to refrain from provoking your children to wrath? If you are a parent, ask yourself how well or how poorly you have been following Paul’s words.**
While Hannah was pleading daily with God for a son, Eli was burdened down with the bad behavior of his own sons. Eli’s sons were “wicked” (1 Sam. 2:12), “had no regard for the Lord” (vs. 12, NIV), and their sin “was very great in the Lord’s sight” (vs. 17, NIV). They were greedy and arrogant in the tabernacle and treated all Israel the same way (see vs. 14).

The Bible shows that the relationship between Eli and his sons was complex. On the one hand, the Bible allows for the fact that he was “very old” and that his sons wouldn’t listen to his rebuke (1 Sam. 2:22-25). On the other hand, God accuses him of indulging his sons—“Why do you honor your sons more than me?” (vs. 29)—and failing to restrain them (1 Sam. 3:13).

The SDA Bible Commentary also notes that Eli showed favoritism to his sons at a time when nepotism—showing favoritism to family by giving them jobs—“had taken a firm hold on Israel” and “the specter of unemployment faced the Levites scattered in every tribe.”—Volume 2, p. 455.

The Bible makes the story of Eli and his sons even more tragic by telling it side by side with the story of Samuel and his parents. God approves of Samuel (1 Sam. 2:21), and he continues to grow in divine and human approval (vs. 26). His godly parents are rewarded with more children. Walter Brueggemann says that in 1 Samuel, “The term ‘great’ (gdl) is the same term used for Samuel. . . . Both Samuel and the sons of Eli are ‘great.’ Samuel is ‘great’ as a mature man of God, Eli’s sons are ‘great’ in sin.”—First and Second Samuel, Interpretation (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1990), p. 23.

Eli was a flawed man but not wicked. No doubt he spent many troubled hours in prayer on behalf of his children. His indulgence of his children, though, is a caution to all parents. We need to pray for wisdom to balance love and concern with the “nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4, KJV).

II. The Reward of Children.

On Friday evenings, observant Jews light candles to welcome the Sabbath. The Sabbath light flooding their homes symbolizes the light that God brings into their lives through the Sabbath. Usually they light two candles. Each represents one of the two Sabbath commands—“Remember” (Exod. 20:8) and “Observe” (Deut. 5:12, NIV).

Within this tradition has arisen another. Many Jewish families also light an extra candle for each child that has blessed their home. Children are considered a reward from God (Ps. 127:3) and, like the light from the candles, their presence fills the home with joy.

Jesus loves children and rebuked the disciples when they tried to keep mothers and their children away from Him (Matt. 19:14). He even said that we need to become like little children if we want to enter the kingdom of God (Matt. 18:3).

“Discipline” can be understood in several ways. Not only is discipline described as training expected to produce a specific character-istic or pattern of behavior, especially training that produces moral or mental improvement, but also as punishment intended to correct or train. This is surprisingly close to how the Bible describes discipline.

The writer of the proverb has a lot to say about the necessity of timely discipline. In 19:18 he puts it in these strong words: “Discipline your son in his early years while there is hope. If you don’t you will ruin his life” (TLB).

**Does physical punishment have a role in disciplining a child?** Prov. 13:24; 23:13, 14; 29:15.

Many countries have introduced legislation that forbids any corporal punishment in schools. In some countries the law also forbids, or severely restricts, physical punishment of children by their parents. With this in mind, what can we say from a Christian perspective?

First of all, we must not forget that discipline varies from culture to culture, and what is considered appropriate in one culture might not be in another.

Second, we must realize that corporal punishment can easily become a way of releasing the frustration and pent-up anger of the parent or educator rather than a carefully thought-through response to the objectionable attitude or action of a child.

And third, if corporal punishment ever has a place, it must be the exception rather than the rule.

“Whipping may be necessary when other resorts fail, yet [the parents] should not use the rod if it is possible to avoid doing so... Many times you will find that if you will reason with them kindly, they will not need to be whipped. And such method of dealing will lead them to have confidence in you.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 250.

**How is the way in which God disciplines us as His sons and daughters a model for the disciplining of children by their earthly parents?** Heb. 12:6-11. **What principles can we learn about disciplining our children from these verses?** If you are a parent, ask yourself, Has my corporal punishment been out of anger or out of the principle depicted in Hebrews?
Some of the strongest words Jesus ever uttered were against people who hurt children: “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:6, KJV). When we see children mistreated and discarded, it’s easy to understand His words. Children should be raised in God’s love, in Sabbath candle hope.

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Deuteronomy 6:6, 7; Psalm 127:3-5; Proverbs 13:24; Proverbs 23:22-25; Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:21.

1. For most of history, marriage and sex were valued because they were necessary to replenish the human race. The Bible often reflects these attitudes. How have our attitudes changed? Discuss if these changes are justified. Are they antibiblical? How does the story of Adam’s and Eve’s creation inform our understanding of these issues?

2. Many modern couples enter into parenthood with the belief that their lifestyle will continue much as before. What about modern society contributes to this attitude? What attitude should Christian couples take toward the belief that parenting is merely a sideline?

3. The Bible discusses the need for discipline of children a number of times. What type of discipline would we regard as biblical? Discuss whether we should literally administer biblical examples of discipline or if we should look to these examples for principles to guide us in modern forms of discipline. What principles of discipline can we glean from the Bible?

4. Corporal punishment is a controversial topic. Many Christians cite the Bible in defense of it. Discuss if the Bible does support such punishment. If so, how might it give us guidance in its application?

5. Unfortunately, Christianity is not passed on genetically. Yet, it is perhaps the most important thing a parent can give a child. How can the choices of parents influence their children’s attitudes toward spiritual matters? How can parents be sure their examples are positive? Discuss whether or not parents always are responsible for their children’s spiritual path.

6. How is it possible for individual members of the church family to influence the children in the church?
Young People Must Decide for Themselves

Christian parents are challenged to do everything they can to urge their children to stay close to the “faith of their fathers” and to the church. But who, in the end, are responsible for the choices children make as they get older? Prov. 1:8-15.

The disciples believed religion was something for adults, but Christ wanted the children also to come to Him (Matt. 19:13-15). He took time for them, to talk to them, and to bless them. Christian parents and other adult church members must be intentional in bringing children to Christ and must take away any barriers they can possibly dispose of.

Of course, eventually each person, young or old, must make his or her own decision whether or not to become a follower of the Lord. No undue pressure should ever be applied. Children should not sign up for baptism simply because their parents are eager they do so. But this does not mean children should not be tactfully urged to make a choice. As parents, we should try in our God-given power to make the path as easy as possible for our children to accept the Lord.

Read Matthew 19:16-23. What does it teach about free will regarding salvation? Why must all parents always keep this principle in mind? At the same time, because our children do have free will, what does this tell us about how careful and tactful and loving we must be with our children as we seek to guide them in the right direction?

We can tell our children about Jesus. We can read daily from a good children’s Bible. We can teach them how to pray. We can take them each week to the children’s Sabbath School. We can make sure we have videos in our home that are worth watching, and we can help our youngsters, as they are developing into teenagers, to make deliberate choices about the music to which they listen, the books they read, and the films they watch. We can sacrifice financially by providing Adventist education. But one of the most important aspects of Christian parenting is never to cease praying for our children. Countless are the stories of how God has answered the prayers of parents who talked to the Lord about their children. This is an aspect of parental care that never comes to an end.
The Bible consistently repeats the importance of sharing God's ways with children. “Teach them to your children” (Deut. 11:19, NIV) and “Impress them on your children” (Deut. 6:7, NIV), said Moses. The Midrash, a collection of Jewish commentaries, says children should be taught God's teachings as soon as they start to speak. Not doing this is like burying the child. See Arthur Hetzberg, ed., Judaism: The Key Spiritual Writings of the Jewish Tradition, p. 140.

One of the key ways of teaching children is through the Sabbath. “Sabbath worship is still the chief bond which unites Jews into a religious brotherhood. Neglect of such worship injures the spiritual life of both the individual and the community.”—J. H. Hertz, foreword to The Babylonian Talmud Seder Mo’ed, Shabbath (London: The Soncino Press, 1935), vol. 1, pp. xiii, xiv.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church supports schools and youth programs to help us teach our children about God and faith. These are wonderful but can’t substitute for the home, which Ellen White

Witnessing

Have you ever heard anyone say, “Ah! The joys of being a parent!”? Parents can either utter these words happily at the vision of themselves playing with their children in a park, or they can utter them ruefully at the thought of having to take a cranky child to the grocery store with them.

The joys of being a parent are nevertheless full of responsibilities. Feeding and clothing children can cost a small fortune, and educating them an even greater one. Although food, clothes, and education are truly important, what is the most important responsibility of being a parent?

God meant for children to learn about Him through their parents. How truly awesome, then, is the responsibility of teaching a child about the Creator and Savior! Children, therefore, should be the very first people parents witness to. When we think of witnessing, we usually think about sharing what we believe with other adults. Yet, it is so crucial to share what we believe with our children from the moment they are born.

While sharing our faith with adults, we sometimes run into discrepancies over specific theological points. Our children, however, hang on every word. They long for us to spend time with them, to teach them. When we embrace the idea of witnessing to our children as one of the responsibilities of parenthood, we will then experience the true joys of parenthood. We can even witness to our children while happily playing with them in a park or dealing with them in the candy aisle of the grocery store.

What will a child learn about God from you today?
Being a Role Model *(Phil. 4:9, 2 Tim. 1:5).*

**Read** Philippians 4:9. What is Paul saying there? What principle do we see in that text that can be very crucial for parents to be aware of as they seek to guide their children on the right spiritual path?

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It is easy for people, at least in public, to appear as fine Christians. You can fool some of the people, most of the time. However, the people you can’t fool, at least for very long, are those in your own family, particularly your children as they grow older. They will see things about you no one else outside your family will see. How important, then, that no matter what we profess, our lives not be lived in contradiction to our profession. This doesn’t mean we are perfect; it means only that our children see the sincerity and reality of our Christian walk, which includes our own repentance, our own humility, our own willingness to apologize to them, even when we make mistakes. How we live impacts our children so much more than what we say or profess to believe.

**What** role models did Timothy have in his youth, and how did these help him to shape his life? *2 Tim. 1:5.* What message is here for us as parents, as well?

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In his book *Passing on the Torch,* Adventist sociologist Roger L. Dudley makes the following observation: “I like to think of value transmission as a huge smörgåsbord where all the tempting dishes of competing values are displayed. Here the youth will eventually get to choose the items that are most appealing to them. And which will they choose? Those that are the most colorful and attractive, most delectable, most tasty! It is not our responsibility to force our values upon our young people. It is our responsibility to model our values so attractively that these young people cannot help seeing that they are vastly superior to the competition, and will freely choose them.”—(Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1986), p. 117.

Of all the things we can do for our children, why is loving them, unconditionally, the way Christ loves us, the most important?
refers to as the child’s “first school.” She writes: “In His wisdom the Lord has decreed that the family shall be the greatest of all educational agencies. It is in the home that the education of the child is to begin.”—The Adventist Home, p. 182.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Joseph Joubert wrote, “Common sense suits itself to the ways of the world. Wisdom tries to conform to the ways of heaven.”—Penelope J. Stokes, Simple Words of Wisdom (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1998), p. 56. How can the wisdom of Matthew 18:3 support Christians in both the joys and sorrows of parenthood: “Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (NIV)? For example, what positive traits of children can benefit the parents of terrible twos and adolescents?

Thought Question:
Are rewards the result of laziness? Who wants cheap rewards? For example, do Olympic athletes train to win the bronze or the gold? With these questions in mind, what are the possible consequences of parenthood suggested by the psalmist who says that children are a “reward” (Ps.127:3)? How can an athlete’s mindset and skills benefit parents?

Application Questions:
1 A science experiment can illustrate how parents can discipline their children without provoking them. Two balloons are held over lighted matches. The air-filled balloon breaks. The water-filled balloon does not. Why? The rubber of the air-filled balloon becomes so hot that the rubber becomes too weak to resist the pressure of the air inside it. However, the water inside the other balloon absorbs the heat from the flame, enabling that balloon to retain the strength of its elasticity. What is the “water” that parents can use to absorb the pressure of the heat that they apply in their discipline? What is the “air” that causes the composition of the rubber to break down?

2 What other elements support the elasticity in parent-child relationships, especially when discipline is administered? Prov. 10:12, 13; Eccles. 7:12; 1 Cor. 8:1; and 1 Pet. 4:8.

“Parents may do everything in their power to give their children every privilege and instruction, in order that they may give their hearts to God; yet the children may refuse to walk in the light and, by their evil course, cast unfavorable reflections upon their parents who love them, and whose hearts yearn after their salvation.”—*Child Guidance*, p. 173.

“Children imitate their parents; hence great care should be taken to give them correct models. Parents who are kind and polite at home, while at the same time they are firm and decided, will see the same traits manifested in their children. If they are upright, honest, and honorable, their children will be quite likely to resemble them in these particulars. If they reverence and worship God, their children, trained in the same way, will not forget to serve Him also.”—Page 215.

Discussion Questions:

1. Numerous times in the Bible, the Lord is called our Father, and we are called His children. What do those images teach us about how we, as parents (either as mother or father) should relate to our children? How does our heavenly Father relate to us? What can we learn from how He deals with us regarding how we should deal with our children?

2. What should a parent do who realizes he or she has been a very poor role model for his or her child? The child is now 18. He or she no longer goes to church and follows a lifestyle that conflicts in many ways with Seventh-day Adventist standards. How can the harm be undone?

Summary: As modern people, we are aware of the biological aspects of conception and childbirth. However, that does not take away from the fact that every child is a gift from God. Receiving children brings joy but also a heavy responsibility. Parenting has to do with teaching and with the transmission of values. Discipline, administered in love, will ever be an important aspect of parenting. But, most significant of all is that parents and other adults involved in the rearing of children live by the faith they profess and make sure they are credible role models.
Marriage Is Not Out-of-Date

**SABBATH AFTERNOON**


**Memory Text:** “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25, NIV).

All through the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, the image of marriage appears, in one form or another. Sometimes the images are of good marriages; sometimes they are of bad marriages; sometimes the images depict faithfulness; sometimes they depict infidelity. Either way, and whether in the Old Testament or in the New, marriage is often used as a metaphor for the relationship between the Lord and His people.

Thus, it should be clear how seriously the Lord esteems marriage. For Him to use it time and again as a metaphor for His relationship with His people should tell us marriage should be something special.

Therefore, this week we take a look at some biblical principles regarding this divinely inspired institution.

**The Week at a Glance:** What can we learn about marriage from the Genesis account? How should a husband treat his wife? How does Christ’s death reflect an important principle necessary for creating a good marriage?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 24.*
Marriage in Paradise

**Read** Genesis 2:18-25. What basic principles can we find in this account of the first husband/wife relationship that can help us, today, understand what God’s ideal for marriage should be? As you read, ask yourself the following questions: (1) What significance is in the fact Eve was created out of Adam’s physical body, as opposed to her being created from something separate? (2) What do Adam’s words in verse 23 mean? (3) Why, when they saw each other naked, were they not ashamed?

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However unique the background to the story, it does show there was to be an intimacy between a husband and his wife that wasn’t found anywhere else. There showed a closeness, a bond, both physical and spiritual, that no other person should be allowed to violate. The marriage relationship is blessed of God; it’s something sacred, something we have been able to take from Eden, from a perfect world. How crucial, then, that we cherish it as we should.

**Read** Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7. How do both Paul and Peter stress the unique bond of a marriage relationship? Who, ultimately, is deemed the head of the home? And yet, at the same time, what principles should dictate how the husband should treat the wife?

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Though both Peter and Paul are clear about the role of husband and wife in marriage, notice how many times they stress that the husband should love the wife; in fact, Paul, in Ephesians, admonished husbands to love their wives with the kind of self-sacrificial love that compelled Christ to love the church. Imagine how much better our marriages would be if both husband and wife, in the Lord, followed these biblical principles.

**Dwell more on the idea of Christ’s death as an example of the kind of self-sacrificing love husbands should have for their wives. What great changes could that attitude on the part of husbands bring to homes and marriages?**
**Key Text:** Ephesians 5:25.

**Teachers Aims:**

1. To show that marriage is as sacred today as it was in Eden.
2. To understand the intimate nature of the relationship that is to exist between a husband and wife.
3. To stress the importance of sexual fidelity within the marriage relationship.

**Lesson Outline:**

**I. Marriage.**
   A. God joined Adam and Eve together in holy matrimony and blessed that great institution.
   B. Peter and Paul stress the need for husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church.
   C. Marriage is a commitment intended to last till death parts the couple.
   D. God forgives adultery as readily as any sin.
   E. Earthly marriage mirrors our relationship to Jesus, the Bridegroom.

**II. Sexual Intimacy.**
   A. God created sex and the sexes (male and female).
   B. God blessed His creation and issued the divine mandate to them to “Be fruitful and multiply” (*Gen. 1:22*).
   C. Humanity has perverted and distorted God’s gift of sex.

**III. Sexual Problems in God’s Church.**
   A. Sexual immorality is an effective tool of Satan.
   B. Church members must guard against susceptibility to sexual sin.
   C. Exercising the will, praying, and keeping spiritually focused are essential in remaining faithful to Christ.

**IV. Christ and Marriage.**
   A. Jesus endorsed the ordinance of marriage and upheld its sacredness.
   B. Jesus attended the wedding at Cana.
   C. We are betrothed to Christ as His bride and await His coming for us.

**Summary:** “Those who regard the marriage relation as one of God’s sacred ordinances, guarded by His holy precept, will be controlled by the dictates of reason.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 121.

**COMMENTARY**

**I. Marriage Is Good for You.**

On one occasion Aristotle was asked to define a *friend*. According to Diogenes Laërtius, who wrote in the year A.D. 200,
Marriage—Till Death Do Us Part *(Matt. 5:32, 19:9)*.

Some people who have been married for just a year or two decide they made a mistake and go their separate ways. Others who have been together for thirty or more years conclude that their relationship has become empty and stale and get a divorce. Also, an increasing number of people live in common-law relationships and shy away from marriage.

What is the underlying problem? Many of today’s younger generation have a problem in making long-term commitments, whether it comes to church membership and/or to sealing a love relationship with a marriage vow.

*How do the words of Christ Himself indicate that marriage is a lifelong commitment?* *Matt. 5:32, 19:9.*

Those are very strong words, leaving what seems like little room for extenuating circumstances. Indeed, the principles stated in the *Church Manual* continue to provide a solid basis for our thinking:

“Central to God’s holy plan for our world was the creation of beings made in His image who would multiply and replenish the earth and live together in purity, harmony, and happiness. He brought forth Eve from the side of Adam and gave her to Adam as his wife. Thus was marriage instituted—God the author of the institution, God the officiator at the first marriage. . . .

“The church adheres to this view of marriage and home without reservation, believing that any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal. The belief that marriage is a divine institution rests upon the Holy Scriptures. Accordingly, all thinking and reasoning in the perplexing field of divorce and remarriage must constantly be harmonized with that holy ideal revealed in Eden.

“The church believes in the law of God; it also believes in the forgiving mercy of God. It believes that victory and salvation can as surely be found by those who have transgressed in the matter of divorce and remarriage as by those who have failed in any other of God’s holy standards.”—(Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assoc., 2000), pp. 194, 195.

Focus on the last paragraph of the *Church Manual*. What hope does that give you if you have, indeed, violated the biblical standard of marriage? At the same time, what should Christ’s words above tell us about how important it is that we do everything possible to keep our marriages intact?
Aristotle replied, a friend is “One soul abiding in two bodies.” Of course the Bible had expressed a similar thought many years earlier in describing two married people as becoming “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5, 6).

Today, in many parts of the world, this concept of two people joining together in marriage is considered old-fashioned and out of touch with reality. This is a shame, because God designed and created marriage—and did so with a purpose. Those who establish partnerships outside of marriage miss out on the fullness of what God intended.

In 2000, Linda J. Waite, professor of sociology at the University of Chicago, and Maggie Gallagher, director of the Marriage Program at the Institute of American Values, wrote:

“For perhaps the first time in human history, marriage as an ideal is under a sustained and surprisingly successful attack.” They point out that in Western countries such as America there is a popular view that marriage is either out of date or an optional extra. On the contrary, they argue, this “most basic and universal of human institutions” is a rewarding “uniquely powerful and life-enhancing bond that is larger and more durable than the immediate, shifting feelings of two individuals.” —The Case For Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially (New York: Doubleday, 2000), pp. 1, 11, 12.

Waite and Gallagher conclude that, despite popular myth, married people actually live longer and are happier, healthier, and wealthier. “When love seeks permanence, a safe home for children who long for both parents, when men and women look for someone they can count on, there are no substitutes,” they write. “The word for what we want is marriage.” —Waite and Gallagher, p. 203.

II. The Wedding Vows.

In Jewish literature marriage is called kiddushin, which translates as “sanctification” or “dedication.” Understood in those terms, a wedding is not just a social arrangement or contractual agreement, it’s a spiritual bonding and the fulfillment of a mitzvah, a divine precept. Marriage is an exclusive relationship, where man and woman are dedicated together, under the blessing of God.

In a traditional Jewish wedding ceremony, a ring is placed on the bride’s right index finger because it’s considered the finger of intelligence—the finger that points at the words when reading Holy Scripture. This is a beautiful symbol of the importance of living married lives in reference to God’s Word, letting its principles guide us.

At the end of the service the groom will often smash a bottle or light bulb with his foot. The symbolic act reminds the bride and groom that, like the shattered glass, the marriage vows are permanent. But it’s also a reminder that a marriage is fragile—handle it
The Joy of Sex

**Read** Genesis 1:27, 28; 2:24, 25. What do they tell us about sexuality? Who originated it? Who encouraged it? Was there anything “dirty” about it in the context in which it is presented here?

Through the centuries there have been Christians who have rejected sex as dirty, unspiritual, and sinful, even to the point that many believed that those who wanted to dedicate themselves to the Lord in a special way ought to remain celibate. Throughout church history, in many religious communities, sex was, at least officially, outlawed, even among married people.

On the other hand, immorality has, at times, been hailed as true freedom, with all inhibitions set aside in the name of advanced religious truth.

The Christian view of sex is a balanced view. There is more to life than sex. But the enjoyment of our sexuality is definitely a precious part of life—a gift of our Creator, who made us “male and female,” and within the right context it can be a beautiful expression of both human and divine love.

Like all God’s gifts, however, it can be abused, and few gifts have been more greatly abused than this one. The key for the Christian is to understand under what circumstances the Lord wants him or her to benefit from and enjoy this blessing. When is sexual activity appropriate, and when is it not? These are important questions, because our world is filled with sad results of those who have misused one of God’s greatest manifestations of His love for humanity. How like the devil to take something so wonderful and turn it into something that will lead to the ruin of many souls.

All of the following texts talk, in one context or another, about human sexuality: Genesis 2:24; Proverbs 5:15-23; Ecclesiastes 9:9; Song of Solomon; Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 7:5. From these texts and any others you find, write a paragraph for someone who isn’t a Christian, explaining the biblical view of sexuality.
with care, treat it with respect, surround it in the protection of God’s love—and it will last forever.

The traditional Protestant wedding ceremony has its origins in 1552 and the Book of Common Prayer. In the service outlined in the Book of Common Prayer, both the bride and groom make public vows in front of human witnesses and God: “I take thee, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, for

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: Malachi 2:16; 1 Corinthians 6:16-19; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5; Ephesians 5:28-33; Philippians 4:13; Colossians 3:1-8, 12-17.

1 Why does the Bible repeatedly use marriage as a metaphor for the relationship between God and humankind? List other human relationships and discuss their characteristics. In what ways is our relationship with God more like a marriage than any other of these relationships?

2 Review Ephesians 5:28-33. What principles guide Paul’s admonishment for husbands to love their wives as much as they love their own bodies?

3 Many people feel that it is acceptable to view their first marriages as starter marriages, to be abandoned if they go sour, or if something better comes along. How does this differ from the biblical view of marriage?

4 While insisting that sex is not a big deal, our society makes it as big a deal as possible. The media in some countries continually tells us how important it is to have sex as often and as early as possible. What is the biblical response to this mind-set? Why is this response a healthier view?

5 Sex is a force many people find difficult to control. But while the Bible and Ellen White stress the use of one’s will power to counter temptation, can we fight this battle ourselves? What is it necessary to do in order to claim God’s power in this struggle?

