Contents

1 The Shepherd’s Crucible—September 29–October 5—5
2 The Crucibles That Come—October 6–12—17
3 The Birdcage—October 13–19—29
4 Seeing the Goldsmith’s Face—October 20–26—41
5 Extreme Heat—October 27–November 2—53
6 Struggling With All Energy—November 3–9—65
7 Indestructible Hope—November 10–16—77
8 Seeing the Invisible—November 17–23—89
9 A Life of Praise—November 24–30—101
10 Meekness in the Crucible—December 1–7—113
11 Waiting in the Crucible—December 8–14—125
12 Dying Like a Seed—December 15–21—137
13 Christ in the Crucible—December 22–28—149

The teachers edition components were written by the following:

1. I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . . : Alan Hecht, librarian, Rebok Memorial Library, General Conference, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.
2. Learning Cycle, Lessons 1–6: James Zackrison, freelance writer, Burtonsville, Maryland, U.S.A.
3. Learning Cycle, Lessons 7–12: Loren Seibold, pastor of Worthington Adventist Church, Ohio, U.S.A.

The Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Manuscript Evaluation Committee, whose members serve as consulting editors. The published guide reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).
“All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3).

“All things” were made by Him, Jesus, and yet—according to Scripture—“Jesus wept” (John 11:35). The Creator wept? Even more so, Jesus was “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). The Creator, a man of sorrows, despised and rejected? And He once cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46).

How could these things be? It’s because Jesus, our Creator, was also our Redeemer, and as such He was the Crucified God—the Creator who took on humanity and in that humanity suffered through a life of privation and toil that ended with Him being hung on a Roman cross.

Thus, our Creator, the One in whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28), suffered in humanity in ways that none of us ever could. We can experience only our own griefs, our own sorrows; at the Cross, He bore “our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isa. 53:4)—all of them. It’s the most amazing act in all cosmic history.

With that background (that of the crucified God looming over us like the desert sky) we will for the next few months seek to better comprehend the incomprehensible—our own suffering, the sufferings of Christians, of those who have committed their lives to Christ. We’re making no claims to have all the answers or even many; we’re claiming only that “God is love” (1 John 4:8) and that although these things happen, we can trust God despite them and, indeed, grow in grace through them, no matter how painful the process.

This quarter we will study the Word of God and see how other flesh and blood, though radiated in faith, nevertheless faced despair, betrayal, disappointment, loss, injustice, and abuse (sound like anything you can relate to?). How did they cope? What did they learn? What can their examples teach us?
As we look at these people, their experiences, their struggles, and their trials of faith (which might be much like our own), we must always see them contrasted against the background of the Cross. We must always remember that no matter what anyone faces, Jesus Christ, our Creator and Redeemer, went through it worse.

Our God is a suffering God. Even Albert Camus, hardly a Christian, understood some of the implications of the Cross and the sufferings of God there: “The night on Golgotha is so important in the history of man only because, in its shadow, the divinity abandoned its traditional privileges and drank to the last drop, despair included, the agony of death.”—The Rebel (New York, Vintage International, 1991), p. 33. Or, as Ellen White expressed it: “The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God.”—Education, p. 263.

Our lessons are not a theodicy, the justification of God in the face of evil. Instead, as we’ve said, they’re an attempt to help us work through the inevitable suffering we all face here in a world where sin is as easy as breathing. What we will try to show is that pain, suffering, and loss don’t mean that God has abandoned us; they mean only that, even as believers, we share now in the common lot of a fallen race. The difference is that for us, through Jesus and the hope He offers, meaning and purpose can be found in what seems meaningless and purposeless and that somehow, even if we can’t imagine how, we can trust the promise that “all things work together for good to those who love God” (Rom. 8:28, NKJV)—the God who, though He made all things, suffered all things, too (and that’s why we love Him).

Gavin Anthony, this quarter’s principal contributor, grew up in Sri Lanka as a missionary kid. He worked as a pastor in England and was conference president in Iceland when he authored these lessons.
How to Use
This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Practice, and Apply

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, practice, and apply. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Practice); and

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in the “I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

**Step 1—Motivate:** Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

**Step 2—Explore:** Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

**Step 3—Practice:** Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

**Step 4—Apply:** Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Psalm 23, Rom. 12:18–21.

Memory Text: “He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake" (Psalm 23:3, NKJV).

Sophie leaned back against her bedroom door and slid to the floor. Tears were welling up fast, and it was only a moment before she was sobbing. “How could he? How could he!” Sophie had just received news that was breaking her heart. Someone she thought was a friend, someone she respected and trusted, was spreading awful gossip about her in order to ruin her reputation and the work she had been doing. Grabbing her Bible off the bed, she suddenly found herself staring at some very familiar words: “He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:3, 4, NKJV).

“Surely this can’t be!” she blurted out to herself. But the logic seemed inescapable. The Shepherd in the psalm was guiding His sheep in paths of righteousness, but these very paths also seemed to wind their way into the valley of the shadow of death. Could it be possible that even this painful betrayal by a friend, this dark valley, could be used by God to train her in righteousness?

The Week at a Glance: At what times have you grown more spiritually—through the easy times or the harder ones?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 6.
A Guide for the Journey: The Shepherd

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Ps. 23:1, NKJV).

Some children were asked to draw a picture of God. Each one drew a heart somewhere in it. When asked why, they declared unanimously that God is love.

It is easy to have a good opinion about God and His purposes when everything is going well. As we grow older and life becomes harder and more complicated, our view of God often changes. God doesn’t change (Heb. 13:8, James 1:17); we do.

Because of the pastoral lifestyle of the people in Old Testament times, Psalm 23 uses the image of a shepherd to describe how God cares for us. The symbol of a shepherd is used for God—in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It’s a wonderful and changeless picture. Before we look at Psalm 23, let’s survey how different Bible writers understand the work and character of the Shepherd.

What do you learn about the Shepherd from each text?

Isa. 40:11

Jer. 23:3, 4

Ezek. 34:12

John 10:14–16

1 Pet. 2:25

What does the Shepherd do to care for His sheep in Psalm 23:2–6?

What does it mean to you to know that there is Someone like this caring for you? How could you encourage someone whose own picture of God has been obscured because of his or her struggles?
I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

Key Text: Psalm 23:3

Teach the Class to:

Know: That God is present and active in good times and bad.
Feel: A desire to follow God’s guidance wherever it leads.
Do: Resolve to seek and choose God’s will for our lives despite hardships.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Shepherd (Ps. 23:1)
- The image of the shepherd spoke to the daily lives of the psalmist’s audience. Is there a comparable image that might speak better to moderns, who think food and clothing come from the local store?
- The idea of a shepherd and his/her sheep implies a certain type of relationship. What is the role of the shepherd? Of the sheep?
- Do you think the idea of God as a shepherd and His people as sheep would have been surprising and/or disturbing to the psalmist’s audience? Think about it.

II. Paths of Righteousness (Ps. 23:3)
- We all know that the best path between two points is a straight line. Does this sound like the paths of righteousness described in Psalm 23?
- If the paths of righteousness sometimes take us through bad or dangerous spots, what makes them righteous?

III. In the Presence of My Enemies (Ps. 23:5)
- In theory, it is best to be on good terms with everyone. In reality, the only way to do that is never to leave home. How could following paths of righteousness be more conducive to making enemies than friends?
- How does Psalm 23 suggest that we relate to our enemies?
- Like the psalmist, how can we be better aware of God’s presence throughout our journey?

Summary: In addition to being one of the most beloved biblical texts, Psalm 23 is an excellent sketch of the Christian’s spiritual journey, with much to tell us about God, life, and how these things relate to us.
Locations on the Journey

“He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake” (Ps. 23:3, NRSV).

Imagine the “paths of righteousness” (vs. 3) stretching out before you, way out into the distance. You cannot see the end, but you know that at the end of the journey is home, God’s house. As you focus a little closer to you, do you see where the paths lead to? You can see some places clearly, but other parts are totally obstructed by large or dangerous obstacles. Sometimes the path disappears over a ridge. Some parts of the path are easy to walk along; others are difficult. It was just like this as Israel traveled from Egypt to the Promised Land, and it is described the same way in this psalm.

Identify from Psalm 23 the locations that David sees the sheep passing through when following the paths of righteousness as they make their way to the house of the Lord.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

But why are these paths called “paths of righteousness” (NIV, KJV) or “right paths” (NRSV)? Here are four important reasons. First, they are the right paths because they lead to the right destination—the Shepherd’s home. Second, they are the right paths because they keep us in harmony with the right Person—the Shepherd Himself. Third, they are the right paths because they train us to be the right people—like the Shepherd. Fourth, they are the right paths because they give us the right witness. As we become the right people, we give glory to the Lord. They are “right” or “righteous” paths whether the going is easy or hard.

It is important to realize that when God leads us, it is not simply a question of His delivering a parcel to the destination. It is much more than guidance and protection. Like the many examples all through the Bible in which God is leading His people (whether it is leading Abraham by His promises or leading Israel by the pillar of fire and cloud), when God is guiding, it is always about Him training His people in righteousness.

How conscious are you that righteousness is the Shepherd’s priority for your life? How can trials change your life so that you better reflect the character of Christ?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, Why is this lesson important to me?

In this quarter’s lessons we are trying to find positive solutions to negative problems. There are often no easy solutions, because the issues arise as integral parts of a world system that disconnects itself from the Source of the solutions—God. Psalm 23, our introductory study, includes statements that seem both contradictory and complementary.

1. Why, if we tread the “paths of righteousness,” do we also find ourselves in the “valley of the shadow”?
2. Why spread a table in the “presence of my enemies” when it would be a lot more pleasant to have it spread in the presence of my friends?
3. How is it that I am pursued by “goodness and mercy” when life really is showering me with injustice and anything but mercy? Who is doing the pursuing, and will they ever catch up?
4. Why is it that I am told that I will have “seasons of terrible perplexity and trial”? Who needs it?

The answers greatly will accelerate your growth in grace and enhance your appreciation for God’s way of handling a complex world messed up by the sin problem.

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Bible Commentary

The lessons for this quarter focus on how to cope with the bad things that happen to good people. Human beings tend to blame God when bad things
Unexpected Detour 1: The Valley

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4, NKJV).

It would be nice if the paths of righteousness wound their way only along the grass-covered banks of cool streams. But that is not the way David paints it. Also along these paths is the valley of the shadow of death—not a place that we are too eager to visit! At certain times of the year, the wadis and ravines found in Israel are prone to flash floods that could come unexpectedly and prove overwhelming. These places are also characteristically narrow, with steep sides that block out the light. Hence, “the shadow of death” is an image for a “very deep shadow” or “deep darkness.”

**Think** about the times you have been in your own “valley of the shadow of death.” What has it been like? Did you have fear, even though you knew that the Shepherd was there? Which Bible texts were most precious to you at that time and why?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

**How** do you think the sheep ended up in the valley? Do you think the sheep went there on their own, or did the Shepherd lead the sheep that way Himself? Justify your answer.

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Elisabeth Elliot writes, “A lamb who found himself in the Valley of the Shadow of Death might conclude that he had been falsely led. It was needful for him to traverse that darkness in order to learn not to fear. The Shepherd is still with him.”—*Quest for Love* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Fleming H. Revell, 1996), p. 218.

**Have you ever felt that you have been “falsely led” into the valley? How did you respond to God during this time? Why do you think the Shepherd might be willing to risk being misunderstood by permitting us to enter a dark valley?**
happen. Even insurance companies identify unexplainable events as *acts of God*. Some Sabbath School students will inevitably ask why these bad things happen in the first place. The following information will be helpful when the question arises.

I. **Is God to Blame?** 

The introduction to this quarter’s lessons mentions the word *theodicy*, a combination of the Greek words for *God* and *justice*. Theodicy is a philosophical discipline that searches for an answer to the problem of evil. Its fundamental question is “If God is good, why is there evil?” In other words, why do bad things happen to good people?

A philosopher named Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) first used the term with the idea of defending God against charges of injustice and accusations of involvement in moral and natural evil. Others used the word to explain why God permits evil (on the assumption that He doesn’t).

Most non-Christian religions have no problem with theodicy because their *gods* just are reflections of the human beings who serve them. No one expects these gods to do much good. These religions tend to focus on appeasing the gods, with the hope of keeping their bad tempers and violent natures in check.

II. **Biblical Perspectives** 

The biblical perspective is entirely different. It presents a God whose unchanging nature is love. He needs no appeasement. Moral evil exists not by divine design but only by divine permission. He tolerates it only because His nature of love is determined to win His wayward children back to Himself.

The sacrifice He asks for is “a broken and a contrite heart” (*Ps. 51:17*), driven by a “new spirit” that changes a “stony heart” into a “heart of flesh” (*Ezek. 11:19*).

In the biblical perspective, humanity caused its own downfall, and God has taken upon Himself the task of rescuing it.

**Point of Emphasis**

It would be worthwhile to spend some time during the class period considering Ellen White’s statement from *Messages to Young People* in Friday’s lesson. This statement is a beautiful explanation of how
Unexpected Detour 2: The Surrounded Table

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over” (Ps. 23:5, NKJV).

Throughout our lives we will inevitably have enemies. How do you deal with them? Have you ever lain awake at night, dreaming up ways to take revenge on those who are trying to hurt you or destroy your work? It can be hard for Christians to deal with enemies.

What type of enemies have you had? How have you responded to those who have tried to hurt you? How well did you follow Christ’s words in Matthew 5:44 or Paul’s words in Romans 12:18–21?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

In Psalm 23:5, David shows us a way of dealing with enemies. He obscures their presence by looking instead at what God is doing in his behalf. And God is there preparing a banquet for him.

In David’s culture, when an honored guest came for a feast, the host would anoint his head with oil as the guest was about to enter the banqueting hall. The oil was a mixture of olive oil and perfume. Then the guest would be seated in front of far more food than he or she could ever eat.

How could the three items (table, oil, cup) in Psalm 23:5 help to remind us about how God provides, even when we are in the valley?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

As Paul reminds us, “our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12, NRSV). Our enemies include those we see and those we don’t. Yet, when we are with the Shepherd, not one enemy, visible or invisible, can steal what He has provided for us.

Reflect on how the Shepherd has treated you when you have been surrounded by enemies. What can you see during these difficulties that can enable you to give thanks?
Christians should relate to trials and tribulations in circumstances all too often dominated by the forces of evil.

**STEP 3—Practice!**

*Just for Teachers:* This step of the Natural Learning Cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: *How can I practice the information I just learned?*

Look at the titles of the lessons for this week:

- A Guide for the Journey
- Locations on the Journey
- Unexpected Detour 1: The Valley
- Unexpected Detour 2: The Surrounded Table
- A Certain Promise for the Journey

**Application Questions:**

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do I pay attention to the Guide, or am I determined to call the shots myself?
2. Is the location I am in right now the end of the journey, or do I have some hope for the future?
3. What unexpected valley has overtaken me? Is my personal valley of the shadow a box canyon with no way out or just a narrow spot in the road where the sun temporarily does not reach?
4. Am I surrounded by the wrong people at the table? How can I get an invitation to a better table in a better environment?
5. If there is, as Thursday’s lesson says, a “certain promise,” on what map do I find it, and where will it lead me?

**Write out for your own edification a statement showing the following:**

1. That you understand the nature of the “valley of the shadow” you find yourself in.
2. That you know at least some of the things that have to be done to help get you past the shadows onto a more brightly lighted path.
A Certain Promise for the Journey

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Ps. 23:6, NKJV).

In the valley or surrounded by enemies, it is sometimes tempting to believe we are alone. It does not always feel as though God has been doing much. But David obviously does not see it like this.

In spite of his trials, what two things does David say in verse 6 that he is certain of? See also Eph. 1:4, 2 Pet. 1:10, Heb. 11:13–15.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Some translations say that goodness and unfailing love will “follow” me all the days of my life. But the original verb is stronger, and the text should read that goodness and unfailing love will “pursue” me all the days of my life. (In fact, it’s the same verb form used in Genesis 14:14, Joshua 10:19, and 1 Samuel 25:29 where the idea of “pursuit” is very clear.)

How do you picture goodness and unfailing love “pursuing” you? What do you think David meant by describing God’s care for us this way?

____________________________________________________________________

No matter how deep the valley or persistent the enemies, the certainty of God’s goodness, unfailing love, and guidance is unquestionable. If these thoughts could sustain Jesus through Calvary, we should take heart. There are times, however, when those we care for are full of questions. Like David, the best way to address these concerns is often not with a theological description of what God can do. Rather, as David shows us in verse 6, it is through an affirmation, the sharing of a personal conviction, of the truth about our God.

What evidence is there from your own knowledge of God that illustrates the certainty of His goodness and unfailing love? What evidences could you add from the Bible? How could you share this with those who may be questioning God’s care? How is the Cross the greatest example of this “pursuit”??
Witnessing

Someone you know may be going through a tough time. Even if you personally do not have all the answers to the questions raised in this lesson (who does?), you may be able to help your friend just by going over Psalm 23. It is surprising that just looking at the problem from a biblical perspective often brings peace of mind. The Bible, because it is the Word of God, brings an added dimension of comfort to the soul.

STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

Something to Think About

Albert Shirkey, in his book *The Lord Is My Shepherd*, writes, “What joy comes to life when we stop to consider that God never changes! His attitude of love no one can ever alter. His offer of mercy and pardon will be mine now and to the end of time. . . . The hills will change, people will change, customs will change, everything in the world or universe will change; but God is the same from everlasting to everlasting.”—(Nashville, Tenn.: The Upper Room, 1963), p. 14.

Personal Application

Shirkey also states, “As I have the right to my Lord, it follows that He has the right to me. He has the right to knock upon my heart and ask me to give it to Him. He has the right to ask me to put my life in His keeping. He has the right to ask me to think as He thinks, to see as He sees, to act as He acts, and to love as He loves.”—Pages 15, 16.

So, somewhere in the shadows there’s an undiscovered opening onto a path leading to everlasting light, a path that may never be found unless you face the shadows first. If God never changes, then even though I can’t see it, there is something in the shadowy valley that will eventually cause the sun to shine.

“Those who are finally victorious will have seasons of terrible perplexity and trial in their religious life; but they must not cast away their confidence, for this is a part of their discipline in the school of Christ, and it is essential in order that all dross may be purged away. The servant of God must endure with fortitude the attacks of the enemy, his grievous taunts, and must overcome the obstacles which Satan will place in his way. . . .

“But if you keep looking up, not down at your difficulties, you will not faint in the way, you will soon see Jesus reaching His hand to help you, and you will only have to give Him your hand in simple confidence, and let Him lead you. As you become trustful, you will become hopeful. . . .

“You will find help in Christ to form a strong, symmetrical, beautiful character. Satan cannot make of none effect the light shining forth from such a character. . . . God has given us His best gift, even His only-begotten Son, to uplift, ennable, and fit us, by putting on us His own perfection of character, for a home in His kingdom.”—Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People*, pp. 63, 64.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. To what extent have you been aware that the “terrible perplexity and trial” that comes into your life may actually be part of your “discipline in the school of Christ”?

2. How might our help, comfort, and encouragement to those in the valley be part of the Shepherd’s way of getting people through their crises? What things can you as a church do to be better used by the Lord to help those in need?

3. In class, go around and have each person talk about how goodness and mercy “pursued” them. What can you learn from one another’s experiences?

4. Think about the last hours of Christ’s life, as He entered into the crucible. From what you can tell, either from the Bible or Ellen White (*The Desire of Ages* is a great source), how was Jesus, in His humanity, able to endure? What can we take from His example for ourselves in whatever crucibles we face, as well?
The Crucibles That Come

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Jer. 9:7–16, Rom. 1:21–32, 2 Cor. 12:7–12, 1 Pet. 4:12–19, 5:8–11.

Memory Text: “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:12, 13, NIV).

In chemistry labs one often places various materials into a small container and heats them to extreme temperatures. As the container becomes hotter, the materials either melt, fizzle, spit, or burn brightly, depending upon what they are made of. The container is called a crucible.

A crucible is defined in the dictionary as (1) a vessel used for melting a substance that requires a high degree of heat, (2) a severe test, (3) a place or situation in which concentrated forces interact to cause or influence change or development.

These definitions also give us a helpful insight into what happens in our spiritual lives. This week we’ll highlight some reasons that we may suddenly find ourselves under pressure and experiencing tests in places in which circumstances cause us to change, develop, and grow in character. This will help to give us an awareness of what God is doing in our lives so that when we enter a crucible, we will have an idea of how to respond.

The Week at a Glance: What are the causes of the difficult times that we experience through our lives?

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

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Pet. 4:12, NIV).

Surprises, painful surprises, can come in many ways. A car veering across the road into your path. A sudden notification that you’re losing your job. A medical test that gives you unexpected bad news. The betrayal by someone you loved and who you thought loved you. As bad as the pain can be, it’s always made worse by the element of surprise.

This week we will look at a few specific types of painful situations or crucibles that should not take us by surprise. To begin, let’s go back to the text for today in Peter. The Greek word for “surprised” in 1 Peter 4:12 means to be “alien” or “foreign.” Peter is urging his readers not to fall into the trap of believing that fiery ordeals and trials are alien to Christian experience. Rather, they are to be considered normal—they can and should be expected.

The word used for “fiery ordeal” (NRSV) or “painful trial” (NIV) or “fiery trial” (NKJV) comes from another Greek word, and it means “a burning.” In other places it is translated “furnace.” This experience of suffering for our faith could therefore be considered a “smelting process,” the process of the crucible.

Read 1 Peter 4:12–19. What is Peter’s message?

Many of us are surprised about suffering because we often have an oversimplified view of the Christian life. We know there are two sides—God, who is good; and Satan, who is bad. But often we then automatically put everything that feels good in the box with God and everything that feels bad in the box with Satan. But life is not so simple. We cannot use our feelings to decide what is in God’s box or Satan’s box. Sometimes walking with God can be challenging and hard. And following Satan can appear to bring great rewards. Job, who is righteous yet suffering, illustrates this when he asked God, “‘Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?’” (Job 21:7, NIV).

Peter was referring to trials that are the consequence of standing up for Christ. But there are also other reasons that trials come. How could 1 Peter 4:12–19 help you to tactfully explain to a friend why they should not be surprised at the painful trials they might face?
Key Text: 1 Peter 4:12, 13

Teach the Class to:

Know: We can face a variety of pressures that can cause us to turn away from God.
Feel: Prepared to confront these challenges and to prevail over them, with Jesus’ help.
Do: Resolve to claim God’s promises of help and strength, even when they appear to bear no relation to our reality.

Lesson Outline:

I. Crucibles That Come (1 Pet. 4:12, 13)

A How does the image of the challenges we face as crucibles help us to understand their purpose better? What is a crucible? Its function?

B To what extent can the trials and difficulties we face be blamed on Satan? Do our trials have a supernatural source? Why, or why not?

C Some difficulties result from sin, some from unwise choices. Does God punish us by these difficulties or merely let us reap the results?

II. Crucibles of Sin (Rom. 1:18)

A Why is it often necessary for us to suffer adverse results in order to be brought back into God’s will?

B Can all or most suffering in a Christian’s life be traced back to secret sin or sinful thoughts?

III. Thorns and Other Undesirable Things (2 Cor. 12:7)

A It would be fairly easy for us to assume that suffering is random and has no meaning. How can we know that this is not the case?

B Can or does all suffering have a spiritual meaning or dimension? If so, how much does it depend on the mind-set we bring to it?

C Is it ever appropriate for us to judge the spiritual experience of others by what we see of their circumstances or problems?

Summary: When we accept God’s will in our lives, we can imbue these trials with spiritual meaning and become stronger by facing them.
Crucibles of Satan

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8, NKJV).

Read the above text. What’s the message there for us? Ask yourself, “How seriously do I take these words?” What things do you do in your life that show whether you take them seriously?

Have you ever watched a hungry lion? It’s awesome because you know it can catch and eat just about anything it wants. Peter says that Satan is prowling around in the same way. The great tragedy is that when we look around, we can see the consequences of his desire to kill. Death, suffering, and the twisting and perverting of morals and values are everywhere. We cannot escape seeing the work of Satan.

Read 1 Peter 5:8–11. How should Christians react to Satan’s prowling?

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

What does God promise to do for those who are suffering? Verse 10.

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Peter writes these words in the context of responding to Satan’s attacks on Christian faith. But as we have mentioned, Satan is at work in many different ways. And although we must be aware of the reality and the power of our enemy, we must never be discouraged, for we must always remember that Jesus has beaten Satan, that Satan is a defeated foe, and that as long as we stay connected with Jesus, as long as we cleave to Him in faith, we can never be defeated either. Because of the Cross, Christ’s victory is our victory.

Think about the other ways that Satan causes pain. How could reading 1 Peter 5:8–11 help us to deal with the anguish that we experience because of our fate in living in a sinful world where Satan is allowed to wreak havoc?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, Why is this lesson important to me?

Introduce the analogy of the crucible. This analogy is the framework for the entire series of lessons, and the use of the analogy needs to be understood by the class members.

Peter’s statement in the memory verse “do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering” (1 Pet. 4:12, NIV) may have been more understandable to first-century Christians than to us. Faced with a panoply of pagan religions, all legally recognized and popular, they probably were not too surprised that their illegal and unpopular faith engendered trials and tribulations.

Most of us, on the other hand, probably live in more or less tolerant societies that for the most part leave us alone.

However, other kinds of crucibles bubble and boil, some unexpected and some within our own ranks. How does all this fit together?

Go through the four crucibles studied this week and solicit some experiences and comments from the class members about their personal familiarity with these crucibles.

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Bible Commentary

I. The Value of Testing

Testing is a common occurrence. Students regularly submit to testing. Automobiles and manufactured goods undergo testing. Pharmaceuticals
Crucibles of Sin

“For 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).

Everything we do has a consequence. If you stand in the hot sun with ice cream, it will certainly melt. Cause and effect always go together. And no matter how desperately we would want things to be different, it is the same with sin. It always reaps consequences. It is not that God sits in heaven wondering what terrible things He could do to people who sin; no, sin itself comes with its own built-in consequences.

The problem is that many times we think that we can somehow out-wit God and sin without the consequences. It never happens. Paul makes it very clear that sinning has not only consequences for eternity but painful and distressing consequences today.

