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Experiencing Jesus Christ as Lord

Jesus Christ is Lord of all. And that’s because He is the Creator of all: “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). Thus, He is Lord of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Though not everyone currently recognizes Him as Lord, the day is coming when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

When Jesus Christ first came to this earth, He “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:7, 8, NKJV). His second coming will be with power and great glory. “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen” (Rev. 1:7).

To those who have received Him as Savior and Lord, the second coming of Jesus will be a time of rejoicing! We will exclaim, “‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation’” (Isa. 25:9, NKJV).

Every tongue will then confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, but for many it will be eternally too late to make a saving confession. For the wicked, confession that Jesus Christ is Lord is simply a recognition of an undeniable truth; it’s not a heartfelt surrender to His love and divine authority.

The Word of God appeals to us to accept the grace of God so freely given through Jesus. Now is the accepted time. Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for our sins. We can, at this moment, stand perfect in His righteousness, which is freely bestowed upon every willing sinner, “even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:22-24). Or, as Ellen White said in Steps to Christ: “Since we are
sinful, unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us. He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.”—Page 62.

When we receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we not only confess Him as Lord of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, we also confess Him as Lord of every aspect of our lives. As Christians, it’s our duty, out of love for God, to show that we truly believe in that Lordship. We do this not just by confessing He is Lord of our lives but by allowing Him to rule there, as well.

In this series of lessons, we will consider what it means to experience Jesus Christ as Lord in every aspect of our existence. It’s not enough to claim Jesus just as our Savior; we must claim Him as our Lord, as well. Because He’s our Lord, He is able to be our Savior. And nothing reveals more that we have recognized Him as Savior than how we live, and how we live depends upon the degree in which we allow Him to be Lord of our lives.

Let’s now take a look at what it means to experience Jesus as the Lord of our lives.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

The teachers comments demonstrate different methods of teaching the Standard Adult Sabbath School 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 often is 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.
Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “Then the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord’” (Luke 2:10, 11, NKJV).

Key Thought: The New Testament calls us to receive Jesus, both as Savior and Lord.

Savior and Lord. Many Christians today are looking for a “no strings attached” Savior. They want deliverance without obligation. They may profess the name of Christian but end up with a savior of their own making. Though it is true an angel counseled Joseph to call the miracle Child “‘Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins’” (Matt. 1:21, NKJV), an angel also announced to the shepherds on the hills near Bethlehem that “‘there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord’” (Luke 2:11, NKJV).

More New Testament texts refer to Jesus as Lord than as Savior. It is impossible to receive Jesus as Savior and reject Him as Lord. Peter refers to Jesus as “our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11, NKJV), and Paul encourages us to look for “the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20, NKJV). This week we will explore both the importance and the consequences of the crucial question: Have you received Jesus, both as Savior and Lord?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 2.
Our Need for a Savior (Rom. 3:9-26).

The apostle Paul warns the Romans that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18, NKJV). Rebellion against the will of God and the Word of God has consequences. “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23, NKJV).

Read Romans 3:9-26. What important point is Paul emphasizing? (If you have never read Paul’s epistle to the Romans, you may want to begin with Romans 1:1 in order to follow his whole argument.)

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Have you noticed the human tendency to compare ourselves with others in order to make ourselves look good? We point to others who are worse sinners than ourselves, forgetting that we ourselves also stand condemned. Even the act of self-justification is an evidence of our fallen condition. The apostle Paul leaves no room for excuses. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We all stand condemned before a holy God. This is not hard to see. All we have to do is look at the world around us, and we see so much evidence of our sinfulness.

What are some of the evidences you see of human sinfulness? How far do you have to look to see them?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

There’s no question: Sin and the results of sin exist all around us. And in us. We don’t have to point the finger at others; we can find all the evidence of sin by looking within ourselves. And that was part of Paul’s point. Every mouth is stopped before God, including our own!

Look at your own life. Do you see anything within yourself that could commend you to God? Why is looking at yourself the best way to realize there is no hope, unless hope comes from a gracious, merciful, and forgiving God?
Key Text: Acts 9:1-19

Teachers Aims:

1. To reveal Christ as Savior of the world and as Lord of our lives.
2. To show that all of us are sinners in need of a Savior.
3. To show that we acknowledge Christ as Lord by allowing Him to rule in our lives.

Lesson Outline:

   A. What obligations come with being a Christian?
   B. When we receive Christ, why must we accept Him for who He is and all He is?
   C. Why is understanding Christ’s role as both Savior and Lord crucial to our spiritual growth?

II. Righteousness Unmerited (Rom. 3:9-26).
   A. What does Scripture tell us about the nature of humanity?
   B. How do we receive God’s gift of righteousness?
   C. Is there anyone God cannot save? Explain.

III. Salvation by Acceptance (John 3:16).
   A. Who receives salvation?
   B. What must follow our acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior? (James 2:14-26).
   C. What change do acceptance and obedience bring about? (Eph. 4:22-24).

Summary: Accepting Christ does not come easy. Human weaknesses can stand in the way. By receiving Jesus as both Savior and Lord of our lives, we can triumph over sin through the power of the Holy Spirit.

COMMENTARY

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Each man and woman is dissatisfied with some aspect of his or her life. That dissatisfaction is manifested in two ways: (1) “Skunks” tend to blame their dissatisfaction on a person or a thing outside themselves, while (2) “turtles” tend to blame themselves for everything. Both views are dysfunctional. Our problems do not come solely from external forces, whether we conceive of these forces as our parents, a particular set of circumstances, or Adam and Eve. Nor do our problems come solely from inside us. We are not to blame for every trouble that comes into our life.

Most of us tend to swing back and forth between being a “skunk” or a “turtle.” If we blame ourselves for our troubles, it is often more than we can stand. Because it is also unrealistic, we hand all the

Sunday’s lesson left us with the realization that, unless there was divine intervention in our behalf, we would have no hope. The good news, of course, is that God has intervened in our behalf: through Jesus Christ.

While many followers of other world religions admire Jesus Christ as a holy prophet or a great teacher, few recognize the true significance of Jesus Christ’s entrance into humanity.

What message did the angel Gabriel deliver to Mary, the mother of Jesus, about the identity of the Child she would conceive? Luke 1:26-35.

The New Testament writers boldly declare that Jesus Christ was conceived by the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit of God. “‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God’” (Luke 1:35, NKJV). Born of a human mother, Jesus could call only God His real Father. He is Son of God and Son of man.

Consider the testimony of the apostle John at the beginning of his Gospel record. What important message does he convey about Jesus Christ? John 1:1-18.

Jesus Christ is more than a holy prophet. He is more than a great teacher. He is the Word made flesh. He is God’s thoughts made audible. One with the Father from eternity past, the only begotten of the Father became human flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He is Immanuel, God with us, and yet He was “with us”—not in the thunder and lightning and clouds of Sinai—but as one of us; that is, He was as fully human as we are. What an amazing condescension for Him who “was in the beginning with God”!

It has been said a desperate situation calls for desperate measures. What should it tell us about what sin has done to us that it would require God Himself becoming a human being and then dying in order to save us from the penalty of sin? How should this realization help us trust that, however desperate our own personal situation, the God who would do this is able to save us from whatever challenges we face?
blame to someone or something outside ourselves. Everything is all our spouse’s fault or all our boss’s fault or the fault of the weather. When our spouse or our boss or the weather does not accept all the blame, we swing back to thinking it is all our fault again.

How are we to escape this gut-wrenching roller-coaster ride?

Let us begin by recognizing we are born separated from God and out of touch with His reality. We had no choice in that. It does not do us any good to blame Adam, Eve, or God.

However, that does not mean we are completely at fault for the condition in which we find ourselves. We do not know what reality is all about. The solution to our dilemma is not found in placing blame on anyone in our past. The solution comes from focusing on the future and on what we need to learn to live in the reality God created. God does not blame us for the circumstances of our birth. Instead, He offers us a way to internalize reality. Through Jesus, we can once more be united with God and learn how to live within His reality.

Jesus is Lord because He created everything and has authority over what He created. But Scripture rarely appeals to this authority as a way of motivating us to obey Him. Rather, Scripture describes Jesus as One who seeks to woo and win us with His love. He is the Creator of the reality He wants us to live in, and He knows best how human beings operate. Because He loves us and does not want us to keep stubbing our toes in the dark, He shines a light into our lives so we can see what is really there. We can pay attention to what is there and avoid hurting ourselves, or we can ignore what is there and remain miserable. It is God’s love and mercy that draw us to Him. Our reception of God’s love and mercy is a prerequisite for our accepting His authority.

Another way of understanding Jesus’ authority is to see it as the authority of a father. The authoritarian father who demands obedience will produce a rebellious child. The child feels condemnation and guilt in the presence of the father. The child does not feel loved. So, the child has no motivation to accept his father’s authority. In contrast, a father who makes sure his child feels loved and who limits the child appropriately will produce an obedient child. The child feels acknowledged, cared for, and affirmed by the father. The positive relationship that develops motivates the child to accept the father’s authority.

Besides being the authority, the father is also the creator of the child and the one who cares for it, protects it, provides for it, and guides it.

In the ancient world, there were clear lines of authority. But there also were clear lines of responsibility. People in authority were responsible for meeting the needs of those under their authority. If people in authority did their job well, they were respected and obeyed. If they were arbitrary and dictatorial, there was often rebellion.
God’s Perfect Plan (Isa. 53:3-7).

When Jesus came to the river Jordan to be baptized, John the Baptist exclaimed, “‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” (John 1:29, NKJV). In this brief declaration, John the Baptist provided a succinct summary of God’s perfect plan of salvation. Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God.

Review the following portions of Scripture. How do these passages help you to understand God’s perfect plan of salvation?

Gen. 22:6-14:
____________________________________________________________________

Isa. 53:4-7:
____________________________________________________________________

Rev. 5:1-14:
____________________________________________________________________

We have all gone astray. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And the wages of that sin is death. We all deserve to die. But Jesus Christ, the Son of God, willingly took our punishment upon Himself. “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5, NKJV).

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He was laying down His life as the Lamb of God. He was fulfilling God’s perfect plan of salvation in every detail. “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3, NKJV). “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21, NKJV).

“Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. ‘With His stripes we are healed.’ ”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 25. Read this famous quote aloud, but put yourself in there: “Christ was treated as I deserve, that I might be treated as He deserves. . . .” Read it aloud over and over until the wonderful truths it portrays hit home and you realize—for yourself—what Christ has done for you.
If we view God as exercising His authority simply because He is the Creator, He may well seem arbitrary and dictatorial. People often believe that kind of God sends people to hell simply because He does not like them. But the Bible reveals a God who does not violate our individuality or our sense of justice. He does not just lay down the law. He embodies it. He is in no way fickle or arbitrary. So, His authority makes sense. His judgments are made in the open rather than in the secret recesses of His mind.

To summarize, we are born out of sync with reality. God is the Creator of the reality He wants us to live in and has, therefore,

### Inductive Bible Study


1. “‘There is no one righteous,’” maintains the apostle Paul, “‘not even one’” *(Rom. 3:10, NIV)*; thus our need of a Savior. A Savior does for us what we cannot do for ourselves; yet, through the years people have tried to convince themselves they do not need a Savior. What evidence in your own life, or in the lives of those you know, persuades you that our situation is hopeless without a Savior?

2. The opposite of *Lord* (Greek: *kurios*) is “slave” or “servant” (Greek: *doulos*). In New Testament times, no one would ever mistake a master for a servant, or vice versa. Yet, according to Philippians 2:6-11, our Lord Jesus became a servant in order to effect our salvation. In what ways did He demonstrate humility? How should we translate His example into our experience?

3. As a result of His humility, “God exalted [Jesus] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name” *(Phil. 2:9, NIV)*. How does Christ’s humility reveal His lordship in ways a demonstration of power and strength never could? How has Christ’s humility affected you personally?

4. In Acts 9, Saul of Tarsus is literally stopped in his tracks by a demonstration of Jesus’ power. At what point or points have you been forced to come to terms with Christ’s claims on your life? What have been the results?

5. The Bible contains many stories of people whose lives were changed as a result of their encounters with divinity. What is the relationship between accepting Jesus as Lord and living a life of freedom?
Responding to God’s Grace (1 Cor. 1:18-31).

Our gracious heavenly Father has made a perfect provision for everyone to be saved. We who were dead in our sins can be made alive in Christ Jesus. The apostle Paul proclaimed the good news: “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9, NKJV). So, when Paul and Silas were asked by the Philippian jailer what he needed to do in order to be saved, their answer was simple and to the point: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31, NKJV). Salvation is available for all who accept God’s perfect plan. When we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be saved.

Unfortunately, not everyone is willing to accept God’s perfect plan. Some view the message of the Cross and blood atonement as a remnant from humanity’s barbaric past. Others would rather trust in their own wisdom rather than the wisdom of God.

How does the apostle Paul describe the varying responses to God’s perfect plan of salvation? 1 Cor. 1:18-31. How are some of these same responses manifested today by those who hear the gospel?

In apostolic times, there were some who viewed the death of Jesus Christ on the cross as a scandal, a stumbling block. How could Someone who was executed as a criminal be the Messiah? Others viewed the message of the Cross as foolishness. How could one Man’s death affect the destiny of the human race? Both groups rejected God’s perfect plan of salvation and scorned His grace, some because it went against their own personal religious views, others because it just didn’t seem reasonable, logical, and “scientific.” However, some embraced the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. They accepted the death of Christ for their sins as the power of God and the wisdom of God. In spite of opposition to the gospel, the apostle Paul declared, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16, NKJV).

What has your own response been to the gospel? Go back over your own experience with Jesus and your response to His saving grace. What, more than anything else, moved you to accept His salvation? Or are you still making excuses?
Witnessing

Perhaps one of the most amazing things about God is He chooses to reveal Himself to us. The Creator of the universe—all-knowing and all-powerful—makes Himself known to sinful humanity.

Not only has He made Himself known through nature, the prophets, and His mighty acts, but He took on humanity itself that we might know Him better. “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:18, NIV).

But God did not stop there! He chose to use His people to further reveal Himself. Just as John the Baptist testified concerning Christ, so we are called to testify.

Whereas John could testify only to the true Light that was coming into the world (vs. 9), if we have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, He has taken up residence in our hearts and that Light shines within each one of us: “To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (vs. 12).

Hebrews 2:11 tells us Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters (NLT). Can we truly say with Paul that we are not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

It has been said:
We are writing a gospel, a chapter each day,
By the deeds that we do and the words that we say,
Men read what we write, distorted or true,
What is the gospel according to you?

Has your life been so transformed that people see Jesus in you? Have you laid hold of the power available through the Holy Spirit that made Jesus say “‘Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these’” (John 14:12, NIV)?

The apostle John records the sad news that Jesus Christ “came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11, NKJV). Because He was not the Messiah they were looking for, many rejected God’s perfect plan for their salvation. But the apostle John also records the good news: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12, NKJV). Many read this testimony and fail to grasp its true significance. When we accept God’s perfect plan of salvation through Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, we not only receive Jesus Christ as Savior. We receive Him as Lord.

Examine the account of Saul’s conversion and his interaction with Ananias, recorded in Acts 9:1-19. What are the implications for your own life when you receive Jesus as Savior and Lord?

When Saul realized he was encountering the risen Christ, the first thing he said wasn’t “Lord, what do You want me to believe?” or “Lord, what do You want me to say?” but it was “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Saul, here, by calling Jesus “Lord,” recognized that because of who Jesus was, Saul needed to obey Him. And when the Lord said “ ‘Arise and go,’ ” Saul arose and went. We see the same response from Ananias. At first he argues with the Lord Jesus Christ, questioning His judgment. But when the Lord said “ ‘Go,’ ” Ananias went. The message is clear: When we confess Jesus Christ as Lord, we recognize His absolute authority over our lives.

What word of reproof did the Lord Jesus Christ give to those who confessed Him with their lips but not with their lives? Luke 6:46-49.

When we receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we will obey Him, and, as a result, our lives will be radically transformed. It’s in the doing, the obeying, and the living the life of faith that we are changed.

If Christ were to suddenly appear to you, as He did to Saul, and you said “Lord, what do You want me to do?” what do you think He would say to you, and why?
ICEBREAKER: If you made a list of concepts and ideas in which you had absolute certainty, what would you include? How long would your list be? How would it be valuable information to share with a friend? In John 1:14 (NIV), Jesus is described as “the One and Only . . . full of grace and truth.” In what ways have you personally experienced His absolute certainty in your life?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:
1. Most advertising campaigns are based on the premise of product superiority. The best product sells. How does the concept of comparisons impact our Christian lives? Why is it dangerous for us to measure our religious experience with that of another human? Paul quotes, “‘There is no one righteous, not even one!’” (Rom. 3:10, NIV). How does personal, honest reflection of your own life help you turn to a gracious, merciful, and forgiving God?

2. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory” (John 1:14, NKJV). The Creator became human to address our need. We each have a choice; we might say, “Our options are open.” Will you see God’s salvation as “foolishness” or the “power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18, NIV)? How has God’s gift of salvation impacted the way you live your life? What have been the practical implications? How would you describe to a neighbor or colleague from work the choice you have made?

APPLICATION QUESTION:
Jesus Christ confronted Saul on the road to Damascus. “A light from heaven flashed around him” (Acts 9:3, NIV) to get his attention. Later Jesus describes Saul to Ananias as “‘my chosen instrument to carry my name’” (vs. 15, NIV). The difference required a name change. How would you describe the impact in your life before and then after you found Jesus to be a personal Savior and Friend? What kind of instrument for the advancement of the gospel has He made you? Write a letter to God that reflects your willingness to do what He calls you to do. This week, find a friend and share your experience and testimony.
Further Study: Read the Second Epistle of Peter. Notice the numerous references to the Lord Jesus Christ. This epistle begins and ends with references to Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

Think of some individuals in Scripture who struggled with the implications of accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Here are some examples:

The rich young ruler—Matt. 19:16-26
Zacchaeus—Luke 19:1-10
Thomas—John 20:19-29

As you look over these examples, what appears to be the reasons for their struggles? Are there any common elements to each situation?

Discussion Questions:

1. How can we encourage one another to confess Jesus Christ as Lord in every aspect of our lives without sounding legalistic or judgmental? How can we be sure to avoid the trap of legalism as we seek to have Jesus rule in every area of our lives? Why is a proper understanding of salvation by faith alone the only way to protect yourself against legalism?

2. As a class, what could you do to help members in your local church realize the importance of allowing Jesus to be Lord of their lives? In other words, what could you do to encourage members to make a total commitment to Jesus?

3. What encouragement would you give to a friend who wants to experience salvation but who is afraid to totally surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord?

4. Go around the classroom and ask each member to answer the following question, “What is the gospel?” After each person has a turn, analyze the answers. What are the differences and the similarities in the various views of the gospel?
Lord of Our Priorities

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 2:24, Exod. 19:5, Job 1:1-5, Rom. 3:24, Eph. 1:7.

Memory Text: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33, NKJV).

Key Thought: The Lord Jesus Christ does not ask to be first among equals in our lives. He asks to be first without equal.

The radical claim of Jesus. Jesus asks us to give Him unrivaled first place in our lives. To all who would be His disciples, He says “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26, NKJV).

Obviously, this statement of Jesus cannot be taken literally. If we are called as followers of Jesus to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44), we should certainly love those closest to us, such as our immediate family. Jesus is not asking us to hate our family members; instead, using powerful and exaggerated imagery, He’s saying that we must give Him first place in our lives. He wants to be our top priority, the recipient of our highest devotion. After all, considering who He is—not only our Creator but the One who redeemed us with His own blood (see 1 Pet. 1:18, 19)—we owe Him everything, and He’s asking us to acknowledge that debt by making Him first in our lives. How could we do any less?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 9.*
The Earth Is the Lord’s

Read the following texts. How do they help us understand the claims Jesus has over our lives?

Gen. 1:1

Exod. 19:5

Ps. 24:1

Ps. 50:10, 11

Isa. 45:18

Col. 1:16

The whole idea of the Lord having priority in our lives is dependent upon who He is in contrast to who we are. It’s in the context of this relationship that we can understand why the Lord should be given complete priority over our priorities. The leader of one nation doesn’t have the moral or legal right to make rules for the citizens of another country, does he? The president of France, for instance, doesn’t have the authority to tell people living in Paraguay how they must live. The Lord, as our Creator, is the sovereign Ruler of the universe. Whether we acknowledge it or not, He has authority over us, in much the same way a ruler in a particular land has authority over the citizens of that country. Though the Lord has given us stewardship and responsibility over the things on the earth, whatever we possess, whatever gifts we have, we have only because God first created these things and then gave them to us.

It’s crucial to keep this realization before us because God does not force us to use, for His glory, the gifts He’s given us. He’s made us free, free to prioritize as we wish. We can acknowledge His claims over us, not just in words but in how we live and how we prioritize, or we can go our own way, doing what we want and, of course, reaping the sad results of our wrong choices.

Whatever you have, whatever you are, dwell upon how everything comes from God. How should this realization help you understand how you should set your priorities?
Lord of Our Priorities.

Our relationship to the authority figures in our life can color how comfortable we are in accepting Jesus as President of our priorities. In our fallen world, many have had unpleasant experiences with clueless authority figures exercising their power simply for the sake of doing so. In such situations, the impulse to rebel can reach epic proportions and come to fruition with devastating results. When we project our traumatic experiences with such authorities onto Jesus, we are disturbed by the thought of His being our Lord, Employer, Owner, President, and Judge. Rather than feeling comforted and contained, we feel exiled to some sort of emotional prison. We are not comforted, and we do not view His words as conveying good news.

Yet, good news is exactly what God intended Jesus to be. Thus, we need to reframe our picture of authority; we need to understand that Jesus’ authority is for us, not against us. We need to see Jesus as Someone who is emotionally and spiritually on our side and who

**Key Text:** Luke 1:38

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To show that we should put God first in our lives because He is our Creator.
2. To show that we should put God first in our lives because He is our Redeemer.
3. To show how Christ our Example gave the Father control of His priorities.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. The Lord Our Creator *(Col. 1:16).*
   A. Why does the Lord have the right to have priority in our lives?
   B. Why are we responsible for using what God has given us for His glory?

II. The Lord Our Redeemer *(Isa. 44:22).*
   A. Why else should we submit our priorities?
   B. Why should this motivate us to let God control our priorities?

III. Following the Example of Christ *(John 6:38).*
   A. Describe Christ’s purpose in life.
   B. How can we follow His example in this area?
   C. How did Jesus demonstrate the importance of putting God first? *(Mark 1:35).*

**Summary:** As our Creator and Redeemer, the Lord has the authority to claim our priorities. We should put Him first in our lives by seeking Him at the beginning of each day and by using all He has given us for His glory and to fulfill His purpose for our lives.
Redeemer God

“I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee” (Isa. 44:22).

Yesterday’s lesson looked at the claims God has over us by virtue of the fact He is our Creator. In that sense, He is our Owner. And yet, in and of itself, in a fallen world, that might not be enough to get us to want to serve Him, to want to surrender our lives and priorities to Him. It might oblige us to, in the sense that someone working for his or her employer is obliged to work for that person. But God wants us to serve Him, not out of some cold, hard obligation but because we love Him for what He’s done for us, not just as our Creator but also as our Redeemer.

In your own mind, recall the situations where you did something for someone because you felt obliged to, as opposed to when you did something for someone because you really loved and appreciated this person. How does this contrast help you better understand the way the Lord wants us to relate to Him?

The Bible makes it clear the Lord is not only our Creator but our Redeemer. Numerous verses talk about Jesus in the role of our Redeemer, of having done the work of redemption in our behalf. Indeed, it’s impossible to understand His death on the cross apart from the notion of redemption.

Read Romans 3:24; Galatians 3:13; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18, 19. How do these verses about Christ’s work of redemption in our behalf help you want to serve the Lord and surrender your God-given gifts to Him?

The word for “redeem,” or “redemption,” both in the Old and New Testament, comes from various words that mean things like “to buy back,” “to ransom,” “to deliver.” These ideas convey the truths of what Jesus did for us. Thus, not only is He our Creator; He is our Redeemer. He ransomed us from the power and, ultimately, the final legal consequences of sin (see Rom. 6:23). When we begin to grasp what this redemption means for us personally, when we experience for ourselves the joy of freedom of this redemption, then it becomes so much easier to make Him the Lord of our priorities.
has the power to help us succeed. Our fear must change to faith before we can access the gift of Jesus as Lord of our priorities.

Changing fear to faith requires that we contrast Jesus’ use of authority with how many humans misuse their authority. Jesus has authority over us, because He created us and knows us. He created us free, which means we have the capacity to make choices. From the beginning of Creation, God gave humanity the freedom to choose its own destiny. Our first parents made an unwise choice, so now, as fallen creatures, we are no longer totally free. Envy and greed have become a large part of our motivational system. Our human nature is bent to sin. If these things were not so, we could redeem ourselves by making a new choice; but as fallen beings, we have a propensity to make choices that lead to destruction and death.

As Christians, however, we are enabled to live a life motivated by faith in the salvation Jesus achieved for us. In living such a life, we become new and truly free creatures. We receive a positive identity to embrace and grow into. The Spirit of God dwells within us and, thereby, re-creates us into the image of God and fully restores our freedom. Only those who, by faith, accept this new identity have the real capacity to make truly free choices for good and for life. In Christ, however, wrong choices do not condemn us. Rather, they provide opportunities for us to learn how to do better. If we stumble in our Christian walk, we have an Advocate we can trust to pick us up, brush us off, and help us get back on track. In this way, we can perceive Christ using His authority, not to criticize or condemn us but to encourage us and to coach us. We will believe He wants to help us do that which will enable us to reach the goal we have mutually set. Jesus created us with certain impulses and drives. We mature as Christians when we learn to nurture our God-ordained impulses for life into full bloom.

There is a paradox in this type of freedom. The paradox is that we achieve this freedom only through obedient surrender. This is not the type of surrender that makes a person a doormat. Rather, it is the type of surrender that requires relinquishing our own power to receive the power of Another. In the Christian life, we give up what power we have to benefit ourselves. As long as we deny the lordship of Christ, we will not be free, because we remain a divided entity. When we surrender from the fight to be our own god, we will find the freedom to be what God originally made us to be.

When we set aside our power to live as autonomous, self-driven individuals, we will be able to serve the needs of the community of which we are a part. In this, Jesus is our Example. Jesus loved not His life to death. He freely chose to fulfill His mission of redemption. He did not fight back against the enemies who falsely accused Him, but He loved them even though He knew they would kill Him. Because He trusted God to the point of self-sacrifice, He achieved His calling as our Lord and Savior. His life and death are truly gifts to humanity.
The Example of the Lord Jesus Christ

Doing His Father’s will was the number one priority of Jesus. His plan for life was simply this: To discover the Father’s will and do it.

Look up the following texts. What is being said in each case? What’s the common theme found in them all? What do they tell us about Jesus and the example of obedience He presents for us?

*Luke 22:42*

__________________________________________________________________

*John 4:34*

__________________________________________________________________

*John 6:38*

__________________________________________________________________

*John 17:8*

__________________________________________________________________

*Phil. 2:8*

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*Heb. 10:9*

__________________________________________________________________

“So utterly was Christ emptied of self that He made no plans for Himself. He accepted God’s plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans. So should we depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 208.

What a powerful example is Christ’s life of complete surrender that not only His deeds but His words were from the Father.

Go back over the texts for today. Put the basic thoughts together and ask, What’s the message they have for me? What do I need to change in order to move better toward this ideal as personified in Jesus?
TEACHERS COMMENTS

We are not called to be the Messiah, and few are called to be martyrs. However, we are called to love others with the love of Jesus. We are to live this side of the Resurrection proclaiming the good news we have experienced. Because Jesus died for us and was resurrected, we can fully live without the fear that someone can steal life from us. Because we know there will be a resurrected life, we know we can live now with unconquerable hope. We have a God who redeems us.

Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** Genesis 2:24, Exodus 19:5, Job 1:1-5, Romans 3:24, Ephesians 1:7

1. Jesus is Lord of our lives because He created us and redeemed us. These two things awaken in us a profound sense of gratitude and inspire us to make serving Christ our highest priority. Yet, putting Christ first every day in all things is often a struggle. What, for you, are the greatest obstacles to committing yourself totally to Christ? What is useful in overcoming these obstacles?

2. Luke 17:11-19 relates the story of ten lepers who came to Jesus for cleansing. All of them were healed, but only one returned to thank Jesus—and he was a Samaritan. Why would religious people—be they Jews or Seventh-day Adventists—feel they are somehow entitled to God’s blessings without thanking Him?

3. Ellen White wrote: “We [should] depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will.”—The Desire of Ages, p. 208. What does that mean in practical terms? Should we stay in bed until He tells us to get up? Not eat until He tells us what to fix for breakfast? Or should we look for opportunities to honor Him as we go through the activities of our daily lives? What kind of opportunities should we be on the lookout for?