6 Review the principles of the ideal marriage found in Genesis 2:18-25. How are these principles supported by the gospel? In Friday’s section, we read that it is the purpose of the gospel to restore the purity and beauty of marriage that was destroyed by sin. How can the gospel help restore marriage to its original purity and beauty?
When There Are Problems *(Matt. 5:27, 28; Heb. 13:4).*

We live in a world full of temptations. Never should we underestimate the determination of the devil to divert the followers of Christ from their life of discipleship; and one of the most effective ways of doing so is to lead them into sexual immorality. The apostle Paul was specifically addressing instances of immorality among church members when he stated: “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall” *(1 Cor. 10:12, NIV).*

**What principle ought to be kept in mind and to be pursued with firm determination by all who are married and claim to be followers of Christ? 1 Cor. 10:13, Heb. 13:4.**

Ellen G. White makes an important point when stressing the role of our will in remaining faithful to a marriage vow. A determination to focus our mind on spiritual matters will help us when we face sexual temptations: “Christ presented before His disciples the far-reaching principles of the law of God. He taught His hearers that the law was transgressed by the thoughts before the evil desire was carried out in actual commission. We are under obligation to control our thoughts, and to bring them into subjection to the law of God. The noble powers of the mind have been given to us by the Lord, that we may employ them in contemplating heavenly things. God has made abundant provision that the soul may make continual progression in the divine life. . . . We give our time and thought to the trivial and commonplace things of the world, and neglect the great interests that pertain to eternal life.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1145.

But not all is necessarily lost when we do succumb to temptation. Although sin may result in consequences that can not be undone, God is always willing to forgive. And to forgive impure thoughts, sexual indiscretions, or even blatantly immoral conduct is no more difficult for God than to forgive a lie or an act of pride or selfishness.

**What practical steps can both men and women take in the area of alleviating sexual temptation, not only for themselves but to make sure they aren’t a stumbling block to others? How do what we read, watch, or wear, and where we go all play a role in how well we deal with this problem?**
sickness, and in health, to love, and to cherish, till death us depart, according to God’s holy ordinance: And thereto I plight [pledge] thee my troth.” It’s a beautiful picture of true human love—endowed with the selfless, unconditional love demonstrated by God Himself.

III. Practical Love.

There are few expressions that have been more devalued than “making love.” As Chris Blake, professor at Union College, Nebraska, says, “In analyzing the phrase we find we’re not really talking about creating or building love; we’re talking about making sex.” He adds, “And when two people have made sex outside of marriage, to be truly accurate we sadly need to describe what else they were probably making. They were making tears. They were making lies. They were making regrets . . . without the responsibility and depth and nourishment of committed love.”—Searching for a God to Love (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), p. 96.

Within a Christian marriage, love is demonstrated in practical ways. Blake describes what it means to “make love” in the real sense of the words: “In the case of couples, watch him washing dishes for them. He’s making love. See how she runs errands for him. She’s making love. Look at how the two keep confidences, support, and smile through the troubles they go through. They’re

Witnessing

The Bible admonishes us not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). While Paul was referring to the church separating itself from the unbelieving world, we can also apply this verse to the marriage union. Many Christians marry someone who is not of the faith. Sometimes two unbelievers marry, and one comes to Christ after that. Often this causes stress within the relationship. The conduct of a Christian wife can be the very means to bring her husband into a right relationship with God. A godly husband can do the same for his wife.

We read in Colossians 3:19, “Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.” The love that God commands a husband to have for his wife is not just sexual or emotional but a love that loves in spite of the response. It is the same type of love Christ showed the church when He died for it (Eph. 5:25). First Peter 3:7 admonishes husbands to honor their wives so husbands may have an open channel of communication with God.

God has placed an awesome responsibility on couples entering marriage, a responsibility to represent Him to each other and to the world around them. When married couples love each other as Christ defines love, they are showing God’s true character.
Christ Endorsed Marriage (John 2:1-11).

Some of the advice given by the apostle Paul would suggest he was not overenthusiastic about marriage. Statements to that effect (such as in 1 Corinthians 7:8) should, however, be read in their context. They were written in response to a specific question (vs. 1), under circumstances we do not know in detail. Just two chapters later, Paul claims the right to marry and refers to the “other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas,” who traveled together with “a believing wife” (1 Cor. 9:5, NIV). The overall message of the Bible is undeniable: Marriage not only is permitted but it is a great gift, in particular, for believers who know the One who instituted it.

**What** does the prominent place given in John’s Gospel to the story of Christ’s attendance at the wedding in Cana suggest? John 2:1-11.

It is quite significant that John includes the story of the wedding in Cana among the very few miracle stories he recounts. The account makes abundantly clear that Jesus was happy to be associated with this wedding feast and that, by His very presence, He underlined not only how good it is to have a party but that it is good when people get married.

**How** does the use of the imagery of the wedding feast further underline the value and importance of marriage? Matt. 22:1-14, Rev. 19:7-9.

“In Biblical times a marriage involved two major events, the betrothal and the wedding. These were normally separated by a period of time during which the two individuals were considered husband and wife and as such were under the obligations of faithfulness. The wedding began with a procession to the bride’s house, which was followed by a return to the house of the groom for the marriage feast. By analogy, the church, espoused to Christ by faith, now awaits the parousia when the heavenly groom will come for his bride and return to heaven for the marriage feast which lasts throughout eternity.” —Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977), p. 340.

Christ gave Himself totally and unselfishly for His people; we, as a people, are to give ourselves totally and unselfishly to the Lord. How does that model of giving one’s self to another reveal essential principles of a strong Christian marriage?
making love. Witness his opening up his insecurities to her. He’s making love. Hear her confront and encourage him. She’s making love. Listen to them discuss the meaning of life. They’re making love.”—Blake, p. 96.

Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** A couple discussed what they would do should one of them die. After they had concluded that they would remain single and pour their energy into the children, the wife quipped, “Besides according to what I know about statistics, there would be no eligible men available to marry me. And according to what I know about you, there would be no women crazy enough to marry you.”—Gerald L. Sittser, *A Grace Disguised* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), p. 107.

Think: How would you assess your own desirability as a marriage partner?

**Thought Questions:**

1. Marriage impacts more than two people and their offspring. How should your marriage specifically benefit the cause of Christ? How should it affect your siblings? Your community? Why should it affect these areas and what specifically should guide you in attaining the desired effect?

2. If marriage were placed on the scales, which side should have the most weight: cultural morality or Christian values? Which tends to prevail, and why? If you were commissioned to develop a marriage checklist for single adults, what specific traits would you enter under these headings, and why: spiritual values, physical attributes, physical health, emotional health, socialization skills, and reality check?

**Application Question:**

Define marriage from a Christian perspective. What are some other common definitions? Are these definitions accurate or fantasized? Explain. Relate the following quote to a good definition of marriage: “The word pretend comes from the Latin roots that literally mean ‘to stretch in front of like a curtain.’ Pretending is a conscious act of believing things are better than they really are, that we really can live happily ever after. It’s all right in fairy tales, but not in real life.”—Florence Littauer, *Taking Charge of Your Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Fleming H. Revell, 1999), p. 44.
Further Study: Comments on marriage and related topics by Ellen G. White are found in a number of different compilations. Her book *The Adventist Home* contains much relevant material. See, for example, Section III: “Choosing a Life Partner,” pp. 43–75, and Section V: “From the Marriage Altar,” pp. 99–127.

“Like every other one of God’s good gifts entrusted to the keeping of humanity, marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty. In both the Old and the New Testament the marriage relation is employed to represent the tender and sacred union that exists between Christ and his people, the redeemed ones whom he has purchased at the cost of Calvary. ‘Fear not,’ he says; ‘thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel.’ ‘Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you.’”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, December 10, 1908.

“It should henceforth be the life study of both husband and wife how to avoid everything that creates contention and to keep unbroken the marriage vows.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 85.

Discussion Questions:

1. If sex is to be enjoyed only within the context of marriage, how do those who do not have a partner, or those who have lost their partner, experience their sexuality? Should they simply forget they are sexual beings? Can one be fully male or female without having any sexual relationship? What does Christ’s example offer them?

2. Look at the second Ellen White quote above. What practical things can both the husband and wife do in order to protect the sanctity of their marriage vows?

Summary: Many marriages fail. As Christians we can never go along with a situation in which unfaithfulness, in word or thought, is condoned. At the same time, a forgiving spirit can save and restore many a relationship that would otherwise be doomed. The Lord deems marriage as something sacred; we, as humans, should do no less.
Friendship

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 1 Samuel 20, John 15:12-15, 2 Cor. 6:14-18, Phil. 2:3-8.

Memory Text: “A friend loves for all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17, NIV).

Many people claim to have lots of friends, though, in reality, they have only superficial links with other people and then only to the degree they find these links personally useful. True friendship, in contrast, does not focus on usefulness but on a personal interest in selected fellow human beings with whom we talk, with whom we listen, and with whom we share our time and emotions. After all, as we’ll see this week, friendship is one of the concepts used to describe what our relationship with the Lord should be; thus, friendship must be based on something more than a superficial need to use someone for our own ends.

“Our affection for one another springs from our common relation to God. We are one family, we love one another as He loved us. When compared with this true, sanctified, disciplined affection, the shallow courtesy of the world, the meaningless expression of effusive friendship, are as chaff to the wheat.”—Ellen G. White, Mind, Character, and Personality, vol. 1, p. 211.

The Week at a Glance: How is friendship depicted in the Bible? How can friendship become a negative experience? How do friendships reflect our relationship with God? What is the basic principle behind true friendship? What must be experienced in our hearts in order to be a true friend?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 31.
What Is a Friend? (1 Samuel 20).

While it is true we cannot always choose all our relatives, we do have more leeway in choosing our friends. It seems inevitable that for beings who are, essentially, social creatures, we will be in contact with those whom we deem friends. Yet, not all friendships are alike. Centuries ago the Greek philosopher Aristotle categorized various kinds of friendships based on the motives that established the relationship between the parties. Since that time, many writers have expounded on this very interesting and, at times, complex phenomenon of friendship.

Think about someone whom you consider or had considered a friend. What particular qualities identify your relationship with that person? Read Proverbs 18:24. How does that text reflect the qualities that define your experience of friendship, if at all?

It is interesting, too, that the word translated “friend” in the last part of this verse in Proverbs comes from the Hebrew word for “love.” In other contexts, that word could have been translated “lover.” The point seems to be that a friend is indeed someone with whom you have a close bond, different from a mere acquaintance or co-worker.

Read the story of the friendship between Jonathan and David as depicted in 1 Samuel 20. What characteristics emerge from this account that help us understand what a friendship is? How does this story relate to Proverbs 18:24? How do these characteristics compare with what you wrote above? Also, how do Jonathan’s actions fit in with what Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:1?

Notice from this story how the Lord formed the center of their friendship. Look especially at 1 Samuel 20:14, with the phrase “the kindness of the Lord.” We now see, though, in this whole relationship, a reflection of the kindness and mercy of God, manifested in the relationship between these two men.

Looking at the story of David and Jonathan, ask yourself about someone whom you consider a friend. How could you better manifest the traits of friendship as revealed in the biblical account?
Key Text: *Proverbs 17:17.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To recognize the qualities of a true friend.
2. To understand that Jesus is the perfect example of what a true friend should be.
3. To emphasize that some friends exert a bad influence.

Lesson Outline:

I. Good Friends and Bad Friends.
   A. Jesus extends an offer of His divine friendship to us.
   B. David and Jonathan shared true friendship.
   C. Many people make friends in order to satisfy selfish motives.
   D. To have friends, one must be friendly.
   E. True friends love unconditionally.

II. The Mind of Christ.
   A. Jesus knew how to be a true friend.
   B. Jesus put the needs and concerns of others before His own.
   C. Jesus talked to and listened to people, ate with them, and celebrated special events with them.
   D. Jesus met people where they were.
   E. Jesus calls us His friends and not servants.
   F. Knowing God and becoming His friend gives us what we need in order to be true friends to others.

Summary: “Whatever arises to disturb or distress us, we should take it to the Lord in prayer. . . . It is his [Satan’s] studied effort to keep us away from our best and most sympathizing friend. We should make no one our confidant but Jesus. We can safely commune with Him of all that is in our hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 776.

COMMENTARY

I. David and Jonathan.

“The warmth of true friendship, the love that binds heart to heart, is a foretaste of the joys of heaven,” writes Ellen White in *The Faith I Live By* (p. 234). One of the most beautiful examples of this is the brotherly love between David and Jonathan. One of Rembrandt’s most famous paintings depicts them at that critical moment after Jonathan has warned David of Saul’s death threats. They are both about to separate, knowing that they will probably never see each other again. Jonathan is holding David as he rises from his knees, weeping.
Bad Company (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

The term friend, at least in English, does not have to be of necessity something positive. Who knows how many lives have been ruined because of the negative influence of a friend? For instance, many people who struggle with some sort of substance abuse, be it alcohol or drugs, often trace their introduction to the substance: not from a shadowy figure hiding in a dark alley but from their best friend. How ironic and, yet, how common, when best friends turn out to be bad friends.

A young man, somewhat of an outcast in school and coming from a cold, uncaring family, found friends who made him part of their close-knit circle. He soon knew they would put their lives on the line for him, and he felt such a sense of belonging that he would have risked his life for them. Sounds like a great thing, right? Sounds like the beauty of friendship, as depicted in Proverbs 18:24, right? Well, not quite, because we’re talking about a young man who joined a youth gang heavily involved in violence, theft, and drug abuse. Thus, like anything, friendship, even what we might call a “good friend,” can be a double-edged sword.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. Notice the contrasts depicted in the texts. What do they tell us? Though we often apply these verses to marriage, what principles could help us understand the kind of friendships the Lord desires us to have? How should these principles guide our friendships? At the same time, in what ways can we take this admonition too far? How do we balance it, for instance, with Matthew 5:13, 14?

“Paul is telling the Corinthians that they cannot have compromising relationships with unbelievers—not that they cannot have relationships whatsoever. Relationships that cut the connection with God are to be completely excluded.”—W. Larry Richards, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier—2 Corinthians (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1998), pp. 148–150.

How can you tell if your friendship with a nonbeliever is hurting you spiritually? If you believe it is, what should you do?
It must have been a heartbreaking moment for these men. We know “the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David” (1 Sam. 18:1, KJV). In his letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul echoes this expression. He uses it first to describe how Christians should act together—with hearts “being knit together in love” (Col. 2:2, KJV). He then uses the same expression to describe how we, the body, relate to God, the Head—“from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (vs. 19, KJV).

The depth of friendship between David and Jonathan had consequences well after Jonathan’s death. When David became king, he gave Jonathan’s crippled son, Mephibosheth, all the property that belonged to Saul. He also provided laborers to care for his lands. “‘I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan,’ ” David told him “‘and you will always eat at my table’” (2 Sam. 9:7, NIV). It’s a beautiful ending to what has been in many ways a tragic story. “And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king’s table, and he was crippled in both feet” (vs. 13).

The Mishna, a collection of early oral commentaries of the Scriptures, talks about a type of love that depends on something else. The problem is, when the thing it depends on ceases, so does the love. It gives the example of Amnon’s love for Tamar. But there is a better kind of love, that doesn’t rely upon something else and so will last forever. The example it gives for this eternal love is the love of David and Jonathan.—See “Aboth,” in The Babylonian Talmud Seder Nezikin (London: The Soncino Press, 1935), vol. 4, p. 70. This love did not depend on anything other than God who fueled the friendship. And it lasted even past the death of Jonathan.

Ellen White says “the name of Jonathan is treasured in heaven, and it stands on earth a witness to the existence and the power of unselfish love.”—My Life Today, p. 210.

II. The Wise Man Looks at Friendship.

The book of Proverbs contains much wisdom regarding friendship. The following verses are thought-provoking discussion-starters for Sabbath School classes:

III. Choosing Friends.

“A righteous man is cautious in friendship” (Prov. 12:26).

“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered” (Prov. 22:24).

What criteria should Christians use when choosing friends? Aren’t we supposed to be friends with everyone?

IV. Money and Friends.

“The poor are shunned even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends” (Prov. 14:20, NIV).
Let This Mind Be in You (Phil. 2:3-8).

As human beings, we are by nature selfish and egotistical: Our first inclination is to look out for “number one.” Though some struggle with this problem more than others, it is the default mode for a sinful, fallen race. For any relationship—including friendship between selfish and egotistical people—to survive, these qualities need to be subsumed. In the end, only the sanctifying power of God working on the heart can bring about the kind of changes needed for a true friendship. No wonder, as we saw in Sunday’s section, the Lord was in the center of the relationship between David and Jonathan. What friendship will succeed if it’s based on people looking out only for themselves?

Read Philippians 2:3, 4. What essential principle is shown there, and why is it so crucial for forming a true friendship?

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In so many ways, the key to a good friendship is found in the same principles found in a good marriage: the willingness of each member to put the good of the other first. This is seen in the example we have of Jesus, giving Himself for the good of others. Think of the kind of friendships we would have were we to esteem others better than ourselves (and were they to do the same for us) or if we looked not upon just our own things but upon the things of others (and they were to do the same for us). This was, of course, the essence of what Christ did when here in the flesh.

The sad reality is so many friendships are often based on selfish motives (What’s in this for me?); and when someone realizes there’s no benefit for them in the relationship, the friendship cools, if not ends. This is nothing extraordinary; it is simply human nature. Far from putting the needs of others before ourselves, oftentimes we find jealousy and envy ruining a friendship. In his Confessions, Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote about how, once he became famous, many of his friends turned against him. Again, this isn’t anything extraordinary; it’s human nature unsubdued by the power of Christ working in our lives.

Read Philippians 2:5-8. Here is the key to bringing about the kinds of changes in us that can stimulate strong friendships. How are your friendships? Are they defined by the texts for today or by jealousy, expediency, and convenience? Dwell, pray, and meditate on these verses in Philippians.
“Wealth brings many friends, but a poor man’s friend deserts him” (Prov. 19:4, NIV).
“Many curry favor with a ruler, and everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts” (vs. 6, NIV).
“A poor man is shunned by all his relatives—how much more do his friends avoid him!” (vs. 7, NIV).

Compare these proverbs with James 2:1-4. How should Christians of modest means relate to rich people? Does the church tend to favor rich people and, if so, what can we do about it?

Inductive Bible Study


1 How is it possible to have friendship unmixed with selfish motives? Is not the enjoyment of another’s company itself a selfish motive? Does the Christian concept of agape require that we offer only our friendship to people who are unlovable?

2 How does the concept of friendship in your culture differ from the concept of friendship in the Bible?

3 Our choice of friends can have a great effect for good or ill in our lives. How can we determine which friendships are dysfunctional and which are edifying? How is it possible to have friendships with others who do not share our religious beliefs?

4 While it is easy to establish friendships with people who come from similar backgrounds, it is more difficult to relate to people who are seemingly quite different from ourselves. How can we relate to those with whom we seem to have little in common? How does Jesus’ example guide us?

5 How is it possible to effectively witness to someone we actually dislike?

6 A non-Seventh-day Adventist moved next door to Trudy and Bill, who were Seventh-day Adventists. Trudy and Bill tried to be friends with their neighbor but with no success. So, one day Bill asked their neighbor if they had done anything to offend him. He replied, “All you Adventists want to do is convert everyone you meet, and I’m just not interested.” How should Trudy and Bill respond, and why?

7 How can Paul’s relationship with Philemon teach us about how to solve problems we might have with a friend (Philem. 1:8, 9)?

The gospel shows us how Christ made friends. He took time to talk to people and to listen to them. He took time to eat together with others and to celebrate special events with them.

**Read** the following passages and analyze what each tells us about Christ’s skills in interhuman relations and, in particular, in making friends.

*John 4:4-26*: Jesus speaks and listens to the Samaritan woman.


In all these situations, Jesus comes to people where they are and mingles among them as one of them. He doesn’t act too good for the Samaritan woman or doesn’t feel too low for the chief Pharisee. Jesus shows Himself ready to listen, to get involved, to show a genuine interest in others. If we will reach out to people, listen, show empathy, and give others the sense that they are valued and accepted, we will be able to establish meaningful relationships and even friendships with the most unlikely people.

This is important if we are to reach others with the gospel. How are unchurched, secular people ever going to listen to a sermon? How can they ever be persuaded to read a book about Christ? Many will be intrigued enough to decide they want to know more only if they have seen Christianity in action and actually have met a credible Christian.

Christ, however, didn’t make friends just for the sake of making friends. He came in contact with the lost, and He became their friend in order to reach them with eternal life. What about us? What motivates our friendship with nonbelievers? At the same time, if it becomes apparent that they have no interest in our faith, do we then just shake the dust off our feet and walk away? What kind of friendship is that?
V. Bad Friends.

“A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends” (Prov. 16:28, NIV).

“He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends” (Prov. 17:9, NIV). “An unfriendly man pursues selfish ends; he defies all sound judgment” (Prov. 18:1, NIV).

What do class members think are the most important aspects of a friendship? From their experience, what are the most common ways that friendships are destroyed? What is the best way to approach gossips and those who keep recalling past offenses?

VI. Characteristics of Good Friends.

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

“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24, NIV).

Witnessing

At the suggestion of his high officials, the king established the decree. For 30 days no one could pray to any other God or man except to King Darius. Then to his horror, the king realized the decree was a plot to catch Daniel. All day Darius attempted to save his most trusted governor, but once he had signed the petition, he could not change it.

So Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den. Darius could not sleep that night, because he was so worried about his friend. He hoped, however, that Daniel’s God could save him.

Early the next morning, the king rushed to the lions’ den. “‘Daniel!’” He cried out. “‘Has your God saved you?’”

“‘O King, live forever!’” came Daniel’s reply. “‘My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions’” (see Dan. 6:22, NIV). Immediately Daniel was removed from the den, and King Darius established a new law, honoring Daniel’s God—the God of heaven.

Our true friends will respect our faith in the God we serve. On the other hand, those who would encourage us to do wrong are not friends at all. Daniel’s enemies devised a plot against him “concerning the law of his God” (Dan. 6:5). But Daniel was not ashamed of God. He continued to pray three times a day and to worship Him.

Like Daniel, we should not be ashamed of God. Our friends and associates should see Christ in us. They should know by our conduct what kind of God we serve. In this way, we can lead our friends to Christ.
Not Servants but Friends *(John 15:12-15).*

No matter how ideal our friendships, people are people, and we should never lean totally upon them *(Ps. 118:8, 9; Jer. 17:5)* for sooner or later people will fail us, just as we fail others. That’s why our Best Friend, the One whom we can trust implicitly, must be the Lord, whom we can know intimately through Jesus Christ *(John 14:9).* However important human friendships are, however much we can learn to trust in the love and dedication of others, we build upon a flimsy foundation when we build our faith upon anything other than the Rock *(Matt. 7:24, 25).*

**Read** John 15:12-15. What did Jesus call His disciples? What does it mean to say we are “friends” with God, as opposed to servants? What’s the difference? What kind of relationship does He seek with us? What can we learn from our friendship with God that can help us with other friendships? At the same time, what is unique about our friendship with God that we can have with no one else? *(See, for instance, vs. 14.)*

In verse 13, Jesus reveals the essence of true love and true friendship, which again comes back seeking unselfishly the best for others over and above ourselves. This is the highest ideal, and Jesus here points to His own manifestation of that ideal as His words point to the Cross. It’s only as we have the kind of assurance, peace, and security that comes from knowing God, from knowing He is our Friend, from knowing we are accepted by Him, that we can give of ourselves and become the kind of friend who truly is a friend, not only with the Lord but with others.

**Look at John 15:13.** It presents an incredibly high ideal for friendship. How many friends do you have for whom you would be willing to die? Do you have to be willing to die for someone in order to be called his or her friend? If not, what do you think Jesus is telling us with those words? What principle is He teaching?
“He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king for his friend” (Prov. 22:11, NIV).

Ask the class to reflect on the best friends they have had. Why have they been close friends? What attributes have they most appreciated in these friends?

VII. The Counsel of a Friend.

“Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses” (Prov. 27:6, NIV).

“Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one’s friend springs from his earnest counsel” (Prov. 27:9, NIV).

What weight should we put on the counsel of friends? How can we judge between good and bad advice?

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: A fifth-grade class includes 14 bald boys. Are they into the latest fad? Are they emulating a punk rock star? Are they skinheads in training? No. One of their classmates who is undergoing chemotherapy faces the prospect of having his hair fall out in clumps. So he had his head shaved. Thirteen of his classmates shaved their heads, so he would not feel out of place.

