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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).
Swede Ingmar Bergman told a story about a knight named Antonius Block who kneels in front of a confessional to confess his sins. He does not realize until later that he is talking to Death—a shadowy, robed character—rather than a priest. Block declares that he is seeking not faith, not suppositions, but knowledge.

“I want,” he says, “God to stretch out His hand toward me, reveal Himself, and speak to me.”

Death replies that perhaps there is no God, that there is only nothing.

“Then,” says Block, “life is an outrageous horror. No one can live in the face of death, knowing that all is nothingness.”

Today millions live in the face of such nothingness. They have no faith in God, no hope in anything past the world around them. No wonder, then, that so many focus on the comforts of this life, seeking solace in pleasure and the various worldly distractions. The Christian faith—which calls upon us to “fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18, NIV)—is foreign to them.

As Christians, we are God’s agents to bring people hope, to show that there is a God who loves and cares for them.

As Christians, we are God’s agents to bring these people hope, to show that there is a God who loves and cares for them, to show that although life has many outrageous horrors, it is not ultimately an outrageous horror but that God will finally make all things right.

The Bible gives us many inspirational stories of God’s agents of hope. In this quarter’s lessons we will focus on some of these outstanding missionaries; on who they were and what they did in seeking to bring others to a saving knowledge of the Lord of salvation.
Ellen G. White tells the story of a man nearly chilled to death in deep snow. He was about to give up struggling for his life when he heard the moans from a fellow traveler nearby. His first impulse was to rescue the other man. When he found him, he rubbed the man’s frozen limbs. He finally got him to his feet and carried him through the drifts to safety.

Then “the truth flashed home to him that in saving his neighbor he had saved himself also” by quickening “the blood which was freezing in his own veins.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 319.

The point? A healthy church is a church focused on mission to others. Sharing God’s love with the community brings fresh life and energy into the church.

It would be a mistake this quarter to study these biblical agents as interesting historical figures and leave it at that. Rather, we need to catch the inspiration of their lives and focus on our mission to this dying world. There is nothing more refreshing, or more life-giving, than reaching out to others.

Our prayer is that this quarter’s lessons on biblical agents of hope will lead us into a renewed commitment to share God’s love with our neighbors and friends and in mission fields around the world. In so doing, we may just find that we have entered into a whole new dimension in our Christian lives.

*Gary Krause, an Australian born to missionary parents in Fiji, is director of the Office of Adventist Mission at the General Conference. He is married to Bettina, and they have one daughter, Bethany Grace.*
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 Lesson in Brief” 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.
For Such a Time As This: The Apostle Paul

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God” (Romans 15:17, NIV).

Key Thought: The apostle Paul had a powerful impact on the then-known world, spreading Christianity far beyond the geographical confines of Israel and the Jewish people. His life and ministry is a model for our mission today.

The idea that the good news was also good news for the Gentiles was a shocker to people who, despite the teachings of their own prophets, had grown up with a different understanding. God’s salvation was for the entire world, not just for Jewish people. Talk about a paradigm shift!

The apostle Paul was a key leader in acting on this revelation. His background, personality, and calling from God made him the right person at the right time to guide the church into this new era of mission to all people.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church went through a similar process during the late nineteenth century, when it began its mission work outside North America. This was a radical step that laid the foundation for today’s international Adventist mission work in more than two hundred countries.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 5.*
Paul’s Background

The apostle Paul is arguably the most influential person in the New Testament, apart from Jesus Himself. He took the good news about Jesus to much of the then-known world.

Paul was born in Tarsus, then the capital of Cilicia, a Roman province, in what is present-day Turkey. This area was noted for its goats’-hair cloth that was widely used for tent making, which was Paul’s trade (Acts 18:3).

Read Acts 22:3–5, 25–29, Romans 11:1, and Philippians 3:5. What do these texts tell us about Paul that could help us understand why he could be so effective a witness at this time in history?

Roman citizenship by birth was highly prized. In Paul’s day, a person could purchase Roman citizenship for 500 drachmas, close to two years’ wages for the average worker. Roman citizenship came with certain privileges—safety from scourging and no death penalty without a trial (see Acts 22:23–29); the right to vote, make contracts, and have a legal marriage; and exemption from paying taxes.

And yet, Paul was also a Jew, one with a rich spiritual heritage. In later years, he often referred to his heritage and said, “ ‘I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today’ ” (Acts 22:3, NIV).

Paul came from the tribe of Benjamin, was reared as a Pharisee, and studied under the great Gamaliel (vs. 3), one of the leading Jewish teachers of the time. We learn from Paul’s letter to the Galatians that he was “extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers” (Gal. 1:14, NIV). This zeal translated into full-scale persecution of those who became followers of Jesus.

Zealous Jew, Roman citizen, Paul was soon to become the greatest apostle the world has ever seen.

What aspects of your own life (nationality, education, upbringing, etc.) can be of special use in witnessing? How can you take advantage of your background to better witness for the Lord?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Romans 15:17

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize that Paul was especially chosen and equipped for a special ministry.
Feel: A desire to use the gifts and talents the Lord has given us for His service.
Do: Inspire each class member to build a discipleship program into his or her lifestyle that will allow time for developing and using their God-given gifts and talents.

Learning Outline:

I. Paul the “Zealot” (Gal. 1:14, 1 Tim. 1:12–14) See also in Friday’s lesson a quote from Selected Messages, book 1, p. 214.

A How do you explain that Paul, before and after his conversion, was always a religious zealot?

B Indicate some of the ways in which Paul’s conversion experience changed him from one kind of zealot into another kind.

II. Life and Salvation Through Christ (1 Cor. 2:2)

A Why does this week’s lesson categorize Paul as “a man of like passions” as ourselves?

B In your own words, summarize Paul’s concept on the role of Jesus in the Christian faith.

III. Themes of Hope (1 Tim. 6:11)

A Why would a “zealot” Jewish-trained rabbi such as Paul be called to take the gospel to non-Jewish people?

B Read Revelation 14:6, 7. Do you see any parallels between Paul’s calling and this message?

Summary: If Paul could do it, we can do it! His unique background prepared him for a unique mission. Our personal background prepares us for some unique mission as the Lord shows it to us.
Paul: His Conversion and Calling

The apostle Paul was not always the apostle Paul but Saul of Tarsus, persecutor of the early church. He then had an experience that set him on the course that would change not only his own life but history itself.

Read Acts 9:1–9, Paul’s conversion experience. What happened to him that changed him so greatly? How hard must it have been for him to accept that he had been so terribly wrong about Jesus?

Paul did not need any deep theological explanation before surrendering Himself to Jesus. Right then and there Paul gave himself to the Lord, declaring, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (vs. 6). The fiery opponent of Jesus was now His humbled and broken servant.

After his conversion, Paul met with Peter, James, and John—the “pillars” among the apostles—and they agreed that Paul’s special calling was to go as an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7–9).

Read Acts 13:47 and Isaiah 49:5, 6. What title and purpose do Paul and Barnabas apply to themselves that was also applied to Jesus? Luke 2:30–32.

Though Paul saw himself as a special envoy or instrument to reach the Gentiles, he also shared the good news with Jewish people. In the same way, other apostles such as Peter preached mainly to Jews, but God also used them to witness to Gentiles. In fact, Peter was the first apostle to reach out to Gentiles (see Acts 10).

Most likely, few of us have had the kind of dramatic conversion experience that Paul did. Yet, we all, at some point, need conversion. What has your own conversion experience been? Most important, what have you learned from that experience that could help you lead others toward having their own, as well?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Have you ever felt that your inadequacies disqualify you to serve God in any meaningful way? Maybe it’s a personality defect that you struggle with. You have a short temper or you procrastinate. Perhaps you look at other people who seem to have more marketable talents. You’re not as smart as Stephen Hawking. You’re not as attractive as Angelina Jolie or Brad Pitt. Or perhaps your past life shames or embarrasses you. You’ve done things and been places that forever disqualify you from running for president or being successfully nominated for a high position in your nation’s government.

As it turns out, none of these things matter to God. God specializes in taking our weaknesses and making them into strengths.

Based on this, ask class members to talk about things they have done or things that have happened to them that seemed to be negatives but became positives. (Alternative: If this is too personal or revealing, ask for examples from the Bible, history, or the news.)

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Confidence in Christ (Review Rom. 15:17 with your class.)

Paul spends a large part of Romans systematically deconstructing any reasons his readers might have for faith in themselves and their future. Gentiles are almost uniformly pagans and degenerates dooming themselves to destruction. Jews are almost as bad, possibly worse because they fail to live up to their own standards and add hypocrisy to an already long list. What is there to hope for then?

“Paul’s glorying was not in himself but ‘through Christ Jesus. . . .’ He recognized that he has nothing whereof to boast. . . . but that as a minister of the gospel he did all things in and through Christ.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 645.
Paul: A Man of Like Passions

It is so easy to envision Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles and, with the exception of Jesus Himself, the greatest force in all Christianity, as some kind of superhuman being, a flawless saint and herald of the faith.

Yet, that is not the picture presented in the New Testament. Scripture puts us all under sin, paints us all as sinners in need of divine grace. The apostle Paul is no exception either.

At times Paul seems impulsive, almost aggressive. He often stood up for his rights. When he and Silas were in jail, he appealed to his rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 16:35–40). Later, when in the court of Agrippa, he appealed to Caesar—which was one of his rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 25:11, 12). Had he waited and not demanded his rights, he later might have been freed (Acts 26:32).

**What can we learn about Paul from the following texts? Acts 15:37–39, Rom. 7:19–25, 1 Cor. 9:27, 2 Cor. 12:7.**

It is a comfort to know that such a giant of faith as the apostle Paul was not perfect. He sometimes made mistakes. He needed the daily grace and forgiveness of Jesus in his life, just as we do. Indeed, from all that we can tell by his writing, Paul was very aware of his own sinfulness. No doubt it was from, partially at least, this awareness of his own weaknesses and faults that made him such a powerful teacher of God’s saving grace.

**Read** Romans 7:24. What does this tell us about Paul’s self-understanding? What hope and comfort can you draw from yourself by these words?

Though Paul was not perfect, God used him anyway. Why is it important that, while being aware of our faults and claiming God’s promises for victory, we not allow them to discourage us from working for the Lord?
**Consider This:** Why is it so natural for us to look to our own presumed personal qualities or external factors when we really should be focusing on God and the valid sense of confidence and self-worth that He wants to give us through Christ? How might one remind oneself of this in one’s daily life?

- **How do the following verses elaborate on the confidence we are given in Christ?** 2 Cor. 10:17, Phil. 4:13.

**II. Christ Here and Hereafter (Review 2 Cor. 1:20–24 with your class.)**

**Consider This:** Our faith in Christ and His plans for us are not some silly fantasy about an imaginary superhero in the sky. What has He already done for us to make Himself worthy of our trust?

“That is, through Christ. All the promises of God became incarnate in Him, they met their fulfillment in Him. He is thus the evidence of the reliability of all the divine promises made to the fathers. . . . The Christian faith is an absolute certainty.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 832.

“Through Christ the promises are proved reliable, and through His people are they proved efficacious. Through the life and ministry of Paul in particular the name of God was being glorified.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 833.

**III. The Cross (Review 1 Cor. 1:18 with your class.)**

This verse indicates that what would have been regarded as most shameful and difficult about the Christian message Paul preached was really the most central fact of Jesus’ life and ministry.

**Consider This:** To people who don’t understand Christ’s ministry or what He came to save us from, the concept and image of the Cross might seem wholly depressing, but it’s also the only chance we have, because there the Lord did what was needed for us to have the hope of salvation.
Life and Salvation Through Christ

Several major themes dominated and motivated the apostle Paul’s life and mission. At the top of the list was the story of Jesus crucified. This event was the basis of everything he taught and did. He wrote to the Corinthians, “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2), and to the Galatians, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14). These verses show that for Paul the cross of Christ (which of necessity includes Christ’s resurrection, as well) was the central theme of his whole theology.

Throughout his writings, Paul describes in many different ways the enormity of what Jesus did through the Cross to save humanity.

Read the following texts in which Paul describes salvation. What do these verses tell us about what Christ has done for us?

Rom. 5:10

Rom. 6:18

Rom. 7:2–4

Rom. 8:15–17

Gal. 2:16

Eph. 1:7

1 Tim. 2:6

1 Pet. 1:18, 19

Paul uses a number of different images and word pictures to describe what Christ has done for us. Most likely that is because no single image alone can do justice to the grandness of what was accomplished for us at the Cross.

How central is the Cross to your own theology? How focused are you on it? Why is it important to keep the Cross at the center of all our witnessing?
IV. Themes of Hope (Review Eph. 2:8–10 with your class.)

**Consider This:** What is missing from many people’s experience of salvation in Christ?

This verse teaches us that salvation does not mean that Christ saves us and simply walks off, leaving us to do whatever we were doing before. On the contrary, we are being sanctified, in a very real sense re-created to be what we were meant to be in the first place. How do we experience this promise of sanctification in our lives on a daily basis?

V. Themes of Truth (Review Thess. 4:13–15 with your class.)

**Consider This:** For all his emphasis on grace and the centrality of Christ, His perfect life, and His sacrifice, Paul apparently thought it was very important that his readers have precisely the correct information on what happens after death, the end of time, etc. Why does Paul think these things are important? How do they fit in with our message to the world?

**STEP 3—Practice**

**Thought Questions:**

1. How was Paul’s background a hindrance or disadvantage to him in the path he later took? In what ways was it an advantage?

2. What false notions, cultural conditioning, and prejudices did Paul have to overcome? What about ourselves? In what ways has our background, education, and culture worked against us? How can we overcome these barriers?

**Application Questions:**

1. One thing most people know about Paul is that he changed his name from Saul. Why do you think he changed it?
Themes of Hope

In yesterday’s lesson, we saw how Christ’s death on the cross was the key theme in Paul’s life and teachings. Today we will touch briefly on some other major Pauline themes.

*Living a godly life (sanctification).* Paul makes it very clear throughout his writings that salvation is free, a gift we cannot earn or deserve (Rom. 5:15, 6:23, Eph. 2:8). But salvation does not free us to behave as we did before we met Jesus. In response to His grace, we must live as Jesus asks us to live.

Paul writes to Timothy: “Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness” (1 Tim. 6:11, NIV). We do not do what is right in order that Jesus will save us; we do what is right because we have been saved. In fact, says Paul, we were “created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (Eph. 2:10, NIV).

We do not obey God so that He will love us, accept us, or give us a ticket to heaven. When we accept Jesus’ gift of salvation, we are accepted totally and unconditionally. We obey God because His powerful love leads us to good works. We obey Him because His love compels us (see 2 Cor. 5:14).

**Read** 2 Peter 1:3–8. What reasons does Peter give for living a godly life? What other reasons can you add?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Paul wrote that he did not want us to “be ignorant” about what happens when people die (1 Thess. 4:13). Why is it important to understand the truth about life after death?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Paul’s key themes are all linked. Through Jesus’ self-sacrifice and resurrection, He conquered death. He will return to bring His gift of everlasting life to His faithful children (see vss. 13–18) at their resurrection. These followers of Jesus have demonstrated their love for Him in the way they have lived their lives (see Eph. 4:20–32).

What is the one hope of Christianity that means the most to you? That is, of all the promises we have, which one offers you the greatest hope, and why? Write out your response and bring it to class on Sabbath.
One thing that is often emphasized about Jesus is that He did not emphasize His rights, accepting unjust treatment and death. What example does Paul give us here? When is it legitimate for us to fight aggressively for our own rights?

Witnessing

As we see how Paul allowed God to use his unique talents, personality, and life history, how can we make use of our own uniqueness, flaws and all, to call people to Jesus?

STEP 4—Apply

Consider This: Ask class members to share ways in which God has shown Himself to them in different circumstances.

Paul had a particularly interesting conversion experience. But it could be argued that all conversion experiences are interesting in their way. Write yours down. Be prepared to share it with others, either in group settings or one on one. How is it similar to, or different from, those you have heard about from other people? How was God uniquely preparing you for service to Him? No matter how different the circumstances might have been, what things did the various experiences have in common with each other?

Do you know yourself as well as you could? Which aspects of your personality and temperament help you in your Christian life, and which hinder you? Find out.

It goes without saying that Paul was a man of prayer. Pray for God’s guidance in your service to Him and mean it. Be prepared to follow it.

Paul’s path led him to join with the people he initially hated the most. Do you have any prejudices or negative first impressions of individuals or groups you might want to put aside? Think about it.

Invite a class member to close with prayer.

“The belief of a falsehood did not make Paul a kind, tender, compassionate man. He was a religious zealot, exceedingly mad against the truth concerning Jesus. He went through the country, haling men and women, and committing them to prison.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 1, p. 214.

“The apostle Paul had all the privileges of a Roman citizen. He was not behind in the Hebrew education; for he had learned at the feet of Gamaliel; but all this did not enable him to reach the highest standard. With all this scientific and literary education, he was, until Christ was revealed to him, in as complete darkness as are many at this time. Paul became fully conscious that to know Jesus Christ by an experimental knowledge was for his present and eternal good. He saw the necessity of reaching a high standard.”—Ellen G. White, Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, July 18, 1899.

“There is one great central truth to be kept ever before the mind in the searching of the Scriptures—Christ and Him crucified. Every other truth is invested with influence and power corresponding to its relation to this theme. It is only in the light of the cross that we can discern the exalted character of the law of God. The soul palsied by sin can be endowed with life only through the work wrought out upon the cross by the Author of our salvation.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1084.

Discussion Questions:

1. What beliefs are most important to you? How do they affect the way you live? How do you respond to those who hold other beliefs, maybe even contrary beliefs to your own, just as strongly?

2. How central is the Cross in your own local church? What could you do, as either an individual or a class, to help ensure that as with Paul, Christ and Him crucified are central to your church and its outreach to the local community?

3. In class, share your responses to Thursday’s final question.

Summary: Paul provides a wonderful example of the fact that there is no limit to what God can do through us—human and weak though we may be. Paul’s unique background and gifts enabled him to take the good news about Jesus to an entirely new mission field.

Memory Text: “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22, NKJV).

Key Thought: The apostle Paul, seeking to bring the gospel to the world, gives us an example of how we need to learn to adapt the way we present our message, depending on the context and culture in which we are witnessing.

Adventist missionary pioneers quickly learned that they needed to present our present truth message in as culturally relevant a way as possible. Today the Global Mission initiative of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church sponsors study centers around the world that explore ways to build bridges to people of other religions and cultures. Before we can effectively communicate with other people, we need to understand their culture and ways of thinking.

This week we explore what it means to adapt our message to people in different circumstances. And we do so by looking at the various ways in which the apostle Paul, a firm and uncompromising believer in truth, tailored the message of Jesus for specific audiences. What can we learn from Paul that will better enable us to reach people with present truth?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 12.*
Paul Encouraged for Mission

After Paul’s Damascus road experience, some of the apostles were not convinced that he was a true disciple (see Acts 9:26). Perhaps they feared he was sent as a spy to infiltrate the church and cause further problems. At that time, Barnabas stood up for Paul and defended him (vss. 27, 28).