4. Jesus prayed before dawn in a solitary place (Mark 1:35). David prayed morning, noon, and night (Ps. 55:17); and Daniel prayed three times a day (Dan. 6:10). The Bible does not say we have to pray as they did; we all have different schedules and temperaments. When and how do you cultivate a prayer experience that works for you?
First on Your Agenda (Luke 6:46).

What question does Jesus ask His hearers at the end of His Sermon on the Mount? Luke 6:46. How different would your life be if you did everything Jesus told you to do?

Obedience is the ultimate evidence that we have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord. His will becomes our will. His plans become our plans. As a loving response to His saving grace, we yield ourselves completely to Him as Lord of every aspect of our lives.

We must avoid at all costs the fatal delusion of calling Jesus “Lord” but failing to recognize His lordship over our lives as we plan our daily schedules. We can easily become preoccupied with working out our own agendas. Instead of asking the Lord to rule and overrule in every activity of our day, we ask God to bless the plans we have already made. Ellen White suggests a different strategy for those who have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord: “Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.”—Steps to Christ, p. 70.

Consider the stories of the following Bible characters. Where did God’s plans for them conflict with their own personal plans?

Exod. 2:11-15

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Jer. 1:4-10

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Matt. 19:16-22

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

2 Tim. 4:10

____________________________________________________________________

Who can’t see himself or herself, to some degree, reflected in these stories? Some of the stories (as far as we can tell) had a good ending, some bad. What made the crucial difference?
Witnessing

As humans, we often see things as black and white, good or bad. It is “obvious” that those who drop out of school or use their money to buy alcohol rather than food don’t have their priorities in order.

As Christians, however, we must operate not on a good/bad model but on one of good, better, and best. Too often it is not the “bad” priority that comes between us and God but the “good” one that keeps us from choosing the best.

Perhaps this is why it is said the road to hell is paved with good intentions; we must never let our own idea of what is good in a particular situation interfere with what God demands.

Our witness, then, must neither demand nor exhibit anything less than full allegiance to God. Jesus never tolerated anything that stood between a person and his or her God. His call was simple: “‘Follow me.’” Those who heeded the call were greatly blessed, but there were many who missed their blessing because they put the good, such as burying their father, ahead of the best (Luke 9:59).

Are we experiencing the promise of this week’s memory text, or are we still wondering whether or not God answers prayer? “‘Seek first,’ ” not as an afterthought, not as a justification, not as a bargaining chip, “‘his kingdom and his righteousness’” (Matt. 6:33, NIV).

Let us humble ourselves, realize our wretchedness (especially if we appear “good” in the world’s eyes), and put God first so we might see how He orders everything else in our lives. What greater witness is there than a life completely surrendered to God?
First in Your Day (Ps. 5:1-3, Mark 1:35).

Our Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated the importance of seeking God first in the day. Mark records that “in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He [Jesus] went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35, NKJV). “The early morning often found Him in some secluded place, meditating, searching the Scriptures, or in prayer. From these quiet hours He would return to His home to take up His duties again, and to give an example of patient toil.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 90.

We would do well to follow the example of our Lord. While it is important to set the Lord always before us (see Ps. 16:8), it also is appropriate to set aside special times of prayer. David prayed in the morning, at noon, and in the evening (see Ps. 55:17). Daniel followed a similar practice (see Dan. 6:10).

Read the psalmist’s prayer in Psalm 5:1-3. Why do you think the morning is such an important time to especially focus our attention on the Lord? What is it about the morning (or whenever you first wake up) that makes it such an important time to commune with God?

Most Christians agree in principle that it is important to make communion with the Lord the first priority of the day. However, many have difficulty putting this conviction into practice. Late-night activities or early morning responsibilities seem to crowd out easily that special time of fellowship with the Lord. As a result, our time with God often becomes reactive, crying out to Him when things go wrong, rather than proactive, seeking Him first before we face any of the challenges of the day. Many seriously cripple their spiritual life because they don’t take that crucial time to pray, read the Bible, or meditate on the Word. In the same way that if you skip breakfast you can soon run out of physical fuel, by skipping morning devotion you can find the spiritual “fuel” lacking to meet the temptations the enemy is always trying to throw in your path (see 1 Pet. 5:8).

What things are you letting interfere with a consistent morning devotional life? Why not, right now, prayerfully resolve in your heart to use this precious time when you begin your day to keep in communion with the Lord?
Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Take a few moments to look back at your appointment book from last week. What occupied the major part of your time? What unexpected things, both good and bad, did you have to manage? What one event was the highlight of your week? How does this review reveal the priorities in your life?

Thought Questions:
1 The issue of origins is much debated in our world. The Bible proclaims Jesus to be the Author of our existence. “I am the Lord, and there is no other” (Isa. 45:18, NIV). This gives Him the title and right to be the sovereign Ruler of the universe and of our personal lives. How does this world view impact the way we live our lives, as well as the way we relate to others? What impact does it make on your response to God to know that He allows you to choose whether or not you offer Him your allegiance?

2 Parents often indulge their children with the best of what they can offer. Paul tells us that “the riches of God’s grace” are “lavished” (Eph. 1:7, 8, NIV) or “made to abound toward us” (vs. 8, NKJV). The Lord has the right to demand our obedience; instead, He compels us through love, demonstrated by His death on the cross. What practical implications does this knowledge have for how you develop your daily agenda? What impact will it have when your story is written at the end of your life?

Application Question:
We live lives driven by what has been called the tyranny of the urgent. As a consequence, we come to the end of each day feeling robbed and discouraged by failure and guilt. The psalmist declares, “in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation” (Ps. 5:3, NIV). How can we learn from Jesus the way to be proactive with our lives? With His help and mentoring, we can make radical changes in our priorities that will help us live in hope. Covenant with God to set aside time to allow Him to reorganize your life.
Further Study: Think of individuals mentioned in Scripture who put God first in their lives and allowed Him to be the Lord of their priorities. For example, consider the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Read Luke 1:26-38. Notice her response to the claim of God.

Note: The idea of yielding our lives under the authority of another is not a popular concept in the twenty-first century. People want to be the masters of their own destinies. They want to be in control. Christians have a different perspective. The One who calls us to live under His lordship is our loving Savior, who gave His life to redeem us. Under His lordship we find freedom, not bondage. We are sons and daughters, not slaves.

Discussion Questions:

1. How is it possible to follow the example of Jesus who “made no plans for Himself” but simply allowed the Father to direct His steps? Give some practical suggestions as to how that approach to life might be implemented. Share your ideas with the class.

2. Look at two other important areas of your life, family, and finances. What are some practical ways we can acknowledge the lordship of Jesus in these two crucial areas?

3. Look up as many texts as you can find that talk about Christ as the Sacrifice for our sins and then write down a paragraph summarizing what they are saying. As a class, have people read aloud what they wrote. How does this great news help motivate you to want to serve the Lord and surrender to Him all He’s given you? What greater motivation could we possibly have to do this?
Lord of Our Thoughts

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 2:16; 2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10-18; Col. 3:1, 2.

Memory Text: “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1, 2, NKJV).

Key Thought: The Lord Jesus Christ desires to renew our minds and be Lord of our thoughts. It is God’s intention that every thought be brought into captivity to the will of Christ.

The battle of the mind. Many new Christians have the mistaken idea that once they have received Jesus as Lord and Savior the battle is over. In reality, the battle has only just begun. As seen in the earthly life of Jesus, it’s often after our baptism that Satan intensifies his attacks. The battle is fought in our minds, and one of Satan’s primary temptations is the sin of remembrance: He tries to lure us back to the old, forbidden pathways. Our Lord Jesus Christ, in contrast, wants us to forget what is behind and “be transformed by the renewing of [our minds]” (Rom. 12:2, NKJV). The Greek verb translated “transformed” comes from the same verb used in Mark 9:2, when Jesus was “transfigured.” What a remarkable ideal the Lord Jesus Christ has for each of His redeemed children. He desires to so renew our minds that the glory of the Lord will shine through us.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 16.
The Power of Thought

Read the following texts: Exodus 20:17, 1 Chronicles 28:9, Matthew 5:8, 1 Corinthians 2:16. What’s the one thing they all have in common?

The Bible, of course, has so much to say about our deeds and our words, all of which is understandable, because our deeds and words can have powerful effects on ourselves and others.

Yet, the Bible also makes it clear that the Lord cares about our thoughts. But why? As long as we don’t act on our thoughts, what does it matter? Why should God care what we think? Whoever heard of anyone hurting another person with a thought? Thoughts are private, personal things that, in the end, if we don’t express them or act upon them, don’t hurt anyone.

Right?

Why do you think it matters what we think, as long as we don’t act on our thoughts? Or is it possible to not, eventually, act on our thoughts? Or even if we don’t act on our thoughts, why does it matter what we think? See Gen. 6:5, Prov. 4:23, Matt. 5:27-30.

Because our thoughts are the foundation of all our words and actions, it matters what we think. Every evil deed ever committed, every evil word, every sin, began first as a thought. How many millions of people first harbored thoughts—nothing more than “harmless” thoughts—that eventually sprouted into words or deeds that have caused incredible damage? Who can know what thoughts will remain only as thoughts, nothing more, and which will bear bitter fruit? We can never know for sure, which is why it’s best to control our thoughts before they turn into something painful and damaging to ourselves and others.

Try this rather frightful, and horrific, experiment: Imagine if your thoughts were suddenly projected on a screen for everyone to see! What would be up there? What does this tell you about what’s in your mind and what changes need to be made?
Key Text: Proverbs 23:7

Teachers Aims:
1. To show how our thoughts are a spiritual battlefield.
2. To show how Jesus wants us to forget our old ways and become changed by renewing our minds.
3. To show how God is glorified when our thoughts are renewed.

Lesson Outline:
I. A Spiritual Battle (Eph. 6:12).
   A. What is at stake in the spiritual war?
   B. How does every sinful habit become a stronghold in this war? How do these habits shape our character?
   C. What is the only way we can forsake sin and defeat the enemy? (John 15:1-8, 16:5-14).

II. Looking Above (Col. 3:2).
   A. Describe ways we can keep our thoughts above earthly things.
   B. Why should we keep our minds on things that are edifying?

III. Glorifying God in Our Thinking (Phil. 4:8).
   A. What is the only way our minds can be transformed? (1 Thess. 5:23).
   B. Discuss ways that glorifying God in our thoughts enables us to do the will of the Father.
   C. As we allow the Lord to work in us, every imagination will be acceptable to Him.

Summary: We are faced with a spiritual battle. We can defeat sin and temptation by guarding our thoughts. Reading, seeing, and hearing things that edify and uplift our thoughts lead us heavenward while giving honor and glory to God.

COMMENTARY

Lord of Our Thoughts.

The mind is not the brain. The brain is the grey matter that resides in the cranium and operates according to certain physical properties. The mind is the pattern of thought. While the mind resides within the brain, it is an individual spiritual entity separate from it. The brain’s function or dysfunction affects the mind and its pattern of thinking. The mind also can affect the brain, since our habits of thinking actually create physical pathways in our brain that affect our future thoughts.

The mind consists of patterns of perception and attention. It includes short-term, long-term, and sensory memory. The mind
Bringing Every Thought Into Captivity
(2 Cor. 10:3-5).

Meditate on Paul’s testimony in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Read it in different versions (if possible) and then answer the following questions:

1. What kind of battle does Paul say we are in?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

2. What does it mean to be in a spiritual battle? How does it differ from a physical battle?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

3. What is one of the “carnal” (the Greek word means “fleshly”) weapons that Christians don’t use? See John 18:36. What are the weapons that we need to use? See Eph. 6:10-18.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

4. What are some of the “high things” that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

The word for “strongholds” in 2 Corinthians 10:4 means “castles” or “fortresses.” Paul doubtless is thinking of the inner fortresses of our hearts, the “castles” of our minds, the habits of sin and self that determine our character. The battle is one of truth against error, the knowledge of God against ignorance and superstition; it is a struggle of true worship against all forms of idolatry. In the end, it’s a great controversy between Christ and Satan for control of the race. All this occurs in the mind, in the heart; and only through the power of God working in our lives can we uproot the enemy.

Keeping in mind the context of what you’ve read today, why is control of our thoughts so crucial in the battle we are facing? Why, in many ways, is keeping control of our thoughts the whole battle?
creates, perceives, and stores images. It solves problems, creates thoughts and ideas, and reasons through issues in a logical or illogical manner. We make decisions based on all these activities of the mind and the emotional significance of the decisions themselves.

Without Christ, we naturally have a mind informed solely by our wants and wishes. Our perceptions are limited, such as a horse's vision is limited by blinders. Our personal interpretation of events skews reality; and we can imagine only that which benefits us personally. Without Christ, we solve problems in ways that maximize our interests and pleasure. Our ideas and reasoning naturally do not consider the presence and power of God. So, we make decisions with no reference to the resources of heaven.

All is not hopeless, however, for in Philippians 2:5 the apostle Paul encourages us to have the mind of Christ. What does it mean, then, to have the mind of Christ? It means we will learn how to perceive things the way He does and to attend to the things He attends to. It means our memories will include an acknowledgment of God's presence, love, and action.

Having the mind of Christ means the images we perceive and create will be inspired by the reality of His involvement in our lives. In our problem solving, we will seek His wisdom and expect His grace to empower us. Our thoughts and ideas about people and things will be a reflection of God's thoughts and ideas. We will seek to reason in a logical and orderly manner, since Jesus is the Author of reason and logic. Based on His involvement in our lives, we will seek to make decisions that are in tune with that involvement and that depend on the power and resources of Heaven. To the extent that if we have the mind of Christ, we will enjoy the benefits of love, peace, and joy. Thinking about God, the world, and ourselves in the way Jesus thinks about them will progressively transform our minds to make them more like our Savior's mind.

We do not acquire the mind of Christ through some magic formula or in some instantaneous way. It takes effort and time. How can we learn to think the way Jesus does? It happens in the arenas of information, ideas, and images. We need the correct information about God, our world, and ourselves before we can form correct ideas about them and imagine them as God would. God's Word is the powerful and active agent for correcting the distorted information we have. God's Word informs us about how justice and mercy operate. It assures us that God's most basic characteristic is love. God's Word reveals we were created in His image and are all under the blight of sin. It reveals that regardless of our enmity toward God, He loves us.

Concerning our world, we learn from God's Word that He does not condemn it but loves it so much He sent His Son to die for it. We can know none of this unless God's Word speaks it from Scripture to our hearts.
Setting Your Mind on Things Above

(Col. 3:1, 2).

Even after we have received Jesus as Savior and Lord, it is still possible to become distracted by a multitude of earthly attractions. We easily can become preoccupied with things of secondary importance and forget we are called to set our minds on things above, not on things on the earth. After all, we physically live on the earth; we are constantly surrounded by things of the earth. And, indeed, many things of the earth are not, in and of themselves, bad (see Gen. 1:31). The key is to learn to know the difference.

What reason does Paul give for setting our minds on things above?

Col. 3:1, 2.

Let’s look a little closer at what Paul is telling us here. Because we have been “raised with [Christ]” (Col. 2:12, NKJV; see also Rom. 6:4), that we have died to self (Col. 3:3) and now have a new life in Him, our thoughts should be on heavenly things, things “above” as compared to “things on earth”—the kind of things we thought about before we met Jesus. But now, because Jesus Christ died for us (see Rom. 5:6), has paid the penalty for our sins (see Isa. 53:6), has covered us with His perfect righteousness (see Rom. 4:4-8), and now is interceding in our behalf in heaven (see Heb. 9:24), we must now dwell upon Him and the great redemption He has wrought out for us (see 1 Cor. 1:30).

Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, is sitting at the right hand of the throne of God. We must always remember to focus our attention on our great High Priest, who has passed through the heavens and ever lives to make intercession for us.

“Fix your thoughts upon the Saviour. Go apart from the bustle of the world and sit under Christ’s shadow. Then, amid the din of daily toil and conflict, your strength will be renewed.”—Ellen G. White, In Heavenly Places, p. 62.

Take as much time as possible to dwell upon the plan of salvation, of Christ’s taking on human flesh, of His substitutionary death in your behalf, of His ministry in the sanctuary above. Think about what it reveals about the character of God. Think about the hope it offers you. Think about the promises that are ours because of all this. Now, imagine if, day by day, you lived in such a heavenly atmosphere. How different would your life be?
Once we get the correct information about God, ourselves, and our world, we will be able to form ideas about them that are a reflection of God’s ideas. The images we form of them will progressively match the reality God created. We will suffer less from living contrary to reality and enjoy more the benefits from living in accordance with God’s reality.

A transformed mind does not usually come about by intentional direct effort on our part. It is the by-product of immersing ourselves in God’s powerfully creative Word through study, prayer, meditation, fasting, and other activities that allow God’s light to shine in

### Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery: Romans 12:1, 2; 1 Corinthians 2:16; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Colossians 3:1, 2**

1. Paul urged the Christians in Rome to “be transformed by the renewing of [their] mind” (Rom. 12:2, NIV). The word *transformed* is the same word that describes the transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly. That word is *metamorphosis*. Our metamorphosis from worldliness to Christianity comes when we feed on Christ and focus on being like Him. What specific methods have you found especially useful in helping you achieve this transformation?

2. Trying *not* to think about something is a useless exercise. As soon as you think of what it is you are trying not to think of, you have lost the battle. It is better to substitute something good for the bad you are trying not to think of. Read Galatians 5:22, 23. How does focusing on these things make it easier to refrain from harmful imaginings?

3. Paul wrote: “I pray that out of his glorious riches he [God the Father] may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:16, 17, NIV). What difference would it make if Jesus lived in your house the way He lives in your heart? What kind of accommodations would you make in order for Him to be comfortable?

4. It is virtually impossible, short of going around blindfolded, not to notice the vain, profane, or suggestive images foisted on us by our modern culture. Yet, Paul urged the believers in Colossae to “set [their] minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Col. 3:2, NIV). What images fill your imagination when you set your mind on things above?
Receiving a Sanctified Imagination  
*(Rom. 12:1, 2).*

**Read** Romans 12:1, 2. Focusing on the theme of this week, write down what you believe Paul is telling us.

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One of the precious gifts we have all received from our Creator is the gift of an imagination. Unfortunately, our imaginations have been corrupted by sinful thoughts and desires. We need our imaginations to be sanctified. Given the importance the Bible places on our thoughts, we should be encouraged to know there is power from above that will help us get control of our thoughts and our imaginations.

**How does this renewal of our minds occur?** *Compare Rom. 12:1, 2 with Titus 3:5.*

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These two passages of Scripture contain the only references to the Greek noun translated as “renewing” or “renewal.” The radical transformation of our minds promised in Romans 12:2 can be accomplished only by the power of the Holy Spirit working in those Christians who have surrendered themselves to Him. God will work in us, even at the level of our imagination, but only to the degree we allow Him to. This surrender can, at times, demand an excruciating struggle on our part. As everyone has surely experienced, it’s very easy for our minds to wander and focus on forbidden themes, earthly, carnal things that are from below and not from above. No wonder that in Colossians 3:2 (see yesterday’s study) the literal translation of “set your affection” means “continually think of” heavenly things. Perhaps that’s partially why Paul says, too, that we should “pray always” *(2 Thess. 1:11)*, because nothing can lift our thoughts as can prayer.

**What are the ways you use your imagination? Is it working for or against your walk with the Lord? What can you do in order to make yourself more receptive to the “renewal” of your mind that God promises?**
our dark hearts. God’s Word is like a light shining in a dark place. You don’t need to do anything to banish the darkness; just let the light shine, and darkness disappears. Our part, then, is to allow God to shine the light into our minds and receive from Him insight into the practice of His way in our lives and in our world.

The end result will be freedom. It will be freedom from conformity to the natural ways of humanity. It will be freedom from all that enslaves us and blights our lives. It will be freedom to live as we were created to live with lives of love, joy, and peace.

**Witnessing**

How many times have we heard the cliché about being “so heavenly minded you’re no earthly good”? While the point may be a valid one, in reality, it has been those who were most fixed on things above that did the most good here on earth.

It was Martin Luther King’s “dream” of having all flesh see the glory of the Lord together that fueled the Civil Rights movement in the United States.

It was Mother Teresa’s conviction that her hands should be the instruments of delivering daily bread “along with the love of God” that brought peace and joy to many of the world’s poorest people in Calcutta.

It was Desmond Tutu whose understanding that God is seeking the restoration of what He first created that inspired among the people of South Africa and the world the ability to achieve what many saw as “idealistic.”

Indeed, it was Jesus’ connection with His Father and love for His creation that transformed the lives of those with whom He came in contact and made salvation available to the world.

Is “this mind . . . in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5)? What is your first thought in the morning? The last before going to sleep at night? Most important, what are these thoughts accomplishing in the world around you in between times? Proverbs 29:18 tells us that “where there is no vision, the people perish.” Are you being true to the vision the Lord has given you, or do you continue to ask what it is the Lord requires when the answer is given clearly in Scripture: “To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8, NKJV)?
Influences

Recently, a nation was horrified. A drunken, bedraggled homeless man in a big city was sleeping in an alley. A group of about three young men, seeing the unfortunate fellow, found a canister of gasoline. As the man was sleeping, they doused him with the fuel and set him on fire. He died a horrible death.

When arrested and asked why they did such a terrible thing, one of the boys answered that they had seen something similar happen in a movie and simply copied what they saw.

Think about this episode. However extreme, what’s the crucial principle we see expressed here?

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As we’ve seen this week, God cares about our thoughts; and He has also promised us strength to change our thoughts. But whatever the power promises from above, God isn’t going to just change our thoughts supernaturally. We just don’t utter a prayer, “Lord, change my thoughts,” and instantly we are pure in heart and mind. However nice that would be, it doesn’t work that way. We have a definite role in cooperating with the Lord. To a great extent, the things we put in our minds will affect what things we think. The more you read about Jesus, the more you focus on holy things, then the more your thoughts will be about Jesus and holy things; the more you read about earthly, unholy things, the more your thoughts will be about unholy and earthly things. It is that simple.

How does Philippians 4:8 capture the essence of this week’s lesson? Write out each of these words (true, honest, just, pure, etc.), and under each heading list some things that fit in these categories (it would be interesting to compare your answers with others in class). How well are you following Paul’s admonition regarding your thoughts?

Having trouble controlling your thoughts? Having trouble thinking of heavenly rather than earthly, carnal things? The answer to your problem could easily be found in what you are reading and watching. Only you can make the necessary changes. Why not, right now, under the power and influence of the Holy Spirit, determine seriously to censor the things that come into your mind? Otherwise, you will never have victory in this crucial aspect of Christian life.
Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Different sports require different forms of protective gear. Roller bladers wear helmets, as well as knee and elbow pads. Bicyclists wear helmets and shoes with toe clips. Continue this list, then discuss your personal experience with the armor Paul tells us is necessary for our spiritual journeys. *(See Eph. 6:10-18.)*

Thought Questions:
1. When you really get down and work in the dirt, your clothes get amazingly dirty. A washing machine will get those clothes clean, yet the old work clothes remain. Jesus invites and makes possible the total renewal of our minds, our very thought processes. Why is it necessary to allow the Holy Spirit to change your whole life focus? Why is Paul’s admonition to “set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” *(Col. 3:2, NKJV)* so crucial to our success?

2. News anchors report battles in diverse and faraway places in our world (sometimes even near at hand). The images portrayed are frightening and discouraging. The Bible makes us aware there is a very real battle being waged for our minds and allegiances. How can we avoid “victim mentality,” which leads to inevitable defeat? Paul tells us we have the arsenal of heaven at our disposal and “divine power to demolish strongholds” *(2 Cor. 10:4, NIV).* Share how this gives you courage and the assurance of victory over wrong imaginations and thoughts.

Application Question:
Paul invites us to present our bodies, our very selves, as “living sacrifice[s]” *(Rom. 12:1)* to God and the cause of the gospel. This embodies an entire transformation of our natures, from selfish to serving. We become nonconformists to the patterns of this world *(Rom. 12:2).* How could this renewal be practically applied in your life? Make a list of activities you are gifted to perform on behalf of God’s kingdom (e.g., sharing a scripture or word of encouragement with a struggling friend or neighbor). This week, plan to do at least one of the things on your list.
Further Study: “The apostle sought to teach the believers how important it is to keep the mind from wandering to forbidden themes or from spending its energies on trifling subjects. Those who would not fall a prey to Satan’s devices, must guard well the avenues of the soul; they must avoid reading, seeing, or hearing that which will suggest impure thoughts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 518.

“The training of the heart, the control of the thoughts, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, will give control of the words. This is true wisdom, and will ensure quietness of mind, contentment and peace. There will be joy in the contemplation of the riches of the grace of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 656.

“Those who would have that wisdom which is from God must become fools in the sinful knowledge of this age, in order to be wise. They should shut their eyes, that they may see and learn no evil. They should close their ears, lest they hear that which is evil and obtain that knowledge which would stain their purity of thoughts and acts. And they should guard their tongues, lest they utter corrupt communications and guile be found in their mouths.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 404.

Discussion Questions:

1. Think about your own home. What things are there that tend to make it difficult for you to have purity of thoughts?

2. What crucial role does prayer and Bible study have in helping us have control of our thoughts?

3. What can you do as a church to help other members, particularly the young, protect themselves from the kind of negative influences that can make it very difficult to control their thoughts?

4. Read Ephesians 6:10-18. In what ways does this help provide a formula for victory in this crucial battle for our minds?
LESSON 4 *July 16-22

Lord of Our Desires

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Genesis 1, 2; Rom. 1:3; 6:1-7; 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:17; Phil. 2:8; Col. 2:12, 13; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:13-16; 1 John 2:1.

Memory Text: “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3).

Key Thought: God created humans with powerful desires for our enjoyment. We, as Christians, need to keep those desires, which we should still enjoy, under divine control.

Submitting our desires to the will of God. The apostle Paul warned that in the last days people would be “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:4, NKJV). Talk about a perfect description of this generation! The guiding principle for many today is: Satisfy your own desires. Christian values are discarded as old-fashioned, unreasonable, and hopelessly out-of-date. The basic sentiment is: As long as you desire to do something that doesn’t hurt anyone else, then there’s no reason why you shouldn’t do it.

In contrast, those who live under the lordship of Christ are called to submit all their desires to the will of God. Our Lord Himself declared, “ ‘For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me’ ” (John 6:38, NKJV). Jesus set the perfect example of submission to the will of God when He prayed, “ ‘Not what I will, but what You will’ ” (Mark 14:36, NKJV). This is our mandate, as well. Our will, our desires, must be surrendered to the Lord.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 23.
Flesh and Spirit

The Christian faith began and spread amid Greek culture and philosophy. Though the Greek Empire itself had fallen to the Romans (see Daniel 2), its influence remained long after its political and military dominance faded.

Sin influences the human body with disease, old age, and so forth. But the body cannot be evil, because Jesus put on a human body when He came to this earth. Greek culture also taught that the spirit is something within us that is always fighting the body. But in Romans 8:4, 5; Galatians 5:24, 25; and Galatians 6:8, the spirit is our attitude of surrender and obedience to Jesus. People who live “in the spirit” are people who have surrendered their sinful natures to the Holy Spirit.

What’s the greatest example we have from the Bible that the human body, in and of itself, isn’t evil? Rom. 1:3, 8:3, Gal. 4:4, Phil. 2:8, 1 Tim. 3:16.

Although now affected by sin, the human body can’t be evil, because Jesus Christ assumed a human body. But what about those New Testament texts, especially in the writings of Paul, that seem to pit flesh against the spirit, such as Romans 8:4, 5; Galatians 5:24, 25; 6:8?

The basic issue here is not that our body, our flesh, is of itself bad. Again, Christ’s humanity proves this point. Paul’s emphasis, instead, deals with control of our flesh, the keeping of its desires under the control of God. Ephesians 2:3 helps clarify this point: “Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” Paul talks about not letting the things of the flesh, that is, the carnal nature of fallen beings, dominate the Christian, who has died to this carnal nature, where passion and lust rule, and who now lives in the “spirit,” that is, in an attitude of faith and submission to Christ.

Part of the problem stems from the use of the word spirit, which, in Paul’s writing, isn’t this eternal holy entity that lives in constant tension or battle with the flesh. In the Bible, spirit can mean “mood,” “attitude,” or “feelings.” Oftentimes in the New Testament, flesh is simply the word used to symbolize the fallen carnal nature, while spirit symbolizes the attitude of submission and obedience to Christ. Those who live in “the spirit” are those who have yielded themselves to the Holy Spirit, which brings the desires of the flesh under control.

How can you know if you are walking after the “flesh” or after the “spirit”?
Key Text: 1 John 2:17

Teachers Aims:
1. To show that the human heart was created with natural desires intended for our enjoyment.
2. To show how human desires have become instruments for indulging in sinful pleasures.
3. To show how Christians can surrender their desires to God’s will.

Lesson Outline:
I. In the Beginning (Phil. 2:13).
   A. How did God create Adam and Eve? What natural desires did He give them?
   B. How did the earth complement their life?