How far out of your comfort zone are you willing to go to nurture your Christian friendships? Work friendships? Friendships within your community? Friendships with the unloved and unloved?

Thought Questions:

1. Methods for developing friendships are diverse: What methods are suggested in Galatians 6:2, Proverbs 17:17, 18:24, and Matthew 11:19?

2. What is missing when a person restricts friendships to one group (for example, one gender, culture, age group, or socio-economic class)?

Application Question:

How are you taking advantage of the methods that Sabbath School offers for nurturing friendships? How are you helping other people who hope to find friendship at Sabbath School become successful in their search by “being there” and being active? How far outside of your comfort zone are you willing to go regarding time of programs, style of programs, and content?
Further Study: “Friendship may be the only form of human social relationship that is sustained primarily by kindness. . . . One continues to function as a parent, spouse, worker, and neighbor, even though kindness may be lacking. . . . With friendship, it is entirely different. Kindness is the glue that binds friends together. If I should humiliate a friend, be insensitive to the feelings of a friend, cause unnecessary harm or hurt to a friend, or in any way treat a friend as an object that I use for my own pleasure and gratification, the friendship dissolves.”—Ray S. Anderson, Living the Spiritually Balanced Life (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House Co., 1998), pp. 78, 79.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1 Research indicates that new Seventh-day Adventists tend to lose most of their old friends within approximately seven years of joining the church. Their former circle of friends tends to be replaced by others whom they have met in their new spiritual home. Is that a good thing, or should new members strive to retain their non-Adventist friends of the past? If so, why, and under what circumstances?

2 The Bible presents some high ideals for friendship, including even the giving up of one’s life for a friend. How, though, do we balance that out with our other relationships and obligations, such as to our family or to the Lord? What happens when obligations to friends clash with obligations to family or to the Lord?

3 Euripides wrote that real friendship is shown in times of trouble; prosperity is full of friends. How does this idea compare with what we have studied this week about friendship?

Summary: The Bible presents some high ideals for friendship, something that does not come naturally to the human heart. Fortunately, through the example and power of Jesus, we can be the kind of friends the Lord would have us to be.
Religion in the Workplace

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 2:15; 3:17-19; Lev. 19:35, 36; Eccles. 9:10; Matt. 18:21; Luke 15:11-32.

Memory Text: “The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out” (Proverbs 10:9, NIV).

In the aftermath of a ferry disaster in 1987 near Belgium, the experts faced serious problems in identifying all the victims. They found that one of them had a double identity; he had lived for years under one name in England and under another name in France. Just imagine how difficult it must have been for this man to keep those two lives, with two families and two sets of friends, in two different countries, totally separate.

This kind of situation does not, of course, occur very often. But in many ways people can live double or even multiple lives. That goes for Christians too. We must make sure not to compartmentalize our life into totally different spheres, in which we are quite different persons in different places. We must be the same kind of person in the workplace as we are at home or in church, operating with the same set of Christian values. This week we’ll take a look at some Bible principles on how we as Christians should behave in the workplace.

The Week at a Glance: What happened to work after the Fall? What are the obligations of a Christian employer and employee? How should Christians give or receive discipline and correction?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 7.
Work Ethic (Gen. 2:15, 3:17-19).

Read Genesis 2:15. What does it tell us about the existence of work in the pre-Fall world?

According to the Bible, work existed even in Paradise, in a perfect environment. Obviously, work must have been something good, something that was an integral part of God’s original plan for the human race. After the Fall, the concept of work continued but, no doubt, in a radically different environment than before.

Read Genesis 3:17-19. What does it imply about work in the post-Fall world?

Cursed, sorrow, sweat, thorns, thistles—these are some of the words used to describe the fate that awaited humanity because of sin, words used even in the context of the work human beings would need to do in a fallen world.

Read carefully Genesis 3:17. What does it mean that God “cursed . . . the ground” for the sake of Adam?

“The thorn and the thistle—the difficulties and trials that make his life one of toil and care—were appointed for his good as a part of the training needful in God’s plan for his uplifting from the ruin and degradation that sin has wrought.”—Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, p. 9. In other words, the Lord made life more difficult for the race, not as punishment but as a means to help mitigate against the ravages of sin. This principle can be seen often, even today: Those who engage in honest labor usually get into less trouble than those who are idle, with nothing to do. There’s something about the discipline and routine of work that, under the right circumstances, can help build character, a crucial task for beings steeped in sin.

In what ways, in your own experience, have you seen the benefits and blessings that come from work?
Key Text: *Ecclesiastes 9:10.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To show that God expects Christians rightly to represent Him in the workplace.
2. To explore the nature of the work that God delegated to Adam and Eve in Eden.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Work Ethic.
   A. Sin altered the nature of labor after the Fall!
   B. God gave work to humanity as a safeguard against sin.
   C. A true Christian witness, at work, will be a diligent, honest worker.
   D. Jesus taught, by example, that it is our duty to be industrious, diligent, and honest at work.

II. The Christian’s Values at Work.
   A. The concepts of right and wrong are not whims to be abandoned in the workplace.
   B. The Christian should be honest and fair at work.

III. The Human Potential.
   A. Just as the contents of a book cannot be judged by its cover, neither can a person’s potential be judged by outward appearance.
   B. Christ chose His disciples based on what He knew they could be, not on what they appeared to be.
   C. Paul and Barnabas disagreed over John Mark’s fitness for service because of his past failure.
   D. Despite this, Barnabas remained convinced of John Mark’s potential.

Summary: “We are to look upon every duty, however humble, as sacred because it is a part of God’s service. Our daily prayer should be, ‘Lord, help me to do my best. Teach me how to do better work. Give me energy and cheerfulness.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing,* p. 474.

COMMENTARY

I. Out of the Salt-Shaker.

During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses salt as an object lesson. “‘You are the salt of the earth,’” He says. “‘But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything’” (*Matt. 5:13, NIV*).

We usually add salt to food by sprinkling—making sure it’s evenly distributed. Large lumps of salt in food would be unpalatable. But, in a sense, this is what happens when Christianity becomes
“Whatsoever Thy Hand Findeth . . .”
(Eccles. 9:10).

Whether in the poignant paintings of Vincent Van Gogh, who tried to capture the hardship of coal miners toiling at their task, or in some of the beautiful prose of Leo Tolstoy, who all but romanticized the toil of peasants in the field, human beings have sought to capture, in one way or another, the inescapable fact of work. With rare exceptions, most people have worked in one capacity or another. Many people, in fact, spend a great deal of their time working. The big question for Christians, then, is What kind of relationships should we have in the workplace?

Read Ecclesiastes 9:10. What is this text telling us that could give us a principle for the Christian on the job?

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One thing most of us have learned, or at least should have learned, is that if we profess to be Christians, people will watch us. As Christians, we make some pretty bold claims, claims about having a new life in Christ, about having a peace that passes all understanding, about striving for a higher moral ideal. We are witnesses, in one way or another (Isa. 43:10, 1 Cor. 4:9, 2 Cor. 3:2). Thus, think for a moment: Which would give a better witness to your faith: if you were a hard, diligent, honest worker who did not only what was expected of you but perhaps even more, or if you were a slacker—cutting corners, trying to get away with as much as you could? The answer, of course, is obvious. Sure, there are all sorts of circumstances that can, at times, make it difficult for us to be good witnesses at work, but, as a rule, a Christian should be a reliable, honest worker doing what he or she is paid for, knowing the true reward is not here but in a new heaven and a new earth. In this context, Ellen White wrote of Christ’s early years: “He was not willing to be defective, even in the handling of tools. He was perfect as a workman, as He was perfect in character. By His own example He taught that it is our duty to be industrious, that our work should be performed with exactness and thoroughness, and that such labor is honorable. . . . All should find something to do that will be beneficial to themselves and helpful to others. God appointed work as a blessing, and only the diligent worker finds the true glory and joy of life.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 72.

The text in Ecclesiastes and the excerpt from Ellen White present an ideal attitude about work. How does your attitude compare? If you’re honest with yourself, what changes do you need to make?
institutionalized, and Christ’s followers isolate themselves from society.

The purpose of salt is to enhance the flavor of food. If it loses this power—and just merges into the food, adding nothing—it’s worthless. In the same way, Christ’s followers are called to add something to their communities. If we just merge in with the crowd, becoming like everybody else, our Christian witness is no longer good for anything.

It’s easy for Christians to lose their saltiness. The apostle Paul tells us: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2, NIV). Are we conforming to the things of this world? Are we allowing it to define what is important, what is acceptable?

If we lose our saltiness, what can we do? First, we need to confess that we’ve “lost our first love.” Second, we need to undergo a process of renewal. Paul writes, “You have taken off your old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Col. 3:9, 10, NIV). Note the wording—“is being renewed.” It’s an ongoing process, not an overnight thing.

How can we be “renewed”? Perhaps the key is found at the beginning of the chapter: “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (vs. 2, NIV). We can “set our minds on things above” through prayer, Bible study, and sharing with others. We can also spend less time focusing on earthly things.

II. The Christian Vocation.

The biblical concept of a divine vocation or calling is contained in the Greek word klesis, which is used only by Paul, except for one reference by the apostle Peter: “Give diligence to make your calling [klesis] and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10, KJV).

Professor Ronald Preston says that klesis normally refers to God’s call to become part of the Christian community, but in 1 Corinthians 7:20, Paul applies the term to the daily work of the Christian. The [American Version] “brings out this double use by translating this verse, ‘Let every man abide in the same calling [i.e., job] wherein he was called [i.e., when he became a Christian].’ ” However, this view became corrupted over the centuries into a doctrine that has been called the double standard, in which the life of the ordinary Christian was considered inferior to the life of poverty, chastity, and obedience to which monks and nuns were called.

“This was to have momentous consequences at the Reformation,” adds Preston.

“Luther rebelled against the doctrine of the double standard, and developed on the basis of 1 Cor. 7:20 a theology of the Christian’s calling in the world. . . . The idea of vocation was brought from the
Christian Values in the Workplace: Part 1

Buying a secondhand car is often considered a rather hazardous adventure. The car may be beautifully cleaned and polished, but what dark secrets are hidden under the hood? Can you trust the odometer? It is said that one should never buy a car from, or sell a car to, a friend, since this may well put the friendship in jeopardy. This should not apply to Christians. Our business deals must be above reproach, whether we privately sell our car or whether we trade professionally. Indeed, whatever work or business we are in and whatever level at which we work, we should be honest, honorable, and fair, because that is what our God tells us to be.

Look up the following texts. What is each one saying, and what are their messages for Christians in the workplace? Lev. 19:35, 36; Prov. 10:17; Jer. 22:13; Mal. 3:5.

Whether employer or employee, as a Christian we need to be honest and fair with either our employer or employees. The only thing worse than employees who abuse their work situation by being dishonest are employers who are dishonest with those under their supervision.

Read again Leviticus 19:35, 36. What motivation is given for honesty in business dealing?

Because we are Christians, our concepts of right and wrong, good and evil, aren’t based merely on the fluctuating whims of culture and time, which change from culture to culture and from time to time; rather, they are based on the eternal God, who never changes (James 1:17). Thus, we should do what is right and honest, because those things that are right and honest are rooted in God, our Creator and Redeemer. We shouldn’t manifest honesty, integrity, and fairness only when they suit us, when they work to our advantage; rather, they should be foundational principles that underlie all we do as Christians, whether at home or in the workplace.

Since Vatican II the Roman Catholic Church has repudiated the distinction contained in the “double standard,” but the influence of this view still lingers. Preston points out that many Christians still see the doctrine of vocation as referring especially to ordained pastors and church workers and, to a lesser extent, work with a high personal content such as nursing or teaching. People in trades or

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: Genesis 3:17; Proverbs 10:3, 9; Ecclesiastes 9:10; Matthew 5:38-42; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Colossians 3:23.

1 Discuss the purpose of work both before and after the Fall. How did the purpose of work change after the Fall? How did it stay the same? Given any of the problems we face at work, it is not hard to view work as a curse. Despite these problems, however, how can we make our work meaningful?

2 As Christians, we should strive to do as well as possible at what we do for a living. But how can we take this striving too far? What part does work play in our identities? Why is it dangerous to define ourselves by our jobs?

3 From a Christian point of view, are some jobs more valuable than others? What jobs should Christians not take, and why?

4 In your own life, are Christian values a help or a hindrance to your career? In what job-related situations might you be tempted to compromise your values? How should you deal with such temptation?

5 When should a Christian seek compensation if he or she has been treated unfairly by an employer? What reasons might there be for confrontation in such a situation? What should be done differently when the employer is the church or a fellow Christian?

6 God rested from His work on the seventh day and blessed it because of His rest (Gen. 2:2, 3). Thus, the Sabbath was set apart for holy use and became a concept embedded in God’s moral law (Exod. 20:8-11). How will proper Sabbath observance (Heb. 4:3-11) help us be faithful to our religion in the workplace?
Christian Values in the Workplace: Part 2

Read Proverbs 16:32, 10:1, and 12:1 carefully and prayerfully. What do these texts teach us regarding the importance of discipline and correction?

Whether it is the army or a school or a factory or whether we talk about the home or the church, discipline is essential. The issue of discipline is a coin with two sides. Most of us will, at least from time to time, have to discipline others: children, co-workers, or church members. We must learn how to do this with consistency, tact, justice, and compassion. But we must also be receptive to discipline and learn how to accept counsel, direction, and, if necessary, correction all in a mature and constructive manner. As Christians in the workplace, we must learn not only to give discipline and correction but to receive it, as well.

We have all through the Bible, particularly in the Gospels, examples of Jesus either forgiving offenders (John 8:4-11) or teaching us the principles of forgiveness (Matt. 18:21, 22; Luke 15:11-32). How helpful are these texts for a Christian employer or supervisor who is dealing with a troublesome employee? Do these texts, though, imply that no discipline or correction should be administered, or are they, instead, teaching a principle that could, in the right context, be applied in the workplace?

At the same time, a Christian employee could believe he or she has been treated unfairly by his or her boss. Jesus, however, expressed some powerful words regarding the attitude of those who are treated unfairly (Matt. 5:38-42).

Look at Matthew 5:38-42. In what ways is this passage helpful for understanding how an employee should react to unfairness? Do these verses mean an employee should, therefore, accept abuse unconditionally, or do they teach something else? Explain your answer.

In a profound article entitled “The Dignity of Labor,” published in the Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, October 3, 1912, Ellen White strongly opposes such a view:

“Christianity and business, rightly understood, are not two separate things; they are one. Bible religion is to be brought into all that we do and say. Human and divine agencies . . . are to be united in all human pursuits, in mechanical and agricultural labors, in mercantile and scientific enterprises.”

She goes a step further:

“It requires more grace, more stern discipline of character, to work for God in the capacity of mechanic, merchant, lawyer, or farmer, carrying the precepts of Christianity into the ordinary business of life, than to labor as an acknowledged missionary in the open field. It requires a strong spiritual nerve to bring religion into the workshop and the business office.”

**Witnessing**

Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and sold as a slave in Egypt to Potiphar, captain of the guard. However, he remained faithful to God, and the Lord was with Him (Gen. 39:2). Joseph worked diligently even as a slave. “His master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand” (Gen. 39:3). Potiphar was so pleased with Joseph’s work that he appointed Joseph overseer of his entire estate, and the Lord blessed Potiphar’s house.

Then Joseph was faced with a terrible injustice. After being falsely accused by Potiphar’s wife of seducing her, he was thrown into prison. Once again he had been forced into a position he did not want or deserve to be in.

While in prison, however, Joseph yet again worked with integrity. The keeper of the prison entrusted him with the responsibility for the other prisoners. We know that in the end Joseph became Pharaoh’s highest-ranking officer and was given charge over all Egypt.

Wherever Joseph found himself, whatever task was given him, he was faithful to God and did his job to the best of his ability. The Bible tells us, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might” (Eccles. 9:10).

Joseph’s witness in the workplace was a powerful example. How can our actions, words, and work habits be a powerful witness in our various places of work? Do we work with diligence? Do we always have the right spirit? Can those with whom we work see that the Lord is with us?
Seeing Potential in Others (Acts 15:36-41, 2 Tim. 4:11).

Unfortunately, we do not always look for the best in others. We often tend to see the things others cannot do rather than the things they could do if properly trained and challenged to do so! In our relationships with co-workers, we need to build on one another’s strengths rather than to focus primarily on one another’s weaknesses.


It has often been remarked that very few of us would have chosen these kind of men as our closest co-workers. But Christ saw the potential in some uneducated fishermen, as well as in an unpopular tax collector, and He challenged them to follow Him and work with Him. They received three years of intensive training and then went out into the world. Jesus discovered them and recognized a potential in these men that few of us would have detected.

**Paul** had a sharp disagreement with Barnabas about John Mark’s suitability for a leading role in the work of the church. Barnabas believed there was potential in John Mark, while Paul pointed to John Mark’s weakness in the past. See Acts 15:36-41, 2 Tim. 4:11. What lessons are here for us (in the context of today’s study)?

When we hear a sermon on these passages, there usually is sharp criticism for Paul and praise for Barnabas. However, we owe it to Paul to put ourselves for a moment in his shoes. John Mark deserted and left Paul and Barnabas when they reached Pamphylia on their first missionary journey, even before the task was completed. It stands to reason that Paul did not want to run the risk that this would happen again.

In our day and age, we tend to argue as Paul did. If we have a choice, we do not continue with someone who has let us down at a crucial moment. Yet, on the other hand, how many of us know people who never again faltered when given a second chance to prove themselves? Maybe we ourselves have been such a person.

**Dwelling on the lesson for today, ask yourself, Have I too quickly written off someone who has failed me in the past, either in the workplace or in any other situation?**
This calling has been recognized by Adventist-Laymen’s Services and Industries (ASI)—an organization of Seventh-day Adventist laymen and women who support the work of the church from their workplaces. Their stated mission is to provide challenge, nurture, and experience in “Sharing Christ in the Marketplace,” as well as support for the Global Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Through ASI’s commitment to be Christian salt in the workplace, thousands of people have come to Jesus, thousands of new congregations started, and thousands of Global Mission and other outreach projects have been completed.

Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** Christ’s way of reaching people can be summarized by the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22, 23. Which of these fruit are you known for in your workplace? In which areas do you need to yield to the Holy Spirit’s power?

**Thought Question:**

If building relationships for Christ in the workplace does not come naturally for you, to which areas of Jesus’ life do you need to pay more attention to make sure your words and deeds reflect Jesus, the Healer (medical personnel); Jesus, the Friend of the downtrodden and disenfranchised (social workers); Jesus, the wedding Guest (socially prominent); Jesus, the Fisherman (sportsmen); Jesus, the Carpenter (contractors); Jesus, the Public Speaker (politicians); Jesus, Friend of children (teachers); Jesus, the Correctional Officer, cleansing the temple (law-enforcement workers); and Jesus, the Deliverer of the mentally suffering (psychologists)?

**Application Questions:**

1 One communication skill-builder focuses on the ability to talk for three minutes to a person of another gender, culture, or age group. Think of a person in one of these categories whom you encounter where you work or volunteer. Describe that person to a friend, then role play with your friend the next three-minute conversation you will have with that person. What were your first words? Why? Have your partner explain why your words were on target or off track. Evaluate your body language. Did your role-play partner respond as you anticipated?

2 What friendship-making techniques can you find in Proverbs 25?
Further Study: “If you have taken advantage in your business dealings, which the Lord calls injustice, this must be adjusted before you can be honest and righteous in the sight of God. These things need to be corrected by our people everywhere. . . . When you take up this work of readjustment and getting right with God, angels of heaven will cooperate with you, giving you discernment to see where you have viewed matters in a wrong light. . . .

“The Lord can not bless the men who corrupt themselves by unjust business dealings, either with their brethren or with worldlings. And those who do such things lose their spirituality; they grow cold and formal and selfish. They gloss over their past mistakes by theories of their own invention that are opposed to the principles of the Word of God.”—Ellen G. White, This Day With God, p. 343.

Discussion Questions:

1. Putting aside the obvious things that involve outright crime or vice, are there certain respectable jobs that Christians, in good conscience, cannot do? If so, what are they, and why should a Christian in good conscience not do these kinds of work?

2. Suppose your boss asked you to work on Sabbath; you said you couldn’t but knew someone else in the office who would take your place. Suppose, however, your boss asked you to steal or lie, and you said you couldn’t but knew someone else in the office who would take your place. What, if any, is the difference between the two situations?

Summary: As Christians, we bring our religion with us as we enter the workplace. Though there are usually limits to the amount of open discussion about religious subjects that can take place, we must still operate only with Christian values. Working together with others in a positive spirit is high on our agenda. Absolute honesty and integrity—as well as love, compassion, and justice—will characterize our conduct. And while we seek to display these values ourselves, we will also try to bring out the best in others and do what we can to make them realize their full potential.
Respect for Authorities

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience” (Romans 13:5, NIV).

One of the greatest questions facing the church is the issue of political involvement. How do people in the world but “not of the world” (John 17:14) relate to the political challenges presented by the world? History is replete with examples of churches that have kept silent during times of great moral and political crises; history, however, also bears a sad witness to what happens when churches take upon themselves political prerogatives that place them decidedly upon the side of evil.

This week we look at the complex and often difficult question of how Christians are to relate to the political issues of the day. Because Christians exist in all sorts of political environments, we can look only at broad principles; in fact, the Bible gives us only broad principles. Perhaps that’s because the Lord, knowing the various and often delicate situations His people would be facing through the centuries, revealed principles broad enough to be used in any environment.

The Week at a Glance: What kind of influence should Christians have in society? How should Christians relate to the political process? Should Christians be in government? What principles should we follow in seeking to balance our obligations as citizens with our obligations to the Lord?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 14.
Sanctified Caution *(Matt. 5:13-16).*

Many Christians believe we should give up on the world. The world is so evil, so confused, and so estranged from God’s original purpose that there is no hope of turning the situation around. Plus, the more we are involved with the world, the greater the chances we will become even more contaminated by it. Withdrawal is the only option for those who want to remain faithful to the Lord. This argument may sound plausible, but is it biblical?

**What role does God expect a Christian to play in society?** *Matt. 5:13-16.*

Christians must do all they can to make a difference in society. They are called to give a more pleasant taste to the world around them and to provide spiritual light. As someone once said: “It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness!”

In early Adventism, the question was often asked whether it would be right for an Adventist Christian to go to the ballot box. Today, most Seventh-day Adventists do recognize that it is their privilege to cast their vote in democratic elections and referendums in an attempt to help promote an agenda that is closest to upholding kingdom values. How we do this, of course, isn’t always easy; much depends not only upon our political and social environment, which can vary greatly from country to country, but also on what individual members believe regarding which agenda best upholds *kingdom values.* Because these questions can be so fraught with many potential hazards, as believers we should always proceed with *sanctified caution* when it comes to dealing with social and political issues.

**How do you balance the verses quoted above in Matthew with texts such as 2 Corinthians 6:17 or James 4:4?**

The issue for most Christians isn’t that we should seek to better whatever society we find ourselves in, but rather, How do we best do that in a way that doesn’t compromise our witness or our obligations to the Lord? As with so many things, we need to strike a correct balance, which is not always easy. At such times, when these questions can have a very powerful impact for good or evil upon the church or upon society as a whole, members, more than ever, need to seek the guidance of the Lord and the counsel of others in how to best proceed.
Key Text: Romans 13:5.

Teachers Aims:
1. To understand the extent of the Christian’s involvement in government.
2. To know that the Christian’s duty to respect earthly authorities is a part of his or her larger duty to respect God’s authority.

Lesson Outline:
I. The Christian in Government.
   A. Christians need to pray for divine wisdom and guidance when dealing with social and political issues.
   B. In addition to Daniel, the Bible has many examples of God-fearing people serving in government.
   C. Right now Seventh-day Adventist Christians are serving in governmental positions worldwide.

II. The Obedience Question.
   A. Peter offers a fail-safe principle to guide all our decisions in areas of conflict between church and state: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).
   B. Biblically, Christians are to obey the laws of their country and strive to be model citizens.
   C. When the laws of men conflict with God’s law, we are to obey God.

III. Christian Values Promoted in Government.
   A. God chose Queen Esther, Daniel, and Moses to influence government policy.
   B. The extent to which the church should seek to bring about change in society is difficult to answer.
   C. Where is the line of influence and action to be drawn?

Summary: “In the name of the Lord we are to go forward, unfurling His banner, advocating His word. When the authorities command us not to do this work, when they forbid us to proclaim the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, then it will be necessary for us to [declare the apostles’ words in Acts 4:19, 20].” —Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 395.