Barnabas was “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith” (Acts 11:24, NIV), and he was a tremendous help to Paul as he began his ministry.

Read Acts 11:19–24. How did the church begin in Antioch? How successful were the missionary endeavors?

The leaders of the church in Jerusalem heard about the new group of believers in Antioch—one of the three leading cities of the Roman Empire at that time. Immediately they sent the highly respected Barnabas to help establish and build up the church.

Read Acts 11:25, 26. Why do you think Barnabas chose Paul to help him?

Acts is full of surprising events: Saul, the persecutor, becomes Paul, the missionary; the gospel of salvation becomes good news for all, not just for the Jews; and now Paul ministers to a church established indirectly as a result of his persecution.

For a year Barnabas and Paul taught the people. As the church grew in strength, it developed a spirit of compassion and ministered to others. The new church members sent financial help to their brothers and sisters in Judea, who were suffering from a severe famine (Acts 11:28–30). Thus, they were not going to hoard their own blessings; when a need came, they were ready to help.

The church in Jerusalem, hearing about Antioch, sent Barnabas to work with it. And Barnabas, knowing about Paul’s calling, brought Paul to help. And that church, hearing about the needs in Jerusalem, sent aid to it.

What lesson can we learn about helping others with the things that we ourselves have been blessed?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Corinthians 9:22

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Indicate to the class some of the ways in which Paul adapted the Christian message to the contemporary culture.
- **Feel:** The importance of adapting the presentation of the message without changing the message itself.
- **Do:** Figure out some ways to do the same thing in presenting the Advent message to people.

**Learning Outline:**

I. “All Things to All People” (*1 Cor. 9:22*)

- **A** How do you do that?
- **C** What happened in the new church in Antioch in Syria that had never happened before in the young Christian church?

II. Keeping the Message Intact (*1 Tim. 4:16*)

- **A** You heard someone present the Adventist message in an entirely different way than you learned it, and you didn’t like it! What made you feel that way?
- **B** Discuss this question with the class: “Why is it important to keep the Advent message intact even if you present it in a unique way?”

III. Dealing With Athenian Philosophers

**Case Study:** Your friend is a secular person indifferent to religion and says “It’s fine for those who like it, but I can take it or leave it.” What do you say to this contemporary “Athenian philosopher”?

**Summary:** If people don’t understand what’s being said, they won’t listen. Paul set an example of how to communicate Christianity in different settings and gave us some good ideas on how to make the Advent message understandable.
All Things to All People

“I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:22, NIV).

What does Paul mean when he says that he has “become all things to all [people]”? We can be confident that whatever his meaning, the apostle is not advocating compromise. He is not talking about changing the gospel, the doctrines, the ethics, or any of the truth of God’s Word. He is talking about making these things as attractive and understandable as possible for different cultures.

Paul modeled this approach by using different methods to reach different people.

For example, in attempting to reach Jews, Paul would arrive in a city, visit the synagogue, and teach (see, for example, Acts 9:19–22, 13:14–16).

Read Acts 13:16–42. In his sermon, where does Paul’s short overview of biblical history begin and end? To what authority does he appeal to prove that Jesus is the Messiah? What does this tell you about Paul’s approach to Jewish people?

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Read Acts 14:8–18. How does the way Paul talks to the pagans—who did not believe the Old Testament—differ from his speeches to the Jews?

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Paul makes no appeal to Scripture as an authority (he does allude to the Old Testament in verse 15, but in the way he might quote a poet, not as an authority). Rather, he appeals to the natural world and the evidence that nature gives of a Creator God. And he points out the futility of worshiping idols.

How far should we be willing to go in trying to reach people in their own culture? How can we avoid the dangers of going too far; that is, of compromising truth in our attempts to spread it?
**Learning Cycle**

**STEP 1—Motivate**

Jesus said that the truth would set us free. As Christians, we have found that the truth Jesus presented to us and the world did indeed set us free. But that doesn’t mean all our problems go away, and one of those problems arises from friends, relatives, or business associates who don’t like or appreciate our new lifestyle and worldview.

How did Paul overcome similar barriers in a culture in which much of his message was completely alien to many of his hearers? What can we learn from his experience?

Based on this, ask the class members to describe a situation in which they had to stand up for their faith in an unfriendly environment. How did it go? What did they learn? What mistakes did they make? What might they do differently next time?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

I. “All Things to All People” (*Review 1 Cor. 9:22 with your class.*)

From what we can glean about Paul’s career elsewhere in the New Testament, a tendency to compromise was not one of his vices/virtues. It is quite clear that Paul did not advocate any compromise on essentials and that smooth social interaction was not his primary interest. “Everything that Paul did, his ready adaptation to the particular society in which he found himself and his willingness to be tolerant and patient toward all men, had but one objective—the saving of those who would believe his message.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 734.

**Consider This:** What do passages such as Acts 9:19–22 or Acts 13:14–16 say to us about how this approach looks when put into action?

II. Witness to the Athenians (*Review Acts 17:18–33 with your class.*)

**Consider This:** The following commentary explains why Paul’s approach to the Athenians differs so much from examples of his preaching and
A Witness to the Philosophers

One of Paul’s most well-known missionary endeavors occurred in Athens, home of some of the world’s greatest philosophers of antiquity, such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. And yet, how interesting: Even with all the philosophy and all its appeals to reason and logic, the city was still “wholly given to idolatry” (Acts 17:16). What a testimony to how, in the end, philosophy cannot answer basic human needs.

Read Acts 17:18–34. What approach did Paul take in trying to reach these people? What does he not use? How successful were his efforts?

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Epicureans taught that happiness comes from living a good life with modest pleasures. The Stoics, on the other hand, urged people to be content with what they had. Together, Stoic and Epicurean philosophers heard Paul in the marketplace and started to argue with him, calling him a “babbler” (Acts 17:18, NIV).

Despite ridiculing Paul, these philosophers invited him to speak at a meeting of the Areopagus—a group of philosophers that assessed new teachings—on what we know as Mars’ Hill.

In his speech, Paul shapes his message to his pagan audience (vss. 22–25) by connecting with their culture. He refers to a statue they had built to the unknown god and identifies Him as the Creator God.

At no stage does Paul refer to the Scriptures, as he would with a Jewish audience. Rather, he again points to the natural world with which they are familiar and connects it to the supernatural. And though Paul did not use the Scriptures, his message to them was, clearly, very scriptural.

In what ways do the things of nature speak to your heart about God? How could you better cultivate an appreciation of our Creator through the things of nature?
teaching recorded elsewhere; it is one of the few times that Paul does not quote Scripture and, in fact, refers to other literature of the day.

“By quoting from their own literature, Paul illustrated his policy of becoming ‘all things to all men’ (1 Cor. 9:22). They would recognize that they were not dealing with an uneducated Jew . . . , but with a man possessed of a culture like their own, and familiar with the thoughts of their poets.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 354.

Why do you think Paul took this approach? How might we need to do something similar in our attempts to reach out to those who don’t have a biblical background at all? What good is quoting the Bible to people who don’t pay any heed or attention to it?

III. The Sticking Point (Review Acts 17:34 with your class.)

Paul was able to convince his hearers that his “philosophy” was at least worthy of consideration, up until the point at which he had to bring up (so to speak) the resurrection of the dead.

It is instructive to note that even though Paul was quite willing to adapt his message to his audience, he was not willing to omit important pieces of information to make the parts that remained more palatable. How important that we learn to do the same thing; that is, to approach people where they are but not to stop there. We need to bring them along to where they need to be.

Consider This: Acts 17:34 shows us very clearly that the “all things to all people” approach does not justify any effort to alter the truth either actively or passively.

IV. Building Churches and the Church (Review Rom. 15:18–23 with your class and compare with 1 Cor. 3:6–14.)

Consider This: Paul is quite specific in this passage in regard to his method of spreading the message. Two things stand out: He avoided extraneous matters, speaking only of Christ and His qualities and accomplishments, and he avoided going to places where someone else had already preached Christ.

What does this say to us today about, for example, our relationship to other Christian churches or efforts to convince other Christians of our distinctive doctrines?
The Message on Mars’ Hill

Read again Acts 17:18–34. Look through Paul’s discourse. Where do you find these basic doctrines: Creation, Redemption, and judgment? In what ways does it sound like our Adventist message?

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Paul not only knew pagan literature; he quoted parts of it from memory. First, he quotes a Cretan poet who wrote, “‘In Him we live and move and have our being’” (vs. 28, NIV). And second, the pagan Cleanthes, whose love poem to the god Zeus contained the line “‘We are his offspring’” (vs. 28, NIV). In each case, Paul takes something from their culture and connects it to the truth he wants to teach them.

“With hand outstretched toward the temple crowded with idols, Paul poured out the burden of his soul, and exposed the fallacies of the religion of the Athenians,” writes Ellen G. White. “The wisest of his hearers were astonished as they listened to his reasoning. He showed himself familiar with their works of art, their literature, and their religion.”—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 237.

Ellen White adds: “Paul’s words contain a treasure of knowledge for the church. . . . Had his oration been a direct attack upon their gods and the great men of the city, he would have been in danger of meeting the fate of Socrates. But with a tact born of divine love, he carefully drew their minds away from heathen deities, by revealing to them the true God, who was to them unknown.”—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 241.

Paul understood that before we can lead people to where we want them to be we must first meet them where they are. That means focusing on their needs, their interests—and shaping our message in a way that connects with them. This does not mean watering down the message. It is just an issue of communication—talking to people in terms and in language they can understand.

What was the one aspect of Paul’s teaching that caused the most dissent in this environment? Why? What should this tell us about the limits of trying to explain rationally all that we believe?
Learning Cycle  
CONTINUED

In the light of his other writings, it is probably reasonable to assume that Paul is describing his form of evangelism and ministry, not prescribing it for all others in all times and places.

V. Becoming an Example  (Review 1 Thess. 1:6–8 with your class.)

**Consider This:** Being a witness to God is not just telling people about Him but giving evidence that you yourself have experienced God.

“The Thessalonian believers were true missionaries. Their hearts burned with zeal for their Saviour, who had delivered them from a fear of ‘the wrath to come.’” — Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 256.

*Nowhere is it suggested that the Thessalonians were such good examples because they were perfect. In his letters to them, Paul makes his share of corrections and suggestions. But the Thessalonians were growing, learning, and sharing their faith.*

**STEP 3—Practice**

**Thought Questions:**

1. Most of us have probably heard or been told that we should not study non-Christian philosophies and religions because it is better to become familiar with what we know is true rather than with what we know not to be true. Do you agree?

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2. What does the fact that Paul is able to find material to support his points in classical Greek literature suggest to you?

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**Application Question:**

In many parts of the world, pastors and church members are departing from the traditions and habits that have defined church for centuries, creating megachurches, seekers’ churches, etc. While these have been wildly suc-
Paul’s Method of Church Planting

Read Romans 15:18–23. How could he claim that “I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (vs. 19, NIV), when obviously most of the population were still not Christians? What does the answer tell us about how we are to determine what success is?

Paul chose to start new congregations in strategic cities throughout the region. He chose places that were major transport hubs—on major Roman roads or seaports—and that were important commercial, trading, or administrative centers. He thus established strategic lighthouses throughout the area, planning that the new groups of believers would take the good news to the areas surrounding these centers. Although Paul’s work was finished, the task of outreach had only begun for the new believers.

On his second missionary journey, Paul, with the help of Timothy and Silas, established a Christian church in Thessalonica, the largest city in Macedonia. It was located at the crossroads of two important Roman highways and was the major seaport for the entire region. A strongly established group of believers in this city would provide a center from which other church plants could grow throughout that area.

This is exactly what happened. Paul says, “You became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere” (1 Thess. 1:7, 8, NIV).

This church was a model for others. Interestingly enough, the Greek word for church (ekklesia) was not a specifically Christian word. It was used for any gathering of people in various settings. However, the Christian ekklesia was called to specific functions—not just to worship together but to reach out to their communities with the good news that they themselves had received.

The church did not exist solely to feed its own members. What is your attitude? Do you go to church seeking only to get your own needs met, or do you go hoping to give even more than you receive?
cessful, at least in the sense of drawing big crowds, they also have drawn their share of criticism. How do we determine which church traditions are based upon principle and which are merely a matter of habit or taste?

Witnessing
How can Paul’s methods teach us how to reach out to the larger community in a multicultural, multiethnic society?

Consider This: What aspects of Adventism do you think might particularly appeal to the non-Adventists you know? What parts might that person find objectionable? How can we help smooth out these potentially objectionable aspects of our faith without compromising it?

STEP 4—Apply

Consider This: Ask class members to describe ways in which they have engaged or could engage segments of society that they are unfamiliar with. Offer the following suggestions for bringing God’s message to a world where many people might not share our traditions and assumptions.

Try This:
1. Is there another culture or subculture that you are curious about? Learn about it.
2. Some of the divisions in our larger society are mirrored in the church. Try crossing these divides occasionally. Example: Why not visit a church that is primarily of another ethnic background?
3. Develop a friendship with someone whose religious beliefs and/or lifestyle differs from your own.

Invite a class member to close with prayer.
Further Study: “Thus [Paul] varied his manner of labor, shaping his message to the circumstances under which he was placed.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 118.

“There are some who will not be convinced by any presentation of the truth. The laborer for God should, nevertheless, study carefully the best method, in order that he may not arouse prejudice or stir up combativeness in his hearers.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 25, 1890.

“They [God’s workmen] are not to be one-idea men, stereotyped in their manner of working, unable to see that their advocacy of truth must vary with the class of people among whom they work and the circumstances they have to meet.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 119.

“By cheerful, patient kindness and Christian courtesy, he won the hearts of the people, quieted their prejudices, and endeavored to teach them the truth without exciting their combativeness. All this he did because he loved the souls of men, and desired to bring them to Christ that they might be saved.”—Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, p. 162.

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you best communicate what we as Adventists believe to an atheist university student? A person from another religion? Someone who believes the Bible but is not an Adventist? A former Adventist? Someone who seems totally indifferent to the whole question of faith or God?

2. No matter how different our approaches might be, what are some of the common things that must always accompany our witness to others? That is, what things should always be front and center of our witness, regardless of the circumstances?

3. How mission centered is your local church? What can you do to help your church get more involved in outreach to your local community?

Summary: Communication does not take place if the listener cannot understand what is being said. Paul provides many examples of how in our witness we must translate the good news into terms that people can understand.
Read for This Week’s Study: Matt. 14:1–12, Luke 1, Col. 2:8, Rev. 14:6–12.

Memory Text: “I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matthew 11:11, NIV).

Key Thought: John the Baptist had a special calling from God; we, as a church, have been called in a similar way. What can we learn from the example of John?

Followers of the ancient Mandaean religion venerate John the Baptist as the last and greatest of the prophets. Today Mandaean believers still can be found, mostly in Iraq and Iran. The great irony is that although they venerate John, they believe that Jesus was a false prophet, which is hard to understand since the whole purpose of John’s message was to prepare the way for Jesus.

From his base near the Jordan River, John preached a message of repentance, forgiveness, and social justice, all to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah. Large crowds gathered to hear him speak; and many followed his teachings. In fact, several of Jesus’ disciples were first disciples of John the Baptist.

This week we will discover more about the mission of a man whom Jesus praised more highly than anyone else; plus, we will look at the parallel between John’s calling and ours.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 19.*
A Special Calling

John is one of a small group of people whom the Bible says God chose before birth for a special mission, people such as Samuel and Samson, and even Jesus Himself. Hundreds of years earlier, the prophet Isaiah prophesied the ministry of John as one who would be “a voice of one calling: ‘In the desert’ ” (Isa. 40:3–5, NIV; see also Luke 3:4–6). John’s father, Zechariah, also predicted that his son would prepare the way for the Lord (Luke 1:76).

**Skim** over Luke 1, where John the Baptist’s mission and calling are prophesied. Make notes on the things that it said that John would accomplish. Compare those prophecies with what we know about John the Baptist. In what ways were they fulfilled?

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**After** looking at John’s accomplishments, look at John’s ignoble end (Matt. 14:1–12). How does that end match all the glorious things predicted about him?

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John the Baptist’s calling and ministry brought him to a hard and difficult path, one that ended almost as ignobly as His cousin’s, Jesus. Despite the trials, the sufferings, and the misunderstanding, he remained faithful, fulfilling the prophecies made about his life. John is an example of the suffering that any of us could face if we seek to remain faithful to God and to whatever calling He has for us.

By most standards, John the Baptist’s life and, especially, his death, would not have made him someone whom the world would call successful. What should that tell us about the difference between God’s ideals and the world’s? Are your standards of success more like God’s or the world’s, and what does the answer tell you about yourself?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Matthew 11:11

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** The content and validity of the comparison between John the Baptist and the remnant church.
- **Feel:** A sincere assurance of belonging to God’s last-day people with a special mission to the world.
- **Do:** Develop a plan to spend time participating in a “John the Baptist” ministry.

**Learning Outline:**

I. A Special Calling *(Luke 1:76)*

What are the parallels between John’s “special calling” and the “special calling” of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

II. A Special Message *(Matt. 11:14)*

- **A** As a class, review the historic Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the “Elijah message.”
- **B** There are those who either do not understand this message’s importance or do not wish to recognize its importance. Why is the historic Seventh-day Adventist understanding still valid?

III. Crucial Lessons *(Matt. 3:2)*

- **A** What did Jesus refer to when He said that the “least” in the kingdom is “greater” than John *(Matt. 11:11)*?
- **B** What are some of today’s answers to the people’s question to John in Luke 3:10 “What should we do then?” *(NIV).*
- **C** In Colossians 2:8 Paul talked about “hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition.” What contemporary application might that have in your church or personal life?

**Summary:** John the Baptist was called to prepare the way for Jesus’ first advent. His mission parallels that given God’s people at the end of time.
Preparing the Preparer

The Lord made many predictions about the life of John the Baptist, saying even before John was born what he could accomplish in his life. This raises the difficult question: Was John predestined to do these things simply because God predicted that he would? In other words, did John have any choice other than to do what God had predicted? Though the question of God’s foreknowledge and our free will has challenged theologians and philosophers for centuries (and so we certainly cannot answer the question right now), we can be sure of one thing: John needed a special preparation for the work he was to undertake.

Read Luke 1:80. What is found in the text that helps us understand some of the preparation John needed? What principles can we draw from here that could help us strengthen our own spiritual life?

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Luke 1:15 says that John would be filled with the Holy Ghost “‘even from his mother’s womb’” (NKJV). And yet, even with that special promise, he needed the kind of preparation found in the harshness of the desert. Often in the Bible the desert or wilderness is portrayed as a place for spiritual discipline and growth. Here it was that “the word of God came to John” (Luke 3:2, NIV). Certainly, John became a man of prayer and later taught his disciples how to pray (Luke 11:1) and fast (Mark 2:18). He knew the importance of a spiritual connection to heaven.

The spiritual power John received from God allowed him to proclaim his message with great force. He was a voice crying in the wilderness or, according to the literal Greek, “bellowing like an ox.”

As Jesus later suggested, nobody went to see John because he was some kind of weakling—“‘a reed shaken by the wind’” (Matt. 11:7, NKJV). On the contrary, they went to hear a man who spoke the truth with power and conviction.