In Romans 1:21–32, Paul describes the process of people falling into sin and the consequences of those sins. Read prayerfully and carefully these verses, and summarize the essence of what he is saying, focusing specifically on the stages of sin and its consequences.

Earlier Paul describes these consequences as the “wrath of God” (vs. 18). God’s wrath in this passage is simply God allowing human beings to reap what they sow. Even for Christians, God does not always intervene immediately to remove the pain that results from our own actions. Many times He allows us to experience the consequences of our actions in order that we may understand how deeply damaging and offensive our sin is.

We have been considering the consequences of breaking God’s moral laws. But what about breaking God’s health laws? Our bodies are God’s home. If we abuse our bodies by failing to eat healthfully or exercise, or if we regularly overwork, this is also sin against God. And this has consequences that can create the conditions of a crucible.

How, in your own life, have you reaped the immediate consequences of your own sins? What lessons have you learned? What changes must you make in order not to go through something similar again?
appear on the market only after extensive testing. People in various occupations are submitted to batteries of tests to see how well they perform. Some professions must submit to periodic upgrading through batteries of tests. The purpose of all this testing is to ensure quality.

II. Spiritual Testing

In the spiritual realm, testing is a little more of a controversial issue. If grace is free, why would the Lord need to submit anyone to a test? This week’s lesson frames an answer, clearly showing that the Lord’s purpose in testing people is to refine them. Refining eliminates impurities and results in a superior product.

III. Keeping an Accurate Perspective

Progress in Christian experience often is looked upon in terms of a series of tests, reinforced by quoting Ellen G. White’s statement that “God will bring you over the ground again and again until with humble heart and subdued mind you bear the test that He inflicts and are wholly sanctified to His service and work.”—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 214. This declaration sometimes is paired with the statement “Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a lifetime.”—Ellen G. White, “Transformed by Grace,” The Acts of the Apostles, p. 560.

These statements reflect biblical truth, but sometimes they are explained poorly, and in the hearers’ minds sanctification comes very close to being a matter of human merit, part of a grading system through which we attain or lose eternal life.

God’s “testing” is not this kind of grading system. It is, to use educational terminology, a redemptive-disciplinary system geared toward character development. It is a result of salvation, not a cause.

This week’s lesson emphasizes very clearly, using the analogy of a crucible, that tests God may apply, or circumstances He may choose to inflict, clearly are designed as part of a refining process to forward the progress of our journey toward the kingdom.

So there will be no misunderstanding regarding this process, Ellen G. White stated to one person immersed in the crucible of purification, “Your trials and temptations borne in God will purify and humble, but will not destroy or endanger you.”—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, p. 93.
Crucibles of Purification

“Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Behold, I will refine them and try them; for how shall I deal with the daughter of My people?’” (Jer. 9:7, NKJV).

“If the Spirit of God brings to your mind a word of the Lord that hurts you, you may be sure that there is something He wants to hurt to death.”—Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour & Company, Inc., 1963), Sept. 27.

How do you understand the above quote and text? What has been your own experience with the pains involved in the purification process?

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

Read Jeremiah 9:7–16. God says that He will “refine and test” (NRSV), or “melt” (KJV), Judah and Jerusalem (vs. 7, NIV). What two reasons does God give for this? How will the refining happen? (vss. 15, 16).

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

God’s refining and testing involved drastic action. There are perhaps three reasons why such refining and testing may feel like a crucible. First, we experience pain as God uses circumstances to bring our sin to our attention. A little earlier, Jeremiah unhappily writes, “‘The bellows blow fiercely to burn away the lead with fire, but the refining goes on in vain; the wicked are not purged out’” (Jer. 6:29, NIV). Thus, sometimes drastic action is needed in order to get our attention. Second, we experience anguish as we feel sorrow for the sin we now see clearly. Third, we experience frustration as we try to live differently. It can be quite uncomfortable and difficult to keep choosing to give up the things that have been so much a part of us.

Think about the sins that you struggle with. If God was going to refine and test you today, how might He do it? What action could you take now to deal with this before God would want to take drastic steps with you, as He did with Israel?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

>STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

Thought Questions:

1. The crucibles of purification and maturity are really blessings in disguise. What can you do to undisguise the blessings and find out what they are?

2. Can you live with the statement in Sunday’s lesson that the fiery ordeals are to be considered normal—they can and should be expected?

3. What does it mean to have a “simplified view of the Christian life”? How does your personal view of the Christian life perceive the issue of trials and tribulations?

Dealing With Personal Crucibles

Write down what you consider to be the kind of crucible(s) you are currently in. Then attempt answers to the following questions:

1. How did I get into this crucible? (Sometimes we fall into inexplicable and unexpected crucibles, and sometimes we make our own crucibles and complain bitterly when we fall into them!)

2. If I am completely confused about the nature of my current crucible, how can I identify possible issues of purification and/or maturity in spite of my confusion?

3. Thursday’s lesson tells us that Paul felt his “thorn in the flesh” was “given him” by the Lord for a reason. Can you identify a “thorn” that the Lord may have “given you” for a purpose? What’s the purpose?

Witnessing

People who are in difficult situations are always disposed to spiritual input. Your personal testimony of how the Lord has helped you get through a crucible is invaluable. Even if you never have been through the particular crucible your friend is dealing with, just the fact that you care is a valuable testimony and spiritual influence. It opens the door for other aspects of Christian witness.
Crucibles of Maturity

“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure” (2 Cor. 12:7, NKJV).

There is a big difference between cutting down and pruning. We cut down plants that we don’t want anymore; we prune plants that we want to develop into greater fruitfulness. Both processes, however, do involve a sharp knife. Indeed, pruning requires cutting parts off the plant that might seem to a novice gardener like destroying it. In a spiritual context, Bruce Wilkinson writes, “Are you praying for God’s superabundant blessings and pleading that He will make you more like His Son? “If your answer is yes, then you are asking for the shears.”—Secrets of the Vine (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001), p. 60.

People have wondered what Paul actually meant by a “thorn in my flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7, NIV). Ideas range from Paul’s having constant attacks from enemies to having a speech difficulty. It seems that this was actually a problem with his eyesight.—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1107. Amazingly, Paul believed that his “thorn” was “given me.”

What do you think Paul meant by “given me”? Who gave it to him? How was God able to use it for Paul’s benefit?

Notice that Paul’s “thorn” had a definite purpose: “to keep me from becoming conceited” (vs. 7, NIV). It was not because of any specific sin he had committed but to prevent him from sinning in the future. Paul recognized that he had, by nature, a weakness to sin and that this “thorn” could guard against it.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7–12. How does Paul deal with his “thorn”? Do you think that Paul’s weakness had any other spiritual benefits to him? How can the way that Paul responds help you to deal with “thorns” that you may have to carry?
STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

Getting It All Together

Looking for personal solutions to crucible problems involves both knowledge and practice. It also involves an honest willingness to do something about it and to use adequate resources.

Resources

Try the following in your search for the nature of your personal crucibles:

1. Talk over the situation with some people you trust and confide in them. They might have gone through the same thing and have some valuable counsel to give.

2. Present the situation to the Lord in serious intercessory prayer. This can be done personally or with a group of people you respect and trust.

3. Read something devotional that will give you courage to face the situation and also something instructive that will give you some hints and tips on how to deal with whatever your crucible is.

Practice

An interesting and helpful activity for your class would be for the members to do the following. Some might be willing to share their plan with the other class members. Some might want to work in groups to develop a plan.

Make a plan about what to do the next time your personal crucible presents itself (if you can identify it, you will know when it appears). The plan should include some specific actions you will take.
**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, Nov. 18, 1903; Ellen G. White Comments, p. 1182, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4; “Enduring Trials,” p. 92, in *My Life Today*.

“He who reads the hearts of men knows their characters better than they themselves know them. He sees that some have powers and susceptibilities which, rightly directed, might be used in the advancement of His work. In His providence He brings these persons into different positions and varied circumstances that they may discover in their character the defects which have been concealed from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to correct these defects, and to fit themselves for His service. Often He permits the fires of affliction to assail them that they may be purified.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 471.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. It really can be hard while we are reaping the consequences of our sin. “Will I ever be able to be made right with God again?” we ask. What promises does God make that can encourage us to persevere through such times and not give up? (See what Paul writes later in Romans 5:1–11.) What can you say to someone who is asking this very question?

2. What does Ellen White mean by “His providence”? How does this work? How do you know when something happens by God’s providence? What acts of God’s “providence” have led to trials in your own life? As a class, discuss what you’ve learned at this time. How might you help someone else who is wondering whether some event is indeed “His providence”?

3. If you know someone going through a crucible right now, does it matter, or should it matter, what brought it on? That is, how should you react to them and their suffering, regardless of what caused it?

4. A Christian young man living in South America went through a bitter trial. After it was over, he moved to Europe and later commented to someone, “I left my corpse in South America.” What does that mean? Why must we all, in a sense, leave our corpse somewhere? What role do trials have in that process?

5. As a class, plan an outing to a hospital or somewhere where you could be of help, comfort, and cheer to those who are, for whatever reason, being squeezed in a crucible.
The Birdcage

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials” (1 Peter 1:6, NKJV).

In the full light of day, and in hearing of the music of other voices, the caged bird will not sing the song that his master seeks to teach him. He learns a snatch of this, a trill of that, but never a separate and entire melody. But the master covers the cage, and places it where the bird will listen to the one song he is to sing. In the dark, he tries and tries again to sing that song until it is learned, and he breaks forth in perfect melody. Then the bird is brought forth, and ever after he can sing that song in the light. Thus God deals with His children. He has a song to teach us, and when we have learned it amid the shadows of affliction we can sing it ever afterward.”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 472.

Notice that the one who carries the bird into the darkness is the master himself.

It is easy to understand that Satan causes pain, but would God Himself actively take a part in guiding us into crucibles where we experience confusion or hurt?

The Week at a Glance: What examples can you think of in the Bible in which God Himself leads people into experiences that He knows will include suffering? What do you think were the new songs He wanted them to sing?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 20.
To the Promised Land Via a Dead End

“And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord” (Exod. 14:10, NKJV).

Have you ever been set up, led into a trap or to a dead end? Sometimes it can be nice, like walking unexpectedly into a room of waiting friends who all shout “Surprise! Happy birthday!” At other times it can be quite a shock, even a very unpleasant one. It may have been bullies when you were at school or a work colleague who unexpectedly tried to make you look bad.

From the day the Israelites left Egypt until they reached the Promised Land, “the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night” (Exod. 13:21, NIV). Every part of their journey was led by God Himself. But look at where He led them first: to a place where the sea was before them, mountains were on either side, and Pharaoh’s army was within eyesight right behind!

Read Exodus 14. Why did God bring the Israelites to a place where He knew they would be terrified?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Following “the pillar” doesn’t assure us of being happy all the time. It also can be a hard experience, because training in righteousness takes us to places that test our hearts, which are so naturally deceitful (Jer. 17:9). During these difficulties, the key to knowing when we are truly following God is not necessarily the absence of trials or pain but, rather, an openness to God’s instruction and a continual submission of our minds and hearts to His leading.

What lesson did the Israelites learn from this experience? Exod. 14:31.

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Why is trusting God sometimes so hard, even though we may know many of the wonderful promises He has for us? Recount some difficult situation you believe the Lord led you into in order to teach you to “believe” in and to “fear” Him.
I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

Key Text: 1 Peter 1:6

Teach the Class to:
Know: That God often leads us through trials that are meant to make us stronger as we follow His will in our lives.
Feel: Assurance that God is guiding our paths even when we are beset by obstacles and seemingly pointless adversity.
Do: Resolve to actively pray and struggle to learn the lessons God wants to teach us through our circumstances.

Lesson Outline:
I. Dead Ends (1 Pet. 1:6)
   A It is easy to assume that if we follow God’s will our path will be relatively free of difficulties. Conversely, the opposite must also be true. Such thinking is, undeniably, intuitive. Is it biblical?
   B If we encounter unexpected, seemingly insurmountable difficulties, does it mean that we’re on the wrong path?
   C If we are mature Christians, indeed, if we are mature adults, we may think we have a good grasp of the difference between wants and needs. How might our own conception of our needs differ from God’s?

II. Not Losing Faith (Jer. 29:13, 14)
   A Society views Christianity as one of many competing paths to happiness. What is this happiness that people seek? Does Christianity lead to it?
   B What lessons can we draw from Christ’s life, as we face seemingly insurmountable disappointment, adversity, or temptation?

III. Strangers in the World (Heb. 11:13, 14)
   A Most of the figures in the Bible suffered from disappointment and despair that dwarfs our experience, but we see the purpose in retrospect. How might your problems on your walk appear in hindsight?
   B We all face temptation; sometimes we give in to it. When we do succumb, does God give up on us? How can we recover our focus?

Summary: Following God does not guarantee an easy—or even a clear—path. It is important to realize that detours may be what God intends for us.
Bitter Waters

“The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink” (Exod. 17:1, NIV).

We might surely not get from God everything we want, but can’t we expect to get all that we need? Not what we think we need but what we truly need?

There was one thing the Israelites certainly needed, and that was water. Just after God led the Israelites through the Red Sea in the cloud, they followed Him through the hot, waterless desert for three days. Particularly in the desert, where finding water is so critical, their desperation is understandable. When would they get the water they needed?

So, where does God lead them? The pillar goes to Marah, where, at last, there is water. They must have been excited. But when they tasted the water, they immediately spat it out because it was bitter. “So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, ‘What are we to drink?’” (Exod. 15:24, NIV).

Then, a few days later, God does it again. This time, however, the pillar actually stops where there is no water at all (Exod. 17:1).

Read Exodus 15:22–27 and 17:1–7. What did God reveal to Israel about Himself at Marah and at Rephidim? What lessons should they have learned?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

In Rephidim, what question did the children of Israel ask? (Exod. 17:7). Have you ever asked the same question? If so, why? How did you feel, and what lessons did you learn after you had it answered? How many times do we need to get it answered before we stop asking it altogether?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, Why is this lesson important to me?

Consider this: We might surely not get from God everything we want, but couldn’t we expect to get all that we need?

The week’s lessons provide two illustrations that suggest an answer:

1. If, in the illustration from The Ministry of Healing about the bird in the cage, the master had not covered the cage and left the bird in the dark, would it ever have learned the tune? This is no easy thought to grasp. We would much prefer to be in the light at all times.

2. Does the bitter water of your particular situation mean that God has removed Himself from the picture? If bitter water is intolerable, how might you react if the next thing that arises is comparable to no water at all?

Is it possible to accept a faith-based answer? Do you feel that you truly can depend on God, even if you seem to be in a darkened bird cage or in a no water situation?

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Bible Commentary

A statement by Ellen G. White may come up in the class discussion of this week’s lesson: “God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern
The Great Controversy in the Desert

“And Jesus, being full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil” (Luke 4:1, 2, NKJV).

Read Luke 4:1–13. What lessons can you learn from this account about how to overcome temptation and not give in to sin?

Temptations can be so difficult because they appeal to things we really desire, and they always seem to come at our weakest moments.

Luke 4 is the beginning of the story of Jesus’ temptation by Satan, and it brings some difficult issues to our attention. At first glance, it appears that the Holy Spirit is leading Jesus into temptation. However, God never tempts us (James 1:13). Rather, as we have been seeing, God does lead us to crucibles of testing. What is striking in Luke 4 is that the Holy Spirit can lead us to times of testing that involve our being exposed to Satan’s fierce temptations. At such times when we feel these temptations so strongly, we may misunderstand and think we have not been following God correctly. But this is not necessarily true. “Often when placed in a trying situation we doubt that the Spirit of God has been leading us. But it was the Spirit’s leading that brought Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. When God brings us into trial, He has a purpose to accomplish for our good. Jesus did not presume on God’s promises by going unbidden into temptation, neither did He give up to despondency when temptation came upon Him. Nor should we.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 126, 127.

Sometimes when in the crucible we get burned rather than purified. It is therefore very comforting to know that when we crumble under temptation, we can hope again because Jesus stood firm. The good news is that because Jesus is our Sin Bearer, because He paid the penalty for our failure to endure that temptation (whatever it was), because He went through a crucible worse than any of us will ever face, we are not cast off or forsaken by God. There is hope, even for the “chief” of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).

What temptations are you facing now? Spend some time in prayer, asking the Lord to teach you how to apply the lessons from Jesus’ example in your own life. Remember, you don’t have to succumb to temptation, ever! Remember, too, that you have a Savior if you do.
the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 224, 225.

I. A Puzzling Proposition

This statement is bewildering to many people. Why would God apparently hide His purpose from us, yet expect us to take in stride some really serious trials and tribulations?

The answer is a matter of faith, as illustrated in the spiritual lesson of the bitter waters of Marah. It has to do with the fact that God ultimately is in control of events. No one knows what kind of tree branch Moses threw into the water. The point is that it worked a miracle. What looks like a dead end to us, God often turns into a miracle.

II. Moving Through the Cycle

From bitter water the Israelites moved on to no water! Cowper certainly has a point when he wrote, “God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.”—*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985), no. 107. Nevertheless, in spite of the bewildering nature of what happens, the Bible tells us that God has a plan and a purpose. It’s not always distinguishable, but it’s still true!

III. The Key Point

The key point of this week’s study is that in spite of what we see and experience, God knows what He is doing and why. This fact can be grasped only through faith.

Something Your Students Should Know:

*Marah*, a Hebrew word meaning “bitter,” applied to the acrid waters of the spring where Israel camped. No one knows exactly where *Marah* was. The most common site is thought to be modern Hawarah, where the water is still bitter. Others look to an oasis some nine miles (14 kilometers) southeast of Suez called Ayun Musa. The soil in these areas contains potassium nitrate, also known as saltpeter. It’s used as fertilizer, in the manufacture of glass, as a food preservative, and in some medicines as a diuretic. It once was used in gunpowder and still is used in explosives, fireworks, and
An Enduring Legacy

Read 1 Peter 1:6, 7. What is Peter saying?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Peter is writing to people who were battling through difficulties and often felt very alone. He was writing “to God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (1 Pet. 1:1, NIV). This is the area we know today as western Turkey. A few texts later, Peter says that he knows that they are experiencing “grief in all kinds of trials” (vs. 6, NIV).

What does he mean by saying that they are “strangers” and “scattered”? How might that add to their trials?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Being a Christian during these times was a new thing; believers were small in number and in various places where they were a decided minority that was often misunderstood at best, persecuted at worst. Peter assures them, however, that these trials are not random or chaotic (vss. 6, 7). Genuine faith is the goal of those who persevere through “all kinds of trials.”

Read 1 Peter 1:6–9. What ultimate assurance does Peter seek to give these people amid their trials? What does that hope mean for us too?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Whatever their trials, whatever they suffer, how can it be compared to the eternity that awaits them when Christ returns? Peter’s words to them are God’s words to us, regardless of whatever we are facing. However difficult or painful our trials, we must never lose sight of the ultimate end, eternal life in a new heaven and new earth, without pain, suffering, or death. With such a promise before us, a promise guaranteed us through the death of Jesus, how important that we not lose faith but, instead, amid our trials ask the Lord to purge us of everything and anything that stands in the way of our faith.
matches. No wonder they couldn’t drink it!

**STEP 3—Practice!**

*Just for Teachers:* This step of the Natural Learning Cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

**Consider This:** Those who study the inner workings of religious belief tell us that people and churches tend to place themselves in one of three categories. Where would you place yourself?

1. We Christians are “in the world and of the world.” That means there is little difference between a Christian and anyone else except that we try to be as caring as possible in our treatment of other people.
2. We Christians are “in the world but not of the world.” That means that while we live in this world, our citizenship is elsewhere, and our thoughts and actions are governed by the “other world.”
3. We Christians are “neither in the world nor of the world.” That means we should do everything we can to separate ourselves from the world and live as if we were already in the “other world,” maybe by separating ourselves from society and living in separate colonies where we can protect our way of life.

**Application Questions:**

1. Why did you select the category you chose?
2. What difference does that category make in your understanding of why you may find yourself in a crucible?
3. Why would Peter say, “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials” (1 Pet. 1:6, NIV)? What is there to rejoice about in trial and tribulations? Why did he say “for a little while”? From the time he said this until Christianity formally was recognized as a legal religion was almost three hundred years. Is that “a little while”?
4. What do the promises of God have to do with the solutions to trials and tribulations in our lives?
Trial by Fire

There was a young man. We’ll call him Alex. He had come out of a very troubled youth: drugs, violence, even some time in jail. But then, through the kindness of a local church member (whom Alex had stolen from), Alex learned about God and gave his heart to Jesus. Though he still had his problems and struggles, and though elements of his past still lingered, Alex was a new person in Jesus. He loved God and sought to express that love by obeying His commandments (1 John 5:1, 2). At one point Alex felt impressed that he should be a minister. Everything pointed to it. He was answering God’s call, no doubt about it.

At college things went well at first. Then one thing after another went awry, and his life began coming apart. His source of money started to dry up; a close friend turned against him, making accusations about him that were false but that damaged his reputation. Next, he kept on getting sick; no one knew what it was, but it impacted his studies to the point where he was afraid that he was going to have to drop out of school completely. On top of it all, he was fighting fierce temptations with drugs, which were readily available in the local community. At one point he even fell in that area. Alex couldn’t understand why all this was happening, especially because he was sure that the Lord had led him to this school to begin with. Was Alex wrong about that? If so, was his whole experience with God a huge mistake? Even the most basic elements of his faith were coming under doubt.

Imagine that, amid this crisis, Alex came to you and asked for advice. What would you say? What experiences have you had that could help someone like him? What Bible texts would you use? How helpful might the following texts be in such a situation? Proverbs 3, Jer. 29:13, Rom. 8:28, 2 Cor. 12:9, Heb. 13:5.

Almost all who follow the Lord have had crises during which they’ve been tempted to doubt the Lord’s leading. The important thing in such situations is to cling to the promises, recount God’s leading in the past, and pray for faith and endurance. The Lord will never give up on us; it’s we who have to fight the temptation to give up on Him.
STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

Personal Case Study

Thursday’s lesson tells the story of Alex and his trials and tribulations. However, it does not say how the story ended. It simply asks the question, Was Alex wrong about his faith and commitment? Then the lesson asks you what advice you would give Alex.

It’s fine to give Alex some advice, and the lesson mentions five texts that are helpful. However, what if you have a personal equivalent to Alex’s story?

Consider These Questions:

1. What’s your personal case that’s equivalent to Alex’s?
2. How did you handle (or are you handling) it?
3. Can you truly say that your inner caged bird is willing to sing instead of complain bitterly about whatever issue is troubling you?

Some Personal Thoughts to Contemplate

Tuesday’s lesson makes a significant statement: “At such times when we feel these temptations so strongly, we may misunderstand and think we have not been following God correctly. But this is not necessarily true.” Here are two questions to contemplate:

1. What is that statement saying to you personally?
2. Can you honestly say that you are willing to recognize that God may have a critical lesson for you in there someplace?

“But of old the Lord led his people to Rephidim, and he may choose to lead us there also, to test our loyalty. He does not always bring us to pleasant places. If he did, in our self-sufficiency we should forget that he is our helper. He longs to manifest himself to us, and to reveal the abundant supplies at our disposal, and he permits trial and disappointment to come to us that we may realize our helplessness, and learn to call upon him for aid. He can cause cooling streams to flow from the flinty rock. We shall never know, until we are face to face with God, when we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known, how many burdens he has borne for us, and how many burdens he would have been glad to bear, if, with childlike faith, we had brought them to him.”—Ellen G. White, “Rephidim,” *Review and Herald*, April 7, 1903.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. We often talk of temptation as an individual thing, which, of course, it is. At the same time, are there any corporate temptations, things that we as a church or a local church family might have to guard against as a group? If so, what?

2. Have those who are willing talk about any of the “unpleasant places” that they have been brought to. Why have they been unpleasant? If they had to revisit them today, would they view them differently?

3. We all understand the principle behind God’s allowing us to be purified and refined by trials. How, though, do we understand the situation in which trials appear to have no value (for instance, someone is killed instantly in a car wreck)? As a class, seek to work through possible answers.

4. As a class, take time together to pray for each other, that each might be strengthened to endure trials and stay faithful.

5. Does your class know of anyone who, having faced trials, lost their way? If so, as a class what could you do in a very tangible way to help lead that person back?
Reading for This Week’s Study: Job 23:1–10, Dan. 12:1–10, Matt. 5:16, 25:1–12, 1 Cor. 4:9, Eph. 3:10, 4:11–16.

Memory Text: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18, NKJV).

Amy Carmichael took a group of children to a traditional goldsmith in India. In the middle of a charcoal fire was a curved roof tile. On the tile was a mixture of salt, tamarind fruit, and brick dust. Embedded in this mixture was gold. As the fire devoured the mixture, the gold became purer. The goldsmith took the gold out with tongs and, if it was not pure enough, he replaced it in the fire with a new mixture. But each time the gold was replaced, the heat was increased. The group asked, “How do you know when the gold is purified?” He replied, “When I can see my face in it.”—Amy Carmichael, Learning of God (Fort Washington, Pa.: Christian Literature Crusade, 1989), p. 50.

God is seeking to purify us, to refine us like gold, to transform us into His image. That’s an astonishing goal, and it seems even more astonishing that a Christlike character is developed in us only as we pass through life’s crucibles.

The Week at a Glance: What role does suffering have in the purifying process? How do we understand all this in the context of the great controversy?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 27.*
“In His Image”

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29, NKJV).

In the beginning, God made us in His image (Gen. 1:27), but that image has been corrupted by sin.

**In** what ways do we see this defacing of God’s image in humanity?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

It’s obvious: We all have been corrupted by sin (Rom. 3:10–19). Yet, God’s desire is to restore us to what we should have originally been. This is where our text today fits in. It reveals God’s plan that for those who submit their lives to the Holy Spirit, they may be “conformed to the likeness of his Son” (Rom. 8:29, NIV).

But there’s another dimension. “The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

**How** do you understand what Ellen White says to us in that quote?  
*See also Job 1, Matt. 5:16, 1 Cor. 4:9, Eph. 3:10.*

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

As Christians, we must never forget that we are in the midst of a cosmic drama. The great controversy between Christ and Satan is unfolding all around us. The battle takes many shapes and is manifested in many ways. And though much is hidden, we can understand that, as followers of Christ, we have a part to play in this drama, and we can bring honor to Christ through our lives.