COMMENTARY

I. The Christian and Secular Authority.
   Few would deny that the Bible generally teaches respect for established authority. Traditionally, few people in any human society would have regarded this as strange or burdensome. Most civiliza-
Christians in Government?

Imagine your nation is overrun by a foreign power that occupies your land, defeats your army, kills thousands of civilians, levels numerous cities, and takes many prisoners. Imagine, next, that one of those prisoners not only becomes a favorite of the very ruler who destroyed your nation but actually serves that ruler faithfully for many years. Most people would deem this person a traitor, would they not?

**Who** is the Bible character described above?

The answer, of course, is Daniel *(see Daniel 1; 2:48, 49)*, whose story (among those of others) raises all sorts of interesting questions regarding the role of faithful people who are in positions of political power and authority.

**What** other biblical hero became a powerful political figure? *Gen. 41:41-44.*

Though, no doubt, the world of politics offers many potential pitfalls for any Christian, there have been those who have faithfully served in government positions. Indeed, even in our own church, Seventh-day Adventists have been involved in government. For a number of years a Seventh-day Adventist Christian served as the prime minister of Uganda. In Papua New Guinea, Seventh-day Adventists form a sizable percentage of the population, and, thus, it should not surprise us that there are many church members in high government positions. The same is true for several of the small island states in the Pacific. And even in countries where Adventists are less numerous when compared to the size of the population, we now find Seventh-day Adventists as members of Parliament or in other high positions.

**Think about this:** We believe God’s law is a transcript of His character; that is, the law He has given us reflects the kind of God He is. With this idea in mind, why would we be better off living in a nation where Christians are involved in the political process, the very process that originates the laws of the country? At the same time, what potential dangers arise from those who seek to use government power to promote a religious agenda?
tions have tended to run on a strictly hierarchical scheme, with obedience enforced with a minimum of concern for what we today would call human rights. Indeed, things simply were the way they were, and a bad end awaited anyone who defied the will of his or her family, tribe, or, worst of all, king.

That is not to say that this was necessarily negative or that there weren’t benefits to people who knew their role in family and society and performed it gladly and well. Today, however, in most Western societies, the balance has tipped the other way. What used to be regarded as established sources of authority and meaning have lost their credibility: Churches are allegedly run by abusive dirty old men; families are said to be hotbeds of child and spousal abuse; television informs us that parents and teachers are clueless buffoons. Every individual must find his or her own path in life without reference to these bankrupt institutions.

The biblical view differs from these extremes. First, we are free individuals created by God with the choice to obey or not. This not only extends to earthly authorities but to the authority of God Himself. Under certain circumstances, we have the right and responsibility to use our brains and our reasoning powers to decide when we no longer legitimately can obey authority. (See Acts 5:29.)

But on the other hand, most of the time we are to obey established authorities and assume that they are in some sense working for our good. Indeed, we are to pray for them and ask God to give them the wisdom to use that power for good. Furthermore, a misguided sense of entitlement or the will to assert oneself is not an excuse to dodge legitimate rules or laws or to attempt to cheat the system.

II. Useful Quotes on the Christian and Secular Authority.

“The general principle which Paul states so unequivocally is the duty of being good citizens. He argues from the nature of organized society, the purpose of God which it is designed to promote, and the right and proper service which ought to constitute the individual’s recognition of these facts. He has not guarded himself by including exceptions or discussing difficult cases, and his plea has nothing to do with the beneficience or the oppressiveness of the ruling power. . . .

“At the same time it is only fair to admit that Paul appeals to men and women whose citizenship possesses certain wholly distinctive marks. While subject to the secular empire, they look for the coming of another kingdom—the kingdom of God on earth. To what extent this becomes an issue of immediate practical politics is a question on which Christians have always differed widely; but there is no doubt that it introduces a new element of tension into our loyalty to the state.”—The Interpreter’s Bible (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1954), vol. 9, p. 599.

Read Romans 13:1-5 and 1 Peter 2:13-15. What attitude toward political leaders do they admonish Christians to have?

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Read Acts 5:29 and Romans 13:7. How do these verses help us better understand the texts quoted in the previous question?

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There’s no question that Christians, in whatever land they are in, should be good citizens, obeying the laws of their country. At the same time, as followers of the Lord, they answer to a higher Power, One greater than the government, to whom they are to give all due honor and respect, tribute, and custom (see Rom. 13:6, 7). At the same time, we must not forget that Paul and Peter died at the hands of the very authorities they were telling their people to obey. Obviously, then, respect for authority and obedience to the government have their limits.

Indeed, one powerful example comes from the history of the United States. In the nineteenth century, when the issue of slavery was dividing the Christians in the United States, Ellen G. White made it no secret as to where she stood.

“When the laws of men conflict with the word and law of God, we are to obey the latter, whatever the consequences may be. The law of our land requiring us to deliver a slave to his master, we are not to obey; and we must abide the consequences of violating this law. The slave is not the property of any man. God is his rightful master, and man has no right to take God’s workmanship into his hands, and claim him as his own.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, pp. 201, 202.

Throughout the years, there have been many examples of civil disobedience, of people purposely violating the law of their land in order to bring about political change. What potential dangers await Christians who get involved in such action? At the same time, what situations might exist where their Christian duty demands they get involved?
“If instead of praise [the Christian] incurs punishment and persecution, what fault is that of his? After all, he was not looking for praise when he did that which brought him punishment, nor did he do good for fear of punishment. If he meets with suffering, instead of praise, his conscience is clear in the sight of God and he has nothing to fear. After all, he has not brought shame and discredit on the Church. He obeys the power, not for material profit, but ‘for conscience’ sake.’ That is why the government cannot hurt the Christian’s conscience even if it makes a mistake. The Christian is

Inductive Bible Study


1. Discuss whether or not Christians should confront a clearly evil political regime when that regime poses no threat to their religious practice. Discuss if it is a *bad witness* to be purposefully out of step with the dominant political system or if Christians should cooperate with such a system in every way possible.

2. Generally we agree we should reflect our Christian values in our vote. Yet, often Christians will disagree on the specifics. How is it possible for two Christians, supposedly voting according to the same principles, to come to such different conclusions? What can we learn from such situations?

3. It is common to regard politics as a dirty and morally suspicious business. Yet, many Christians, including some Seventh-day Adventists, are involved in it. How is it possible to remain untainted by corruption in the world of politics?

4. Usually we are told that we are to obey the law of the land unless it conflicts with the will of God. How can we know when this line is crossed? How might our own biases color such a perception either way?

5. “You can’t legislate morality” is such a common observation that it has become a cliché. Yet, clearly some morality is legislated. One might even argue that all or most law is based on some moral principle. However, the question remains: How much morality can or should one legislate?

6. List specific church-state issues that are in the news. What principles regarding the church-state connection can we find in Romans 13:1-7 that will help us deal with these issues in a concrete manner?

Few people, if any, like to pay high taxes. But in any modern society, the state must have large amounts of money to pay for the things a government is expected to provide: education, basic health care, roads, tunnels, bridges, police, armed forces, and so on. We may question whether the taxes should be as high as they often are, but we cannot question the legitimacy of being taxed.

**What did both Jesus and Paul say about the legitimacy of taxation by the authorities?** Matt. 22:15-21; Rom. 13:6, 7.

The tax referred to in Matthew 22 was “payable into the imperial exchequer, imposed on every inhabitant of the country from the time of puberty until the age of sixty-five. It was resented by the Jews as a repeated reminder of the fact that they were subject to foreign power in their own land.


**What other principle comes into play when we deal with our taxes?**


We must show honesty and integrity in all our financial dealings. This principle also extends to what we can receive from or must pay to the government. It is dishonest to claim a benefit to which we are not entitled, and it is just as wrong to withhold from Caesar what is his due.

Of course, we may use all legitimate means to lower our taxes. But making false claims and defrauding the government are as much a dishonesty as stealing from our employer or from our neighbor. A Christian cannot be expected to smile when his or her taxes are higher than expected, but he or she can be expected to be honest.

**Suppose you have cheated on your taxes in the past. What can you do to make restitution?**
still free and has nothing to fear, and he can still pay the State its
due by suffering innocently.”—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of

“The good that a Christian strives for in a secular society will be
the highest good that a secular society can reach in a fallen world.
He must not try to impose on his fellow citizens some mirror copy
of the kingdom of God. Yet he must find a good way, and give it
practical expression in his secular situation.”—*Eerdmans
Handbook to Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans,

III. The Bible on the Christian and Secular
Authority.

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for
there is no authority except that which God has established. The
authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently,
he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God
has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on them-
selves” *(Rom. 13:1, 2, NIV).*

**Witnessing**

As children we were taught to obey our parents and respect
our elders. In school we learned to follow the rules. On our jobs
we report to our supervisors and follow company regulations.
When we drive we must obey the traffic laws or be ticketed. All
through life we find there is always someone or something in
charge. Everywhere we go there are rules to follow and authori-
ties to answer to. We see signs such as Keep Off the Grass, No
Pets Allowed, No Swimming, Do Not Enter, and Private Property.
When God created the world He put Adam and Eve in charge.
He gave them dominion over the whole earth, including every
creature *(Gen. 1:27, 28).* By this we can see that the concept of
someone being in charge is God’s design. As long as those in
charge do not go against God’s law, we as Christians have a
responsibility to submit to authority.

Joseph was a slave in the house of Potiphar, “and his master
saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that
he did to prosper” *(Gen. 39:3).* A Hebrew maiden who had been
taken captive by the Syrian army directed her heathen master to
Elisha the prophet of God for healing *(2 Kings 5).* Even David
refused to take the life of the king whom God had anointed,
although the king sought to kill him *(1 Samuel 24).*

How can respectfully following regulations and doing our
duties with a Christlike attitude provide opportunities for wit-
nessing to both those in authority and our associates?
Promoting Christian Values

The Seventh-day Adventist Church always has been strongly opposed to any interference by the state in the affairs of churches and other religious communities and, vice versa, the meddling by organized religion in matters of government. Individual members may choose to serve their country in a high office, but the Adventist Church believes that, as a corporate body, it should stay away from politics.

This does not mean, however, that the church has no interest in the values that are promoted in society and that it should not make its voice heard on moral issues that affect society. It would be wrong to impose some of our values on others, but it would be equally wrong not to present a strong witness with regard to the values we believe would make the world a better place in which to live. It is not always an easy balance to find.

What examples can we find in the Bible of faithful followers of the Lord who sought to bring about a change in government policy?

Exod. 5:1-3

Esther 7:1-7

Dan. 2:24-27

Besides these examples, the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, is filled with examples of the prophets attempting to influence government policy; that is, to try to get the rulers to turn away from apostasy and to follow the Lord. Of course, the times back then were radically different from any we face today. Nevertheless, there’s nothing wrong with Christians seeking to use their influence toward helping bring about positive moral and social changes. The difficult questions arise, however, concerning just what changes a church should seek to bring about and how a church should implement these changes. Not everything that’s sinful should be made illegal, a distinction Christians in all ages have not always understood. Where to draw the line has been and still is a difficult question for the church to answer. Thus, as mentioned earlier, this is a topic in which sanctified caution must be used.

What have been your own attitudes toward church involvement in politics? Do you tend to be an aggressive advocate of involvement, or do you think the church should shy away from these issues? What reasons do you have for the position you take?
“Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must obey God rather than men!’” (Acts 5:29, NIV).

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to commend those who do right” (1 Pet. 2:13, 14).

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** Vince Lombardi gave this formula for a winning football team to Lee Iacocca: “There are a lot of coaches with good ball clubs who know the fundamentals and have plenty of discipline but still don’t win the game. Then you come to the third ingredient: if you’re going to play together as a team, you’ve got to care for one another. You’ve got to love each other.”—Edward K. Rowell, ed., *Fresh Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christianity Today, Inc. and Baker Books, 1997), p. 137.

How do you express love for the authorities in your life?

**Thought Questions:**

1. Does loving or respecting a leader require liking or being fond of that person? What insights does Galatians 5:13-15 provide?

2. What counsel in Proverbs 6:12-19 can be used to evaluate authorities?

3. How do 1 Samuel 16:7; Matthew 7:12; Galatians 5:14; Isaiah 8:20; Psalm 1:1, 2; and Hebrews 12:1 help us establish boundaries in our relationships with authorities?

**Application Questions:**

1. Childhood is the building block for adult behavior. How did you relate to authorities—parents and teachers at school and church? Reexamine memories of the patterns in your childhood to understand how you now relate to authority. Which of the following pairs of behavior belonged to you: blaming or accepting responsibility; riding on the back of others or being disciplined; inconsistency or consistency; uncontrolled behavior or self-controlled through the Holy Spirit?

Further Study: “Christ’s reply was no evasion, but a candid answer to the question. Holding in His hand the Roman coin, upon which were stamped the name and image of Caesar, He declared that since they were living under the protection of the Roman power, they should render to that power the support it claimed, so long as this did not conflict with a higher duty. But while peaceably subject to the laws of the land, they should at all times give their first allegiance to God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 602.

Discussion Questions:

1. Ellen White was very active in the temperance movement in the United States. In fact, she was so strongly in favor of banning alcohol (prohibition) that she encouraged people to vote for prohibition—even if the vote was held on Sabbath. “‘Shall we vote for prohibition?’ she asked. ‘Yes, to a man, everywhere,’ she replied, ‘and perhaps I shall shock some of you if I say, If necessary, vote on the Sabbath day for prohibition if you cannot at any other time.’”—A. L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Lonely Years* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1984), vol. 1, p.160. Discuss the implications of her stance in the context of this week’s lesson.

2. Is it legitimate, or even a duty, for the church to speak out on some moral issues, even if this may draw the church into a political debate?

3. Though living at a time of great political corruption, Jesus said very little about the political issues of His day. What lessons can we draw from His example? What lessons should we not draw from that example?

Summary: Christians are citizens of the heavenly kingdom first, but they are most definitely also citizens of their own country and are to accept their part of the responsibility all citizens should share. The principle of rendering to Caesar what is his and to God what is God’s gives us a broad outline from which Christians are to work in whatever land they reside.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: John 10:16; John 13:34, 35; 1 Corinthians 13; 2 Pet. 1:12; Rev. 14:1-12.

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

However committed we should be to our message, we mustn’t read more into it than is there, such as the belief that we alone as Seventh-day Adventists are saved. That view has not, nor has ever been, the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: “We recognize those agencies that lift up Christ before men as a part of the divine plan for evangelization of the world, and we hold in high esteem Christian men and women in other communions who are engaged in winning souls to Christ.”—General Conference Working Policy (1999–2000), p. 494, Policy O 100, art. 1. The question for us this week is How should we relate to these other Christians, those who, for all we know, have been redeemed by the blood of Christ?

The Week at a Glance: If you don’t have to be an Adventist to be saved, why should we seek to reach other Christians with our beliefs? What advantages does our faith give us over those who might be Christians but in another denomination? How should we relate to other Christians?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 21.
For any of us to proclaim dogmatically who is or is not saved is to play God. It is to take prerogatives that belong only to Him. The Lord alone knows the heart; the Lord alone can judge motives; the Lord alone knows those who are His. As Seventh-day Adventists, we are called to preach our message to the world; we are not called to pass judgment upon who is or is not saved.

“God has children, many of them, in the Protestant churches, and a large number in the Catholic churches, who are more true to obey the light and to do [to] the very best of their knowledge than a large number among Sabbathkeeping Adventists who do not walk in the light.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 3, p. 386.

What are the following texts saying that help reinforce the point the Lord made in John 10:16?

Mark 9:38-40

Acts 10:35

2 Tim. 2:19

The fact is that, all over the world, the Lord has His faithful people, those who are living in accordance with all the light they have. Our job, in a sense, is to give them more light, to lead them into light that points more directly to Jesus Christ and the events surrounding His return. All people, no matter of what faith, need to hear what we have to say. How people respond is, basically, between them and God. All we can do is preach, teach, and reveal to people in our lives the love and grace of God.

If you don’t have to be an Adventist to be saved, then what’s the purpose of trying to evangelize? Keep in mind Revelation 14:12 as you answer.
**Key Text:** John 10:16.

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To understand that God has faithful people in other religions who are living up to all the light they have been given.
2. To reveal the importance of reaching out to others with the gospel message.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. The Other Sheep and Present Truth.
   A. Our commission is not to judge but to share the gospel.
   B. Only the Lord knows the heart.
   C. Seventh-day Adventists are not the only ones who will be saved.
   D. Our task is to share present truth with the world.
   E. The Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of Revelation 14 presents a unique message that no other denomination is preaching.

II. The Adventist Difference.
   A. The Advent message unveils the great controversy and where we are in history.
   B. The Advent message contains many vital truths, not the least of which includes light on the Sabbath, tithing, the state of the dead, earth’s final events, the health message, the sanctuary, the judgment, and, most importantly, the grace of Christ.

III. Loving Those Other Sheep.
   A. Love knows no boundaries.
   B. We are to reach out lovingly to members of other denominations.
   C. Seventh-day Adventist pastors should reach out to ministers of other denominations to share the gospel.

**Summary:** “As an earthly shepherd knows his sheep, so does the divine Shepherd know His flock, that are scattered throughout the world. . . .

“Every soul is as fully known to Jesus as if he were the only one for whom the Saviour died.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 479, 480.

**COMMENTARY**

I. Present Truth.

What is it that distinguishes Seventh-day Adventists from other Christians? Does it involve something specific to the seventh-day Sabbath, state of the dead, or vegetarianism, to name some well-known examples?

The answer to that would be a clear and definite Yes or No. All of these things do indeed distinguish (some) Seventh-day
Present Truth

How did you answer the last question in Sunday’s study? If you don’t have to be an Adventist to be saved, then why should we bother even trying to witness to Christians of other denominations? After all, salvation comes only from Jesus Christ and what He did for humanity at the Cross; it doesn’t come from joining any particular religious community, including our own. Thus, why bother witnessing to Christians in churches other than our own?

**Read** 2 Peter 1:12. What insights does that, though expressed in a context different from ours today, give us regarding our Seventh-day Adventist message and the need for us to spread it around the world?

The fact remains that no one else is preaching what we as Seventh-day Adventists are preaching. And this point becomes important, especially in the context of the last days, when the whole world is to be divided into those who fit the description in Revelation 14:12 and those who don’t.

**Read** Revelation 14:1-12. What’s at stake here?

As Seventh-day Adventists, we have been called to preach to everyone the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14. Christ’s other sheep need to know the things we know; they need to understand how the deep issues in the great controversy between Christ and Satan are going to be manifested at the close of time. We have been called to point these people not only to the texts that make prominent the “faith of Jesus” but to the “commandments of God,” with the special emphasis on the fourth commandment. Again, because we don’t know the hearts of anyone, we must tell everyone—“faithful Christians” in other denominations—the present-truth message as found in Revelation 14. They need to know what we know, especially as we near the closing crisis.

**Read** Revelation 18:4. Whom is the Lord calling out of Babylon, and why? How does this text help us better understand how we are to relate to faithful Christians of other denominations?
Adventists from people of other denominations, but in every instance one can find non-Adventists who practice or believe one or more of these things. So one would have to say that while these things may be important, it is not any one of them that definitively distinguishes Seventh-day Adventism.

What makes Seventh-day Adventists different from others who may or may not accept some or all of these practices/beliefs is the claim of present truth that Seventh-day Adventism holds as the last-day remnant church. We must therefore ask ourselves what present truth, or Present Truth, is and how it differs—if in fact it does—from past truth.

Does the idea of present truth imply some form of relativism? In other words, does it mean that what is true today might not have been true yesterday and might well not be true tomorrow? Could someone come forward with some truth that appears to contradict what we thought was truth yesterday?

The answer is a definite No—or Yes. Truth does not change in the sense that what is truth today does not flatly—or subtly, for that matter—contradict what was legitimately true yesterday. But on the other hand, our understanding of truth may—individually or collectively—be progressive. It may even show what we thought was truth previously to be false or mistaken. If you don’t believe it, observe how many people, with quite convincing passion, still insist that Sunday is the Christian Sabbath.

We can know the difference in the usual, nonesoteric way: study, prayer, and time with God. The truth does indeed set one free.

II. Useful Quotes on Present Truth.

“‘God has called His church in this day, as He called ancient Israel, to stand as a light in the earth. By the mighty cleaver of truth, the messages of the first, second and third angels [of Revelation 14], He has separated them from the churches and from the world to bring them into a sacred nearness to Himself. He has made them the depositories of His law, and has committed to them the great truths of prophecy for this time. Like the holy oracles committed to ancient Israel, these are a sacred trust to be communicated to the world.’”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers, p. 50, cited in Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2000), p. 580.

“There are many precious truths contained in the Word of God, but it is ‘present truth’ that the flock needs now. I have seen the danger of the messengers running off from the important points of present truth, to dwell upon subjects that are not calculated to unite the flock and sanctify the soul.”—Ellen G. White, Early Writings, p. 63.

“The revealed truths of former times were of divine origin, and were sufficient for the time in which they were given. But the new historical context, in which the Messiah had fulfilled his mission on
However important the issues surrounding the mark of the beast (as depicted in Revelation 14), our message isn’t just limited to warnings about end-time persecution. There’s so much we have been given that can be a blessing in a very practical and personal way now. That’s why we must share it, even with Christians of other denominations.

Below are some texts that are tied in with our message. Write down some of the benefits we have, here and now, from understanding these important truths:

Exod. 20:8-11

Eccles. 9:10

Mal. 3:8-10

Rom. 8:34; Heb. 8:1, 2

1 Cor. 6:19

Though, of course, some of these truths are understood, to some degree, by various Christians, we alone have them tied nicely into a complete package. And, indeed, these special Adventist truths don’t depict mere marginal differences with other Christians. They represent important biblical concepts, and people who do not know about them miss out on something that can make a major difference in their Christian experience. The Adventist message helps us to know where we are in human history. It unveils the great-controversy perspective, which shows us the larger picture of what God is doing for our rebellious planet. It tells us about the ongoing heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ and the hope He presents for us as erring sinners.

The Adventist message also helps us to follow through on our commitment to Christ in very concrete ways: in finding physical and spiritual rest on God’s holy day, in living a life of faithful stewardship of all that has been entrusted to us, and in learning how to take care of our bodies while we’re still in this mortal clay.

If asked by a Christian of another denomination how the Adventist faith is different from what most other evangelical Christians believe, what would you say?
earth and had ascended to heaven, made it vitally important to be ‘established’ in this additional truth. Former truth was no longer sufficient. The expression ‘present truth’ implies truth that is peculiarly appropriate in the present historical situation.

“In a similar sense, Seventh-day Adventists sometimes refer to the three angels’ messages (Rev. 14:6-12) as ‘present truth,’ thereby characterizing them as God’s appointed message for the last days, immediately prior to the second coming of Christ.”—“Present Truth,”

Inductive Bible Study


1. Officially, the Seventh-day Adventist Church always has recognized that other Christian denominations have some valuable things to offer. Discuss whether or not the recognition that other Christians have something of value to contribute causes the unique Seventh-day Adventist message to be devalued.

2. While we are told not to judge others, we have a nearly irresistible tendency to do so. Discuss if it is ever proper to draw conclusions about another person’s spiritual state.

3. Some people choose to remain ignorant about God’s salvation. What are the consequences of willful ignorance? What benefits does a person gain from receiving as full a knowledge of God as possible even in this present age?

4. Religion has been responsible for conflicts between groups of people. Discuss how Christians might contribute to such conflicts.

5. How can we develop the ability to discern other’s needs without feeling superior to them? Why do we not have the right to feel superior?

6. It is natural for people who share the same religious beliefs to associate with one another. Why is it healthy to do so? In light of this week’s lesson, when do such associations become elitist?

7. In the world of the apostles, why were Jews and Gentiles estranged? What cultural groups are estranged today, and why? What implications does such alienation have regarding the spread of the gospel? What principles do we find in the story of Cornelius’s conversion that can help us with the issues that arise from converting estranged groups of people?
The Adventist Difference: Part 2

Just because someone is a Christian doesn’t mean there’s no more truth for him or her to learn. On the contrary. Many of Paul’s letters were written to Christians, often on the assumption that these people already knew the Lord and were already in the faith. Indeed, most of the New Testament was written to those already in the faith. Nevertheless, that didn’t stop Paul (and the others) from giving the churches more light.

Read Romans 1:1-7, Galatians 1:1-5, Ephesians 1:1-4, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. How do these texts help affirm the above paragraph?