II. The Effects of Sin (Rom. 7:8).
   A. How does sin affect these natural desires? How can the things of the earth that God meant for our pleasure now affect our lives?
   B. How does Satan appeal to our senses in order to control our will?

III. Surrendering the Will to God (Gal. 5:16).
   A. How did Jesus teach us to surrender? (Matt. 4:1-11, 26:36-44).
   B. The Lord calls us to be holy, just as He is holy. How can we be holy?

Summary: God created humanity with natural desires; but because of sin, our hearts are filled with lust. When we walk in the Spirit, the Lord gives us power to deny this lust and to make Him Lord of our desires.

COMMENTARY

Lord of Our Desires.
In human growth and development, desires come before control. For example, infants eagerly suck whatever they can get into their mouths, and babies enthusiastically reach for any bright object they see. Meanwhile, toddlers brashly attempt steps they’ve never before tried. In these examples, impulse guarantees growth. Desire leads to development.

During such growth, it is the parents’ responsibility to provide an environment in which it is safe for babies to reach, touch, and hold what they see. Such behavior is applauded, because Mommy and Daddy know their child is learning and practicing foundational skills that will help him or her grow.

Fortunate children have two parents who protect their children’s urges to exercise these tasks. Carefully and tactfully the parents teach the children the difference between good and bad things to
The Creation

Review the Genesis Creation account of humanity (Genesis 1 and 2). What evidences do you find there that God intended for human beings to enjoy the physical creation He had made?

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Even the most simple reading of the Creation account reveals nothing of the notion that the physical world, especially the human body, is bad. On the contrary, God created man and woman to interact closely with what He had made. Man came directly from the ground, which God had just created, and woman came from the man. Thus, humankind and the earth are intimately linked. Together, man and woman, living on this earth and drawing sustenance from it, were to be “fruitful, and multiply” (Gen. 1:28); they were to be involved in the process of creating more human beings, more human flesh. God gave them “every herb” (Gen. 2:5) for meat, and He gave them every tree that “is pleasant to the sight” (Gen. 2:9), and that was “good for food,” indicating they were to enjoy what they ate, that it would not only nourish but please them. Truly this was a paradise, and what helped make it a paradise was how well it pleased their human senses.

There’s no question: God created us as physical beings, and He gave us physical desires, which, in and of themselves, can’t be bad precisely because God gave them to us. The problem is not our basic desires but rather how we as fallen beings use them, how we keep them under control in order that we don’t allow them to take us where God never intended us to go. We can do this only through knowing what God’s will is for us and then surrendering our sinful selves to Him so we can have the power to keep our desires within that will and not enter into the paths of self-destruction.

Despite the ravages of sin, in what ways can you see, even now, indications of how wonderful the original creation was? What are some of the things we have been given that we should enjoy, and how do these reveal to us the Creator’s love?

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grab and suck. The children will learn to view such instruction as a gift of love; and they will learn to love themselves by gradually exercising the same caring control over their actions. They will learn to protect themselves with acts of control because they had parents who protected them.

Other children may be less fortunate. Perhaps there are not enough parents to share the load; or perhaps childish impulses scare the parent. Then, too, perhaps the parent is emotionally unavailable to lovingly protect the children. Sometimes, emotionally depleted and frightened parents use fear to stop their children. They might scream to prevent them from acting on impulse, rather than specifically and lovingly act to protect the children. Such experiences teach children to be anxious regarding their wants. They are not sure whether to stop themselves or go ahead. When there is no parent in control, it is very difficult to learn the nuances of good self-control.

Sometimes control problems have nothing to do with the parents. Illness and stress can hinder the development of a good control system. It is hard to learn the joy of reaching for a brightly colored object when your hands are restrained to protect you from disturbing an intravenous tube or a surgical bandage. It is hard to practice walking away from Mommy when your brain and legs do not work together.

Jesus offers good news for all impulse disorders, regardless of our heritage. In Christ, we are not saved by how well we control our impulses. Nor are we lost because of our history of no self-control. Instead, we are encouraged to be born again and learn in the presence of a loving God how to bring order and expression to the wonderful impulses He gave us. Our past behaviors need not dictate our future behaviors. In Christ, we have new options and the power of God’s grace to make new and better choices. These choices are not only pro-life, they are pro-eternal life.

Jesus’ offer is an intervention aimed at changing our generational heritage. With Him by our side, the sins of the fathers no longer need determine our fate. When parents are born again, they have the chance to disrupt the inevitable course of self-destruction. When grandparents are born again, they can give their children and their grandchildren the nurturing guidance they never received and were not able to give the first time around.

God’s love, expressed through His people and in combination with a new believer’s desire to respond in kind, creates an opportunity for new learning and Christian development. Nurturing the desires of the newly born Christian requires greater skill than parenting one’s natural children. This is because all skills must be relearned. Fears that formerly controlled the person will be transformed in faith to open new horizons. Yes, there will be limits; but these limits will be motivated by love, not fear. Then, addictions and delinquencies will recede into the background. The bondage of self-
The Fall

The Lord placed our parents in a paradise, a garden filled with things that delighted their senses, things that they, in their physical bodies, could enjoy. Unfortunately, some of these same things were used against them by Satan in order to cause the Fall.

**Read** Genesis 3:1-6. How did the devil use the physical senses to deceive the woman and get her to flagrantly disobey God?

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It should be a powerful warning to us that, even in their unfallen state, Adam and Eve allowed their senses to turn them away from God. Satan knows that our senses, our appetites, though God-given, are a powerful means to control us. That's why the Bible tells us to keep them under control; otherwise, Satan will use them to destroy us.

**Read** 1 John 2:16. How do you see the principles here reflected in the story of the Fall? Notice, is it saying the eyes and the flesh themselves are bad, or is it saying something else? If so, what?

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All around us we can see the results of humans who have allowed these wonderful God-given gifts to control them and their lives. God gave us sex, and we became pornographers. God gave us material possessions, and we became greedy and selfish. God gave us music, and we became punk rockers. He gave us fire, and we became arsonists. He gave us food, and we became gluttons. He gave us words, and we lie and we curse. He gave us grapes, and we became drunks. It’s hard, really, to think of any God-given gift that we, as humans, haven’t, one way or another, perverted or abused because of sin. The effects are seen everywhere.

Try to imagine a world where our God-given senses are in perfect harmony with the world around them (kind of sounds like heaven, does it not?). What do you think it would be like? And though you can’t have that world now, what changes do you need to make in order to bring your desires and senses into closer harmony with the world as God originally meant them to be? Why would doing that make your life better now?
TEACHERS COMMENTS

destruction will be forever broken and the capacity to freely live received.

We are earnestly to desire the gifts provided by God for the development of the body of Christ, so that body can function fully. These gifts include, but are not limited to, becoming apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, helpers, administrators, speakers of various languages, and interpreters (1 Cor. 12:28, 29, NIV). In the family of God, it is good to desire achievement. Repression is not God’s order. He encourages us to develop ourselves. The psalmist tells us God desires to satisfy our desires (Ps.

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: Romans 6:1-7, 8:1-4, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, 1 Peter 1:13-16, 1 John 1:8–2:2

1 God created humans perfect and placed them in an environment where each of their five senses—sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell—would be stimulated often. What stimuli for each of these senses are you most grateful for? List at least one stimulus for each sense.

2 Ever since our first parents lost access to the tree of life, the appetites and desires God created for our benefit have become twisted and warped. Instead of enjoying simple pleasures in moderation, people have adopted extremes in diet and lifestyle. Think about some of the things God created to be a blessing that have now become a curse because of extremism.

3 “Since we live by the Spirit,” wrote Paul, “let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25, NIV). This is good counsel for those who have been tempted to believe they must deprive themselves of every pleasure. There are legalistic fads that have nothing to do with the self-discipline Jesus requires of His followers. Read Colossians 3:20-23. What modern situations might apply to Paul’s counsel?

4 What habits or appetites have you indulged innocently, only to discover they had a firmer hold on you than you thought? What did you do to break free? How was your relationship with Christ helpful in that effort?

5 “Be holy in all you do,” wrote Peter (1 Pet. 1:15, NIV). To be holy is to be set apart for a special purpose. The Sabbath is holy, set apart for rest and worship. When we are holy, what is the special purpose for which we are set apart?
Times of Solitude

Read Matthew 4:1, 2 (see also Mark 1:12 and Luke 4:1, 2). Why do you think Jesus fasted for so long? What’s the message here for us?

“Many who profess godliness do not inquire into the reason of Christ’s long period of fasting and suffering in the wilderness. His anguish was not so much from the pangs of hunger as from His sense of the fearful result of the indulgence of appetite and passion upon the race. He knew that appetite would be man’s idol and would lead him to forget God and would stand directly in the way of his salvation.”—Ellen G. White, Confrontation, p. 51.

How fascinating that though Satan caused our first parents to sin on the issue of appetite, Jesus—in His first major conflict after His baptism—would go over the same ground and succeed where Adam and Eve failed. What a message His self-denial should have for us, we who are often enslaved to our appetites and passions.

Read prayerfully and carefully 1 Peter 1:13-16. What is the essential message to us regarding our desires and lusts? How do his words “gird up the loins of your mind” focus us on last week’s study, and why is this crucial to keeping our desires under control?

Amid these exhortations is the call to be holy. That’s a pretty intense command for beings who, at their core, are sinful and fallen. And yet, it’s obviously an attainable goal; otherwise, why would the Bible more than once call us to holiness? And, in this context and others—holiness, which basically means to “be set apart”—deals with the control of our lusts and passions. It says to be holy in all manner of conduct, behavior, and lifestyle. Though we have been given these basic desires by God, we are to be separate from the world and the world’s indulgences and abuses and perversions of these desires.

How much self-denial do you allow yourself to go through? In other words, when your desires are leading you where you know you shouldn’t go, how do you respond? What does your answer tell you about how well you’re following what the Lord tells us about the control of these desires?
145:16-19). No wonder! God created us to have desires and to satisfy them. He tells us, “Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Ps. 37:4, RSV).

God has created a new family for us. We are to come to that family to learn how to walk the Christian path. It is an amazing offer, one that should fill each of us with hope. Life is created when we make Jesus Lord of our desires.

**Witnessing**

It is often noted how human beings are born and “shapen in iniquity” (Ps. 51:5). In fact, it almost seems an excuse these days for our continued sinful behavior: “I can’t help it; that’s just the way I am.”

If you are a child of God, however, you should quote 2 Corinthians 5:17. If you are, indeed, born again, then the fact you were once “born and shapen in iniquity” no longer has any bearing. Instead, your desire should be for “Nothing Less Than Holiness,” singing:

I want to be like Jesus,
I want to be more like Him.
Every day He’s changing me and
Making me as I should be.
O, I want to be more and more like Him.

Until this is truly our desire, our witness is meaningless. Having said that, it is important to remember the Christian life is not a linear development but a complete transformation with various stages happening simultaneously. Never wait until everything is “right” with you before reaching out to others.

First, you will never be ready, and, second, in reaching out to others, you will grow in your own Christian experience.

While we were yet sinners, Jesus died for us. In the same way, we need to take the initiative and let people know Jesus died for them too.

It is natural when people first come to Christ to look at the one who brought them in as a role model. Being humans, however, we will all, ultimately, disappoint others. It is essential, then, that we continue to point people to Jesus “that we decrease so He might increase.” Only then, despite the fact we don’t yet have everything quite perfect in our lives, can we still be an effective witnessing tool. We don’t have to be perfect in order to witness effectively for a perfect God.
Yield

It’s one thing, of course, to read the Bible admonitions to keep our desires under control; it’s another to do it. Though we want to do what is right, sometimes it’s so easy to surrender, not to the will of God but to our lusts and passions. Perhaps this problem was best expressed by Augustine, who once prayed, “God give me power over my passions—but just not yet!” Who, to some degree, can’t relate?

Nevertheless, there is great hope for us as Christians. We can have victory over the things that can, otherwise, destroy us, but we can have that victory only through the power and Spirit of God working in a soul that yields to that power. In the end, we all yield: The question is—to what? To our passions, which bring death, or to God, who brings life? There are no other options.

Read prayerfully and carefully the following texts: What’s the basic message in them all? What personal experience are they all talking about? Rom. 6:1-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 2:12, 13.

Those who have totally surrendered their lives to Christ will, through the Spirit of God, die to their old selves and be “born from above” (John 3:3, NRSV). They have surrendered to God their whole existence, including the desires of the heart and flesh (see Rom. 6:13). Now, they live under the power and influence of the Holy Spirit, which gives them a new life in Christ (see Gal. 5:25). Unlike before they knew the Lord, those who have died to self and live again in Christ can, through this power, live with their desires under control.

This new existence, however, is a day-by-day existence. Though we sometimes hear stories of those who, having surrendered to Christ, suddenly have their lifelong habit of smoking, drinking, or whatever just simply vanish, for most Christians that’s not the case. Plus, too, character doesn’t change in an instant. There’s a day-by-day battle with sin, with self, with the carnal nature, which, though subdued through the power of God, is always there trying to break through. In and of ourselves, we can’t win against our fallen flesh; all we can do is, moment by moment, surrender our wills to Christ and claim His power over our sinful desires. This takes self-denial, vigilance, a struggle, and lots of prayer, but victory is promised. Otherwise, defeat is certain.

How, in your own life, have you experienced what these texts listed today have talked about? Why is knowledge of the Cross so important for you to understand when, at times, you fail?
Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** Creativity to design and make something useful or beautiful is a quality God implanted in every human being. We craft songs, artwork, lush gardens, even inviting meals. Share about what you most enjoy making. Why is it fulfilling to you? God saw what He had made and said “it was very good” (Gen. 1:31, NIV). How does knowing God was pleased when He fashioned you affect your relationship with Him? Discuss your feelings about His expectations of you and His plans for you.

**Thought Questions:**

1. We were created with holy desires. Through the Fall, those positive desires were replaced with unhealthful, weak, even destructive ones. Thankfully, the story of humanity and, consequently, our personal lives do not have to end with failure. We can choose to be united with Christ and, therefore, “no longer . . . slaves to sin” (Rom. 6:6, NIV). Consider what this freedom means for the daily practice of your life. What changes will you make as you yield even your leisure time to God’s direction?

2. When we look back on our lives, what usually stands out are the glaring mistakes we have made. Review just this past week; when a poor choice or missed opportunity shouts **Failure**, repeat 1 John 2:1 using the personal pronoun: I have an Advocate with the Father! Why is quiet time in prayer so helpful to change your experience from defeat to victory?

**Application Question:**

“Prepare your minds for action” (1 Pet. 1:13, NIV). Write 1 Peter 1:13-16 on an index card and carry it with you. How will time spent memorizing this portion of Scripture and reflecting on its implications impact your daily agenda? Review such biblical stories as those of Cain, Moses, David, Peter, and Judas. What practical lessons can you learn from both their successes and their failures?
**Further Study:** Consider the stories of various Bible characters who failed to yield their desires to the will of God. Note the consequences of their actions. Some of these individuals repented of their sin and trusted in God’s grace for forgiveness and salvation. Others continued in their sin and will be eternally lost.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bible Character</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
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<td>Cain <em>(Gen. 4:3-15)</em></td>
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<td>Moses <em>(Exod. 2:11-15)</em></td>
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<td>David <em>(2 Samuel 11–18)</em></td>
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<td>Peter <em>(Matt. 26:69-75)</em></td>
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<td>Judas <em>(Matt. 27:3-5)</em></td>
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“You may live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, and bear the fruits of the Spirit; you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Then you will be living channels of light, having your life hid with Christ in God.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, p. 49.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. As a class, talk about what it means to die to self and live a new life in Christ. Share your own experiences and how some person may have changed your life. What advice would you give to someone who, wanting to be a Christian, admits that he or she never had such experiences with God before?

2. In our struggle to keep our desires under control, why is understanding the good news of Christ’s substitutionary death so important, especially after we make a mistake and yield to our sinful desires?

3. In your own community, where do you see businesses exploiting our fallen condition? Though there are limits, of course, to what you could or even should do, is there anything that, as a class or a church, you could do to help limit the damage these businesses are doing to your community? If so, what?
**Lesson 5**
*July 23-29*

**Lord of Our Speech**

**SABBATH AFTERNOON**

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Psalm 9; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; Eph. 4:15, 29; Col. 4:6; James 3:5-13; 4:11.

**Memory Text:** “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Colossians 4:6, NKJV).

**Key Thought:** We are called to use our speech for the glory of our Lord and the blessing of others.

The gift of speech can be a tremendous blessing or a terrible curse. When we enter into a newness of life under the lordship of Christ, Jesus invites us to let Him be the Lord of our speech. Used wisely, our speech can bring glory to God and blessing to those around us. Misused, our speech can wreak havoc. Corrupt communication causes pain to the heart of God and damage to the lives of those within our circle of influence.

Ellen White reminds us that “the faculty of speech is a precious gift, and if the noblest of our faculties, reason, is set to the task of knowing God, then the gift of speech may become a means of grace to others, a channel through which the knowledge of God may be communicated.”—Manuscript Releases, vol. 19, p. 277.

In this week’s study, we will explore some practical ways in which we can use our speech for the glory of God and the blessing of others. The same appeal that the apostle Paul gave to young Timothy is given to each one of us today: “[Be] an example in speech” (1 Tim. 4:12, NRSV).

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 30.*
Speaking Words of Praise to the Lord

It is the highest privilege for members of the human family to speak words of praise to the Lord. The psalms are full of exhortations to praise the Lord. In Psalm 9 the psalmist David declares, “I will praise You, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High” (Ps. 9:1, 2, NKJV).

**As** much as possible, read the last five psalms. What was it about the Lord that caused the psalmist to utter so much praise?

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Throughout the Scriptures, we find the testimonies of individuals who used their gift of speech to express praises to God. For example, when the secret of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was revealed to Daniel, the young prophet was quick to offer praise to the Lord (see Dan. 2:20-23). This is seen over and over again in the Bible.

**What** spiritual advantages come to us by taking time to praise the Lord, whether verbally or in writing?

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There’s power in words that impacts not only those who hear or read those words but those who speak or write them. Through our own acts of praising the Lord for His goodness, His mercy, His divine acts in our behalf, we only strengthen our faith and appreciation of the Lord’s goodness, mercy, and divine acts in our behalf. Thinking about these things is also important, but there’s something about expressing them, either through spoken or written words, that increases their impact on us. No wonder, then, that the Scriptures have whole sections praising the Lord.

**Write your own psalm of praise to the Lord for whatever you feel impressed to praise Him for, and then read it aloud. See for yourself how such expressions can impact you only for the good.**
**Key Text:** Psalm 19:14

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To show that our speech should glorify God and bless others.
2. To show how words impact the speaker and the listener.
3. To show that our words should be used for edification.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Words of Praise and Blessings (*Ps. 9:1, 2*).
   A. If Christ is truly our Lord, how will our speech be affected?
   B. How can our speech point others to Christ?
   C. Explain how our speech is an example of who or what controls our life.

II. The Influence of Speech.
   A. How do words of praise and edification strengthen faith and build character in the speaker?
   B. Why is it important for us to speak the truth with love and grace?

III. Guided by the Holy Spirit (*Gal. 5:22, 23*).
   A. When guided by the Holy Spirit, how can our daily speech be a powerful tool for winning souls?
   B. How will a sincere, personal relationship with Jesus affect someone’s preaching?
   C. What would our speech be like if it reflected the fruit of the Spirit?

**Summary:** Because words have a powerful influence for good or evil, we should use our speech to benefit those with whom we speak. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can speak words that will build character, bless others, and give honor to God.

**Commentary**

Lord of Our Speech.

In the beginning, God’s word created our world and made us in His image. Most of us understand that being made in God’s image means being part of God’s creative process by bearing children. Yet, there is also creative power in our words. As creatures made in His image, we, too, exercise our words to “create” our worlds. When we speak, where nothing was, something becomes. Our vows, our promises, our encouragement, and our commands create the reality of the inhabitants of our world. Good words, habitually spoken, create a world where the inhabitants find safety and love. Well-chosen words create a place where life and love can thrive. Life needs such a place to develop. When the place created is protecting and nurturing, growth readily occurs. God’s Word creates such a place in
Speaking With Grace (Col. 4:6).

Study the apostle Paul’s counsel to the believers in Colosse, as recorded in Colossians 4:6. What does it mean to “let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt” (NKJV)? Keeping in mind, too, that salt back then was used as a preservative, what do you think “seasoned with salt” means in this context?

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Nowhere in the Scriptures do we find the suggestion that grace can originate in the hearts of human beings. Grace always originates in the heart of God. Grace cannot be worked up. It must be prayed down from heaven. We can speak with grace only if our lives are filled with grace. How does that happen? Through a daily living connection with the Source of all grace, through understanding how grace has been poured out upon us. When we keep this great truth before us, that we have been recipients of grace, that we have received from God, through Christ, what we absolutely do not deserve—then we can begin to speak with grace to others.

Read the story in John 8:1-11 of the adulterous woman who was cast at the feet of Jesus. How does the interaction of Jesus with the woman and with her accusers illustrate one way by which one can speak with grace?

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We often face situations where the natural tendency would be to speak sharp words, words that don’t reflect grace but anger, judgment, or retaliation. Oftentimes, we might be in a position where a firm word is needed, but even then it’s how we say it, the manner and the tone in which we say it, that can either reflect grace or our own selfish nature. Even when we have been mistreated, the Lord desires that we respond with words of grace rather than words of rebuke or retaliation. Christ’s whole passion provides us with a perfect example of speaking words of grace, even to those who mistreat us.

Think about the last time your words were graceless. Though all you can do is ask for forgiveness for that past act, what can you do now to help prevent yourself from making a similar mistake next time?
our minds; and in that place, the mind of Christ grows.

When we, as God’s children, have the mind of Christ, our words can do what the word of God in Jesus did. Our words can enter into the midst of fallen humanity to heal, inspire, give hope, and create peace. Carefully selected and disciplined words can help the untamed and untrained. The right words can give life where there is death; and with the right words, your church family can become a community of support, sharing a vision of love and Christian growth.

God always delivers His words with love to build up, not destroy. There are times when we use words to destroy what we imagine to be bad. Like sticks of dynamite, we imagine our explosive words will level battlefields of contention. Such impulses are rarely from God. Hastily spoken, harsh words more frequently destroy new growth than nurture it.

We often exhibit our tendency to use such words in our intimate relationships, because we trust that in these relationships it is safe to vent. However, we must recall God formed those we are close to; and we must respect that. Venting can erode what God has formed, causing a landslide. In such relationships, our words should show respect. Our words should create places where freedom to disagree is allowed and separateness is valued. Love respects the differences in individual uniqueness. Communication about troublesome spots in relationships ought to allow each person abundant time to mentally and emotionally process what it would mean to see things as the other person sees them.

We grow the ability to speak God’s words. Be patient with, and think positively about, your own growth. You did not know how to speak on the day you were born. You cried and screamed in an attempt to communicate your feelings. In a way, your cry created your world. It was a stimulus you placed into the environment to get a reaction. Words, too, create worlds. As Christians, we desire to participate in the creation of a world made new. We want to be part of a world where love and harmony, peace and justice, hope and kindness create new life. Creating such a world means developing a language that is mutually acceptable to all God’s community. In itself, this language will need to promote harmony, peace, justice, and kindness in order for all parties to experience love and respect. Loving communication requires that we learn to understand the effect our words have on others.
Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph. 4:15).

As we suggested yesterday, there are times when we might need to speak words of rebuke, counsel, or admonition to others.

**Read** the following texts: Matthew 16:23; 23:13-39; John 14:8, 9; John 18:19-23. What kind of tone do you think Jesus used when speaking these words? How would that tone reflect the principles of love and grace He Himself embodied?

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“Christ Himself did not suppress one word of truth, but He spoke it always in love. He exercised the greatest tact, and thoughtful, kind attention in His intercourse with the people. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes. He wept over Jerusalem, the city He loved, that refused to receive Him, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. They rejected Him, the Saviour, but He regarded them with pitying tenderness, and sorrow so deep that it broke His heart. Every soul was precious in His eyes. While He always bore Himself with divine dignity, He bowed with tenderest regard to every member of the family of God. In all men He saw fallen souls whom it was His mission to save.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 353.

**Read** Ephesians 4:15. How do you understand what it means to speak the “truth” in love? Is “truth” still “truth” if spoken in any other way but love?

Unfortunately, there are times when we fail to speak the truth in love. We seem to easily fall into one of two traps. Some are quick to speak the truth but fail to speak it in love. Others replace love with a sentimentalism that hinders their ability to speak the truth at all.

So often it’s not what we say but how we say it that can make all the difference in the world. Stand before a mirror, or before others, and practice saying the same words, once in a loving tone, once in a harsh, unkind tone. You will be shocked that, though the words themselves are the same, their meanings will seem so different. There’s a powerful lesson here for us, if we will learn it.
Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** Psalm 9; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, 13; James 3:5-13; 4:11

1. Who does not warm to a compliment sincerely delivered? God does not need our praise, but His heart is warmed when we recognize His activity in our behalf and praise Him for His divine attributes. Take a few moments to list all the things about God for which you are grateful. How many can you come up with?

2. “Be gracious in your speech,” wrote Paul (Col. 4:6, The Message). Share examples from your experience when barriers were broken down or tensions relieved when someone spoke graciously. Share at least one example when someone intended well but spoke unadvisedly. What was the result? How does one guard against speaking ill-advisedly?

3. Most of us are not professional communicators. Yet, we communicate every day with people whose only source of information about Christianity is what they see and hear in us. Read Mark 5:1-20. What is the most important thing to communicate with others (notice especially vss. 19, 20). If you had to summarize what the Lord has done for you, what would you say?

4. In Ephesians 4:29-32, Paul urged believers to be careful how they communicate with one another. We are not just to avoid “unwholesome talk” and all that such talk involves; we are to communicate messages that edify one another and “benefit those who listen” (vs. 29, NIV). What are some examples of edifying and beneficial communication? What are some settings where such communication would be especially useful?

5. One of Solomon’s proverbs states: “Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue” (Prov. 17:28, NIV). Should a Christian spend more time listening or talking? Explain.
Speaking in the Power of the Spirit

(Acts 1:8, 1 Cor. 2:1-5).

When someone refers to speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit, we generally think of preaching. The testimony of Scripture is clear: It is God’s intention that all preaching be delivered in the power of the Spirit.

Study the promise of Jesus in Acts 1:8 and the testimony of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. What is the secret of powerful preaching?

Powerful preaching is not the product of human wisdom or eloquence. Rather, it is the testimony of one who has entered into a personal, intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The same Holy Spirit who placed His seal of approval upon the preaching of Paul will also enable humble servants of Christ in our generation to speak with a demonstration of divine power.

Speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit, however, is not limited to preaching. God intends that all our speech be delivered with a demonstration of divine power. Indeed, each one of us who lives in newness of life under the lordship of Christ is given the privilege and responsibility of speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit. Divine power, however, doesn’t necessarily mean just eloquence (see Exod. 4:10, 1 Cor. 2:1). If we are speaking in the Spirit, our words, our tone, our message will reflect the attributes of the Spirit that are made manifest in lives touched by the Spirit. Our words will reflect the kind of people we are; they will reflect whether we are walking after the flesh or after the Spirit.

Also, we must never confuse grand elocution with speaking in the Spirit. Many of history’s worst tyrants were men whose speech was very powerful and very effective; one, though, would hardly say they were speaking in the Spirit.

What principles do the following texts give us that help us know whether we, or someone else, is speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit? 1 Cor. 12:1, 2; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:9, 10; 6:17-19. How can you apply these principles in your own life and speech?
“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.”

Perhaps we feel if we repeat this to our children enough times, someone may believe it someday. The reality, however, is that a few harsh words can hurt far more than sticks or stones.

We are called to be witnesses “‘in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 1:8, NIV). The order is of great significance: Witness first to those in our immediate surroundings, then broaden to neighboring areas, and then to corners unknown. How often are we polite to strangers but lack simple courtesy with those closest to us?

If those who know you best were asked to judge simply on your speech and everyday conversation, would they be able to identify you as a follower of Christ?

Much is said in the Bible regarding both malicious and uplifting speech. Unfortunately, many do not practice the kind of discipline James warns is necessary in his numerous analogies regarding the tongue (James 3:1-10).

How well do we know Barnabas? He was the one who recommended Saul (later known as Paul) to the disciples. He also went with Paul and later with John Mark on their journeys. His name means “son of encouragement,” and that was precisely his role.

Speaking uplifting words may not gain you a position of prominence, but often those who are the greatest blessings in our lives are those who are least conscious of their being a blessing.

We are told the world will know us by our love. Let us determine to be sons and daughters of encouragement, speaking the truth in love, and harnessing our God-given gift of speech to His honor and glory so others may see Him through us.
Avoiding Corrupt Communication (Eph. 4:29).