Take an honest look at your own spiritual life. How often do you pray? How often do you study the Word? How immersed are you in the world and worldly things? What changes do you need to make? Might you need to spend some time in a desert somewhere?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

John the Baptist’s life was not an easy or pleasant one by ordinary standards. Not only did his message and way of life put him strongly at odds with much of society, but there was no ego gratification in it. His whole purpose was to prepare the way for Someone else. As far as he knew, when Jesus came he would be forgotten, or at most a footnote. And yet, John the Baptist was not forgotten. Not by his fellow humans, not by Jesus, and not by the Bible.

Ask class members to describe any instances in which they felt that their efforts to serve God or follow God’s will seemed to be failing. What did they learn from these experiences that could be of value to others?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Preparing the Way (Review Matt. 11:11 with your class.)

In his time, John often was compared to Old Testament prophets. Jesus here points out that he was in fact much greater and more fortunate, in that his whole purpose was to announce the coming of the kingdom of heaven in the person of Christ. Any of the prophets of the Old Testament would have given anything for the certainty that they would not only be the ones to predict this happening imminently but would live to see it themselves.

Conversely, he was not quite as fortunate as those who actually would live to see Jesus’ ministry fulfilled in His death, resurrection, and ascension.

Consider This: We live in the time after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension and thus know things that completely eluded Jesus’ own apostles and followers when He walked the earth. Therefore, according to Jesus Himself, we are “greater” (more privileged, actually) than John the Baptist or any of the others who didn’t live to know about the death and resurrection of Jesus. What do you think of this idea? Are we really more privileged than these people?

Also, what advantages do we have over them in terms of seeing a lot of prophecy fulfilled that they, in their own time, didn’t?

CONTINUED
The Spirit of Elijah

The angel who appeared to Zechariah alluded to Malachi’s prophecy and applied it directly to John (Luke 1:17). Jesus Himself confirmed it—“‘If you are willing to accept it, he [John] is the Elijah who was to come’” (Matt. 11:14, NIV; see also 17:11–13).

Elijah stands tall among the great prophets of the Old Testament. He called on King Ahab and the people of Israel, who were steeped in idolatry and apostasy, to return to God and reform their ways. The test on Mount Carmel, where he stood up for God against the pagan prophets, is one of the watershed moments in the entire Bible.

The “Elijah message” is a phrase deep with meaning for Seventh-day Adventists. Ellen G. White parallels the tasks of Elijah, John the Baptist, and God’s end-time people. She describes the “Elijah message” simply as “‘Prepare to meet thy God.’”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 1184.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE ELIJAH MESSAGE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elijah</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Called to reform Israel and call them to obedience to God’s laws. He delivered a message of judgment to King Ahab and a chance of repentance to Israel.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>John the Baptist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preached repentance and the principles of the kingdom of heaven. Delivered a message of judgment to religious leaders and people. Prepared people for Jesus’ first coming.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>God’s End-Time People</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reformers who preach righteousness by faith and call people to worship God, repent, and obey His commandments. Message: “‘The hour of his judgment has come’” (Rev. 14:7, NIV). Prepare people for Jesus’ second coming.</td>
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The apostle John wrote about three angels with special messages to proclaim to the world (Rev. 14:6–12) at the end of time. These messages include a call to worship God (because His judgment has come) and to remain faithful to Jesus. The gospel is central to this warning message. Ellen G. White wrote, “Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel’s message, and I have answered, ‘It is the third angel’s message in verity.’”—The Review and Herald, April 1, 1890.

Read Revelation 14:6–12, the three angels’ messages. Where do you see warnings, as well as hope, mingled? In what sense was John’s message both warning and hope? How can we use warnings to point people toward hope?
II. Responding to the Call *(Review Luke 1:80 with your class.)*

**Consider This:** The Gospels make clear that John was called to his ministry long before he even existed. But he didn’t merely wait for things to “fall into place.” *Look at Luke 1:15, 80, and Matthew 3:2.*

“God does not force the will of His creatures. . . . It remains for us to choose whether we will be set free from the bondage of sin, to share the glorious liberty of the sons of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ,* pp. 43, 44.

III. The Elijah Message *(Review Matt. 11:14 with your class.)*

Elijah is one of the most compelling prophets in the Bible. Like John the Baptist and Jesus, he wasn’t much of a writer. All the surviving material concerning him is about—not by—him. Yet, his message didn’t require much writing. It was the message of the whole Bible before and after his time, stripped to essentials: “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.”

**Consider This:** Of all the prophets, Elijah was the one most associated as an individual with the hope for the end of days. Why do you think this is the case?

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IV. Repent and Change *(Review Matt. 3:2 with your class.)*

**Consider This:** In John’s message, it could be suggested that the repentance was to be followed by action. How is our faith revealed by our behavior?

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“James contends that ‘faith’ which does not result in good ‘works’ is worthless. Genuine faith is obvious to others from the ‘works’ it produces; its existence does not rest on mere personal testimony.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 520, 521.
Changed Behavior

There were two key parts to John the Baptist’s message—repentance and behavior. Both were closely connected.

The Greek word John uses for repentance (metanoeo) is a compound word: meta, meaning “change,” and noeo, meaning “thinking.” Thus, repentance means to change one’s thinking about something.

When John says “ ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’ ” (Matt. 3:2, NIV), he is telling the people that the coming kingdom of heaven requires a totally new outlook. In other words, in preparing the people for Jesus’ arrival, in preparing the way for the Lord and making “straight paths” for Him (vs. 3, NIV), John was challenging the people to change their worldview and how they live.


One key aspect of repentance was the confessing of sin (Matt. 3:6). The other key aspect was changing behavior according to the principles of the kingdom of heaven (vs. 8). Nothing less could prepare them for Jesus, who would bring a time of refreshing such as they had never seen.

Baptism was closely associated with repentance. In fact, Luke says John preached “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:3, NIV). Being washed in the water symbolized the changed view of life, the fresh start, and the forgiveness of sin.

Although John’s strong words offended some people, the Bible indicates that large crowds came to hear him. “People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan” (Matt. 3:5, NIV). But not only did they come and listen, they confessed their sins and were baptized (vs. 6).

OK, you believe in God, believe in Jesus, believe that He died for your sins, and that you have salvation only through His righteousness credited to you, by faith alone. The question is, How well are you following the principles of righteousness as expressed by John the Baptist? How well does your life reveal the faith that you profess to have?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

V. Tradition (Review Col. 2:8 with your class.)

Consider This: What exactly is tradition, and why might it be harmful to one’s spiritual life?
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When we speak of tradition, it might help to know exactly what we mean by the term. According to the online Wikipedia, “the word tradition comes from the Latin word tradition which means ‘to hand down’ or ‘to hand over.’ However, on a more basic theoretical level, tradition(s) can be seen as information or composed of information. For that which is brought into the present from the past, in a particular societal context, is information. This is even more fundamental than particular acts or practices even if repeated over a long sequence of time. For such acts or practices, once performed, disappear unless they have been transformed into some manner of communicable information.” —“Tradition,” Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tradition.

■ It is clear that tradition in Jesus’ time was much more than “things we do over and over” as we tend to think of it today. As such, it became a substitute for God for many people, especially as it touched upon the relationship between human beings and God. We can assume that this was the major point of the antipathy to “tradition” we find in the New Testament.

STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

John and his message were obviously attractive to many people. What was it about him and his teaching that drew some and repelled others?

Can justification by faith be found in John’s message? If so, where?
A Crucial Lesson From John

**Read** Colossians 2:8. What is it saying to you, in your own culture and tradition? What must you be careful about?

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The Bible has much to say about tradition, and little of it is good. On one occasion the Pharisees and the teachers of the law asked Jesus why His disciples broke the tradition of the elders by not washing their hands before they ate (Matt. 15:2). This tradition was based on rules and regulations established by the rabbis, not by the Scriptures.

**Read** Matthew 15:3 and Mark 7:13. What specific points is Jesus making that gets at the heart of why tradition can be faith-destroying?

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An essential part of John the Baptist’s mission was to speak out against tradition and point people back to the revealed Word of God. Ellen G. White writes: “What was it that made John the Baptist great? He closed his mind to the mass of tradition presented by the teachers of the Jewish nation, and opened it to the wisdom which comes from above.”—Conflict and Courage, p. 276.

John the Baptist was not bound by tradition or by accepted modes of speech. He spoke against sin in all its forms, from adultery to social injustice. Whenever God’s message is given in a clear, unambiguous way, people react differently. Some people responded to John the Baptist by accusing him of being demon-possessed (Matt. 11:18). Of course, exactly the same thing happened with Jesus (John 7:20).

**Is tradition always bad?** Why, or why not? How can we, in whatever culture we are in, retain aspects of that culture while still staying faithful to the Lord?
Application Questions:

1. John was sure of his calling. Can we be sure that God has a distinct calling for each of us? How might we find it?

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2. Does anything in our lives/society today exert a force comparable to that exerted by the “traditions of men” in the New Testament era?

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Witnessing

How can we call people to make the changes necessary in their lives? Is it enough to introduce them to Jesus and allow the rest to follow?

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STEP 4—Apply

Consider This: Ask class members to share ways in which God has guided them in their spiritual lives. Offer the following suggestions for claiming God’s help in becoming the people He intends for them to be and to act on what they learn.

1. Take a day, a weekend, or an hour to shut out the distractions and listen to God’s voice. Set aside a special time and—ideally—a place to communicate with God and have Him communicate with you.

2. The next time you are tempted to indulge in instant gratification, maybe you should skip it just this once. Do something else with the money: for example, give it to a person or cause that really needs it.

3. Reconcile with somebody. If you were in the wrong, admit it and fix it.

4. Inform yourself. Take action or speak out on a social issue that concerns you. Pray for the situation and the people involved.

Invite a class member to close with prayer.

“God had directed John the Baptist to dwell in the wilderness, that he might be shielded from the influence of the priests and rabbis, and be prepared for a special mission. But the austerity and isolation of his life were not an example for the people. John himself had not directed his hearers to forsake their former duties. He bade them give evidence of their repentance by faithfulness to God in the place where He had called them.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 150.

“In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, such a work as that of John is to be done. God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord. The message preceding the public ministry of Christ was, Repent, publicans and sinners; repent, Pharisees and Sadducees; ‘repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ As a people who believe in Christ’s soon coming, we have a message to bear,—‘Prepare to meet thy God.’” (Amos 4:12).—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 55.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What dangers are there in following tradition? Is there any way that tradition actually can help your spiritual life? If so, how? As a class, talk about the traditions in your own culture. Which ones are helpful to faith, and which ones go contrary to it? How can you know the difference, and how can you help others who might have trouble breaking away from the traditions that are harmful to their Christian walk?

2. What has been your own “desert” experience, if any? What have you learned that could be a blessing to others who might be going through something similar?

3. Review the parallels between John’s mission and ours as a church. How well are we doing? What could we be doing better? How could we, as individuals and as a local church, help in fulfilling this high calling?

**Summary:** John the Baptist had the high calling of preparing the way for Jesus. In many ways his mission parallels that given to God’s people at the end of time—to preach the Elijah message to prepare people to meet God.
The Son of God Among Us

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Matthew 23; Mark 9:12; Luke 24:7; John 1:1–14, 29; Heb. 2:9.

Memory Text: “The one who existed from the beginning is the one we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is Jesus Christ, the Word of life” (1 John 1:1, NLT).

Key Thought: Nobody else in history has had such a huge impact on the world or such a divided opinion as much as Jesus. The future of each of our lives comes down to one crucial question Jesus Himself asked: “Who do you say I am?” (Matt. 16:15, NIV).

Some people today dispute whether Jesus ever lived, but the historical evidence is overwhelmingly clear. The real issue concerns His identity and purpose. Was He just a good man or God’s Son? “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.”—C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1960), p. 52.

As Adventists, we work from the starting point that the Bible is the Word of God and that what it says about Jesus is the truth, period. We do not have the time to waste on nonsensical high-critical speculations about whether Jesus did the things the Bible says that He did.

After all, if we cannot believe the Bible, what can we believe?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 26.
Who Was Jesus? Part 1

Over the centuries, people have argued about Jesus, sung about Him, written about Him, preached about Him, cursed Him, made movies about Him, even died for Him; but most people in the world today either do not know Him or know only what He has accomplished in their behalf.

If someone were to ask you, Who was Jesus? what would you say, and why?

Your answer, whatever it contained, should have dealt with the fact that Jesus was the divine Son of God and that He died for our sins and rose again. That He did great things while here is fine; that He preached powerful sermons is fine; that He revealed to us the character of God is fine. But none of these things, in the end, really matter if Jesus did not come and die as the Substitute for us, thus giving each of us the promise of eternal life (if we but claim it for ourselves).


There have through history been many great men and women who have accomplished marvelous things, things that on the surface seemed even more impressive than what Jesus of Nazareth had accomplished. After all, He was an “unofficial” rabbi from a relatively small and insignificant province of Rome who died an early death and left just a handful of fearful and demoralized followers. On the other hand, when we grasp who Jesus was and just what He did while here, we realize that nothing that any other human being could have done is even worth comparing with Him. In fact, in the end, without Jesus and what He did for us, anything that anyone ever accomplished in this world would, in the large scheme of things, ultimately come to nothing. Because without Jesus and His death, the whole world and everything in it would come to nothing.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 John 1:1

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Have the absolute assurance that what is said about Jesus in the Bible is true and accurate.
- **Feel:** An admiration and attachment to Jesus as the only Savior of humanity and as a true Hero to be emulated.
- **Do:** Make a list of ways in which you feel you are “imitating” Jesus and compare it to what we learned in this week’s lesson.

**Learning Outline:**

I. A well-known European theologian made the following statement. Discuss this statement in your class. What are its implications? “Our system [calendar dating] does not proceed from an indicial point, but from a center. . . . It takes as the midpoint an event that is open to historical investigation and can be chronologically fixed. . . . This event is the birth of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.” John 1:1–14.—Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time, The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964) p. 17.

II. How do you explain the titles of Wednesday’s and Thursday’s lessons, “Exposing the Hypocrites” and “Love for the Hypocrites”? What does that have to do with a lesson about Jesus? *Matthew 23:13, 23:37.*

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III. How do you explain Ellen White’s statement in Friday’s lesson, “We may do much in a short time”?

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**Summary:** Even the most commonly used secular calendar systems divide time by the birth of Jesus. His ministry and plan of salvation are the only true hope of humanity.
Who Was Jesus? Part 2

What made Jesus unique in human history? It certainly was not a powerful public relations and marketing team. He did not have one. It certainly was not His wealth. He did not have any, at least not as the world understands wealth. And He did not have any political power to speak of either. On the contrary, He had been essentially on the margins of political power.

Jesus did have power, but it was a selfless power. He healed diseases, restored broken lives, and left pious hypocrites speechless. He once said to His disciples, “‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all’” (Mark 10:42–44, NIV). Not exactly a formula for those aggressively seeking political power, is it?

Read John 1:1–14. What is found in these texts that reveals to us why Jesus was so special, unique, in all human history?

We can read these famous words so often that we tend to forget just how incredible they really are. Dwell on the implications of what John is telling us. These should be words filled with hope, especially in contrast to the teachings of modern science, which has us all here as the mere by-products of some great cosmic accident, the result of blind forces that, purely by chance, created humanity. In other words, instead of us being the creations of a loving God, One who became “flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14), we are just a complicated conglomeration of chemicals that just happened to form on the surface of this planet, and just as there was no meaning or purpose to our creation, there is no meaning and purpose to living and dying. What a contrast to the hope offered us through Jesus.

What do you find especially encouraging about those verses in John 1? Write down your thoughts and bring them to class on Sabbath.


**Learning Cycle**

- **STEP 1—Motivate**

  Who was Jesus Christ? Was He just a great teacher? Just a prophet? The Son of God? Divinity in the flesh? Most important, what is He to you? Is Jesus your Savior? Is He your example? Is He your Lord? What evidence do our lives give that reveal just how we view Jesus?

  Ask your class members to describe how their understanding of, and relationship to, Jesus have changed or progressed over the years.

- **STEP 2—Explore**

  **Bible Commentary**

  **I. God With Us** *(Review 1 John 1:1 with your class.)*

  When humankind was first created, we walked with God; that is, God was able to manifest Himself to us in ways that He doesn’t now. Sin caused alienation from God, which over the centuries and millennia became deeper and more pronounced, until it was assumed to be the natural order of things. Sin, death, alienation, sickness, unhappiness, fear, instability, war, and so forth are so common we just assume that’s the way things are supposed to be. But that’s not how it was supposed to be. No, not at all.

  And Jesus came to change all this. He was God in the flesh, here, once again, so we could see Him, talk to Him, and know what He is like. Most important, He came to give us all a chance to start over and to have a new beginning now and for eternity.

  **Consider This:** How do the following verses assure us of Christ’s continuing love and care for us? *John 14:18–20, Luke 1:11.*

  **II. Who Was Jesus?** *(Review Luke 24:7 with your class.)*

  **Consider This:** How did Jesus’ life and teachings find their fulfillment in His death?

  “As the inspired apostle John beheld the height, the depth, the breadth of the Father’s love toward the perishing race, he was filled with adoration...”
Jesus Among Sinners and Publicans

Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was also a human who lived and dwelt among us. As such, He had various kinds of human interactions, both with family and friends. The amazing thing about Christ was not so much that as a human He had interaction with other people; no, what is amazing is that He chose to interact with certain types of people.

Read Matthew 11:19; Mark 2:15, 16; Luke 15:1, 2. What kinds of people was Jesus associating with? What kinds of people in your own society might have elicited the same response from other more “respectable” folk?

Jesus came to reveal the character of God to all the world through both His life and His death. By associating with those who were considered, at least by worldly standards, lowlifes, Jesus was giving us a message about the character of God and about what God deems good and bad. As humans, we tend to look at the outward appearances (1 Sam. 16:7); God, though, looks at the heart, where He can see what we often do not.

Read Matthew 21:28–32. How does that help us understand why Jesus associated with the kinds of people He did? What important message can we, those who are “religious and respectable,” take from this?

Unlike us, Jesus knew the heart; Jesus saw what was going on inside those who, from the outside, looked so unworthy and so unpromising. At the same time, He knew what was going on inside those who, from the outside, looked so righteous and pious. We might be able to fool each other, and even ourselves, but never the Lord.

What is your attitude toward the “publicans and sinners” of your own society? How much of the attitude of the scribes and the Pharisees do you harbor in your own heart? (Remember, these men were exceedingly self-deceived.)
and reverence. . . . Through transgression the sons of man became subjects of Satan. Through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the sons of Adam may become the sons of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 15.

III. In the Beginning Was the Word *(Review John 1:1–14 with your class.)*

John 1:1–14 leaves no room to doubt that Jesus was God in every sense imaginable. He was eternal and was the means by which the universe and the earth were created.

“John 1:1 is probably the clearest assertion of the deity of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. It contains three brief but profound statements that complement each other by correcting the misunderstandings that would arise if any one of the three were examined in isolation from the others. . . .”—Jon Paulien, *John* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1995), p. 42.