As we relate to other Christians, we must remember: The issue isn’t that we judge who’s saved and who isn’t (remember the Ellen White quote in Sunday’s section); rather, the issue is, Do we have something to say, not just to the world at large but to other Christians? The answer, of course, is that we most definitely do.

For instance, millions of Christians believe the dead go right to heaven or right to hell immediately at death. Others believe in purgatory, where the dead are purged from worldliness before entering into heaven. Most of these people have no protection, therefore, against spiritualism of any kind, and who knows how many fear that right now some loved ones are suffering the flames of eternal torment?

Others believe final events will unfold with a massive Mideast war, in which some future antichrist power will make a pact with the Jews in Israel, an event that will begin a seven-year tribulation period, before which all true Christians are taken to heaven. Most who believe this way have no concept as to how final events regarding Rome, America, and the issue of the Sabbath will unfold.

All over the world, many Christians have no knowledge of health principles; thus, they eat, drink, and live like so much of the non-Christian world.

Millions of others believe salvation can be found in Jesus only through the mediation of their church body and that they must perform various works in order for the merits of Christ to be applied to them.

Most of the Christian world totally ignore not just the seventh-day Sabbath but the whole concept of a serious rest day. Not only do they miss out on the spiritual blessings of the Sabbath but they also miss out on the physical renewal that Sabbath keeping offers.

What other things do we as Seventh-day Adventists teach that could be a blessing, even now, to other Christians?
“People have always asked the same basic question. What is the meaning of the world and our lives in it? Christians claim that the faith of the Bible gives true and satisfying answers to this question and the many that flow from it. Christianity is not just true in what it teaches about God and salvation. It is also true to the way things are.”—*Eerdmans Handbook to Christian Belief*, p. 38.

“We should . . . keep in mind that new truth does not invalidate established truth. What it does is add new dimensions and luster.”—B. B. Beach and John Graz, *101 Questions Adventists Ask* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 2000), p. 33.

**III. The Bible on Present Truth.**

“So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have” (*2 Pet. 1:12, NIV*).

“To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn” (*Isa. 8:19, NIV*).

**Witnessing**

Cornelius, a Roman officer, was a God-fearing man. He and his household regularly prayed to God and helped those in need. But Cornelius did not know all there was to know about salvation until the angel of the Lord led him to Peter. After meeting Cornelius and learning that he was an upright man, Peter proclaimed, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him” (*Acts 10:34, 35*).

Peter then shared the full gospel story with Cornelius and those of his household. Once Cornelius heard the words of Peter, the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius. There were other non-Jews present who also received the Holy Spirit, just as the Jews had on the Day of Pentecost.

There are many Christians of other denominations who love and serve the Lord. They may not yet know or understand the gospel in its fullness, but they live according to what they do know. The Holy Spirit patiently works with them, leading them to know His complete will. Those who are sincere will in time come to a full acceptance of the truth. Discuss ways we can be a light to our brothers and sisters in Christ who are not from our fold. Why is it so important for us to live by the truth, in addition to knowing it?
Love One Another

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34, 35).

Read the above quote, the words of Jesus. How are all to know who are Christ’s disciples? How well have His disciples followed that command?

There’s no question: Christians are to show their love to one another. Sadly, that has hardly been the case. History is filled with examples not just of hatred between different churches but of violence, as well.

Whatever the immediate context of Christ’s words, we can hardly believe they meant we were to love only those of our own denomination, whatever that denomination or church body happens to be. Love should know no denominational boundaries and certainly not be limited only to those who know the truth. Indeed, there’s no more powerful witness for truth than the love compelled and generated by that truth.

Of course, loving someone isn’t the same as agreeing to his or her beliefs; rather, it’s acknowledging the value of this person in the sight of God and the commonality we have as followers of Jesus, however different our expressions might at the present time be.

As Seventh-day Adventists, with the understanding we have been given of God’s love for us, particularly as revealed in the context of present truth, we should be the most loving of all Christians. And that’s because to whom much has been given much is expected, and because we have been given much, we should give much, not just to the world at large but to our brothers and sisters in other churches, as well. And nothing we can give means anything without love.

Examine your own relationship with Christians in other churches. Do you look down on them? Do you see anything in them that you could learn from them? Do you feel a need to tell them what we know? Based on what we’ve studied this week, what changes, if any, in your attitude toward them should you make?
**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** The blue-footed booby nests on the ground on various islands in the Pacific Ocean. The mother booby forms a ring of droppings around the nest to define the boundaries of her responsibility. Any chick outside the ring is an outsider and is considered to be another mother’s responsibility. When food gets scarce, the largest chick often pushes the weaker chicks out of the nest. The outsiders die of starvation. (See James A. and Priscilla Tucker, *Glimpses of God’s Love*, vol. 3, July 7.)

Church members who make the family of faith unpleasant are like the selfish booby chick. How can Adventist Christians provide a nurturing nesting place for Christians of other faiths?

**Thought Questions:**
1. Every member is to be a shepherd (*Matt. 28:19, 20; John 21:16, 17*). Yet, Jesus also calls us His sheep. How can *sheep* also be *shepherds*?

2. Based on the duties of a shepherd and the characteristics of sheep, what level of care is needed for a church to be a safe haven?

3. What other things besides shepherd and sheep can we use to describe the task of those who “go” (*Matt. 28:19, 20*)?

**Application Questions:**
1. How can Adventist Christians maintain their dress code without condemning the dress code of other Christians?

2. When should an Adventist Christian go beyond modeling Christian dress to a more pointed teaching of Christ’s standards?

3. It is relatively nonthreatening for Adventists to dialogue with other Christians about outlandish styles of dress on which most Christians agree. However, what guidelines can you list to guide Adventists in honestly conversing about more controversial topics, such as entertainment, diet, and doctrine?

4. As Adventists, we are especially mindful of the significance of the times in which we live. How should this awareness affect the encounters we have with people as we travel, take part in community events, sports gatherings, etc.? What differences should there be in our approach and content between long-term relationships and one-time or chance encounters with other Christians?
**Further Study:** Ellen G. White has a lot to say about our attitude to other Christians. See, for instance, *Evangelism*, section 17, “Laboring for Special Classes,” pp. 552–586.

“Our ministers should seek to come near to the ministers of other denominations. Pray for and with these men, for whom Christ is interceding. A solemn responsibility is theirs. As Christ’s messengers, we should manifest a deep, earnest interest in these shepherds of the flock.” —Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 78.

“You may have opportunity to speak in other churches. In improving these opportunities, remember the words of the Saviour, ‘Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.’ Do not arouse the malignity of the enemy by making denunciatory speeches. Thus you will close doors against the entrance of truth. Clear-cut messages are to be borne. But guard against arousing antagonism. There are many souls to be saved. Restrain all harsh expressions. In word and deed be wise unto salvation, representing Christ to all with whom you come in contact. Let all see that your feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace and good will to men. Wonderful are the results we shall see if we enter into the work imbued with the Spirit of Christ. Help will come in our necessity if we carry the work forward in righteousness, mercy, and love. Truth will triumph, and bear away the victory.” —Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, pp. 563, 564.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Imagine that you are given the pulpit in another church; it will be your only opportunity to preach there. What would you say, what wouldn’t you say, and why?

2. Is it wrong to worship with Christians in their church on Sunday, or not? Justify your answer.

**Summary:** All our relationships with other Christians should be marked by warm respect for them as brothers and sisters in the Lord. But, at the same time, we must also be sure of our reason for existence as Seventh-day Adventists, and we must be ready, when the right opportunity arises, to tell them the things we believe that they need to know. And, just as important, they need to see in our lives the reality of our experience with Christ, a reality that will be manifested by our unconditional love.
How to Relate to Non-Christians

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 1:18-20; 2:14-16; Phil. 2:5-11; Rev. 14:6, 7.

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

Many people today no longer want to hear about absolute truth. The various religions, including the Christian faith, are seen as equally valid ways to reach the beyond. Many claim that, in essence, we all worship the same God—we simply have different historically and culturally conditioned ways of doing so. Everyone should be allowed to have his or her own truth. And no belief system should claim superiority over another.

As Christians, of course, we reject that concept. The very nature of our Christianity demands we do. We maintain that the religion of Christ is unique and that we must continue to call people everywhere to become His disciples.

The question, then, remains for us: How should we relate to those who are not of the Christian faith? This week we look at some broad principles regarding this important topic.

The Week at a Glance: Why, as Christians, must we reject the notion that all religions are valid? How should we treat non-Christians? What’s the best way to witness to them? Why should we witness to them? To whom does the three angels’messages go?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 28.
Incurably Religious

All through human history, in almost every culture, in every age, even in the most adverse and trying conditions, humans have had belief in some sort of god or gods. Through the centuries the question has been asked: Where does this belief come from? Was religion “invented” or “discovered”? Does humanity’s belief in God originate in humanity itself, as a projection of some inner need? Has humankind always been religious? And if so, why so?

As Christians, we believe that religion originated with God, who has revealed Himself to us in various ways, the greatest revelation being that of Jesus Christ coming in the flesh, where He revealed to us the love and self-sacrificing character of the Lord.

Not everyone, though, has heard or known the good news of the love and character of our Lord. And yet, God has not forsaken these people, either. Remember, at the Cross, Christ died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2); His death, by default, excluded no one (John 3:16); He suffered death for every person (Heb. 2:9). No one was left out, not even those who have never heard, nor will ever hear, of Christ’s death, at least in this life. Why would the Lord die in their behalf if they weren’t, somehow, offered the option of salvation?

Read Romans 1:18-20, 2:14-16. What do these texts tell us about those who haven’t heard directly about Jesus and the salvation He offers? Are they still accountable to God, and, if so, why?

Those who consciously turn their backs on God do so at their eternal risk, that’s for certain. But many have always lived in darkness through no fault of their own. Yet, even these people have had a limited revelation of God and, thus, will be held responsible only for what they knew in their deepest of hearts.

English poet Samuel Coleridge once suggested that instead of locking criminals in jail, the offenders should be placed in nature, where, seeing the natural world’s “soft influences,” they would turn from their evil ways. However nice an idealized and romantic view of the natural world this is, what are its flaws? What are the limits of what we can know about God, truth, and morality from nature alone?
Key Text: Acts 4:12.

Teachers Aims:

1. To capture the essence of Jesus’ ministry, which involves selfless service to one’s fellow human beings.
2. To understand how we, as Jesus’ followers, are to relate to non-Christians.

Lesson Outline:

I. Innately Religious.
   A. Humanity’s belief in God and its inner need to worship Him were put within the soul by God at Creation.
   B. Many deviate from true religion to the worship of other gods.

II. There Is Only One God and Savior!
   A. Adventist Christians must reject the postmodern worldview of different truths for different folks.
   B. With sensitivity and respect for the differences of others, Christians must seek to introduce the believers in Mohammed, Buddha, and Confucius to Jesus, the Savior of the world.

III. Christ’s Methods Worked.
   A. Jesus met people where they were emotionally, spiritually, educationally, and financially.
   B. The methods of sharing the same message often vary in order to make the presentation more relevant to the people being reached.
   C. All nations and all faiths need to hear the truth as it is in Jesus.

Summary: All humans are the result of a loving Creator-God. As such, His desire is that all learn of Him and follow Him. Seventh-day Adventists have humbly accepted Jesus’ challenge found in Matthew 28:19, 20 to “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations.”

COMMENTARY

I. Christian Uniqueness and Non-Christian Religions.

I have known many people who were raised as Christians, with little or no exposure to what other religions teach and believe. Coming from such a background, it may be a shock to discover: (a) that adherents of other faiths may believe just as strongly in their own religion as the average Christian believes in Christianity, possibly more so; and (b) that these religions often do teach many positive precepts and high moral standards. The adherents of other faiths may even feel it is their duty to convert the Christian to what they see as the true faith
The Universal Claims

**Read** John 14:6. What is Jesus saying? Why would many people, especially in today’s world, find such words so hard to accept?

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The religion of the Bible knows nothing of the notion of relativism, of each person seeking his or her own version of truth. There is only one God, one Creator, one Redeemer, one Lawgiver, and one means of salvation. Given the very nature of what we believe as Christians—that all the world is fallen into sin and that at the Cross Jesus Christ bore the sins of all people upon Himself—it’s hard to see how there can be different truths for different folk. The very claims of the Bible regarding Creation, Redemption, sin, are universal, encompassing every human being. Given these claims, then, it’s not realistic to assume that every other spiritual or religious path is valid, as long as those who are on these paths act from a sincere and loving heart.

**Look up** the following texts. What point do they make about the universality of the claims of the Bible? *Gen. 1:1, Rom. 3:23, 5:12, Heb. 2:9, Rev. 20:13.*

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What all this means, then, is that we, as Christians, should preach to non-Christians, sharing with them what we believe. If Christianity is true, then other religions have to be false. This doesn’t mean there isn’t some good in these faiths, and we certainly aren’t in a position to judge the hearts of others, whatever their beliefs. Instead, because of the universal claims of Christianity, we must, in meekness, humility, and love tell others the good news of a loving God who sent His own Son into human flesh and in that flesh ransomed the world from sin. The claims of the Cross included everyone; everyone, therefore, must be told about it.

**How do you respond to someone who makes the claim, “Well, your religion is just your truth; I have my own truth”?** What’s wrong with that statement?
in the same way that Christians feel that they must evangelize the world for Christ.

All of this is very confusing to someone who may have been taught that non-Christians—or even merely non-Adventists—are ignorant of their own religions and are simply waiting for someone to come along and show them the Truth and free them from their dead, dreary legalism. What a shock to find that one’s audience is not applauding: they know their faith and like it. It answers their questions, and they feel they can answer your questions. What does it mean?

First of all, non-Christian religions often contain some very positive things. They have the best—and occasionally the worst, it is true—that humanity has to offer. Compassion can be found in Buddhism. Fierce dedication to the one God can be found in Islam. Nonviolence and vegetarianism can be found in Hinduism. Sublime contemplation of the divine and lofty ethical teaching can be found in all of them. But again, this is the best that humanity has to offer. It cannot offer what humanity does not have.

Human beings can preach higher morality and accurately grasp what it is, but they can’t live according to it consistently. Most human attempts to live a good life, according to one of the many moral or religious codes available, end up as hypocrisy to one degree or another, because we simply can’t do it. We also know very well what the problem is, at least in general outline: We are disconnected from the source of goodness. But we can’t seem to reconnect ourselves by means of any of these human-made paths.

So what is it that Christianity has that these other religions and codes don’t have? Christ. It is Christ who enables us to be good and who offers us the only way out of the prospect of eternal death.

II. Useful Quotes on Christian Uniqueness and Other Religions.

“What Christians believe is very different from what is believed by the adherents of other religions. But this element of search in the hope of finding is something they have in common with all others who in any way at all share in the same search, and are sincere in their desire and willingness to learn. It is this common element that makes it possible to speak of Christianity among the religions of the world.”—Eerdmans Handbook to Christian Belief, p. 192.

“If you are a Christian, you are free to think that all these religions, even the queerest ones, contain at least some hint of the truth. When I was an atheist I had to try to persuade myself that most of the human race have always been wrong about the question that mattered to them most; when I became a Christian I was able to take a more liberal view. But, of course, being a Christian does mean thinking that where Christianity differs from other religions, Christianity is right and they are wrong.”—C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (London, U.K.: Fontana, 1952), p. 39.
Christ—the Only Way (Acts 4:12).

It is often pointed out that other religions also have their heroes, just as Christianity has Christ. And, indeed, we must have great respect for Muhammad, who insisted—in a highly polytheistic society—upon the worship of one God. Who can’t help respecting and admiring the Gautama Buddha’s compassion and sensitivity to human suffering? And there’s much good, too, in the profound teachings of Confucius.

But these people do not begin to compare with Jesus Christ, not in who they were nor in what they accomplished, nor even claimed to accomplish, for the world. To suggest that Jesus and these other people are simply different versions of good men teaching good things is to pervert the basic teaching of Scripture grossly. The Bible teaches that Jesus is the Savior of the world. Either we accept the claim fully, or we reject it fully. It’s hard to see, with such a claim, how there can be any middle ground, any compromise.

**What fundamental truth must we recognize when comparing Christianity with other religions?** Acts 4:12; see also Isa. 45:5.

It’s precisely because of the universality of what Christ has done that, as Christians—having now been redeemed by Jesus (Eph. 1:7, Col. 1:14, Heb. 9:12)—we should be motivated to tell others in order that they, by faith, can share in the promises of God made to them, as well.

“How then should we relate to those of other religions? First of all, we must treat them as fellow human beings—with respect and honor. . . . We need to approach them with openness, ready to listen and learn. In our finiteness we do not have all that we need at any point in our experience. Different points of emphasis may help to strengthen our own experience. Nor should we apologize for what we believe or our conviction that we have truth in having Jesus Christ. Never should we hesitate to witness to another. But our efforts must always reflect humility and avoid a spirit of triumphalism or a subtle attitude of imperialism.”—S. Kubo, *The God of Relationships* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assn., 1993), p. 138.

**How do you show respect for people and for their personal faith and integrity, while at the same time rejecting their beliefs? Or can you?**
III. The Bible on Christian Uniqueness.

“’I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (John 14:6, NIV).

“Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: ‘Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: To an Unknown God. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you’” (Acts 17:22, 23, NIV).

Inductive Bible Study


1. Is it possible for someone to attain eternal life in the total absence of knowledge about Christ? If so, why should we attempt to acquaint people with Christ?

2. Some people consciously reject Christ. But how might it be possible to reject Christ unconsciously, while still thinking we are following Him?

3. The very nature of Christianity teaches that it is not sufficient for someone to believe sincerely in something that is wholly or partly false. Why is sincerity not enough? Should it not be what is in someone’s heart that counts?

4. What should our attitude be toward teachers and prophets of other religions who taught good things and held high moral standards? Were they inspired in any real sense, or were they uniformly deceivers? What, if anything, can we learn from them?

5. To some extent, we have to meet people where they are in order to share the gospel with them. To what extent can we do this before we compromise our beliefs?

6. Acts 17 is about fitting the method used to preach the gospel to the methods of communication in a particular society. Have your class discuss why or why not the following methods of soul winning are effective for your part of the world: passing out tracts on a street corner; holding revival meetings in a church; conducting a series of health seminars; sponsoring an evangelistic series on TV; sponsoring a marriage seminar in the community; conducting Bible studies in homes; doing house-to-house visitation; putting Jesus Saves bumper stickers on your car; conducting a Vacation Bible School program.
All Things to All Men

Though the truths of what we believe are eternal and unchanging, the context in which we spread those truths is always changing. The approach one would take with an Indian shaman wouldn’t be the same as with a New Age German banker; the witness to a Canadian Inuit living in the far end of the Yukon wouldn’t be the same as with a Singaporean business executive. Though the message is the same, the methods often vary.


“More than 2 billion of the world’s population will hear the gospel only if cross-cultural missionaries will make themselves servants and become all things to them. From tribes in Africa to heavy-metal rockers in the ‘jungles’ of New York City, from the sophisticated professional to the troubled teenager next door, people desperately need to hear the gospel in a context they can understand. Who will humble themselves and become incarnate as slaves for the sake of these souls? Who will go through the hard, risky business of contextualization so others may clearly hear the gospel?”—Jon Dybdahl, “Cross-Cultural Adaptation: How to Contextualize the Gospel,” Ministry (November 1992), p. 17.

In what perfect way was this principle of reaching people where they are realized in the ministry of our Savior? Phil. 2:5-11.

Christ came to meet us where we are. He assumed human form. He expressed Himself in human language. He became one of us. If, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the church wants to reach the modern world with the message of Christ, it will have to meet people where they are and speak the language of the people of today and not of a century ago.
Witnessing

Jesus was always aware of the people around Him and of the influence He had on them. Every act, word, glance, and even His silence was designed to point them to the truth. Christ met people where they were. He sought to meet their needs, whether those needs were physical, emotional, social, or psychological. Once their personal needs had been met, He could then reach them spiritually. If they were hungry or sick, He fed and healed them. *(See Mark 8:1-8, Luke 8:40-55.)* If they were bereaved, He comforted them. *(See Luke 8:49, 50.)* If they were lonely, He befriended them. *(See John 4:4-42.)* If they were torment, He delivered them. *(See Mark 9:14-29.)* He also wove everyday experiences into stories that conveyed the truth. *(See Luke 15, 16.)* People could relate to these stories, because they were part of their own experiences.

How can we meet non-Christians where they are? Have your class discuss specific ways to find common ground with others, ways to help them fulfill their needs and their pure desires and interests.

Also discuss the role that our lifestyle, words, and acts of kindness have in witnessing to non-Christians. So often we think of lifestyle as what we eat, wear, etc. However, what does Romans 12:9-21 include in the area of Christian lifestyle? What principle underlies these verses, and how can that principle in itself be a witness to non-Christians? Each verse in this section contains one aspect of the Christian lifestyle. Discuss each one of these aspects as it relates to witnessing to non-Christians.
Christ’s Method Alone

We’ve tried to show this week a crucial point regarding the universality of our faith; we can’t be true to what we believe without believing that these truths that offer us so much hope offer that same hope to every other human being. The nature of the claims cry out for us to tell them to others. Indeed, that’s an essential component of who we are as Seventh-day Adventists. It’s also why, through the grace of God, we are in almost every country of the world.

Read Revelation 14:6, 7, the first angel’s message. What does it tell us about whom we are to preach to?

That’s every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, which would include those of every faith. Our commission is set before us in no uncertain terms.

At the same time, we must remember that no matter where people live, no matter their religious faith, no matter their beliefs, we are all the same, beings created in the image of God, beings who are sinners, beings who have basic needs. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we believe that the light that God has given us can help meet those needs better than anything else the world has to offer. The better we seek to meet those needs, the more we can reveal to the non-Christian world the love and character of God, and the more effective our witness will be.

Look at this quote from Ellen White: “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’ ”—The Ministry of Healing, p. 143. Why would an approach like this be effective for whatever people group we were seeking to reach?

The bottom line is that we live in a world filled with hurting, suffering people; the good news is that we worship and know the Lord, who cares about these people and their suffering. As Adventists, we can minister to them, even from our own personal sufferings, and point them to something better in this life, as well as to the only One who can give them eternal life. This is our calling; to do anything else would be unfaithful to that calling.

Talk to those in your church about ways to reach out to the non-Christian faiths in your own community. What practical things could you do to make a positive impact for the Lord?
Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: A wood tick waits months for a feeling of warmth, the signal to attach itself to a food source. “How long the people of the world wait for the warmth of Jesus’ love—the presentation of which can come only from His followers living His life and spreading His warmth throughout the world.”—James A. and Priscilla Tucker, Glimpses of God’s Love, vol. 3, Aug. 15.

The difference in Adventists reaching out to non-Christians is that we supply the warmth while they feed not upon us but upon Christ.

Thought Questions:
1. How different would be the attitude and effect of Adventist witnesses if they really understood their role in the spiritual food chain for the world?
2. How can a person honor someone he or she does not respect?
3. Ignoring a child is one of the cruelest forms of abuse. How would you spiritually nurture one of God’s untidy adult children? Also address the physical, mental, and emotional needs.

Application Questions:
1. How can you be the instrument for correcting myths held by Christians of other faiths and draw them closer to the truth?
2. Use the following activity to check your outreach options: Trace the outline of your hand on a piece of white paper. On the palm you drew, list your spiritual gifts and talents. On each finger write ways of making connections with non-Christians that are open to you because of your spiritual gifts. On the thumb write your prejudices that could sabotage what you have written on your fingertips. Write the words of James 1:5 beneath the hand. Include these words of wisdom in your daily prayers.
Further Study: “Even among the heathen are those who have cherished the spirit of kindness; before the words of life had fallen upon their ears, they have befriended the missionaries, even ministering to them at the peril of their own lives. Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 638.

“There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit.”—Ellen G. White, Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 458.

Discussion Questions:

1. Look at that last quote from Ellen White. How can your church, as a whole, better manifest those principles in your community?

2. To what extent do believers hold the eternal destiny of non-believers in their hands? Why did God choose to involve human beings in His plan of salvation?

Summary: As Christians, we do not believe that our faith is just one path of many that ultimately leads to God. The Bible makes it clear that there’s only one path, and that’s through Jesus. Thus, it becomes crucial that we witness to those of every other faith, and the most effective way to do that is through kind, loving, self-sacrificing service. That’s how we are to relate to non-Christians. It’s also the essence of who we should be as Seventh-day Adventists.
Loving Our Enemies?