The apostle Paul admonished the believers in Ephesus to avoid corrupt communication. Unfortunately, many of us live in a social environment where corrupt communication is considered normal. People frequently take the name of the Lord in vain, use profane language, and make rude or suggestive comments. Even as Christians, if we allow ourselves to be exposed continuously to this kind of language, sooner or later it will influence us to where we, ourselves, are more likely to use these words. We must constantly be on guard.

In the light of Paul’s comment in Ephesians 4:29, how would you define “corrupt communication”? Why is it not limited only to what is known as profanity? Consider also Exod. 20:16, Prov. 10:18, Eph. 4:31, James 3:5-13, 4:11.

Corrupt communication tears down. The Greek word used in 1 Timothy 3:11, translated “slanderers” (KJV) or “malicious talkers” (NIV), is diabolos, one of the names used for the enemy, Satan. When people use corrupt communication, they are actually doing Satan’s work. What a testimony to the power that is inherent in our words!

In contrast, the apostle Paul appeals to believers to use speech that is “good for necessary edification” (Eph. 4:29, NKJV). The word used here literally means “building up.” One translation puts it this way: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Eph. 4:29, NIV).

Our words, then, have a powerful influence, either for good or for evil, for either building up others in faith or for tearing them down. Who hasn’t experienced themselves the power of words, either for good or for evil, either for edification or for creating doubt? How crucial that we watch not just our words but the tone and manner in which we express them. Indeed, even the right words in the wrong spirit also can be considered “corrupt communication.”

How much “corrupt communication” emanates from your own lips? We’re not talking just about curse words; we’re talking about untruths, slander, exaggeration, being judgmental, and so forth. Take a hard look at yourself: What things might you need to change regarding your speech?
Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** Can you remember when you gave your first speech? It may have been at “Show and Tell” time in kindergarten or later in an actual speech class. What were the results of your message? Share your story with your Sabbath School class. As you look back on that experience and its consequences, consider how God invites us to look forward. How does He want to use your voice so others’ “faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Cor. 2:5, NIV)?

**Thought Questions:**
1. Have you ever tamed anything? To *tame* is to be “taken from the wild state and made obedient: a tame bear”; “gentle”; or “tone down; subdue.”—E. L. Thorndike and C. L. Barnhart, *Thorndike/Barnhart High School Dictionary* (Scott, Foresman and Company, 1965), p. 965. It is much easier to tame something other than ourselves. Consider James 3:5-12. Try to make a list of how God wants to tame our tongues and then use the words we speak to His glory. Why is silence sometimes the best use of our tongues?

2. The gift of speech can be a tremendous blessing. To speak with authority draws and compels listeners (consider our Savior’s impact on listeners). Peter, in the context of the end time, declares, “If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God” (1 Pet. 4:11, NIV). How does the power and conviction of your testimony affect your witness? Why is it necessary to use words, as well as how you live your lives, to share the good news of God’s grace? How will the Holy Spirit make your witness powerful and effective?

**Application Question:**
“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love” (1 Cor. 13:1, NIV), I end up making a lot of useless and, sometimes, hurtful noise. Why is it important, wise, and helpful to use our mouths for “building others up according to their needs” (Eph. 4:29, NIV)? How might this apply to our method and approach of sharing the gospel? During this coming week, practice using your voice to encourage someone specific. Share the results in class next week.
**Further Study:** The gift of silence. The wise man Solomon reminds us that there is a time to speak and also “a time to keep silence” (Eccles. 3:7, NKJV). When Jesus Christ is Lord of your speech, you will not only speak for the glory of God and the blessing of others; you will also discern when it is time to keep silent.

**Note:** In the light of this week’s study, consider to what extent you are allowing Jesus Christ to be Lord of your speech. Spend time reading Scripture with the intention to be more attentive to God’s words than to your own. Use a journal to record your thoughts. When you conclude your time of silence, you might find that you are more aware of the gift of speech.

“I wish we could have a pledge in our hearts that we would not utter one word against a brother or a sister. . . . Do not gossip about them and make remarks about their character, but go to them in the love of Jesus and the love of the truth and try to help them.” —Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 289.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **Jesus was described as a speaker of “gracious words”** *(Luke 4:22, NKJV).* This may be a reference to both the content of His speech and also the way He spoke. What narratives in the Gospels illustrate the gracious speech of Jesus? What can we learn from these examples?

2. We tend to think of speech as only an individual thing. But what about us as a church? How do we, as a church, use the power of speech? Why, in many ways, is our responsibility as a church regarding our words more important than as individuals?

3. What counsel would you give to an individual who works in an environment where corrupt communication is considered normal? When should a person stay to be salt and light? When is it wise to leave?
Lord of Our Prayers

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Isaiah 53:12; John 14:12-14; Romans 8:15, 18, 34; Galatians 4:5, 6; Ephesians 1:5; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6, 12:24.

Memory Text: “And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:13, NKJV).

Key Thought: Those who choose to live under the lordship of Christ are called to follow the Master in a life of prayer.

The life of our Lord. Christ’s life was a life of prayer. Jesus made prayer a top priority. Mark records that “in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35, NKJV). Luke testifies that Jesus “went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12, NKJV). “No other life was ever so crowded with labor and responsibility as was that of Jesus; yet how often He was found in prayer!”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 362.

If we follow the life and teachings of Jesus, we, too, will devote ourselves to prayer, and we will learn from the example of our Lord. Prayer is the heart and soul of the Christian life. We would be spiritually dead without it.

When we pray, let us address our prayers to our heavenly Father. Let us pray in Jesus’ name. Let us pray according to His will. Let us join our Lord in the sacred work of intercession.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 6.
In His personal communion with heaven, Jesus addressed God as “Father” (John 17:1), “Holy Father” (John 17:11), and “righteous Father” (John 17:25). Even the brief prayer of Jesus recorded in Luke 10:21 is addressed to “Father, Lord of heaven and earth.” During His agony in Gethsemane, Jesus addressed the heavenly Father using the Aramaic term Abba (Mark 14:36), an endearing name connoting the idea of “my father.” The early Christians apparently followed His example, at least on certain occasions (see Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:6).

Look up the following Old Testament texts. How do they reveal the kind of relationship God sought for His people, and how does the image of “Father” fit in? Deut. 1:31, 32:6, Ps. 103:13, Prov. 3:12, Isa. 63:16, Mal. 2:10.

Ideally, a father is to be someone who is loving, caring, protecting, someone whom a child can love, trust, and obey.

Then there’s also the biblical notion of adoption, that as followers of Christ we have been “adopted” into the Father’s household (see Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:5, Eph. 1:5). In Roman times, when a son was adopted, he received all the legal rights and privileges that came with the new family. As followers of Christ, we receive the fullness of salvation that comes from being the children of God. “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (1 John 3:1, RSV).

Thus, praying the name Father should give us comfort, hope, and joy.

Of course, many earthly fathers have been the opposite of what a father should be. What advice can you give to someone for whom the idea of father brings painful memories? How can you help him or her experience the Father’s love?
Key Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Teachers Aims:
1. To show how we should make prayer our top priority.
2. To understand why we should pray in Jesus’ name.
3. To discuss the purpose of prayer.

Lesson Outline:
I. Putting God First (Mark 1:35).
   A. Why should we begin each day with prayer?
   B. How else can we make prayer a part of our daily life?
   C. Why is prayer vital to spiritual growth?

II. Praying in Jesus’ Name (John 15:16).
   A. Why should we pray in Jesus’ name?
   B. Because we claim Christ’s righteousness, we may come “boldly” to God. What does it mean to come boldly to Him?
   C. How does praying in Jesus’ name remind us to live in His name?

III. The Purpose of Prayer (John 15:4-7).
   A. How does prayer help us stay attached to the Vine?
   B. How will obeying Christ’s command to love others affect our prayers?
   C. If we remain in Christ and His words remain in us, what types of things will we ask for? How does the answer to this question help us understand Christ’s words, “‘Ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you’” (vs. 7, NIV)?

Summary: As we pray in Jesus’ name, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, and we receive power to live each day in His name. Continual prayer will help us do God’s will.

COMMENTARY

Lord of Our Prayers.

Prayer is talking to God as to a friend. There are many books about prayer, but there are not many books about talking to a friend. When we get together to chat with a good friend, the conversation just happens naturally. We do not need a formula to follow. This suggests certain principles that might assist us as we reflect upon prayer.

The most important principle regarding prayer concerns the Person with whom we are talking. God is not just an authority figure who tells us what to do, and then we do it. Rather, He is our Father, our Friend, and our Creator. As such, He wishes to be in an ongoing relationship with us. Therefore, we do not just share information and events with Him. We should talk with Him about our...
Praying in Jesus’ Name

“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5, NKJV).

In John 14:12-14 Jesus tells us that we should ask for things in His name. That is, what we request from the Father, we should request in the name of Jesus. What does this mean? So often, when we pray, we pray to the Father, and then we often, in our prayer, end with something to the effect, “And we ask these things in Jesus’ name.” What is implied with these words?

What are the following texts saying to us that can help us better understand the idea of praying to the Father in Jesus’ name? Isa. 53:12, Rom. 8:34, 1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 8:6, 12:24.

By praying in Jesus’ name, we are declaring before ourselves, before other humans, and even before the universe (see 1 Cor. 4:9) that we, personally, acknowledge the authority and power of Jesus Christ in our lives. By praying in His name we verbalize our personal acceptance of Him as our Savior, our Redeemer, as the One who died for our sins and the One through whom we have complete access to the Father (see Heb. 8:1). By praying in the name of Jesus, we can claim the promises of God that we have in and through Him. By praying in the name of Jesus, we are openly expressing our faith in Him as the One who has closed the gap caused by sin between heaven and earth, the One through whom we, as sinners, have been reconciled to our heavenly Father. “And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18, 19).

By praying in Jesus’ name, we acknowledge Him and what He has done for us. At the same time, what obligations does that place on us—we who pray in His name—regarding how we live, how we speak, and how we treat others?
relationships, our feelings, our wishes, and our desires. We converse with acquaintances on a surface level. We converse with friends on deeper levels. If prayer is talking to God as we would to a friend, then we can converse with Him on the deepest of all levels. Someone might object by saying God already knows what we are thinking. But often we do not know our thoughts until we form them into words. That being the case, God cannot respond to our inner world until we do so.

We might converse at length with a person we meet on a bus or airplane. Often, we will never see that person again. In contrast, a friend is someone with whom we share many conversations about the deeper issues of our life. We may meet with that person only occasionally, but the trust and the level of sharing remain deep. If, however, we agree to become partners in a project, it is likely we will converse daily. We will ask for each other’s opinions. We will bounce ideas off each other. We will make requests of each other. Likewise, God has invited us to partner with Him in the project of living. We cannot succeed in this project unless we are in daily communication with Him. We do not need a formula for how to do it. We simply need to think differently about prayer.

Prayer is not asking for what we want. It is not telling God about what has happened to us. It is not unburdening our hearts to Him so we feel good. All these may happen in prayer, but they are not prayer. Prayer is talking to God as to a friend as we work out the project of living the kind of life He has designed for us to live.

Sabbath’s study quotes Ellen White in The Desire of Ages, page 362, about how Jesus’ life was filled with labor and responsibility; yet, He often was found in prayer. The real issue for Jesus, and for us, is how to combine the daily life of labor with the spiritual life of prayer. Could it be that Jesus saw His life as a partnership with God? If so, then prayer was not just His top priority, the first thing He did before He did anything else. It was an all-pervading necessity of life. He often was found intentionally praying; but it also is true that He was always in prayer.

If prayer is a conversation with a friend, it needs to be just that, not a monologue. If someone dominates a conversation and never asks about you, there is little likelihood a friendship will develop. With God, we can view prayer as primarily a matter of discovering God’s will. We have a problem, and we want to know God’s will for us in the matter. Sometimes we receive a clear understanding of what God wants us to do. Other times, when God’s will is not clear, we have to pray a prayer of resignation—“If it be Your will.” In such matters, God is the only One who speaks, and what He says is all that matters. However, this concept of prayer leads to boredom and resentment. We are not partners with God.

Another way we can view prayer is to see it as our opportunity to tell God about our needs and ask Him to solve our problems. We
Praying According to the Father’s Will
(Mark 14:36; John 6:38; 1 John 5:14, 15).

Jesus declared, “‘For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me’” (John 6:38, NKJV). Even in His prayers, Jesus demonstrated His commitment to yield His own will to the will of His Father. When we pray, there are certain requests we can know for certain are in harmony with the Father’s will. For example, when we pray for salvation, Jesus assures us in John 3:16 that we are praying in accordance with the Father’s will.

List three other requests we can make with full assurance that we are praying in accordance with the Father’s will.

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In other situations, it may be more difficult to determine the Father’s will. For example, have you ever prayed for someone who is sick? How do you know the Father’s will for that individual? We are told to pray for the sick and to trust that God will bring healing. But we do not know the way in which healing will come, nor do we know God’s timing. Should we then shrink back from praying for those who are feeble and weak? No! “Let your prayer include this thought: ‘Lord, Thou knowest every secret of the soul. Thou art acquainted with these persons; for Jesus, their advocate, gave His life for them. He loves them better than we possibly can. If, therefore, it is for Thy glory and the good of these afflicted ones to raise them up to health, we ask Thee in the name of Jesus, that health may be given them at this time.’” —Ellen G. White, Counsels on Health, p. 375.

Go back and read Jesus’ prayer in Mark 14:36. Notice the sequence of thought: (1) His word Abba expresses the close relationship with His Father. (2) He acknowledges the Lord’s power. (3) He expresses His own personal desire. (4) He surrenders His own personal desire to the Father. How does this serve as a model for our own prayers? Is there any prayer you need to pray right now that reflects this same pattern? Why not get on your knees, even now, and pray it in the will of God?
can spend our time in prayer asking God for miracles in each situation. In this concept of prayer, we are the only ones who speak, and what we say is all that matters. God may well work some miracles in the areas we have prayed about, but His response is not part of what happens in prayer.

A fulfilling prayer life is one where God is our Friend and Partner. Our conversations involve mutual sharing at the deepest levels. Both what we say and what God says are essential to the communication process.

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Matthew 6:9-13, John 14:12-14.

1. When Jesus is Lord of our lives, one of the ways we communicate with Him—and He with us—is through prayer. For many, prayer begins with the words “Dear Jesus,” followed by a list of favors that ends with the words “in Jesus’ name, Amen.” What is the difference between that and a child’s letter to Santa Claus? What are some better human examples of what has been called the “Privilege of Prayer”? (See Ellen G. White, in *Steps to Christ*, p. 93.)

2. Our modern society is obsessed with results. We not only want Internet access, we want it faster. We not only want solutions, we want them now. “Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend,” wrote Ellen G. White. (See *Steps to Christ*, p. 93.) Communication with a friend is not primarily about getting answers, it is about being heard. What assurances do you have that God hears you when you pray? Is that enough to ensure a satisfactory prayer life? Explain.

3. When God adopted us into His family, He placed us in a special relationship with Him. How does the love and care of an earthly parent reveal something of God’s love for His children? How can that knowledge be translated into our understanding of prayer?

4. By praying in Jesus’ name, we identify our needs and interests with Him and His kingdom. Although we often pray according to our own needs and interests, when Jesus is Lord of our lives, we make our desires secondary to God’s perfect will. Share briefly an experience when God answered your prayers differently (but better) from what you had in mind when you prayed.
Praying for Others

It is impossible to live under the lordship of Christ and pray only for yourself. When Jesus Christ is Lord of your prayers, you will join Him in interceding for others. Jesus prayed for groups of people (see John 17:9, 20) and also for individuals (see Luke 22:31, 32). Several Greek verbs are used in the New Testament to describe the prayers of Jesus. One such verb means “to beg.” This is the verb used in Luke 22:32 to describe the prayer of intercession that Jesus offered on Simon Peter’s behalf. “Satan could do nothing against the all-powerful intercession of Christ. And the prayer that Christ offered for Peter He offers in behalf of all who are humble and contrite in heart.”—Ellen G. White, Sons and Daughters of God, p. 91.

How do the following texts help us understand why we should pray for others? Jer. 29:7; Mark 9:29; Rom. 15:30, 31; Phil. 1:9, 10; James 5:16.

Many times we are asked to pray for others when they are facing difficulties and trials. Lists are read in church of people who “need our prayers.” On occasion, we may be tempted to feel overwhelmed because there are so many people on our prayer list. Nevertheless, there are too many mandates and examples in the Bible of God’s faithful servants praying for others. We can’t neglect doing our part, as well. There’s a power in prayer that only those who pray in the Spirit and in truth can experience.

In fact, even science is beginning to understand more about the power of prayer. Though the issue is still debated, studies have been done that have convinced many “secular” scientists and doctors that praying for sick people does, indeed, help the sick get better—a fact that from their “scientific” perspective does not make sense. All of this simply shows how prayer is something beyond science.

What are some of the things Satan throws before our minds to make us think our prayers are not needed? Or don’t matter? What can you do to reject those thoughts and make a personal commitment to pray for others in need?
**Witnessing**

Prayer is a learned part of the lives of men and women, and it is a way in which the life of the Spirit within us is fed.

Too often we try to bring God down to our level in prayer, but prayer is designed to lift us up. We treat God as an ATM machine, simply going to Him when we are in need of something. God, however, invites us to come boldly before His throne with Jesus by our side and the Holy Spirit offering prayer on our behalf, for we do not even know how we should pray (*Rom. 8:26*).

We would do well to spend more time listening in prayer or, at least, less time talking. There is an adage that says, “Pray at all times. Use words when necessary.”

Job was a righteous man, but he also talked a lot. When God addressed him, He had to put Job in check. But the really significant part of Job’s story is that his losses were restored when he prayed for his friends (*Job 42:10, NIV*).

If Jesus is interceding on our behalf in heaven, how much more should it be the business of those who call themselves Christians to be actively engaged in intercessory prayer?

You may have limitless opportunities to witness each day, but if your witness is not set on a solid foundation of intercessory prayer, there will be no harvest to reap. We plant the seeds, but conviction is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray for our friends *now* and for those with whom we come in contact on an ongoing basis.
Prayer Examples

The Bible is filled with examples of powerful prayers uttered by God’s people. None of these folk were perfect, none of their lives sinless, and none had any righteousness in and of themselves to commend them to God. All of them were—as all of us are—sinners in need of divine grace, in need of the incense of Christ’s righteousness to mingle with our prayers and make them acceptable to a holy God (see Rev. 8:3). Nevertheless, in their great need, in their realization of who they were and who God was, they prayed to their Creator, their Redeemer, their heavenly Father.

Prayer is an expression of our realization that we can’t do it ourselves, that there are forces beyond our control, and that we are beings dependent upon something greater than what we ourselves or what our material world could provide for us.

Below are referenced a few great prayers depicted in the Bible. As much as time allows, read each prayer (or pick one or two), and write down what thoughts come to you about what makes these prayers so powerful. As you read, ask yourself: What can I learn from these prayers that can help my prayer life be more effective?

1 Kings 8:15-61

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Psalm 51

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Dan. 9:4-19

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
Icebreaker: The youngest child learns to get attention from its parents by calling them Da Da or Ma Ma. Most parents then eagerly respond to the child’s needs. What did you call your parents? How did they respond, positively or negatively? Our heavenly Father longs for us to call on Him. We can address Him in lofty terms or deep, tender endearment (see Rom. 8:15). How has He answered your prayers? Share what you have learned about God through His responses to your prayers.

Thought Questions:
1. “No other life was ever so crowded with labor and responsibility as was that of Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 362. How does this statement compare with your life? Paul tells us “our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18, NIV). How does God help us order our priorities so we get the quality time with Him we so desperately need? Start a prayer journal where you record the blessings God reveals to you during your private prayer time.

2. Plans and agendas look great on paper one day and inadequate and ineffective the next. How does this compare with Jesus’ prayer and plans for us as recorded in John 14? Reread this chapter with your spouse or in class. What gift does Jesus want to give us that will help us not to be troubled? Why is it important that this gift is not just in the future but is an everyday reality as we allow His work in our lives?

Application Question:
It always is affirming when a friend speaks on your behalf. The Bible tells us Jesus is “interceding” for us in the very throne room of the universe (Rom. 8:34, NIV). Make a list of at least five friends, neighbors, and work associates who have needs or challenges you could present to God for His intervention. Record their names and the answers to prayer received. As they recognize positive things happening in their lives, be prepared to share your knowledge about the Source of those good things.

Note: Various models for prayer have been helpful for Christians. The best-known model is the Lord’s Prayer. It is possible to recite this prayer in fewer than 60 seconds. However, if you use the main movements of this prayer as an outline for prayer, your prayer time can be expanded to last for half an hour, an hour, or even all night.

The earthly sanctuary is also a helpful model for prayer, including praise, confession, cleansing, prayer for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, empowerment through God’s Word, intercession, and intimate communion with the Lord before the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place.

Discussion Questions:

1. The apostle Paul encourages believers to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17). What do you think that means? How can we pray “without ceasing”?

2. Share in class some personal experiences with prayer. You can talk about dramatic answers to prayer or about what prayer does for you, or how you understand how prayer works. What can you share that can help edify and encourage class members in their own prayer life?

3. Is there anyone whom you, as a class, know needs prayer? Why not stop everything and, right now, pray as a group for this person? Afterward, discuss the experience of praying as a group as opposed to praying individually.

4. How can you help your children, or children within your circle of influence, to experience a meaningful prayer experience with their heavenly Father?
Lord of Our Relationships

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

Key Thought: God created human beings to enjoy intimate relationships with Him and with one another. When Jesus Christ is the Lord of our relationships, we will experience the meaningful intimacy that was part of God’s original plan.

Created for relationships. After God had created Adam, He said, “It is not good that man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18, NKJV). Adam was not simply a work of art to be admired by his Creator. He was a relational being, created with the innate desire to experience intimacy with God and with other created beings. When the Lord brought Eve to her companion’s side, Adam gave the following testimony of the intimacy he was already experiencing: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (vs. 23). Moses provides a brief description of the intimate relationship that our first parents enjoyed: “They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (vs. 25).

So much has changed since that first relational encounter. Relationships have become damaged and fractured by sin. God desires that we experience the meaningful intimate relationships that were part of His original plan.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 13.
The God of Relationships

As human beings, we live in relationship with other human beings. There’s no escaping it. Nature itself shows we are meant to exist in relationships.

For starters, each one of us is here only because of a relationship that resulted in our birth. And even after birth, infants cannot live but a few hours on their own. They need a relationship to survive; that is, they need at least one other person to take care of their physical needs. And almost as important as the physical are the mental needs, as well. Infants crave love, attention, and affection. From their youngest days infants are aware of, and respond to, human love—to touching, to words, to moods, to attitudes. Babies are made to bond, not with toys or with the bed, but with other people. The children who have loving, close parents to bond with are so much better adjusted than those who never had them. And that’s because we were made to be in relationship with other people.

And yet, no matter how basic to our existence and identity as humans, something has gone wrong with our relationships. All around us we can see examples of relationships gone sour. Most of the pain and heartache we suffer as humans, we suffer because of bad relationships.

But because God loves us, He obviously cares about our relationships, which form such an important part of our existence. Thus, He wants us to have good, healthy, affirming relationships. That’s why the Bible has so much to say about this crucial topic.

Look up the following texts: Exodus 20:14, 17; Luke 6:27, 28; Romans 12:2-21; Ephesians 4:32; 5:25; Galatians 6:2; Philippians 2:2, 3. What do they tell us about relationships? What can we learn from them about how we are to relate to others? As far as time allows, find as many verses as you can in the Bible that talk about relationships (be prepared to share what you find with your class).

Here, as we interact with others, the true measure of our walk with Christ will be revealed. Thus, as Christians, no aspect of our lives should be under the lordship of Jesus Christ more than our relationships.

How well do your relationships reflect the principles expressed in the above texts? In what areas, perhaps, do you need to make some radical, even painful, changes?
Key Text: John 15:12

Teachers Aims:
1. To show that God created us as social beings.
2. To understand that sin causes breakdowns in human relationships.
3. To show that with Christ as the Lord of our relationships we can have true love for one another.

Lesson Outline:
I. Created for Intimacy (Gen. 2:18).
   A. Why did God create a partner for Adam?
   B. What is it about God that teaches us He created us to be social beings? (Gen. 1:26).
   C. What else about the creation of humanity signifies God’s desire for us to be social beings? (Gen. 1:28).

II. Building Healthy Relationships (1 Cor. 10:24).
   A. Discuss practical ways of fulfilling the command in 1 Corinthians 10:24.
   B. What other guidelines does the Bible give about how we should relate to others?
   C. Explain how having a personal relationship with God enables us to have healthy human relationships.

III. Christ—the Center of All Relationships (Phil. 1:27).
   A. If we conduct ourselves in ways that are “worthy of the gospel of Christ” (NIV), how will we treat one another? How will we not treat one another? Be specific.
   B. What things constitute careful listening? How can careful listening help us build better relationships?

Summary: God planned for humans to be social beings. Because of sin, however, human relationships have fallen from God’s original plan; but through an intimate relationship with Him, our relationships can be redeemed.

COMMENTARY

Lord of Our Relationships.
Several generations ago a man with five young children and a wife mortgaged his house and fled with the money. Thirty years later he was planning to travel through the area where his now married daughter lived. He told another family member that his daughter would have to accept him into her home because she was a Christian. He experienced no guilt about his past behavior, only an awareness of how guilt could motivate her to take him in.
Relationship With God

Though we all want good, healthy relationships with each other, that’s not always so easy to achieve. We are all sinners with defects that don’t always make us so easy to get along with.

Crucial, however, to our relationship with others is our relationship with God. He created us, He alone can change us. Only through a close connection with the Lord can we have the kind of relationships with others that we should, ideally, have.

Read Matthew 22:36-39. How does what Jesus says here affirm what the lesson states above? Why is our relationship with God so important in helping us form the right relationships with others? What does God do to us that helps us have the right kind of relationships with others?

Look up the following texts. How do they help answer the above questions? Ps. 51:10, 2 Cor. 5:17-19, Gal. 4:19, 2 Pet. 1:4.

When Job declared “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth” (Job 19:25, NKJV, emphasis supplied), he was referring to more than simple awareness of a fact. This same Hebrew verb yada is used in Genesis 4:1 where Adam “knew” his wife, and she conceived and bore a son. Job was testifying concerning an intimate personal relationship. In an article entitled “Growth in Grace,” Ellen White shared the following insight: “To be living Christians, we must have a vital connection with Christ. The true believer can say, ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth.’ This intimate communion with our Saviour will take away the desire for earthly and sensual gratifications. All our powers of body, soul, and spirit should be devoted to God.”—Review and Herald, May 30, 1882.

How has your own relationship with God impacted your relationships? Write down the practical, tangible ways in which knowing God has impacted how you relate to people. In what areas do you need to grow?
Was he right? Should Christians, under the lordship of Jesus Christ, not set boundaries with those people who have harmed them? Does making Christ Lord of our relationships mean we must allow others to abuse us?

In the last few decades there has been quite a bit of discussion about “codependency” in the spiritual life. Much of this is borrowed language from organizations that treat persons with addictive disorders. Codependency, basically, is enabling someone who exploits another person to continue to do so. Addicts usually have at least one person who enables them to continue in their addictive behaviors. For example, a parent keeps giving a child cash, even though the child uses it to buy drugs; or a wife lies for her husband to cover up for his alcoholism. Another example of codependency is when a student keeps silent even though she or he knows a friend is using dangerous doses of an addictive substance. In each of these examples, the enabler experiences some sort of secondary gain.

Persons addicted to any substance, behavior, or idea will change only when they reach “rock bottom” and are forced to come to terms with their own responsibility for their situation. Codependency prevents this from happening and protects addicted persons from encountering reality in all its harshness. Yet, only when addicts do encounter reality will they be forced to make a decision for life or death. Only then is there a chance of turning from destructive behavior in order to enjoy freedom.

In contrast to codependence is interdependence. In each of the codependent relationships described above, one person is dependent on the other in order to continue an addictive behavior. The codependent person can help the addict heal by refusing to be codependent. As a result, the addicted person will be forced into a crisis situation that will offer the opportunity for healing to occur. This is the first step toward interdependence.

Interdependence acknowledges we are a part of humanity and that we need to live that part. Interdependence embraces healthy dependency and gracefully admits that need. Interdependence says, “I need you and you need me, but we are separate.” In interdependence, self-pretentious independence is replaced with a humble acknowledgment that we need to be part of the body of Christ.

Substances are one type of addiction. Beliefs can be another. Religious addiction involves the use of religious escape to deny reality. It views life, not from a position of faith but as a series of opportunities to manipulate others or one’s self to accomplish a personal agenda. Religious addicts escape from internal pain and anxiety by controlling others with their beliefs or by allowing themselves to be controlled by strong religious figures such as cult leaders.

In contrast, when we make Jesus Lord of our relationships, we receive His grace, which strengthens us to withstand pressure, face reality, and grow. We do not avoid pain. Instead, we embrace pain,
The Gift of Marriage *(Eph. 5:22-33)*.