**Consider This:** John 1:1–11 is an astounding series of statements. It cannot be denied. Look at John 1:14–18. What do these texts add?

IV. The Human Jesus *(Review Luke 15:1, 2 with your class.)*

**Consider This:** In Jesus’ time, people who considered themselves or aspired to be “holy” associated only with other holy people. This was a matter of ritual purity, and to do otherwise was nearly unthinkable. While we as Christians do not have formal ritual purity standards today, are there places or people we regard as too dangerous or damaged to bother with?

“Shepherds, the scribes ruled, could never really purge themselves from ritual pollution because they handled animals continually, and were thought to rob their masters. Women had dubious value as religious examples, despite the scriptural mention of Deborah, Miriam, and others. Yet a shepherd and a woman are the very ones whose desperate search, and exuberant joy upon finding, display God (Luke 15:4–6, 8, 9).”—Walter Scragg, *The God Who Says Yes* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1987), pp. 86, 87.

V. Hypocrisy and Hypocrites *(Review Matt. 23:13 with your class.)*

**Consider This:** Jesus, as the above text suggests, didn’t take hypocrisy
Exposing the Hypocrites

“But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in” (Matt. 23:13).

Though we often picture the kind and gentle Jesus working gingerly and softly with the worst of sinners, that is not the whole picture presented in the Bible. On the contrary, when the time was right Jesus unleashed a torrent of warnings about and toward a certain group of people. As we all know, Jesus had strong words to speak against many of the religious leaders of ancient Israel, very strong words, in fact. Indeed, in some ways He sounded just as some of the Old Testament prophets did; which, of course, is not surprising, because He was the One who inspired them to write what they did to begin with. Thus, for centuries, in one venue or another, Jesus was pleading with His people. Is it any different today?

Read Matthew 23. What were the charges Jesus was leveling against the leaders? How would you categorize them? Which, in your own mind, would be the worst, and why? If you could summarize in just a few sentences the essence of His complaints, what would you write?

If you really read carefully, all the things that Jesus accuses them of doing are amazing. One theme, however, comes through very clearly: These men were hypocrites, hiding the ugliness of their souls under the veneer of faith and piety. What kind of outward show of piety do you put on? How different are you in private than in public? How might your local church view you if they knew the real you? What can you do to make the real you more like the public version?
lightly. Why was He so uncompromising in regard to it?

“This hypocrisy [of the Pharisees] Christ declared would bring them the greater damnation. The same rebuke falls upon many in our day who make a high profession of piety. Their lives are stained by selfishness and avarice, yet they throw over it all a garment of seeming purity, and thus for a time deceive their fellow men. But they cannot deceive God.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 614.

Who is actually harmed the most by hypocrisy? Hypocrisy is a deadly sin that by definition is hidden, unlike those committed by “decent, honest” publicans and sinners.

In spite of that, God loves hypocrites too much to want them to stay hypocrites. Ask for God’s help to become the real thing.

**STEP 3—Practice**

Thought Questions:

1. People want to make Jesus into their own image. How do we sometimes try to squeeze Jesus into a mold we’ve created for Him? Why is that easier to do than we often think?

2. How do you think people can claim to admire Jesus while ignoring or discounting the things He said, including the things the Gospels record Him saying about Himself?

Application Questions:

1. Jesus was known for associating with society’s outcasts. As humans, we tend to associate with those most like ourselves, and as Christians we tend to associate with other Christians. How do we reconcile these impulses?

2. The Pharisees seemed to hope to achieve perfection and “godliness”...
Love for the Hypocrites

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

**What** is the message of the above text? How seriously do we take it? That is, do we understand that Christ’s death included the worst sinners, even the hypocrites we read about yesterday?

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The amazing thing about the life of Jesus was that even amid the harshest circumstances He never lost sight of His mission: to save the lost. Even as He hung on the cross, even as the weight of the world’s sin was crushing out His life, the good of others was constantly on His mind. *(See Luke 23:34, 42, 43; John 19:26.)* What a powerful lesson for us, we who are called to follow in His footsteps.

This applies to the religious leaders that Jesus railed against. Yesterday we read His scathing denunciations against them, as recorded in Matthew 23.

**Read** Matthew 23:37. How is it different in tone from the rest of the chapter? What does this tell us about Jesus and His feelings toward even those He just denounced? What very important principle is found here for us? How can we take what we see here and apply it in our own lives and our treatment of others, even those who reject our overtures toward them?

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Missionary work is not easy. Look at what happened when Jesus Himself was here. Look at how so many reacted. Yet, even toward the worst Jesus showed love and care and compassion. Our feelings toward those who reject us should not be anger or resentment; they should be of pity, of concern, and of care. When people refuse to listen, they are not rejecting us personally; they are rejecting Jesus.

**How do you respond to those who react negatively toward your witness? How can you learn to feel compassion, as opposed to anger and resentment? Why would anger and resentment only make things worse?**
without the direct intervention of God. Are we ever guilty of a similar attitude? If so, how so?

Witnessing

There has never been more information about Jesus available, but much of it is incorrect or misleading. How can we help those to whom we witness better understand the truth about Jesus, about who He was, what He was like, and what He has done for us? Why is it so important that we, individually, know Jesus? How much better our witness would be if we truly knew the One whom we were talking about!

Consider This: Paul stated in Philippians 1:18 that “The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice” (NIV).

STEP 4—Apply

Consider This: Ask class members to share those aspects of Jesus Christ’s teachings, life, and ministry that speak most to them personally. Offer the following suggestions for renewing or rediscovering the freshness of their relationship with Jesus and possibly conveying it to others.

1 Rewrite a favorite story from the Gospels about Jesus, with yourself in the place of the individual that Jesus is interacting with. How would you feel? What would it motivate you to do?

2 The next time you pray, really talk to Jesus. Say what is on your mind. How would the Jesus you know from the Gospels respond?

3 Don’t be a hypocrite. Ask for help from Jesus and others to admit and overcome your faults.

4 Asking “What Would Jesus Do?” seemed like a really good idea, until people started wearing it on their T-shirts and not doing it. Try actually doing what Jesus would do. How would your actions be radically different from what they are now?

Invite a class member to close with prayer.

“The Pharisees thought themselves too wise to need instruction, too righteous to need salvation, too highly honored to need the honor that comes from Christ. The Saviour turned away from them to find others who would receive the message of heaven. In the untutored fishermen, in the publican at the market place, in the woman of Samaria, in the common people who heard Him gladly, He found His new bottles for the new wine. The instrumentalities to be used in the gospel work are those souls who gladly receive the light which God sends them. These are His agencies for imparting the knowledge of truth to the world.” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 279.

“We may do much in a short time if we will work as Christ worked. We may reflect with profit upon His manner of teaching. He sought to meet the minds of the common people. His style was plain, simple, comprehensive. He took His illustrations from the scenes with which His hearers were most familiar. By the things of nature He illustrated truths of eternal importance, thus connecting heaven and earth.” —Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 565.

Discussion Questions:
1. Why is the idea of Jesus as just a great moral teacher not good enough? What hope do we have if Christ were only a moral teacher and nothing else? Look at the C. S. Lewis quote from the introduction for Sabbath’s study. Why is that such a powerful argument in favor of the deity of Christ? Or is it? What options do we have if Jesus isn’t the Son of God?

2. As a class, discuss your answer to Monday’s last question.

3. Whatever we might have to say about the Pharisees, one point we shouldn’t forget. They were members of God’s remnant church, the elite of the only faith in the world that had present truth. What’s the message, and warning, for us in that fact?

Summary: The story of Jesus is the most important story in history. His life and teachings show us not only the way to live and how to treat one another but also the way to eternal life—by believing in the salvation He brought to us through His death on the Cross.
Matthew 10: Jesus and His Disciples

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Lev. 25:8–54, Matthew 10, John 10:10.

Memory Text: “‘So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows’” (Matthew 10:31, NIV).

Key Thought: Jesus, the world’s greatest Teacher, gave His disciples instructions before sending them out to witness. What principles can we take from His words for ourselves today?

Jesus knew that an important part of His task was to train a group of His followers to continue His mission. So now, after touring Galilee—preaching, teaching, and healing—He knew it was time to send out His 12 disciples on their first assignment. They were to receive their first practical experience.

The disciples had received a highly specialized education from the greatest Teacher the world has ever known. They had seen in Jesus—in living action—the principles on which the universe is founded. They had seen the ultimate model of how human beings should live.

The disciples had been with Jesus for only a year or so. But they had walked and talked with the One who was, Himself, the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). The time had finally come to put into practice what they had learned. Before Jesus sent out the disciples, He gave them special instruction.

This week we will explore the highlights from Jesus’ words to His disciples as they embarked on their mission.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 2.*
The Kingdom of Heaven Is Near

Read Matthew 10:7. What does it mean that the “kingdom of heaven” is near? What is your understanding of the “kingdom of heaven”?

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A kingdom is the territory under the authority of a king. God’s kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, includes not only geographical territory but spiritual, as well. At one point Jesus even said, “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21).

What does it mean that the “kingdom of God” is within us? How are we to understand this idea?

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Before Jesus and His disciples began their ministry, John the Baptist began preaching that the kingdom of heaven was near (Matt. 3:2). The New Testament clearly sees Jesus as Israel’s promised King, fulfilling all the hopes and predictions of the Old Testament (see Luke 1:32, 33). But the people were expecting a political king who would establish a political rule over specific geographical territory and free them from the Romans.

The kingdom that Jesus preached about was far different. It was not going to come when the Romans were overthrown. The kingdom of heaven was now. Now people could see Jesus, hear His words, and learn the principles on which salvation and heaven are based. Now they could learn to follow His example of how to live. Now they could see how the principles of God’s government operate in real life. Now they could choose to become part of that kingdom. Now they could have the promises of the Holy Spirit, of victory over sin, of hope for eternal life.

In what ways are you now enjoying and benefiting from the privileges of living in the “kingdom of God”? What opportunities and promises are you not yet fully taking advantage of?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Matthew 10:31

The Student Will:
Know: The essentials of witnessing.
Feel: A desire to witness.
Do: Develop a plan of action for personal witnessing.

Learning Outline:
I. The “Kingdom of God” (Luke 1:76)
   Here are some statements from well-known sources. How do these concepts of “kingdom” relate to what Jesus was talking about?
   • Martin Luther King: “I have seen the promised land.”
   • John the Baptist: “The kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15).
   • The “Kingdom Age”—the rule of God on earth defined as control of all social institutions (a contemporary Pentecostal viewpoint).

II. Witnessing Instructions (Matthew 10)
   A As a witnessing methodology, what does “wise as serpents and harmless as doves” mean (Matt. 10:16)?
   B Monday’s lesson states that based on Matthew 10:8 these first disciples had “powers” we don’t have. How are we to understand that? Did these powers stop with the original disciples?

III. Whom to Witness to? (Matt. 10:5, 6; 28:19)
   A How can you correlate these three verses that seem to contradict each other?
   B What is a “cultural sensitivity,” and why is it important? (See Tuesday’s lesson.)

Summary: The original disciples received witnessing instructions based on timeless principles. They work just as well today when properly understood and applied.
Missionary Instructions

In Matthew 10, Jesus commissions the Twelve to go out and do missionary work. Read over the chapter and then answer the following questions:

What does Jesus mean by telling the disciples to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (vs. 16)? How can we apply these words to ourselves today?

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Read Matthew 10:2–4. What is the one thing that all of Jesus’ disciples had in common? What does that tell us about the need always to keep cultural sensitivities before us as we seek to work in various cultures?

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What special powers did the disciples have? How can we, without those powers, still minister and witness to the world?

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What kind of reception did Jesus prepare His followers to receive? What lessons can we take from those words for ourselves?

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Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Say to your class:
Imagine: Jesus comes to where you work (at the office, assembly line, shop, classroom, barn, or company vehicle).
He says, “I’m here to invite you to follow Me and be one of My disciples.”
“What, exactly, does that mean?” you ask.
He answers, “It means I want you to help Me build up My kingdom.”
“What about my family, my job, my other responsibilities?” you want to know.
“I didn’t say anything about leaving town,” He says with a smile. “You can still live at home, keep your job, and take care of your family; I just want you to be more deliberate about recognizing opportunities to build up My kingdom.”

Ask your class:
Does it ever seem as though you don’t have what it takes to be among Christ’s inner circle? That those who leave home and family to follow Jesus are somehow more dedicated than those who choose to stay behind to tend their family and work responsibilities?

Consider This: Can we fully be Christ’s disciples without leaving everything to follow Him? If so, how? Be specific.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. The Kingdom of Heaven Is Near (Review Matt. 5:3–10 with your class.)

When Jesus gave His disciples the message, “ ‘The kingdom of heaven is near’ ” (Matt. 10:7, NIV), He had in mind a kingdom different from what most of us are familiar with. If anything, He had in mind an “upside down kingdom,” where the poor are more blessed than the rich; where the meek are more honored than the powerful; where the persecuted are to be admired more than persecutors (see Matt. 5:3–12). What other aspects of Christ’s kingdom are radically different from the common values of today?

CONTINUED
Gentiles and Jews

Read Matthew 10:5, 6. How are we to understand these words in light of His later commission to witness to all the world?

As He sent out His disciples, Jesus clearly told them to go only to the Israelites, not the Gentiles. Looking back from our perspective, we might deem this unfair. Why should the good news go only to the Jewish people? Why should everyone else be ignored, at least at that time?

The answer, it seems, stems from cultural sensitivities. Jesus did not want the disciples to jeopardize their mission. As Ellen G. White writes, “If they had first preached the gospel to these, they would have lost their influence among the Jews who were first to hear the message of God.”—The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, April 19, 1892.

She also suggests that it would have involved them in controversy with the Pharisees, and this would have discouraged the disciples in their work.—Ellen G. White, The Signs of the Times, July 18, 1900.

In our mission today, there will always be certain cultural practices to which we must be sensitive. These practices may be misguided. They may be wrong. They might be exceedingly offensive to us. But to ignore these practices is to weaken the power of our witness.

Read John 10:10. What is Jesus saying here that can help us as we meet people with harmful cultures and traditions?

As followers of Christ, we need to be very sensitive to the cultures that we are working in. The last thing we need is to portray a sense of arrogance and superiority. If we have something better, if we can point others to a more abundant life, let our message and lifestyle testify to it.

If someone were to look at your Christian lifestyle, what would they see that would make it appealing? What kind of message does your lifestyle send to others?
Consider This: Which kingdom principles are Christians known for in your community? Or are they simply just part of the regular community, in that their lives are no different from everyone else’s?

Gallup once took a poll in the United States that showed professed Christians aren’t a whole lot different from their nonbelieving neighbors when it comes to basic moral values. What horrible message should this send to us as those who claim to be followers of Christ?

II. Serving in Christ’s Name (Review Matt. 10:1–10 with your class.)

Two significant words appear in the first two verses of Matthew 10: disci- ples and apostles. Although these two words both appear in connection with the Twelve, there is an important difference between the two.

The word disciple refers to learners or students; those who put themselves under the guidance or discipline of their master and live by that individual’s philosophy.

The word apostle (literally, one who is sent) refers to those who have all the authority of the person who sent them. In the vernacular, it could refer to a slave who had the authority to sign a master’s name to a legal document. For the perspective of Jesus’ followers, it means that His apostles had all His authority to “drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness” (Matt. 10:1, NIV).

Christ’s apostles thus became His agents in establishing the power and authority of His kingdom. Technically, an apostle served only one generation: an apostle could not, strictly speaking, invite another person to be an apostle of the master; that prerogative belonged solely to the master.

Consider This: In today’s church are there some who are disciples and some who are apostles? Do we have any authority aside from that which Christ has granted us? How is that authority granted?

III. Snakes and Doves (Review Matt. 10:16–20 with your class.)

In the age of sound bites and pull-quotes, the idea of being quoted out of context is a real possibility (just ask any politician or public personality). How important is it, then, for Christians to speak carefully and diplomatically?

Consider This: While we can’t possibly be prepared for every situation we may face each and every day, we can be confident that we won’t
A Holistic Ministry

Read Matthew 10:7, 8. Besides preaching the gospel, what else was involved in the disciples’ mission?

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Jesus’ commission to His disciples was not concerned with just the spiritual aspect of life. The disciples were to teach and preach, but they were also to care for people’s physical needs. Sure, in the end, the ultimate goal for everyone is salvation and eternal life, but that does not mean we need to ignore the pain and suffering we find all around us.

When Jesus spoke in the synagogue in Nazareth, He read from the book of Isaiah and made the words His own (see Luke 4:18, 19). Not only is He going to help the poor, the blind, the oppressed, and the imprisoned; He also is going to proclaim “‘the year of the Lord’s favor’” (vs. 19, NIV). Jesus here refers to the jubilee year (Lev. 25:8–54), where every 50 years the ownership of land returned to the original owners.

Skim Leviticus 25:8–54. What seems to be the main moral concern there? What principle is the Lord conveying to His people?

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As Ellen White says, “a safeguard was afforded against the extremes either of wealth or of poverty.”—Education, p. 43. In the jubilee year, all slaves were also to be freed, and all debts were to be canceled.

Jesus instructs His disciples to have a balanced ministry. Certainly, they were to prepare people for the kingdom of heaven. But they were also to remember that, in an important sense, the kingdom was already with them. And that meant they were to have concern for people’s total needs—including physical and social. By ministering to folks’ needs now, we can open them up to the reality and promise of eternal life.

How do you treat those less fortunate than you? When is the last time you did something for someone purely out of selfless compassion and concern?
have to speak or act alone. What comfort can we gain from Jesus’ promise: “‘It will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you’” (Matt. 10:20, NIV)?

STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

1. While we may not have literally followed Jesus down the dusty lanes of Galilee, we are His disciples every bit as were the Twelve. In what ways does that realization change the way you see yourself? Your congregation?

2. Jesus’ promise is that as we cooperate with Him in spreading the gospel, He will be with us “‘to the very end of the age’” (Matt. 28:20, NIV). What tangible results do you expect from that promise?

Application Question:

Jesus’ great commission (Matt. 28:18–20) has local as well as global implications. While we can support the taking of the gospel to the entire world, Christ’s commission won’t be completed until it’s completed in our own communities, as well. How might God be calling you—as individuals and as a group—to take the gospel to your community?

Witnessing

We are God’s agents for sharing the principles of His kingdom with our community. What aspects of His kingdom principles would you share with the following:

• a single parent?
• a teenager?
• a business person?
• a scientist?
• an immigrant?
Do Not Be Afraid of Them

Much of Jesus’ address to His disciples is devoted to advice on how to deal with problems they will encounter. The message they proclaim, although it is about love and right living, will encounter opposition in certain places. In fact, said Jesus, they should be prepared for persecution.

Read Matthew 10:22 and Hebrews 10:35, 36. What is the crucial message to us in these texts?

Jesus’ reference to perseverance is in the context of persecution. The apostle Paul says, “We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Rom. 5:3, 4, NIV). Likewise, James writes, “The testing of your faith develops perseverance” (James 1:3, NIV).