**Imagine being on the field of a huge stadium.** Sitting in the bleachers on one side are heavenly beings loyal to the Lord; on the other side are beings who have fallen with Lucifer. If your life for the past 24 hours was played out on that field, which side would have more to cheer about? What does your answer tell you about yourself?
I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

► Key Text: 2 Corinthians 3:18

► Teach the Class to:

Know: Trials are intended to help us develop the Christlike character we need in order to face eternity.

Feel: The importance of allowing God to purify our character so that we can reflect His image more faithfully.

Do: Resolve to allow ourselves to be positively changed by the experiences and opportunities that God makes available to us.

► Lesson Outline:

I. Character (Matt. 25:1–12)

A Character development is a phrase used often by Ellen G. White and other writers and teachers. Can we find the concept in the Bible?

B Is character something we’re born with or something we acquire? Does character development come more easily to some than to others?

C Our salvation is reflected in our character, and our character is revealed in our works. Is this salvation by works? Why, or why not?

II. “Getting Right With God” (Dan. 12:1–10)

A Many people basically believe in the tenets of Christianity but choose to put off “getting right with God.” Why is this a misguided strategy?

B Clearly, it is important to be at least in a state of steady spiritual growth when end-time events begin to gain momentum. What does this mean?

C How will significant end-time events uniquely reveal our character?

III. Character in Action (Eph. 4:11–16)

A How important is life in the community—the church and the world at large—to the development of character?

B How are individual habits and practices, i.e., health habits, devotional habits, etc., relevant to character development?

► Summary: People look at appearance, intelligence, or wealth. God looks at character. Without God, this is, simply, hopeless. If we allow God to help us fight our battles, we can triumph over those things that cause us to stumble.
Faith Amid the Refining Fire

It’s one thing to be in a battle; it’s another not even to see the forces arrayed in that battle. In a sense, this is what we as Christians deal with. We know that the forces are out there, we can feel them in our lives, and yet, we have to press ahead in faith, trusting Him “who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27, NKJV).

Read Job 23:1–10. What is the essence of Job’s struggle? What does he not see? At the same time, what does he take on faith, despite all his trials?

Even amid his terrible trials, Job trusted in the Lord. Despite everything, Job was determined to endure. And one of the things that kept him persevering was gold. Not a gold medal; rather, he was looking into the future and realized that if he held on to God, he would come out the better for it—he would come out like gold. How much Job knew of what was happening behind the scenes, we aren’t told. Regardless of how much was hidden from him, he endured the refining fire anyway.

Do you fear the fire? Do you worry about the heat that circumstances generate? Perhaps, as with Job, the heat of God seems unexplainable. It may be the difficulty of adjusting to a new job or a new home. It could be having to survive ill treatment at work or even within your own family. It could be illness or financial loss. Hard as it is to understand, God can use these trials to refine you and purify you and bring out His image in your character.

Being proven to be gold seems to be an incentive for Job here, something to fix his eyes upon and that helps pull him through his troubles. It’s a powerful testimony to his character already that, amid all the pain and suffering, he was able to sense the reality of the purifying process. Also, however much he didn’t understand, he knew that these trials would refine him.

In your own experience, how do trials refine and purify? What other ways could you be refined other than through suffering?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate!

**Just for Teachers:** Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, Why is this lesson important to me?

The following quotations can be used to launch the class members on a search for answers:

1. “God gives the talents, the powers of the mind: we form the character.”—Ellen G. White, “Talents,” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 331.

2. “The prophets and apostles did not perfect Christian character by a miracle. They used the means which God had placed within their reach; and all who will put forth the same effort will secure the same results.”—Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ*, p. 97.

3. Even more reflective is the statement that “if you would be a saint in heaven, you must first be a saint on earth.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 16.

Point out that the sin problem necessitates a purification and refining process. That very process builds character. Fortunately for the believer, “a noble character is earned by individual effort through the merits and grace of Christ.” That does not preclude, however, “hard, stern battles with self. Conflict after conflict must be waged against hereditary tendencies.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 331.

STEP 2—Explore!

**Just for Teachers:** This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Bible Commentary

The subject of character development has given birth to all kinds of definitions and philosophical concepts. Some people see personality as a broad description of what the social environment perceives in a person, character being the ethical component of personality.—Adapted, Louis P. Thorpe,
Jesus’ Last Words

Jesus was in Jerusalem, about to die. According to Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus’ last teaching hour before Passover is spent telling His disciples parables, including the parables about the ten virgins and the sheep and the goats. These stories are related to the way we should live as we wait for Jesus to come. Thus their relevancy to today—with the signs of Jesus’ soon return all around us—has never been more important.

In the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1–12), many commentators point out that the oil is a symbol for the Holy Spirit. Ellen White agrees but also says that this oil is a symbol for character and that it is something no one can acquire for us.

Read the parable. In what ways does the meaning of the story change, depending on whether you see oil as a symbol of the Holy Spirit or for the possession of character? What are the implications of this story for you if the oil represents the Holy Spirit, or a Christlike character?

Holy Spirit:  

Character:  

Read the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31–46. What criteria is used in separating the sheep and the goats?

Notice that the king separates the sheep and the goats based on their works, their character. Though Jesus is not teaching salvation by works here, we can see how important character development is in the plan of salvation and how those who are truly saved by Christ will reflect that salvation through their lives and characters.

It has been said that “character is what a person is in the dark.” What sort of person are you when no one is looking? What does that answer tell you about changes that need to be made?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED


Character frequently is equated with self-worth. The more people recognize and value themselves, the better their character will be. In this sense character becomes a composite of ethical behavior, personality traits, and all-around adhesion to social mores.

I. The Biblical Model

As this week’s lessons point out, in the Bible character is equated with Christlikeness. The mold in which character is formed is neither self-worth nor adhesion to social mores. It is understanding and emulating the person of Jesus. Romans 8:29, studied in Sunday’s lesson, is the overarching text defining the biblical concept of character: “Predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son . . .” (NKJV).

An Issue for Your Class to Consider:

The imitation of Christ in human character, the biblical ideal, is not an accomplishment. It is a gift. No one can accomplish this kind of character apart from the grace of God. That is the miracle of a Christlike character. It is an ideal for which God Himself provides not only the outlines of its components but the power to actually apply those components in daily life.

II. Character and Community

Thursday’s lesson is vitally important. It discusses an often-overlooked element of spiritual character development—the power of corporate fellowship.

This has to do with the use of spiritual gifts and progress in learning to live together as a unit. The Bible calls it reciprocal or one another living.

For Christian maturity to become a reality, individual personalities in a church family must learn to live together in an intentionally agreed-upon harmony based on biblically defined norms. That is not easy to do, but it is essential.

STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle will
“The Wise”

Yesterday we looked at the importance of character for those waiting for the Second Coming. Today we will look more specifically at the importance of character for those who are alive at the second coming of Jesus.

Read Daniel 12:1–10. What is the context? What time in earth’s history is being referred to? Most important, what can we tell from these texts about the character of God’s people alive at this time? What characteristics are given them, in contrast to the wicked? See also Rev. 22:11.

Daniel is told that just before Jesus comes, there will be a time of distress unequaled at any other time of history. In verse 3 and verse 10 we’re given a depiction of the righteous and the wicked during this time. Notice how the wicked “shall do wickedly” (vs. 10, NKJV) in contrast to the righteous, who in verse 2 shine brightly, perhaps because they have been “purified, made spotless and refined” (vs. 10, NIV) during this “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time” (vs. 1, NKJV). In contrast, too, the wicked do not understand, but the righteous are “wise” and do understand.

Understand what? Math, science, higher criticism? Proverbs says that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7, NKJV). Perhaps, in this context, the “wise” are wise because they have an understanding of these final events, the time of trouble, as it unfolds. They are not taken by surprise; from their study of the Word, they know it’s coming. And most important, they know enough to allow this time of trouble to purify and refine them; the wicked, on the other hand, are just made more obstinate in their rebellion and thus continue in their wickedness.

The crucial point is that we here are given a depiction of a people who have been through a refining and purifying process.

Though we’ve looked at these texts in the context of the very last days, what principles do we see here that can help us now better understand what the purifying and refining process is all about, even for us today?
assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

Seeing Through Dark Glasses

Sunglasses really help when you are driving or doing activities out in the bright sunlight. They cut out ultraviolet rays so you can see more clearly.

All this is well and good. But if you decide to wear very dark glasses, such as welding glasses, they are so dark that you won’t be able to see a thing unless the light is incredibly intense. If you drive with welding glasses on, it is only by faith you will arrive anywhere in one piece!

With this analogy in mind, put yourself in Job’s place (Job 23:1–10, TEV). Here’s his lament about seeing through excessively dark glasses. Write down Job’s lament and then fill in your own thoughts under each statement.

Verses 1, 2: “I still rebel and complain against God; I cannot keep from groaning.”

Verses 3, 4: “I wish I knew where to find him, and knew how to go where he is. I would state my case before him and present all the arguments in my favor.”

Verse 5: “I want to know what he would say and how he would answer me.”

Verse 7: “I am honest; I could reason with God; he would declare me innocent once and for all.”

Verse 8: “I have searched in the East, but God is not there; I have not found him when I searched in the West.”

Verse 9: “God has been at work in the North and the South, but still I have not seen him.”

The Apply section will continue this project. As a teacher you could use the two sections together, though each can be a unit in itself.
Character and Community

A song goes like this: “I am a rock, I am an island.” Have you ever felt like that? Wanting to stand alone? You may have even heard people say, “Well, my walk with God is a private affair. It’s not something I want to talk about.”

Read Ephesians 4:11–16. What’s the point Paul is making here? What role does he give here for community?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

When Paul writes to the Ephesians, he describes the church as a body. Jesus is the head, and His people make up the rest. If you look at verse 13, you will notice the ultimate purpose of living in such a community—it is to experience “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (NIV). And for that we need each other!

It certainly is possible to be a Christian all alone. Indeed, like many people through the centuries who have been ridiculed or persecuted, standing alone is often unavoidable. It is a powerful witness to the power of God that men and women do not buckle under the pressures that surround them. However, while this is true, Paul is wanting to emphasize a critical truth: The fullness of Christ is ultimately experienced and revealed when we are working together in fellowship with each other.

In today’s text, what does Paul say must happen before the fullness of Christ may be revealed in our Christian community?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

In what way is the witness of a community revealing the fullness of Christ different from an individual revealing the fullness of Christ? What are the implications of this in the context of the great controversy? See Eph. 3:10.

____________________________________________________________________

It’s easy to be nice when you are by yourself or with strangers, but it is much harder being nice to people you either know really well or don’t like. This means that when we still show these people grace and kindness, we provide an irresistible witness to the truth about God.
STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

It’s easy to complain about trials and tribulations. It’s not so easy to see God’s hand on the other side of the dark glasses. At the negotiation table, we are informed, the participants sometimes wear dark glasses so the opposing side cannot read their eyes. Is that how you feel about God’s leading in your life?

Seeing Clearly Through Dark Glasses

Job (Job 23:1–14, TEV) believed that God would be impressed by his honesty and the weight of his arguments. But all this didn’t solve the problem of the overly dark glasses.

In spite of this inability to see, Job did see something. As you look at Job’s words below, put yourself in his place. Could (or can) you say the same things? Does your faith reach beyond the limited field of vision of your own dark glasses?

Verse 6: “Would God use all his strength against me? No, he would listen as I spoke.”

Verse 10: “Yet God knows every step I take; if he tests me, he will find me pure.”

Verse 11: “I will follow faithfully the road he chooses, and never wander to either side.”

Verse 12: “I always do what God commands; I will follow his will, not my own desires.”

Verse 14: “He will fulfill what he has planned for me; that plan is just one of the many he has.”

“Character building is the most important work ever entrusted to human beings; and never before was its diligent study so important as now. Never was any previous generation called to meet issues so momentous; never before were young men and young women confronted by perils so great as confront them today.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 225.

“In the parable, the foolish virgins are represented as begging for oil, and failing to receive it at their request. This is symbolic of those who have not prepared themselves by developing a character to stand in a time of crisis. It is as if they should go to their neighbors and say, Give me your character, or I shall be lost. Those that were wise could not impart their oil to the flickering lamps of the foolish virgins. Character is not transferable. It is not to be bought or sold; it is to be acquired. The Lord has given to every individual an opportunity to obtain a righteous character through the hours of probation; but he has not provided a way by which one human agent may impart to another the character which he has developed by going through hard experiences, by learning lessons from the great Teacher, so that he can manifest patience under trial, and exercise faith so that he can remove mountains of impossibility.”—Ellen G. White, The Youth's Instructor, Jan. 16, 1896.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does “character building” mean? How can you do this? How much of a visible priority is character building within your own life and your church community?

2. Thursday’s study talked about the important role of community in the life of a Christian. How well does your local church function as the body of Christ? How well do you represent the Lord as a community? As a class, talk about what you can do to improve.

3. As a class, talk about the question of why character building is important, even if we are saved by faith alone in Jesus. If His righteousness, and His perfect character, are what saves us, then what do we need to develop character for?

4. Helen Keller, who was deaf and blind from an early age, wrote, “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”—Leadership, vol. 17, no. 4. Do you agree? Discuss the relationships between character, suffering, and the great controversy.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Genesis 22, Job 1:6–2:10, Isa. 43:1–7, Hos. 2:1–12, 2 Cor. 11:23–29.

Memory Text: “Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand” (Isaiah 53:10, NKJV).

As the wife of the famous Christian writer C. S. Lewis was dying, Lewis wrote, “Not that I am [I think] in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not ‘So there’s no God after all’, but ‘So this is what God’s really like.’ ”—A Grief Observed (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1961), pp. 6, 7.

When things become really painful, some of us reject God completely. For others like Lewis, there is the temptation to change our view of God and imagine all sorts of bad things about Him. The question is, Just how hot can it get? How much heat is God willing to risk putting His people through in order to bring about His ultimate purpose of shaping us into the “likeness of His Son”? (Rom. 8:29, NIV).

The Week at a Glance: Why do you think God is willing to risk being misunderstood by those He wants to know and love Him? How much do you think God is willing to be misunderstood in order to mold you into the “likeness of His Son”?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 3.
Abraham in the Crucible

Read Genesis 22. Out of nowhere and without explanation, God suddenly calls Abraham to offer his own child as a burnt offering. Can you imagine how Abraham must have felt? On a human level, it was a totally revolting idea for a holy God to request that you sacrifice your own son. On a spiritual level, even if Abraham thought that this was acceptable, what about God’s promises of an inheritance? Without his son, the promise would be gone.

Why did God ask Abraham to offer this sacrifice? If God knows everything, what was the point?

God’s request and its timing were not random. Indeed, the test was calculated to exert the deepest possible anguish, for “God had reserved his last, most trying test for Abraham until the burden of years was heavy on him, and he longed for rest.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 147. Was this the test of a mad God? Not at all, for “the agony which he endured during the dark days of that fearful trial was permitted that he might understand from his own experience something of the greatness of the sacrifice made by the infinite God for man’s redemption.”—Page 154.

This was just a test—God never intended for Abraham to kill his son. This highlights something very important about the way God sometimes works. God may ask us to do something that He never intends for us to complete. He may ask us to go somewhere He never intends for us to arrive at. What is important to God is not necessarily the end, but what we learn as we are reshaped by the process.

Jesus may have been thinking about Abraham’s experience when He said to the Jews, “‘Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.’” (John 8:56, NIV). Abraham could have missed out on this insight, dismissing the instructions as from Satan. The key to Abraham’s surviving and learning through the whole process was his knowing God’s voice.

How do you know the voice of God? How do you know when God is talking to you? What are the ways He communicates His will to you?
I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

**Key Text:** Isaiah 53:10

**Teach the Class to:**
- **Know:** God’s character remains the same even when circumstances might cause one to doubt His goodness.
- **Feel:** God’s care and concern for us when we easily might conclude that the opposite is the case.
- **Do:** To communicate with God and rely upon His guidance at all times and in all circumstances, even when our gut feelings suggest otherwise.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **God Must Be Crazy? (Genesis 22)**
- **A** Most of us think we have a clear concept of who God is and what He expects of us. What do we do with episodes in the Bible in which God seems to do—or demand—things that go against this understanding?
- **B** Abraham knew God’s voice. How can we know God’s voice, as opposed to some other voice that might be leading us astray?
- **C** Does God ever command us to do things that we know to be immoral?

II. **In the Crucible (2 Cor. 1:8, 9)**
- **A** Have you ever held back from a full commitment to God out of fear of what He might ask of you?
- **B** How can we affirm God’s righteousness and goodness when we have no evidence for it in our lives? How might Job’s example help us?
- **C** Have you ever felt that God was absent from you? How did you deal with these feelings? Can you see God’s presence in retrospect?

III. **Recognizing God at Work (1 Cor. 4:5, 13:12)**
- **A** How does the evidence of the past provide us with reason to hope in the future?
- **B** How can we maintain contact with God when His presence is not obvious?

**Summary:** While God does not want us to suffer, sometimes the suffering is necessary for us to grow in our relationship with Him. Sometimes we may not understand why it is coming our way or what God means by it, but by staying connected to Him, we can gain insight into God’s goodness.
Wayward Israel

The story of Hosea has some powerful lessons to teach us. Hosea’s situation is remarkable. His wife, Gomer, runs away and has children with other men. Though she is sleeping around, God calls Hosea to take his wife back and fully show his love to her again. This story is meant as a parable about God and Israel. Israel had left God and were prostituting themselves spiritually to other gods, but God still loved them and wanted to show His love to them. But just look at God’s methods!

Read Hosea 2:1–12. What methods does God say He will use to pull Israel back to Himself? What would these experiences have felt like?

vss. 2, 3

vss. 5–7

vss. 8, 9

vs. 10

This story raises two important issues about the way we experience God when He is bringing us to repentance.

First, we risk not recognizing that God is at work. When Israel went through such hard and painful experiences, it might have been hard for them to recognize that their God was working for their salvation. When our path is blocked by sharp thorns or we are walled in so we don’t know where we are going (vs. 6)—is this God? When our basic necessities disappear or we are embarrassed (vss. 9, 10)—could our Father be in the middle of it all? The truth is that whatever we feel, God is always working to bring us to repentance, because He loves us so very much.

Second, we risk misunderstanding God when He is at work. We may recognize that God is at work, but we don’t like what He’s doing. While we are feeling hurt and embarrassed, it is easy to blame God for being cruel, for not intervening, or for not caring. But God is always working to renew us through His covenant of love.

Read Hosea 2:14–23. What does this passage reveal about God? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if you have been running from God in any area of your life. If you are convicted that you have been, why wait to go through the crucible? What’s stopping you from surrendering all to the Lord?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate!**

*Just for Teachers:* Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, *Why is this lesson important to me?*

Sometimes when the journey through life gets really tough—*extreme heat,* as this week’s lesson terms it—the key question, asked in Sabbath’s lesson, is, “*Just how hot can it get?*”

That is followed by a key thought, *How much heat is God willing to risk putting His people through in order to bring about His ultimate purpose of shaping us into the likeness of His Son?*

The human dilemma is a lack of a full understanding of just what the love of God means. As we learned about Job, God was willing to risk a major cosmic test because He was convinced that Job would come through. If God puts us into these situations, or does not prevent them from overtaking us, it is because there is a reason or lesson in there somewhere.

So, God may well deem it necessary to apply some extreme heat so that the refining process can do its intended work.

There are, of course, times when our own missteps dump us into the crucible. At these times another aspect of God’s love kicks in, and He launches a rescue operation to get us out.

**STEP 2—Explore!**

*Just for Teachers:* This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *What do I need to know from God’s Word?*

**Bible Commentary**

The man sitting beside me in the Sabbath School class said, “I still don’t have a job. I have filled out dozens of job applications. I have a fairly impressive résumé. I have never worked on Sabbath and don’t intend to. But I still don’t have a job. I’m not sure I really want to sit here and talk about God’s love!”
Surviving Through Worship

**Read** Job 1:6–2:10. What caused Job’s suffering?

There is something astonishing here. The angels come to see God, and Satan comes with them. God asks Satan where he has been, and Satan replies that he has been “‘roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it’” (vs. 7, NIV). Then God poses this question: “‘Have you considered my servant Job?’” (vs. 8, NIV). The question itself is not remarkable; what is remarkable is the One who asks it. It isn’t Satan who points out Job as a subject for examination, but God. Knowing exactly what is going to follow, God calls Job to Satan’s attention. Down on the earth, Job has absolutely no idea how hot his crucible is about to become. And though it’s very clear that it is Satan, not God, who causes Job’s suffering, it is also clear that it is God who gives His explicit permission for Satan to destroy Job’s possessions, children, and his own physical health. If God is giving permission for Job to suffer, what difference does it make whether God or Satan is personally inflicting the suffering? How can God be righteous and holy when He actively allows Satan to cause Job such pain? Is this situation a special case, or is it characteristic of the way God still deals with us today?

**In** Job 1:20, 21, how does Job respond to the trials?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

It is possible to respond to such suffering in two ways. We can become bitter and angry, turning our backs on a God we believe to be cruel or nonexistent, or we can hang on to God more tightly. Job deals with his catastrophe by staying in God’s presence and worshiping Him.

In Job 1:20, 21, we see three aspects of worship that may help when in anguish. First, Job accepts his helplessness and recognizes that he has no claim to anything: “‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart’” (vs. 21, NIV). Second, Job acknowledges that God is still in total control: “‘The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away’” (vs. 21, NIV). Third, Job concludes by reasserting his belief in the righteousness of God: “‘May the name of the Lord be praised’” (vs. 21, NIV).

**Going through a trial? Follow the steps that Job used. How might they help you as well?**
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

I. Mysterious Providence

There’s no easy answer to this brother’s lament. The new-birth experience results in a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17, NIV) that bestows a new citizenship (Eph. 2:19). But this new citizenship leaves the person physically tied to the same world he or she always lived in, but now as a “stranger” and “alien” (see Heb. 11:13, NIV).

Our lesson this week calls this situation extreme heat, and it surely is. Satan influences the powers behind all this (Eph. 6:12). The powers extend to social and governmental systems, the environment, and a host of things that comprise our everyday world.

In spite of all this, the Bible tells us that the everlasting arms of God’s providence are our refuge (Deut. 33:27).

II. Unexplainable Trials and Tribulations

One of the outstanding points in Job’s experience is God’s confidence in Job! Job’s perception of God and His workings eventually broadened, but God had a marked confidence in Job from the very beginning. We would hope and pray that that would be God’s confidence in each of us as individuals.

It also would be of value to point out that Job’s friends got their ideas from “disquieting dreams” (Job 4:13, NIV), traditional ideas (Job 8:8), and personal opinion (Job 11:5, 6). All of these sources abound in our own social circles. In spite of his trials and tribulations, Job never went to these sources. He stuck with the Lord.

III. Adventures, Trials, and Tribulations

With the exception of his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7), Paul’s trials and tribulations are different from those of Job. Paul was a missionary who voluntarily endured shipwrecks, stoning, imprisonment, floggings, bandit raids, dangerous river crossings, lack of sleep and food, and a host of assorted discomforts (2 Cor. 11:23–27). To him these things were an expected part of his ministry, and he harbored no complaints about them.

STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?
Surviving Through Hope

“We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:8, 9, NIV).

As God’s chosen apostle, Paul had endured more than most people. Yet, Paul was not crushed. Rather, he grew in his praise for God. Read his list of hardships in 2 Corinthians 11:23–29. Now read 2 Corinthians 1:3–11.

In verse 4, Paul states that the reason for receiving God’s compassion and comfort is “so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (NIV). To what extent might suffering be a call to ministry? How could we become more alert to this possibility?

God wants to minister through us to hurting people. This means that He may first allow us to experience the same sort of hurts. Then we’ll offer encouragement, not from theory but from our own experience of the compassion and comfort of God. This is a principle from Jesus’ life (see Heb. 4:15).

Paul’s vivid descriptions of his hardships are not to make us feel sorry for him. They are for us to know that even when we’re in the depths, the Father still can intervene to bring His compassion and comfort. We may despair even of our own lives, and even be killed, but fear not, God is teaching us to rely on Him. We can trust Him, for our God “raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:9, NIV).

As Paul continues to set his eyes on proclaiming the gospel, he knows that God will rescue him in the future as well. Paul’s ability to remain firm is supported by three things he mentions in 2 Corinthians 1:10, 11. First, God’s proven track record: “He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us” (vs. 10, NIV). Second, Paul’s determination to fix his concentration on God Himself: “On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us” (vs. 10, NIV). Third, the saints’ continual intercession: “as you help us by your prayers” (vs. 11, NIV).

What can you learn from Paul that can help you from falling into self-pity amid your own struggles?
This man Hosea really goes through some extreme heat. He marries a girl who turns out to be a prostitute. She leaves and goes back to plying her trade, ending up pregnant with other men’s (plural) children. It hardly gets tougher than that!

If we were to find ourselves in this kind of situation, probably the most common reaction would be to seek a divorce lawyer. Hosea jumped from the frying pan into the fire—he went and found his wife and won her back.

We know that this is a story aimed at Israel in Hosea’s own time, but it sounds a lot like a contemporary reality in many people’s lives.

Consider These Applications With the Class:

1. Monday’s lesson states, “God is always working to bring us to repentance, because He loves us so very much.” Does God truly expect me to act like Hosea when facing such a circumstance or its equivalent? How hot does my extreme heat have to get before God backs off—or I burn up?

2. Devise a case study that contains the elements of Hosea’s experience but positioned in your particular environment.

Witnessing

The story of Hosea opens the doors to witnessing activities. If people in the church membership or friends of yours are going through some really tough family situations, the story of Hosea can be of encouragement.

On the other hand, it might just make people mad! Out of their personal anger their reaction may well be, “I will never forgive what he or she did to me!”

In spite of these reactions, retelling the story does bring hope. If the Lord could help Hosea to the point that He did, maybe there is some hope for my situation after all. The dawning of these thoughts may well open the way to a resolution, even if the heat is almost too much to bear.
Extreme Heat

So far this quarter, we have considered many examples of the crucibles that God uses to bring purity and Christlikeness to our lives. However, some people may view these examples and conclude that God is a severe and demanding taskmaster. Sure, some may say, “We know that God wants something good for us, but these examples don’t reveal much care and love. Instead, God looks more like a bully. He sets out on a purpose that causes us considerable hard times, and there’s nothing we can do about it.”