Marriage, like the Sabbath, is something we have taken from Eden. Sadly, though, many marriages today have hardly been made in paradise. Probably few things better represent the extent of the damage sin has caused to human relationships than what it has done to marriage, something that was originally designed to bring fulfillment, happiness, and joy.

**Read** Genesis 2:24, a command that is repeated in Matthew 19:5 and Ephesians 5:31. Is this talking only about physical union, or is there more implied? If so, what?

When Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives and Lord of our relationships, our perspective on marriage will be uniquely Christian. “Men and women can reach God’s ideal for them if they will take Christ as their helper. What human wisdom cannot do, His grace will accomplish for those who give themselves to Him in loving trust. His providence can unite hearts in bonds that are of heavenly origin. Love will not be a mere exchange of soft and flattering words. The loom of heaven weaves with warp and woof finer, yet more firm, than can be woven by the looms of earth. The result is not a tissue fabric, but a texture that will bear wear and test and trial.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 112, 113.

**Following** what Paul says about marriage in Ephesians 5:22-33, how would you answer the following questions:

1. How are wives to relate to their husbands?

2. How should husbands treat their wives?

3. How does what Christ did for the church represent what a husband should do for the wife?

4. What mutual principles of love and respect are seen in these texts? How would following these principles greatly enhance any marriage?
learn from it, and rise above it. Christians have an arsenal of strategies with which they face the onslaught of the enemy. We view suffering, not as something to run from but as something that helps us grow. Paul says suffering produces endurance, and, ultimately, endurance produces character and hope (Rom. 5:3, 4, RSV).

So, we must each ask ourselves, Is Jesus Lord of all our relationships? We must measure the value of longsuffering against the value of calling sin by its right name and rejecting it. As he fled, Joseph left his coat with Potiphar’s wife. Yet, Jesus accepted another wanton woman, refusing to condemn her. From these two examples we see that responding to Jesus as Lord of our relationships looks

### Inductive Bible Study


1. When God observed that “‘it is not good for the man to be alone’” (Gen. 2:18, NIV). He was talking about more than marriage. He was pointing out that we need social interaction in order to develop physically, emotionally, and spiritually. List eight to ten types of relationships most of us have on a regular basis (family, church, community, etc.). How will these relationships be affected by claiming Jesus as Lord?

2. There is a direct relationship between our relationship with God and our relationships with other people. Read 1 John 4:19-21. Make two lists: one of people to whom it is easy to reflect God’s love, the other of people to whom it is difficult to show love. How can we show love to those who are decidedly unlovely? What biblical counsel do you find useful?

3. Some people use Ephesians 5:22-33 as a familial flowchart to illustrate the line of succession from Christ to the husband to the wife to the kids to the pets, etc. If Jesus became a servant to win our allegiance (Phil. 2:5-8), what is the best way to establish “authority” in the family? Mention at least six practical ways we can show servant leadership in this social unit.

4. When Jesus becomes Lord of our lives, He influences our relationships with our families, churches, workmates, and wider community. Read Luke 10:25-37. What are the two great principles that capture the essence of the Ten Commandments? Can we truly keep the commandments if our lives are not motivated by these principles? Explain.
The Gift of Family

**What insights can we gain from Psalms 127 and 128 about the gift of family?**

God has blessed each one of us with the gift of family. Whether we are single or married, with or without children, we are all part of a family circle. That family circle is extended exponentially when we become a part of God’s family! In all our family relationships, we who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus and now live under His lordship should manifest a Christlike spirit and a loving conduct that are different from that of unbelievers.

In the home, perhaps more than anywhere else, parents have a sacred obligation to live out the principles of their faith. Love, forgiveness, kindness, compassion, care, discipline—these principles are especially crucial. So many of the child’s early impressions about God are formed early on as a direct result of how the parents interacted with the child and with each other. Nothing done in the home occurs in a vacuum: The repercussions of our words, our body language, our tone, and our deeds are felt throughout the house, whether we realize it or not. And long after the deeds and words or even attitudes are past, the influences live on, often in the hearts and minds of the children, who are so malleable, so tender and sensitive. How crucial that parents, or anyone interacting with children, deal gently with them.

**What counsel does the apostle Paul give to Christian families regarding the interaction between parents and children? Eph. 6:1-4.**

When caring for children within our circle of influence, the Lord Jesus Christ wants us to avoid two extremes: a harsh, tyrannical disposition and a careless, indifferent attitude. Parents need to find the delicate balance between these two extremes, giving discipline and guidance when needed, while, at the same time, showing children the mercy and love and grace God has shown to them. It’s a sacred, and solemn, responsibility. Here, as in all relationships, parents need to learn from God at the foot of the Cross.
different in different situations. It requires discernment to decide when to accept and continue a relationship and when to break it off.

This developmental process is evident in the experience of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In the early stages of World War II, Bonhoeffer had the opportunity to escape Germany by accepting a teaching appointment in the United States. Accepting this appointment would have saved his life. During the decision-making process, Bonhoeffer wrestled with the thought of what Jesus would do. He concluded he would stand in solidarity with other Christians who remained in Germany. He felt if he did not identify with his people’s suffering, he would have no right to help with the postwar reconstruction of the church. In the end, his decision cost him his life. (See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* [New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1959], pp. 16, 17.)

Witnessing

In both His life and words, Jesus gave us the perfect example of how to reveal God to others, and that is to be in relationship with Heaven. We were created in the image of God, who is the ultimate relational Being—Father, Son, and Spirit in One.

Given the importance of relationships, it is no wonder they are under such heavy attack and have suffered much damage through sin. As a result of seeing through the lens of their sin-ravaged relationships, people too often have a distorted image of God.

Your father left before you knew who he was? Or did he stay too long—long enough to be abusive? Don’t let your imperfect example impair your vision of the Perfect. No matter what your life experience, the Spirit can make you cry out, “Abba, Father” to the One who is able to make you whole again (see Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:6).

There is nothing greater we can offer those to whom we are witnessing than the healthy relationships to which the Savior calls us. While on earth, Jesus spent little time preaching but much time showing love and concern for those with whom He came in contact, be they leprous, Greek, Samaritan, female, or tax collector. Likewise, we would do well to spend less time trying to convert others and more time truly getting to know them. There is no greater testimony to the love of God than experiencing that love through one of His children.

Indeed, this was Jesus’ final recorded prayer. Knowing the persecution His disciples would face, He did not pray for their safety; neither did He pray for their success or happiness but that they should be one, as the Father and Son are One.

Those who live under the lordship of Christ experience a unique sense of community. The Greek noun used in the New Testament to describe this community is koinonia, often translated as “fellowship.” Some scholars suggest that the “[koinonia] of the Holy Spirit,” spoken of by the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:14 (NIV), may also be translated the “koinonia brought about by the Holy Spirit.” In other words, to the degree that we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, to that degree we will have fellowship with one another.

Examine the description of the early Christian community in Acts 2:41-47. Luke records that they continued steadfastly in koinonia. After reading the texts, answer the following questions:

1. What kind of practical and theological unity did they manifest?

2. What kind of fellowship did they have?

3. In what practical ways did they relate to one another?

4. What kind of witness did they, in their koinonia, present to the world?

What a beautiful picture of the early church; what a powerful depiction of the very principles regarding relationships Jesus Himself taught and, of course, manifested in His life. Try to imagine what a force for good your local church could be were it to manifest such koinonia. What a powerful witness it would be (see John 13:35).

What changes need to be made in your church in order for it to reflect better what we’ve learned today? Why, though, must those changes begin in the heart of each believer? What is the only way these changes can come?
**Life/Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** Insomnia has spread as a global malady of epidemic proportions. What interrupts your sleep? Share with your spouse or a close friend. The psalmist proclaims God’s promise, “He gives His beloved sleep” *(Ps. 127:2, NKJV)*. What keeps us from claiming the gift God offers? What relational turmoil blocks your rest? Accept God’s promise, and allow Him to change you through His Word and the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life.

**Thought Questions:**
1. Forgiveness is a really big concept. Take a moment to write a definition without using a dictionary. Ephesians 4:32 records the command to forgive. Why is it important that Paul includes the phrase “even as God in Christ forgave you” *(NKJV)*? Rewrite your definition to include the concept of God’s forgiveness. Pray for an opportunity to practice true forgiveness.

2. Acts 1 and 2 record the amazing story of Pentecost. We tend to read these chapters and long for what might have been. How is it possible and even critically necessary for our churches to reflect this type of authentic Christian community? Acts 2:44 *(NIV)* records that “all the believers were together and had everything in common.” Reread Acts 2:41-47. Make a list of principles that brought about such harmony in the church. In your Sabbath School class, discuss practical ways to apply the principles you discover.

**Application Question:**
Jesus admonished us to “love your enemies, do good to them which hate you” *(Luke 6:27)*! Our reaction may be, “This seems impossible! What about those who terrorize, maim, and kill?” Reflect on what it means and what it takes for us to love the unlovable. How does what Christ did for us at Calvary affect how we respond to those who have wronged us? What good thing can you do this week to bless an enemy?
Further Study: When building relationships, the art of listening is crucial. We listen to God primarily through His Word and through His creative works. We listen to others as they communicate both verbally and nonverbally.

Examine the following situations in the life of Jesus where He demonstrated the importance of listening when building relationships: John 3:1-21, 4:4-42.

“The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God’s love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So it is His work that we do for our brother when we listen to him. . . . But Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work they should share. We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God.”—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1954), pp. 97–99.

Discussion Questions:

1. In every aspect of our relationships with others, one crucial theme comes to the forefront, and it’s best expressed in the words of Matthew 16:24. Read those words aloud as a class. What’s the key principle there? Why is this principle so important in order to have the right relationship with others?

2. List the three most important relationships currently in your life. What are you doing to nurture those relationships?

3. What are some creative ways you can reach out to people who lack meaningful relationships in their lives?

4. As a class, read together the Bonhoeffer quote listed above. What practical things can you do in order to become a better listener?
Lord of Our Resources

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Deut. 8:7-18; Matt. 6:19-21; 24:45-51; 1 Cor. 9:11-14; Phil. 4:11-13; Heb. 13:5; James 1:16, 17.

Memory Text: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17, NKJV).

Key Thought: Every good and perfect gift comes from above. We are not owners but stewards of the resources the Lord graciously places at our disposal.

The psalmist reminds us that “the earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1, NKJV). Every good and perfect gift we receive comes from the Father’s hand. The greatest gift of all was bestowed when God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. “He poured out all heaven to man in that one great gift. And then he completed the work by surrounding man with unlimited blessings, favor upon favor, gift upon gift, opening to our view all the treasures of the future world.”—Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, August 17, 1891.

When we have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, we will recognize Him as Lord of all our resources, for all our resources have come only from Him and certainly not from ourselves. We, then, are stewards, not owners, and as stewards we identify ourselves with the Master, whose goods we have been given to oversee. We must accept the responsibilities of a steward and act in our Master’s stead.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 20.
Giving Thanks for Every Good and Perfect Gift *(James 1:16, 17).*

**What** important truth does James reaffirm in his letter to the brothers and sisters in Christ scattered abroad? *James 1:16, 17.* What are some of these gifts? What error is he trying to help them avoid?

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Our culture tells us we get what we earn, and we control what belongs to us. The Word of God, however, reminds us we get what we don’t deserve and that our possessions belong to God. Every good and perfect gift comes from above. Were it not for our loving heavenly Father, we would have no life, no meaning, and no future. The apostle Paul reminds us that “in Him we live and move and have our being” *(Acts 17:28, NKJV).*

Think for a moment about the blessings you enjoy on a daily basis. Have any of us duly considered how much we have to be thankful for? What do you possess that didn’t, ultimately, have its origins in God, our Creator? Wealth, power, prestige, whatever you have, at its source it didn’t start with you but with God, who created all things. How important that we never forget that truth.

**How** does the Sabbath help keep this important truth before us on a weekly basis?

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**What** danger did the children of Israel face as they prepared to possess the land of promise, soon to be surrounded with a multitude of blessings? *Deut. 8:7-18.* What is the Lord warning them against doing? How are we in danger of doing the same thing?

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What are some of the gifts you have been given that mean the most to you? Why are they so important? What can you do to protect yourself against taking them for granted or thinking you somehow deserve them because of your own innate goodness?
**Key Texts:** *John 1:3, John 3:27*

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To show that the good things we possess come from God.
2. To show that earthly things are temporal.
3. To show that we can be content in any situation.

**Lesson Outline:**

**I. All Good Things Come From God** *(James 1:17).*
- A. What things in your life do you believe are gifts from God?
- B. How does the Sabbath remind us God is the Giver of good things?
- C. In addition to tithes and offerings, discuss other ways we can acknowledge that all good things come from God.

**II. Looking to Heaven** *(Matt. 6:19-21).*
- A. Share evidence from your own life or from the news that earthly things are temporal.
- B. Why is it so important to treasure things of a spiritual nature?
- C. What do the ways you spend your time, use your resources, and interact with others say about you?

**III. Being Content** *(1 Tim. 6:6, 7).*
- A. Why is truly believing God will meet all our needs so vital to the Christian life?
- B. How do we honor the Lord when we are content with what we have?

**Summary:**
God has given us all things. Earthly possessions will pass away and should be used for the glory of God. When we accept God as Lord of our resources, we will learn to be content.

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**COMMENTARY**

**Lord of Our Resources.**
Making God Lord of our resources involves three distinct steps. First, it involves identifying and naming our resources. Second, we are to develop our resources as the Lord would have us develop them; and, third, we are to recognize our limits regarding the use of our resources.

Identifying our resources requires taking an inventory of all God has given us. There is a favored hymn whose opening line reads, “Count your many blessings, name them one by one.”—Johnson Oatman, Jr. and Edwin O. Excell, “Count Your Blessings,” *The Hymnal for Worship & Celebration* (Waco, Tex.: Word Music), no. 563. Our resources are our blessings. They are the raw materials out
Returning a Faithful Tithe

The Lord gave the following command to the children of Israel through His servant Moses: “‘And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's. It is holy to the Lord’” (Lev. 27:30, NKJV). The phrase “holy to the Lord” makes more sense when you understand that the idea of holy carries with it the notion of “set apart for holy use,” indicating the tithe is to be set apart for the Lord, to be used for Him and His purpose specifically, as opposed to other uses. It is something special, something different from the rest of our “seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree.”

Read Malachi 3:8-10. Why does God call not paying tithe robbery? What does that imply about who owns it to begin with?

We see various aspects of the tithing principle throughout the Bible. Abraham gave tithe to the priest of the Most High God, Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20), a fact that’s reemphasized in the New Testament book of Hebrews (see Heb. 7:2); Jacob, as well, understood the idea of tithing (Gen. 28:22); and, after the Exodus, God reaffirmed the law of tithing as a divine institution (Lev. 27:30-32; Num. 18:24, 26, 28; Deut. 12:6, 11, 17).

“Because Abraham is the father of all believers, he is the model of tithe paying for Christians. As Abraham paid tithe to Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High God, so New Testament believers give tithe to Christ, our High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:9, 10; 7:1-22).”—Seventh-day Adventists Believe, p. 272.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:11-14. How do Paul’s words here help us understand an important principle behind our duty to pay a faithful tithe to the storehouse of the church?

How is tithing a visible manifestation of our acknowledgment that all that we have comes from God? Why is tithing such an important act of faith?
of which we achieve the dreams God plants in our hearts. When we recognize with gratitude the resources we have, we should discipline our minds to think in a positive, hopeful way. Gratitude is a cure for depression and defeat.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam’s first recorded task was to name the animals. This task most likely involved observing the animals and thinking about what label fit each one. It was a verbal exercise that pulled what was experienced on an unconscious level to the conscious level. Naming brings organization to what we experience and helps us to form mental categories for our experiences. Naming creates mental structure and, therefore, is a necessary process for mature development. At the base of every discipline is a set of vocabulary to be mastered. The unique terms of each discipline give that discipline its identity. So it is with us who have been designed to uniquely reflect the image of our Creator God. It is responsible discipleship to inventory the resources He has given us, to catalog, categorize, and contemplate each resource in its relationship to the others.

Then, once we have identified the essence of who we are, we are to consider our resources in light of being a child of God. What resources add to the concept of being a son or daughter of God? How does your identity in Christ change or contribute to your core identity? How does your Christian identity affect some of the strengths and weaknesses you have observed in yourself? Do you have large desires for which you might have less aptitude? Do you have few dreams but a great many abilities? Are your desires and aptitudes well developed, but your will feeble or cowardly? How does God’s promise that His strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9) apply to you? What are the things that are fixed and the things that can be changed? What is needed to help you grow, learn, and flourish? How can you best obtain these?

These questions are necessary to develop a responsible plan for spiritual growth and development. God invites us to actively “work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). He promises us we can do this because He “is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (vs. 13, RSV).

Developing our resources in the Lord also means we must actively choose some resources over others. We must decide when to emphasize one gift and downplay another. Without such decision making, resources remain chaotic, unorganized fragments. Chaos can be important to creativity, but creativity requires taking the steps to bring order out of raw data. Thus, every decision involves some loss. No one person at any point in life has enough time to engage in activities that utilize all their talents. Developing our resources means carefully considering the amount of time we have to do the things God is requiring of us at any given time. It also means there will be times when we will have to say No to requests that will sidetrack us.
Laying Up Treasure in Heaven (Matt. 6:19-21).

Read Matthew 6:19-21. Rewrite the text in your own words, expressing the essential message you believe the Lord is telling us here.

However simple Christ’s words, the idea behind them is profound. Jesus warns us that things of this world are temporal, transitory, unstable; why, then, put all your treasure where one day it will be swept away or lost forever? Why put your money in a bank that you know is going to collapse? The Lord is pointing us to eternal things, to heavenly things, to things that long after this world and all that’s in it pass away will still be here.

Read 1 John 2:15-17. In what ways are these words saying to us the same thing that Jesus did in the above verses?

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Laying up treasure in heaven deals, not just with what we do with our money but with our whole lives. What are our priorities? What are our biggest concerns? How much of our life is spent on earthly, worldly, temporal things as opposed to spiritual and heavenly things? For example, how much time do we spend in prayer, Bible study, or witnessing as opposed to watching TV? Do our lives reveal that we, indeed, are not only preparing to meet Jesus but we are working to help others prepare, as well? Those who are laying up treasure in heaven are daily making decisions for the Lord; they are choosing obedience over sin, love over hatred, and others over self. In short, laying up treasure in heaven is living the Christian life, a life marked by self-sacrificing love, a life that isn’t dominated by love of the world or the things in the world, where moths and thieves and rust exist.

Dwell on Christ’s words, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Where’s your heart? What does your answer tell you about yourself and where your treasure is? Is it time to transfer your account?
But even our ability to choose what is right has its limits. There is an old Christian heresy called Pelagianism that is easy to slip into when we emphasize Christian decision making as the avenue through which we make God Lord of our lives. Pelagius, a fifth-century monk from what is now the British Isles, lived and taught in Rome. Though quite saintly, he was deemed a heretic because he believed each person was created with perfect freedom to choose either good or evil and was therefore able to attain a sinless life by making good choices.

### Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Deuteronomy 8:7-18, Matthew 6:19-21, 24:45-51, Philippians 4:11-13*

1. List all the things that contribute to your quality of life—food, health, shelter, education, etc. (do not forget mobility, companionship, freedom, truth). See how many items you can list that you receive as a direct result of God’s mercy and kindness. Then attach a monetary value to them. The point of this exercise? Without even mentioning the gift of salvation, we are totally indebted to God. What are the implications of this indebtedness in how we live our daily lives?

2. God obviously does not need material help from us. Yet, He commands, “‘Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse’” *(Mal. 3:10, NIV)*. Is this command for His benefit or for ours? If it is for us, what benefits are ours when we return a faithful tithe?

3. What, in addition to money, can we give God as a token of our loyalty and gratitude? Read Romans 13:8-10. How does loving our neighbors reveal our appreciation for what God has done for us? How can we love more effectively as individuals? As a church? Be specific.

4. Read Philippians 4:11-13. Notice the context of the familiar promise: “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” *(vs. 13, NIV)*. What, in our modern society, is “the secret of being content” *(vs. 12)*? How does one achieve contentment?

5. People often refer to the story of the rich young man *(Matt. 19:16-26)* as an example of the sacrifice God wants us to make for His kingdom. But is that really the story’s point? How is being a good steward of all God gives us better than giving away all our resources? Or is it?
Living as Faithful Stewards (Matt. 24:45-51).

Read the account in Matthew 24:45-51. What message is the Lord giving us here?

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Look at the characteristics of the faithful and wise servant. He is doing what was expected of him. In other words, it wasn’t just that he had correct doctrine or theology. Perhaps all that was implicit in his actions. The point is, the man was obedient. Hence, the time of the master’s return wasn’t all that important; it made no difference when he came back, because, at any time, he would find his servant working faithfully.

Meanwhile, in contrast, it is easy for us to pass judgment on the unfaithful steward and condemn him for his waywardness. And yet, how many of us act in much the same way? We use the resources our Master has placed at our disposal to serve ourselves. We preoccupy ourselves with our own present desires and agendas, at the expense of what the Lord has asked us to do as stewards of the gifts He has given us.

Read again the texts for today. How did the evil servant manifest his wrong attitude toward the Lord? What did he do? What are some modern parallels to beating the servants and eating and drinking with the drunken? In other words, how might we, today, still awaiting the coming of Christ, manifest in our lives the same wrong attitude as the unfaithful servant?

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Notice, too, the unfaithful steward didn’t believe that the Lord wasn’t coming back; he thought it was just going to be longer than first anticipated. What could better depict a danger that we as Adventists face—we who have long been expecting the Lord to come and who often talk (rightly or wrongly) about a “delay”? Have we, even subconsciously, changed how we live because we think the Lord’s coming is delayed?

Suppose Christ came back yesterday. Would He have found you a faithful or an unfaithful steward? If the answer was the latter, what would you have done differently yesterday in order to have been deemed a faithful servant?
In essence, Pelagius taught the heresy that our choices are responsible for our salvation. He reasoned that since we must choose Christ to be saved, our choice is the all-important factor. The problem with such thinking is that it de-emphasizes our fallen nature and the essential role of grace in the salvation process.

Our will, or our ability to make “right” choices, is as fallen as our conscience or our desires. By nature we often make choices that are not in our best interest. Perhaps this is why God’s Word consistently encourages us to work in community, to confess to one another, and to seek counsel from others. There is a risk in acting alone. We need to make use of all the support structures God has provided to strengthen our will and our capacity to make good choices. Then we can trust God. Christianity emphasizes that because He is our Lord, even our wrong choices can eventually work for good (Rom. 8:28).

Witnessing

In examining the lordship of Jesus Christ, we see that possibly nothing reminds us more of Someone greater than ourselves than the principles of stewardship.

As in anything in the Christian life, the ideas of stewardship are foolishness to the world but life itself to those who believe.

Commiserating over inadequate salaries with a coworker? When was the last time you let him or her know how God provides for you when you have less to work with, having taken one-tenth off the top for tithe, plus a liberal offering?

Has someone shared how there never seems to be enough time to get everything done? When was the last time you shared the blessing of the Sabbath? Surely, if God can create the earth in six days, you can accomplish all you need to in the same amount of time and set aside a day just for God.

And what about your daily devotions? How does the practice of setting aside time alone with God each day help you?

What is your witness in terms of stewardship? Do people see God’s blessings multiplied in you because of your faithfulness? Do you recognize and acknowledge that every good and perfect gift is given freely from God?

Having freely received, do you freely give, or are you like the Dead Sea, which is stagnant because it only receives? Sometimes what we term “good stewardship” is really selfishness. Have you become more attached to the gift than to the Giver? Have you started to act as if you are the owner, rather than a steward?

Let us truly reflect on all God has given to us and express our gratitude by freely giving of our time, talents, and resources.
Learning to Be Content

“But godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6, NKJV).

The noun translated “contentment” in 1 Timothy 6:6 implies self-sufficiency, “the state of one who supports himself without aid from others.” This state of being was highly valued by some of the philosophers in Paul’s day. While the apostle Paul also affirms contentment as a virtue, he suggests that, for the follower of Jesus, the source of contentment does not come from within but from without.

Study the following passages of Scripture that refer to “contentment” or “being content” (Phil. 4:11-13, Heb. 13:5). How is a Christian able to experience contentment even in the most difficult circumstances? In what ways have you experienced some of the things Paul is talking about in these verses? What lessons did you learn in these experiences? Give specific examples of your situations and share them with your class.

Our contentment is based upon our confidence in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is the One who strengthens us. He is our Rock, when everything else is shifting sand. He is our Surety, when everything else is uncertain. Apart from Jesus Christ, there is no true contentment.

“Paul in this letter to Timothy would impress upon his mind the necessity of giving such instruction as should remove the deception which so easily steals upon the rich, that because of their riches they are superior to those who are in poverty, that because of their ability to acquire they are superior in wisdom and judgment—in short, that gain is godliness. Here is a fearful deception. How few heed the charge which Paul commissioned Timothy to make to the rich! How many flatter themselves that their acquisitiveness is godliness! Paul declares, ‘Godliness with contentment is great gain.’ Although rich persons may devote their whole lives to the one object of getting riches, yet as they brought nothing into the world, they can carry nothing out. They must die and leave that which cost them so much labor to obtain. They staked their all, their eternal interest, to obtain this property, and have lost both worlds.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 541.

Why does one not necessarily need to be rich in order to face the dangers Ellen White is talking about? Why is the imbalanced pursuit of anything worldly dangerous? What practical steps can we take to make sure we don’t get caught up in this trap?
Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Take a mental walk through your home. What things are precious to you? How would you react if some catastrophe (fire, flood, terrorism, etc.) destroyed them all? Jesus desires to save us from the trauma of lost possessions. He invites us to store our treasures in heaven. See Matthew 6:19-21. Share and discuss how having our true treasures in heaven changes our focus. How would it assure security and peace, even in the midst of a crisis?

Thought Questions:
1. God warned Israel that after they were in their new land, they would think they themselves were the ones who brought all the blessings to pass (Deut. 8:7-18). Why is it so important for us to “remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth” (vs. 18, RSV)? Discuss what happened to Israel that fulfilled God’s warning. What practical things can we do to always be able to recognize the true origin of our blessings?

2. Heaven and its beauties can become so desirable that we have a hard time living in today’s world with its struggles and challenges. Paul, in his confinement, was able to say “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content” (Phil. 4:11-13, NKJV). Read the passage as a group. Define contentment, then discuss why it is so necessary. How does our attitude, both in good times and in trouble, affect our witness?

Application Question:
The word stewardship flashes images of tithing and planned benevolence into our minds. A deeper impact comes when we consider that stewardship should involve every aspect of our lives. God has given us the gift of time, talents, and creativity, as well as the ability to earn wages and accumulate things. Keep a record for at least three days of how you have spent not only your money but your time and talents. Then review that record and present it to God. How will He reorder your life in all the areas of life stewardship?
**Further Study:** Look at two case studies in stewardship. Compare the story of the rich fool with the story of Nicodemus.

**The Rich Fool:** *Luke 12:13-21*

“By the parable of the foolish rich man, Christ showed the folly of those who make the world their all. This man had received everything from God. . . . He did not realize that God had made him a steward of His goods that he might help the needy. He had a blessed opportunity of being God’s almoner, but he thought only of ministering to his own comfort.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 256.

**Nicodemus:** *John 3:1, 2; 19:38-40*

“Now, when the Jews were trying to destroy the infant church, Nicodemus came forward in its defense. No longer cautious and questioning, he encouraged the faith of the disciples and used his wealth in helping to sustain the church at Jerusalem and in advancing the work of the gospel. Those who in other days had paid him reverence, now scorned and persecuted him, and he became poor in this world’s goods; yet he faltered not in the defense of his faith.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 105.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **What if everyone felt at liberty to place their tithe wherever they felt the urge to place it, as opposed to the church itself? It’s hard to see how the church could still function or even exist. What should this tell us about the importance of where we place our tithe? Discuss this issue as a class.**

2. **How does the act of returning tithes and offerings help keep us from being greedy?**

3. **Suppose someone were to come to your class and say, “Look, I just lost my job. I barely have enough money to pay the rent and feed my kids. I just can’t possibly return tithe. I can’t get by on what I have now.” What would you say to that person? What could you do for that person, as well?**
Lord of Our Body Temples

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: John 1:1-4; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 10:31; Gal. 3:13; Col. 1:16, 17; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.

Memory Text: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20, NIV).

Key Thought: Our bodies are not disposable containers we can use and abuse according to our own desires. As trophies of God’s grace, redeemed by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, we should honor God with our bodies. The question is, How do we do that?