In what ways can difficult times test your faith? How can you strengthen your spiritual life so that you will persevere in your faith through these times?

Jesus tells His disciples that they should not fear the difficult circumstances they will encounter. They will be brought before governors and kings to be His witnesses.

“‘But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it,’ ” He says (Matt. 10:19, NIV). He promises that God will speak through them and give them the words to speak.

The book of Acts provides plenty of examples of what Jesus warned about. Peter and Paul and many others were taken constantly before the authorities to give an account of their actions. Each time they spoke boldly of their faith. Jesus reassures the disciples that God cares even for sparrows and that He has numbered “‘the very hairs of your head. . . . So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows’” (Matt. 10:30, 31, NIV).

Read Matthew 10:38, 39. What is Jesus promising us? What is He not promising us? What comfort can you draw for yourself from these words?
Why must we present the truth “differently” to different people? How can we do this without compromising it?

Consider This: Just as advertisers have target audiences and focus their messages to reach them, so should Christians be careful about how they tailor their message to their listeners. One size does not fit all.

STEP 4—Apply

“A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master,” said Jesus (Matt. 10:24, NIV). What, exactly, do people sign up for when they become one of Jesus’ disciples? Why did you decide to follow Jesus?

Consider This: Jesus was a rebel, a renegade, a maverick according to some. The values He came to establish were completely out of phase with those of the religious practitioners of His day. That’s why He eventually ended up crucified, humiliated between two thieves.

Reflect on Jesus’ story and consider these present-day options. If Jesus had only two hours to visit your community, would He spend it:
- with adults or with children?
- with the pastor or with someone struggling with temptation?
- at prayer meeting or at a sports bar?
- with the “A” students or with the dropouts?
- with the Pathfinders or the gang members?

The question we all have to ask ourselves is, What does it mean to be a disciple now, in this place? Not, What does my church expect? Or, What does my family expect? But, How can I most effectively and creatively live as one of Jesus’ disciples?

Invite a class member to close with prayer, asking God to guide each class member in being sensitive to ministry opportunities open to Jesus’ modern disciples.

“Men’s hearts are no softer today than when Christ was upon the earth. They will do all in their power to aid the great adversary in making it as hard as possible for the servants of Christ, just as the people did with Christ when He was upon the earth. They will scourge with the tongue of slander and falsehood. They will criticize, and turn against the servant of God the very efforts he is leading them to make. They will, with their evil surmisings, see fraud and dishonesty where all is right and where perfect integrity exists. They lay selfish motives to the charge of God’s servants, when He Himself is leading them, and when they would give even their lives if God required, if by so doing they could advance His cause.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 234.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways does our mission field today differ from the one Jesus’ disciples went into? What are the similarities?

2. As a class, talk about what it means to be living in the “kingdom of heaven” now. What, if anything, do we have to show for it; that is, if someone were to look at us as a whole, what would they see that is different than what they would see in any other voluntary organization working together for a common cause?

3. How involved are you and your local church in evangelism, in witnessing? How are you working to relieve the suffering of those around you? How can your local church do better in that area? Why is that aspect of our work so crucial? Why, though, is ministering to the physical needs of those around us not enough? At the same time, what happens when we emphasize preaching and ignore the social dimension of the gospel?

Summary: The greatest Teacher the world has ever seen took time to give specific instructions to His disciples before He sent them out into their mission field. The principles He outlined to them are timeless, and we must not ignore them today.
The Compassionate Savior

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: John 1:14, John 3, John 4; 9:1–7, Eph. 4:32, 1 John 2:12.

Memory Text: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36, NIV).

Key Thought: Jesus ever ministered to the needs of the people. What can we take away from His example that can help us do the same?

These lines from “The New Colossus,” by poet Emma Lazarus, sit on the bottom of the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” Her words echo the ministry of Jesus, who said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matt. 11:28, 29).

Compassion motivated every aspect of Christ’s ministry. He ministered to all types of people, regardless of their social class, gender, or race. He demonstrated unconditional love and forgiveness in His life and, most powerfully, in His death on the cross, paying in Himself the penalty for our sins.

This week we will look more at Jesus and how He ministered, learning what we can that will help us as we minister, as well.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 9.
Reaching the Masses

**Read** Matthew 4:25 and Luke 6:17. What two specific points do the texts make about how people responded to Jesus’ ministry? Also, what do those points tell us about the effectiveness of Christ’s ministry?

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There was no mass transit back then; no one jumped on a plane, in a car, or even on a bicycle to come and see Jesus. Travel back then was, in contrast to our day, painfully slow and exceedingly treacherous. Nonetheless, that did not stop “a great multitude” from coming to hear Jesus.

**What** do the following texts tell us about the motives of some of those who came to hear Jesus? Mark 5:25–29, 6:15, John 12:9.

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The crowds who followed Jesus had mixed motives. Some had heard that He had the words of life that He spoke with authority, and they hungered after spiritual food. Others were looking for physical healing for themselves or for friends or family. Some wanted to see for themselves if He was the promised One who would liberate them from Roman rule. Still others were mere curiosity seekers. One time the crowd was so large and pressing against Him that He had to get into a boat and teach them from a distance (Matt. 13:2). The crowds grew so big that the Pharisees commented, “‘Look how the whole world has gone after him!’” (John 12:19, NIV).

**Write out a paragraph answering this question, What is my motive for following Jesus? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Matthew 9:36

The Student Will:
Know: What “compassion” means in terms of Jesus as a model.
Feel: A desire to personally experience that kind of compassion.
Do: Call for a moment of silence in the class, asking each member to consider personally how “compassionate” he or she really is in terms of this week’s lesson about Jesus.

Learning Outline:

I. The Height and Depth of Compassion (Luke 11:1–13)
Talk this case study over with the class to see what comes of the discussion:

- Someone said that their congregation was very “compassionate.” What does that mean? Is compassion simply something we feel, or is it something we do? Or both? How can we know if we truly have compassion as Jesus did?

II. The Personal Touch (Mark 1:22, 11:18, 12:37)

A How is compassion related to a “personal touch”?

B Ellen G. White remarked that “Men’s hearts are no softer today than when Christ was upon the earth.”—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 234. How do you deal with such people and still show compassion and a human touch?

III. Components of Compassion (Matt. 11:28, 29)

In what way is forgiveness a major component of compassion?

Summary: Jesus, the compassionate Savior, hated sin and loved sinners. His method of ministering to people in crowds and individually should be a model for our witness today.
The Personal Touch

People were attracted to Jesus. Mark says they listened to him “with delight” (Mark 12:37, NIV) and were “amazed at his teaching” (Mark 1:22, 11:18, NIV). He often spoke and ministered to large crowds. There was, however, another whole aspect of Christ’s ministry.

Look up the following texts. What is the one thing they all have in common? What important message does this send to us regarding ministry? John 3, 4, 9:1–7.

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The foundation of Jesus’ ministry was personal contact. “He went journeying from town to town and village to village, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1, NEB).

Within decades His message had spread throughout the then-known world. But it happened for one reason—the Master’s hand had personally touched lives, and those lives, particularly His 12 disciples, went on to touch others personally.

The 12 disciples had seen Jesus interact with people. They had seen the way He spoke words of comfort and encouragement to those who were “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36, NIV). They heard Jesus say, “ ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light’ ” (Matt. 11:28–30, NIV).

What more attractive message could there be for people today who are stressed, burned out, and looking for comfort and peace?

Why is the personal touch so important? How have you been blessed by those taking time to minister to you, personally, one on one? Think about ways you can use your gifts and time to minister directly, one on one, to the needs of someone else.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus is described with the words: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36, NIV).

If Jesus had compassion on the thousands who followed Him all those centuries ago, what does He feel today for the millions who are oppressed, exploited, and marginalized?

Every day headlines scream the details of the horrific destruction caused by natural disasters and the resulting loss of life and property. Television reports chronicle tales of human misery caused by ethnic and religious hatred and intolerance and the widows, orphans, and other refugees displaced by such atrocities. Direct mail appeals solicit financial support for people caught in the endless cycle of disease, poverty, oppression, and exploitation.

When Jesus preached “‘the kingdom of heaven is near’” (Matt. 10:7, NIV), His deeds of compassion, ministry, and service reinforced His commitment to improving people’s quality of life now, not just sometime in the distant future.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. God With Us (Review John 1:1–18 with your class.)

One of the fundamental truths of Christianity is that Jesus, Himself fully God, came down to the level of fallen humanity. Theologians call that His “incarnation.” The word in John 1:14 translated “dwelt among us” (John 1:14) literally means that Jesus “pitched His tent” among us. In his paraphrase of the Bible, Eugene Peterson renders this verse: “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14, The Message).

There is, in fact, an Old Testament precedent for what Jesus did in the New Testament. The earthly sanctuary system was set up with the express purpose of allowing God to be close to His people. He told Moses, “‘Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them’” (Exod. 25:8, NIV).

CONTINUED
Forgiveness

Compassion drove everything Jesus said and did. Note how often the Gospel writers say He was “filled with compassion” or “had compassion.” Sometimes this meant strongly condemning sin. At times Jesus did speak harshly to the religious leaders, but He always did it in love.

And central to that expression of compassion was forgiveness. So often Jesus taught and revealed forgiveness. Considering the essence of Christian theology, that we are sinners in need of God’s forgiveness, no wonder it is such a powerful theme in Jesus’ life and teachings.

What do these texts reveal to us about forgiveness? Matt. 18:21, 22; Luke 23:34; John 8:1–11; Eph. 4:32; 1 John 2:12.

Jesus often likens His grace to being forgiven a great debt. Imagine you owed someone one million dollars, and they canceled the debt. Imagine how you would feel. That is what God’s grace is like. And the reason that debt has been canceled is that Jesus, Himself, paid it for us.

Also, again and again, Jesus taught that those who have been forgiven must forgive others. An unforgiving Christian is a contradiction in terms. Think of the parable of the ungrateful servant (Matt. 18:21–34), the story of Mary and Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36–50), and even the Lord’s Prayer—“ ‘Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us’ ” (Luke 11:4, NIV). When we consider what happened at the Cross, and what it cost God in order to be able to justly forgive us our sins, it is not that hard to understand why such an emphasis is placed on our learning to forgive others. Think about our world and how different a place it would be if we learned how to forgive others. Think about the difference, not only in world politics but in our own personal relations, our families, our homes, etc.

How much resentment, anger, and bitterness resides in you because you still refuse to forgive? How can you better learn to forgive those who have done you wrong?
**Consider This:** What does Jesus’ incarnation (and the Old Testament sanctuary) say about God’s desire to be close to His people? Think about the implications of this idea: The Creator God, the One who made the heavens and the earth, that is, all creation, chose to dwell in a human building. What does this tell us about God’s love for us and His willingness to reach down and impact our lives?

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**II. He Spoke Their Language**

Jesus often used parables to describe His kingdom to His followers. His listeners could easily identify with the everyday events and people He described—weddings, feasts, farmers, shepherds, fathers and sons, etc.

Unfortunately, the more theologically “sophisticated” we get, the more we debate the finer points about what it means to be a Christian and the less likely we are to be able to communicate with people who may not have the background in Christianity we have.

**Consider This:** Every specialty has its own vocabulary—carpenters, mechanics, doctors, professors, etc. How can Christians translate the principles of Christ’s kingdom into language that people can understand?

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Jesus used parables to describe His kingdom. If you look at today’s technology, do you see any possibilities for spreading the gospel that include, for example, stories told in the medium of film or television?

**III. They Responded**

While the Gospels record several times that Jesus spoke to audiences of hundreds or thousands, there are at least as many times that He spoke to an audience of just one or two. Jesus’ conversations with Nicodemus (John 3), the woman at the well (John 4), the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24), are all examples of when He took time to focus on His followers’ individual needs.

CONTINUED
God With Us

Read John 1:14. What are the amazing implications of that text? What does it tell us about the character of God? Think about the size and complexity of the universe as you contemplate your answer.

In the 1700s and the 1800s, an idea arose, an outgrowth of the scientific revolution, called deism. Though it taught that God created us, this God—far from being involved in our everyday lives—has left us on our own, basically to fend for ourselves. According to this view, the world was like a clock that God wound up and then left. God created His natural laws, and we here have to live within those laws the best we can. It is like a parent who raises a child until that child is 18 and then says, “OK, Sonny, you’re on your own. I’ll never see you again. Good luck.”

But that god is not the God of the Bible, that is not Jesus Christ, who became one of us, who lived among us, who took upon Himself our humanity and in that humanity died for our sins, the God depicted in John 1:14.

The Greek word translated “dwelt,” skenoo, in John 1:14 means to “pitch one’s tent” or “live in a tent.” When Jesus came to this world, He did not live at a distance from the people to whom He ministered. He “pitched His tent” among them, living and working among them—relating to them at their level.

Matthew quotes Isaiah’s prophecy about a virgin giving birth to a son named Immanuel and directly applies it to Jesus. He even translates the meaning of Immanuel—“God with us” (Matt. 1:23).

Besides coming to die as a substitute for us, Jesus came to earth to show us exactly what God is like. On one occasion Philip asked Jesus, “‘Show us the Father.’”

How did Jesus respond to Philip’s request (John 14:8–11)? What does Jesus’ answer tell us about what God is like? What aspects of that character come through very clearly? Are there some that you find disturbing? If so, what are they? Bring your concerns, if any, to class.
**Consider This:** The intimacy of private conversations often allows for more focused, direct communication. Yet, relationships of this kind take time to develop. Ask your class to suggest what made Jesus so effective in person-to-person conversations.

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**STEP 3—Practice**

**Thought Questions:**

1. Even though God spoke often through His prophets, that was not as effective as His Son living and teaching as a man (*see* Heb. 1:1, 2). What does that say about the importance of letting Christ’s character be reflected in our lives?

2. What does it mean to be “in the world” but not “of the world” (*John 17:16*)? How important was it for Jesus to live among those He was trying to reach with the gospel?

3. When it comes to modeling the values of Christ’s kingdom, who is likely to do it better in the long run: evangelists, who live in a community for a few days or weeks? Or pastors, who live and serve parishes for years? What are the implications for those of us who want to serve our communities?

**Application Questions:**

1. Jesus told Philip, “‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father’ ” (*John 14:9, NIV*). How realistic is it to tell our friends, “Anyone who has seen me has seen Jesus”?

2. For generations Adventists have advanced the ideal of moving away from large population centers to live in rural settings. How do you reconcile Jesus’ example, as well as His words “‘You are the salt of the earth’” (*Matt. 5:13, NIV*), with that ideal? Are they contradictory? What advantages are there to country living as opposed to urban living? Or vice versa?
Speaking in Parables

Jesus knew how to communicate with people. His speech was aimed at their level. He did not use deep philosophical and theological language, although He spoke the most profound truth. He spoke in simple, practical terms that everyone could understand. He spoke of things that people could apply to their lives.

Jesus illustrated His teaching with objects from nature and common household items. He spoke about coins (Luke 15:8–10); farmers sowing seed (Mark 4:26–29); yeast and flour (Matt. 13:33); sheep (Matt. 18:12–14); fig trees (Mark 13:28–32)—and numerous other items to which the people could relate.

Pick a few of the parables listed above. Read them. What point was Jesus making in each case? Why were those images so appropriate? Ask yourself this: Were Jesus walking among us today, in the flesh, what images might He have used to make those same points?

As you read those parables, perhaps you noticed something about them, and that was how most, if not all, of those images would be just as appropriate today. That is, there was a timelessness, a universality, of those images that in a way paralleled the timelessness of His message.

How does that fact help us understand why, perhaps, Jesus used those specific images?

Matthew records several mini-parables Jesus used to try to describe what the kingdom of heaven is like. He said that the kingdom of heaven is like “a grain of mustard seed” (Matt. 13:31); “leaven” (vs. 33); “treasure hid in a field” (vs. 44); “a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls” (vs. 45); “a net” (vs. 47); “a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old” (vs. 52); “a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard” (Matt. 20:1); “a certain king, which made a marriage for his son” (Matt. 22:2).

Which one of those images works best for you? Why would Jesus use so many different images to make the same point? What message could the Lord be sending us through this deliberate use of different images that could help us learn how to witness to others?
**Learning Cycle CONTINUED**

How can we know what’s best for us in our own individual circumstances?

**Witnessing**

Countless options exist for reflecting Christ’s compassion to our communities and to the larger world. Examine the following and discuss their advantages and disadvantages:
- A community-based homeless shelter operated by a consortium of churches
- Adventist Community Services (Dorcas Society)
- A community-funded shelter for battered women
- Stop Smoking classes taught by church members
- Supporting a development organization in a foreign country

▶ **STEP 4—Apply**

The word *compassion* literally means “to feel with” or “to sympathize with.” It’s not enough to say about a painful situation, “Isn’t that a shame; somebody really should do something about that.” When Jesus saw that the people “‘were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd,’” He told His disciples, “‘Ask the Lord of the harvest . . . to send out workers into his harvest field’” (Matt. 9:36, 38, NIV). We are those workers.

This doesn’t mean that we all have to preach or give Bible studies or minister to the sick. But it does mean that we have all been given gifts for spreading the gospel and building up God's kingdom. How can we, in whatever situation we are in, best use our talents for witnessing to others?

**Consider This:** In the final moments of your class, ask each person to share what gift he or she has been given to build up Christ’s kingdom. Ask each person for which community or church-based outreach program does he/she plan to use that gift.

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Invite a class member to pray that members will find a way to demonstrate Christ’s compassion to the community and global needs they’re aware of.
**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Go Teach All Nations,” pp. 818–828, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“In all true teaching the personal element is essential. Christ in His teaching dealt with men individually. It was by personal contact and association that He trained the Twelve. It was in private, often to but one listener, that He gave His most precious instruction. To the honored rabbi at the night conference on the Mount of Olives, to the despised woman at the well of Sychar, He opened His richest treasures; for in these hearers He discerned the impressible heart, the open mind, the receptive spirit. Even the crowd that so often thronged His steps was not to Christ an indiscriminate mass of human beings. He spoke directly to every mind and appealed to every heart. He watched the faces of His hearers, marked the lighting up of the countenance, the quick, responsive glance, which told that truth had reached the soul; and there vibrated in His heart the answering chord of sympathetic joy.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 231.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Since 1983, the majority of new Adventist congregations around the world have been established by Global Mission pioneers (for more information, visit http://www.adventistmission.org). These Adventist lay people live among the people to whom they are ministering at the same socioeconomic level. Why do you think they have had so much success?

2. As a class, discuss your answers to the questions at the end of Sunday’s and Wednesday’s lessons.

3. As we saw, it was the personal touch that was so central to Jesus’ ministry. In what ways did someone’s personal touch influence you to accept Jesus? Share your stories and then ask yourselves, How can we as a local church work better to minister to people’s needs on a personal level?

4. Because of Jesus’ example of love and acceptance, should we accept anybody to worship in our church—no matter what their lifestyle?

**Summary:** Jesus, the compassionate Savior, hated sin and loved sinners. His method of ministering to people in crowds and individually should be the model for our witness today. Because of the salvation we have received through Him, we can extend His love and forgiveness to others.
The Apostle John

**SABBATH AFTERNOON**

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Matt. 8:21, 22; Mark 10:35–45; 1 John; 2 John; 3 John.