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Jer. 31:31-34, Matt. 5:44, 6:12, Luke 6:27-36, 23:1-34.

Memory Text: “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18, NIV).

Some people have or claim to have only friends and no enemies; some have no friends but only enemies. Most of us are somewhere in the middle: We have friends, but we also do not get along with everybody. This may seem a simple fact of life, but, as Christians, we cannot simply shrug our shoulders if our relationship with some others is disrupted or if we harbor feelings of distrust, even antipathy, toward some people. Nor should it leave us indifferent if some people have problems with us. The Christian message of love has relevance for our relationship with those whom we dislike or, even worse, might even feel hateful toward.

We are admonished to “turn from evil and do good” and to “seek peace and pursue it” in every way we can (Ps. 34:14, NIV). Though it is important not to forget the larger picture, this week we’ll focus on ourselves and the way we relate to those with whom we have (shall we put it kindly?) unresolved issues.

The Week at a Glance: What does Christ’s example on the cross tell us about loving our enemies? How can we love our enemies? Why should we do so? Why must we forgive before we can love?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 4.
Jesus and His Enemies

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Read Luke 23:1-34, reviewing the events that lead to Christ uttering these incredible words. In light of all that was happening to Jesus, how He was being treated, how He was being spoken to, how He was being mocked, how He was being lied about, what powerful lesson can we learn from this example regarding how we treat our enemies?

Unrewarded, unaccepted, reviled, mocked, tortured, Jesus has every reason to hate those who treated Him as they did. And yet, amid His own sufferings, amid His own abasement, Jesus—forgetting self—prays for those who would, by most standards, be deemed His enemies. What an amazing testimony to God’s love! What a powerful rebuke to our own pride, envy, and hateful attitudes toward others!

Some of history’s cruelest and meanest characters have been able to manifest kindness and love to those who were kind and loving to them. Indeed, almost anyone can do that. But we see Jesus here living out a principle that reflects something greater: unconditional love, even to those who hate Him back. It’s hard to imagine a more powerful witness to the world of the character of our God and His power to work in our lives.

This attitude, in a sense, reveals the essence of the Cross. “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Rom. 5:10). In other words, despite our attitude toward God, He poured Himself out for us through the life and suffering of Jesus. And He did this even while we were sinners, even while we were alienated and estranged from Him.

With such an example before us, how could we do anything other than, through God’s grace, seek to manifest that same principle ourselves?

Go back over Luke 23:1-34. In what similar ways have you been treated unfairly? How did you respond? What does your response, in contrast to Christ’s, tell you about your own personal need to grow in grace?
Key Text: Romans 12:18.

Teachers Aims:
1. To exhort us as Christians to love our enemies.
2. To understand how to follow Jesus’ example of forgiveness.

Lesson Outline:
I. Love My Enemy!
   A. Jesus is our example of how to love our enemies.
   B. Jesus had every reason to hate those who mistreated Him, but He didn’t.
   C. It is easy to love the lovable who return our love. On the other hand, it is more difficult to love the unlovable, especially when they return love with hate, indifference, or cruelty.

II. Faith, Grace, and Forgiveness.
   A. Only by surrendering self to the Lord will we be able, by God’s grace, to love, pray for, and do good unto our enemies.
   B. The heart of the sinner cannot, of itself, love its enemy.
   C. Loving an enemy requires forgiveness.
   D. To refuse to forgive suggests that one has never been forgiven.

III. Why You Should Love Your Enemy.
   A. God requires His followers to love one another, including one’s enemies.
   B. To love and to forgive our enemies is good medicine for the soul.
   C. Loving our enemies presents a powerful and attractive witness to the world.

Summary: Proverbs 17:22 says, “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.” Love and forgiveness together play an integral part in cultivating a merry heart. God knows that our happiness depends upon our obedience to His commands. That is why loving and forgiving our enemies are cornerstones of His commandments.

Commentary
I. Loving Your Enemies.
   Why is religion—which is nothing if not an attempt to reach a higher standard that usually includes peace and forgiveness—often such a source of conflict? If we are truly living a Christian life, why should we have enemies at all? What does our choice of enemies—or our enemies’ choice of us—say about ourselves?

   As Christians, we are going to make some enemies among people who simply resent us for our Christianity. Paul warned us that all who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). But most often, we probably are at least fifty percent responsible for most of our mutually hostile relationships. Ego and self-will on the

Ghandi (1869–1948) once said, “It is easy enough to be friendly to one’s friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion.”—Non-Violence in Peace and War (New York: New Directions Pub. Corp., 1965), vol. 2, sect. 248. These words sound like an echo from the One who practiced, even more perfectly than Ghandi, what He preached.

**What basic principle was given by Christ, which must govern our relationship with those who have turned against us?** Matt. 5:44, Luke 6:27-36.

Having grown up in Galilee, an area renowned for its political unrest, and living in a land under occupation by a ruthless foreign power, Christ knew about civil unrest, war, tyranny, and enemies. When He began His work and challenged the beliefs and practices of the religious elite of His days, He inevitably made many bitter enemies. But He did, indeed, love His enemies, even when He was brutally arrested, flogged, and nailed to a cross (Luke 23:34).

**Review the following texts, which spell out in more detail what loving our enemies implies:** Proverbs 24:17, 25:21, Matthew 5:38-42, Ephesians 4:26.

“We are to love our enemies with the same love that Christ manifested toward His enemies by giving His life to save them. Many may say, ‘This is a hard commandment; for I want to keep just as far as I can from my enemies.’ But acting in accordance with your own inclination would not be carrying out the principles that our Saviour has given. ‘Do good,’ He says, ‘to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. . . .’ This scripture illustrates one phase of Christian perfection. While we were yet enemies of God, Christ gave His life for us. We are to follow His example.”—Ellen G. White, Medical Ministry, pp. 253, 254.

**We clearly have been told by inspiration to love our enemies. Now, if someone were to ask you, “How do you love your enemies?” what would you respond?**

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part of all interested parties can usually be seen to be at the root of conflicts. This is especially true of conflicts within the church or other religious conflicts, which are usually about “my religion” or “my theology,” rather than just about religion or theology.

In any such situation, it is up to at least one of the combatants—assuming one or both claim to be followers of Christ—to neutralize the other’s hostility with love, or at least nonhostility. It is easy enough to see what others are doing wrong and to blame our negative relationships on baseless persecution on the part of others. But Christ calls us to see through our own ego games and see that we are—at least part of the time—the problem. Ironically, our enemies may be the very ones who can help us in this, yet another reason to love your enemies.

II. Useful Quotes on Loving Your Enemies.

“The word translated love [in Matt. 5:44] originally meant ‘to welcome, entertain, be well pleased, contented.’ . . . In the N.T., however, it denotes the love of God for man and of man for God (I John 3-5) and the benevolent lovingkindness which seeks the material and spiritual good of others (I Cor. 13). When Jesus commands love of enemies, he thinks primarily of personal relationships and perhaps also of the relationships of small groups. Such love is the supreme test of the religious man’s character.”—The Interpreter’s Bible (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1951), vol. 7, p. 303.

“But love, in the Christian sense, does not mean an emotion. It is a state not of the feelings but of the will; that state of the will which we have naturally about ourselves, and must learn to have about other people.

“I pointed out in the chapter on Forgiveness that our love for ourselves does not mean that we like ourselves. It means that we wish our own good. In the same way Christian Love (or Charity) for our neighbours is quite a different thing from liking or affection. We ‘like’ or are ‘fond of’ some people, and not of others. It is important to understand that this natural ‘liking’ is neither a sin nor a virtue, any more than your likes and dislikes in food are a sin or a virtue. It is just a fact. But, of course, what we do about it is either sinful or virtuous.”—C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, p. 113.

“Christ is not dealing with abstractions here. Being like the Father means loving one’s enemies, just as God loves His enemies. After all, doesn’t He provide sunshine and rain for evil people, just as He does for the good? Anybody, even a tax collector, can love his or her friends. God demands supernatural love for all people. Just as the Father so loved the world that He gave His Son to die for people who were ungodly and His enemies . . . so are Christians to love even those who despitefully use them. This is the ultimate in God-likeness.”—George R. Knight, Matthew: The Gospel of the Kingdom (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 1994), p. 95.
Increase Our Faith

For the past two days, we’ve looked at one of the loftiest principles in Scripture: love, not for those who love us back but for our enemies. We have not only Christ’s words to that effect but His example, too, manifested most clearly at the Cross, unquestionably the greatest revelation of that principle ever revealed in the universe.

It’s one thing to be told what to do, to know what to do, or even to want to do it; it’s another, however, to do it. Here, perhaps more than anywhere else in our lives, we need power from above.

Read Matthew 18:21, 22 and Luke 17:3-5. What question do the disciples ask Jesus? How does He answer? How do they respond to His answer?

“Lord, increase our faith.” Who of us couldn’t relate to their request? Jesus here points them to a standard they are not used to, a standard that goes beyond what even many of the most forgiving people would aspire to—which is why their response is so sensible. They want to do this but realize they need something more than what they have in themselves at the moment to be able to do it. Thus, their appeal to Jesus for help.

Of course, faith is a gift (Eph. 2:8), but there’s so much we can do to receive the gift, to multiply the gift, to strengthen the gift. Here’s where a life of prayer, of devotion, and of meditation upon Christ all play a crucial role. Only as we surrender ourselves to the Lord, only as we reckon ourselves dead to self and sin (Rom. 6:10, 11), only as we allow the Lord to work in us (vs. 4), will we by God’s grace be able to love our enemies, to pray for them, and to do good to them. Left to their own, our sinful, vengeful hearts will never allow us to love our enemies. That’s why we need to surrender constantly to the Lord, and we can do that only by a conscious choice on our part to make such a surrender.

Who are your enemies? What makes them your enemies? If you’re not loving them, what’s the first step you could take in at least trying to?
III. The Bible on Loving Your Enemies.

“You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:43-45, NIV).

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Rom. 12:17, 18, NIV).

Inductive Bible Study


1. When a Christian has enemies, is it because he or she is doing something right, something wrong, or both? Under what circumstances might Christians be hated for no reason?

2. How did Jesus react to His enemies? Did He ever reciprocate the hateful treatment He received? If so, why? Are we ever to lash out at our own enemies?

3. Jesus was treated unfairly many times in His life, yet He never insisted on His own rights. How can this be a model for us in our rights-saturated society? What circumstances might warrant standing up for our rights? Discuss a Christian way of doing so.

4. Loving our enemies is, to all appearances, an impossible demand. Many unbelievers have cited it as an example of the impossibility of living a Christian life. How can loving our enemies become a living reality in our lives? What stands in our way of Jesus’ command to do so?

5. The Romans oppressed the Jews and so generally, the Jews hated the Romans. But Jesus teaches we should love our enemies. This does not necessarily mean we have affection for those who commit evil against us. It is instead referring to an act of the will in which we wish our enemies no harm and even act in their best interests. Discuss what it means to act in our enemies’ best interests. (Think about how Jesus acted in the best interests of His enemies.)

6. Many people believe it is impossible to forgive someone unless they have asked for our forgiveness. What does Jesus’ example teach us about this?
The Grace of Forgiving (Jer. 31:31-34, Matt. 6:12).

Before we can love our enemies, we must forgive them; and before we can forgive, we must first learn to accept forgiveness. This is where the Christian life begins: the certainty of having been accepted by God and the assurance of forgiveness through faith in our risen Lord.

How does the Lord’s Prayer remind us that we must, in turn, be willing to forgive those who have sinned against us? Jer. 31:31-34, Matt. 6:12, Heb. 8:12.

‘If we really know Christ as our Savior our hearts are broken and cannot be hard, and we cannot refuse forgiveness. If you are refusing forgiveness to anybody I suggest that you have never been forgiven... Pray to God and say, ‘Forgive me O God as I forgive others because of what Thou hast done for me. All I ask is that Thou shouldst forgive me in the same manner; not to the same degree, because all I do is imperfect. In the same way, as it were, as Thou hast forgiven me, I am forgiving others. Forgive me as I forgive them because of what the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ has done in my heart.’ ”—D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Studies in the Sermon on the Mount (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1960), vol. 2, pp. 75, 76.

The author presents a crucial point. To truly forgive, we must understand how much we have been forgiven. Whatever others have done to us, is it worse than what our sins have done to the Lord? Hardly. The distance we have to cross in order to forgive others is almost nonexistent in contrast to the distance Christ, the eternal God, crossed in order to forgive us. This is a reality we must constantly keep before us if we are to forgive and then to love.

How does the Cross help us understand what our forgiveness cost God? Isa. 53:4-6, Phil. 2:5-8.

By dwelling on the Cross, by dwelling on the cost of our forgiveness, we can, through God’s grace, come to the point where we can learn to forgive others, even those whom we might deem, and rightly so, our enemies.

Are you having trouble forgiving, much less loving, an enemy? Write down your understanding of what Christ suffered at the Cross in order to forgive you. Pray and meditate over just what He did in your behalf. See if it will not help open you up toward those who have earned your anger.
Witnessing

“For if a man find his enemy will he let him go . . . away?” These were the words that Saul spoke after David spared his life (1 Sam. 24:19). King Saul was David’s enemy. In a jealous rage, Saul desired to kill David. But on one occasion as David and his men hid in a cave from the hostile king, David had the opportunity to kill Saul.

Saul unsuspectingly entered the cave where David and his men were hiding. David’s men encouraged him to avenge himself, but David was moved with compassion and could not bring himself to kill the king, the Lord’s anointed.

Even as Christians there are people with whom we are not able to get along, whether by their choice or ours. Whether we call them enemies or not, they certainly are not our friends. Discuss Romans 12:9-21 in light of the questions: How do we get along with people who do not wish to get along with us? How can we witness to those who want to be our enemies? How did Jesus exemplify the counsel in these verses, and how can we follow His example in today’s world?

The majority of the world lives by the rule, “Do unto others before they do unto you.” As Christians, we recognize this as a greatly fractured version of Matthew 7:12—the golden rule. As the “true standard of Christianity” (Ellen G. White, Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, pp. 136, 137), how does this rule help us to understand what it means to love our enemies?
Why Should We Love Our Enemies?

“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Prov. 15:1).

*Why* should we love our enemies?

If you answered the above question, *Because God tells us to*, you have given probably the best answer a Christian can give. We should love our enemies, because our God has told us to, and if we are Christians, we obey the Lord.

But the Lord doesn’t ask us to do things in a vacuum; there’s usually a practical reason for what He asks, because He loves us and wants what’s for our good. (*See Deut. 10:13.*) Thus, there’s an incredible amount of practical, personal good that can come not just to our enemies but to ourselves by learning to love those whom we deem enemies. Think of how much different our world would be if we learned to love our enemies. It would be the closest thing to heaven we’re ever going to find on this earth, at least for now.

*Read* Romans 12:20, 21 and 1 Thessalonians 5:15. What is Paul saying there? How do his words fit in with the overall theme of this week’s lesson?

God has done so much for us. As Christians, we have so much reason to have hope, because we have the promise not only of all things working for good now but the promise of eternity in a whole new existence; one filled with love, peace, and prosperity, an existence we can’t even begin to comprehend now. Thus, with such a promise before us, we, of all people, should be able to rise above the common hatreds that have poisoned this planet until it’s a cauldron of hate, violence, and revenge. What better way to be salt, to be light, than to love our enemies, thus bearing a powerful witness to the world that we have something it desperately needs, and that, of course, is Jesus.

*In your own situation, wherever you live, what changes would come about if all the Christians you knew, yourself included, started to love their enemies? Write out a paragraph imagining the changes.*
Life-Application Approach


**Thought Questions:**

1. Dwight Nelson wrote, “I remember my friend Frank Jackson, who whispered to me before he died, ‘Dwight, what we need most of all is the simple message of Jesus.’” The old adage is still true. “It isn’t what you know that matters in the end but Who you know.”—Holy Bible, *A Guide For the Next Millenium* (Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996), pp. 3, 4. How does your opening the door for people to know Jesus as Friend and Healer and to know you as a brother or sister in Him help you to be friends rather than enemies?

2. What light does Romans 7:18; 8:13, 26-28; and Isaiah 42:6 shed on the Christian struggle to forgive enemies?

3. When might there be a time when a Christian should not reach out to an enemy? What is your Bible basis for your response?

4. In light of the topic of forgiving our enemies, how are James 4:4; Matthew 5:44; and 28:10, 19 in harmony?

5. Why does God’s forgiveness not put us on spiritual *Easy Street*? Are temptations and trials easier or more difficult because of God’s forgiveness? Is forgiveness the beginning or the end of the struggles in life? Explain your answers.

**Application Question:**

Khalil Gibran wrote, “If you would know God, be not therefore a solver of riddles. Rather look about you and you shall see Him playing with your children.”—*The Sanctuary of the Spirit*, p. 54. Can you see God playing with the children of your enemies? Can you see Him playing with His children who are your enemies? How can this family image help you to grasp the relationship He would have you develop with your enemies?
Further Study: Read “The Measure of Forgiveness” in Ellen G. White’s book Christ’s Object Lessons (pp. 243–251). Note in particular the following statement:

“Our Lord teaches that matters of difficulty between Christians are to be settled within the church. They should not be opened before those who do not fear God. If a Christian is wronged by his brother, let him not appeal to unbelievers in a court of justice. Let him follow out the instruction Christ has given. Instead of trying to avenge himself, let him seek to save his brother. God will guard the interests of those who love and fear Him, and with confidence we may commit our case to Him who judges righteously.”—pages 248, 249.

Discussion Questions:

1. Dwell more on this idea of the practical good that can come from loving our enemies. Discuss what this world would be like if this principle were to take hold of the world as quickly and as firmly as does the desire for revenge.

2. Should the idea that in the end God will bring justice and punishment to evildoers play a role in helping us learn to love our enemies? Is it really love if we want God ultimately to punish them? How does Christ’s prayer on the cross help answer that question?

3. Relatives of a murder or rape victim often say they will never be able to forgive the person who committed that heinous crime. How can one help someone in dealing with this very human and understandable reaction?

Summary: Many of us have enemies or are regarded by others as their enemies. It is important to analyze our relationships and ask ourselves why some relationships have broken down and what can be done to restore them. As Christians, we are challenged to build positive relationships, even with those we do not really like. Loving our enemies does not come naturally. Yet, if we realize how God always stands ready to forgive us, we should be prepared also to forgive “our debtors.”
Brothers and Sisters in the Faith

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Matt. 26:21-25; John 10:16; 17:11; Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:3, 13; Phil. 2:2.

Memory Text: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10, NIV).

As Seventh-day Adventists, we often refer to one another as “brother” and “sister.” When overused, however, such terminology can, of course, easily become an empty phrase; and if used without care, it can, at times, create an awkwardness when nonmembers are around. Nonetheless, the idea that we are “brothers” and “sisters” in faith is something we should not lose, even if, at times, like all families, our relationship with our “brothers” and “sisters” faces hard challenges. Some of our spiritual siblings have traits we do not admire, and not every “brother” and “sister” always acts brotherly and sisterly toward each other. This is a fact of church life; we might as well get used to it.

Thus, as most of us who are church members could understand, there is ample reason to devote a week on the topic of our relationships with fellow believers, especially those who can try our patience and mercy to their limits.

The Week at a Glance: How did Paul describe the diversity amid the unity of the church? Around what should our core unity rest? What things may cause disunity among us? How was Christ’s treatment of Judas an example in how we should respond to those among us who treat us badly?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 11.
One in Christ *(Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27).*

One of the greatest challenges facing our church is the question of unity. The church started as a movement among North Americans with a predominantly Protestant background. It then moved into Europe and gradually also into other parts of the world, encountering more and more different belief systems and cultures. Today the church has a presence in more than two hundred countries and is growing fast, particularly in the non-Western world. It is not hard to see how there is a continuous danger of growing apart or even fragmenting, unless we are determined to stay together. A sustained focus on unity is, therefore, needed more than ever as we face the challenges ahead. After all, how can we light the world with the glory of the three angels’ messages if we are busy fighting among ourselves?

**What** is one of the favorite images of the apostle Paul to describe the nature of Christ’s church? How does this image underline the essential aspect of unity? *Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27.*

“Paul . . . makes a very effective parallel with the church collectively being compared to the parts of the human body. The comparison was not original with Paul. Many ancient writers had made a similar point. . . . The Corinthians would therefore readily understand Paul’s words, ‘If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body’ *(1 Cor. 12:15, NIV).* . . .

“The very weakest members . . . are indispensable; and, furthermore, the parts that we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor. For example, the vital organs (such as the heart, the kidneys, the lungs, the liver, and the stomach) are not visible, but life cannot exist without them.”—W. Larry Richards, *The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier—1 Corinthians* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1997), pp. 216, 217.

**How** did the early church at its very beginning display the kind of unity God had intended? *Acts 1:14, 2:1, 4:32.*

**How’s** your local church doing in terms of the kind of unity depicted by Paul or as in those verses in Acts? If you are divided in certain areas, what can you yourself do to help bring about a change?
Key Text: Galatians 6:10.

Teachers Aims:
1. To bring home the fact that unity can be found only in Jesus Christ.
2. To understand that even brothers and sisters in the faith are, unfortunately, not always brotherly and sisterly.

Lesson Outline:
I. Diverse, Yet One.
   A. With the church’s presence in over two hundred countries and growing, unity is a global challenge.
   B. Paul compares the church to the human body. No matter how small, each member of the body of Christ has a function and work to do.
   C. To avoid division over doctrinal differences, power struggles, and ethnic tensions, we must humbly submit ourselves to God and seek divine wisdom to govern our words and actions.

II. First, Be a Servant.
   A. Jesus came to serve as a minister to fallen humanity.
   B. The mother of James and John desired the best positions in heaven for her sons.
   C. Her sons craved power and prestige in heaven.

III. Difficult People.
   A. To keep from being part of the problem in the church family, one must strive to be part of the solution.
   B. Judas Iscariot was a traitor and a difficult person, but Jesus loved him like a brother.

Summary: A bicycle wheel is a wonderful object lesson in unity. The spokes on the rim of the wheel merge closer and closer together as they reach the center. So if we, with all our diversities and personalities, would leave the perimeter of our Christianity and approach Jesus, the center of our joy, we would find ourselves becoming closer and closer to one another.

COMMENTARY

I. Unity and Uniformity.
   It is common in Christian circles today to distinguish between unity and uniformity. Unity can perhaps be described as a commonality of purpose and mission, and to some extent, a shared core of belief, although the question of which beliefs constitute that core and how these beliefs should be framed remains a matter of debate. Uniformity, on the other hand, is usually defined as conformity
The Beauty of Diversity

The McDonald’s restaurant chain has tens of thousands of restaurants worldwide. Whether in Pakistan or in the U.S.A., in Hungary or in South Africa, you will find the golden arches. And you can be sure the product is always the same. The burgers will always have the same size and weight, and the milk shakes always come in three tastes and in the same size cups. Some might call this unity. But this kind of similarity has nothing to do with real unity; instead, this is uniformity, and there’s an important distinction between the two. In our thinking about the unity of the church, we must be careful not to confuse uniformity with unity.

What are some of the characteristics of the unity that the church ought to display? What is emphasized, and what is not mentioned? John 10:16; 17:11, 21; Eph. 4:3, 13; Phil. 2:2.

“The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not a superhuman effort to overcome difficulties—though there will be much of this to do—but union with Christ.”—Ellen G. White, The Adventist Home, p. 179.

Ellen White’s words, in the context of the texts listed above, are so crucial to an understanding of unity. We can come from different ethnic, national, religious, and economic backgrounds, but at the foot of the cross, we are all the same: sinners in need of God’s grace.

And yet, the hand is not the foot, the foot is not the eye, and the eye is not the heart; all are different—all have different compositions, different functions, different roles. If the eyes demanded that the heart be like them, the body would soon be dead; if the heart demanded that the eyes be like them, the body would be blind.

Thus, because our church is so different—composed of various national, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, many of which have clashed over these differences—our unity must be found in something that, while not denying these differences, transcends them. And for us as Adventists, that must be Jesus Christ and the common mission He has given to us. This side of heaven national, ethic, and political differences will remain; but as Adventist Christians, with a common Savior, a common mission, a common message, we should seek, through God’s grace, never to allow these things to disrupt the unity that God seeks for His church. Admittedly, this isn’t always easy. But if we are called to love our enemies, we certainly should be able to love fellow church members, should we not?

If any ethnic, national, or political issues are dividing your church, what can you do to pull people to the Cross, the only true solution to the problem?
to an outward set of signs that clearly indicates to a believer that he or she is among his or her kind of people. Examples of this would include the presence of a certain kind of music played on certain kinds of instruments, preferably taken from a hymnal that is easily identifiable even across linguistic lines.