It’s true that while living on this sin-filled earth, we will understand only a little of why things happen. In heaven we’ll understand so much more (1 Cor. 4:5, 13:12), but for now we will have to live with the tension of believing that God is present and caring for us, even though things don’t always feel too good. Isaiah describes this tension very well.

Read Isaiah 43:1–7. In verses 2 and 3, God says that His people will pass through waters and through fire. These are figurative of extreme dangers, but perhaps they hint at the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan, both fearful times but times that paved the way to a new life. You may expect that God might say that He would protect His people from these dangers, that He will guide them along an easier route. But like the Shepherd in Psalm 23, He rather says that when the difficult times come, God’s people need not be overwhelmed—for He is with them.

Look back at Isaiah 43:1–7. Write down the different ways in which God assures His people of comfort during the times of water and fire. What picture of God does this paint in your mind? Which promises can you claim for yourself?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

We could summarize what we have learned about God’s crucibles in three ways. First, God’s extreme heat is to destroy not us but our sin. Second, God’s extreme heat is not to make us miserable but to make us pure, as we were created to be. Third, God’s care for us through all things is constant and tender—He will never leave us alone, no matter what happens to us.

What do these texts teach you about the actions and character of God? Ps. 103:13, 14; Matt. 28:20; 1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Pet. 1:7. How have you experienced the reality of these verses in your own life?
**STEP 4—Apply!**

**Just for Teachers:** In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question, *With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?*

**Something to Think About**


*Overcooking* due to *extreme heat* can make you angry and frustrated with the Lord; it can turn you into a legalist determined to smash your way into the kingdom by any means, or it can be a refining process ending up as joy, whatever form that may take in your circumstances.

Angus adds, “When someone tells me, ‘I had such a blessing the other day,’ I respond with, ‘Great. Now what are you going to do with it?’ ” That’s the responsibility aspect of the refiner’s fire.

**Get the Class Involved**

This lesson is an ideal opportunity to get the class involved in some serious consideration of the problem of *extreme heat*. Try the following activity:

1. Have the class members write down or relate some *extreme heat* situations they have been through.
2. What were the various attitudes that arose as they moved through the *heat*?
3. Include how issues were resolved and how the heat turned down.
4. What was learned as a result?

“God has always tried His people in the furnace of affliction. It is in the heat of the furnace that the dross is separated from the true gold of the Christian character. Jesus watches the test; He knows what is needed to purify the precious metal, that it may reflect the radiance of His love. It is by close, testing trials that God disciplines His servants. He sees that some have powers which may be used in the advancement of His work, and He puts these persons upon trial; in His providence He brings them into positions that test their character. . . . He shows them their own weakness, and teaches them to lean upon Him. . . . Thus His object is attained. They are educated, trained, and disciplined, prepared to fulfill the grand purpose for which their powers were given them.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 129, 130.

“If in the providence of God we are called upon to endure trials, let us accept the cross and drink the bitter cup, remembering that it is a Father’s hand that holds it to our lips. Let us trust Him in the darkness as well as in the day. Can we not believe that He will give us everything that is for our good? . . . Even in the night of affliction how can we refuse to lift heart and voice in grateful praise, when we remember the love to us expressed by the cross of Calvary?”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 316.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. In class, have someone recount his or her own test of faith such as Abraham had. What can you learn from this person’s experience, from his or her successes or failures?

2. Review the last 24 hours of Christ’s life. What extremes did He face? How did He endure? What principles can we take from His example and apply for ourselves when in the midst of our own crucible?

3. Discuss the idea, touched on this week, about how through our own suffering we can minister to others who are suffering. However true it might be, what are some of the problems we might encounter with this idea?

4. Ellen White wrote above: “Let us trust Him in the darkness as well as in the day.” That’s easier said than done. How can we help each other develop the kind of faith that will enable us to do just that? Why is it important to trust God in the bad times?
Struggling With All Energy

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Genesis 32; Matt. 5:29; John 16:5–15; Col. 1:28, 29; 1 Pet. 1:13.

Memory Text: “To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Colossians 1:29, NIV).

A man and woman sat together on a talk show. Both had experienced the murder of a child. The woman’s son had been murdered 20 years before, and her anger and bitterness were as great as ever. The man was totally different. His daughter had been murdered by a terrorist a few years earlier. He spoke about forgiveness toward the killers and about how God had transformed his hurt. However terrible the pain, this man had become an illustration of how God can bring healing to the darkest moments of our lives.

How can two people respond so differently? How does spiritual change occur in the life of the Christian, enabling us to mature through life’s crucibles rather than being completely overwhelmed by them?

The Week at a Glance: What is the role of our wills, and willpower, in the battle with self and sin? How can we avoid the trap of letting our feelings rule the decisions we make? Why must we persevere and not give up when in the crucible?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 10.
The Spirit of Truth

Have you ever prayed, “Please, God, make me good!” but little seems to change? How is it possible that we can pray for God’s great transforming power to work within us, but our lives seem to remain the same? We know that God has unlimited supernatural resources that He so eagerly and freely offers us. We really want to take advantage of it all, and yet, our lives don’t seem to change in a way that matches what God is offering.

Why? One reason is disturbingly simple: While the Spirit has unlimited power to transform us, it is possible to restrict by our own choices what God can do.

Read John 16:5–15. In this passage, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of truth” (vs. 13, NIV). What does this imply that the Holy Spirit does for us?

While the Holy Spirit can bring us the truth about our sinfulness, He cannot make us repent. He can also show us the greatest truth about God, but He cannot force us to believe or obey it. If God did compel us in even the slightest way, we would lose our free will, and Satan would accuse God of manipulating our minds and hearts and thus be able to accuse God of cheating in the great controversy. When the great controversy broke out in heaven, our Father did not compel Satan or any of the angels to believe that He was good and just or compel the angels to repent. And in the Garden of Eden, when so much was at stake again, God made the truth about the tree in the middle of the Garden very clear but did not prevent Eve and Adam from exercising their free will to disobey. God will not act any differently with us today. So, the Spirit presents the truth about God and sin and then says, “In view of what I have shown you, what will you do now?”

It is the same when we are in the crucible. Sometimes the crucible is there precisely because we have not obeyed or repented of our sins. For our Father to work in such cases, we must consciously choose to open the doors of repentance and obedience in order for God’s power to enter through and transform us.

What convictions has the “Spirit of truth” brought to you recently? How well are you listening to His voice? And, most important, what choices are you making with your free will?
I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

Key Text: Colossians 1:29

Teach the Class to:

Know: We must struggle to follow God’s will for our lives.
Feel: The desire to let go of everything that hinders from achieving what God wants for us.
Do: Claim God’s power and promises as we allow God to perfect us.

Lesson Outline:

I. Making the Choice (John 16:5–15)

A Why can’t God simply cause us to be good people who do good things?
B What is the role of the Holy Spirit in turning us in the right direction?
C When can we rely on our feelings in making decisions? What criterion do we have to judge the reliability of our emotions and desires?

II. Radical Commitment (Matt. 5:29)

A While it may never be a good idea to put out one’s eye, have you ever had to forsake something that seemed harmless or even beneficial in itself in order to follow God more faithfully?
B Why does God allow us to be subjected to seemingly unbearable temptation?
C Have you ever had a sinful desire or tendency removed? Was it sudden or gradual?

III. Wrestling With God (Genesis 32)

A In struggling with sinful desires or tendencies, we sometimes find ourselves pitted against not only the desires or tendencies themselves but everything in us. What can we do to hang on, no matter what?
B When Jacob encountered the Angel, he both struggled against and clung to God. How might this reflect our own experience?

Summary: Part of being human is having sinful desires and tendencies that we feel we have no control over. Part of being Christians is allowing God into our lives to help us struggle against those sinful tendencies and desires.
The Divine-Human Combination

What is your greatest accomplishment ever? Chances are, whatever you achieved did not happen simply by rolling out of bed in the morning. If we want to achieve something worthwhile in this life, it takes time and effort. Our discipleship to Christ is no different.

Read Colossians 1:28, 29. Though Paul talks about God working in him, in what ways does he show the human effort also involved? See also Deut. 4:4, Luke 13:24, 1 Cor. 9:25, Heb. 12:4.

In Colossians 1:29 there is a very interesting insight into the way Paul sees his relationship with God in this work. He says that he is struggling—but with the power of God.

The word for “labor” means to “grow weary,” to “work to the point of exhaustion.” This word was used particularly of athletes as they trained. The word for “struggle,” which comes next, can mean in some languages “to agonize.” So, we have the word picture of an athlete straining with everything to win. But then Paul adds a twist to the idea, because Paul is not straining with everything he has but with everything that God gives him. So, we are left with a simple conclusion about Paul’s ministry—it was a ministry done with great personal effort and discipline but done with God’s power. This relationship works in exactly the same way as we pursue the development of Christ’s character in us.

This is important to remember because we live in a world in which we want more and more with less and less effort. That idea has crept into Christianity, too. Some Christian evangelists promise that if you just believe, the Holy Spirit will fall upon you with amazing supernatural power and perform great miracles. But this can be a dangerous half-truth, because it can lead people to the conclusion that we just need to wait for God’s power to come while sitting comfortably in our seats!

What is your own experience with the kind of striving Paul talked about? What things has God laid upon your heart that you are struggling with? How can you learn to surrender to God’s will?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, Why is this lesson important to me?

This week’s lesson deals with four key words: struggle, the will, perseverance, and energy. All these words sound very much like works of merit rather than links in the unfolding of the grace of God in a person’s life. It is very important to make the distinction in the presentation of the lesson. Consistent practice and application is not the same as trying to earn salvation through human merit.

This point of emphasis in this week’s lesson is that discipline is involved in the Christian life. Citizenship in the kingdom carries responsibility!

Some Key Questions to Ask the Class:
1. What does it mean to apply energy to the Christian life?
2. What is a disciplined will?
3. If I am supposed to experience the joy of salvation, why do I have to struggle to pull it off?

Carefully examine with the class members the memory verse, Colossians 1:29:

1. Who labors in this verse?
2. Who struggles?
3. What does he or she struggle with?
4. Where does the power to struggle come from?

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?
The Disciplined Will

One of the greatest enemies of our wills is our own feelings. We are increasingly living in a culture bombarded with pictures and music that can appeal directly to our senses, triggering our emotions—anger, fear, or lust—without us realizing it. How often do we think such things as “What do I feel like eating for supper?” “What do I feel like doing today?” “Do I feel good about buying this?” Feelings have thus become intimately involved in our decision-making. Feelings are not necessarily bad, but how I feel about something may have little to do with what is right or best. Indeed, our feelings can lie to us (“The heart is deceitful above all things” [Jer. 17:9].) and can create a false picture of reality, causing us to make bad choices, setting us up for a crucible of our own making.

What examples can you find from the Bible where people made choices based on feelings rather than on God’s Word? What were the consequences? See, for example, Gen. 3:6; 2 Sam. 11:3, 4; Gal. 2:11, 12.

Read 1 Peter 1:13. What is Peter concerned about, and what does he want his readers to actually do?

Peter understood that the mind is the rudder for the body that we control. Take away the control of the mind, and we will be controlled by whatever feelings blow our way. Imagine walking along a narrow path to the Shepherd’s home. Along the way there are many paths leading in different directions. Some of these paths go to places that we would not want to visit. Others look tempting; they appeal to our feelings, our emotions, our desires. If, though, we take any one of them, we get off the right path and go in a way that might be exceedingly difficult to get off.

What important decisions are you facing? Ask yourself honestly, “How can I know if I am basing my choices on feeling, emotion, or desire, as opposed to the Word of God?”
II. Free Will

Free will is a different story. It involves choices, which presupposes involvement, activity, accountability, and responsibility. This is the way clearly indicated in Scripture.

Consider with your class some of the implications of free will:

1. If you are free to choose, you are also responsible for the choice and its consequences (see Gal. 6:7).
2. If you are free to choose, you can choose what is right. The beauty of this is that the Lord does not require the choice of anything beyond our reach. “Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach” (Deut. 30:11, NIV; see also vss. 12–14 for further clarification).
3. Discipleship, meaning growth in Christian maturity and involvement in the life of the church, is a vital component of free will. Words such as striving, labor, work, service fit here. These are not words that in any way counterpoint God’s saving grace. They are part of the Christian discipline of living according to biblical mandates such as the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20).

Early Protestants, many of whom believed in predestination, were not concerned with discipleship or evangelism, because they felt that the Lord already had chosen who would be saved or lost, so, they had no need to preach to anyone but themselves.
Radical Commitment

“If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matt. 5:29, NIV).

Dwell on the words of Jesus in the above text. Would you call them radical? If so, why?

Radical action is necessary not because God has made the Christian life difficult, but because we and our culture have drifted so far away from God’s plans for us. People often wake up and wonder to themselves, “How could I have gone so far away from God?” The answer is always the same: just one step at a time.

Read Matthew 5:29, 30. Jesus is speaking in the context of sexual sin. However, the underlying principles apply to dealing with other sin, as well. Indeed, the principles can apply to our growth in Christ in general.

What crucial point is Jesus telling us with those words? Are we really called to literally maim ourselves?

Jesus isn’t calling us to physically harm our bodies—not at all! Rather, He is calling us to control our minds and therefore our bodies, no matter the cost. Notice that the text does not say that we should pray and that God will instantly remove the sinful tendencies from our lives. Sometimes God may graciously do this for us, but often He calls us to make a radical commitment to give up something, or start doing something, that we may not feel like doing at all. What a crucible that can be! The more often we make the right choices, the stronger we will become and the weaker the power of temptation in our lives.

God sometimes uses crucibles to catch our attention when there are so many noisy distractions around us. It is in the crucible that we realize how far we have drifted from God. The crucible may be God’s call for us to make a radical decision to return to our Father’s plan for us.
III. Judgment

Free will implies the need for the judgment because there always will be those who choose the wrong side. The issues of the disciplined will and radical commitment in this week’s lessons are vital considerations for a growing Christian character. King Solomon’s advice to “follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment” (Eccles. 11:9, NIV) is as valid and valuable today as it was in his time.

STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

Have the class members take this true or false quiz and then discuss each question. The answers are all in the daily lessons for this week.

T  F 1. Our own choices can restrict what God can do.

T  F 2. Even without the power of God, we easily can control our own wills and do the right thing.

T  F 3. Things like struggling, agonizing, and laboring are part of life, even for a faithful and dedicated believer.

T  F 4. The mind is the rudder for the body, which we can control. Take away that control, and the ship of life will drift off course.

T  F 5. Radical action on God’s part is necessary because we have drifted so far from God’s original plan.

T  F 6. God expects too much. There is no way I can make it even if I struggle with all energy, as the lesson says.

T  F 7. It is only by determined endeavor to correct errors and to conform to right principles that the victory can be gained.

T  F 8. None of this makes any sense to me at all!
The Need to Persevere

Read the story of Jacob wrestling with God (Genesis 32). What does this story say to us about perseverance, even amid great discouragement? (Keep the whole context of Jacob’s situation in mind before you answer.)

We can know what is right and exercise our wills to do the right thing; but when we are under pressure, it can be very difficult to keep holding on to God and His promises. That’s because we are weak and fearful. Therefore, one of the important strengths of the Christian is perseverance, the ability to keep going despite wanting to give up.

One of the greatest examples of perseverance in the Bible is Jacob. Many years before, Jacob had tricked his brother, Esau, and his father into giving him the birthright (Genesis 27), and ever since, he had been running in fear of Esau’s desire to kill him. Even though he had been given wonderful promises of God’s guidance and blessing in his dream of a ladder reaching to heaven (Genesis 28), he was still scared. Jacob was desperate for God’s assurance that he was accepted and that the promises made to him many years before were still true. As he fought someone who was actually Jesus, Jacob had his hip dislocated. From that point on, it could not have been possible to fight, as the pain would have been too excruciating. There must have been a subtle shift from fighting to hanging on. Jacob is hanging on to Jesus through unbearable pain until he receives an assurance of his blessing. So Jesus says to him, “‘Let me go, for it is daybreak’” (Gen. 32:26, NIV).

Jacob’s blessing came because he held on through the pain. So it is with us. God may also dislocate our “hip” and then call us to hang on to Him through our pain. Indeed, God allowed the painful scars to continue—Jacob was still limping when he met his brother. To outside appearances it was a weakness, but for Jacob it was an indication of his strength.

What are some practical choices you can make (associations, lifestyle, reading material, health habits, spiritual life) that will help you better persevere with the Lord amid discouragement and temptation?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

T  F  9. All who are fitted for usefulness must be trained by the severest mental and moral discipline.

T  F  10. Forget it! I don’t want to do it. It’s too hard!

STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

We have reached the halfway point in this quarter’s study of the assorted crucibles we confront in our Christian walk. No one is immune, and no one gets away unscathed. This is a good time to take stock and look these crucibles in the eye.

Consider the following: (These questions can be answered by yes or no, but try to put some reasons with your answers, such as, “Yes, but . . .” or “No, because . . .”).

1. Can you honestly say that you are willing to settle for the fact that you have, and will continue, to face crucibles?

2. Can you really accept the fact that God will let you face crucibles, because He knows that you need to for the reason He has in mind?

3. Does the fact that the Christian life requires a certain amount of discipline, both for correction and for the sake of maturity, bother you?

Try This:
Write a letter to yourself as if you were giving yourself some counsel because you are discouraged and frustrated with the struggle.

“This will, that forms so important a factor in the character of man, was at the Fall given into the control of Satan; and he has ever since been working in man to will and to do of his own pleasure, but to the utter ruin and misery of man.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 515.

“In order to receive God’s help, man must realize his weakness and deficiency; he must apply his own mind to the great change to be wrought in himself; he must be aroused to earnest and persevering prayer and effort. Wrong habits and customs must be shaken off; and it is only by determined endeavor to correct these errors and to conform to right principles that the victory can be gained. Many never attain to the position that they might occupy, because they wait for God to do for them that which He has given them power to do for themselves. All who are fitted for usefulness must be trained by the severest mental and moral discipline, and God will assist them by uniting divine power with human effort.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 248.

Discussion Questions:

1. To what extent do you think that we appreciate that our wills were “at the Fall given into the control of Satan”? How, by focusing on the character of Jesus, can we better appreciate just how fallen we are and how great God’s grace is toward us?

2. Read the story of Jesus in Gethsemane (*Matt. 26:36–43*). What were Jesus’ own feelings and desires, as opposed to God’s will? What can we learn from this example?

3. As a class, talk about the distinct things in your own culture that can work to break down our defenses and leave us more vulnerable to Satan’s attacks. What can we do to help other church members be aware of these dangers, as well as help those who feel the need for help?

4. Do you know someone in your church who hasn’t been there for quite a long time, who might be getting ready to give up or has already given up? What can you do as a group to encourage this person, to help him or her not turn away from Jesus? What practical things can you do to help?
Indestructible Hope

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:5, NIV).

When in church surrounded by smiling people, how easy it is to talk and sing about hope. But when we find ourselves within the crucible, hope does not always seem so easy. As circumstances press around us, we begin to question everything, particularly the wisdom of God.

In one of his books, C. S. Lewis writes about a make-believe lion. Wanting to meet this lion, a person asks if the lion is safe. They’re told that he’s not safe, “but he’s good.”

Even though we don’t always understand God and He seems to do unpredictable things, that doesn’t mean that God is against us. It simply means that we don’t have the full picture yet. But we struggle with the idea that for us to have peace, confidence, and hope, God must be understandable and predictable. He needs to be, in our thinking, “safe.” As such, we set ourselves up for disappointment.

The Week at a Glance: How does our understanding of the character of God help us maintain hope in the crucible?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 17.
The Big Picture

When we are hurting, it is very easy to presume that what happens to us is the only thing that matters. But there is a slightly larger picture than just “me” (see Rev. 12:7, Rom. 8:22).

Read Habakkuk 1:1–4. What did Habakkuk face?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

You might expect that God would say something like “That’s really terrible, Habakkuk; let Me come and help you immediately.” But God’s answer is the opposite. He tells Habakkuk that it is going to get worse. Read this in Habakkuk 1:5–11.

Israel had been taken into captivity by the Assyrians, but God promises that worse is coming: The Babylonians will now carry away the people of Judah. Habakkuk cries out again in verses 12–17, and then waits to see what God is going to say.

How does God’s introduction to the promised destruction of Babylon in Habakkuk 2:2, 3 bring hope?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Habakkuk 2 is God’s promise of the destruction of the Babylonians. Hebrews 10:37 quotes Habakkuk 2:3, hinting of a messianic application to this promise in the future. With the same certainty that the destruction of Babylon was promised, so we also have the certainty of the destruction of “Babylon the Great” (Rev. 18:2, NIV).

Habakkuk was trapped between the great evil surrounding him and God’s promise of worse to come. Yet, this is precisely where we find ourselves in salvation history. Great evil is around us, but the Bible predicts that much worse is to come. The key to Habakkuk’s survival was that he was brought to see the whole picture. Therefore, in chapter 3 he is able to pray an incredible prayer of praise because of what God will do in the future.

Read Habakkuk 3:16–19. What does Habakkuk identify as his reasons for hope? What is the hope of God’s people as we wait for the last prophetic scenes to unfold? How can you make this hope your own?
I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

Key Text: Romans 5:5

Teach the Class to:
- **Know:** God may not seem immediately responsive to even legitimate needs and desires.
- **Feel:** God never forsakes us and has a plan for us in all circumstances.
- **Do:** Look to God for our hope, rather than to other people, things, or events.

Lesson Outline:

I. Who Our Father Is (Job 38)

A. Do you ever feel that God is working against you? Are there circumstances in which this might actually be the case? Why?

B. How do we distinguish God’s waiting from absence or indifference?

C. Why are we often unable to discern God’s hand in our affairs?

II. Hope in Things Not Seen (Isa. 41:13)

A. When Job asks God why he’s suffered all he has, God responds by overwhelming Job with evidence of His own grandeur. Was this really an answer?

B. Given that God doesn’t need us as such, how can we know that we are important to Him and have a place in His plan?

C. Do you find it at all paradoxical that God is so big and yet so concerned with you as an individual? Why is this yet more evidence of His greatness?

III. A God of Hope (Jer. 29:1–10)

A. In normal life, we have many things in which we can place our hope other than God. In adversity, God often regains our attention. Is this true for you? What can you do to change?

B. How can we help others—and let others help us—to continue to place our hope in God first?

Summary: Hope, as a quality second only to love, is a defining characteristic of true, vital Christianity. As Christians, hope is something we must cultivate in a world that often doesn’t seem to provide much reason for it.
Who Our Father Is

Oswald Chambers writes, “Have you been asking God what He is going to do? He will never tell you. God does not tell you what He is going to do; He reveals to you who He is.”—*My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour & Company, Inc., 1963), Jan. 2.

**What** do you think Chambers means by this idea?

As we know, the book of Job begins with great personal tragedy for Job. He loses everything, except his life and his wife, and she suggests that he “‘curse God and die!’” (*Job* 2:9, *NIV*). What follows is a discussion in which his friends try to work out why it has all happened. Throughout all of these discussions, God remains silent.

Then suddenly in *Job* 38 God appears and speaks: “‘Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?’” (*vs.* 2, *NIV*). Without pausing, God asks Job about 60 jaw-dropping questions. Open your Bible and scan through these in *Job* 38 and 39.

After the last question, Job replies, “‘I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more’” (*Job* 40:4, 5, *NIV*). But God is not finished. He then begins again and asks another set of “big” questions in succession.

**Read** *Job’s final response in Job* 42:1–6. What was God trying to tell Job, and what was the effect on him?

God never answers any of the “why” questions of Job’s friends. But God does paint a picture of His unparalleled greatness as revealed through the astonishing works of creation. After this, Job certainly does not need any answers. The need for explanations has been eclipsed by an overwhelming picture of the magnificence of God.

This story reveals a fascinating paradox. Hope and encouragement can spring from the realization that we know so little. Instinctively, we try to find comfort by knowing everything, and so we become discouraged when we cannot know. But sometimes God highlights our ignorance so that we may realize that human hope can only find security in a Being much greater than ourselves.

**Are things that you just can’t understand happening now? If so, focus on the character of God. How can doing that give you the hope that you need to persevere through what’s for now incomprehensible?**
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, Why is this lesson important to me?

Place Yourself in One of These Situations:

• At the bedside of a loved one, you hear the physician say, “There’s nothing more we can do except keep the patient comfortable.” The patient says, “I’m so discouraged. I have nothing to look forward to except death.”

• A colleague says, “I’ve just been fired. I have so many bills. I’m not sure where I’ll find another job. I’m dreading the future.”

• A friend confides in you that his or her spouse has been discovered having an affair. “I’m not sure the marriage will last,” your friend says, in tears. “I have nothing to live for.”

These may be your friends or relatives—or perhaps you. In each situation, people have lost hope. The argument of Scripture is that God has a will and a purpose in all things and that trust in Him will not go unrewarded. God doesn’t fix our immediate needs always. But our long-term prospects—even beyond death—are marvelous. Trust in God is the foundation of an indestructible hope.

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Bible Commentary

I. The Big Picture

Read Habakkuk 1:1–4. Habakkuk’s complaint concerned widespread corruption during the reign of King Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:34–24:7). The rich prospered, while common people were taken advantage of. Habakkuk takes the side of the common people (and this is characteristic of the prophets) against the powerful.
Our Father’s Presence

“‘For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you’” (Isa. 41:13, NIV).

Someone once said, “When God seems far away, who is the one who has moved?” When problems strike, we presume that God has deserted us. The truth is that He hasn’t gone anywhere.

God’s presence seemed very far away to the Jews in exile. Yet, through Isaiah God assures them of future deliverance. However, while the actual return to Jerusalem was still many years in the future, God wanted His people to know that He had not moved away from them and that there was every reason for hope.

Read Isaiah 41:8–14. What reasons for hope can you identify for people waiting eagerly for future deliverance? How does this promise help us as we wait for our exile on earth to end?

One of the most powerful images in these texts is found in verse 13. The sovereign God of the universe says that His people do not need to fear, because He is the One who takes “‘hold of your right hand’” (NIV). It is one thing to imagine God guiding events on earth from a big throne light-years away from our earth. But it is an altogether different picture to realize that He is close enough to hold the hands of His dearly beloved people.