You are the temple of the living God. When the apostle Paul first mentioned the word temple to the inhabitants of Corinth, they did not think of their own bodies; rather, they thought of the temple of Aphrodite, a place where worshipers engaged in sexual immorality with temple prostitutes. That’s probably why in his letters to the Corinthians Paul goes to great lengths to reeducate the new believers concerning the temple where God dwells, which is in the hearts of those who accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Paul declares, “You are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor. 6:16, NKJV), and “Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19, NKJV). Thus, the most compelling reason to care for our bodies is not simply that we might extend our lifespan or enjoy better health now, but because we choose to honor God with our bodies, which are His gifts to us.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 27.*
All Things Were Made by Him (John 1:1-3).

The New Testament writers boldly proclaim that the Lord Jesus Christ is not only the Messiah, the Son of the Highest, but He is also the Creator of the world. Thousands of years before the Son of God entered into humanity in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, He spoke the world into existence.

What three claims about the Word who became flesh does the apostle John make at the beginning of his Gospel record?

| John 1:1, 2 |
| John 1:3 |
| John 1:4 |

The apostle Paul also emphasizes the supremacy of Jesus Christ, Son of God, as the Creator of all things, and the One from whom we have even our life. Speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, the image of the invisible God, Paul writes, “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:16, 17, NIV).

Compare John 1:1-4 with Colossians 1:16, 17. How do they complement each other? What’s the key message of both?

During His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ never explicitly claimed to be the Creator of all things. However, as we study His life and teachings, we find many evidences that point to His creative power. For example, when Jesus calmed the storm on the sea of Galilee, the astonished disciples exclaimed, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!” (See Mark 4:41, NIV)

With the few texts we read for today as background, read Genesis 2:7, the account of God making humanity. Notice the closeness, the intimacy, of the act, in contrast to how everything else in the Genesis account was made. What does that tell us about the basic meaning of our own personal existence, about who we are, about why we are here? What radically different conclusions can we draw about the meaning of our lives in contrast to those who believe we are products of pure chance, nothing more? (See also Gen. 1:26, 27.)
Key Text: Romans 12:1, 2

Teachers Aims:
1. To establish that God is the Creator and Sustainer of life.
2. To show that our bodies are temples for the Holy Spirit.
3. To show that we honor God in caring for our bodies.

Lesson Outline:
I. The Creator and Redeemer (Gen. 2:7, 22; Gal. 3:13; Col. 1:16, 17).
   A. What does the way in which God created humans tell us about the type of relationship He wants to have with us?
   B. How should we live, knowing that all things continue to exist through Christ?

II. The Temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19, 20).
   A. What is the price with which we were purchased?
   B. List the various aspects of our lives. Then discuss how each aspect should be affected by the understanding that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

III. To the Glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31, 3 John 2).
   A. Why is it so important that whatever we do be for God’s glory?
   B. Discuss how the condition of our bodies affects us mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. How can a person suffering from a serious physical problem maintain mental, emotional, and spiritual health?

Summary: God desires us to live as healthfully as we can so He can dwell in us through the Holy Spirit. Living this way glorifies Him and helps us to witness to others.

COMMENTARY

Lord of Our Body Temples.

Our spiritual lives are not separate from the lives we live in the physical realm. What happens to us in the physical realm and what we choose to do in that realm impacts our spiritual lives. The choices we make regarding our relationship with God impact our bodies. If we hear God calling us to become a vegetarian, to fast, or to lose some weight, and if we then respond to that call, our body will be affected. On the other hand, if we live within the physical realm as if such calls do not matter, bodily degeneration and disease will increase and limit our spiritual effectiveness.

God wants us to stop doing things to our body that have a negative impact on our spiritual lives. He wants us to stop overeating and start exercising. He wants us to start being faithful to our families,
Redeemed

In yesterday’s study, we saw that the Bible very clearly reveals Jesus Christ as the Creator, the One who created all things, the One who spoke the world into existence, and the One who in a very intimate act breathed “the breath of life” into the first human being. Thus, we are not our own, in that we somehow created ourselves or put ourselves here out of our own volition, and, therefore, have an absolute claim over ourselves. On the contrary. As the objects of His specific act of creation, we belong to God, whose claim over us is greater than our claim over ourselves.

**Read** the last sentence of the above paragraph, specifically the italicized section. What are the implications of that thought? How should it impact how we live and the kind of decisions we make? When was the last time you made a decision based on the premise of that sentence?

We might belong to God because He is our Creator, but, according to the Bible, that’s not His only claim over us.

**Read** the following texts. What are they saying, and how do they help us understand the Lord’s claims over us? Acts 20:28; Gal. 3:13; 4:4, 5; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:12; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.

In the Bible, the idea of being redeemed is to be ransomed, to be bought back, to be recovered, to be rescued, or to be set free. Through Jesus our Redeemer, all these things have happened to us, which means His claims over us are even greater than before, for now we are His, by both creation and redemption. And redemption might even be a greater claim, because simply being created doesn’t necessarily mean something good. After all, some people might curse their own existence and wish they had never been born. In contrast, as the One who redeemed us in an act that promises us a new existence in a world without sin or suffering, Christ has done something wonderful for us that nothing can diminish or destroy (see Dan. 2:44).

**Write out a prayer thanking God for what He has done for you as your Creator and Redeemer. How, then, do you want to respond to Him because of what He has done? What obligations do you feel toward God, and what motivates you to fulfill those obligations?**
and He wants us to stop working too hard.

But God also invites us to do things to our body that have a positive impact on our spiritual lives. These bodily actions include such things as worshiping and praising Him, and doing loving acts of service for others.

Our bodies do not remain passive against the choices we make for ourselves or the choices other people make that affect our lives. We can enlist our bodies on our side in the realm of spiritual warfare. While we are not able to do direct battle with spiritual forces on our own, we can use our physical form in ways that not only protect us from the forces of evil but enable us to go on the offensive against them.

Paul speaks of this in 1 Timothy 4:7, 8: “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (NIV).

How do we train ourselves to be godly? We do it in the same way we train to perform any skill. We practice. So, training ourselves for godliness is not a purely spiritual or intellectual activity. You have to do something with your hands, arms, legs, and feet. If you are going to train yourself to play the violin, you must repeatedly move your fingers and arms to make certain motions in order to play the instrument well. You have to practice. Thus, if you are going to be godly, you have to practice godly acts continuously. You also need to understand you will not get it perfectly the first time you try it.

Certain spiritual exercises, called disciplines, performed in the physical realm, can have a profoundly positive impact on one’s spiritual life. For example, Sabbath keeping is a spiritual discipline. At God’s command (Exod. 20:8-11), we stop working and rest for 24 hours. We have faith that God will then continue in a special way to re-create His image in us. As a result, for one entire day we can be free from the busyness of our daily lives to devote in distinctive ways that entire day to God.

Other spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, Christian meditation, and Bible study, follow the same pattern.

1. We act in the physical realm.
2. We act in the physical realm at God’s invitation and, at times, at His command.
3. We act because we expect Him to act in return.
4. The result is a twofold freedom. We are free not only from bondage to that which would ultimately destroy us, but we are free to respond to God in new and creative ways.

An example of this is fasting.

1. Fasting is a bodily action. When we do not feed our bodies, they let us know about it.
2. God, however, may invite or command us to fast, in order to
The Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19, 20).

In his first epistle to the Christians in Corinth, the apostle Paul emphasized the importance of honoring God with our bodies. The Corinthian believers were facing some intense challenges. They lived in a city where sexual immorality was not only prevalent, it was encouraged. Satan was marring the image of God in unbelievers and believers alike. Promiscuity was not only plaguing the culture, it was permeating the church.

In Paul’s discussion of the damaging effects of sexual immorality, what two reasons does he give for honoring God with our bodies? 1 Cor. 6:19, 20.

Summarize in a few lines what you believe Paul is telling us with these two verses. How should these truths impact our lives in a practical, daily way?

As followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot use and abuse our bodies with careless indifference. Too often, people say, “This is my life, and I can do what I want with it.” The Word of God challenges that self-centered philosophy. When Christians engage in harmful activity, they damage themselves personally and dishonor God publicly.

What are some other harmful activities that are inappropriate for those whose bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit? See Deut. 21:20; Prov. 20:1, 25; 1 Cor. 10:31.

Honoring God with our bodies involves more than refraining from sexual immorality. Once we recognize that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus, this realization will affect every aspect of our lives. We will not only seek to avoid defiling our body temple with any substance or activity that is harmful or inappropriate. We will also actively seek to care for our body temple and involve ourselves in activities that honor God.

“What matters for the Christian is only the spiritual, not the physical.” How would you, from a biblical perspective, respond to this claim? How do you understand the strong link between the physical and the spiritual dimensions of humanity?
give us freedom from a specific appetite or to help us solve a particular problem. Fasting only to get something from God or to earn His favor is worthless. Such communication is one way—from us to Him. But when we respond to God’s invitation, we are allowing Him to communicate with us, as well.

3. When we fast, we are not merely “mortifying” our bodies. Instead, we are quieting the clamor of voices in our inner being so we can hear God; and whenever God speaks and we respond, we become a bit more transformed into His image.

4. We find freedom from our cravings. We have learned to say No to our desires by saying Yes to God. Instead of being controlled

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**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** John 1:1-4; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; 10:31; 3 John 2

1. The study of the human body leaves no doubt its creation was an act of genius, not chance. Reflect on each of the different systems—digestive, respiratory, circulatory, reproductive, skeletal, neurological, dermatological—and their interrelatedness. Regardless of the spiritual mandate to care for our bodies, simple logic tells us our bodies deserve the finest care possible. Why are so many of us clueless when it comes to the care and feeding of this magnificent machine? What simple habits have you adopted for maintaining optimal health?

2. We belong to God by virtue of creation and redemption. Our usefulness to Him is directly related to our mental and physical vitality. Yet, the enemy has often succeeded in turning Paul’s counsel, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31, NIV), into an arbitrary, legalistic list of “dos” and “don’ts.” What can we do to reclaim the gospel of good health from legalists and extremists? Make three specific suggestions.

3. We live in a society that says “If it feels good, do it.” How does knowing Jesus as Lord help us order our priorities? What habits have you adopted or abandoned that show Jesus is Lord of your life?

4. Jesus was fun to be around. His enemies described Him as “‘a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners’’” (Matt. 11:19, NIV), suggesting that He was not joyless and severe. Clearly, there should be a balance in the way we live and in what we eat and drink. What is that balance?
Do All to the Glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

Having appealed to the believers in Corinth to avoid defiling their body temples through sexual immorality, the apostle Paul shares a principle that can guide every aspect of life: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31, NIV). The Greek noun translated “glory” is the same word used as a verb in 1 Corinthians 6:19: “Honor God with your body.” The correlation between these two passages is clear. Because your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, everything you do, including what you eat and what you drink, should be done to the honor of God.

How possibly does one “honor God” with one’s body, or how does one eat and drink “to the glory of God”? What does that mean? How do these above texts show us that God does care about what we eat and drink? Why would He care?

We are physical beings. In the new heaven and the new earth, we will still be physical beings (see Rev. 21:4, 14). The idea that we are temples serves to prove even more so how sacred, and important, the physical aspect of our being is. No wonder, then, we are admonished to take care of ourselves, to use our bodies in ways that glorify the One who made them. Any kind of physical indulgence, any kind of bodily sin, any kind of abuse of our body simply defiles what God has created and given us.

Also, if God loves and cares about us, then it should be no surprise that He wants us to take care of our bodies, which can be a source of much joy or so much suffering, often depending upon how we ourselves take care of them.

What do the following texts say about God’s attitude regarding our physical well-being? Exod. 15:26, Jer. 30:17, Mark 5:25-34, 3 John 1:2.

Read these words of Ellen White: “Since the laws of nature are the laws of God, it is plainly our duty to give these laws careful study. We should study their requirements in regard to our own bodies and conform to them.”—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 369. What is she telling us here? How do these words reflect the principle Paul gave us in 1 Corinthians 10:31?
by our impulses, we learn to put them under God’s control. Instead of being our enemy, our body becomes our friend. What we do in the body actually can enable us to hear God more clearly and act for Him more consistently. The more we practice godliness, the more we will reflect His goodness and love to the world.

**Witnessing**

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” *(1 Cor. 10:31, NIV).*

Because we have not truly made Jesus Lord of our lives, we tend to separate spiritual matters from our everyday lives. God has not called us simply to religious exercise. He has called us to a complete and total life transformation. This calls for nothing less than allowing Him to permeate every aspect of our lives—even the mundane.

In doing all things to His honor and glory, we are a witness to the transforming power of God. Never allow anything short of complete transformation in your own life, bringing everything into submission to God’s will.

If you have a Christian bumper sticker or symbol on your car, are your driving habits a good witness?

Would we think twice about wearing a Christian T-shirt, hat, or other identifying factor, given some of the things we do or places we go?

As people see your life transformed, be sure to give the glory to God. And don’t soft-peddle transformation to those you’re witnessing to—God expects nothing less of their lives.

What is mentioned above are only those things people see, but even more important are those things no one sees but God. If our lives are not transformed even in the most secret places, this, too, will be apparent, for people learn early to spot hypocrisy.

We may understand prophecy, the 2,300 days, the significance of the sanctuary service, but if we are not living to His honor and glory in the everyday matters of life, these things are meaningless. Remember, most people would rather see a sermon lived than hear one preached.
Shalom!

Many people have heard of the Hebrew word shalom, understood as “peace.” It is sometimes used as an informal greeting among Jews today.

What do you think of when you think of the word peace? In what different ways do you use that word in your language? What does it mean to you?

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The word shalom itself has a very rich and deep meaning in the Old Testament, where it appears in one form or another hundreds of times. It carries within it the idea of completeness, good welfare, wholeness, soundness, well-being, inner harmony, and health. The word itself incorporates every aspect of life, including the physical, mental, and the spiritual, whether individually, collectively, or nationally.

For example, in one of the earliest uses of the word, Jacob inquires about the well-being (shalom) of Laban (see Gen. 29:6). The word translated “well” both times in the text is shalom. In contrast, in Jeremiah 29:7, Jeremiah tells the Jews in captivity to pray for the shalom “of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away,” because, the Lord says, in the shalom of the city will be the shalom of the Hebrew captives.

Look up the following texts where shalom, in one form or another, appears. How does its use help us understand the meaning of the word in regard to our total health and spiritual well-being? Gen. 43:28, Ps. 38:3 (the word translated “rest” in my bones is shalom), 119:165, Prov. 3:2, Isa. 48:22, Jer. 33:6.

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The Bible calls Jesus, Sar-Shalom, “the prince of peace,” which makes sense because, in Him, through faith in Him, through obedience to His law, both moral and physical, we can find “shalom,” wholeness, completeness, and well-being in our lives.

As Adventists, we have been greatly blessed with a health message. How seriously do you take the light we have been given on health? What changes might you need to make to have more “shalom” in your own life?
**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** There is a profound sense of awe as we experience a birth and watch a baby take its first breath. John 1:3, 4 tells us that Jesus is the Source of life, even before a baby’s first gasp of air. Share your experience with new life. Was it when one of your children was born or when you were a child and saw a puppy take its first breath? How did you feel? What does recounting that story help you remember about the God who originated life?

**Thought Questions:**

1. Jesus’ lordship of our lives is based not only on the fact that He is the Author of our existence. It also involves the profound gift of salvation. “You were not redeemed with corruptible things . . . but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:18, 19, NKJV). How does Jesus’ involvement in your rescue affect how you view His authority over your life and choices? How would you share the benefits of recognizing your value in God’s eyes with a neighbor or work colleague?

2. “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). What if these words were emblazoned in neon lights over your pantry and refrigerator door? How do the words to the glory of God deepen the magnitude of their importance? Discuss in your class what it means to make decisions based on something broader than our own self-interest and desires. Practically speaking, how do we glorify God through our treatment of our body temples?

**Application Question:**

The concept of temple means a different type of structure in the vast variety of cultures on planet Earth. In 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 Paul tells us we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Consider how you respect your body temple as evidenced by your treatment of it. Consider what first step God will help you make to live a healthier lifestyle (suggestion: drinking at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water each day if your physician allows it). Covenant with God to begin this week.
**Further Study:** The message of health reform, honoring God with our bodies, has always been important for Seventh-day Adventist Christians. God provided much guidance on the topic of health reform through the ministry of Ellen White. It is our privilege to share this message of honoring God with our bodies with the world. “It is impossible to work for the salvation of men and women without presenting to them the need of breaking away from sinful gratifications, which destroy the health, debase the soul, and prevent divine truth from impressing the mind. . . . Let the poor have the gospel of health preached unto them from a practical point of view, that they may know how to care properly for the body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 137. See also *Education*, pp. 99, 100; *Health Reformer*, October 1866; *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 347, 348; *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 17.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Since we are saved by God’s grace through faith and not by our own works, why does it really matter how we care for our body temples?

2. In what ways, if any, can you see a link between holiness and healthful living? Is that idea found anywhere in Scripture?

3. As a class, talk about what you might be able to do to help your own church members be more conscious regarding the need to take care of their bodies.

4. What dangers do we face in emphasizing the importance of health and its link to faith and spirituality so that we don’t make those who are sick feel as if they were somehow facing the judgment of God?

5. What role do dress and adornment have in the question of our body temples? What does Scripture say about this topic?
LESSON 10  *August 27–September 2

Lord of Our Labor

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 1:27, 28; 2:15; 3:17-19; Matt. 25:14-30; Acts 10:36-43; Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:6-12.

Memory Text: “‘He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise’” (Luke 3:11, NKJV).

Key Thought: Those who live under the lordship of Christ will demonstrate excellence and productivity in their labor. The work of their minds and hands will bring honor to God and blessings to those around them.

The dignity of labor. We are called, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, to set our minds on things above, not on things on the earth. However, at the same time, God also calls us to be productive in our daily labor. Commenting on Christ’s parable of the talents, Ellen White notes that “God has called us to serve Him in the temporal affairs of life. Diligence in this work is as much a part of true religion as is devotion. . . . Every man and woman who is truly converted will be a diligent worker.”—Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 343.

In this week’s lesson, we will explore the gift of work for those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We will discover that excellence and productivity in our work are important parts of our witness as citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 3.
The Gift of Labor in Eden (Gen. 1:27, 28; 2:15).

Contrary to a common notion, daily labor is not one of the negative consequences of living in a sinful world (the common notion that labor itself is bad, though, is a consequence of sin). Meaningful labor for the human family was part of God’s original and perfect plan.

What work assignment did the Creator give to our first parents? Gen. 1:27, 28; 2:15. What was the nature of their work? Why should there be work in a sinless, perfect environment? What does the existence of work in such a context tell us about the idea of work in general?

The Garden of Eden was a flawless environment. All creation rejoiced together in perfect harmony. In this idyllic setting, God gave Adam and Eve a meaningful work assignment, both for the Garden itself and for the world in general. Their whole relationship with the created world around them wasn’t limited to just enjoying it; they were, rather, to interact with it. In fact, they were to rule over the created world; thus, in a sense, they were gardeners-rulers, working in their garden home while ruling over the earth and the things in it. Created out of that world, they were distinctly part of it, working in it as laborers while at the same time given rule over it, an interesting combination of roles, to be sure.

Given the nature of humanity and our capacity to grow, to learn, to be changed, why do you think God wanted our original parents, even in a sinless environment, to work and to have responsibilities?

In what ways does your labor, whatever kind it is, offer you opportunities to grow, to mature, to learn? What could you do in order to take advantage of whatever opportunities your work does offer you toward growth and maturity?
Key Texts: *Genesis 1:28, 2:15*

**Teachers Aims:**

1. To show that God instituted labor before the Fall.
2. To explore the benefits of labor.
3. To show how our labor can bless others.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **Labor in the Garden** *(Gen. 2:15).*
   A. Why was labor an important part of God’s original plan?
   B. How were Adam and Eve originally meant to have dominion, or rule, over God’s creation?

II. **Labor After the Fall** *(Gen. 3:17, Prov. 14:23).*
   A. How did the Fall affect the concept of labor and labor itself?
   B. Why is labor still important?
   C. How is honest labor a way of glorifying God?

III. **Working to Bless Others** *(Eph. 4:28).*
   A. Discuss how refusing to work or how not working wisely can be a drain on society.
   B. How can the fruit of our labor be a blessing to others?

**Summary:** The Lord instituted work for our benefit and a blessing to others. Productive labor should be a part of our daily Christian living. Whether working at home, on our jobs, in the community, or for the church, we should work to the best of our ability. This honors God, who is the Lord of our labor.

**COMMENTARY**

Lord of Our Labor.

Learning to labor is one of the first tasks a person must learn. A baby must learn to suck in order to feed successfully. Fortunately, God created us with the desire to work. Most persons have some activities they enjoy doing—an activity that brings satisfaction to the soul. When a person’s labor is in harmony with the way God created that person, then that person finds working enjoyable.

Unfortunately, in our fallen state, few persons know themselves well enough to really understand what God created them for. When we do not know ourselves well enough to discriminatingly select what is good for us, we are more likely to take hold of what is near. Or, if someone were reared to believe the mistaken idea that “good” work means subservient obedience to an external authority figure, that person may never have studied his or her responses to stimuli in order to nurture them.
The Challenges of Labor After the Fall  
(Gen. 3:17-19).

The entrance of sin into our world resulted in numerous negative consequences. The most devastating consequence was death. Long before Adam and Eve experienced death personally, they would witness the horrifying consequence of their sin in the death of Abel at the hands of his brother Cain. Sin not only affected the human family; it also affected the environment.

**Read** prayerfully and carefully Genesis 3:17-19. How did the entrance of sin affect the environment and our interaction with it? How do you understand what God is saying in these texts? Were these changes purely a punishment of sin, or were they the natural results of sin?

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It is not clear how much time elapsed after God created the world before sin marred the perfect creation. Undoubtedly, Adam and Eve enjoyed the privilege of laboring in that wonderful setting. With the entrance of sin, however, the environment became harsh and hostile. Our first parents were now compelled to labor by the sweat of their brow. The cycle of deterioration and death in the natural environment would be a constant reminder of their own mortality as well as a stark contrast to the Eden they had once enjoyed.

**A quick reading** of those texts sounds as if the Lord was being very harsh in punishing them. Yet, if you read below the surface, what else can you see here? In other words, in what ways could the Lord have used these changes to help Adam and Eve?

“It was God’s purpose to alleviate by toil the evil brought into the world by man’s disobedience. By toil the temptations of Satan might be made ineffectual, and the tide of evil stayed. And though attended with anxiety, weariness, and pain, labor is still a source of happiness and development, and a safeguard against temptation. Its discipline places a check on self-indulgence, and promotes industry, purity, and firmness. Thus it becomes a part of God’s great plan for our recovery from the fall.”—Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People*, p. 213.

**What examples have you seen, if any, of how work can be used for our spiritual benefit?**
Individuals must develop their own identity to know what work fits them best. With the lack of a secure identity in Christ, many persons settle for jobs that do not completely mesh with the gears that drive them. Whenever they put in the clutch to change their speed or direction, they feel the gears grind and tear at their soul. In such situations work is toil, rather than a means of creative satisfaction. It may provide money to put food on the table and a roof over one’s head, but it is destructive to the lives that live under that roof and eat that food. Work in such a situation is closer to a curse than the blessing God originally designed it to be.

Fortunately, there is good news for those who labor under the curse rather than under Christ. We find good news in the response of Christ to both the religious leaders who accused a woman of inappropriate labor and to the woman herself. This woman, who, in her culture, was supposed to work for her husband and find satisfaction in his lordship, was caught adulterously meeting her needs elsewhere. Christ saw she had not been created as a wanton woman but that her needs had been deprived and she had developed a habit of looking elsewhere to find satisfaction. Rather than accuse her, He considered her motives and understood the ache in her heart.

Jesus also saw the harshness of the religious leaders who had trapped her and who now blamed her for hungrily seeking satisfaction, all the while failing to address the structures that had deprived her. Jesus understood that when one lives in a desert, it is difficult not to desire water. So He evened the scoreboard. With the words “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7, NASB), He took away their pulpit by giving them a taste of their own sinfulness.

Jesus’ words changed the direction of this woman’s work. Through His words, He gave the men a chance to create a confessing community—a community where no one was any better than an adulterer. Thus, He leveled the playing field of their world and strengthened the woman’s capacity to transcend her deprivation. Jesus’ command to stop sinning was now something she would be able to do (vs. 11).

So it is with us. When we attack ourselves for our sins the way the religious leaders attacked the adulterous woman, we leave ourselves deprived and more vulnerable to the very impulses that caused us to sin in the first place. Stoning ourselves for our bad behavior will not help us stop that behavior or do good deeds.

Frequently, a person whose behavior is problematic is also a person with a perfectionist conscience. We find the answer to the destructiveness of perfectionism when we finally understand why we make certain bad choices. Understanding why we choose wrongly frees us to claim the strength our compassionate Lord wants to give us, so we can love ourselves the way He loves us. Such a love equips us to make choices in line with God’s will for our life.
Productivity in Our Labor (2 Thess. 3:6-12).

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 and then answer the following questions:

1. Whom should the people avoid?

2. Whose example should they follow, and in what?

3. What reason did Paul give for the fact that he and his fellow evangelists worked to earn their bread?

4. What was Paul’s attitude toward those who refused to work?

5. How would you sum up the essence of what Paul is writing here? What principles are here that we, today, should apply to our own lives and how we relate to work and to those who don’t work?

6. In what kind of situations might those who are not working be excused for not working? What, then, is your responsibility toward such a person?

When we are productive in our labor, we are blessed in many ways. We are able to provide for the needs of our families and loved ones. Our productivity also brings honor to the Lord we serve. Whether we are ploughing a field, caring for the sick, working in the home, or operating a small business, we can use this time of labor for the honor of our Lord and the blessing of those around us. Such is the attitude of an individual who is living under the lordship of Christ.

“If any would not work, neither should he eat.” How do you relate to this admonition with the whole idea of grace, of forgiveness, of treating people better than they deserve, just as Christ has treated us better than we deserve?
TEACHERS COMMENTS

If the slot we are filling in our social structure is problematic for either ourselves or others, Christ offers us the power to “go and sin no more.” For some, sinning no more could mean removing themselves from their current work environment. For others, it will mean being a new creature in the same setting.

God created each of us to reflect His image in a multitude of ways and circumstances. When Christ is Lord of our labor, our labor becomes an opportunity to demonstrate outwardly God’s inward work in us. We are both the clay in our heavenly Potter’s hands and the dough worked by the Holy Spirit’s leaven.

Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** Genesis 1:27, 28; 2:15; Matthew 20:1-16; 25:14-30; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

1 In addition to our jobs, we often have hobbies we pursue as a form of recreation. Our hobbies reveal God’s ideal for labor. Whether it is gardening, woodworking, music, art, sewing, mechanics, or cooking, we receive satisfaction from doing something useful. Why did God’s plan for us involve physical and intellectual exertion? What does this say about being created in God’s image? What hobby do you enjoy, and why?

2 How we perform our jobs reveals the extent to which Jesus is Lord of our lives. What does our job performance say about us? About our faith? If you could visit the carpenter’s shop in Nazareth, what would you see to indicate the quality of the products manufactured there?

3 Read Matthew 20:1-16. Who got the most out of the deal? The ones who got paid a full day’s wage for working one hour? Or the ones who got to work with the Master for the entire day? Explain your answer.

4 Read Matthew 25:14-30. Was the servant who hid his master’s money lazy, fearful, or both? What would have happened to the servants who doubled their master’s money if instead they had made bad investments? Would their master still have praised them? In other words, does God honor risk taking, results, or both? Explain your answer and give examples.

5 How is your life on the job affected by your life of personal Bible study and prayer? What Bible promises do you claim in order to be a better worker? Share an experience when your good work inspired a compliment from your boss or a fellow worker.
Laboring for the Benefit of Others

What principle regarding labor did the apostle Paul share with the believers in Ephesus? Eph. 4:28.

The apostle Paul practiced what he preached. Speaking to the Ephesian elders before leaving Miletus, he said, “‘I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me’” (Acts 20:33, 34, NKJV, emphasis supplied). Paul’s teaching in words and life reminds us of the counsel of another servant of our Lord Jesus Christ. John the Baptist challenged his hearers to let the fruits of their labors bless the lives of those around them: “‘He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise’” (Luke 3:11, NKJV).

Read James 2:14-20. What important message does he have for those who profess to be saved by faith alone? How does this counsel help us understand what saving faith is?

What’s fascinating about James’s words is the kind of works he links with faith. We often tend to think of works as not stealing, not killing, not breaking the Sabbath, and so forth, which, of course, are all part of what it means to follow Christ. Yet, James here talks about something else, that of taking care of those around us who are in need. Just saying nice things to them or just offering a prayer for them isn’t enough. James is giving us an example of the kind of works that reveal true faith. As Christians, we need to be careful that we don’t, as did the Pharisees, get caught up in “‘tithe of mint and anise’” while ignoring the weightier matters of the law, “‘judgment, mercy, and faith’” (Matt. 23:23).