Usually one gets the sense that unity is good, while uniformity is bad. This is not necessarily the case. It is true that uniformity can be a tool for keeping people with disturbing habits or customs from infringing on one’s comfort zone. While such an impulse is human and even understandable, it must be fought if we are serious about taking the gospel to all people. Christ’s church is not a club for hobbyists.

Yet, some uniformity may be helpful. The relative similarity of Seventh-day Adventist worship across the globe has arguably been a major factor in creating the unity of mind and mission that has—most of the time, one hopes—characterized the world church. We are human, after all, and respond to outward signs. It is much easier to feel unified if one looks unified.

There are also practical uses for habits that may appear to be arbitrary. For example, one may or may not accept that the King James Bible is the only valid translation. But whether or not this is the case, the universal use of this one translation—in the English-speaking world, anyway—made teaching and memorization of the Scriptures much easier.

The fact is that we do live in a pluralistic world, and in the future the church will need to determine how much of this pluralism is compatible with its core message and mission. How can we distinguish among differences that are merely superficial and incidental and those that actually change the content of our message?

II. Useful Quotes on Unity and Uniformity.

“Can pluralism in the Adventist Church be a blessing? Some would envision a melting pot in which diverse opinions are liquefied into sameness. Such a perspective can hardly make pluralism a benefit for the church. Others who see theology and doctrine as absolute objective truths may not accept differences of interpretation. . . .

“On the other hand, if we are willing to see pluralism as a mosaic in which different perspectives occupy interactive positions, thus revealing a picture that displays the full reality of God’s truth, pluralism can be an enriching experience for Adventism.”—A. Gerhard van Wyk, “Dealing With Pluralism,” *Ministry*, vol. 68, no. 3 (March 1995), p. 7.

“Whether we like it or not, modern Adventism displays an increasing pluriformity. There is a variety in worship styles, in standards of behavior, and even in beliefs. . . . Many feel that this trend toward greater pluriformity endangers the unity of the church. Others, like me, are happy with this development: People with different cultures should have space to make their religion relevant to
The Ugliness of Division (Num. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:11, 12).

During the 2000 General Conference Session, Andrews University professor George R. Knight gave a thought-provoking speech about issues he sees as threatening the church. Among many other things, he said: “[If I were the devil,] I would get as many Adventists as possible to think tribally, nationally, and racially. I would make the church one big power struggle, without regard to mission or efficiency. Having made that statement, I hasten to add that there are injustices that need to be rectified and complex situations that can never be made completely straight. My plea is that even in the most difficult and unjust situations we need to behave as born-again sisters and brothers, able to discuss these things without losing sight of the mission of the church, which makes the issues meaningful in the first place.”—George R. Knight, “If I Were the Devil,” Adventist Review (January 2001), pp. 14, 15.

There are numerous causes for disunity in the church. State, in a few words, what the core issues were in the conflicts mentioned in the following Bible passages: Numbers 16:1-3; Acts 6:1, 2; 15:1, 2; 1 Cor. 1:11-17.

Who is in charge? Who will benefit more than others? And whose theology is correct? These are the most common causes (often in some combination) of division in a local church or in a denomination. The issues themselves can be quite legitimate. Social groups—and this includes spiritual organizations—need to determine how matters of leadership and authority must be dealt with. When an organization consists of various subgroups, there must be a mechanism to ensure that the interests of these groups are safeguarded. Real problems are not to be swept under the carpet. But those who profess to follow Christ and want to imitate His nature will choose a strategy in which prayerful dialogue, a desire to understand one another, patience, tolerance, and love are the key concepts.

Look at some of the problems listed in the above texts. There were power struggles, doctrinal differences, and ethnic tensions, even cliques. How little has changed over the centuries. Again, why must we all come to the Cross and be broken if these problems are ever to be resolved?
their situation. Only if that happens can the church be truly their church. . . Of course, extremes must, as usual, be avoided. Forcing one mode of acting and thinking upon the worldwide church would require a totalitarian monocultural approach that is doomed to fail in the long run. On the other hand, cultural diversity must never be understood in terms of total relativism. All cultures must be judged by the gospel. All cultures have some elements that can be embraced but also elements that must be rejected!”—Reinder Bruinsma, *It’s Time* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 1997), pp. 82, 83.

**Inductive Bible Study**


1. Generally, conflict within the church is destructive, rather than constructive. When might it be appropriate to challenge church members or even leadership?

2. Does the fact that church members should share a general outlook and goals mean that individuality is taboo? What guidance does the Bible give us regarding the attitude that we should have toward differences among members and the management thereof?

3. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Paul states that just as the body is a unit composed of several parts, so is the church. Ask class members to share what part of the body they think they are, and why. (For example, as the teacher of the class, you might think you are a mouth, because you enjoy teaching.) Then ask each member to select another person in class, and say, for example, “Jennifer, I’m glad you are a________________, because I need a_________________________ to_______________________________.

4. Inside the church and outside, it is generally considered a good thing to encourage people to celebrate cultural and ethnic differences. Yet, the most horrible conflicts arise from precisely these differences. How can we keep these conflicts outside the church yet still celebrate such differences?

5. Christ’s example is a reproach to the politics we engage in. Why, then, are politics still in the church? How can church leadership on all levels exercise authority without becoming addicted to it?

6. We all must deal with difficult people in the church at one time or another. What can such people teach us about ourselves and our relationship with God?
Servanthood Versus Power Play

To be a servant is not our idea of success. We see success in terms of influence, of power, of the ability to direct and control others. It seems to be part of human nature to make comparisons between ourselves and selected others, with the desire to come out on top.

What fundamental principle did Jesus state in response to the request from the mother of James and John for a place of special prestige for her sons? *Matt. 20:20-27.*

If you study the above verses carefully, you will see clearly the contrast between sinful humanity and a perfect God. Here is first a mother, zealous for the success of her children; then there are the other disciples, indignant at what they must deem a power play. And remember, these are all followers of Christ (the mother came worshiping Jesus); yet, greed, jealousy, and selfishness are unveiled.

All this is contrasted to Jesus, who not only spoke the principle of servanthood but, in a way that our finite minds can barely grasp, lived it.

Read Matthew 20:28. What is Jesus talking about? How did He express this principle in the most amazing manner?

No question, many of the things that divide or threaten to divide the church would vanish were we to take seriously Christ’s words about being a servant to others. Being great, or chief, doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with office or prestige. Yet, it can have a lot to do with power, not power as the world sees it but power to change lives, to bring healing, to reveal to others the love and character of God. And this comes through influence—of being a good example and of revealing to others the spirit of Christ. That’s true power and greatness.

It’s one thing to talk about being a servant; it’s another to act in that role. What are some practical things that you could do that would express the principle of servanthood in your own church body? How, for instance, does the foot-washing service represent this principle?
“Living in a variety of cultures, times, and places, the church may appear as disparate. The book of Revelation itself celebrates the Lamb who through the cross ‘didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation’ (Rev. 5:9). All, however, belong to one body, whose inner unity seeks and acquires outward expression in the profession of the same faith . . . and Christian conduct in a visible church.”—Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2000), p. 562.

III. Unity and Uniformity in the Bible.

“ ‘I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one’ ” (John 17:11, NIV).

“And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation’ ” (Rev. 5:9, NIV).

Witnessing

The church is a place for sinners. But it is not a place for strife. There is no excuse for having an unloving spirit in the house of God. When people visit our churches they should see something different about us. That something different should be unity. We cannot be faithful witnesses to them if disharmony exists among us. We may not always agree, but we can disagree in a Christlike manner.

Jesus showed His disciples that in His kingdom there is no room for contention. James and John asked to sit next to the throne of Christ, one on the left and one on the right. When the other disciples heard of their request, they were displeased with the two brothers. But Jesus assured the disciples that in His kingdom no one is to be above another. All are called to service just as Jesus Himself came to serve. (See Mark 10:35-45.)

First Corinthians 10:24 tells us to put the interests of others above our own. Discuss with your class members how this counsel can be applied to specific situations within a church. How can following this counsel stop disagreements before they even start? Discuss how a church in which each member wants her or his own way is a negative witness.

Our role as God’s people is not to be fed but to feed. We are to be a source of strength to other church members and to our community. When we all accept this job description, visitors and members will find in our churches a place of refuge, a family full of lovingkindness.
Dealing With Difficult People

Have you heard of the 20-80 principle? It suggests that 20 percent of the people you have to deal with produce 80 percent of the problems. Ask personnel directors or customer-service directors what their experience is, and you will find them in agreement. Virtually all pastors will confess that a relatively small percentage of their parishioners give them most of their headaches. Yes, unfortunately, not all people are as lovable and likable as we would prefer them to be (of course, others might and with some justification say the same about us, as well). Some people provide a serious challenge to our Christian experience.

Read Mark 14:43, 44; Luke 22:3-6, 47, 48; John 18:3-7. What did Judas do to Jesus? Why was his act such an act of treachery?

Few people in history have gone to their grave with such infamy as Judas Iscariot, who, with his betrayal of Jesus, brought upon himself eternal ruin. And yet, even knowing what Judas would do, Jesus still sought to save him.

Read Matthew 26:21-25. What happened here that showed that Jesus was still trying to work with Judas?

“But Judas was not yet wholly hardened. Even after he had twice pledged himself to betray the Saviour, there was opportunity for repentance. At the Passover supper Jesus proved His divinity by revealing the traitor’s purpose. He tenderly included Judas in the ministry to the disciples. But the last appeal of love was unheeded. Then the case of Judas was decided, and the feet that Jesus had washed went forth to the betrayer’s work.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 720.

What a powerful testimony to us of how we should treat those who are, for better or for worse, among us. Indeed, who hasn’t experienced personally how, sometimes, the most painful struggles we have are not with those whom we would deem our enemies but those whom we would deem otherwise our “brothers” and “sisters”? We have here an example from Jesus how we should respond.

Have you been betrayed by a Judas? If so, how can you, through the grace of Christ, respond as Christ did?
**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** A man had quite a poor reputation for being childish, self-serving, and unfair in his professional and social interactions. He falsified incidents between himself and people of another culture. When weaker people in that culture responded patiently and kindly while he berated them, he reported that they responded violently. When they appropriately used authority in supervising their staff, he told others that the staff were being treated unfairly and rudely. By taking advantage of his community’s prejudices, the man saved himself at the expense of the people who were members of the other culture.

What is to be the foundation of interactions among the family of God? Second Peter 1:5-10; 3:17, 18 offer some insights.

**Thought Questions:**

1. Who are some of the Bible characters we remember because of how they used their influence? *Review Genesis 37–47, Numbers 12, Joshua 7, Daniel 3, Matthew 25, and Luke 15.* What principles can we learn from their situations that can guide us in how we influence others?

2. Does Galatians 6:10 suggest that Christians should discriminate against people who are not their brothers and sisters in Christ? Explain your answer.

3. What are Paul’s words to believers who want to erect barriers between brothers and sisters in the church? *See 1 Cor. 1:10.* Why are barriers created among believers?

4. What attributes of positive family relationships are revealed in the relationships between David and Jonathan; Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; Ruth and Naomi?

**Application Questions:**

1. It has been said that God has no grandchildren. Do Christians have spiritual cousins? Explain your answer.

2. What is the significance of the terms *brothers* and *sisters* that can help Christians establish boundaries in their relationships with one another and yet not become exclusive or snobbish?
**Further Study:** Read the chapter “Who Is the Greatest” in Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 432–442.

“In these first disciples was presented marked diversity. They were to be the world’s teachers, and they represented widely varied types of character. In order successfully to carry forward the work to which they had been called, these men, differing in natural characteristics and in habits of life, needed to come into unity of feeling, thought, and action. This unity it was Christ’s object to secure. To this end He sought to bring them into unity with Himself. The burden of His labor for them is expressed in His prayer to His Father, ‘That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us;’ ‘that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me.’ John 17:21, 23. His constant prayer for them was that they might be sanctified through the truth; and He prayed with assurance, knowing that an Almighty decree had been given before the world was made. He knew that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached to all nations for a witness; He knew that truth armed with the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit would conquer in the battle with evil, and that the bloodstained banner would one day wave triumphantly over His followers.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 20, 21.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How does one determine what belongs to the unchangeable core of our beliefs in contrast to what are mere cultural expressions and can, therefore, be changed to fit the context of various groups? Why, for the sake of unity, must we be able to distinguish between the two concepts?

2. Imagine that your local church has a membership of around one hundred. Most members are pleasant and easy to get along with. But a few are capable of destroying the atmosphere. They are very opinionated and have very strong convictions about what should and should not be done during a divine service. This situation clearly hampers the growth of the church. What would you advise?

**Summary:** The church must be characterized by unity rather than uniformity. There is beauty and richness in diversity as long as there is unity in Christ. Only as we all learn to surrender at the Cross can we have the kind of unity that Christ seeks for His people.
Supporting Our Leaders

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Ps. 51:3, 4, 10; 1 Pet. 2:9; Eph. 1:22, 23; Col 1:18.

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

To be a leader in the church is not always easy. In fact, we live in a general climate in which leadership is suspect. Leadership, in general, is often almost synonymous with politics, and politics usually has connotations of power, self-interest, and even dishonesty or corruption. Church leadership is not totally immune to those accusations either.

Thus, more than ever, the church needs good leaders at all levels, and we must use the best possible processes to select those leaders. And while we must hold them accountable for the decisions that they make while in power, it’s even more important that we seek to support them in all ways possible. We owe that to them and to God.

This week we look at the important topic of how, as Christians, we should relate to our church leaders.

The Week at a Glance: Does the idea that we are all equal before God mean that there’s no need for church leadership? In what ways are we all unequal? Who is the Head of the church? What does the Bible teach about the necessity of church leaders?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 18.
All Are Equal *(1 Pet. 2:9).*

One of the great rediscoveries of the sixteenth-century Reformation was that all people have the same standing before God. We do not need other human beings as our mediators. We all have the same direct access to our heavenly Father *(Heb. 10:19).*

**How is the fundamental equality in status before God underlined by the apostle Peter?** *1 Pet. 2:9; see also Exod. 19:6.*

The idea of a priesthood of all believers was one of the great concerns of the Protestant Reformers. The concept recognizes that every church member has a spiritual ministry to perform. The ordained ministry does not have a more privileged form of service than do others in the church body. The clergy merely performs a different service. All members have spiritual gifts, and all have important contributions to make. As a church, it’s important not to forget this principle.

**What other assurance is given in the Holy Scriptures that affirms our equal standing before God?** *Gal. 3:28.* What is this text saying?

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“No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts out of Satan’s circle the poor souls who have been deluded by his deceptions. It places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise.

“In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free. All are brought nigh by His precious blood.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons,* p. 386.

Dwell on the thoughts for today’s study. Why is this principle so important for Christians to understand? How can it be a cure for one of the greatest and most dangerous of all sins: spiritual pride? What practical changes would you see in your own church were this principle put into practice?
**Key Text:** Ephesians 4:15.

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To establish that Christ is the ultimate Leader of His church.
2. To understand that God established the hierarchy of leaders and members in His church. To each He gave different roles and responsibilities.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **Members and Leaders Have Different Roles.**
   A. In the sight of God we are all equal.
   B. The ordained minister is not above the member in importance before the Lord.
   C. God has given spiritual gifts to His church, and each member has an important contribution to make.
   D. God instituted leaders for His people.

II. **Support Your Leaders.**
   A. Many faithful biblical leaders were not perfect.
   B. Some great leaders made serious mistakes.
   C. It is our sacred duty to help our leaders in their ministry.
   D. Support takes various forms as in: financial, spiritual (as in the form of prayer), and social (as in encouragement), and so forth.

III. **Christ Is Our Leader.**
   A. The church’s structure requires human leaders at various levels.
   B. As witnesses for the Lord, we are called to be His ambassadors to the world.
   C. Christ, the Head of the church, affirms our calling and gives us the power to execute His will.

**Summary:** “Instead of cooperating with Satan, let everyone learn what it means to cooperate with God. In these depressing times He has a work to be done that demands the firm courage and faith which will enable us to sustain one another. All need to stand shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart as laborers together with God.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 184.

**COMMENTARY**

I. **Leaders and Followers in the Church.**
   There has always been a tension in Christianity between its message of the essential equality of all Christian believers and the fact that it also prescribes different roles and functions for its members. Furthermore, it is possible for one to view some of these roles and functions as superior or higher than others. A pastor, of course, exercises a special kind of authority and expertise, and many members
We Have Different Roles

What a paradox: We are all equal and, yet, we are not. Though we all have the same status before God, we do not all function in the same role. It is God’s design that there is order, and that the church—as a spiritual organization—has leadership. Strong support for the principle of “the priesthood of all believers” does not mean that leadership arrangements are unnecessary. From the earliest days we have evidence of God instituting leaders for His people.

How do the following texts establish the legitimacy of leadership among the people of God, in Old Testament as well as in New Testament times?

1. Moses  
   Exodus 3

2. Assistance for Moses  
   Exod. 18:21-27

3. Deborah  
   Judg. 4:4

4. David  
   1 Sam. 16:1-13

5. The twelve disciples, or apostles  
   Mark 3:13-19

6. Stephen and the other deacons  
   Acts 6:1-7

7. Elders  
   Titus 1:5

Though the Bible does not prescribe a detailed organizational model that is to be implemented in all times, God wants His people to do things in an orderly manner. Organization and leadership are not only legitimate but necessary, as is choosing the right kind of leadership.
will tend to view him as a font of all wisdom, virtue, and knowledge until it is proven otherwise. When this almost inevitably happens, the same people may become disillusioned with the pastor, or even with the church or Christianity itself. Even among the roles usually taken by laypeople, a similar perceived hierarchy of worthiness exists. Elders are supposed to be higher than deacons and quite often have an extensive résumé of worldly achievements—money, power, education, etc.—that further adds to this aura in the minds of many. Older, more established members may be viewed as preferable to new converts, who don’t know when to stand or sit or how to find things in the hymnal.

Ironically, the Bible and true Christianity have no place for these false values that seem so natural to us. On one hand, the Christian recognizes that different people are suited to different roles based upon abilities, temperament, etc. Yet, all of these are equally essential to the functioning of God’s kingdom on earth. Church leaders are not in their positions—one hopes—in order to feel important or superior to others but to guide the church in achieving its mission. And of course this mission could not be achieved without those who keep the lights on and the buildings safe and sanitary. True leaders—such as Christ—don’t even shrink from doing dirty or unpleasant things if the occasion should arise.

Also, true Christianity doesn’t care how much money you make or how many people respect you in the business community. It just is not relevant. Many important Old and New Testament figures would be considered losers and/or bums by any creditable human standard. As humans, of course, our minds will continue to nudge us toward these mistaken judgments; our job is to allow God to nudge us back to His reality.

II. Useful Quotes on Leaders and Followers in the Church.

“God calls upon every church member to enter His service. Truth that is not lived, that is not imparted to others, loses its life-giving power, its healing virtue. Everyone must learn to work and to stand in his place as a burden bearer. Every addition to the church should be one more agency for the carrying out of the great plan of redemption. The entire church, acting as one, blending in perfect union, is to be a living, active missionary agency, moved and controlled by the Holy Spirit.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies to the Church, vol. 8, p. 47.

“It is not alone by men in high positions of responsibility, not alone by men holding positions on boards or committees, not alone by the managers of our sanitariums and publishing houses, that the work is to be done which will cause the earth to be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. . . . This work can be accomplished only by the whole church acting their part under the guid-
Even Saints Are Not Perfect *(Ps. 51:3, 4, 10).*

Reading biographies of famous missionaries and great religious leaders can be extremely inspiring. Often one wonders: Would I have been able to demonstrate that same commitment? Would I have been able to persevere under such adverse circumstances? Would I have had the faith and spiritual strength to help and direct people? When we think of the history of our own church and of the energy, courage, and determination of many of the Adventist pioneers, we cannot help being impressed and inspired.

**Take a good look** at Hebrews 11 and list some of the great heroes of faith who, “by faith,” were sure of what they hoped for and persevered in their leadership role, often despite countless challenges. What was the secret of their success?

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The Bible presents us with inspiring examples of faith but also informs us, in all honesty, that even the greatest leaders of ancient times were not perfect. It is not difficult to find examples of how great leaders made serious mistakes. Sometimes the mistakes were such that they could not be maintained in their role. But in many cases, God was willing to continue working through them.

**Go back** again through Hebrews 11. Pick out some of those mentioned there who were, in one capacity or another, in leadership roles. What mistakes did these great people of faith make, despite their calling before God? What message do their mistakes have for us concerning how we should view our leaders?

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Leaders, as the rest of us, are sinners in need of grace, forgiveness, counsel, and encouragement. At the same time, to be a leader is a great privilege, and with privilege comes responsibility. Though our leaders aren’t perfect, they are still leaders, and in that role they should be expected to act accordingly.

**Should church leaders be expected to adhere to a higher moral and spiritual standard than someone not in that role? If so, why so? If not, why not?**
ance and in the power of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies to the Church, vol. 8, p. 47.

“In the same way the church of Jesus Christ transcends all differences of status; slaves and free are of equal value in the mystical unity of this body of Christ. There is little doubt, as has been suggested, that both classes were included in the membership of the Corinthian church. That is a great matter. The life of the church is vastly enriched by the peculiar contribution that every member can make and in the power of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies to the Church, vol. 8, p. 47.

“I believe the church of Jesus Christ transcends all differences of status; slaves and free are of equal value in the mystical unity of this body of Christ. There is little doubt, as has been suggested, that both classes were included in the membership of the Corinthian church. That is a great matter. The life of the church is vastly enriched by the peculiar contribution that every member can make.

**Inductive Bible Study**


1. People are skeptical of their political leaders and not without reason. Inevitably, this trend has spread to the church. What model for leadership does the Bible offer? If followed, how would this form of leadership reverse the trend toward skepticism?

2. Is the leadership of the church ordained by God? If so, what does that mean about our attitude toward church leaders? If so, does it mean church leaders are exempt from criticism except by someone who also is in a church leadership position? When might it be necessary for laypeople to question a church leader’s ability to lead, and what form should such questioning take?

3. If God has ordained church leadership, has He ordained the correct form? Are we free to choose, for example, whether the church is to be denominational or congregational in its organization?

4. In the church, there is a reciprocal relationship between leaders and membership, which is one reason our own attitudes are so important. In what ways are we called as laypeople to facilitate the task of leadership?

5. Is leadership necessarily a quality restricted to those who hold official or semiofficial offices in the church organization? In what ways might we as laypeople engage in leadership, whether in the church or in daily life?

6. List the qualities of good leadership found in the Proverbs texts listed in Texts for Discovery. Discuss why each characteristic is important. Also discuss how Christ displayed each characteristic and how we can display them in our leadership roles.
Supporting Our Leaders

We owe it to our leaders to support them in whatever way we can. As Aaron and Hur supported Moses and helped him to reach out to heaven, we have the sacred duty to help our leaders in their ministry (Exod. 17:12).

What may those who are full-time employed in the gospel ministry expect from the members of the church? Matt. 10:9, 10; Rom. 16:23.

God has arranged for a system of support for those who serve Him as full-time ministers so that their material needs are provided for as they preach the gospel and nurture the church. If all church members gave according to the plan that God instituted, there would be more than sufficient means to meet the needs of many more church workers.

What other form of support for our pastors and other leaders is just as essential as material support? Eph. 6:18, 19; 2 Thess. 3:1.

“Leaders know the importance of support. It comes in many different forms—regular prayer, encouragement through calls, conversations, and notes, interaction on ideas and communicating what is going on in the organization. Often it is as simple and straightforward as asking the leader, ‘What can I do to help you?’”—Leith Anderson, A Church for the Twenty-First Century (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 1992), pp. 230, 231.

While support for leaders shouldn’t be blind—that is, we do whatever they say we should do, no questions asked—true support doesn’t mean we support them only when we absolutely agree with everything they do. Sometimes leaders might make a decision that someone disagrees with. Here, too, out of respect for the position the person is in, we should as much as possible seek to work with those decisions.

How’s your attitude toward your church leaders? Are you showing them the mercy Christ has shown you? What changes might you need to make in relating to them?
bring to the fellowship.”—*The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 10, p. 158.