When we are busy, it can be hard to remember that God is so close to us. But when we do remember that He is Emmanuel, “God with us,” it makes such a difference. When God’s presence is with us, so are His purposes, His promises, and His transforming power.

Over the next few days, try an experiment. At every moment possible, try to remind yourself that the God of the universe is close enough to you to hold your hand and is personally promising you help. Keep a record of how this changes the way you live. Be prepared to discuss your experience in class on Sabbath.
Consider This: Are we Seventh-day Adventists prophetic in the sense that the book of Habakkuk was about how powerful people treat the less powerful? How do we as a church deal with questions of the rich oppressing the poor?

Read Habakkuk 2:2, 3. Habakkuk is told he will have to wait for God to act. *Wait!* is one of God’s frequent responses to our prayers. We are to wait for the end of sin (*Rom. 8:23*), for a restored relationship with God (*Ps. 62:5, 1 John 3:2*), for answers to our prayers (*Ps. 40:1*), for justice to be done (*Ps. 37:7, Isa. 30:18*), and for the coming of Jesus (*James 5:7*).

II. Who Our Father Is

While most Christians seem to pray for what they want, the preponderance of Scripture’s best prayers seem to have a deeper goal: to help the one praying to know God.

Read Job 42:3.

Consider This: Job realizes that there are many things about God that he cannot properly understand. How might we overstep our bounds in trying to understand the things of God?

III. Our Father’s Presence

Theologians speak of God as either *transcendent* (that is, above and independent of the material world) or *immanent* (that is, present and within the natural world, and therefore intimately familiar with us). In Isaiah 41:8–14, God assures His people that He is both: Even when they are in a distant land—when they feel especially alienated from Him—He is spiritually no less accessible to them.

Consider This: Do you feel closer to God in some places than in others?

IV. Our Father’s Plans for Us

Jeremiah 29:1–10 is a good example of how God’s purposes and ours are not infrequently at cross-purposes. Israel’s purpose seemed to be to create a great nation, as evidenced by the single-minded pursuit of a monarchy like the surrounding nations had (*Judg. 17:6*).
Our Father’s Plans for Us

Everyone is looking for hope. But from where is it found? For some people, hope is found in the smile of a friend. For others, hope grows from financial security or a stable marriage. Where do you normally look for hope and courage?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

In the book of Jeremiah, the prophet is writing to people who had lost hope in their exile. “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion” (*Ps. 137:1, NIV*). But even though they are heartbroken, Jeremiah lays out reasons why they should not give up hope.

**What reasons for hope are given in Jeremiah 29:1–10?**

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

In this passage, there are three important sources of hope worth highlighting.

First, God tells His people that they should not give up hope, because their situation is not the result of chance or unpredictable evil. For God Himself says, “I carried [Judah] into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon” (*vs. 4, NIV*). Though evil seems to surround them, Judah has never left the center of God’s hands.

Second, God tells His people that they should not give up hope, because He can work even within their present difficulties. “‘Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper’” (*vs. 7, NIV*).

Third, God tells His people that they should not give up hope, because He is going to bring an end to their exile at a specific time. “This is what the Lord says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place’” (*vs. 10, NIV*).

After God explains how He was in charge of their past, is in charge of their present, and will be in charge of their future, He then beautifully conveys His tender care for His people (*see vss. 11–14*).

Read verses 11–14, saying your name after the word *you*, as if God is making these promises to you personally. Apply these promises to yourself in whatever your present struggles might be.
God’s purpose was to grow them into spiritual maturity, with their eternal destiny in mind. Why else would He show so little regard for their national aspirations that He had them exiled to a foreign country and encouraged them to be good citizens there (Jer. 29:4, 7)?

**Consider This:** How do Christians balance patriotism with the truth that earthly kingdoms have no importance in God’s eternal plan?

V. Our Father’s Discipline

The word *discipline* in Hebrews 12:7, NIV, is the Greek *paideia*, which comes from *pais*, meaning a child or pupil. *Paideia* is not retributive punishment but a teacher’s evoking skills and understanding in students by pushing them to study and learn. A better translation might be *instruction*, or *training*, as it is rendered in 2 Timothy 3:16.

**Consider This:** Can you share a hard experience that turned out to be spiritually instructive to you?

► **STEP 3—Practice!**

**Just for Teachers:** This step of the Natural Learning Cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

**Thought Question:**

How do we find the balance between a faith-filled anticipation of God’s response to our needs, while patiently, and perhaps even resignedly, waiting for it?

**Application:**

Many Christians want to encourage those who feel hopeless but don’t know what to say—and may even say unhelpful things. What follows are some difficult situations people encounter. Ask your class to suggest a hope-filled response we could make to the people in these situations.

As you go through the list, attend especially to those in the class who have experienced similar problems. What words or actions encouraged them? Be sure to stress the importance of being available and listening attentively—which is often better than anything you can say!
Our Father’s Discipline

Read Hebrews 12:5–13. What’s the message to us here, and how does it fit in with what we have been studying this quarter?

In Hebrews 12:5–13, the author describes trials in the context of discipline. In the NIV Bible translation, the word discipline appears nearly ten times. In the Greek world, this word was the most basic word for education. So to understand discipline is to understand how God educates us in the school of faith that the author has been describing before in Hebrews 11.

Throughout Hebrews 11, the author has been painting pictures of men and women of faith. Their faith was what kept them going when they were faced with all sorts of trying situations. As we enter chapter 12, the author turns to us, the readers, and says that since so many people have persevered against incredible odds before us, we also can run and finish the life of faith. The key is to fix our eyes upon Jesus (vs. 2) that He may be an example when times are difficult (vs. 3). Reading chapter 12 is like being given a set of reading glasses. Without these glasses our vision or understanding of hardship will always be fuzzy. But if we look through these glasses, it will correct the blurred explanation of suffering that our culture presses upon us. Then we will be able to understand clearly and be able to respond to trials intelligently.


the source of discipline?

our response to discipline?

the goal of discipline?

Read through Hebrews 12:1–13 again. Make a list of all the reasons you can identify with as grounds for hope. How have you experienced this hope in your own times of spiritual “education”?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

• Divorce in a family with young children
• Loss of a spouse after more than fifty years of marriage
• A biopsy disclosing a malignant lump
• Loss of a job at a crucial time
• Loss of a home from fire or natural disaster
• A bankruptcy

STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

Nowadays we use the word *adamant* to refer to someone who is especially stubborn. In ancient literature, *adamant* was a mythical mineral so hard as to be indestructible. *Adamant* was the only substance hard enough to harm the Greek gods. In Roman mythology, the underworld was sealed with columns of solid adamant. Adamantine chains are the only bonds strong enough to imprison Satan in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and Jonathan Swift, in *Gulliver’s Travels*, gives it as the element supporting the machinery that makes his fictional island of Laputa fly. Adamant even shows up in modern fiction, such as in J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and Marvel Comics.

Though adamant is a mythical substance, it makes a good metaphor for the kind of hope that we Christians seek. God’s promises are sure and indestructible; it isn’t always easy, though, to incorporate them into our lives as living truths by which to live our lives with courage and certainty.

Consider This: How do we develop an indestructible, adamantine hope—an expectation of God’s faithfulness so sure and certain that no event in our lives or in the world around us will ever alter it?

“Into the experience of all there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement—days when sorrow is the portion, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind benefactor of His earthborn children; days when troubles harass the soul, till death seems preferable to life. It is then that many lose their hold on God and are brought into the slavery of doubt, the bondage of unbelief. Could we at such times discern with spiritual insight the meaning of God’s providences we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, striving to plant our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills, and new faith, new life, would spring into being.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 162.

Discussion Questions:

1. Ellen White says that “all” of us experience times of “keen disappointment and utter discouragement.” How well do we notice each other as we go through such times? How can we better learn to be agents of hope for each other when we experience such bitter disappointments?

2. As a class, go over your answers to Tuesday’s final question. What difference did it make in your life as you kept the reality of God’s nearness ever before you?

3. In class, read aloud sections in Job 38–41. What kind of picture of God does it present? What do you learn that gives you hope and encouragement? How does the Sabbath fit into this picture? How does it help keep before us the nature and character of God?

4. Hope that transforms comes from heaven. This means that we can pray for hope to be brought into each other’s lives. Spend some time praying for those whose hope has been faltering recently, that their hope may be renewed. More than that, what can you do for others who are in a losing struggle with hope?

5. If someone is willing, ask that person to recount a time when despair and trials caused him or her to lose hope and faith. What turned that person around? What can we share with one another that can help when we are in times of doubt and despair?
Lesson 8

*November 17–23

Seeing the Invisible

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:27, NKJV).

The definition of faith in the book of Hebrews is always challenging. “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1, NIV). How can we be sure about what we do not see? Yet, this is exactly what Moses illustrates in our memory text: “He persevered because he saw him who is invisible” (vs. 27, NIV).

It is even more challenging to realize that we are called to see “him who is invisible” not simply when times are good but especially when everything is going wrong. For this we need faith, a Christlike faith that must be shaped by the truth about God and God’s kingdom. The truth about our Father’s goodness, the power in the name of Jesus, the power of the resurrection, and the compassion of God are essential truths that will enable us to stand strong when we are in the crucible and may be tempted to doubt everything.

The Week at a Glance: What truths about God can help sustain us through even the worst situations?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 24.
Our Father’s Extravagance

“If God really loved me, He would certainly do _______ ___________ for me!” I wonder how many times that thought has flickered through our minds. We look at our circumstances and then begin to wonder whether God really loves us, because if He really did, things would be different.

There are two rationales that often lead us to doubt God’s goodness. First, when we have a burning desire in our hearts and minds for something that we believe is good, the idea that God might want something different for us may seem ridiculous. Second, we may doubt God’s goodness because our experience clashes with what we believe. If something looks good or feels good or sounds good or tastes good, then it must be good. And so we get angry with God when we can’t have it.

This is where faith comes into play. Faith comes into action precisely at those times we are tempted to doubt God and His goodness.

Romans 8:28–39 is a powerful passage that describes the goodness of God toward us. What reasons can you find in the text that can guard our minds against doubting God’s goodness?

In verse 32 there is an important piece of logic that is extremely helpful in guarding us from becoming overwhelmed by our circumstances. “If God didn’t hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn’t gladly and freely do for us?” (The Message). How could we possibly think that God would send Jesus to die for us and then turn mean and stingy?

This means that the truth of God’s generosity to us, seen in the death of Christ, must have a stronger impact in our thinking than all of the doubts that the crucible may generate inside us.

How is it possible for a truth (God’s goodness) to have a more powerful effect on you than your doubts? Spend some time meditating on the truth that God has given Jesus to die in your place and that this incredible generosity continues in a thousand different ways for you today. What does this do for your faith?
I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

Key Text: Hebrews 11:27

Teach the Class to:

Know: What we believe in is true even in the absence of readily visible evidence.

Feel: Trust that God can sustain us through our temptations to doubt.

Do: Let go of our worries and anxieties as we cling to an invisible but all-powerful God.

Lesson Outline:

I. Belief Versus Experience (Rom. 8:28–39)

A Do faith and reality contradict each other? How can we know when we should ignore what appears to be real in favor of what our faith tells us?

B As Christians, what does the historical fact of Christ’s sacrifice tell us about God’s plan for us?

C Can we find concrete examples of God’s goodness and care for us as individuals, even in the worst circumstances?

II. Faith Amid Doubt (John 14:1–14)

A What did Jesus mean when He told His disciples they could do anything in His name (John 14:1–14)?

B Does anything in this context necessarily mean a spectacular change in the circumstances that distress us?

C Why might God not choose to work spectacular, nature-reversing miracles on our behalf?

III. Prayer Versus Worry (1 Pet. 5:7)

A Is worry a sin? Why, or why not?

B Why is prayer in Jesus’ name a particularly powerful weapon against worry and anxiety?

C What is it about a prayerful attitude of mind that precludes worry?

Summary: While our relationship to God often may appear to be of the long-distance variety, we are assured that He is always close at hand. We must learn to see through the eyes of faith to be aware of His continual presence.
In the Name of Jesus

“This ‘If you ask anything in My name, I will do it’” (John 14:14, NKJV).

Jesus was not going to be with the disciples much longer. The One who had been their support and encouragement was going to heaven, and the disciples were beginning to feel confused and powerless. But although the disciples would not be able to physically see Him any longer, Jesus gave them a remarkable promise.

Read John 14:1–14. According to verses 13 and 14, Jesus promises to do for us “anything” that we ask in His name. Because of this, we almost always add onto the end of our prayers, “In Jesus’ name, amen.”

When we say this, what do we normally think it means? What does Jesus mean when He encourages us to pray like this? What clues are there in these verses that help us to understand the point He’s making?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

When our request is “in the name of Jesus,” we can be certain that the whole machinery of heaven is at work on our behalf. We may not see the angels working all around us. But they are—sent from the throne of heaven in the name of Jesus, to fulfill our requests.

Sometimes when we pray in the name of Jesus, we open our eyes and expect everything to be different around us—but it all looks the same. However, while the power of God may come with dramatic effect, as when Jesus calmed the storm, it may also come in quietness, unnoticed, as when the power of God sustained Jesus in Gethsemane. Something dramatic may not suddenly happen, but that doesn’t mean that God is not at work for us.

Read again John 14:1–14. As you read, imagine that Jesus is talking directly to you, face to face. What hope and encouragement can you draw from these promises? At the same time, ask yourself, “What things in my life could be standing in the way of having these promises fulfilled for me? What changes must I purpose in my heart to do?”


**Learning Cycle**

**STEP 1—Motivate!**

*Just for Teachers:* Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, Why is this lesson important to me?

Have you ever watched a stage magician make a person float in midair? He generally will pretend to place his accomplice in a trance then lay him or her across the backs of two chairs. When he removes the chairs, the body seems to hover there without support. The magician even may pass a hoop over the body to convince you there’s nothing holding it up.

But it is only a clever trick. Ingeniously hidden from view is a strong steel support that reaches from behind a curtain and attaches to a body brace worn by the *floater.* The body of the magician’s accomplice looks like it is floating only because the support is invisible to the viewers.

Skeptics may ridicule believers for placing their trust in an often-invisible God. But while God doesn’t reveal Himself readily to the gaze of a skeptical, unbelieving world, His support for the people He loves is tangible and undeniable.

**STEP 2—Explore!**

*Just for Teachers:* This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

**Bible Commentary**

I. Our Father’s Extravagance

*(Read Romans 8:28–39.)*

While God promises here to work for the good of those who love Him, the context shows that this promise has a long-term perspective in mind: The completion of His making all things work for our good doesn’t appear until we are glorified—that is, until the resurrection of the saints and our making our homes in heaven.

*CONTINUED*
The Power of the Resurrection

The Resurrection addresses the problem of human powerlessness. When we think about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we often think about how the death of Jesus was the event that made us legally right with God. And that is, of course, true.

However, the Resurrection adds a specific dimension to salvation. The resurrection of Jesus is meaningful not just because it shows us that one day we will be resurrected, as well. The Resurrection placed Jesus at the right hand of the Father in a position of power and authority. This resurrection power is the same power that God makes available for us today!

In Ephesians 1:18–23, Paul talks about the power of God. What does this text teach us about the power of the Resurrection? What hope and promises for yourself can you find in these verses?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Paul is praying that the Ephesians understand a few things that can be understood properly only with divine help: (1) that there is the hope of transformation and an eternal future to which Jesus has called us; (2) that we understand the power that was manifested in our behalf.

Paul then tries to describe how astonishing this power is. The power that is available to us today is the same power that resurrected Jesus not just out of the ground and back to life but to the place of power at the Father’s right hand.

But Paul doesn’t stop there. The Resurrection didn’t simply give Jesus just any sort of power but the power to rule and provide every possible thing His people could ever need—for all eternity!

Make a list of the areas in your life where you need the power of the resurrected Jesus. When you have finished, pray that this power will be applied to all these areas of need. At the same time, what can you do better, what choices can you make, that can allow this power to work more freely in your life?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: How can we most effectively remind ourselves and teach our children that even in troubling life situations, God is working for our ultimate good?

II. In the Name of Jesus

The words in Jesus’ name often are tacked on to the end of prayers, as though they were a way to make prayers work better. The third commandment (Exod. 20:7) warns of the danger of making insincere or thoughtless transactions in the name of God. So saying in Jesus’ name, without fully appreciating the implications of what these words mean about accepting and living within God’s will, may amount to a kind of taking of Jesus’ name in vain.

III. The Power of the Resurrection
(Review Ephesians 1:18–23.)

Consider This: Focus specifically on the Resurrection, as opposed to the other events of Jesus’ ministry, Passion, and death. Would Jesus’ life be meaningful without it? What does it add to our lives 2,000 years later? Why is the Resurrection so central to all that we believe? What do we have without it?

IV. To Carry All Our Worry
(Read 1 Peter 5:7.)

For many of us, our deepest worries and concerns are private and personal, spoken only to the Lord. Yet in encouraging us to give our burdens to the Lord, Peter quotes from the Jewish hymnbook for public worship, the book of Psalms (55:22). David was rarely shy about speaking his deepest personal concerns aloud in worship. The implication may be that what we consider very private spiritual work should be encouraged and prayed about in corporate worship.

Consider This: Might this idea speak to the value of testimony meetings, now rarely practiced?
To Carry All Our Worry

There is a plaque that some people have in their homes that reads “Why pray when you can worry?” It makes us laugh because we know how often we worry rather than come to God and give Him our concerns.

Someone once said that when our life becomes all tied up, give it to God and let Him untie the knots. How God must long to do this for us. Yet, amazingly we manage to hang on to our problems until we are about to snap. Why do we wait until we are desperate before we go to the Lord?

Read 1 Peter 5:7. Peter is quoting Psalm 55:22. What’s the basic message here for us? See also Matt. 6:25–33.

It is a very simple text. There is no secret hidden in it, and it means exactly what it says. To cast means to do just that, to throw, to give away, so that what is causing the aching and the concern no longer has any connection to you. But, of course, our burdens are not just thrown anywhere. Our worry does not disappear into a void. It is given to our Father in heaven, who promises to sort it out. That’s what Jesus is telling us in the verses in Matthew. The problem in doing this is not that it’s hard; rather, it’s that it just seems too easy, too good to be true.

Anxiety is caused by all sorts of reasons. It could be pressure from work. Unexpected criticism. Feeling that we are unwanted or unloved. Health or financial worries. Feeling that we are not good enough for God. Believing that we are not forgiven.

Whatever they are, one reason why we hang on to our problems is that we think we can sort them out better than anyone else. But Peter urges us to reconsider any such idea. The reason we don’t have to worry is that God cares. But does God still care enough to intervene when a divorce is looming or we feel totally useless? The Bible says that He cares enough to transform any situation.

What are things that cause you worry now? However legitimate they are, however troublesome they are, is there anything too hard for the Lord? Maybe our biggest problem is that even though we believe that God knows about it and can fix it, we don’t believe that He will resolve it the way we would like it resolved. Dwell on that last point and ask yourself how true it is in your own life.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

V. Still Faithful When God Cannot Be Seen
(Review Isaiah 40:27–31.)

Israel appears, in this passage, to want God to fight their battles for them. God’s response is that He will strengthen them to fight their own battles. A major component of spiritual strength, as presented here, is optimism: the belief that God has a goal for our lives that we realistically can expect to reach.

STEM 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

Activity

As a class activity this week, draw on the rich heritage of hymns that encourage us to trust God. If the class is of sufficient size and ability, you may wish to sing a few verses of these hymns together. An accompanist isn’t necessary; sometimes people listen more carefully to the words of hymns when singing a cappella.

1 God’s extravagant love: Romans 8:38, 39 is summed up in the fourth verse of “I’ve Found a Friend.”—The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, no. 186.

2 The power of Jesus’ name: Sing the first verse of the familiar hymn “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name.”—The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, no. 229.

3 The power of the Resurrection: Sing the chorus of “Because He Lives.”—The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, no. 526.

4 God will take our worries: A much-underused hymn is no. 477 in The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, “Come, Ye Disconsolate.” (The word dis-consolate is an old-fashioned word for a discouraged or worried person.)

5 God’s invisible power: Try the lovely Welsh hymn, “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise.”—The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, no. 21. Its words are some of the most poetic in our hymnal.
Still Faithful When God Cannot Be Seen

To think that no one cares about what is happening to us is very unpleasant. But to think that God does not know or care about us can be most distressing.

To the Judeans exiled in Babylon, God did not seem to care much about their situation. They were still exiled, still feeling abandoned by God because of their sin. But Isaiah speaks words of comfort to them. Isaiah 40 is a beautiful passage in which Isaiah speaks so tenderly to the people about their God: “He tends his flock like a shepherd: he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young” (vs. 11, NIV). But after so long, the exiles were thinking, Where are You, O Lord? We can’t see any evidence that You are still there—or care!

Read Isaiah 40:27–31. In what ways does Isaiah describe God? How is this description of God meant to answer their belief that “ ‘My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God?’ ” (vs. 27, NIV).

Another group of people who might have considered that their way was hidden from God is found in the book of Esther. In this book, God is not mentioned even once. However, the whole story is an unfolding drama of God’s intervention to save His people from an irrevocable law to have them destroyed. Not only does this story describe the events of the past, but it symbolizes a time in the future during which God’s people will again be persecuted and a law again introduced for their destruction (Rev. 13:15). Can you imagine how easy it would be to conclude that if such terrible circumstances were existing, God must surely have deserted His people? But we are not to fear. The same God who saved His chosen ones in the story of Esther will save them again in the final crisis.

We have read how Isaiah described God to the exiles. How would you describe God to people who felt that God had disappeared and abandoned them? How would you teach them to see through the eyes of faith and not be dependent on what they see around them with their human eyes?
STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

Just because something is invisible doesn’t mean it is without power. Think of magnetism, wind, radiation, and germs. None are visible to the naked eye, but their effects can be extraordinary. Though God is invisible, His effects on our life can be extraordinary, as well—just as they were in the life of Moses.

“Moses had a deep sense of the personal presence of God. . . . Moses believed in God as one whom he needed and who would help him because of his need. God was to him a present help.

“Much of the faith which we see is merely nominal; the real, trusting, persevering faith is rare. Moses realized in his own experience the promise that God will be a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 651.

Consider This: Faith, as we see it demonstrated today, is so often shallow or, at best, merely intellectual. Real faith is not just a statement of belief but the effect of God’s invisible power demonstrated in visible ways. How can we put our faith into practice in such a way that we see God’s power solving life’s problems and encouraging us in our daily walk?

“Moses was full of confidence in God because he had appropriating faith. He needed help, and he prayed for it, grasped it by faith, and wove into his experience the belief that God cared for him. He believed that God ruled his life in particular. He saw and acknowledged God in every detail of his life and felt that he was under the eye of the All-seeing One, who weighs motives, who tries the heart.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, pp. 651, 652.

“Has not God said He would give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him? And is not this Spirit a real, true actual guide? Some men seem afraid to take God at His word, as though it would be presumption in them. They pray for the Lord to teach us and yet are afraid to credit the pledged word of God and believe we have been taught of Him. So long as we come to our heavenly Father humbly and with a spirit to be taught, willing and anxious to learn, why should we doubt God’s fulfillment of His own promise? You must not for a moment doubt Him and dishonor Him thereby. When you have sought to know His will, your part in the operation with God is to believe that you will be led and guided and blessed in the doing of His will. We may mistrust ourselves lest we misinterpret His teachings, but make even this a subject of prayer, and trust Him, still trust Him to the uttermost, that His Holy Spirit will lead you to interpret aright His plans and the working of His providence.”—Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases, vol. 6, p. 225.

“Faith grows strong by coming in conflict with doubts and opposing influences. The experience gained in these trials is of more value than the most costly jewels.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 555.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, talk about the kinds of things we believe in that we do not see, things that we know are real yet are beyond our sight. How can this help us understand what it means to see “Him who is invisible”?

2. Discuss the final question found at the end of Wednesday’s lesson. How often do we find ourselves in that situation? What can we do that will better enable us to trust that the Lord’s way is the best, even if it’s not what we want?

3. If “faith grows strong by coming in conflict with doubts and opposing influences” and this leads to something extremely valuable—“of more value than the most costly jewels”—how should this shape the way we look at such conflicts?
A Life of Praise

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Josh. 5:13–6:20, 2 Chron. 20:1–30, Psalm 145, Acts 16:16–34, Phil. 4:4–7.

Memory Text: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4, NIV).

It’s always easy to shout with joy to the Lord when we feel joy. It’s not so easy, however, when things are bad, when we are in the worst situations imaginable, when the crucible tightens. Yet, it’s precisely then that we need, perhaps, more than ever to praise God, for praise is a means of helping us sustain faith.

Indeed, praise can transform even our darkest circumstances, maybe not in the sense of its changing the facts around us, but in the sense that it can change us, and those around us, in a way that helps us face challenges.

Praise is faith in action. It may not always be natural to us, but when we practice praise so that it becomes a natural part of our lives, it has the power both to convert and conquer.

The Week at a Glance: What is praise? How could praise be such a powerful spiritual weapon in difficult circumstances? How can praise transform us and the situation around us?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 1.
Framework for Praise

The great Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevski had been sentenced to death, only to have the sentence commuted at the last moment. He spent years in prison instead. Talking about his prison experience, he wrote: “Believe to the end, even if all men go astray and you are left the only one faithful; bring your offering even then and praise God in your loneliness.”

In these lessons we have already seen how Paul endured incredible opposition and persecution. But now he is sitting in a Roman prison. But he is not depressed; instead, he is eagerly writing to encourage the believers in Philippi!

Read Philippians 4:4–7. How do you think Paul could have written such things when he himself was sitting in a prison? What are the keys in this verse to gaining the “peace of God”?

__________________________________________
__________________________________________

It is one thing to rejoice when everything is going well. But Paul exhorts us to rejoice always. That may sound strange. If we take what Paul writes literally, there are two critical implications for us.

First, if we are to rejoice always, it must mean that we should be rejoicing even when circumstances do not appear to give any grounds for rejoicing. Second, if we are to rejoice always, it must also mean that we are going to have to learn to rejoice at times when we do not feel like it.

Paul is calling us to praise God even though many times it may seem quite unnatural to us. It may even seem unreasonable. But as we will see, it is precisely because there are times where it appears unreasonable that we are called to rejoice. In other words, praise is an act of faith. Just as faith is based not on our circumstances but rather on the truth about God, so praise is something we do, not because we feel good, but because of the truth of who God is and what He has promised us. And amazingly, it is such faith that begins to shape our thoughts, feelings, and circumstances.