Helping the poor requires two things: time and money. How much of your time, how much of your money, are you willing to spend helping those in need around you? What does your answer say about the kind of faith you have?
**Witnessing**

The majority of people spend the better part of their life engaged in some form of labor. If this is where most of our time is spent, and where we come into contact with people outside our family and church circles, it is also our greatest witnessing opportunity.

This week’s study asks an important question: “If all people knew about your faith was from how you went about your work, what impressions would they likely receive about your faith?”

Would they see someone who cares for others or someone concerned only with his or her own advancement?

Would they see an honest and trustworthy person committed to upholding the values of his or her God, or would they see someone willing to cut corners?

Would they see someone who went about his or her daily business with integrity and diligence or someone who was just as engaged in office politics and backstabbing as anyone else?

Would they see someone committed to offering solutions or someone who spent his or her time around the watercooler discussing all the problems?

Would they see someone willing and able to work with anyone—even the coarsest people—or would they see just another member of a particular clique?

Would they see someone easily discouraged or someone with an inner Source of strength?

Too often we allow ourselves to be affected by our environment instead of being the salt and light God calls us to be. God places His children in certain situations for a reason; let us not lose sight of our greater mission!
Laboring as We Await Our Lord’s Return (Matt. 25:14-30).

The Lord Jesus Christ told a parable that emphasized the importance of using every resource to its full potential while we await His return.

**Read** the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. What lessons can we learn for our lives today? What message is Jesus giving to us?

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“There is not one human being to whom is not committed some talent, not one but has a work to do for the Lord. Not one is to be excused. Not one is to remain in idleness; but every man is required to do his best; the talents entrusted to him are to be used in consecrated service for the Master.”—Ellen G. White, “Redeem the Time Because the Days Are Evil,” *Review and Herald*, April 21, 1896.

What’s fascinating, too, about this parable is that it comes right after the parable of the foolish virgins (see Matt. 25:1-13), which has an emphasis more on the life of faith, devotion, and prayer, which leads to the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Right after comes the parable of the talents, which deals with the active Christian life, not of just praying and believing and studying but of outward work for the Master.

The principle here, though, doesn’t have to be limited only to our work for the Lord. In all our work, all our labor, we should seek to go about our tasks with faithfulness and diligence as did the faithful servants.

**How** do we understand this parable in light of the concept of salvation by faith alone? (Rom. 3:28, 4:1-13, Gal. 2:16).

Our faith will be revealed in our works, in what we do with the gifts God has given us. We cannot separate our Christianity from how we live; and how we live cannot be separated from how we work, how we do our job, whatever it is. In the workplace, faithful, thorough, diligent, and honest labor can be a powerful expression of our faith, as well as a powerful witness to the God we serve.

If all someone knew about your faith was from how you went about your work, what impressions would they likely receive about your faith?
Icebreaker: In the beginning, the Godhead created a beautiful garden for humankind. It was a wonderful paradise. Where in your life do you find perfect beauty? When do times of complete fulfillment happen on a sinful earth? Discuss how our occupations, ministry to others, and family time can provide gardens of time where God meets us. How does “taking care” (Gen. 2:15, NIV) of people and places bless our lives?

Thought Questions:
1. Paul admonishes the Ephesian church members to “steal no longer” and to “work” (Eph. 4:28, NIV). Why is it important to apply our hands to useful labor? What should be our relationship to those in our midst who don’t work to support their families? Paul says the goal is to have something to share with those in need. How might this principle impact how you disburse your income?

2. Review Matthew 25:14-30. It contains a parable of those who labor productively for God versus one who does not. Take a few moments to rewrite this parable using your own words, reflecting the culture in which you live. Which servant are you? What talents has God given you? How will you balance the Master’s call to service with the necessity of earning a living for your family? How might work and ministry be integrated to God’s glory?

Application Question:
Doing in our society seems to imply a frantic pace filled with activity and accomplishments. Compare this to Jesus’ life. Acts 10:36-43 records how Jesus “‘went around doing good and healing . . . because God was with Him’” (vs. 38, NIV). How do we live a reflection of Jesus’ mission of mercy on this earth? Covenant with God to labor for Him, asking for His power and direction. On your calendar, make an “appointment” next week to do something good for someone else.
Further Study: See also *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 359, 360.

Some individuals are called to full-time service for God. They have the privilege and responsibility of devoting their complete attention to kingdom business. Ellen White spoke of this call to full-time ministry in a letter written at the beginning of the last century: “Many young men and women now engaged in secular labor will feel earnestly stirred to give themselves to the service of God, to become channels of light. . . . Let these be given an opportunity to obtain an education for the work of God. And let all God’s workers help and cheer and encourage one another with their prayers and faithful conversation, impressing one another with the dignity and responsibility of the work in which they are engaged.”—Letter 66, 1901, *Manuscript Releases*, p. 44.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does the Sabbath fit in with this whole question of labor? What message does the Sabbath tell us regarding our labor?

2. How do you understand the basic message of this week’s study with the words in Galatians 6:2?

3. In every generation, God raises up women and men who honor Him in their labor. Think about your own culture. Who comes to mind as an individual whose labor has brought glory to God and blessing to others?

4. Is there anyone in your own church family out of work right now? If so, what can you do as a church community to help (1) provide for his or her family’s immediate needs and (2) find the person work?

5. “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (1 Tim. 5:8). As a class, discuss the implications of this text in regard to how you would treat someone who refuses to provide for his own family.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Psalms 47; 63:1-4; 95:6, 7; 99:9; 150; John 2:13-16; Acts 4:24-31; Col. 3:16; Rev. 5:8-14; 14:6, 7.

Memory Text: “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand” (Psalm 95:6, 7, NKJV).

Key Thought: Those who live under the lordship of Christ will find their greatest joy in worshiping God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in spirit and in truth.

God is seeking true worshipers. Every human being will inevitably worship someone or something. Our choice is not whether or not we will worship but rather what or whom we will worship. During His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ emphasized the importance of worship, both in His actions and also in His teachings. Whether in the temple, in a synagogue, or out on a mountainside, Jesus took time to worship His heavenly Father. On one occasion, when meeting with a woman at Jacob’s well, Jesus shared the startling news that God is actively seeking true worshipers. According to Jesus, true worshipers are those who worship God “in spirit and truth” (John 4:23, NKJV).

In this week’s study, we will explore the theme of worship as it relates to those who live under the lordship of Christ.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 10.
The Focus of Our Worship

There is only One who is worthy of worship. When Satan urged Jesus to bow down and worship him, our Lord responded:

“ 'Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve’ ” (Matt. 4:10, NKJV).

What are some reasons given in the Scriptures for worshiping God?

Ps. 95:6, 7

Ps. 99:9

Rev. 4:8-11

Rev. 5:8-14

Even though the Scriptures clearly testify that God alone should be the focus of our worship, there are times when individuals attempt to direct their worship elsewhere. For example, when the apostle John encountered an angelic being, he fell down in worship. He received the following rebuke from the heavenly messenger: “ ‘See that you do not do that! . . . Worship God!’ ” (Rev. 19:10, NKJV).

Read Acts 14:8-18. How did the inhabitants of Lystra respond to Paul and Barnabas after a crippled man was healed in Jesus’ name? Why were their actions so understandable? In what ways might we, today, in the twenty-first century, be tempted to do the same thing; that is, worship something other than God?

The inhabitants of Lystra brought sacrificial animals and wanted to worship Paul and Barnabas, saying, “ ‘The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men’ ” (Acts 14:11, NKJV). Ellen White notes that even though “Paul endeavored to direct their minds to the true God as the only object worthy of worship, it was still most difficult to turn them from their purpose.”—Sketches From the Life of Paul, p. 58.

If someone were to ask you, Why do you worship the God that you do, what answer would you give? How do you justify worshipping a Being you have never seen, whose mere existence even you have to take on faith? Write a paragraph or two that clearly and simply gives your reasons (read them to one another in class on Sabbath).
**Key Text:** 1 Chronicles 16:29

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To show that God is worthy of our worship.
2. To discuss the meaning of true worship.
3. To discuss various expressions of worship.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Worshiping the God of Heaven *(Matt. 4:10).*
   A. Why is the Lord God of heaven the only One worthy of worship?
   B. We cannot see God physically, but how can we “see” Him in creation and in answers to prayer?
   C. How does observing the Sabbath as a day of worship show that we honor God?

II. Worshiping the Lord From the Heart *(Ps. 111:1).*
   A. What does taking time to worship God show about our relationship with Him?
   B. How is worship an expression of love for God?
   C. Why must true worship come from the heart?

III. Expressions of Worship *(Ps. 149:1-6, Psalm 150).*
   A. Why can worship not be limited to any certain time or place?
   B. List various ways to worship. Why is it important to have different ways of worship?
   C. True worship will be filled with joy. What other emotions are appropriate for worship, and why?
   D. Why is it important to worship with others?

**Summary:** True worship must come from the heart. We can worship God in a church or on a mountaintop, alone or in a congregation, with a whisper or with a shout.

**COMMENTARY**

`Lord of Our Worship.`

Do we worship God for His sake or for ours?

In one sense, all worship is generated by God and directed toward Him. It is all for His sake. Any worship that is not for His sake is illegitimate.

Yet, in another sense, we worship for our sake. God is still God whether we acknowledge it or not. However, we gain enormous benefit when we worship God rather than “things.” When we worship God as Lord, we live within a worldview that recognizes only one supreme Authority. Contrary to what we often feel, neither you are nor I am that supreme Authority. In addition, when we worship
Sabbath and Worship

It is our privilege to worship our Creator moment by moment. Every time we lift our hearts and voices to God in worship, we join with the heavenly beings before His throne who worship Him day and night. Through silent prayers of thanksgiving and praise, we can worship our God anytime, anywhere (see 1 Thess. 5:17). In many ways, our personal, private devotion and worship are more important than what we might do as part of a community.

Nevertheless, there are special times for worship, distinct from whatever we might do throughout our normal daily routine. This was seen, in principle, in the ancient Hebrew feasts, where numerous times were set apart for various acts of worship and thanksgiving (see Lev. 23:4-44).

Yet, more universal than the Jewish feasts is the seventh-day Sabbath, which has been set apart by our Creator as a time for all God’s people, Jews or Gentiles.

Read Genesis 2:1-4. What do you see in there that shows the universality of the seventh day; that is, why it was not set aside simply for one group of people but for all humanity?

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Read Revelation 14:6, 7 and then answer the following questions:

1. Whom is the message of the “everlasting gospel” to go to? How does this answer fit in with what we’ve just read above in Genesis 2:1-4?

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2. Whom are we told to worship?

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3. How do your answers to questions 1 and 2 help you understand the role of the Sabbath here in the first angel’s message of Revelation 14?

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What is it about the Sabbath commandment itself (Exod. 20:8-11) that gives us a special opportunity for worship we might not have at any other time? How well do you avail yourself of that opportunity? What changes might you need to make to get the best out of the Sabbath that it offers?
God, we connect ourselves to Him in such a way that He is able to transform us.

During the 1960s and into the 1970s, numerous young people sought in various ways to "find" themselves. Eventually, many of them gravitated to eastern religions. These religions teach that human beings can find meaning by discovering their place in the cosmos. God is not out "there," they teach. Rather, He is within each one of us, and each one of us is within God.

The Bible offers a contrasting view of reality. God is out there; but He is not simply a force in the universe. He is active, not silent. Indeed, His Word created us in His image; and when we sinned, He sent that same Word to bring us back to Him. This is the glorious foundation of our worship.

We worship God for our sake. We need to continually experience His activity in our lives. We need to continually listen to His Word. We need to remember we are God's creatures, His beloved daughters and sons, and through His Word, He offers us salvation.

God has given us the Sabbath to help us remember. The Sabbath is not just a day off from our daily activities. Rather, it is a day filled with special activities that will help us learn crucial lessons. Gathering as a worshiping community gives us opportunities to affirm and to be affirmed. We also are encouraged by hearing others tell us how God has worked in their lives. We can spend time in fellowship or in solitude, according to what our needs are on that day. We can enjoy the natural world as we delight in our relationship to it; and we can serve others in meaningful ways. Worship on the Sabbath includes what we do between 11:00 A.M. and noon, but it is much more.

What makes for a meaningful worship experience? A church leader once said that worship was hearing a good sermon in which she was informed about something new. Another friend defines worship as what happens when he gets lost in the adoration of God in music. Only then is he able to ignore the little parental voice in his mind that tells him he is not good enough. When he is singing to God, he feels fully loved and accepted by Him. These two positions describe the extremes of worship as an intellectual event and as an emotional event.

Perhaps we need both types of events in our worship services. Perhaps it also is true that some people need more of one event than of the other. Perhaps my intellectually oriented friend needs more joyful emotion in her worship, and perhaps my emotionally oriented friend needs a more intellectual component in his worship. Then again, perhaps they have truly found the styles of worship that best engage them spiritually.

It is crucial, however, to remember that worship is not about us but about God. Worship does benefit us, but it does so only because we focus our attention on God. As we do so, we are emotionally moved. As we see how God has given Himself to us, we feel God's
A Heart for Worship

Read  David’s song of thanksgiving in 1 Chronicles 16:8-36. What does it mean to “worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (vs. 29)? Read John 4:23, 24 for further insights.

Holiness in the Bible gives the idea of something “set apart for holy use.” In a real sense, worship is just that, setting aside not just time but setting aside ourselves for special communion and interaction with God. It’s our way of saying, “How great Thou art, and how unworthy I am.” It’s our way of acknowledging our total dependence upon Christ’s righteousness as our only means of salvation. It’s a time to cease from work, from play, from everything else we do and pour ourselves out in praise and adoration of the One who’s the Source of all that we are, the One whose death on the cross has opened the door to heaven for all who will walk through.

Yet, true worship is so much more than merely forms, songs, or a liturgy. It’s, in a real sense, a work, a human expression of gratitude for who God is and the great things He has done for us through Jesus. Just as John said, “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1 John 5:3, NKJV), we also reveal our love for God by worshiping Him. It’s a different kind of expression of love than that of keeping His commandments, but it’s an expression nonetheless. Certainly this was part of what Jesus talked about when He said we would worship the Lord in “spirit and in truth.”

Keeping the above idea in mind, what do you think motivated Jesus to do what He did at the temple? John 2:13-16.

Worship, like anything that’s repeated, faces the danger of becoming mechanized, routine. Once we cease worshiping God out of sincere love for who He is and what He has done for us, our worship can go in any one of a number of unhealthy directions. The temple services during Jesus’ time on earth had become cold, formal, and businesslike. The same can happen now; or they can become a means of entertainment or a social gathering where the Lord could look upon us and say: “With their lips [they] do honour me, but [they] have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men” (Isa. 29:13).

Think of two different worship experiences you have had: one where you left exuberant, uplifted, encouraged in your faith; the other, where you left downbeat, discouraged, cold. What caused the crucial difference between the two?
**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Psalms 95:6, 7; 150; John 4:21-24; Revelation 14:6, 7

1. Someone has pointed out the modern tendency to worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship. Our inability to prioritize the truly important things may be the greatest peril we face in today’s secular climate. What guiding principles have you adopted that help you to properly prioritize your recreation, work, and worship? How has knowing Christ as Lord helped you in this process?

2. Worship is our response to something God has done or will do. When the Israelites passed through the Red Sea, they worshiped. Even before God delivered them from Egypt, they worshiped Him for what He promised to do (Exod. 4:31). When Jesus’ parents dedicated Him at the temple, Simeon praised God for the privilege of seeing the Messiah and for what He would accomplish (Luke 2:25-32). Give examples from your own experience of one thing God has done and one thing He will do. How do you prefer to express your praise and worship?

3. One of the last messages to be taken to the world involves worship (Rev. 14:6, 7). How is the Sabbath related to this emphasis on worship? What other Adventist fundamental beliefs are related to the principle of worshiping God as the Creator? List at least five.

4. When Isaiah saw the Lord in vision, he exclaimed, “‘Woe to me! . . . I am ruined! For I . . . have seen the King, the Lord Almighty’” (Isa. 6:5, NIV). Yet, Jesus taught us to address God as “our Father” (Matt. 6:9). How do you reconcile these two concepts? Should we worship God with fear, boldness, or both? Explain.
The Expressions of Our Worship

As we search the Scriptures, we discover that through the ages worshipers have expressed their devotion to God in a variety of ways.

**What** expressions of worship do you find in the following passages of Scripture? As you read these texts, ask yourself: What kind of environment do they seem to speak of, something morose, solemn, or something joyful and exuberant? Is something automatically holy if it’s somber, or is it automatically irreverent if joyful? *Psalms 47, 63:1-4, 149:3, 150.*

Music has always played an important role in worship. The heavenly courts are filled with songs of praise (*see Rev. 5:9, 10; 15:3, 4*). When we express our worship to God through music, we are privileged to join in that symphony of praise. “Music forms a part of God’s worship in the courts above, and we should endeavor, in our songs of praise, to approach as nearly as possible to the harmony of the heavenly choirs. . . . Singing, as a part of religious service, is as much an act of worship as is prayer. The heart must feel the spirit of the song, to give it right expression.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 594.

**How** do you understand Paul’s counsel that, when singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, we should sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord? *Col. 3:16.*

There are musical performances that may be entertaining or aesthetically pleasing, but they bear no traces of the grace of God. Only music that flows forth from a heart that has been touched by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, is worship that’s “in spirit and in truth.”

**What is your favorite worship song, a song that really moves your heart? Why not sing it now and offer praises of thanksgiving to the Lord?**
God initiates the worship experience by inviting us to worship Him through the influences of His Spirit. When we come to worship, we can expect to be moved and changed by God. The outcome of worship is freedom from devotion to lesser things. It is a freedom to give affection to and receive affection from the One who loves us more than anyone else ever could.

**Witnessing**

There is so much controversy over worship that perhaps this is where we need to recognize God’s lordship most. It seems strange to say this because worship (you would think), in and of itself, shows our recognition of His lordship. Or perhaps we need to ask the question, Do we truly worship God or our idea of God? Do we find ourselves insisting worship must be “reverent” and ignoring the clamorous picture Revelation gives us of the elders and beasts before God’s throne? Or do we find ourselves quoting psalms and demanding everyone shout God’s praises, missing the call for all the earth to be silent before Him?

The truth is that we need the complete and full picture of worship presented in the Bible, rather than focusing on a few places that support our view while ignoring everything else. Only then can we strike the right balance and not fall into one extreme or another.

Some claim worship is boring and routine. That can be the case; however, one of the surest ways to keep our worship from becoming “mechanized” or “routine” is to regularly share our faith with others. If God is truly worthy of our praise and worship, we should not try to keep Him to ourselves. And in sharing, allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal new truths, and inviting others to worship with us, our own understanding of God will be enlarged, and we will have only more reasons to worship Him!

Is there something blocking your vision of God? “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord” (Isa. 6:1, NIV). King Uzziah was a godly leader, but it was not until he was removed that Isaiah had his glorious vision of God. Having worshiped God in all His majesty, let us, with Isaiah, say, “ ‘Here am I. Send me!’ ” (vs. 8).
The Impact of Our Worship

When we worship God in spirit and truth, we will experience personal transformation. It is impossible to stand in the presence of the Holy and remain unchanged.

**Consider** the experience of the early Christians as they gathered together for worship, as recorded in Acts 2:46, 47. What was the impact of their worship?

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True worship impacts us personally. The psalmist David declared, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the LORD’” (Ps. 122:1, NKJV). He had discovered that in God’s presence “is fulness of joy” (16:11). We experience joy when we worship God in spirit and in truth. Though there’s always the danger of getting carried away with hype and emotionalism (as seen in certain types of church services), there’s also the danger of our worship being cold, dead, and lifeless worship that’s neither in spirit or in truth.

**Though** worship is nothing if not a personal expression of faith, the Bible talks about corporate worship, about coming together and worshiping as a community. How, for example, were the lives of the early Christians impacted by the time of prayerful worship following the release of Peter and John from prison? Acts 4:24-31. What can we learn from this account about what corporate worship should do for us?

The early Christians left their times of worship filled with joy, ready to speak the Word of God boldly. They were strengthened and encouraged by the others’ expression of faith, of testimony, and of their love for God. This should be our experience, as well. We should draw faith, hope, and encouragement from others, just as others should draw these things from us. Corporate worship should bring us closer to God and to one another; it should fill us with a desire to proclaim the great news of Christ and Him crucified. If this isn’t your experience, you haven’t worshiped; you’ve just gone through the motions of a religious service.

Write down your understanding of what true corporate worship should be about. Might you have some notions that need to be changed? Compare notes in class.
Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** Thirsty? The mere question causes us to look for a glass of water. We can teach our bodies to live with less water than they actually need, but this leads to negative consequences for our health. When have you been really thirsty? How can we become more *thirsty* in our desire to know and worship God? How can we grow spiritually so we join the psalmist in feeling that God’s loving-kindness is “better than life” (*Ps. 63:3, NKJV*)?

**Thought Questions:**
1. An angel flying in the midst of heaven proclaims a call “to those who live on the earth” (*Rev. 14:6, 7, NIV*) to worship God. This worship is based on His right to lordship in our lives because He has authored our very existence. This startling symbol is used to attract attention, because not everyone on our planet knows about God and His ongoing judgment. How can we share this vital information where we live and work? Why is it so critical that we begin this very moment? What are the consequences if we don’t share?

2. When the extended family of Jesus’ disciples met to pray as He had directed, a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit blessed and empowered them. Acts 4:24-31 records the boldness of their prayers. Think back to God’s interventions in your life. What happened when you prayed boldly? What hinders us from daily praying as those disciples prayed (busyness, division, disbelief, apathy, etc.)? Why should we allow God to remove any barriers so His power will be evidenced in tangible ways through our lives and witness?

**Application Question:**
Read Psalm 150 in as many translations of the Bible as you have available to you. Notice the different admonitions to praise God. How could you use this psalm as an outline for your worship of God? Why does recognizing that God invites “everything that has breath” (*Ps. 150:6, NIV*) to worship Him make this song a command? When you worship Him “in His sanctuary” (vs. 1, NIV), how will He be blessed?
**Further Study:** Worship and the Cross. Go through the New Testament and find some texts on Christ’s death for us on the cross. Dwell on what that death means; write out your understanding of His death and the forgiveness it offers you. Pray over it and ask the Lord to help you grasp the fullness of what Christ has done.

Afterward, you will be filled with a desire to worship Him, for of all the reasons we have to worship God, none is better than because of the Cross.

It will be the privilege of the redeemed to worship God throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity. We will come from every kindred, nation, tongue, and people. Our cultural heritage will be different, but our worship will blend in a beautiful symphony of praise. “Heaven and earth will unite in praise, as ‘from one Sabbath to another’ (Isa. 66:23) the nations of the saved shall bow in joyful worship to God and the Lamb.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 770.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. As a class, have different people express what their understanding of what an ideal worship service would be like. What differences are there between your views? Are there fundamental differences or simply differences in taste and style? Most important, what does Scripture teach us about proper worship?

2. How can our worship reflect more clearly the worship of God in the courts above? *See Revelation 4, 5, and 19:1-7.*

3. What changes have you observed in the way people worship? To what extent are those changes cultural rather than biblical? How much of a role should culture play in worship? Is there any one “right” way to worship the Lord?

4. Worship services can either turn crusty, stale, and formal, or they can turn into “sanctified” entertainment. In which direction does your local church lean? What changes might you need to make, and how can you make them?
LESSON 12 *September 10-16

Lord of Our Service

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant” (Mark 10:42, 43, NKJV).

Key Thought: Our Lord Jesus Christ provides the ultimate example of service. He reminds us that “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45, NKJV). As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to serve in Jesus’ name.

When we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, He invites us to follow in His steps. This is not a call to greatness as the world counts greatness. Rather, it is a call to service. It is a call to have the mind of Christ, who humbled Himself in the form of a servant. Like the disciples, we often find ourselves struggling for the place of honor, the position of authority. But Jesus lovingly reminds us, both in word and in life, “it shall not be so among you” (Matt. 20:26).

We are called first and foremost to serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and then to serve others in Jesus’ name. We will serve, not out of compulsion but out of love for Him, who loved us and gave Himself for us. That’s the only service that’s truly acceptable in His eyes, service born out of a heart of love for God and others.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 17.*

Only the apostle John records the story. Not a word from Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Not a single reference in the writings of Peter or Paul. And yet, when you read this story, it reminds you so much of the character of Jesus.

**How** did the conduct of Jesus in the upper room demonstrate His willingness to serve rather than to be served? *John 13:1-15.*

The foot-washing service is an opportunity for Christians to reaffirm their need for spiritual cleansing through faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Jesus made this point clear when He said “‘He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean’” (*John 13:10, NKJV*) and “‘If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me’” (*John 13:8, NKJV*).

However, the foot-washing service is not only an opportunity to say Yes again to Jesus as your Savior and Lord. It is also an act of service. Jesus provided for the disciples, and for each one of us, a perfect example of service. He had every right to sit back and let someone else serve, but Jesus humbled Himself. He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant.

**Explore** some other incidents in the earthly ministry of Jesus that demonstrate His willingness to serve. What can we learn from these stories about the call to service? *Mark 1:32-34, Luke 9:12-17, John 2:1-12.*

Jesus demonstrated, both in word and deed, that He came to serve rather than to be served. When He calls you to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him; He is calling you to a life of service.

**When was the last time you went out of your way to do a service for someone who had no possibility of repaying you, a service that took your time, your money, or both, a service that offered you nothing (at least in tangible goods) in return? What does your answer tell you about yourself?**
**Key Text:** Philippians 2:4

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To show that Christians are called to service.
2. To show that Christ is our Example in serving others.
3. To discuss ways we can serve.
4. To show that service must be done in the right spirit.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **Accepting a Life of Service** *(1 Cor. 10:24, 33).*
   A. Why is service part of the Christian life?
   B. What should motivate our service, and why?
   C. How can ministering to the needs of others be an avenue for winning souls? Is winning souls the only reason we should live a life of service? Explain.

II. **Following Christ’s Example** *(Rom. 15:1-3).*
   A. In what ways was Jesus’ life a life of service?
   B. How was even His death an act of service?
   C. Discuss practical ways we can imitate Christ’s life of service.

III. **Different Forms of Service** *(1 Cor. 12:28).*
   A. How can the spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:28 be of service today?
   B. List and discuss biblical examples of people who lived a life of service.

IV. **Serving in the Right Spirit** *(1 Cor. 13:1-3, Gal. 2:16).*
   A. How do acts of service strengthen our relationship with Christ?
   B. Why should service be free from stress, worry, and competition?

**Summary:** Serving others will come naturally when we have a right relationship with Christ. We will serve because of our love for Him and our desire to do His will. Our acts of service testify of Christ’s love for all people.

**COMMENTARY**

**Lord of Our Service.**

The first line of a popular Christian song is “Make me a servant, humble and meek.”—Kelly Willard, “Make Me a Servant” (Maranatha! Music, © 1982).

This plea asserts a Christian value where the power pyramid is inverted. In much of Christianity the giving of service is lauded, while the withholding of service is shamed. Christians, however, are called to serve humbly.

At times, service can be difficult. Several years ago, doctors diagnosed that my mother had terminal cancer. She told me she had
Our Greatest Service

Of all the good things we can do for others, the greatest is to lead them into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, the One who, at the cross, paid for the sins of every human being. And if we believe that every Christian is commissioned to share this good news of Christ’s sacrifice with the world, the question is not whether we should witness to others, but how. Here again, we can learn from the example of Jesus. “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.’ ”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 143.

Dwell on what the Lord’s servant wrote above and go through some of the Gospels and note specific examples of where Jesus was doing what she wrote. See, for example, Matt. 12:9-14, Mark 2:15-17, Luke 19:2-7. After you find some examples, answer this question: Even if I can’t perform these same kinds of miracles, how can I, nevertheless, minister as Jesus did?

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Christ’s method of reaching souls, however, took something that many of us, even professed Christians, don’t want to give: And that is ourselves. Oftentimes we might be tempted to think that throwing some money in a collection plate for a mission offering or handing out a few flyers for an evangelistic series is enough. And though these acts have their role, they are not the same as mingling with people, spending time with people, and ministering to their needs. To do this we need to give of ourselves in unselfish service. That’s not always easy; it takes a painful death to self and a willingness to serve the Lord by serving others. Only through a daily commitment, a daily taking up of our own cross, will we be doing what we could for the Lord through ministering to others. This is the essence of Christian service, and it can open hearts to our message in ways that all the argumentation, Bible studies, and prophecy charts could never do.

Think of individuals within your sphere of influence who need to hear the gospel message. What are some practical ways that you can use Christ’s method to reach them? Also, are you willing to make the personal sacrifices needed in order to reach them?
appointed me executor of her estate, meaning it would be my responsibility to see that all her affairs were legally settled. I am the first of my mother’s five daughters. As the day of her death approached, I became anxious about my upcoming responsibility and begged her to give me some guidance regarding how she would like me to handle her affairs. She looked me in the eye and sighed, as if she had failed. Then she called for a meeting with all her loved ones, and as we gathered around her, she pulled out her big black Bible and read, “[The] first shall be last; and the last shall be first” (Matt. 19:30). It was then I realized what she expected me to do. Instead of worrying about doing it “right” or about how the rest of the family might perceive what I did, I was to look at my responsibility as an opportunity to serve the rest of my family.