**Memory Text:** “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 4, NIV).

**Key Thought:** The apostle John is one of the most loved characters from the Bible. What can we learn from him?

A church tradition describes the apostle John as an old man living in Ephesus. Because of his feeble condition, his followers had to carry him to church. As they met together, his only spoken words were, “Little children, love one another.”

His followers tired of hearing John repeat the same thing all the time and asked, “Master, why do you always say this?”

“It is the Lord’s command,” he replied. “And if this alone be done, it is enough!”

Whether true or not, this story captures the essence of this “son of thunder” who was eventually transformed into a “son of love and grace.”

In John’s three epistles, or letters, we see the heart of a man whose life is motivated by love; we see also some of the most encouraging verses in the Bible. One of the most famous is “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One” (1 John 2:1, NIV).

This week we will explore further the life and mission of this pillar of the early Christian church.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 16.*
A Special Calling

When Jesus called John and his brother James to follow Him, they were working in their boat fishing. “And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him” (Mark 1:20).

Read carefully Mark 1:20 again. What important principles can we take from there about what it means to follow Jesus? See also Matt. 8:21, 22; Luke 14:26; Phil. 3:8.

John’s decision to follow Jesus and leave his father’s business would forever change his life. Luke gives the most detailed account of Jesus’ call (Luke 5:1–11).

What verse in Luke 5:1–11 again conveys what it means to be a follower of Jesus? What, again, is the point that is being made?

No question, those who follow Jesus need to make a full and complete commitment. Jesus, as Lord of all, is owed all. Yet, He does not demand our hearts out of selfishness; no, not at all. Instead, He knows the reality of the battle that we are in, and if there is any opening, any area of self not surrendered, the evil one will take advantage and use it to try to destroy us. Thus, we need to surrender completely to the Lord.

Which John did. And thus, instead of catching fish, John spent the rest of his life catching people for the kingdom of heaven. From now on, John’s mission field was the world—to carry hope and healing and the good news to those who desperately needed it. Though he would have some hard lessons to learn, because he was dedicated to Jesus, he was in a position to learn them, no matter the pain that would come.

How committed are you to Jesus? Have you forsaken all for Him? How can you know where your heart truly is? What changes might you need to make?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 3 John 4

The Student Will:

Know: John is the connecting link, physically and spiritually, between the early church and the second generation.
Feel: A desire to see the class develop character traits molded by Jesus as were John’s.
Do: Have the class members take a close look at themselves in the light of John’s life and accomplishments.

Learning Outline:

I. The Logos: Theology at Its Best (John 1:1–3)

A. Outline with the class the various applications of the Greek word *logos* (see Tuesday’s lesson).

B. How does John apply this *logos* concept to Jesus? Why do you think John used this particular word when he talked about Jesus some thirty years after His ministry on earth?

II. Called (Luke 5:1–11)

Case Study: Imagine yourself as the manager of this “Peter & John Fisheries, Inc.” (Luke 5:10), trying to get along with Peter, the militant, armed nationalist matched with John, the hot-tempered, ambitious social climber. How would you handle that?

III. Character Refinement (Mark 10:35–45, 1 John 2:10)

Case Study: Have the class picture John some years later. How has he changed, what changed him, and how does he now react? Add some Bible texts to illustrate your analysis.

Summary: John let his time with Jesus flow into all his words and actions. His later life and writings remind us of the primacy of love in the Christian life.
Sons of Thunder

Jesus gave John and his brother James a special nickname—“the sons of thunder” (or Boanerges in Aramaic). Evidence suggests that this name referred to their disposition—a disposition that Jesus gently corrects.

Read Mark 10:35–45. What request do James and John make? How does Jesus respond to their request? What does this tell us about the character of both these men?

John and his brother also showed an unhealthy pride. In response to their request, Jesus asked if they could share His fate. “We can,” they boasted (Mark 10:39).

On another occasion Jesus and His disciples were traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem. As appears to have been His normal habit, Jesus went directly through Samaria rather than circumnavigating in order to avoid the hated Samaritans. He sent James and John ahead to find lodging for the night. They approached one village, but when the people learned they were headed for Jerusalem, they showed no hospitality.

What does their response to this indignity also reveal about their character? How much does the beloved John have to learn? Luke 9:54.

What a contrast we can see in the John depicted here in these accounts and the one who writes the letters he does later. What a changed man; what a changed personality! No doubt, though, the change did not happen easily or overnight. John had some hard lessons to learn that enabled him to become the great missionary that he eventually became.

Recount some of your most recent hard lessons. What did you learn? What other ways could you have learned what you did other than through suffering? What other lessons do you need to learn? What changes do you need to make in your life now that, perhaps, could spare you from having to learn them the hard way?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Some people read the Bible as if they’re cramming for an exam or preparing to play a game of Trivial Pursuit. They fill their heads with lots of details: names, places, chapters, and verses. But that kind of knowledge, while useful on a certain level, does not have the power to transform our lives. Jesus said to those who persecuted Him, “‘You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.’” (John 5:39, 40, NIV).

This week’s lesson focuses on one of Christ’s disciples who, perhaps more than any other, understood Jesus’ character of unconditional love and unqualified acceptance of sinners.

Your task as teacher is to remind your class that knowledge about the Bible will take us only so far in securing our salvation. In the final analysis, only our relationship with Christ will save us and transform us—as it did for John—from being a “child of Thunder” to a “disciple whom Jesus loved.”

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Startled by Grace (Have someone read Luke 5:1–11 out loud.)

A few years ago the book The Tipping Point appeared on several bestseller lists. In it author Malcolm Gladwell described the process by which a person, idea, or product goes from being practically unknown to sweeping society like wildfire.

It’s likely that John, James, Peter, and Andrew knew about Jesus some time before they laid down their nets to follow Him. It’s unwise to drop everything to follow someone we know nothing about. (What parents would encourage their children to marry someone they met that afternoon on a flight from Chicago?)

Consider This: What was it about Jesus and His teachings that captured the attention of these first disciples? Remember, they hadn’t yet

CONTINUED
The Witness of John

As an eyewitness who had spent much time in Jesus’ company, John had much to tell; more, in fact, than he could.

Read John 21:25. What message do you think John was seeking to convey by that statement? What hope can we find in that text?

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Though not able to tell us everything, John, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, does teach us one of the most important of all truths, that Jesus Christ came in human flesh. That truth is something that all the philosophy, science, and logic could never lead us to. Instead, God uses John to tell it to us.

In the first verse of his Gospel, John refers to the Word, or in Greek, the logos. To the Jewish reader, the Word referred to the Word of God that created the world, as well as to His teachings, or law, that guides the way we should live our lives (see Deut. 32:45–47).

For the Greek reader, logos had other meanings. The logos was a life force that kept the universe together. The symmetry of a leaf, the harmony of the seasons, the stars in the sky—all were kept in balance by the logos. The philosophers Heracleitus, Plutarch, Philo, and Plato, as well as various stoic philosophers, wrote about the logos.

For both Jewish and Greek readers, John makes a startling claim: This Logos is a person. The Logos became flesh and broke into human history in a specific place at a specific time with a specific purpose—to bring salvation to humanity.

Read John 1:1–3, 14. What does this mean? In your own words, write out your best understanding of what the Lord is revealing to us here.

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Jesus, our Creator, entered into humanity and became a human being. That alone is amazing; add to it the reason He came, to die for our sins, and we are given a revelation of the character of God that should bring us to our knees in gratefulness, faith, and humble obedience.
seen some of His greatest miracles or heard some of His more popular teachings. What role did the miracle of the fish play in their decision?

II. Transformed by Degrees  (Have someone read Luke 9:51–56 and Mark 10:35–45 out loud.)

In the Bible, the only person who lived a perfect life is Jesus. Everyone else had to grow in his or her spiritual development as he or she became more like Christ. The fact that we can read in a few verses both their failures and their triumphs may give some the false hope that transformation is effortless and instantaneous. In fact, spiritual growth requires discipline, patience, and perseverance practiced over a lifetime.

**Consider This:** Ellen G. White wrote, “The character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts.”—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 57, 58.

Are we more likely to notice spiritual growth in ourselves and others over days, months, or years? What does that say about spiritual growth?

III. Captivated by Love  (Have someone read 1 John 3:1–3 out loud.)

In the Gospels, the names Peter, James, and John always head the lists of Jesus’ disciples. Yet, in John’s Gospel, his name doesn’t appear at all. Four times John is identified as “the one whom Jesus loved.” John leaned against Jesus at the Last Supper, he was at the foot of the cross when all the other disciples had fled, he was one of the first to visit the empty tomb, and he spent the rest of his life reminding Christ’s followers of the importance of love.

**Consider This:** What does love look like in your life? What form does it take in the life of your congregation?
Life-Giver

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31, NIV).

In these words John summarizes the reason he wrote his Gospel, and the entire purpose of his life—to lead people to believe in Jesus in order that they might gain eternal life. A key theme, all through the New Testament, is that eternal life exists only in Jesus.

Look up the following verses to see some of the things John says about this key theme, that of “life.” Also, as you read them, where can you see how the idea of “life” applies not only to eternal life but has immediate implications for life now?

John 3:15, 16, 36

John 6:35

John 6:63

John 10:28

John 12:25

John 14:6

John 17:3

What makes these promises of eternal life so important is that, although all creatures on earth die, human beings alone are capable of contemplating the idea of eternity. We alone can grasp the vast gap between our short existence and the prospect of eternity, and the cold reality of that gap hangs over us every instant of our lives—lives that are just a clogged artery, a drunken driver, or an AIDS virus away from ending.

What a wonderful hope we have, then, to know that death is not the end; on the contrary, it is just a sleep that to us will seem like a second, and the next thing we know we will be with Jesus, for eternity.

How should the hope of eternal life impact how we live now? In what ways do you live this life differently, knowing that you have the promise of eternal life?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

1. Can you remember when you realized that salvation is a gift that cannot be earned? Describe in one word how you felt when you came to that realization. Why is this such an important truth to remember? How can you help others understand the reality of salvation by faith alone?

2. Some transformations seem instantaneous: drunk to sober, addicted to liberated, guilty to guilt-free. But other less dramatic transformations seem to take forever: impatience, quick temper, procrastination, etc. Should we be satisfied with degrees of transformation? If so, how should we measure progress? What are the potential dangers in measuring our progress in these things? At the same time, how can we know if we need to make improvements?

Application Questions:

1. How did John become known as “the disciple whom Jesus loved”? What would have to happen in our lives for that to be said about us?

2. “This is love:” wrote John, “not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10, NIV). Selfless love (Greek: agape) gives without expecting anything in return. List at least five examples of selfless love that do not have anything to do with family relationships (i.e., husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters).

Witnessing

As a class, select an individual, family, or group to whom you can demonstrate God’s love. Designate a specific amount of time (a week, a month, a quarter) during which you can do something tangible to meet their material or spiritual needs. Outline a comprehensive, step-by-step plan, along with names, actions, and expected results.
Spending Time With Jesus

“Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God” (3 John 11).

What does John mean about those who had not seen God? What is his point? How does one see God?

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John had much to learn from Jesus. Even after spending time in His compassionate presence, John was still protective of his own turf and intolerant of others. On one occasion he stopped someone from casting out demons in Jesus’ name because he was not an official disciple (Mark 9:38). Jesus gently taught him that “‘whoever is not against us is for us’” (vs. 40, NIV).

John grew in strength of character at the Master’s side. At the time of Jesus’ crucifixion, when other disciples had fled, John alone remained at the foot of the cross. The regard Jesus held for John is shown in the way He entrusted His mother into John’s care (John 19:26, 27).

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18. What important principle is found there? What practical ways can we apply this principle to our own lives?

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If you read the epistles of John, you cannot help noting the kindness, the gentleness, the compassion found all through them. What a profound difference from the John presented in the Gospels. Truly something utterly remarkable happened to that man. We, of course, know what it was: He had been with Jesus, and his life and character had been radically altered from the experience.

Skim through the three epistles of 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John. Look at the character revealed there. How did Jesus change John’s life? What aspects of your own life could use change, as well? What practical steps are you taking in order to allow God to bring those changes?
When John laid down his fishing nets by Galilee’s shores, he never could have imagined where his journey with Jesus would take him. That’s how it is when we decide to follow Jesus. We may not leave everything to follow Him, as John and some of the other disciples did. But our lives will be changed; how can they not be?

There are two ways to experience Christ’s presence in our lives: One is as His agents, reflecting His love in acts of devotion and service to others. The other is by serving Him in the person of the less fortunate, the discouraged, the oppressed. Either way, our path of discipleship will draw us closer to Him.

Consider This: Ask your class members:

• What habits do you have to cultivate to stay in step with Christ? What works for you?

• What’s your preferred method of Bible study? Do you study by topic? By book? By memorizing? By reading or consulting different versions?

• What, for you, is the most meaningful way to pray? On your knees in a quiet place? At certain times? In certain places? By keeping a prayer list and recording God’s answers?

• In what settings are you most comfortable reflecting God’s love, and to whom? How are you known for demonstrating God’s love outside the setting of your church?

Close with prayer, asking God to open your eyes, as individuals and as a class, to better reflect Christ’s love to others.

“In the terrible persecution that followed, the apostle John did much to confirm and strengthen the faith of the believers. He bore a testimony which his adversaries could not controvert and which helped his brethren to meet with courage and loyalty the trials that came upon them. When the faith of the Christians would seem to waver under the fierce opposition they were forced to meet, the old, tried servant of Jesus would repeat with power and eloquence the story of the crucified and risen Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 568.

“John lived to be very old. He witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the ruin of the stately temple. The last survivor of the disciples who had been intimately connected with the Saviour, his message had great influence in setting forth the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, the Redeemer of the world. No one could doubt his sincerity, and through his teachings many were led to turn from unbelief.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 569.

Discussion Questions:

1. Go through the three epistles of John again. What other elements of John’s character can be found there? What strong words can you find there for those who are not following truth? How does this help us understand what love is all about?

2. What is your understanding of the idea of character development? How does it work? How does Jesus change our characters? Though the Bible does relate many supernatural events, is there any event in which a person’s character is changed immediately, supernaturally, in the same way the blind were given sight or the lepers cured? If not, why not? What does the answer tell us about the process of character development?

3. As a class, talk about the answers to these questions: How loving and accepting is your local church? What things can you do to help your church become more loving and accepting of others?

Summary: Having experienced firsthand the life-giving love of his Savior, the apostle John let that experience flow into all his words and actions. His life and writings remind us of the primacy of love in the Christian life and how it must be the basis of all our mission activity.
LESSON 8  *August 16–22

From Folly to Faith: The Apostle Peter

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Acts 2:14–40, Acts 3, 5:1–11, 1 Peter, 2 Peter.

Memory Text: “Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life’ ” (John 6:68, NIV).

Key Thought: The apostle Peter was one of the central pillars of the early church. Jesus changed Peter from an unreliable but passionate disciple into a rocklike tower of strength in sharing the gospel.

Peter’s impulsive, emotional character has made him an interesting study. He was a disciple whose heart was in the right place but who made many mistakes.

Peter’s story especially helps us understand the role of emotions in the Christian life. When you are lost in a forest, your senses can take you only so far. You can see, hear, and smell—and still be lost. You need a compass and a map, something more than what you have naturally.

So it is in our spiritual lives. What we feel is not the final test of what is truth. We need something more—something outside of us. We need a spiritual compass and map. Emotions are a vital part of the Christian life but not the most important part. Without appropriate care, they even can be dangerous. Peter was someone whose emotions got him into trouble more often than not. However, once placed under submission to Jesus, his emotions and zeal became powerful tools for the Lord’s work.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 23.
The Fisherman

Peter came from Bethsaida, a fishing village on the northeastern coast of the Sea of Galilee. Bethsaida, which means House of Fishing, was where Jesus later performed many miracles. For nearly two thousand years, Bethsaida was lost to history. Not until 1987 was the archaeological site of this village discovered.

Although Peter was married (Matt. 8:14), we know nothing about his wife or any children he might have had. We do know he was living with his wife and mother-in-law in Capernaum when Jesus called him to be His disciple.

Read Matthew 4:18–20. How did Peter respond to Jesus’ call? What significance is found in the fact that they “left their nets” (vs. 20)?

The simplicity of this description leaves us to guess what went through Peter’s mind. Obviously, something about Jesus was so compelling that Peter was prepared to leave his home and livelihood to follow this itinerant Teacher. The point should be obvious to all of us. We need to be ready to do the same thing; that is, to follow Jesus no matter the personal cost (see Luke 14:26, 27).

Peter came from a humble working-class background. Contrast that to Paul’s background. Acts 22:3, Rom. 11:1, Phil. 3:5; see also Acts 5:34. What point can we take away from this contrast?

Either way, for both Peter and Paul, regardless of their different backgrounds, the call of Jesus required total commitment on their part. Upper class, working class, it does not matter.

Recount your own experience when being called by Jesus. What did it cost you? What did you have to give up? If someone asked you, Was it worth it? how would you respond, and why?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: John 6:68

The Student Will:
- **Know:** Peter as an activist leader who got things done, but with tendencies to react more emotionally than rationally.
- **Feel:** What it must have taken to mold Peter’s character into what Jesus wanted.
- **Do:** Develop with the class a game plan for character development.

Learning Outline:

- What is an “activist” leader? Is that good or bad?
- Make a list of some of Peter’s “not-too-solid” experiences.
- What’s the difference between Peter and John (review last week’s lesson)?
- This week’s lesson talks about Peter in the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles. Have the class discuss these three “Peters.”

II. Church Leadership: Who Should Be There? (John 21:15–18)
- Ask your class if they would elect Peter as head elder of your church. Why, or why not?
- Which disciple would they elect?
- Have the class make a list of characteristics they expect to see in church leaders at any level.

III. Game Plan
- Taking John (last week’s lesson) and Peter as examples, have the class come up with some specific things that need to be done for characters to be molded according to Jesus’ expectations.

Summary: Jesus harnessed Peter’s activism and good intentions and strengthened him in the faith to be a major pillar of the early Christian church.
Peter’s Folly

Like the other disciples, Peter had a unique opportunity to learn from Jesus. He walked many miles with Him, ate with Him, worked with Him. He listened to Jesus speak, watched the way He dealt with people, saw Him heal the sick. He witnessed dramatic spectacles—the Mount of Transfiguration, where Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah; Jesus raising the dead; Jesus arrested; Jesus risen from the grave.

Peter also had many opportunities for practical learning. Often Peter found himself in the middle of experiences that provided life-changing object lessons. All these lessons were preparing him for his role as one of the great missionaries of the early church.

In the course of his experiences with Jesus, Peter made many mistakes. Read the mistakes depicted below. What were they, and what lessons should Peter have learned from them?

Matt. 14:22–32
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Matt. 26:36–46
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Mark 14:29–31, 66–72
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John 18:10, 11
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Brash, presumptuous, prone to violence, collapsing under pressure, sleeping on the job, Peter on one level appeared to be everything that a humble, meek, faithful Christian should not be. And yet, before it was all over, Peter became one of the key leaders in the early Christian church, a powerful evangelist and missionary for Jesus. What a testimony to what God can do in a life surrendered to Him.