What is the truth about God that Paul identifies in today’s text—truth that enables him to rejoice, even in prison? Write down a short list of what you know to be the truth about God. Go through the list and praise God for each item. How does this change the way that you feel about and view your circumstances?
**I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .**

**Key Text:** Philippians 4:4

**Teach the Class to:**

**Know:** Praise is not something we do when we think of it or feel like it; it is a way of life that we must cultivate.

**Feel:** A realization that God is the source of all our needs, which will lead to a genuine desire to praise God.

**Do:** Allow our praise of God to penetrate our daily lives and give us courage that we otherwise might not possess.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. A Life of Praise (*Phil. 4:4–7)*

A. Does God need us to praise Him, or is the praise more for our own benefit? Why does God want our praise?

B. When Christians refer to praise, they usually mean something specific that takes place in a church service. How does the biblical concept of praise go beyond this?

C. How does praise transform our reaction to our circumstances?

II. Rejoice Always (*Acts 16:16–34)*

A. Why should we rejoice always? Is everything that happens to us God’s will?

B. If everything that happens to us isn’t necessarily God’s will, how can praise to God transform events or situations?

C. Is it sometimes necessary to discipline ourselves to praise God when things seem to be going well?

III. Praise and Reality (*2 Chron. 20:1–30)*

A. Why is it beneficial to express praise of God verbally?

B. How can our outwardly expressed praise affect those around us?

C. Have you ever been in a situation that appeared to have been changed directly and dramatically for the better by your praise of God?

**Summary:** God wants our praise, because praising Him helps us to remain mindful of our relationship to Him. Whatever occurs in your world, continue to praise God and watch its impact on your attitude and environment.
Praying Down Walls

There’s an expression in English: “to be painted into a corner.” Imagine painting the floor of a room but then realizing that you have wound up in a corner and cannot get out—except by walking over the fresh paint. You have to stay there until it dries!

Sometimes our faith seems to paint us into a corner. We arrive at a situation, and, like the wet paint on the floor, our faith “traps” us. We look at the situation and either have to reject God, faith, and everything we have believed in, or our faith compels us to believe what appears impossible.

God brought the Israelites to a corner. After they had wandered for 40 years in the wilderness, God did not lead His people to empty, peaceful grasslands. God led them to one of the most strongly fortified cities in the whole area. Then they had to walk around Jericho in silence for six days. On the seventh day God told them to shout—and that shouting, together with the trumpets, would bring victory.

Read Joshua 5:13–6:20. What is God trying to teach the Israelites?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Shouting loudly was not going to cause vibrations to trigger the walls to collapse. When God called the Israelites to “shout,” it was the same type of shouting that David writes about in Psalm 66: “Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious!” (vss. 1, 2, NIV). This shouting was praise! After six days of looking at the huge walls, they must have concluded that they hadn’t a chance of breaking them down themselves.

How does this idea help us understand the meaning of Hebrews 11:30?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

When God is on the verge of doing something new in our lives, He may bring us to a Jericho, for He may need to teach us that the power to triumph does not come in our own strength and strategies. Everything we need comes from outside ourselves. So, no matter what is in front of us, no matter how insurmountable it may seem, our role is to praise God—the source of everything we need. This is faith in action.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, Why is this lesson important to me?

There is a tendency among modern people to treat life as nothing more than a series of problems to be solved—preferably by means of power and force. For example:

When they feel they’ve been treated unfairly, some contact a lawyer and investigate filing a lawsuit, rather than trying to talk it through with the people involved.

When sick, patients often opt for surgery, even if the problem could be solved by simpler means.

When one country threatens others, more powerful countries often answer its threats with military force, rather than first attempting mediation.

There is an appropriate place for each of these responses, of course. Yet, Scripture suggests that Christians have a larger repertoire of responses to choose from. To meet life’s problems with praise and prayer seems the oddest of these to people accustomed to relying upon power and force. Yet, praise is a powerful, optimistic response and one whose power to effect change often is underestimated.

Consider This: How would the world be different if everyone saw life’s challenges as opportunities to praise God?

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Bible Commentary

I. Framework for Praise  
(Read Philippians 4:4–7.)

Praise, thanksgiving, and prayer as strategies to meet life’s difficulties appear of little value to the power-seeking, problem-solving mind. Yet, in
The Life of Praise

Praising the Lord might not be natural to us, even in good circumstances. Thus, how much more difficult to do it in bad ones? Yet, that is what we are called to do. Praise is something that must be practiced until it changes from being an activity done at a particular time to an atmosphere in which we live. Praise shouldn’t so much be a specific act but a specific way of life itself.

Read Psalm 145. What are the reasons David gives for praising God? In what ways should the words of this psalm be your own?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

The great British preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote a book called The Practice of Praise. It is based on verse 7 of today’s psalm. In this short verse, Spurgeon calls our attention to three important things that can help in developing praise in our lives.

1. **Praise is practiced as we look around us.** If we do not look around us to see the greatness of God, we will have no reason to praise Him. What can you see in the created world that is praiseworthy, such as the beauty of God’s creation? What can you see in the spiritual world that is praiseworthy, such as the growing faith in a young Christian?

2. **Praise is practiced as we remember what we have seen.** If we want to live in an atmosphere of praise, we must be able to recall the reason for it. In what ways can we remember the great things about God, so that His goodness and the truth about Him do not slip from our minds (such as developing new rituals or symbols that remind us of His goodness)?

3. **Praise is practiced as we talk about it.** Praise is not something that we do in our heads. It is meant to come out of our mouths, to be heard by those around us. What reasons can you think of to praise God verbally? What will the effect of such praise be, and on whom?

Take a pen and some paper and spend some time working through these three points. What can you do to develop the habit of praise in your life?
addition to enlisting heaven’s energies on our behalf, they are the foundation of a distinctly Christian attitude. For in shifting the exercise of power from us to God, Christians are freed to manifest a determined and unmistakable gentleness (vs. 5, NIV). The Greek word (epieikes) connotes generosity, magnanimity, and even a willingness to yield to others. In 2 Corinthians 10:1, Paul attributes gentleness as a central quality of Christ’s personality.

Consider This: Give an example of gentleness being more effective in solving a problem than more conventional means.

II. Praying Down Walls

God’s sanctioning the killing of whole tribes is a legitimate theological difficulty in the story of Jericho’s collapse (Joshua 5:13f–6:27). In this discussion, however, try to keep the class focused on the interpretation of the story offered in Hebrews 11:30, an example of God doing the heavy work in response to His people’s faith, praise, and prayer.

III. The Life of Praise

Psalm 145 is known to Hebrew readers as the tehillah of David, meaning David’s praise. While many psalms have notes of praise, the tehillah is noteworthy in its lofty, artistic development of this theme. (For more on this psalm, see Step 3—Practice!)

IV. A Witness That Convicts
(Read Acts 16:24, 25.)

The striking thing about verse 25 is not simply that the apostles were singing and praying while imprisoned but the offhand, matter-of-fact way in which it is mentioned. The rapid juxtaposition of arrest with singing and praise suggests that the writer of Acts was so used to this kind of behavior from the apostles that it is not terribly noteworthy to him. To modern people, accustomed to prayer as a private exercise, the apostles’ lack of bashfulness reminds us that praise for God is something we can do publicly, even when surrounded by those who may not share our convictions.

Consider This: What do people hear from you when you’re going through hard times? Complaints, or praise?
A Witness Who Convicts

In the book of Acts, praise had an astonishing effect on those who heard it. Read Acts 16:16–34. Having been stripped and beaten hard, Paul and Silas were thrown into prison. No one was there to put ointment on their badly cut and bruised backs. In great physical pain and with their feet in stocks, they were placed in the darkness of the inner prison. But as the other prisoners sat listening, Paul and Silas begin to pray and sing.

After the earthquake, and after the jailer had discovered that neither Paul nor Silas nor any of the other prisoners had escaped, he “fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’” (vss. 29, 30, NIV).

Why did this event cause the jailer to focus on his own need of salvation? What role do you think Paul’s and Silas’s prayers and songs played in the prisoners’ not running away, and in the conversion of this man and his whole family?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

It is amazing to think that our praise can transform the eternal destinies of those around us. If Paul and Silas had sat in the dark mumbling and complaining as prisoners often do, do you think anyone would have been saved that night?

We don’t know what happened to the jailer and his family later on, but can you imagine them reading the words that Paul later wrote from another prison in Rome: “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have” (Phil. 1:29, 30, NIV). If they did read this and reflected on how Paul’s suffering had brought them joy, it surely must have brought a song to their hearts and a fresh challenge to remain faithful, no matter the cost.

Who do you think could be influenced for God by a song of praise that could come from your heart? Make a concerted effort to be more open and effusive in your praise to God around others. You don’t know the positive effect it could have.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

V. A Weapon That Conquers

Recount the main points of Jehoshaphat’s battle in 2 Chronicles 20:1–30. This story, like that of the fall of Jericho, shows that praise and prayer do not imply passivity; in both cases God expected cooperative action on the part of those praying for help.

STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

Class Activity: Praise is a part of the spiritual life that is better understood in practice than by theological analysis. Today lead your class in some shared praise activities.

1 Enlist class members in performing a dramatic reading of Psalm 145. Rather than simply mumbling through it—as often happens with Scripture readings—coach the class in an enthusiastic, praiseful, choral responsive reading. (You may wish to use number 705 in The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, a shorter version of the psalm.) If you have access to someone with acting or drama-coaching experience, have them assist you in performing the choral reading with suitable emotions and gestures.

2 Have the class write personal praise psalms to share. You may provide a template such as this:

Lord, You are (list qualities of God)

______________________________________________________________________________

In this world, You have (include acts and signs of God observable to all)

______________________________________________________________________________

I praise You that in my life, You have (describe personal signs of God in your life)

______________________________________________________________________________

CONTINUED
A Weapon That Conquers

Read 2 Chronicles 20:1–30. As Jehoshaphat discovered, praise is a powerful weapon. After receiving the report that a “vast army” was coming against him, Jehoshaphat did not immediately jump to military action but “resolved to inquire of the Lord” (vs. 3, NIV). As the people of Judah came to Jerusalem for a fast, Jehoshaphat admitted the reality of the situation, saying that “we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you” (vs. 12, NIV).

When you see a “vast army” approaching, what is your instinctive reaction? From Jehoshaphat’s response in verses 3–12, what can you learn about dealing with overwhelming opposition?

As the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, he boldly announced: “You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you” (vs. 17, NIV). After that, they worshiped God and sang praises to Him “with very loud voice” (vs. 19, NIV). Even though God was going to fight for them, they still had to go out to face the enemy.

But this was no ordinary march to war. Jehoshaphat appointed a choir to sing praises to the Lord as they marched out. “As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated” (vs. 22, NIV). According to the author, God intervened at the very moment they exercised their faith in His promise, as they began to “praise him for the splendor of his holiness” (vs. 21, NIV).

Read through the texts for today again. What spiritual principles can you find there that can be applied to your own walk with God, especially in times of trial and stress?
In the future, I know that I can trust You to (list expectations of God’s actions in your life or in the world)

Remember that David wrote in the language and idioms of his day about current events, and from a personal point of view. Ask class members to avoid stained-glass language and Bible-sounding words in favor of very personal, modern reasons to praise God.

**STEP 4—Apply!**

**Just for Teachers:** In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

One of the greatest works of Christian devotion is Augustine of Hippo’s *Confessions*. Written about four hundred years after Christ, it is the heartfelt account of Augustine’s journey to God, which led to his becoming one of the early church’s most influential evangelists and theologians. He begins the *Confessions* with praise—specifically, with a quotation from Psalm 145:

“You are great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised: great is your power and to your wisdom there is no limit. And man, who is a part of your creation, wishes to praise you, man who bears about within himself his mortality, who bears about within himself testimony to his sin and testimony that you resist the proud. Yet man, this part of your creation, wishes to praise you. You arouse him to take joy in praising you, for you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”—*The Confessions of St. Augustine*, book 1, chap. 1, vss. 1–3 (New York: Image Books, 1960), p. 43.

According to Augustine, prayer arises naturally when we reflect on our own mortality, sinfulness, pride, and need for God. To Augustine, praise was the essential first step in spiritual growth.

**Consider This:** Psalm 22:26 says that “they who seek the Lord will praise him” (*NIV*). If you’ve ever felt that your relationship with God was lacking something, consider the possibility that the missing element is systematic and sincere praise.
Friday November 30


“Then let us educate our hearts and lips to speak the praise of God for His matchless love. Let us educate our souls to be hopeful and to abide in the light shining from the cross of Calvary. Never should we forget that we are children of the heavenly King, sons and daughters of the Lord of hosts. It is our privilege to maintain a calm repose in God.”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 253.

“And while I adore and magnify Him, I want you to magnify Him with me. Praise the Lord even when you fall into darkness. Praise Him even in temptation. ‘Rejoice in the Lord alway,’ says the apostle; ‘and again I say, Rejoice.’ Will that bring gloom and darkness into your families? No, indeed; it will bring a sunbeam. You will thus gather rays of eternal light from the throne of glory and scatter them around you. Let me exhort you to engage in this work, scatter this light and life around you, not only in your own path, but in the paths of those with whom you associate. Let it be your object to make those around you better, to elevate them, to point them to heaven and glory, and lead them to seek, above all earthly things, the eternal substance, the immortal inheritance, the riches which are imperishable.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, pp. 593, 594.

Discussion Questions:

1. **What role does community praise have in the life of the Christian?** How would you describe the praise in your Sabbath services? Is it uplifting? Does it encourage members to maintain faithfulness amid trial and trauma? If not, what can be done?

2. **What does it mean to “praise the Lord even when you fall into darkness” or to “praise Him even in temptation”?** How can praise help us through these situations?

3. **Let members give testimonies on how praise has affected their lives.** What can you learn from each other’s experiences?

4. **As a class, pick a psalm of praise and spend time reading it.** What does it teach you about praise? What impact does praise have on your faith?
Meekness in the Crucible

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5, NIV).

We don’t hear the word meek used much, except maybe when reading about Moses or studying the Beatitudes. It’s not hard to figure out why, either. Meekness is defined as “enduring injury with patience and without resentment.” No wonder we don’t hear much about it; it’s hardly a trait well respected in culture today. Sometimes the Bible translates this word as “humble.” Again, humility isn’t a character trait seen as desirable by most cultures, either.

But meekness, enduring injury with patience and without resentment, is one of the most powerful characteristics of Jesus and His followers. And yet, it’s not an end in itself: Meekness of spirit can be a powerful weapon in the hands of those who are in the midst of pain and suffering. Indeed, the crucible is a great place to learn meekness of heart, for through our own meekness and broken places we can be powerful witnesses for God.

The Week at a Glance: What is the relationship between suffering and meekness? How can we, in our own meekness and broken places, be a witness to others? How can meekness really be a strength, not a weakness, for the Christian?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 8.*
Broken Bread and Poured-Out Wine

Oswald Chambers has said that we are to become “broken bread and poured-out wine” for others. What do you think he means by this?

All through the Bible there are examples of people being “broken” to serve others. Moses was called to endure unending waves of gossip and criticism as he led people to the Promised Land. Joseph was called to a journey that involved betrayal and imprisonment as he was brought to a position of service in Egypt. In each case, God permitted the situations in order that His people’s lives could become theaters of His grace and care, not only for themselves but for the good of others, as well. God may use us in the same way. It is easy to feel angry or hurt in such situations. But as we noted yesterday, meekness is the God-given ability to endure such things “with patience and without resentment.”

Read Ezekiel 24:15–27. What’s happening here? Why was Ezekiel put through this crucible?

In verse 24 God says, “ ‘Ezekiel will be a sign to you; you will do just as he has done. When this happens, you will know that I am the Sovereign Lord’ ” (NIV). Through Ezekiel’s example the people of Israel were going to be convicted of the truth about who God was, the Sovereign Lord—as they experienced the fulfillment of the prophecy that Ezekiel’s life was symbolizing. But they would see this only because Ezekiel became broken in the fingers of God—for them. Who knows how many people will see “the Sovereign Lord” through us in our own broken places, as well?

Sooner or later life itself breaks us all. What has been your experience with being broken? What lessons have you learned? How can your own broken soul be used by the Lord to help other people?
I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

**Key Text:** 1 Peter 4:12, 13

**Teach the Class to:**
- **Know:** Meekness, or patience in the face of injury, is necessary in the Christian life.
- **Feel:** A willingness to love our enemies in the sense that we can see them through God’s eyes.
- **Do:** Allow God to take control of our reactions in instances in which we face injustice or mistreatment.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **Meekness** *(Matt. 5:5)*

- **A** Most religions or spiritual traditions embrace some form of meekness as a quality to be desired. Why then is it disdained in the real life of most societies?
- **B** How does meekness make us better able to witness for God?
- **C** Meekness usually is thought of as a New Testament virtue; can you think of instances in the Old Testament that teach the value of meekness?

II. **Loving Our Enemies** *(Matt. 5:43–48)*

- **A** How does Jesus’ example help us in the difficult task of loving our enemies?
- **B** Why is loving our enemies in the biblical sense different from merely excusing unjustifiable actions, or being a doormat? Is it different?
- **C** How can God help us to learn how genuinely to love our enemies?

III. **A Closed Mouth** *(Matt. 11:29)*

- **A** Are there ever situations during which we should speak out against injustice? If so, how can we keep it from becoming hate for the person committing the injustice?
- **B** Is meekness in the face of injury and injustice synonymous with inaction? Keep in mind that some among us may take seriously this position.
- **C** Have you personally suffered injustice? How did you react? What were the results?

**Summary:** While meekness and humility may appear to be weak by worldly standards, Jesus valued them enough that He promised that the meek would inherit the earth.
Interceding for Grace

Read Exodus 32:1–14. What role do we find Moses playing here?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

After the people began worshiping the golden calf, God decided they had gone too far and announced that He would destroy the people and make Moses a great nation. But rather than taking up God’s offer, Moses pleaded for God to show grace to His people, and God relented.

Exodus 32:1–14 raises two important issues. First, God’s offer to destroy the rebellious people and bless Moses was a test for him. God wanted Moses to demonstrate just how much compassion he felt for these desperately disobedient people. And Moses passed. Like Jesus, he pleaded for mercy for sinners. This reveals something very interesting: Sometimes God may also allow us to face opposition, He might allow us to be in a crucible so that He, we, and the watching universe can see how much compassion we have for those who are wayward.

What reasons did Moses give for asking the Lord not to destroy Israel?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Second, this passage shows that opposition and disobedience are calls to reveal grace. Grace is needed when people least deserve it. But when they least deserve it is also the time that we feel the least like offering it. But when Moses’ sister, Miriam, was criticizing him, he cried out to the Lord to heal her from leprosy (Numbers 12). When God was angry with Korah and his followers and threatened to destroy them all, Moses fell on his face to plead for their lives. The next day, when Israel grumbled against Moses for the death of the rebels and God threatened to destroy them all again, Moses fell facedown and urged Aaron quickly to make atonement for them all (Numbers 16). In his own meekness, in his own selflessness in the midst of this crucible, Moses sought grace on behalf of those who certainly didn’t deserve it.

Think about the people around you who you think are the least deserving of grace. How can you, with meekness and selfless humility, be a revelation of God’s grace to them?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, Why is this lesson important to me?

Don’t take it for granted that your class members understand biblical meekness. While people know meekness as a biblical concept, very few understand what it means or, for that matter, aspire to be meek. People may think of meekness (or its synonym, humility) as weakness, being a doormat to others, a mousy timidity, ignorance, having no opinions of one’s own, or a lack of ambition. Why would anyone want to adopt those qualities?

Consider, However, a Few of the Humble People of Scripture:

- Moses: Numbers 12:3
- Hezekiah: 2 Chronicles 32:26
- Jesus: Matthew 11:29
- Paul: Acts 20:19

While these are said to be humble before God, none of them were weak. Rather, an intentionally cultivated humility was part of their survival strategy for hard times. It helped them to trust God and to avoid resentment.

This quarter’s lessons suggest ways of surviving difficult times by adopting attitudes that may be counterintuitive to modern coping strategies. In a world in which success is sometimes synonymous with trampling on others, few other demonstrations of power are so distinctly Christian as humility.

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Bible Commentary

I. Broken Bread and Poured-Out Wine

(Review the main points of Ezekiel 24:15–24.)

This is a troubling story. But discussing why (or whether) God killed...
Loving Those Who Hurt Us

Someone once said: “Loving our enemies, then, does not mean that we are supposed to love the dirt in which the pearl is buried; rather it means that we love the pearl which lies in the dust... God does not love us because we are by nature lovable. But we become lovable because He loves us.”

When you look at your “enemies,” what do you normally see—the pearl or the dirt around it?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Read Matthew 5:43–48. Jesus calls us to love and pray for our enemies. What example from nature does Jesus give us there that helps us understand why we should love our enemies? What’s the point He is teaching us?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

In verse 45, Jesus uses the example of His Father in heaven to illustrate how we should treat those who hurt us, who perhaps put us in the worst kind of crucibles. Jesus says that His Father sends the blessing of rain to both the righteous and the unrighteous; if God gives even the unjust rain, how then should we treat them, as well?

Jesus isn’t trying to say that we should always have a warm, fuzzy feeling to everyone who causes us trouble, though this may also be possible. Fundamentally, love for our enemies is not meant to be a feeling we have for them but specific actions toward them that reveal care and consideration.

Jesus concludes this passage with a verse that often causes a lot of debate: “‘Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect’” (vs. 48, NIV). But the meaning is very clear in the context: Those people who want to be perfect as God is perfect must show love to their enemies as God shows love to His. To be perfect in God’s sight is to love the opposition; and to do this takes a meekness of heart that only God can give.

Keeping in mind our definition of meekness (“enduring injury with patience and without resentment”), list the changes you must make in order to allow the Lord to give you the kind of meekness of heart that will help you have the right attitude toward “enemies.”
Ezekiel’s wife will yield less to the lesson’s point than God’s purpose as stated in verse 24: that Ezekiel’s humble reaction to the misfortune is to be an object lesson to clarify Israel’s understanding of God.

Consider This: Has observing someone’s reaction to misfortune ever helped your understanding of God?

II. Interceding for Grace

intercession against God’s wrath over the golden calf incident displays a boldness bordering on impudence.

Almost impertinent is his warning God (as if God doesn’t know) of the damage that His anger will do to His reputation: After all the effort of bringing Israel out of Egypt, says Moses, His rage now would suggest to the Egyptians that Israel’s being rescued was a bad idea from the start. Moses finishes with bold demands: Stop being angry, change Your mind, and remember Your promises.

Consider This: How demanding do we have the right to be when interceding with God?

III. Loving Those Who Hurt Us

(Read Matthew 5:43, 44.)

“In its absoluteness and concreteness, it is without parallel in paganism or Judaism. The command should not be understood abstractly, ‘love all people, including even enemies.’ In Jesus’ situation it referred particularly to the occupying Roman forces, and thus to national enemies as well as to competing religious groups and personal enemies.”—The New Interpreter’s Bible, vol. VIII (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1995), p. 195.

Consider This: Is it possible to love an especially hateful enemy—such as a terrorist? How would such love be manifested?

IV. A Closed Mouth

(Read 1 Peter 2:18–25.)

This passage has been controversial because it appears to recommend passivity in the face of societal oppression. During the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century abolitionist movement, pro-slavery advocates cited it
A Closed Mouth

The most powerful examples of meekness in the crucible come from Jesus. When He said to come and “learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29, NKJV), He meant it in ways we probably can’t imagine.

**Read** 1 Peter 2:18–25. Peter is offering some surprising advice to slaves. He describes how Jesus responded to unjust and painful treatment and suggests to them that He has left them “an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Pet. 2:21, NKJV). What principles of meekness and humility in the crucible can we learn from Jesus’ example, as expressed here by Peter?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

It is terrible to watch someone else unjustly treat another. And it is extremely painful when we are at the receiving end of such treatment. Because we normally have a strong sense of justice, when injustice occurs our instincts are to “put things right” while carrying what we believe to be a righteous and just anger.

It is not easy to live like this. It is perhaps impossible unless we embrace one critical truth—that in all unjust situations, we must believe that our Father in heaven is in control and that He will act on our behalf when it is according to His will. This also means that we must be open to the possibility that like Jesus, we may not always be saved from injustice. But we must always remember that our Father in heaven is still with us and in charge.

Peter’s advice, modeled from Jesus’ life, is surprising because it seems to be that silence in the face of unjust suffering is a greater witness to the glory of God than “putting people right.” When questioned by Caiaphas and Pilate, Jesus could have said a lot of things to correct the situation and to justify Himself, but He didn’t. His silence was a testimony to His meekness.

How do you deal with situations in which you have been treated unfairly? How can you better apply some of the principles looked at here today to your own life?
as proof that Holy Writ supported them. It troubles human rights activists when it is used to suggest that the oppressed ought not object to social or economic tyranny.

Of course, these interpretations miss the point. Peter wasn’t advocating slavery but addressing how one can survive it spiritually when there’s no other choice.

**Consider This:** In light of Peter’s prescription that slaves meekly should accept their lot, how do Christians defend taking stands in favor of human freedom and dignity?

**V. Our Rock and Refuge**

*(Read Psalm 62:1–8.)*

The theme of isolation of enemies by God’s strength is apparent even in the organization of the psalm: The danger David faces from treacherous people *(vss. 3–5)* is preceded *(vss. 1, 2)* and followed *(vss. 6–8)* by the assurance that God surrounds and protects His own. Metaphorically, then, the enemies’ evil intentions are bracketed by, and neutralized by, God’s power as those who trust Him are surrounded and strengthened by it.

**STEP 3—Practice!**

**Just for Teachers:** *This step of the Natural Learning Cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?*

**Class Activity:**

As you share each of the following seven quotations on humility, ask the class what the author meant in each case and what it adds to our understanding of humility.

1. “Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues; hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance.”—Augustine of Hippo, early Christian theologian [http://www.Thinkexist.com].

2. “Humility is like underwear, essential, but indecent if it shows.”—Helen Nielsen, novelist [http://www.Thinkexist.com].