There are at least two ways Christians think about service. For some, to be of service means to put the needs of others ahead of your own. This involves stretching your personal boundaries in order to give yourself for the betterment of another. Jesus modeled such selflessness when He willingly gave His life for our salvation. He calls us to pick up our cross and follow Him (Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23, 24). Paul tells us to consider others better than ourselves because Christ “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant . . . and became obedient unto death” (Phil. 2:3-8, RSV).

For other Christians, this emphasis on sacrificial service is an unbalanced interpretation of Scripture. It is sometimes referred to as the “Messiah complex.” Treatment for such thinking asserts that Jesus alone died for us, and we cannot and should not try to do it again. His death is sufficient. It is not our call to die in serving others. Rather, we should live to serve out of the abundance of what God has given us instead of depleting ourselves.

Most likely, Christ’s lordship embraces both these views. Jesus did not give Himself in service indiscriminately. There were occasions when He said No to going to Jerusalem because it was not yet His time. Yet, He did not flinch in going ahead when the time was right. As Christ’s disciples, we, too, must be open to God’s leading. Sometimes our service will be one of self-preservation for the greater good of the body; and sometimes it will be characterized by self-sacrifice. There is no single guiding principle. Instead, there is a guiding relationship with the Spirit of God, who will make it clear whether any given call to serve is one of self-sacrifice or one of self-preservation. Jesus has promised us this.

As we trust God’s Spirit to direct our service, our spirituality will mature. There is a difference between obeying God because we are told to or obeying Him because He lives in our hearts. It is the difference between being a child and an adult. How often have you heard someone say “I don’t do that, because I’m a Seventh-day Adventist”? Hiding behind a label is for the immature. Embracing one’s identity as a child of God is for the mature. Rather than
Varieties of Service

“And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (1 Cor. 12:28).

We are all called to share the good news about Jesus Christ with others. This is our greatest service, and we will be effective when we follow Christ’s method for reaching people. It is important to realize, however, that the way in which we serve others will vary, based upon our personality and spiritual gifts. We are not all called to do the same thing. Part of the death to self required for Christian service is being willing to accept just what our gifts and callings are and are not.

Make a list of various forms of service recorded in Romans 12:4-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28–13:3. In what ways do you sense the Lord calling you to serve others in His name? Justify your reasons.

When we consider the various ways Christians are called to serve in Jesus’ name, a natural question to ask is this: “In what ways is the Lord calling me to serve?” Every follower of Jesus Christ has to answer that question personally, but here is a process that might be helpful.

Step 1: Explore the forms of service found in Scripture. The list you just made is not exhaustive. Other forms of service can be found in narrative passages of Scripture.

Step 2: Experiment with various forms of service. As you serve others in a variety of ways, be attentive to your own thoughts and feelings. When you serve others using the gifts the Lord has given you, you will experience freedom and joy.

Step 3: Be attentive to the counsel of brothers and sisters in Christ. The Lord frequently uses people either to confirm the fruitfulness of your service or to suggest alternate forms of service that might be more appropriate, based upon the gifts they observe in your life.

How were you able to identify the gifts the Lord has given you? How are you using those gifts in service for others? Might you need to make changes in how you work, or maybe you should be doing something else entirely?
encouraging any person to adopt a collective identity instead of a personal identity, it is the goal of Christianity to have our service spring out of the core of who we are in Christ. How much better to say we do not want to do something, because Christ is Lord of our life. We are each created to serve our God in a unique way that is in accordance with whom He created us to be. I am a Seventh-day Adventist in part because I believe my Lord created me for rest and worship and that He spent time designing the specifics of that experience for my good. I relish this gift from Him. Then, when our lives are fully in tune with Christ and when our service is fully in line with His lordship, He can say to His accusers as He said of Job,

Inductive Bible Study


1 When we accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, we abandon the world’s standard of greatness and power. The question we ask ourselves is not How can I be honored? but How can I serve? How have you answered that question in your own life? What biblical role models (besides Jesus) are good examples? What modern examples inspire you to be more involved in service?

2 Jesus’ act of washing His disciples’ feet was an act of outrageous humility (John 13:1-17). It shattered all cultural standards of the day. When we commemorate that act in connection with the Communion service, our actions are largely symbolic. In most cases, our feet are not really dirty. What, therefore, is the real meaning of this symbolic act? Use your imagination to think of real-life acts that would demonstrate real—not symbolic—humility.

3 “There is a time for everything” (Eccl. 3:1, NIV). Yet, often we crowd our days with so many activities we cannot possibly do them all justice. Often things we should value most—relationships, spiritual growth, re-creation, service, etc.—get shoved to the side. Part of making Jesus Lord of our lives is ordering our priorities according to His will. What adjustments have you made to your daily schedule that allow you more time to serve Him and others? What adjustments do you still need to make?

4 “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us” (Rom. 12:6, NIV). What are some things you really enjoy doing for others? For the church? For your community? How do these acts reflect the fact Jesus is Lord of your life?
Examples of Service

The New Testament is filled with examples of men and women, boys and girls, who served others in Jesus’ name. Some well-known examples include Andrew, when he brought his brother Simon to Jesus (see John 1:40-42), and Dorcas, who sewed garments for those in need (see Acts 9:36-39).

You may find it interesting and educational to select a book of the Bible and read it entirely, looking for examples of service.

**Skim** through the book of Acts, which contains numerous examples of service in Jesus’ name. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify examples of service you might imitate in your own life. (Or perhaps you might find another book and do the same thing.)

When we serve others in Jesus’ name, we are not only following the example of our Lord. We are giving evidence of His transforming presence in our lives. We are no longer self-centered and self-serving. Rather, we find joy in serving others. There is a power in unselfish service for others that no force in the world can negate. Again, for sinful beings who are inherently self-centered and selfish, this doesn’t necessarily come easy. Daily surrender to the Lord is crucial.

What’s so important, too, is to keep the Cross before your eyes, for here is the greatest example in all the universe of unselfish service for others. As we day by day contemplate the great sacrifice made in our behalf, the spotless Son of God, the One through whom the worlds were made (see Heb. 1:2), taking upon Himself the sins of the world, our hearts will be broken. Before the Cross, nothing Christ asks of us will be too much; before the Cross, our service to others will be the least we can do for the God who has said to us, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40).

**Take time to dwell on the sacrifice of Christ, the greatest example possible of unselfish service. How does dwelling on the Cross impact you and your willingness to serve others?**
“Have you considered my servant?” (Job 1:8, NIV). What an affirming endorsement! In essence, God is saying, “Think about My servant’s service; think about the consistency of his behavior, and you will recognize that I AM the Lord of My servant.”

**Witnessing**

This week’s study talks of “taking up our cross,” but what does this mean in terms of service? Too often, Christians seem a miserable lot because they appear as martyrs. Self-appointed martyrs quickly become preoccupied with themselves, but God is looking for His people to be so closely identified with Christ that there is no thought of self.

Indeed, Jesus promised that “‘whoever believes in me . . . streams of living water will flow from within him’” (John 7:38, NIV). Rivers run their course, from source to ultimate destination, reaching places unknown and finding their way around or through any obstacle that stands in their way.

Is our connection to the Source so strong that living water streams from us, or has it slowed to a trickle?

Are we so intent on reaching our destination that nothing can stand in our way?

Has the overflow reached those around us and even to places unknown?

If you know all those you’ve touched, or they can each point to you as the stream through which their blessings came, your witness has been too small. Just as rivers will drop out of sight for miles, so, too, should much of our service be unrecognized.

The best way to keep from serving out of competition is to realize that our standard of comparison is not with one another but with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Jesus met needs people did not even know they had. Surely we can never measure up to the example of service Christ left for us, so let us simply carry on the ministry of caring for all those He came to save so they might see Him.

We must be careful not to allow our service in Jesus’ name to hinder our relationship with Jesus. Indeed, we need to keep our relationship with Jesus as the center, the foundation, of our desire to serve others. Otherwise, a number of things can happen. For instance, we can become proud, thinking our good works are things we do that add to our salvation, that are meritorious toward our basic acceptance with God.

At the same time, it is possible as followers of Jesus to become so preoccupied with serving others that we have no time to spend with Jesus Himself. A classic example of misguided service is seen when Jesus visited the home of Martha. In many ways, Martha is a model of devotion. She believed Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God *(see John 11:27).* She was willing to keep trusting, even when she did not see the way *(see John 11:21, 22).* On one occasion, however, when Jesus visited Martha’s home in Bethany, she allowed her service to hinder her relationship with Jesus.

**How** does Martha’s preoccupation with “serving Jesus” affect her personally and, consequently, impact her relationship with the Master? *Luke 10:38-42.*

Martha is worried. The verb used here in the Greek (translated as “careful” in the KJV is a strong one. We find this same verb in Philippians 4:6, where Paul exhorts the believers to “be anxious for nothing” *(NKJV).* We find a variation of the word, as a noun, in 1 Peter 5:7, where Peter appeals to believers to cast all their anxiety, all their cares, upon the Lord. But Martha is holding on to all her anxieties. She is anxious. There is a division and distraction in her mind. She is full of inner turmoil.

Martha is also troubled. The Greek verb (translated “troubled” in the KJV) implies external agitation. Martha is not only full of inner turmoil. She is also externally agitated. Her service for Jesus is misguided. As a result, her relationship with Jesus suffers. Instead of sitting at His feet and experiencing intimate communion with Him, she accosts Him with these words: “‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me’” *(Luke 10:40, 41, NKJV).*

**How can we avoid this trap, where our preoccupation with serving in Jesus’ name gets in the way of our relationship with Him? Why must we not let anything, even our service for the Lord, hinder that relationship?*
Icebreaker: Can you remember when you were little and doing dishes with Mom was fun? Later, doing dishes became one of your chores, and you did all kinds of things to avoid it. Where did the fun go? Jesus, the eternal God, came to earth to serve humanity. See John 13:1-15. Discuss what motivated Him and how you can recapture the joy of blessing others through acts of service.

Thought Questions:
1. Mary sat at Jesus’ feet while Martha scurried around the kitchen preparing to meet His needs. She was “distracted with all her preparations” (Luke 10:40, NASB). When she complained to the Lord, He pointed her to a better choice. How do we sort out our agendas so we receive from Jesus in anticipation of serving others? How would this prevent discouragement and burnout? Take some time this week to schedule time to “sit at Jesus’ feet” before you seek to go out and serve on His behalf.

2. In the context of spiritual gifts, our God provided and empowered abilities to serve others. In the same context, Paul takes time to show us “a still more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31, NASB). This is the linking concept to 1 Corinthians 13 that describes the depth of love. Why is it necessary to allow God to motivate our service for Him through a heart filled with His love? Reflect on when you have served out of a sense of duty versus serving for the joy of making a difference in someone’s life. Ask God to fill your heart with His compassion for others and profound joy in blessing them.

Application Question:
Cookie cutters are designed to create uniform cookies. God desires we unite in our focus to serve Him, but He didn’t make us all exact duplicates of one another (Rom. 12:4-8). “We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us” (vs. 6, NASB). Discuss the diversity of spiritual gifts recorded in the Bible. (Also see 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.) If you don’t know what your spiritual gifts are, ask your pastor to help you discover them. Covenant to let God work through the gifts He has given you to serve others and honor Him.
Further Study: Another danger Christians face as they serve others in Jesus’ name is a spirit of competition. We can easily fall into the trap of comparing ourselves with others or measuring our service against theirs. Consider the following passages of Scripture that address the issue of competition in our service for others: Luke 9:49, 50; 1 Cor. 1:11-13. What lessons can we learn from the teaching of Jesus and the attitude of the apostle Paul?

Note: The teaching of Jesus recorded in Matthew 25:31-46 suggests that our service for others is an important indicator of our Christian experience. This account of the dividing of the sheep and the goats suggests that those who are not involved in acts of service to others will be sent away into everlasting punishment. How would you explain this passage in the context of salvation by grace through faith? Are acts of service necessary for salvation? Is it accurate to say that we must feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and care for the sick if we expect to enter into the kingdom of heaven?

Discussion Questions:

1. A friend tells you she would like to explore ways of serving others in Jesus’ name, but she feels her schedule is already overloaded. What counsel would you give her?

2. What can you do together, as a class, to reveal to others the caring and serving spirit that should be the hallmark of all who profess to follow Jesus Christ?

3. How can we avoid the trap of believing that our service for others somehow earns us merits with God, that somehow good works can add to our salvation?

4. What contemporary example of serving others has been most inspirational to you, and why? Discuss.

Memory Text: “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. . . . And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:11, 16, NKJV).

Key Thought: Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will come again in glory to gather the redeemed of all ages into His eternal kingdom. All those who have received Him as Savior and Lord will welcome Him with joy when He returns to this earth.

Of all the promises that Jesus, our Savior and Lord, has given us, the greatest promise is that He will return and take us from this sin-sick world. We have this hope, the hope in the coming of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, as our Savior, reconciled earth to heaven and thus paved the way for the great and glorious day of His return when—as KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS—He will bring that reconciliation to its eternal consummation.

This is the great hope of all whose acknowledgment of Christ as Lord has been made manifest in their lives; in contrast, for those who—regardless of what they confess—have rejected Jesus as Lord of their lives, the Second Coming will be a sad and fearful event.

Why not, right now, make that complete surrender to the One who, at Calvary, surrendered all for us?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 24.*

Those who have received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord are a people of hope. With joyful expectation we are “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13, NKJV). Our hope concerning the return of our Lord Jesus Christ is not wishful thinking. It is based upon the faithfulness of our Lord to honor His promises.

What promise did Jesus Christ give to His followers concerning His return to this earth? John 14:1-3.

We trust in this promise of Jesus: “‘I will come again.’” This phrase might literally be translated “I am coming again.” The verb to come is in the present tense. We call this a “futuristic present,” which emphasizes the certainty of that which is being described. In this promise, Jesus Christ assures us His return is as certain as if it were already taking place!

What promise of two heavenly messengers confirmed the promise of Jesus regarding His return? Acts 1:9-11.

Seventh-day Adventist Christians have long cherished the blessed hope of the glorious return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our name, Adventist, reminds us that Jesus Christ, who came once as a baby in Bethlehem’s manger, will come again as King of kings and Lord of lords. Even though our pioneers expected His return long before now, the promise is still sure. “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come” (2 Pet. 3:9, 10, NKJV). The apostle Paul affirms the certainty of our hope in these words: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven” (1 Thess. 4:16, NKJV). The second coming of Jesus is not wishful thinking. It is our certain hope.

Feeling discouraged, worried, fearful? Prayerfully, read again John 14:1-3 and place yourself, your name, in each spot where it’s appropriate. Realize that in a very real sense, Jesus is talking to you, that those words are for you. What hope do you draw from this precious, and intimate, promise of Jesus—to you, personally?
**Key Text:** Acts 1:11

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To discuss Christ’s return as King and Lord.
2. To emphasize the surety of Christ’s promise to return.
3. To examine the difference between people who will be ready and those who will not.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Christ the King *(Rev. 19:16).*
   A. Why will Jesus return as both Lord and King?
   B. Why is He called Faithful and True?
   C. What gives Him the right to rule this earth as King of kings?

II. The Blessed Hope *(2 Pet. 3:9, 10).*
   A. Why can we be sure of Christ’s promise to return?
   B. At Christ’s ascension, why did angels assure the disciples of His return?
   C. Why does the Bible describe how Jesus will return?

III. Will You Be Ready? *(Rev. 16:15).*
   A. How can we go about our daily lives yet live as if Christ will return at any moment?
   B. Discuss what it means to be ready when Christ returns.
   C. Why will everyone confess that Christ is Lord when He returns?

**Summary:** We can be sure Jesus will return. On that day even the wicked will confess He is Lord. We must decide now if we want to be ready to meet Him when He comes. Because ready or not, Jesus is coming again!

**COMMENTARY**

**King of Kings and Lord of Lords!**

Ancient Hebrew civil law recognized God as the ultimate Judge. That meant the exclusive goal of every human judicial proceeding was to discover God’s judgment on the matter. God’s actions as Judge were not just the model human judges were to follow. He was the Authority to whom human judgments must submit *(see 1 Kings 8:31, 32; 2 Chron. 19:6, 7).* Today we tend to ignore this aspect of human judgment because we do not follow a biblical understanding of the activity of a judge.

We tend to think of judges in terms of condemning people. When a person is found guilty of an offense in Western tradition, a judge pronounces the sentence that condemns that person for his or her improper activity. Even in the Hebrew tradition, there is a need for this. In the Bible, however, the principle task of the judges was
The Nature of Christ’s Return

Our Lord Jesus Christ wants us not only to be certain of His return but also to understand the nature of His return. We have already discovered from yesterday’s study that His coming will be literal. Jesus declared, “‘I will come again.’” We must reject any interpretation that would attempt to spiritualize Christ’s second coming as His coming into our hearts. While it is true that Christ can dwell in our hearts through faith (see Eph. 3:17), this dwelling in our hearts by the Holy Spirit does not replace His literal return in glory.

What can we learn from the following comments of Jesus about the nature of His return? Matt. 24:23-26, 27, 30, 31.

The second coming of Jesus will not be secret. It will be dramatic, visible, and audible. These words of Jesus also imply that a resurrection of the dead will occur at the time of His coming. Listen to another promise of Jesus: “‘And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day’” (John 6:40, NKJV).

Read Paul’s descriptions of the nature of Christ’s second coming (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). Why would that be something hard for an imposter to fake? Why, too, with such clear biblical testimony regarding the nature of Christ’s return, have so many people been fooled by false christs in the past?

The apostle Paul reinforces the teaching of Jesus regarding the nature of His return. The second coming of Jesus Christ is personal: The Lord Himself will descend from heaven. It is dramatic: The Lord will shout and the trumpet will sound. There will be a resurrection: The dead in Christ will rise first. Finally, all the redeemed will be gathered up to meet the Lord in the air.

Using your imagination, depict in writing what it will be like when Jesus returns. Share it with your class.
to set things right. As part of that task, judges categorized acts, thus clarifying the difference between good and bad actions. In fact, the words for right and righteous, judge and judgment, all have the same root in Greek: dikaiao. The poor, the outcast, the oppressed, the widows and the orphans went to the judges to ask them to come to their defense and set aright a wrong that had been done to them. Thus, the Old Testament uses the words salvation and righteousness as synonyms (see Ps. 71:13-16, Isa. 51:5, 56:1, 59:15-17).

When God acts as a righteous Judge to set things right, He brings salvation, vindication, and deliverance to the oppressed and the exiled. God clears up the confusion of right being called wrong and wrong being called right. In Jesus’ parable, the woman knows where to go to get things set right, and she keeps going there until the judge acts on her behalf, even though he is an unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8).

So, when Jesus and Paul talk about righteousness and judgment, they are more concerned about the process of setting things right than they are about condemning anyone. In the book of Judges, the “judges” did very little of what we would consider judicial activity. But what they did do was work to set things right.

The judges’ task was not ended when they passed sentence. It was their job to follow through to make sure the sentence was carried out and the right thing was actually done. That might involve punishment for the wrongdoer, restitution to the one wronged, or both. Judges got the right things done. They did not just tell other people to do the right things.

It is not enough, however, to render a judgment and see that it was carried out. That judgment must be published as widely as possible so all concerned could agree the judgment was just. Everyone who heard it, whether the innocent party or the guilty party, whether the prosecutor or the defender, whether the witnesses or the spectators, needed to agree that the decision was correct.

Instead of each party being the adversary of the other, all the parties had a responsibility to see justice done. When a just judgment was given, everyone then agreed the matter had been settled, that what was wrong had been made right and that the judge had done exactly what needed to have been done.

Perhaps this helps us understand what the investigative judgment is all about. God is not trying to determine whom to condemn. He is trying to clear things up on this earth. This judgment is an investigation into what has happened. It is an investigation in which facts are revealed and truth is told. The Judge renders a verdict, and that verdict brings salvation to God’s righteous people because of their relationship with Christ. They are not just covered with His “robe of righteousness.” They have become part of the body of Christ. They themselves are a people working for justice.

Then God publishes the verdict for all to examine it. First, the
The Timing of Christ’s Return

Almost two thousand years ago, in His last recorded comment in the book of Revelation, our risen Lord declared, “‘Surely I am coming quickly’” (Rev. 22:20, NKJV). Christians have wrestled with that declaration ever since. From our perspective, it doesn’t seem as though He is coming quickly. We realize, of course, that the Lord is not locked in time as we mere mortals are. The apostle Peter reminds us that “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8, NKJV).

Dwell upon what Peter wrote regarding the Lord and time. What mistake should these words protect us from making?

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In terms of eternity, the Lord Jesus Christ is coming quickly. And yet, many times we find ourselves crying out with the souls under the altar, “‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’” (Rev. 6:10, NKJV).

Read the parable Jesus tells in Matthew 24:45-51. In your own words, write out what you believe is the basic message Jesus is giving us here. Why is this parable so relevant for us as Adventists?

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There’s been a long-running debate in the church about the question of a delay. Is there one? If so, why? If not, then why hasn’t Christ returned? And though we probably won’t get all these questions resolved this side of eternity, the crucial thing for us is to be ready always, regardless of when He comes.

If someone were to ask you, What does it mean to be ready for Jesus’ return, how would you respond? If Christ returned today, would you be ready? Justify your answer.
Inductive Bible Study


1. The differences between Christ’s first and second advents could hardly be more pronounced. At His first coming He was totally vulnerable. He spent His entire public life as a servant. However, He will come again as a Conquering Hero who vanquishes sin in every form. Is our present experience more like Jesus’ first or second advent? Why? How does serving Christ as Lord prepare us to live with Him in glory?

2. The parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) speaks directly to the delay between Christ’s ascension and His return. The wise and foolish maidens both slept, but only the wise were prepared for the delay. What keeps you motivated to keep watching for the Lord’s return? What is more conducive to waiting productively—activity or inactivity? What are your preferred methods of staying active?

3. The man who built his house on the rock (Matt. 7:24-27) did not prevent a flood from happening. Nor did having a house on the rock hasten or delay the flood. The only benefit to having a house on the rock was being prepared when the flood came. What/whom does the rock symbolize? (Ps. 18:2). What specific steps then can we take to be prepared? How does knowing Jesus as Lord help you to keep your focus?

4. Read Colossians 3:1-4. What did Paul mean when he wrote, “Your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (vs. 3, NIV)? What assurance do you have that your life is indeed hidden with Christ? What practical differences does that make in your life? What do other people—particularly non-Christians—notice?

The Impact of Christ’s Return

The glorious return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will impact those living on the earth in one of two ways. For those who have refused to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, it will be a time of terror. Even for many professed followers of Christ, those who never let Him be Lord of their lives, it will a time of fearful judgment.

Read carefully the following texts in light of this whole quarter's lesson: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:21-23). How do these verses capture the essence of what it means to profess Jesus as Lord but not allow Him to be Lord? What is the crucial difference between the two?

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Our Savior is very clear: We can’t separate a profession of faith in Him from a life of obedience to Him. Notice how Jesus here links obedience with actually being in a saving relationship with Him; He says He “never knew” those who—though professing Him as Lord, and even doing deeds in His name—weren’t obedient to the will of God. This has to be one of the strongest statements Jesus ever made about the futility of calling oneself a Christian while not living like one, and living like one demands that we do the will of the Father in heaven. Otherwise, our faith is made out of nothing but sand.

Read the parable that comes right after Christ’s words here (Matt. 7:24-29). How does this fit in exactly with what Jesus said in verses 21-23?
**Witnessing**

Even if God never did another good thing in our life, He would still be worthy of our praise, for He is King of kings and Lord of lords!

It is our response to God that determines our preparedness for His return. As Adventists, awaiting the Second Advent, we are in danger of staring into the sky as the disciples did at Christ’s ascension.

We look forward to His return, but while we are here, He has a work for us to do. We think we are ready, but if we have not made God Lord of our priorities, our thoughts, our desires, our speech, our prayers, our relationships, our resources, our body temples, our labor, our worship, and our service here on earth, how can He be our Lord in heaven?

And so the question comes down to us through the ages: “Why stand ye gazing?” *(Acts 1:11).*

Jesus will come back, but we have a commission to fulfill in the meantime! We must let others know of this Lord and King; we must share the hope we have in the soon coming of the Lord.

If Jesus is Lord of our life, then we would be no more willing that any perish than He is willing for any to perish. Yes, we find ourselves in enemy-occupied territory awaiting our sovereign Lord to take back what the enemy stole. But let us work to help as many come over to the Lord’s side as are willing, so they might rejoice with us on that day when He comes back in all His glory.
The Cosmic Confession

For Christians, their profession that Jesus is Lord is matched by a life of faithful obedience, not an obedience that saves (it can’t), but an obedience that expresses a true faith in God.

Read Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:14, and Hebrews 9:12. What do these verses tell us about how we are redeemed?

And yet, these people are not the only ones who acknowledge Jesus as Lord. According to the apostle Paul, the day is coming when every knee will bow and every tongue will make that same confession.

Read Philippians 2:9-11. What is Paul talking about here?

“At His first coming, Christ was denied and rejected by men, and by them dragged as a criminal to Pilate’s bar, where they charged Him with blasphemy. He was scourged and crucified. Nails were driven through His hands and His feet. . . . At His second coming, the scene will be changed. He will be acknowledged by all as the King of glory. At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. The angels will bow in adoration before Him. His enemies will see the mistake they have made, and every tongue will confess His divinity.”—Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, April 19, 1905.

However, for the wicked, this will not be a saving confession but simply a recognition of that which is undeniably true. There is no change of heart. No repentance. In fact, according to Revelation 20:7-9, they continue their rebellion against the Lord.

In contrast, there are those who—though sinners, though imperfect, though in and of themselves possessing no righteousness—have, nevertheless, committed their souls to the Lord Jesus by surrendering their will to Him. These people will proclaim Jesus as their Lord, and their lives will reflect that proclamation. Our praise of the Lord in heaven will simply be our picking up where we left off praising Him here. If we love and serve Jesus even amid the toil, pain, sin, and corruption on earth now, then how much more so in the new heaven and a new earth? Our service to Jesus as Lord there will just be the continuation of our service to Him here but without the cumbrousness of sin, disease, ignorance, and the devil. That’s the victory Jesus won for us. We can, by trusting and living by faith with Jesus as Lord, start enjoying the fruits of that victory, even now.
Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** What troubles you? If you were making a list, would it include inadequate finances, negative interpersonal relationships, or unrealistic demands at work? Or is it all those things and more? In John 14:1, Jesus says “Do not let your hearts be troubled” (NASB). What reasons does He give for peace in adversity? (vss. 2, 3). How does the worldview of a soon-coming Savior allow us to stand firm even during difficult times?

**Thought Questions:**

1. At your place of employment, who has the final say, the most authority? This person usually “lays down the law” and is the consummate problem solver. In the universe, God the Father is the ultimate Authority. He wants to solve our worst problems—sin and separation from Him. He even sent His Son so we would have tangible proof of His rescue plans. Why is it important to you that Jesus is “Faithful and True” (Rev. 19:11, NKJV)? How does this compare with your boss? How would you explain your trust in God’s authority and plans to a work colleague?

2. Reread Matthew 24:23-51. Here Jesus paints a verbal picture of end-time events. He invites His followers to be aware of the signposts that will announce His return. He also tells a parable of those who wait. How will you answer His question, “‘Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household?’” (Matt. 24:45, NASB). As a class, pray for the ministry and witness of each member. Covenant together to support one another to be faithful and watchful.

**Application Question:**

God prophesies that “at the name of Jesus every knee will bow ... and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:10, 11, NASB). Scripture also records that some who worship Jesus will praise Him and others will call for the rocks to hide them from His presence. How does the blessed hope of His imminent return benefit your life? What will you do this very week to authentically share the good news of a soon returning Savior, who is worthy of praise, honor, and worship?
**Further Study:** Read the last four chapters in the book of Revelation. Take time to meditate on this beautiful scene of the new earth: “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever” *(Rev. 22:1-5, NKJV).*

What a blessed hope is ours. Soon our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will return as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will create a new heaven and a new earth, and we will reign with Him forever and ever. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

**Discussion Questions:**

1. As a class, compare notes from what you wrote in Monday’s study about what it will be like when Christ returns.

2. What do you say to someone who, when the subject of Christ’s return is brought up, says, “Look, ever since I was a kid, I was told that Christ was coming soon. That was so many years ago. Please, don’t bother me with this talk of His ‘soon’ return”?

3. If you read the selection above in Revelation, talk as a class about what you think life will be like in the new earth. What will the major difference be between life there and life here now?

4. As a class, talk about the difference between merely believing in Jesus as Lord and experiencing that lordship in your life.