What lessons can you learn, from this account, about not judging others? Or even judging yourself?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Very few New Testament characters rival Simon Peter in terms of bold actions and outrageous statements. He invited himself to walk with Jesus on the water, he cut off a man’s ear, and he initially refused to let Jesus wash his feet just before the Last Supper. Often, when Jesus asked His disciples a question, it was Peter who spoke up. With James and John, Peter accompanied Jesus on some of His most outstanding miracles.

Yet often in the sermons that mention Peter, he’s treated as kind of a lovable buffoon; someone who speaks and acts before he thinks through the results of his words or actions. The implied message of these sermons is, “Don’t be like Peter. Keep your mouth shut and your hands to yourself. It’s better to be safe than sorry.”

That attitude misses the entire point of his story: Peter’s influence in the early church was huge because he was willing to take risks for Christ. When Peter was converted and transformed, the Holy Spirit used Peter’s bold proclamations and brave actions to build up Christ’s kingdom.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Peter’s Call (Review Matt. 4:18–22, Mark 1:16–20, Luke 5:1–11 with your class.)

A casual reading of these verses gives the impression that Jesus showed up out of the blue and invited Peter, James, and John to follow Him, and almost on a whim they accepted His invitation.

But even fishermen are more sophisticated than that. We know that Peter was married; what kind of thoughts must have gone through his mind as he considered leaving everything to follow Jesus?

Consider This: Peter and his fellow fishermen had no doubt heard about Jesus before He showed up and sat in his boat. What effect did the miraculous catch of fish have on those who saw it? What was behind Peter’s exclamation: “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”

CONTINUED
Learning From Jesus

**Read** Matthew 16:13–26. What was the nature of the exchange? Why did Peter respond as he did? What basic lesson was Jesus seeking to teach the disciples?

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Though Peter had declared that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, he had a false understanding of what that meant. The view Peter and the other disciples had of the Messiah reflected the common understanding of the day. The Messiah would come from the line of David and would overthrow the Romans and bring justice and peace.

Yet, Jesus clearly taught the disciples and the crowds that the kingdom of God was a spiritual kingdom. They would not establish it by power, swords, and daggers but by love, forgiveness, and righteousness.

At a pivotal stage of His ministry, Jesus decided to tell the disciples about His death—that He would go to Jerusalem, be killed, and rise again after three days. Peter was offended by the idea that Jesus was going to die—even though this death was to be the central pillar of the plan of salvation.

Within Peter’s worldview, there was no room for this. Peter had left his home village and his fishing business to follow Jesus. He had given his life to supporting Him and His ministry. The death of his Master, therefore, had no place in the scenario Peter had painted in his mind. Jesus would set up His kingdom on earth, and Peter would play a key role in that kingdom of justice and peace. How could such a wonderful movement of righteousness and healing end in the death of its Leader? It is almost as if Peter either did not hear or did not understand Jesus’ promise to rise on the third day.

Notice the degree of selfishness seen in Peter here. That explains, it seems, Christ’s words in Matthew 16:23–26. Read those verses again. In what areas of your own life might you apply those words?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

(Luke 5:8, NIV)? What does that tell us about Peter and about His openness to the prompting of God? Imagine if Peter had thought himself so holy and religious that he didn’t need Jesus.

II. Peter’s Conversion (Review Matt. 16:13–23, 26:69–75, John 13:39 with your class.)

These passages describe situations in which both Peter’s character strengths and flaws are revealed. But to maintain, as some do, that Peter was not truly converted indicates how many of us misunderstand conversion.

Being converted doesn’t mean that we’ll never again experience failure, any more than being married means you’ll never fight with your spouse. Conversion simply means that we’re on the Christian pathway. If we fall, as Peter sometimes did, we get back up and get back on the path.

Consider This: What comfort comes from knowing that Jesus can transform us as He transformed Peter? What does Peter’s transformation tell us about conversion? Is it an event or a process?

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III. Peter’s Ministry (Review Acts 2:1–14, 3:1–12, and 10:1–22 with your class.)

Being a Christian is a learning experience. Peter’s experiences with Jesus provided the platform on which he built his ministry to both Jews and Gentiles.

Consider This: For each of the three incidents recorded in the Scriptures above, what was the primary lesson Peter had to learn? Ask your class: How might the Holy Spirit be leading us to be more daring for God?

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The Peter of Acts

No doubt, much of the Gospels do not paint Peter in a particularly great light. He is shown, time and again, floundering, falling, making great mistakes. Yet, the Gospels end with a clear indication of the bumbling disciple’s future.

**Read** John 21:14–19. What is Jesus saying to Peter here? Why is that so astonishing, considering Peter’s past?

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“Feed my sheep”? That is exactly what Peter eventually comes to do. Again, what a powerful testimony to what God can do in the life of someone dedicated to Him. The fiery, impetuous Peter now takes a key role in the formation of the early church.

**Browse** through the following texts. What do they tell us about the role and work of Peter?

*Acts 2:14–40*  
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*Acts 3*  
____________________________________________________________________

*Act 5:1–11*  
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The transformation was astounding, and the lessons for us should be obvious. Through the surrender of himself to Christ, Peter became a powerful witness for the Lord. Despite Peter’s numerous mistakes and shortcomings, the Lord was still able to use him as a powerful witness.

**How different are you today from when you first started following Jesus? What progress have you seen? What areas need more improvement? Why, no matter how slow the progress seems, should you never give up?**
IV. Peter’s Legacy (Have someone from your class read 1 Pet. 3:8, 9; 4:7–11 out loud.)

According to tradition, Peter died by being crucified upside down. Apparently, at the end of his life of service to Christ he felt unworthy to die in the same way Jesus did.

Consider This: If, after reading the Scriptures in this section, you had to summarize Peter’s counsel to the church in one word, what would that word be?

▶ STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

1. All we know about most of the characters in the Bible is gleaned from just a few verses. Some of the snapshots we have of Peter aren’t all that flattering. What would people know about you based on glimpses of your life, seen here and there?

2. Another thing about Bible biographies is that months and years are compressed into a few verses or chapters. How long does it take for a person’s character to be revealed? At what stages is it most likely that character can be altered?

Application Questions:

1. Jesus’ love and patience are highlighted in the stories of Peter’s misdeeds and mistakes. In what areas of your life can you see God changing you into someone who more correctly reflects His character? List at least three.

2. What, exactly, was Jesus doing for Peter when He told him, “‘Feed my sheep’” (John 21:17, NIV)? When has Jesus expressed His confidence in you by giving you a responsibility you weren’t sure you were capable of?

Witnessing

1. No question: When Jesus first called him, Peter was a little rough
The Peter of the Epistles

When Jesus told Peter, “Feed my sheep,” no doubt the discouraged fisherman had no idea what was coming, or the role he would play in the Lord’s church. Though we have seen, in Acts, Peter fulfilling that command, we can see it also in the fact that this same Peter was also the author of two epistles, his way of “feeding the sheep” not just in his own time but for all church history. In a sense, every time we read one of his letters, we are seeing another fulfillment of Christ’s words to His disciple.

**Pick** one chapter, any chapter, from either of the epistles of Peter. Read it over, pray over it, and try to imagine the character of the person writing it. What can you learn about the new Peter from what you have read in that chapter?

In some ways it is hard to imagine these deep, eloquent words coming from the same man seen in the Gospels, the harsh, brash fisherman whose mouth ran faster than his mind or his faith. Yet, this is the Peter transformed by God’s grace into what Paul called “a new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Particularly powerful are Peter’s words in 1 Peter 1:18–21 and in 1 Peter 2:24, in which Peter puts emphasis on the death of Jesus for the redemption of our souls. The Peter who once was determined that Jesus should never go to the Cross is now the Peter who is proclaiming the Cross as the means of redemption, as the place where Jesus, our Substitute, bore our sins. Notice, too, the wording of 1 Peter 2:18–23 in which Peter is advocating a kind of pacifism, a turning of the cheek that one would not have found in the Peter of the Gospels. Truly, the change was remarkable. It should give us all hope, regardless of where we are in our own personal character development.

**Go back over the chapter you picked from one of Peter’s epistles. What was the main point? How can you take what this shepherd is feeding you and make it your own?**
around the edges. Who, in your circle of friends or fellow church members, needs some help polishing out the rough places? What specific activities are you prepared to engage in to see that it happens?

2 It has been said, “Truth is not so much taught as caught.” Peter was a man of action because Jesus was a man of action; Peter just reflected what he saw in Jesus. What activities or events could you plan, as a group or as individuals, to model Christian virtues for those who are still developing as Christians?

**STEP 4—Apply**

Ellen G. White wrote, “Sanctification is the work of a lifetime. As our opportunities multiply, our experience will enlarge, and our knowledge increase. We shall become strong to bear responsibility, and our maturity will be in proportion to our privileges.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 65, 66. The truth of this statement is surely borne out in the story of Peter.

**Consider This:** There are two ways to look at Peter’s story: one, from Peter’s perspective, and the other, from Jesus’ perspective. Ask your class to respond to these three questions:

- What is it about Jesus that makes you want to dedicate your life to Him and His kingdom, as did Peter? What talents do you bring to this relationship? Why is it important to recognize that no matter what your gifts are, they all come from the Lord?

- As you see yourself from Christ’s perspective, what areas of your life need to be transformed? Are you a more faithful follower of Christ today than you were a year ago? Two years ago? Ten years ago? How can you know one way or another?

- What responsibilities are you now carrying that you never imagined would be yours? What larger responsibilities might God have in store for you?

As you close the class with prayer, allow a few moments of silence for God to impress your class members of avenues they might pursue to be of greater service to Christ and His kingdom.

“In his early discipleship Peter thought himself strong. Like the Pharisee, in his own estimation he was ‘not as other men are.’ When Christ on the eve of His betrayal forewarned His disciples, ‘All ye shall be offended because of Me this night,’ Peter confidently declared, ‘Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.’ Mark 14:27, 29. Peter did not know his own danger. Self-confidence misled him. He thought himself able to withstand temptation; but in a few short hours the test came, and with cursing and swearing he denied his Lord.

“When the crowing of the cock reminded him of the words of Christ, surprised and shocked at what he had just done he turned and looked at his Master. At that moment Christ looked at Peter, and beneath that grieved look, in which compassion and love for him were blended, Peter understood himself. He went out and wept bitterly. That look of Christ’s broke his heart. Peter had come to the turning point, and bitterly did he repent his sin. He was like the publican in his contrition and repentance, and like the publican he found mercy. The look of Christ assured him of pardon.”—Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, pp. 152–154.

Discussion Questions:

1. Go through Peter’s epistles and look for things that specifically show how different a person he was from the Peter of the Gospels. What encouragement can you draw from what you find?

2. It is easy to criticize Peter’s lack of faith as he sank into the water. But Peter was the only disciple who had the courage to get out of the boat. What are some of the ways you need to “get out of the boat” in your Christian life? What about your own church? Does it need to do the same?

3. Ellen G. White writes, “Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary.”—The Desire of Ages, p. 195. Many followers of Christ lose their early enthusiasm to share what they have learned with others. How can church members recapture that passion for sharing the good news? How can you help each other regain this desire for witnessing?

Summary: The story of Peter is a tribute to what God can do through even the weakest disciple. Jesus harnessed Peter’s passion and good intentions and strengthened him in the faith to be a mighty pillar of the early Christian church.
A Pillar of Mission: The Apostle Peter

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Pss. 18:2, 31; 95:1; Matt. 16:18; Acts 5:15; 10:25, 28–43; 11:19–26; Gal. 2:11–14.

Memory Text: “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13, NIV).

Key Thought: Peter, the transformed Peter, became one of the greatest missionaries the world has ever seen, even despite some lessons he still needed to learn.

Last week we looked at the amazing transformation of Peter, how he went from instability to a pillar in the church. How easy it would have been, after his disastrous fall, to have written him off from the service of the Lord. As we saw, however, that was not God’s intention for this flawed hero.

Indeed, after his restoration, Peter would devote his life to one mission: to share spiritual food with Jesus’ flock—both inside and outside the sheepfold.

Last week we also saw what Christ did in Peter’s life to make him the great missionary that he became. This week we will look at the results of his mission. We will follow some of Peter’s experiences as he played a key role in the work of the early church and in helping spread the gospel to the Gentiles.

There are some powerful lessons for us today from the story of Peter, both his successes and his failures.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 30.
Peter’s Commission: A Closer Look

“I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18).

These are some of the most controversial words in all of the Bible. A lot of Christian history has been based on how people have interpreted the meaning of this text.

For many, it meant that Jesus built His church on Peter, that he was what has been called “the first pope,” and that he, Peter, was the rock that Jesus was talking about.

Others, however, interpret it as Jesus saying, essentially, “You are Peter, but on this Rock, Myself, I will build My church.” The evidence, as we’ll see below, is strongly in favor of the latter.

Look up the following texts. How do they help us understand what the rock is that Jesus is talking about here? Deut. 32:4; Pss. 18:2, 31; 95:1; 1 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6.

No matter how privileged Peter was, no matter the importance of his role, God’s church has never been built upon a sinful human being. Heaven forbid! Jesus Himself is the Rock, the foundation upon which His church rests. All of us, including Peter, whatever our role and position, are secure as long as we rest on that foundation, that Rock, and we can do that only to the extent that we are surrendered in faith and obedience (see Matt. 7:24) to the words and command of our Lord. Sure, the Lord knew the future of Peter and knew what Peter would become, but He certainly was not going to make Peter, a sinful, fallen human being, the foundation rock of His church.

What should Christ’s words tell us about the importance of humility in our lives and especially in our work for the salvation of others? Why, whatever our gifts, are they nothing if not surrendered to the Lord?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** *Acts 4:13*

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** The history and reasons for the development of Peter as a major leader in the early church.
- **Feel:** An attachment to Peter as a worthy example of the kind of people Jesus calls to mission.
- **Do:** Motivate your class to grasp the meaning and be involved in the “wider mission” of the church.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Peter the Leader** *(Matt. 16:18)*
   - A. Review the Roman Catholic and Protestant ideas about the meaning of this text. *It is very important that your class understand the meaning of this text.* Who is “Peter,” who is the “builder,” what’s the “rock,” what’s the “church,” and what are the “gates of hell”?
   - B. What is “Peter’s shadow” talked about in Monday’s lesson, and how would you characterize a “Peter’s shadow” in our church?

II. **Peter the Jewish Nationalist** *(Gal. 2:11–14)*
   - **Case Study:** Your class is the church board in Antioch. Peter and Paul are hard at it. How will you resolve the problem?

III. **Peter: A Wider Vision** *(Acts 1:8)*
   - A. What is Wednesday’s lesson talking about when it says that Peter got a “wider vision”?
   - B. Have the class write out a statement of how they are/could be involved in the “wider mission” of the church.

**Summary:** Peter became a major church leader. He allowed Jesus to redirect his personality toward the mission of the church, even though he had a difficult time dissociating himself from some long-held opinions.
The Shadow of Peter

It appears that immediately after Jesus returned to heaven, Peter took the role of leader among the believers, about 120 people. In the book of Acts he is usually named first in lists of the apostles, and he led the believers in choosing an apostle to replace Judas. As we saw last week, however, it is not until after Pentecost, when he stands up and preaches powerfully to the crowd, that we fully see the amazing transformation in Peter’s life (Acts 2:14–41). As a result of the Holy Spirit’s working through his preaching, 3,000 people accept Jesus and are baptized.

The next time we see Peter, he is walking up with his fellow apostle and longtime friend John to the temple to pray. Peter then performs the first healing miracle recorded in Acts, as he heals a man crippled from birth (Acts 3:6–8).

**Compare** Acts 3:6, 12, 13; 4:10. What common theme runs through Peter’s words?

Peter had a long and bitter experience of trying to do things in his own strength. He would never forget sinking into the dark waters after he took his eyes off Jesus. He would never forget betraying his Master after His arrest. He would never forget Jesus rebuking him for trying to do things his own way. Peter, apparently having learned his lessons, was leaning on the power of the Lord. He would need to.

**Read** Acts 5:15, 10:25. What was going on in these two accounts? What kind of incredible pressure was being placed on Peter here? What great danger would he, or anyone, face in that situation?

People wanting only to have “the shadow of Peter” touch them? In many ways now, Peter, filled with power from on high, would face his greatest spiritual challenges.

**What would it do to you if people responded to you the way they did to Peter? What is the only way you could keep yourself from spiritual pride of the most damaging kind?**
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Can the Lord use only “perfect” people—or is there room for folk like you and me?

This part of Peter’s story builds on his humanness to show us that God can use just about anyone. Peter swore, denied Christ, even resorted to violence, and yet, he went forth with “the keys to the kingdom” and became a mighty witness for God’s truth and God’s Son, Jesus the Messiah, or Christ.

Peter was a fisherman, unschooled in the higher realms of Scripture, certainly not one who sat at the foot of the rabbis of old. Yet, despite his “rough” background and sometimes “raw” behavior, God’s grace transformed him into an evangelist par excellence.

Ask your class members to think of people whom they’ve known over the years whose worldly experience ill-fitted them for spiritual achievement, and yet these people were used to reach others with the gospel and the three angels’ messages.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

1. I Will Build My Church (Review Matt. 16:18 and related verses from the lesson with your class.)

Our lesson accurately points out the controversy surrounding the simple words from Matthew. Jesus couldn’t be referring to a single, sinful human being as the foundation for the Christian church. If so, why would we have needed a perfect Savior? Instead, Jesus is trying to encourage us, through the example of Peter, that God can take imperfect people and use them, when surrendered, for great things.

Consider This: What are the needs in your church, your community, your nation that can only be filled, or, perhaps, best be filled, by consecrated people of faith? How can each of us, as fallen people in a fallen world, use the gifts that God has given us to build God’s church?
Organizing the Early Church

In the early stages of the Christian church, the new believers shared their possessions and goods, met together daily for worship, and enjoyed fellowship together. They were “praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people” (Acts 2:47, NIV). Things were going well under the leadership of the apostles.

But, as the church grew, problems arose. It became clear that the church needed an organizational structure. Peter and the other apostles realized there had to be a proper balance between maintenance work and their main mission. They decided: “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables” (Acts 6:2, NIV).

As new congregations were formed in new areas, proper church organization became even more critical. It was vital to ensure that the believers were properly established and nurtured in their new faith.

The Jerusalem church began sending missionaries in groups of two (following the example of Jesus when He sent out the apostles and the disciples two by two).

What did the leaders in Jerusalem do when they heard about the new group of believers in Samaria that Philip had established? Acts 8:14. Or when a new church was founded in Antioch? Acts 11:19–26. What is the significance of these actions?

Throughout the book of Acts, we see Peter and the other church leaders in Jerusalem keeping a close administrative and spiritual eye on the rapid growth of the church, particularly among the Gentiles. They realized how easy it would be for them to slip back into paganism or to be led astray by false doctrines. Having come to Jesus as babes in the faith, these new believers needed to be weaned from the “milk” of the Word and firmly planted in solid doctrine.