3. “Humility is to make a right estimate of one’s self.”—Charles H. Spurgeon, English preacher [http://www.Thinkexist.com].
Our Rock and Refuge

So often the most proud people, the most arrogant and pushy, are those who suffer from low self-esteem. Their arrogance and pride—and total lack of meekness or humility—exist as a cover, perhaps even unconsciously, for something lacking inside. What they need is something we all need: a sense of security, of worthiness, of acceptance, especially in times of distress and suffering. We can find that only through the Lord. In short, meekness and humility, far from being attributes of weakness, are often the most powerful manifestation of a soul firmly grounded on the Rock.

Read Psalm 62:1–8. What seems to be the background for this psalm? What points is David making? What spiritual principles can you learn from what he is saying? Most important, how can you learn to apply these principles to your own life?

“Without cause men will become our enemies. The motives of the people of God will be misinterpreted, not only by the world, but by their own brethren. The Lord’s servants will be put in hard places. A mountain will be made of a molehill to justify men in pursuing a selfish, unrighteous course. . . . By misrepresentation these men will be clothed in the dark vestments of dishonesty because circumstances beyond their control made their work perplexing. They will be pointed to as men that cannot be trusted. And this will be done by the members of the church. God’s servants must arm themselves with the mind of Christ. They must not expect to escape insult and misjudgment. They will be called enthusiasts and fanatics. But let them not become discouraged. God’s hands are on the wheel of His providence, guiding His work to the glory of His name.”—Ellen G. White, in Spalding and Magan Collection, p. 370.

How immune are you to the reproaches and barbs of others? Mostly likely not that immune, right? What can you do to better cleave to the Lord, to better anchor your sense of self-worth on the One who loves you so much that He died for your sins and thus help protect yourself against the slights of others?
“Pride makes us artificial and humility makes us real.”—Thomas Merton, American spiritual writer [http://www.Thinkexist.com].

“Pride slays thanksgiving, but an humble mind is the soil out of which thanks naturally grow. A proud man is seldom a grateful man, for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves.”—Henry Ward Beecher, American preacher [http://www.Thinkexist.com].

“The churches must learn humility as well as teach it.”—George Bernard Shaw, British playwright [http://www.Thinkexist.com].

Humility is a self-assessment that comes from seeing yourself as God sees you rather than as the world sees you.

Consider This: We think of humility as the antidote to too much pride. In light of quotation 7, might biblical humility also have an effect on a person who feels inferior to others?

STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

Meekness is one of the hardest virtues to teach. American journalist Mignon McLaughlin joked, “The proud man can learn humility, but he will be proud of it.” It is a virtue taught better by example than by precept. That’s why we rely on people such as Jesus, Moses, Paul, and others (both in Scripture and outside of it) to demonstrate for us lives in which power and confidence are not incompatible with meekness.

The difficulty in making application of this lesson will be to help your class understand that genuine humility is a strength, not a weakness. The key is to show humility as a function not primarily of one’s attitude toward other people (that is, acting humble toward others, when you really may not feel it) but of one’s attitude toward God. Humility begins with a resignation to heaven’s will and intentions that, in turn, creates the right attitude toward earthly people and problems.

“The difficulties we have to encounter may be very much lessened by that meekness which hides itself in Christ. If we possess the humility of our Master, we shall rise above the slights, the rebuffs, the annoyances, to which we are daily exposed, and they will cease to cast a gloom over the spirit. The highest evidence of nobility in a Christian is self-control. He who under abuse or cruelty fails to maintain a calm and trustful spirit robs God of His right to reveal in him His own perfection of character. Lowliness of heart is the strength that gives victory to the followers of Christ; it is the token of their connection with the courts above.”—Ellen G. White, _The Desire of Ages_, p. 301.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does humility allow us to “rise above” hurts and annoyances? What do you think is the most important characteristic of humility that allows us to do this?

2. In your own particular culture, how are the characteristics of humility and meekness viewed? Are they respected, despised, or what? What kind of pressures do you face in your culture that work against your cultivating these characteristics?

3. Are there any great examples of meekness and humility from people alive today? If so, who are they, how have they expressed these traits, and what can you learn from them?

4. Why is it that we so often equate meekness and humility with weakness?

5. We saw how David sought the Lord as a refuge. But how does that work, how is that refuge always manifested? In other words, how can we, as a church, be a refuge for those who need a refuge? What kind of refuge does your own local church provide? What can you do to help make it a place of refuge for those who need it?
Scientists did an experiment with four-year-old children and marshmallows. Each child was told by a scientist that they could have a marshmallow; however, if the child waited until the scientist returned from an errand, they would be given two. Some of the children stuffed the marshmallow into their mouths the moment the scientist left; others waited. The differences were noted.

The scientists then kept track of these children into their teenage years. The ones who had waited turned out to be better adjusted, better students, and more confident than those who didn’t. It seemed that patience was indicative of something greater, something important in the human character. No wonder, then, we’re told to cultivate it by the Lord.

This week we’ll look at what could be behind some of the most trying of all crucibles: the crucible of waiting.

The Week at a Glance: Why do we sometimes have to wait so long for things? What lessons can we learn about patience while in the crucible?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 15.
The God of Patience

Read Romans 15:4, 5. What is found in these verses for us?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

We are normally impatient about things that we really want or have been promised but don’t have yet. We are often satisfied only when we get what we are longing for. And because we rarely get what we want when we want it, it means that we are often doomed to irritation and impatience. And when we are in this state, it is almost impossible to maintain a peace and trust in God.

Waiting is painful by definition. In Hebrew, one of the words for “wait patiently” (Ps. 37:7, NKJV) comes from a Hebrew word that can be translated “to be much pained,” “to shake,” “to tremble,” “to be wounded,” “to be sorrowful.” Learning patience is not easy; sometimes it’s the very essence of what it means to be in the crucible.

Read Psalms 27:14, 37:7, and Romans 5:3–5. What are these verses saying to us? What does patience lead to?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

While we wait, we can concentrate on one of two things. We can focus on the things that we are waiting for, or we can focus on the One who holds those things in His hands. What makes such a difference when we wait for something isn’t so much how long we have to wait as it is our attitude while we wait. If we trust the Lord, if we have placed our lives in His hands, if we have surrendered our wills to Him, then we can trust that He will do what’s best for us when it’s best for us, no matter how hard it is sometimes to believe it.

What things are you desperately waiting for? How can you learn to surrender everything to God and to His timing? Pray your way into an attitude of complete surrender and submission to the Lord.
**I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .**

**Key Text:** *Galatians 5:22*

**Teach the Class to:**

- **Know:** God wants us to have good things, but He wants us to have them at the right time for our spiritual development.
- **Feel:** Surrender and submission to God’s timing; in other words, patience.
- **Do:** Pray that God will give us the patience that doesn’t come naturally and to remain open to God’s timing.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **Waiting Times** (*Rom. 15:4, 5*)

- **A** Why would God make us wait for things that we seemingly should have and that we believe would be beneficial to all concerned?
- **B** How is patience linked to such spiritual virtues as faith and trust?
- **C** How can you know when an opportunity to fulfill, say, a longstanding desire is or is not God’s will?

II. **Delighting in the Lord** (*Ps. 37:4*)

- **A** We often are tempted to delight in the fulfillment of our wants and desires. How does the development of patience teach us to delight in the Lord instead?
- **B** What if your deepest desires turn out not to be what God feels you should have?
- **C** How is the struggle for patience related to, or different from, the struggles against outside circumstances or our enemies that we’ve studied so far this quarter?

III. **Grant Us Patience, and Quickly** (*2 Tim. 1:12*)

- **A** What is the role of prayer in achieving patience?
- **B** How do we overcome the fact that we may not want to be patient, that we may, in fact, not have patience for patience?
- **C** Can you think of something for which you’ve had to wait a distressingly long time? Was it worth it? Might there have been a downside to receiving it when you wanted it?

**Summary:** While patience is crucial in the spiritual life, it is one of the hardest virtues not only to develop but to want. But the idea that good things come to those who wait—on the Lord, specifically—is not just a cliché.
In God’s Time

Read  Romans 5:6 and Galatians 4:4. What do they tell us about God’s timing?

In these texts, Paul tells us that Jesus came to die for us at exactly the right time. But Paul does not tell us why it was the right time. It is very easy to read these verses and wonder, Why did Jesus wait for thousands of years until He came to the earth to deal with sin—didn’t the universe understand that sin was a very bad thing long before then? We may ask why Jesus is waiting to come the second time also. We may also ask, Why is the Lord waiting so long to answer my prayer?

Think about, for instance, the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27, the prophecy that points to Jesus as the Messiah (review it if you need to). How long was this time period? What does this tell you about learning to wait for things in God’s time, even if it takes what seems to us a long time?

There are many important spiritual reasons that we will experience waiting times. First, waiting can refocus our attention away from “things” and back to God Himself. Second, waiting allows us to develop a clearer picture of our own motives and desires. Third, waiting builds perseverance—spiritual stamina. Fourth, waiting opens the door to develop many spiritual strengths, such as faith and trust. Fifth, waiting allows God to put down other pieces in the puzzle of the bigger picture. Sixth, we may never know the reason we have to wait; hence, we learn to live by faith. Can you think of any other reasons for waiting?

What examples can you find in the Bible of God doing things in His own time that can help you learn to trust that He will do for you what’s right in His own time, as well? (Think, for instance, about Abraham and Sarah and the promise of a son.) At the same time, ask yourself, “What might I be doing that could be delaying a prayer that could have been answered long ago?”
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, Why is this lesson important to me?

Imagine:
1. You’ve given yourself just enough time to drive to your appointment. Suddenly an accident ahead of you blocks all traffic lanes. There’s no way around. You’ll be late.
2. You’re at the market for a carton of milk and a loaf of bread. Ahead of you in the checkout line is a shopper with two carts full—and there’s no shorter line. You’ll be there awhile.

This kind of waiting is surely annoying; there is another kind that is spiritually challenging:

3. You’ve prayed for 40 years for an erring child. Neither of you is getting any younger. Will you ever see this loved one come back to God?
4. You’ve asked God repeatedly to heal you of an illness—one that may kill you. Will you, you wonder, get your prayer answered in time?
5. You’ve spent a lifetime trying to defeat a bad habit or overcome a damaging character trait. You’ve worked at it and prayed. How long until you realize improvement?

One of the hardest virtues to cultivate is patience. In this lesson we’ll teach patience as a strategy for managing life’s trials.

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?
David: An Object Lesson in Waiting

In 1 Samuel 16:1–13, we see the young lad David anointed by Samuel as king. However, it was a long journey from the fields of his father, Jesse, to the throne in Jerusalem. No doubt, at times he felt in the midst of a crucible.

First, the lad is called to play music to soothe Saul’s troubled spirit (1 Samuel 16). Later, he becomes Israel’s hero as he kills Goliath (1 Samuel 17). Then there are many years during which David is running for his life. Both Saul and his son Jonathan know that David is destined to be the next king (1 Sam. 23:17, 24:20). But David does nothing to advance his God-given destiny. In fact, he appears to do the opposite. Even when Saul tries to kill him and David snips a piece of cloth off the king’s robe, he wished he had never done such a thing (1 Sam. 24:5–7). Again when Saul is trying to kill David, David refuses to kill Saul when the opportunity arises (1 Sam. 26:7–11).

Read 1 Samuel 26:1–11. Why does David refuse to kill Saul? What principles does this teach us about the way God brings about His plans for our lives?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Now read 1 Samuel 26:12–25. How does David’s refusal to kill Saul affect Saul? What does this teach us about the advantages of waiting for God?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Looking at the whole of David’s road to the throne, we could perhaps summarize it in a short sentence—don’t grab what God has not yet given. God’s gifts are always best received from His hand and in His time. This may require a very long time of waiting. Bean sprouts may literally grow up within hours, while an oak tree will take many years. But then when the strong winds come, the tree will not be uprooted.

Think how easily David could have justified killing Saul. (“After all, wasn’t I told I’d have the throne? And Saul is so evil anyway.”) Yet, his actions speak of true faith in God. What might you be able to draw from this example for yourself in whatever you might be waiting for?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Bible Commentary

I. The God of Patience
(Read Romans 15:4.)

The Bible is itself a lesson in patience. In our reference to prophecies that are thousands of years old, we demonstrate that waiting (sometimes even for millennia) is a built-in part of God’s plan.

II. In God’s Time

What made the first century just the right time for Jesus to die (see Rom. 5:6, NIV)? Some explain it in terms of human history: that God had waited until humankind was especially evil, when old religions were failing, and when the Roman Empire had brought peace, transportation, education, and a lingua franca to speed evangelism.

A more thorough explanation of just the right time is that God chooses to act at times best for His purposes—whether or not we understand His reasons. Remember that the right time for His second coming is not when it is convenient to us (Matt. 24:50), but when God chooses (Matt. 24:36), and whether we’re ready or not (1 Thess. 5:2).

III. David: An Object Lesson in Waiting
(Review the main points of 1 Samuel 25:1–25.)

This story speaks not only to David’s patience but to a willingness to partner with God to become king without resorting to assassination. “David models a willingness to receive the kingdom on God’s terms by refusing violence as a means to power and trusting that God will open other options for dealing with Saul.” But this can occur “only when we give up our own attempts to force the future and instead choose partnership with God, who constantly gives us our future as a gift and bids us receive it rather than grasp it.”—The New Interpreter’s Bible, volume II, pp. 1176, 1177.

IV. Elijah: The Problem of Rushing
(Read 1 Kings 19:1–9.)

Consider This: Can you think of reasons that Elijah, after experiencing a
Elijah: The Problem of Rushing

The showdown on top of Mount Carmel had ended (1 Kings 18). Fire had come out of heaven, all the people had acknowledged the true God, and the false prophets had been put to death. God had been vindicated. You would have thought that Elijah would have been growing in spiritual strength as the day went on, but suddenly he heard something that terrified him so much that he wanted to die. Read the rest of the story in 1 Kings 19:1–9. The last words in the text are worrisome: “And the word of the Lord came to him: ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” (vs. 9, NIV). Evidently, Elijah’s fear caused him to run and find himself in the wrong place.

After such a powerful intervention by the Lord, Elijah should have been full of faith and trust; instead, he runs in fear for his life. What lesson can we learn from this bad example?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

This story illustrates something important: When we rush, we can very easily find ourselves in the wrong place. In Elijah’s case, it was his fear that caused him to be overwhelmed and rush into the desert, wishing that he had never been born. But there are other things that cause us to rush outside of God’s plan for us.


____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

How easy to let such things as ambition, anger, passion, lack of faith, and a supposed “zeal” for the Lord cause us to rush ahead to where we shouldn’t be. No one is immune to this danger. The key is to cultivate a trusting faith in the goodness and mercy of God, who we know loves us and wants what’s best for us. This doesn’t happen automatically. Faith might be a gift, but it’s a gift that needs to be cultivated, nurtured, and jealously guarded.
miraculous victory, was so thoroughly intimidated by a muttered threat? One cause may be implied in what Elijah did in the desert. He rested and ate. The long, stressful hours on Mount Carmel appear to have reduced Elijah to a state of mental, physical, and spiritual exhaustion. We don’t need to deprive ourselves while we wait. Elijah’s breakdown might have been prevented had he taken care to preserve his own strength and trusted God to vindicate Himself—which is what God always does anyway.

V. Learning to Delight in the Lord
(Read Psalm 37:1–11.)

Compare this passage with Jesus in John 14:1–3 and Paul in Romans 8:18, 28–31. These are all good expressions of how explicitly trusting God’s promises for a good future supplies courage to live in the present. If you really believe that God is going to make all things right in the end, you can endure suffering, uncertainty, and injustice now.

STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

Class Activity:
Supply paper and pencils for this exercise. (Assure the class ahead of time that you will not ask them to reveal personal information unless they feel comfortable doing so.)

1 Write down one important thing that you’ve been praying and waiting for.
2 How long have you been waiting?
3 Can you think of anyone in the Bible who waited for something similar?
4 What lessons is God teaching you by letting you wait?

After giving class members time to write, lead a discussion, with special focus on question 4.
Learning to Delight in the Lord

“Delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Ps. 37:4, NRSV).

Psalm 37:4 is a wonderful promise. Imagine getting what you have always wanted. But getting the desires of our hearts hinges on having a heart that is delighting in the Lord. So what does it mean to “delight in the Lord”?

Read Psalm 37:1–11. The context for verse 4 is perhaps a little surprising. David is writing about being surrounded by people who are working against God and against him. When people are working against us, the natural response is often to get angry or to set out to justify ourselves. But David advises something different.

In the following verses, what is David’s counsel to God’s people in this situation?

vs. 1

vs. 5

vs. 7

vs. 8

Read verse 4 again. In the context of the verses you have just made comments on, what does it mean “to delight in the Lord”?

David is repeating again and again, in different ways, “Trust God.” Trust Him to act. Don’t get upset, because God is your God, and He is working for you—even right now. You don’t have to charge in and try to sort things out by yourself. Your Father in heaven is in charge. Trust Him completely.

It is in this context that David writes about delighting in the Lord. To delight in God means that we live in a state of perfect trust. Nothing can ruffle our peace, because God is here and at work. We can praise Him, we can even smile, because no one can outwit our God! When we can learn to do this, we really will receive what our hearts long for, because we will receive what our loving Father wants to give us, at the time that most benefits us and His kingdom.

How can you learn to “delight in the Lord”? Spend some time in prayer, seeking God’s guidance in how this may become a reality in your life.
Here Are Some Suggested Lessons From Waiting:

- God’s sense of time is different from ours: Psalm 27:14; Psalm 90:4; Matthew 24:36, 44; Romans 5:6.
- Trusting God’s future for us: John 14:1–3, Romans 8:28.
- Character growth: Romans 5:3–5.
- We will have to wait for some things until eternal life: Revelation 21:4.

**STEP 4—Apply!**

**Just for Teachers:** In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

“Waiting for God is not laziness. Waiting for God is not going to sleep. Waiting for God is not the abandonment of effort. Waiting for God is activity under command; readiness for any new command that may come; the ability to do nothing until the command is given. . . .

“Waiting for God means that I adjust my life to Him rather than to circumstances, and that I set my hope on Him rather than on the wit and the cleverness of men. . . .

“This is not lack of power to do anything. Waiting for God needs strength rather than weakness. It is power to do nothing. It is the strength that holds strength in check. It is the strength that prevents the blundering activity which is entirely false and will make true activity impossible when the definite command comes. . . .

“For those who thus wait, God works. . . . When the call comes, it is almost invariably to something new and surprising and startling. . . . Waiting is far more difficult than working. . . . Waiting requires strength. It demands the absolute surrender of the life to God, the confession that we are at the end of our own understanding of things, the confession that we really do not see our way and do not know the way.”—G. Campbell Morgan, *The Westminster Pulpit*, vol. IX, pp. 320–333.

God’s plan for us may require that we do a lot of waiting, and this really can feel like a crucible. Learning patience during this time can be developed as we focus on the person of God and trust that He is acting for us. There are many reasons for waiting, but all are concerned with the fulfillment of God’s plans for us and His kingdom. Much can be lost if we rush ahead of God, but much can be gained by maintaining an attitude of trust and delight in Him.

“Every trial is weighed and measured by the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is not beyond man’s ability to endure through the grace given unto him.”—Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases, vol. 12, p. 81.

“I cannot read the purpose of God in my affliction, but He knows what is best, and I will commit my soul, body, and spirit to Him as unto my faithful Creator. ‘For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day’ (2 Tim. 1:12). If we educated and trained our souls to have more faith, more love, greater patience, and a more perfect trust in our heavenly Father, I know we would have more peace and happiness day by day as we pass through the conflicts of this life.

“The Lord is not pleased to have us fret and worry ourselves out of the arms of Jesus. More is needed of the quiet waiting and watching combined. We think unless we have feeling that we are not in the right track, and we keep looking within for some sign befitting the occasion; but the reckoning is not of feeling but of faith.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 2, p. 242.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean that every trial is “weighed and measured” by Jesus? How can knowing this help us while we wait?

2. Have people in class give personal testimonies to what patient waiting is all about. What were their fears, their joys? How did they cope? What did they learn? What promises did they cling to?

3. What can you do as a church, or a class, to help others who are in the crucible as they await God’s timing for something?

4. What is the role of prayer in the development of patience? Are there others you can pray for so the Spirit will develop patience in their lives?
Dying Like a Seed

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 1 Sam. 2:12–3:18; 13:1–14; Zech. 4:1–14; Rom. 12:1, 2; Phil. 2:5–9.

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

Jesus’ picture of a kernel of wheat dying is a fascinating analogy of our submission to God’s will.

First, there is the falling. The kernel that falls from the wheat stalk has no control over where or how it falls to the ground. It has no control over the ground that surrounds and then presses over it.

Second, there is the waiting. As the kernel lies in the earth, it does not know what the future holds. It cannot “imagine” what life will be like in the future, for it is only a kernel of wheat.

Third, there is the dying. The kernel cannot possibly become a wheat stalk unless it gives up the safe, comfortable situation as a kernel. It must “die”; that is, it must give up what it has always been before it may be transformed from a seed into a fruit-bearing plant.

The Week at a Glance: If we know that God’s will is best for us, why do we have such a hard time accepting it? What example of submission has Christ left for us? How do you see the analogy of the kernel of wheat applying to your own life?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 22.
Submission for Service

Read Philippians 2:5–9. What important message is there for us in these verses?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Contemporary culture urges us all to demand and assert our rights. And all this is good and is often the way it should be. But, as with Jesus, the will of God may ask us to freely give up our rights in order to serve the Father in ways that will make an eternal impact for God’s kingdom. This process of giving them up may be difficult and uncomfortable, creating the conditions of a crucible. Look at how Jesus did this (Phil. 2:5–8). These verses describe three steps that Jesus took in submitting Himself to the Father’s will. And at the beginning, Paul alarmingly reminds us: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (vs. 5, NIV).

In order to be in a position to save us, Jesus gave up His equality with the Father and moved to earth in the form and limitations of a human being (vss. 6, 7, NIV). Jesus did not come as a great and glorious human being but as a servant of other human beings (vs. 7, NIV).

As a human servant, Jesus did not live a peaceful and long life but “became obedient to death.” But He did not even die in a noble and glorious manner. No, He was “obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (vs. 8, NIV).

In what areas of life is this example of Jesus a model for us? If rights and equality are good and should be protected, how would you explain the logic of sometimes needing to give them up? Now read verse 9. In what way does this verse help us to understand the logic of submission to the Father’s will?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Pray for wisdom from the Holy Spirit, asking, What rights am I holding on to right now that actually might be a barrier to submitting to Jesus’ will in serving my family, my church, and those around me? To what extent am I willing to endure discomfort to serve others more effectively?
Key Text: John 12:24

Teach the Class to:

Know: Serving God may require us, in some sense, to die to the bundle of needs and wants we call the self.

Feel: A desire to follow Jesus Christ’s example in surrendering all to God’s will.

Do: Be willing to listen to what God calls us to do, and possibly to give up, and to direct our lives accordingly.

Lesson Outline:

I. Dying to Live (Phil. 2:5–9)

A Why does the Bible repeatedly use death as a metaphor for the Christian’s relationship to his or her former self?

B In what sense is this death really like death? In what sense does it just feel like it?

C Why does God want us to go through this seemingly very traumatic process?

II. A Kernel of Wheat (John 12:24)

A How did Jesus’ life model our spiritual journey? Is it fair to compare Jesus’ mission with ours as followers of Christ?

B In our culture, survival by any means necessary is paramount. The best thing we can say about someone is that he or she is a survivor. What might Jesus say about this supersized, self-preservation instinct?

C Did Jesus know how His radical act of self-abnegation would turn out? Was He assured of success?

III. Listening (1 Sam. 3:10)

A How can we hear and know God’s voice?

B Western and particularly American culture regard self-reliance not only as a good thing but as strictly necessary for a responsible adult life. Does self-reliance in this sense conflict with the Christian emphasis on relying on God?

C We are told not to rely on our own judgment. Is this an absolute? Are there times when we should use our own judgment and critical faculties?

Summary: Salvation is free, but its end result is that we stop living the lives we led before. We need to let God guide us to become different from, and better than, our old selves.
Dying Comes Before Knowing God’s Will

Many Christians sincerely seek to know God’s will for their lives. “If only I could know God’s will for my life, I would sacrifice everything for Him.” But even after promising God this, we still may be confused about that will. The reason for this confusion may be found in Romans 12:1, 2. Paul is describing how we can know God’s will, and he makes an important point: If you want to know what God’s will is, you have to sacrifice first!

Read Romans 12:1, 2. Paul writes that we will be able to “test and approve what God’s will is” (vs. 2, NIV) when:
1. We have a true understanding of “God’s mercy” for us (vs. 1, NIV).
2. We offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God (vs. 1).
3. Our minds are renewed (vs. 2).

It is only the renewed mind that truly can understand God’s will. But this renewal hinges on our death to self first. It was not enough that Christ simply suffered for us—He had to die. It is the same with us.

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you any areas in which you are not completely “dead.” What things does the Holy Spirit need you to give up in order to become a “living sacrifice” for God?

When areas of our lives are not completely dead to self, God permits crucibles to bring them to our attention. However, our suffering not only helps us confront our sin, it also gives us an insight into Jesus’ giving Himself up for us. Elisabeth Elliot writes, “The surrender of our heart’s deepest longing is perhaps as close as we come to an understanding of the cross. . . . Our own experience of crucifixion, though immeasurably less than our Savior’s, nonetheless furnishes us with a chance to begin to know Him in the fellowship of His sufferings. In every form of our own suffering, He calls us to that fellowship.”—*Quest for Love* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Fleming H. Revell, 1966), p. 182.

Read and pray over Romans 12:1, 2. Think about the things you need to give up in order for you to become a sacrifice. How does this help you to understand the sufferings Jesus faced for you on the cross? How can this knowledge help you enter into fellowship with Jesus and His sufferings?
Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, Why is this lesson important to me?

A young single man once said, “I’m a little afraid to ask God to help me find the right woman to marry. I’m afraid that God will pick someone I won’t like. Knowing what God values, He will expect me to live the rest of my life with a religious, but probably unattractive, wife!”

Many are concerned about submitting to God. It is difficult, especially for self-actualized, goal-oriented people, to believe that submission to God’s will is safe. It seems better to make our own choices, even though we’ve proved ourselves wrong quite often.