“When Jesus washed the disciples’ feet, he showed that Christian leadership was that of a servant, not a boss. Service means being sensitive to what people need. Consequently there was no rigid pattern of church government at the beginning: it was flexible according to the needs of the particular church. Nor was there any sharp distinction between ordained and lay members of the church.”—*Eerdmans Handbook to Christian Belief*, p. 408.

### III. The Bible on Leaders and Followers in the Church.

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ” *(1 Cor. 12:12, NIV)*.

**Witnessing**

David was not only Israel’s king, he was also their spiritual leader. Yet, he slept with another man’s wife. She became pregnant with David’s child. Then, to cover himself, David had the husband killed *(2 Samuel 11)*. How was Israel supposed to respect such a leader?

Every one of us falls prey to sin, even our spiritual leaders. That is one reason why we cannot look to them for salvation. They can only point us to the One who can save, and that is Jesus. Although spiritual leaders are there to guide us, they, too, are in need of a Savior. They are sinners who make mistakes, sometimes openly. Because they are fallible, we must be willing to embrace them and forgive them when they fall.

In Ephesians 4:2 we are told to walk “with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.” To forbear is to be tolerant of or patient with something or someone. Our spiritual leaders need our forbearance and understanding as much as we need theirs. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ and need to be ministered to as they minister to others. Remember, we are all members of one body, each member having a different function. Those in leadership positions need the support of other church members, so in unity we can be a light to the world.

Think of the leaders in your local church. Consider not only the pastor(s) and the elders, but the deacons, deaconesses, Sabbath School teachers and superintendents, etc. What special issues might they be facing regarding their church responsibilities? How can you witness to them and encourage them to depend on the Lord?
Christ Is Our Leader *(Eph. 4:15, 2:20, 1 Pet. 2:25).*

Read the following texts. What are they all saying about Christ and His church?

*Eph. 1:22, 23*

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*Eph. 4:15*

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*Col. 1:18*

As we have seen this week, though we are all equal in the sight of God, this fundamental equality does not imply that there should not be any leaders, or even a *hierarchy* of leadership, among us. The biblical model teaches that there is, indeed, a structure, and that the church does have human leaders at various levels.

At the same time, however, we (and our selected leadership) must remember that Christ is the head of the church and that He alone is the Source of its authority. Not only is Christ the Head of each person, He is the Head of the church, in a corporate sense. As individuals, and even more so as leaders, we can be faithful to our calling only to the degree that we are faithful to Christ. Only as we submit to Him in faith, repentance, and obedience can we fulfill whatever role He deems for us in His church.

“It is Christ who makes the church important, not the other way around. As his body, the church derives its significance from Him. The church is what it is because of who Jesus is, not because of who its members are.

“The symbol of the body also suggests subordination. As Christ’s body, the church is subject to his authority. He is ‘the head over all things for the church’ *(Eph. 1:22).* Recognizing that Christ’s authority in the church is supreme prevents us from exaggerating the importance of any church official or organizational structure. The church needs organization, of course, but no organization should obscure Christ’s authority.”—Richard Rice, *The Reign of God* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1985), p. 190.

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How can those who lead out in the local church or occupy some position of leadership in the conference or some other organizational unit ensure that they never lose sight of the fact that Christ is the ultimate Leader of the church? If you could give some practical advice to any of our leaders on what’s the surest way to stay connected to Christ and allow Him to lead the church through them, what would you say?
“‘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’” (John 13:14, 15, NIV).

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: The Atlantic Monthly printed the details of an interview in which a reporter raised the issue of competitiveness between the tenors Jose Carreras, Placido Domingo, and Luciano Pavarotti. Domingo’s classic response was: You can’t be rivals when you are together making music.

How can Domingo’s view help to improve relationships between church leaders? The laity’s relationship with church leaders? Church leaders’ relationship with laity?

Thought Questions:
1. Many church members support the idea that church leaders should have a higher level of spiritual maturity than the laity. Is this belief Bible based? Explain your answer.

2. Jesus used the Greek paraclete when referring to the Holy Spirit as “helper” (John 14:16, NKJV). This term refers to the Greek military practice of pairing soldiers so they could protect one another’s back. Discuss how this practice has value for the relationship between laity and leaders today.

Application Questions:
1. Review with your class the relationship between King David and Joab: 2 Samuel 3; 1 Kings 2:5, 6. What lessons from this relationship can you apply to the relationship between laity and leaders?

2. “Dan’s classroom and coaching duties kept him pretty busy, but he couldn’t help noticing how stressed the school principal seemed. . . .

“Dan prayed, but he wished he could do more. . . . On a piece of paper he wrote these words: ‘Just a note to say thanks for being a great principal. . . . Let me know . . . how I can help.’ The next time Dan saw [the principal], the principal approached him eagerly [and said], ‘Funny how little things really do make a difference.’—Colleen L. Reece, Apples for a Teacher (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour Publishing, Inc., 1998), p. 40. What little things can you do systematically to support your leaders?
**Further Study:** “Since His ascension Christ has carried forward His work on the earth by chosen ambassadors, through whom He speaks to the children of men and ministers to their needs. The great Head of the church superintends His work through the instrumentality of men ordained by God to act as His representatives.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 360.

“There have ever been in the church those who are constantly inclined toward individual independence. They seem unable to realize that independence of spirit is liable to lead the human agent to have too much confidence in himself and to trust in his own judgment rather than to respect the counsel and highly esteem the judgment of his brethren, especially of those in the offices that God has appointed for the leadership of His people. God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for he who does this despises the voice of God.”—Pages 163, 164.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Though it’s important to work with the leadership of our church, at what point, if ever, should a person stand up and openly challenge leadership? Is this ever the correct Christian response? If you answer Yes, what biblical or historical precedents can you cite? If you answer No, defend your position.

2. Sometimes, when our leaders fall, we tend to be harder on them than on others who might make the same mistakes. Why do you think that is so? Should it be so?

**Summary:** On the one hand, we must never lose sight of the fact that we are all, truly and fully, equals before God. Yet, it is God’s purpose that not all have the same role. Some have a special calling to be leaders, of different kinds and at different levels. Leaders must be held accountable, but we must not expect them to be perfect. We owe our leaders our wholehearted support, in particular in our prayers. But both the *followers* and the *leaders* must remember always that Christ is the Leader of His church.
Embracing the World

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Matt. 13:33; 25:31-46; John 17:15-17; 2 Cor. 5:19, 20; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 4:14.

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

Those who have studied the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church know that it took a while before the church began to understand the immensity of the challenge God had given her. At first, the small band of disappointed Advent believers saw only a very limited task: to encourage fellow Adventists after 1844. Gradually, however, they saw that God had given them a much greater assignment. They sought a wider audience and began to spread their message to Protestant America. In 1874 the horizon widened as the first official missionary left for Europe. By the year 1900 Adventism had gained a small foothold in many parts of the world and was on its way to what it is today: a truly global movement.

Thus the question for us is this: How are we, as Adventist Christians, to relate to the world at large?

The Week at a Glance: What kind of image should we present to the world? How can we be in the world but not of it? What does the universality of Christ’s death tell us about the universality of our own mission to the world?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 25.*
Representing the King (Matt. 13:33, 2 Cor. 5:20).

What images did Paul use to point out to the church members in Corinth that they are representatives of God?

2 Cor. 2:15-17

2 Cor. 3:1-3

2 Cor. 5:20

Our life should be such that it calls people to a decision, for or against the principles we espouse. For those who reject the Christ we serve, our witness will be an irritant or even a “smell of death” (2 Cor. 2:16, NIV). But for those who find Christ through us, we are a “fragrance of life” (vs. 16, NIV).

We also are pictured as ambassadors. Ambassadors are a small but important class of people. They go wherever they are sent to represent their government. Often they must venture into a culture that differs greatly from their own. Their work demands tact and diplomacy, as well as frankness and courage. Their duty is to guard jealously the interests and the reputations of their home country. What a fitting metaphor for those who represent the kingdom of heaven!

What other image is used in the Bible to illustrate the positive influence Christians are expected to have in society? Matt. 13:33. And what does it mean?

Leaven is, in general, a symbol for evil influences, carrying infection. In this sense Jesus used it when He spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees (Mark 8:15 and parallels). It also is used by analogy as a symbol for a wholesome influence, which spreads out, as well. The working of leaven in dough is not a slow, imperceptible process. At first, it is true, the leaven is hidden, and nothing appears to happen, but then the whole mass begins to swell and bubble as fermentation advances.

The moment you identify yourself as a Christian, you are, for better or for worse, representing your Lord. In other words, whether you are good, bad, or indifferent, you are still representing the Lord to those around you. You can never be neutral. Think about those whom you are around. What kind of influence are you projecting? Where and how can you improve?
Key Text: John 17:15, 18.

Teachers Aims:
1. To reemphasize that the church’s mission is a global mission.
2. To recognize that we must meet the needs of the people where they are.

Lesson Outline:
I. Ambassadors for King Jesus.
A. We are to go to “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” with the gospel (Rev. 14:6).
B. We are to be in the world but not of the world as we witness.
C. God’s remnant church is not an elite country club for members only.
D. The gospel commission requires that we mingle with the people of the world in order to share Jesus with those who do not know Him.

II. Roll Up Your Sleeves.
A. Faith and love require people who are willing to be proactive servants, not bystanders, on the sidelines of faith.
B. People must be reached in places as diverse as rural Appalachia in the Eastern United States, the mountains of Nepal, the slums of the cities of the world, the prisons, and suburban neighborhoods.

III. Prayer Changes Things.
A. Intercessory prayer for others should be a top priority.
B. It takes earnest prayer to take the message of salvation in Jesus to a dying world.

IV. Into All the World.
A. True followers of Christ seek to inform the world that Christ paid the price for their sins.
B. Christ’s death offers salvation for the whole world. Our ministry and outreach must be as inclusive.

Summary: “And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40).

COMMENTARY

I. To Love or Not to Love the World.

As Christians, we are called to go to the world with the good news of the gospel. We are also called to remain separate from the world, to be “in, but not of” it. John 3:16 famously informs the
“In the World” but Not “of the World” (John 17:15-17).

For many Christians, the church is like a club—strictly for members! Although they will say that they believe in witness and evangelism and want their church to grow, their deeds and their attitude speak a different language!

How are we to relate to the world? Are we to embrace the world and all that it offers? Are we to shun the world? Or is there another option? See John 17:15-17. What principles is Jesus expressing?

If we want to be true followers of Christ, we will have to mix with the people around us. We must not spend all our time in pious meditation, thanking God that we differ from all those worldly people around us. The opposite is true. While we must be holy—as in being radically different in the way we live—we must not keep our distance from those who must also hear the good news. We are told to “‘Go into all the world’” (Mark 16:15, NIV) and, like Paul, identify with the people with whom we come in contact (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Why did God intervene when, after the Flood, the inhabitants of the world decided to build an enormous fortress that would house them all? Gen. 11:4, 7.

The descendants of Noah and his sons did not want to move away from where they lived. They wanted to stay together. If ever there was a group of people with a fortress mentality, we find them in Genesis 11. But God intervened. He did not agree with this fortress mentality then, and He doesn’t now.

“Babel plays itself out over and over again in the lives of congregations. A new church is formed with excitement, energy and vision. As the years pass, however, the church functions less to introduce Jesus Christ to nonbelievers than to provide a safe, secure and familiar environment to those who already believe and belong.”—Stephen A. Rhodes, Where the Nations Meet (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), pp. 25, 26.

Go back and read again John 17:15-17. How does that apply in your own personal situation? Are you really not “of the world”? If you answer Yes, what justification can you give for that answer? How can one be truly “not of this world”?
reader that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.” But the same author elsewhere states: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15, NIV).

Rather than reflecting contradictory sentiments, these seeming contradictions demonstrate the difficulties that face us in our efforts to relate to a world that is largely ignorant of—or disinterested in—Christian principles and is both essential and dangerous to our own relationship with God.

What should our attitude be toward the world, here taken to mean the larger part of humanity for whom Christ is irrelevant? We should love it, right? So we are not given the option of isolating ourselves from the world in small enclaves of believers trying to avoid corrupting influences from out there. That is not to say that some Christian sects or organizations have not, in fact, done just that; it is just that it is hard to see how they support it, and history seems to demonstrate that it just doesn’t work.

But, on the other hand, just how much are we to love the world? Are we to become unduly interested in it to the extent that we imitate it in our own life and spirituality? Once again, we are not given that option. We are to remain “in the world, but not of it.” As in the former case, some have tried this approach anyway, with similar results.

In seeking the meaning of all this, perhaps we should examine the meaning of love. As humans, our concept of love can be quite misguided and even crass. In such a way, we can take love to mean unconditional admiration or support for anything the object of that love is or does. If that means that we confirm the bad or destructive aspects of the beloved to the extent of adopting them ourselves, our love has been a force for evil, not for good. Or we could love the world because it gives us pleasure that we feel is lacking in our humdrum Christian life. In such an instance our love is selfish, and again, destructive to all concerned.

The love the Christian is to show to the world is a love that ultimately intends to bring the world to salvation, rather like the love of John 3:16 and unlike the love of 1 John 2:16.

II. Useful Quotes on the Christian and the World.

“The world is created and loved by God, and Christ has come to save it. But it is ephemeral, subject to decay and death; moreover, it has fallen under the control of the evil one, and therefore into darkness. The world of men and the world of nature were closely inter-related in the thought of ancient men. Thus in our present passage not only the lusts of a fallen humanity but a love of the creature and the creation is disparaged over against the primal and everlasting ground of existence, the Father and his purpose.”—The Interpreter’s Bible, vol. 12, p. 238.
“Religion in Overalls” (Matt. 25:31-46).

The title of today’s study is borrowed from that of a book by William G. Johnsson in which the author takes a close look at the meaning of the Gospel of Matthew. Johnsson writes:

“In an age that proclaims on its T-shirts, ‘Only Believe’ and ‘I love you!’ Matthew insists that practice balances one’s profession, that faith and love put on overalls and get their hands dirty out where the people are—in jail, in the slums, in the poorhouse, in the charity ward.”—William G. Johnsson, Religion in Overalls (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Association, 1977), p. 22.

What are the following texts telling us about how we are to relate to the world around us?

Matt. 25:31-46

Luke 1:52, 53

The question is not whether followers of Christ should focus on preaching or helping the needy. It is not a matter of either/or but of and/and. Christians share in the universal responsibility of helping fellow human beings who face particular challenges: hunger, thirst, illiteracy, poverty, poor health conditions, imprisonment, discrimination, etc. Christ is our role model. He ministered to all aspects of our human condition—the spiritual, as well as the emotional and the physical. The early church clearly did not forget its social responsibility, and neither should we. Community-service activities, religious-liberty advocacy, educational programs, prison ministries, and ADRA are just a few of the avenues through which we can minister to people.

“Pure and undefiled religion is not a sentiment, but the doing of works of mercy and love.”—Ellen G. White, Welfare Ministry, p. 38.

Serving others in these capacities, however, demands self-denial, just as being a Christian does. Only as we learn to surrender and die at the foot of the Cross will we be in a position to minister to others in the same way that Christ did.

What are you doing for the poor, the needy, and the afflicted in your community? If the next time you see some of them and think of Christ’s words, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40), why wouldn’t it be so easy just to walk away and ignore them?
“The world at enmity with God is the very world which God ‘so loved . . . that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life’ (John 3:16; cf. 1 John 4:9). Christ is the ‘Savior of the world’ (John 4:42; 12:47 . . . ).

“The word ‘world’ is less frequently used in this sense by Paul, but his whole doctrine of salvation is summed up in the statement: ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself’ (II Cor. 5:19 . . . ).

“Insofar as the world is redeemed, it . . . becomes instead the kingdom of God, the ‘world/age . . . to come.’ ”—C. R. North, “World,” The Interpreters’ Bible Dictionary (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1962), vol. 4, p. 878.

“Kosmos indicates the ethical order in which human responsibility and human sinfulness stand in relationship to God. Thus ‘world’

Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** Matthew 6:10; Mark 16:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22; James 2:16, 17; 1 John 2:15-17.

1. As Christians, we are usually warned about the corrupting influence of the world. Yet, in John 3:16 we are told that God so loved the world He sent His only begotten Son to save it. How do we reconcile our duty to remain separate from the world with our duty to enter it and save it?

2. Given that part of our mission to the world is to live a consistent Christian life, are there possibly innocent behaviors we should forego, because they do not look right? What might some of these behaviors be, and why might they give the wrong impression?

3. Among other things, the church should be a place where believers can take refuge from an often hostile world. But how do we keep the church from becoming a private club? Why is this club mentality so natural to us?

4. It is not uncommon to regard efforts by the church to help the poor, etc. as evidence that the church is wavering in its evangelistic mission and accepting a merely social gospel. While recognizing the incorrectness of this assumption, how might it be possible that the church could begin to focus on good works at the expense of its message? What would result from this? On the other hand, what picture would we present to our communities and the world if we were to engage in evangelism only?

5. Why and how should we pray for others? When does it become selfish to pray for others to change in ways we regard as proper?
The Power of Prayer

Intercessory prayer is a reservoir of power that should be tapped to an even larger extent than it is today. Prayer for ourselves, for our own spiritual and material needs, is essential. But prayer for others—for the pastors, literature evangelists and missionaries, the church’s administrators, for the leaders of our countries and, yes, for the world—should rank high on our list of priorities.

If someone were to ask you to compose a 30-second prayer for the world, what would you pray, and why?

_______________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________

Praying for fellow human beings, pleading with God on behalf of others, is a duty and a privilege for every Christian. And, though we can never be sure when and in what manner God will answer our prayers, there is no doubt that they do have effect. The apostle James states it clearly: “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (5:16, NIV).

There are countless examples in Scripture of men and women who prayed for others. Read the following texts: Gen. 20:7; Num. 11:1, 2; 1 Sam. 12:19, 23; 1 Kings 13:6-9; Ps. 122:6; Matt. 5:44; Col. 1:9; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1. What do they tell us about the need to pray for others?

_______________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________

“Our intercessory prayers express a sense of solidarity with other human beings. We are embedded in the great fabric of humanity. What happens to others inevitably involves us, and what we do affects them, too. Furthermore, God has ways of working in the world that we cannot understand.”—Richard Rice, The Reign of God, p. 297.

In your experience, what impact has prayer had in your own life? How has it changed you? How have your prayers, as far as you can tell, impacted others? What evidence, if any, do you have that prayer does make a difference?
can have a highly negative connotation, indicating a place of corruption, a place antagonistic and antipathetic to God, a place in the grip of the demonic ‘powers.’ It is, nevertheless, the very place that God has chosen as the theater of redemptive activity, an activity that takes place in the midst of human history. This . . . meaning is the principal theological usage in the Pauline and Johannine writings.”—C. J. Hemer, “World,” The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), vol. 4, pp. 1114, 1115.

III. The Bible on the Church and the World.

“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).

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15, NIV).

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2, NIV).

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Cor. 5:18, 19, NIV).

Witnessing

When we think about how we are to live in this world yet not be a part of it, Jesus’ life should be our guide. From childhood until His death, we see in His life a constant desire to share salvation with a sinful world.

Jesus was radically different and did not seek to gain the approval of His contemporaries, friends, or family. Yet, so many who met Him wanted to be with Him. We must ask ourselves if we are the type of people others want to be around. Do we share our beliefs in a loving, tactful, open-minded manner, or do we rudely dictate what we believe to be essential to salvation?

When Christ walked the earth He associated with prostitutes and thieves. He cared for the poor, sick, and needy. He was always ready to help people with their problems. How do His actions help us define witnessing?

Based on Christ’s example, discuss how we might respond to the following scenarios: (1) Your church is holding an evangelistic series. One stormy evening, a homeless person attends just to get out of the rain. (2) Because no church in your area can afford to maintain a food or clothing bank, many denominations are suggesting that all churches pool their resources to establish such a center. Planning sessions will be during Sabbath hours. (3) While on vacation, your family meets another family with whom you really get along. They seem genuinely interested in what you believe.
The Cross and the World

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus gives us our calling as a church. Notice it is a worldwide calling. We are to go to all nations with the message of salvation found in Jesus Christ. We see this same basic calling, only in a specific end-time context, in the first angel’s message (Rev. 14:6, 7).

Thus, God’s church is to impact the whole world. And that makes perfect sense, because Christ’s mission was for the whole world.

Look up these texts. What are they all saying about the universality of what Christ has done at the Cross? Isa. 53:6, 2 Cor. 5:19, Heb. 2:9, 1 John 2:2, 4:14.

The point is simple: Christ’s death covered every human being who ever lived. It was complete for the whole world. Thus, the whole world needs to know about Jesus and what He has done for them.

“But the atonement for a lost world was to be full, abundant, and complete. Christ’s offering was exceedingly abundant to reach every soul that God had created. It could not be restricted so as not to exceed the number who would accept the great Gift. All men are not saved; yet the plan of redemption is not a waste because it does not accomplish all that its liberality has provided for. There must be enough and to spare.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 565, 566.

We can’t be true followers of Christ unless we are, in whatever capacity, seeking to let the world know about what Christ has done for it. Thus, we must not flee the world but must engage the world and make a difference by the way we live and interact with people and by the way in which we respond to the needs of fellow human beings, far and near. This, more than any other way, will open people up to hear what we have to say about the God who not only has created all of us but who has paid for all our sins. Even those living in abject ignorance of Christ have had their sins paid for at the Cross, just as much as ours were paid for there. Thus, these people need to know what we know; and how can they ever learn if we—who do know about the Cross—don’t tell them? Hence, our mission to the world.

Not everyone, of course, is in a position to minister directly to those in others lands. What, though, can you, either as an individual or through your church, do to have a part in our worldwide calling?
Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** The German philosopher Schopenhauer compared the human race to porcupines huddling together on a winter’s night. He said, The colder it gets outside, the more we huddle together for warmth; but the closer we get to one another, the more we hurt one another with our sharp quills. And in the lonely night of earth’s winter eventually we drift apart and wander out on our own and freeze to death in our loneliness! —Edward K. Rowell, *Fresh Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching,* p. 135. Adapted.

Even the homely porcupine can provide valuable lessons. How can we get past the pain of the pokes and get to the heart of the worldly people God has asked us to love? For direction and encouragement, read Isaiah 40:1, 2, 28-31; Proverbs 25:13; Romans 8:35-39; Colossians 3:23.

**Thought Questions:**

1. An email story has been circulating about a little boy who learned the power of John 3:16, first by parroting the words and then by feeling the warmth of people who loved the God of John 3:16. Keep a journal for 24 hours of what you say and do. How do your words and deeds compare with what you tell people about the God of John 3:16?

2. Grandpa rushed to the hospital where his tiny granddaughter had been born so prematurely that she was clinging to life. Shortly before her birth her father deserted what was to be her home, leaving her mother totally distraught. The nurses’ directions to Grandpa were, “Gently stroke the baby’s arm as you talk to her. She needs to connect your touch with your voice.” How can Christians connect God’s voice (His Word) with His touch (their ministry to other people)? How many non-Christians do you “touch” for Christ in a week?

**Application Question:**

Some people in the world are like people in the church. They build what they think are impenetrable walls around themselves. Think of one Adventist who has built solid walls around himself or herself and who is like you in the following areas: gender, age, hobbies, skills, background, family composition, education, diet, physical ability, or lack of it, etc. How does your interaction with this person prepare you to reach similar persons outside the faith?
**Further Study:** “The suffering and destitute of all classes are our neighbors, and when their wants are brought to our knowledge it is our duty to relieve them as far as possible. A principle is brought out in this parable [of the good Samaritan] that it would be well for the followers of Christ to adopt. First meet the temporal necessities of the needy and relieve their physical wants and sufferings, and you will then find an open avenue to the heart.”—Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 118.

“Every provision has been made for the salvation of the fallen race. All power has been given to Him who offered himself as a sacrifice for the redemption of every son and daughter of Adam. ‘As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.’”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Jan. 7, 1902.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. We are told we are “in the world” and that we must identify with those we want to reach. We must understand how they think and must speak their language. How are we able to do this without being impacted in a negative way by some of the negative things they do?

2. However important it is to meet the temporal needs of those in the world, we must also remember that meeting the needs of the world isn’t the end but a means to an end. What is that end? How can we avoid the danger of forgetting what our true purpose here is?

**Summary:** Though we are “not of the world,” we should be very much “in the world,” making a difference and giving a better taste to society. True Christianity is not just a matter of having correct doctrine or calling people to a faith in God. It also is a ministry to the poor and disenfranchised. In addition, we have the responsibility of praying for others, in the church and out in the world. Christ’s death covered the whole world; our ministry must, then, be just as inclusive.