Jesus was the perfect example of submitting to the will and purposes of His all-knowing Father in heaven. In this lesson, we want to inspire our class members with the joy and peace of submitting their lives to God.

►STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Bible Commentary

I. Submission for Service

Philippians 2:5–9 traces Christ’s life cycle: He begins in heaven, accepts a demotion to humanness, and so is rewarded with a heavenly status even higher than before.

The key theological point is that His incarnation is voluntary. It was not merely Christ’s humanity or suffering that earns Him heavenly merit: It is His having chosen to endure this existence. A reluctant, grudging, or forced submission would have been useless to the plan of salvation.
Willingness to Listen

“The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ Then Samuel said, ‘Speak, for your servant is listening’” (1 Sam. 3:10, NIV).

Have you ever heard that still, small voice of the Holy Spirit but ignored it? Consequently, everything went wrong, and you thought to yourself later, Oh no, why didn’t I listen?

First Samuel describes a story of an old man and two wicked sons who didn’t listen to the Lord and a little boy who did. Though there were strong warnings from God, those who needed to change their course didn’t.

Read their story in 1 Samuel 2:12–3:18. What contrast is made apparent here between those who listen to God and those who don’t?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Eli’s sons had other things on their minds than the things of God. And even when Eli, after hearing what God wanted, spoke to his sons, he didn’t seem to do anything else. And his sons were obviously not ready to submit the details of their lives to God’s will. What a contrast to the young Samuel!

Preacher Charles Stanley describes how essential it is to cultivate openness to God’s voice in what he calls “shifting into neutral.” He says: “The Holy Spirit . . . does not speak for the sake of passing along information. He speaks to get a response. And He knows when our agenda has such a large slice of our attention that it is a waste of time to suggest anything to the contrary. When that is the case, He is often silent. He waits for us to become neutral enough to hear and eventually obey.”—The Wonderful Spirit-Filled Life (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers, 1992), pp. 179, 180.

What do you think Stanley means by becoming “neutral enough”? When you think about your openness to God, what things often prevent you from being “neutral enough to hear and eventually obey”? What do you need to do in your life to cultivate openness to God’s voice and a decisiveness to be obedient to His direction?
II. Dying Comes Before Knowing God’s Will
(Read Romans 12:1, 2.)

To interpret this teaching of the body as a living sacrifice solely in terms of eating the right foods is a weak and ultimately false understanding of the apostle’s message here. Read this not as a proof text for health reform but rather as a Christian Shema (the central Jewish faith statement of Deuteronomy 6:5): Christians must submit to God the totality of their loyalties, thoughts, and actions, including their bodies and all the varieties of work, play, worship, and service the body is capable of. To sacrifice your body mostly by being scrupulous in diet is a distortion of Paul’s message and ours.

III. Willingness to Listen

Consider This: First Samuel 3:1 says that direct revelation from God was rare in Samuel’s time. Is it as rare today? Given the uncommonness of experiences like Samuel’s, how do we distinguish the genuine voice of God from the stirrings of our own desires, or even from the delusions of unbalanced minds? How do we direct and reassure those who are listening for God’s voice and feel they’re hearing nothing?

IV. Self-reliance
(Review the story in 1 Samuel 13:1–23.)

Readers may be sympathetic with Saul here. After all, he takes initiative to move forward in a dangerous situation, while Samuel reacts as an over-controlling old grouch. But knowing the end of the story (1 Sam. 31:4, 6), we cannot help seeing Samuel’s reaction (bad-tempered as it was) as a reflection of God’s feelings: that Saul is once more overstepping his authority and succumbing to hubris.

Consider This: Leaders must show self-confidence and initiative for people to follow them. How do leaders balance those qualities with submission to God’s authority?

V. Substitutes
(Read Zechariah 4:6.)

“Zerubbabel will not accomplish this task [of rebuilding the temple] with
Self-Reliance

When Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, it wasn’t simply because she doubted God’s word. At the heart of the problem was her belief that she had enough wisdom to decide what was good and right for herself. She trusted her own judgment. When we rely on our own judgment as opposed to trusting God’s Word, we open ourselves up to all sorts of problems.

The story of Saul describes the steps to self-reliance and the tragedy that so quickly follows. Samuel anointed Saul as God’s king (*1 Sam. 10:1*). Then he gave Saul specific instructions (*vs. 8*), but Saul disobeyed.

**Read** the next part of the story in *1 Samuel 13:1–14*. What did Saul do that led to his own downfall?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

There are three steps that led Saul down the road to self-reliance so soon after having been made king. The problem is that none of the steps were that bad in themselves. Yet, they contained the seeds of tragedy because they were each taken independently of God. Notice the order in which Saul’s fall occurred.

1. Saul said, “I saw” (*NIV*)—the scattering of his troops and Samuel’s absence (*vs. 11*). Saul was under pressure, and he evaluated with his own eyes what was happening.

2. Saul moved from “I saw” to “I said”—that the Philistines would conquer them (*vs. 12, NKJV*). What he saw with his own eyes shaped what he said, or surmised, about the situation.

3. Saul moved from “I said” to “I felt”—compelled to offer sacrifice (*vs. 12, NKJV*). What Saul thought now shaped his feelings.

All of us have done this: We rely on our own human eyesight, which leads us to rely on our own human thinking, which leads us to rely on our own human feelings. And then we act on these feelings.

**Why do you think it was so easy for Saul to follow his own judgment, even though he had God’s clear instructions still ringing in his ears? If we know that we are so fragile and have such imperfect knowledge, why do we still try to rely on ourselves? What can we do to learn more to trust in the Lord’s commands than upon ourselves?**
the might and power that a royal figure usually commands, however. Rather, he is to put himself in the service of God’s Spirit. It is difficult to understand, and even harder to believe, that the Spirit of God can and does prevail in place of power and might. Contemporary instincts often run in the opposite direction. Even if we confess that by the Spirit of God the world was created, it is easier to think of this Spirit as a subtle influence than as the world-creating and transforming power of the Lord of hosts.”—The New Interpreter’s Bible, vol. VII, p. 772.

STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

Class Activity:
Because of its poetic structure and language in Greek, scholars suspect that Philippians 2:5–11 may be an inserted hymn or worship litany, either composed by Paul or quoted from another Christian writer and already familiar to Paul’s readers. The passage frequently was used in worship in early Christian times.

Read it with your class today as a responsive reading. (Since people will have different Bible versions, you must either supply copies of the text or use reading no. 842 in The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal.) Remind your class that they are participating in a worship activity enjoyed by Christians of 2,000 years ago! Try to imagine how this reading sounded when read aloud (or, more likely, incorporated in some sort of variant) in a house church in Ephesus, beneath the trees at a river baptism in Philippi, in catacombs beneath the streets of Rome, or in an early European cathedral.

As You Read Together, Invite the Class to Contemplate These Questions:

- Am I modeling my life attitude upon Christ’s?
- Christ was submissive to His Father’s will. Am I?
- Am I a servant to others?
- Would I be obedient to God, even if He asked me to give up my life?
- Can I wait for heaven to be exalted, or am I ambitious to be exalted here?
Substitutes

As we saw yesterday, submission to God’s will can be undermined as we rely on our own strength. It also is possible to rely on other substitutes for God. When some people feel depressed, they go shopping for something to make them happy. When some feel inadequate, they pursue fame. When others have difficulties with their spouse, they look for someone else to give them intimacy and excitement.

Many of the things we use can relieve the pressure, but they do not necessarily solve the problem nor teach us how to handle the situation better the next time. Only supernatural help from God can do that. The problem is that many times we try to depend on substitutes for God rather than on God Himself.

Here are three substitutes that we may use instead of God:

1. Using human logic or past experience when we need fresh divine revelation.
2. Blocking problems from our minds when we need divine solutions.
3. Escaping reality and avoiding God when we need communion with God for divine power.

Zechariah helps us to focus on what really matters when we are tempted to use substitutes. After many years away, the exiles had finally returned from Babylon and immediately began to rebuild the temple. But there was an incredible amount of opposition to this (some background can be found in Ezra 4–6). So Zechariah came with this message of encouragement to Zerubbabel, who was leading the work.

Read this message in Zechariah 4:1–14. What does God mean in verse 6? How could the completion of a building project be affected by the Holy Spirit? What does this teach us about the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the practical things that we do?

God did not prevent the opposition to the temple nor spare Zerubbabel from the stress of dealing with it. And God will not always protect us from opposition. But when opposition comes, God may use it as a crucible to teach us to depend on Him.

When stress comes, what’s your first reaction? Food? Television? Prayer? Submission to God? What does your answer tell you about yourself and the things you need to learn or to change?
STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

Accustomed as we are to thinking that we have at least some control of our own destiny, some find submission to God’s will difficult. Class members may well wonder how they are to submit. Our self-determination is strong. Especially for take-charge people, the concept of surrender to the will of another in practical areas of life is difficult, especially if such a choice appears uncertain or unclear. I may want to submit to God’s will, but if faced with a decision, I may still wonder, How am I to know what choice God wants me to make?

Two Responses May Help to Clarify the Idea of Submission:

1. Help the class understand that submission is an attitude more than a road map. Those who submit to God’s will may not feel that they have more information than other people do, but they certainly will make better choices.

2. Though we don’t know all of God’s will, there are plenty of areas in which Scripture has made God’s will perfectly clear. If we submitted only in those areas in which we’ve no doubt of God’s will, that alone would help us open our hearts to God’s further leading.

Submission to God’s will comes as we die to our own desires and ambitions. This opens the way for true service to others. We cannot live for God without becoming a sacrifice and living in continual openness to God’s voice. For us to truly submit our wills to our Father’s will, we must recognize the dangers of relying on ourselves and on substitutes for God’s Word and power. As submission to God’s will is at the heart of a Christlike life, God may allow crucibles to teach us dependence on Him.

“The neglect of Eli is brought plainly before every father and mother in the land. As the result of his unsanctified affection or his unwillingness to do a disagreeable duty, he reaped a harvest of iniquity in his perverse sons. Both the parent who permitted the wickedness and the children who practiced it were guilty before God, and He would accept no sacrifice or offering for their transgression.”—Ellen G. White, Child Guidance, p. 276.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, talk about the incredible condescension of the Son of God in coming to earth as a human being in order to die for our sins. What does it tell each of us about what self-sacrifice and self-denial for the good of others means? Though we certainly can’t do anything like that, the principle is there and should always be before us. What ways can we, in our own spheres, emulate the kind of submission and self-sacrifice shown to us by Jesus at the Cross?

2. For many people, submitting to God without knowing what will happen next can be a terrifying thing. How would you counsel someone who is relying on themselves rather than God? What would you say to help remove their fears of not knowing—or being able to control—the future?

3. As a class, spend some time praying for people you know who have difficulty in submitting to God’s will, that they may see that trusting God’s will is the only route to a lasting peace. At the same time, what practical things can you do for these people to help them see that they can surrender to God and that His way is the best? In other words, how can God use you to help others know of His love and willingness to provide?

Memory Text: “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

Whenever we look at the issue of suffering, the question comes: How did sin and suffering first arise? Through divine revelation we have good answers: They arose because free beings abused the freedom God had given them. This leads to another question: Did God know beforehand that these beings would fall? Yes, but obviously He thought it was, as C. S. Lewis wrote, “worth the risk.”

Worth the risk? For whom? For us, while God sits in heaven on His throne? Not exactly. The freedom of all His intelligent creatures was so sacred that, rather than deny us freedom, God agreed to bear in Himself the brunt of the suffering caused by our abuse of that freedom. And we see that suffering in the life and death of Jesus, who, through suffering in our flesh, has created bonds between heaven and earth that will last throughout eternity.

The Week at a Glance: What did Christ suffer in our behalf? What can we learn from His suffering?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 29.
The Early Days

Scripture gives us little information about the early years of Jesus. A few verses, however, tell us something about those conditions and the kind of world the Savior entered.

Read Luke 2:7, 22–24 (see also Lev. 12:6–8) and Matthew 2:1–18. What do we see in these texts that gives us an indication of the kind of life Jesus faced from the start?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Of course, Jesus was not the first person to live in poverty or to face those who wanted to kill Him, even from an early age. There is, however, another element that helps us understand the uniqueness of what Christ suffered from the earliest times.

Read John 1:46. What element does this add to help us understand what sufferings the young Jesus had faced?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

With the exception of Adam and Eve before the Fall, Jesus was the only sinless Person who ever lived on the earth. In His purity, in His sinlessness, He was immersed in a world of sin. What a torture it must have been, even as a child, for His pure soul constantly to be in contact with sin. Even in our hardness because of sin, we ourselves often shrink away at sins and evil that we find repulsive. Imagine what it must have been like for Christ, whose soul was pure, who wasn’t the least bit tainted by sin. Think of the sharp contrast between Christ and others around Him in that regard. It must have been exceedingly painful for Him.

Ask yourself, “How sensitive am I to the sins that exist all around us? Does it bother me, or am I hardened to it?” If you are hardened to it, could it be because of the things you read, watch, or even do? Think about it.
I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

**Key Text:** Matthew 27:46

**Teach the Class to:**

- Know: God, through Jesus, was prepared to sacrifice all to reconcile us to Him.
- Feel: The immensity of what Christ came to earth to do for us and the comparative insignificance of our own plight.
- Do: Remember the results of Christ’s suffering for us, our redemption, and live our lives accordingly.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Worth the Risk *(John 1:14)*

- **A** What was the nature of the risk taken by God in creating humans with free will? Did free will mean that the Fall was inevitable?
- **B** What was the risk of Christ’s attempt to redeem us? Could Christ have failed? What would failure have meant to Him and to us?
- **C** Why did the Fall make Jesus Christ’s mission necessary?

II. God Among Us *(Matt. 23:37)*

- **A** What might it have been like to be a sinless being in a world dominated by sin?
- **B** People in Christ’s time respected religion and religious figures; why then was Christ so misunderstood and in some cases rejected?
- **C** In what way was Christ’s life and ministry a preparation for what came later on the cross?

III. Because He Lives *(John 10:28)*

- **A** Isaiah says that Christ has “borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” *(Isa. 53:4)*. How can this knowledge help us to deal with the very real grief and sorrow we still face in our lives?
- **B** What has Christ earned for us as a result of His sacrifice, both now and in the future?

**Summary:** God not only has provided us with comfort and guidance in the crucible of life on earth, but He has sent His only Son to show us the way out. Let us remember this as we face the inevitable trials that come our way.
Despised and Rejected of Men

Read the following texts, keeping in mind the whole time the fact that Jesus was divine, the Creator of heaven and earth and that He came to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (Matt. 12:22–24; Luke 4:21–30; John 8:58, 59). How do these texts help us understand the sufferings that Jesus faced here on earth?

Whether by leaders, or even by the common people, Jesus’ life, acts, and teaching were constantly misunderstood, leading to rejection and hatred by people He came to save. In a certain sense it must be like a parent who sees a wayward child in need of help, and though the parent is willing to give everything for that child, the child spurns the parent, heaping scorn and rejection upon perhaps the only person who can spare that child from utter ruin. That’s what Jesus faced while here on earth. How painful it must have been for Him.

Read Matthew 23:37. What does that tell us about how Christ felt about the rejection? As you read, ask yourself, too, “Was He feeling bad for Himself [as we often do when facing rejection], or was it for another reason?” If for another reason, what was it?

We’ve all felt the sting of rejection, and maybe our pain was similar to Christ’s in that it was unselfish: We were pained not because we were rejected but because of what the rejection would mean for the one who was rejecting you (perhaps someone you care about who refuses to accept salvation in Christ). Imagine, though, what it must have felt to Jesus, who was fully aware of what He was to face in order to save them, and at the same time fully aware of what the consequences of their rejection would be. “It was because of His innocence that He [Christ] felt so keenly the assaults of Satan.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 3, p. 129.

What can you learn from Christ that can help you better cope with the pain of rejection? What does His example show you? How can you apply it to your own life?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, Why is this lesson important to me?

“They shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint” (NKJV). These are the familiar words at the end of Isaiah 40:31. The connotation is that the running and walking are expected to continue for some time and that it will not be an easy journey. But the runners and walkers will not grow weary.

Who are they, and what will they not grow weary of? They are . . . “they that wait upon the Lord” (vs. 31), and as they wait on Him, they shall not grow weary of the difficulties and the suffering that they must encounter in this life of sin. They will keep on running and walking without giving up, because the Lord, who suffered just as they suffer, will be running and walking with them.

The Central Concept for This Lesson Is: Although we suffer many trying and difficult experiences, we can find comfort in knowing that Jesus also suffered and that He will give us strength to continue on.

Have each class member give a synonym for the word fight. Start off with the word confrontation. Then go from person to person until no more words can be thought of. Some examples are: conflict, battle, struggle, warfare, encounter, dispute, combat, brawl, and wrestle. Then discuss Ephesians 6:12, emphasizing that every difficult encounter that we may experience is a battle with the enemy, which we can overcome through the power of God.

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?
Jesus in Gethsemane

“And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch” (Mark 14:34).

Whatever Jesus suffered through His 33 years here on earth, nothing compared to what He started to face in the last hours before the Cross. From the eternal ages (Eph. 1:1–4; 2 Tim. 1:8, 9; Titus 1:1, 2) the sacrifice of Jesus as the offering for the world’s sin was planned, and now it was all coming to pass.


“He went a little distance from them—not so far but that they could both see and hear Him—and fell prostrate upon the ground. He felt that by sin He was being separated from His Father. The gulf was so broad, so black, so deep, that His spirit shuddered before it. This agony He must not exert His divine power to escape. As man He must suffer the consequences of man’s sin. As man He must endure the wrath of God against transgression.

“Christ was now standing in a different attitude from that in which He had ever stood before. His suffering can best be described in the words of the prophet, ‘Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts.’ Zech. 13:7. As the substitute and surety for sinful man, Christ was suffering under divine justice. He saw what justice meant. Hitherto He had been as an intercessor for others; now He longed to have an intercessor for Himself.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 686.

Dwell upon what was happening to Jesus in Gethsemane. Already the sins of the world were starting to fall upon Him. Try to imagine what that must have been like. No human being has ever been called to go through anything like this before. What does this tell us about God’s love for us? What hope can you draw from this for yourself?
Bible Commentary

I. Ready for Battle
(Review Ephesians 6:10–18.)

No soldier goes into combat without protective gear. In the battle against sin and suffering, we, too, must be guarded and ready to fight. Go back to Ephesians 6:11: “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (NKJV).

Consider This: What are some of the specific things Jesus said and did that assure us that He was shielded by the armor of God? (See Matt. 4:4, Matt. 26:53, Mark 1:35, Luke 19:10, John 17:17, 1 Pet. 2:21–23.)

In these verses we see that Jesus often made reference to the Scriptures. God’s Word was His guide. He had an active prayer life, communing with the Father on a daily basis. He lived a pure life free from sin. He never sought to defend Himself but trusted in the Father’s power to deliver Him in times of need. His sole purpose in life was to do the will of His Father, which was the salvation of humanity. In the life of Christ we see all of the elements of the armor of God that are mentioned in Ephesians 6:14–18: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God.

Consider This: How can we, like Jesus, guard against the “wiles of the devil” (vs. 11)? Give some practical everyday examples (see John 8:31, 32; 1 Cor. 13:4–7; 1 Thess. 5:17; Titus 2:11–13).

II. Letting Him Bear the Burden
(Review Psalm 55:22.)

One of the darts the enemy throws our way is suffering. Suffering may come as a result of personal loss, problems in relationships, financial difficulties, being misunderstood or mistreated, or some other hardship. All of these things are commonplace in our human experience. Those who wait upon the Lord shall be strengthened, those who put on the armor of God shall stand, and those who cast their burdens on the Lord shall be sustained.

Consider This: Does casting your burden upon the Lord mean that the problem or the suffering will be removed? Explain your answer.
The Crucified God

Death by crucifixion was one of the harshest punishments the Romans meted out to anyone. It was considered the worst way to die. Thus, how horrific for anyone to be killed that way, much less the Son of God! Jesus, we must always remember, came in human flesh like ours. Between the beatings, the scourgings, the nails hammered into His hands and feet, the harrowing weight of His own body tearing at the wounds, and the physical pain must have been unbearable. This was harsh, even for the worst of criminals; how unfair, then, that Jesus, innocent of everything, should face such a fate.

Yet, as we know, Christ’s physical sufferings were mild in contrast to what was really happening. This was more than just the killing of an innocent man.

**What** events surrounding the death of Jesus showed that more was going on than most people there understood at the time? What significance can we find in each of these events that can help reveal what happened there?

*Matt. 27:45*

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

*Matt. 27:51, 52*

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

*Mark 15:38*

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Clearly, something much more was happening here than just the death, however unfairly, of an innocent man. According to Scripture, God’s wrath against sin, our sin, was poured out upon Jesus. Jesus on the cross suffered not sinful humanity’s unjust wrath but a righteous God’s righteous indignation against sin, the sins of the whole world. As such, Jesus suffered something deeper, darker, and more painful than any human being could ever know or experience.

As you go through whatever struggles you are facing, what hope and comfort can you draw from the reality of Christ suffering for you on the cross?
III. Just Stand
(Review Exodus 14:13, 14.)

Led by Moses, the Israelites left Egypt bound for freedom, until they came to the Red Sea. With Pharaoh’s army quickly closing in on them and the sea in front of them, they cried out to the Lord. They thought they surely would perish. But God had another plan. He had not brought them so far to let them die in the wilderness. “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord” (vs. 13, NKJV), was the explicit command of Moses.

Stand still, and having done all . . . stand. With nowhere to turn, the only thing left for the Israelites to do was to stand still—to wait—and see the salvation of the Lord.

God would deliver them, but they had to wait on Him and watch what He would do.

Consider This: Is it true that sometimes the best defense is no defense at all? Discuss.

How can you know whether it is best to do something or better to do nothing? Can we wait on the Lord in either case?

STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

Thought Questions:

From the very beginning the Savior was threatened or judged by others (see Isa. 9:6, Matt. 2:13). How did Jesus handle threats? How should we handle the threats or judgments of others?

1. Jesus was rejected even in His hometown, by those who had known Him His whole life (Luke 4:22, 28, 29). What does this tell us about earthly ties?

2. How can we maintain human relationships while remaining loyal to God?

Application Questions:

1. Jesus was heartbroken by those who rejected Him, yet His sorrow was
The Suffering God

We might as well get used to it: As long as we are here, in this world, we are going to suffer. It is, as fallen creatures, our fate. Nothing in the Bible promises us anything differently. On the contrary . . .

**What** do the following texts have to tell us about the topic at hand? *Acts 14:22, Phil. 1:29, 2 Tim. 3:12.*

Yet, in the midst of our suffering, two things we should keep in mind.

First, Christ, our Lord, has suffered worse than any of us ever could. At the Cross, He “has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (*Isa. 53:4, NKJV*); what we know only as individuals, He suffered corporately, for us all. He, who was sinless, became “sin for us” (*2 Cor. 5:21*), suffering in a way that we, as sinful creatures, couldn’t begin to imagine.

But second, as we suffer, we should remember the results of Christ’s suffering; that is, what we have been promised through what Christ has done for us.

**Read** *John 10:28, Romans 6:23, Titus 1:2, and 1 John 2:25.* What are we promised?

Whatever our sufferings here, thanks to Jesus, thanks to His bearing in Himself the punishment of our sin, thanks to the great provision of the gospel—that through faith we can stand perfect in Jesus right now—we have the promise of eternal life. We have the promise that because of what Christ has done, because of the fullness and completeness of His perfect life and perfect sacrifice, our existence here, full of pain, disappointment, and loss, is no more than an instant, a flash, here and gone. In contrast to this, there is the eternity that awaits us, an eternity in a new heavens and a new earth, one without sin, suffering, and death. And all this is promised to us and made certain for us only because of Christ and the crucible He went into so that one day, coming soon, He would see “the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (*Isa. 53:11*).
not for Himself. It was for them, because He could not save them *(see Matt. 23:37).* In light of how Jesus felt about those who rejected Him, how should we relate to those who treat us unkindly?

Like Christ, our main purpose in life should be salvation—the salvation of every soul, including our own. Name some specific ways that we can keep our focus on the Lord’s soon coming, even in difficult experiences.

Witnessing:

Is it possible that God uses our suffering as an avenue for saving others? If so, give an example. If not, explain your answer.

STEP 4—Apply!

*Just for Teachers:* In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question, *With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?*

*Consider This:* Share with the class a trying experience that you have had. How did you handle it? Is there anything you could have done differently? Would you consider this a kind of suffering? Tell how this experience may have strengthened you spiritually.

*Try This:* Ask class members to keep a journal for one week of any trials that they encounter, recording how they respond to each situation, and how to apply the principles outlined in this week’s lesson.

Invite a class member to close with prayer.

“Three times has He uttered that prayer. Three times has humanity shrunk from the last, crowning sacrifice. But now the history of the human race comes up before the world’s Redeemer. He sees that the transgressors of the law, if left to themselves, must perish. He sees the helplessness of man. He sees the power of sin. The woes and lamentations of a doomed world rise before Him. He beholds its impending fate, and His decision is made. He will save man at any cost to Himself. He accepts His baptism of blood, that through Him perishing millions may gain everlasting life. He has left the courts of heaven, where all is purity, happiness, and glory, to save the one lost sheep, the one world that has fallen by transgression. And He will not turn from His mission. He will become the propitiation of a race that has willed to sin. His prayer now breathes only submission: ‘If this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.’ ”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 690, 693.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does it help us in our own sufferings, this knowledge that God Himself, in the person of Christ, suffered worse than any of us ever could? What should the sufferings of Christ in our behalf mean to us? What comfort can we draw from this amazing truth? As you think about your answer, keep in mind the following statement from Ellen White: “All the suffering which is the result of sin was poured into the bosom of the sinless Son of God.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 3, p. 129.

2. As a class, go over the sufferings of Christ looked at in this week’s lesson. What were the crucibles that Christ faced? In what ways are they like our own; in what ways are they different? What can we learn from how He handled these challenges that can help us amid our own crucibles?

3. What are some of your favorite Bible promises, promises that you can cling to amid sorrow and pain? Write them out, claim them for yourself, and share them in class.

4. Write out a summary paragraph, highlighting whatever few main points you got from this quarter’s lesson. What questions were resolved for you? What issues still remain unanswered? How can we help each other work through those things that still greatly perplex and trouble us?