What more could you do to help new members be better grounded in Jesus and our message? Why not take a new member under your wing and help him or her along?
II. Simon, Son of Jonah

**Consider This:** Peter wasn’t always called Peter. He was Simon, the son of Jonah, a rough-hewn fisherman. Jesus upgraded his name, calling him a “rock,” symbolizing solidity and determination.

Even with a new name—on earth, no less, not just “written down in glory,” as the old hymn goes—Peter didn’t always live up to the title given him. He feared drowning, he feared the hostile leaders, he feared the crowd, and he feared the Romans—the latter three with good reason.

Yet, Jesus saw something beyond the present reality to make Peter’s future a divine forecast. After the Resurrection, after Jesus appeared to him and both forgave and commissioned Peter, he became a mighty, indefatigable warrior for the faith, this time with only the Word of God as his sword!

What can we discern in those around us, in the family of God, that would make them candidates to help spread the gospel? How can we encourage and help these people develop into what they could be for the Lord?

III. Against the Gates of Hell *“And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”* (Matt. 16:18).

So much has come against the church over the years—persecution, heresies, divisions, false teachings, repressions, forced conversions to other faiths, atheism, and communism, to name a few. Yet, as Lonnie Melashenko remarked in his December 17, 2006, *Exploring the Word* broadcast, “God has always had a remnant, even in the darkest hours.”

Many have tried to crush Christianity, but the church comes back stronger and more vital. Peter succeeded after some of his darkest moments—shouldn’t that inspire us to be dedicated soldiers of the cross?
A Wider Vision

After Pentecost, Peter’s life was transformed, and he became a mighty pillar of the church. But there still was more for him to learn. Like the other apostles, Peter still saw his mission as exclusively to the Jews.

Read Acts 1:8. What was Jesus saying that should have helped Peter and others understand that things were not going to be quite what they expected, at least in terms of mission?

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In Acts 10:1–14, Peter was given a vision in which he was told to eat unclean foods. As a Jew, he was astounded at what was told him. “‘Surely not, Lord!’” Peter replied.

“‘I have never eaten anything impure or unclean’” (Acts 10:14, NIV). It would be the same as a Seventh-day Adventist being told in vision to smoke a cigarette and drink from a bottle of alcohol.

Of course, God was not literally telling Peter to eat unclean foods—just as He would not ask us to smoke tobacco or drink alcohol. Peter’s vision was a parable. At first he wondered about the meaning (vs. 17), but soon it became apparent as he was invited to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile.

Read Acts 10:28–43. What was the real meaning of the vision? What did Peter now understand that he did not before?

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For us today, it is obvious that the gospel was a message for the whole world, but it must have been quite a surprise for someone like Peter, coming out of the background that he did. How important that, whatever our position in the church, we not let our cultural prejudices put blinders on us. How important that, as with Peter, we get a wider vision of the mission of our church.

What are some personal or cultural blinders that you have had to deal with? Or, perhaps, that many in your church still do? How can you get a wider vision?
STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

1. What did Peter learn from his attempts to do things in his own strength, such as taking his eyes off Jesus when called to walk on the water? What lesson did he learn about relying on God’s power?

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2. When new congregations were formed in near and distant places—Samaria or even Antioch—what was the reaction in Jerusalem? They sent more experienced people to help the congregations grow. Today, such calls are made, and answered, on a more local level, but why is this still a good idea?

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Application Questions:

1. As Peter progresses in his work, some people begin to look to Peter, and not Jesus, as their source (Acts 5:15); Cornelius even wanted to worship Peter (Acts 10:25). How would you react to those who want to credit you, and not God, for the good things they see in your ministry?

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2. In Acts 10:28–41, Peter learns the importance of treating people whom he might have considered “unclean” as being as much children of God as his Jewish brethren. How can we apply this idea of tolerance, acceptance, and understanding in the church? In our daily lives?

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Witnessing

There’s a lot more to sharing the gospel with others than can be done merely by the printed word, a shortwave broadcast, or even satellite television. All of these are important, even vital in some areas of the world where Christians can’t easily travel or work. But in those places where people can share the good news, how can we help those who hear but don’t
Growing in Grace

Even when church members in Christ are working together for the same mission, misunderstandings and disagreements can arise. The early Christian church was no exception.

Nor was Peter. However singularly blessed of God, however crucial to the work of the church, even Peter, after Pentecost, still had some growing to do. How nice to know that even with his faults, God was still using him.

Read Galatians 2:11–14. What did Peter still not understand?

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Paul was upset because he believed that Peter was acting like a hypocrite. After Peter’s vision about unclean foods and his encounter with Cornelius, he had begun associating with Gentiles. For this he was criticized by the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 11:2). Peter defended his actions, and as a result, his critics changed their minds. “They had no further objections and praised God, saying, ‘So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life’ ” (vs. 18, NIV).

But now, to Paul’s disgust, after having achieved so much on behalf of the Gentiles, Peter was reversing his behavior. He was now bowing to pressure from Jewish Christians and going against his convictions. He was now refusing to eat with Gentiles, because he did not want to offend the Jewish Christians. Paul, though, was offended by Peter’s actions, even though in another place he warned about a stronger brother being an offense to a weaker one (1 Cor. 8:9–14).

Obviously, though, in this case, that of associating with Gentiles, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, thought that the sense of mission to others, the sense of all being one in Christ, was the overriding and most important principle.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:9–14. What is Paul talking about there? How could you take what he is saying and apply it to yourself and your church? What things might you be doing that are offending weaker members?
fully understand, as the Ethiopian eunuch confessed, to grasp the wonder and hope of grace?

**STEP 4—Apply**

On a clear spring afternoon on the sidewalks of New York some twenty-five years ago, a band of Christians witnessed in the “open air,” singing songs, reading Bible verses, and offering prayer to those who needed or wanted it.

“I didn't have a prayer left in the world,” Tom Lucas later said in a conversation with this author in 1982, so he raised his right hand and asked for help. That marked the start of Tom’s change from a drunkard, a drug addict, and a toothless street denizen into a Christian witness. Tom cleaned up his act and spent his remaining career helping others out of the pit of loneliness and despair that had consumed much of his lifetime.

**Consider This:** Are there people around us who exhibit some spiritual potential, but somehow fail to reach it? Can we help these people see that God’s plan doesn’t end with their salvation but only begins there?

If we believe that the church has a specific role to play in spreading the gospel before Jesus returns, who will do that? An evangelist? Your pastor? The local conference administration?

The Great Commission of Matthew 28 isn’t addressed to church administrators—it’s addressed to you and to me. We each, we all, have to move forward in faith to share the good news with others; and we can each encourage those believers around us to “go, and do likewise.”

But what if we’re the only Christian in our home, our community, even our nation? What can we do then, especially if it is difficult or dangerous to engage in public evangelism?

**We can pray:** We can pray for those at work in the harvest fields, and we can pray for those who have yet to believe. We can do good to our neighbors and, carefully perhaps, answer as to why we’re doing something for others when most people are too wrapped up in themselves. Peter healed those in need; we can offer spiritual help and healing to all.
**Further Study:** “The Saviour’s manner of dealing with Peter had a lesson for him and his brethren. Although Peter had denied his Lord, the love which Jesus bore him had never faltered. And as the apostle should take up the work of ministering the word to others, he was to meet the transgressor with patience, sympathy, and forgiving love. Remembering his own weakness and failure, he was to deal with the sheep and lambs committed to his care as tenderly as Christ had dealt with him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 516.

“After all the failures of Peter, after his fall and restoration, his long course of service, his intimate acquaintance with Christ, his knowledge of Christ’s pure, straightforward practice of principle; after all the instruction he had received, all the gifts and knowledge and great influence in preaching and teaching the Word, is it not strange that he should dissemble and evade the principles of the gospel, for fear of man, or in order to gain his esteem? Is it not strange that he should waver, and be two-sided in his position? May God give every man a sense of his own personal helplessness to steer his own vessel straight and safely into the harbor. The grace of Christ is essential every day. His matchless grace alone can save our feet from falling (MS 122, 1897).”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 1108, 1109.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. As a class, discuss the issue of dealing with weaker folk in the church who might be offended by certain practices. How far do we go in accommodating them? What principles should we follow so that we do not, as did Peter, sacrifice a higher purpose in our well-meaning attempts not to offend?

2. Spiritual pride is always a danger for anyone. How can we protect ourselves from this, especially if we are having great success in soul winning, in ministering, or in any area of church life? How does the Lord help keep His servants humble?

3. Is your church organized more as a club than a mission organization? If so, what can you do to help restructure the church for its central mission?

**Summary:** The apostle Peter went through a dark night of the soul before, during, and after Jesus’ death. When Jesus was resurrected, he was given another chance to be faithful to his Lord. Peter dedicated his life to that task and led the church from strength to strength in challenging times.
Women of Mission

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “‘Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little’” (Luke 7:47, NIV).

Key Thought: Though women were often given background roles, the New Testament shows them heavily involved in advancing the mission of the church.

W omen play key parts in biblical history. They include good and bad queens, righteous maids, praying mothers, powerful leaders, influential wives, generous givers, prostitutes, prophets, deaconesses, gracious hosts, and faithful supporters and friends of Jesus.

In such stories as Esther and Deborah, women take center stage. Throughout the Bible’s broad canvas, we can see how women with a mission have helped advance the kingdom of heaven in many ways.

In the New Testament we see examples of how Jesus dealt with women. At the same time, many women followed Jesus and supported Him financially (Luke 8:1–3) and helped care for His needs (Mark 15:41). Jesus specifically ministered to women on several occasions. When many of His disciples deserted Jesus at His death, women remained true and stayed with Him to the cross. Women were the first witnesses of His resurrection.

This week we will look at just a few of the women in the New Testament who, although their stories may be brief, played a vital part in the mission of the church.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 6.*
Breaking the Rules

In the society in which Jesus lived and worked, women were largely kept out of public life. At Sabbath worship, they were mere onlookers, not participants. Like the Gentiles, women had a specially designated outer court at the synagogue, from which they could not stray. Significantly, it was located beneath the court for the men.

In public, men were restricted in how much they could talk to a woman, even their wives. Women were not allowed to study the Torah; in fact, they were not even allowed to touch the Scriptures, lest they contaminate them.

Jesus took a different approach. Women were His beloved children, just as much as men. His death covered them just as much as any male.

Although rabbis of the time were not permitted to teach women, Jesus happily did. On one occasion, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, sat at His feet like a pupil (Luke 10:38–42).

Prejudice against women entered every aspect of life. Men were allowed to divorce women, even for the most trivial offenses, but women were not allowed to divorce men, even for the most serious of offenses. Jesus had strong words to say about the current practice of divorce, which treated women as if they were objects owned by men (Matt. 19:3–8).

In the space of two chapters in Luke, Jesus breaks the laws regarding contact with ceremonially unclean women. He touches a dead girl and restores her to life (Luke 8:41, 42, 49–55); allows a hemorhaging woman to touch Him (Luke 8:43–48); and lets a woman of ill repute wash His feet (Luke 7:37–39). Read each of those accounts. What principles do you think led Jesus to break these rules? How are those principles applicable today?

While He was on earth, Jesus broke down earthly, human barriers. As the apostle Paul said, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

What kind of prejudices are you still harboring against any group? How can you recognize those prejudices? More important, why must you overcome them?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Luke 7:47

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** The difference between cultural rules and regulations and biblically authoritative rules and regulations.
- **Feel:** A responsibility to make sure all members of society receive the honor and respect they deserve.
- **Do:** Devise some things the class can do to carry out the “know” and “feel” issues above.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Jesus Breaks the Rules** *(see for instance Luke 7:37–39)*

   - **A** Have the class make a list of ways in which Jesus “broke” cultural rules and substituted biblical principles.
   - **B** Discuss with the class some contemporary cultural rules in your society that might need to be “broken” when compared to biblical principles; for instance, the early church *(Acts 16:14–16).*
   - **C** If Lydia were alive today in your society, what position might she occupy in the church?
   - **D** If Priscilla *(Rom. 16:3–5)* came to your church as an evangelistic speaker, how might she be received?

II. **“Four Unmarried Daughters Who prophesied”** *(Acts 9:21)*

   Have the class discuss the implications of such action. What are the implications for church leadership, authority, and ministry in these few words?

**Summary:** God’s people today need to make a clear distinction between cultural customs and biblical principles. Cultural customs are changeable; biblical principles are not. Jesus always focused on biblical principles and the mission of the church.
The Woman at the Well: Part 1

The division between Jews and Samaritans was long and bitter (for its historical roots, see 2 Kings 17:24–41). When the exiles returned from Babylon and attempted to rebuild Jerusalem’s temple and walls, the Samaritans tried to stop their work (see Ezra 4:7–22 and Neh. 4:1–5). Incidents such as this, as well as the dispute over the true site for the temple, fueled hatred between both groups. On one occasion a group of people tried to insult Jesus by calling Him demon-possessed and a Samaritan (John 8:48).

The most direct and quickest route between Jerusalem in the south and Galilee in the north was through Samaria. However, when making this trip, people would often take a detour around Samaria—despite the inconvenient longer distance in order to avoid their long and bitter enemies.

Look up the following passages in Luke. What do they reveal about Christ’s attitude toward Samaritans? What should this tell us about what our attitudes toward those traditionally despised by our own culture must be? Luke 9:51–56, 10:30–37, 17:11–19.

On more than one occasion the Gospel writers show Jesus traveling directly through Samaria. One time on His way from Judea to Galilee, He stopped at the Samaritan town of Sychar—the site of Jacob’s well and near Mount Gerizim, the holy place for the Samaritans, the site of their temple. It was here that He had His famous exchange, not just with a Samaritan but a Samaritan woman (see John 4).

Much to the woman’s surprise, He asks her if she would draw water for Him to drink. The request shocks her, because Jesus was a Jew and she was a Samaritan and a woman!

As Jesus speaks to this woman, He breaks several cultural taboos. The apostle John says that when he and the other disciples returned, they “were surprised to find him talking with a woman” (John 4:27, NIV). It was not considered appropriate for a man, even a religious teacher, to be seen talking to a woman in public—especially, of all people, a Samaritan woman.

Jesus did not let social custom interfere with His mission. How do you find the right balance between not giving social offense and doing what is right?
Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Peter, Daniel, David, Isaiah, Moses, and Paul. The Bible is replete with the stories of men who have done great things for God and with God, and there’s no doubt about that.

However, it would be dishonest—even foolish—to minimize the role of women in the Bible. From Eve, through whose seed the Savior Himself was promised, to Sarah, Rebekah, Esther, Mary, Martha, and others, the ministry of women is of inestimable value to God’s church and His people.

This lesson explores some of the essential women of the New Testament church and their impact on the world around them. These women, and countless others, didn’t wait for marching orders from a field general or for a committee to meet and agree on their role. Instead, they fulfilled that old bromide about success: “Find a need and fill it.”

When discussing this lesson with your class, ask them to remember women in the church who played a key role in their lives. Remember: Gender is not a prerequisite for being used of God; a willing heart is the only necessary qualification.

►STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Transcending Boundaries (Review the indicated verses in Luke 7, 8, and 10, and related verses from the lesson, with your class.)

Jesus was nothing if not unusual for His time—and for all time. An observant Jew, He nonetheless reached out to women in all stations of life—even one of “ill repute”—to bring them the good news of salvation. Women supported His ministry and tended to some of His needs, and it was a woman who received the first commission to proclaim the Resurrection.

Consider This: Are there people in your church—in your corner of the world—who can bring useful and helpful things to the world around them but are held back by prejudice or misunderstanding? What are you doing to help recognize the abilities of these people and to encourage them to be available to God for His service?
The Woman at the Well: Part 2

Read John 4:1–40, Christ’s encounter with the woman. In what way does Jesus connect the woman’s daily life and circumstances to the spiritual truth He wants to share? That is, how was He able to connect to her spiritual needs?

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The woman is so excited by what she has seen and heard that she rushes back to town, not even bothering to take her water jar (John 4:28). She has met the Messiah, and she just has to share the news with others.

The first part of her testimony is an invitation for them to meet for themselves the Man who knew her life story (vs. 29). Here is a simple but classic truth about witnessing. Our mission is not to convert people. Our task is to sow the seed and bring people to Jesus. From there, the Holy Spirit cares for conversion. As the people later testify after meeting Jesus—“Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42).

The second part of her testimony is a question—“Is not this the Christ?” (vs. 29). The way this question is structured in the Greek suggests that she is assuming that the answer to her question is negative. Thus, her question is literally: “He could not be the Messiah, could He?” or “This is not the Christ, is it?”

Either the woman was still not 100 percent certain about Jesus being the Messiah or, more likely, she was breaking the news gently to people who could be hostile to her for making such a claim.

Though many lessons could be taken from this account, one important one is that by doing what He did, Jesus clearly broke with the traditions of His time, witnessing to not only a woman but a Samaritan woman but then using this woman to be a messenger and evangelist for the gospel.

Jesus uses a Samaritan, a woman, and one of hardly the best moral background, too, to be a witness for Him. It is as if He purposely went against every taboo and prejudice of His time. What lessons should we draw from this for ourselves about who is or is not qualified to work for the Lord?
II. Bridging the Gap

**Consider This:** The woman at the well isn’t that much different from you and from me—no matter how “good” we may view ourselves to be. Her sins, not her race or religion, had separated her from God. And, in the person of Jesus, God was right there offering reconciliation.

There is, it seems, one in every town, in every school, even in every church: a person who, for whatever reason, is an “outcast.” Maybe they’re not well educated. Perhaps a person has a physical deformity or disability that limits their full participation in some activities. Or someone might just be a, well, you know—a sinner—and we can’t have that kind in church, can we?

Jesus found someone who didn’t like the Jews, and, frankly, whom the Jews themselves didn’t like too much. She was a woman in a society in which women weren’t always viewed positively. And let’s face it, her personal life wasn’t anything to be proud of.

Yet, this “woman at the well,” whose name we are never told, goes back home and becomes a dynamic evangelist who helps convert many of her neighbors. A woman! A sinner! Someone just like us.

When someone presents themselves for service, how do we react? Do we gracefully accept the help that is offered, or do we measure people against an artificial set of parameters designed to weed out willing servants as much as include them? If the latter, why should we reconsider that attitude?

III. Tentmakers Three

Priscilla, Aquila, and Paul had two things in common: they were all believers, and they were each tentmakers. In New Testament times, tentmaking was a necessary skill. Travelers and others depended on tents in a time when there was no Motel 6 or other lodging to make them welcome.

It was a way to make a living and thus help finance the gospel work of that era. Priscilla and Aquila opened their home to others: first to Paul, who joined them in both tentmaking and disciple-making occupations. Then, in Syria, Priscilla helped a Jewish man named Apollos, who became a believer in Jesus. This simple act of charity added one more person to the list of Christ’s followers, as well as created someone who later went on to help the church at Achaia to grow.

Are there people with whom we work—or with whom we could work—
Women in the Early Church

Throughout the book of Acts and in Paul’s letters, women are often mentioned as playing a role in the early church. The early Christians did not worship in churches but instead met in people’s homes, often around the meal table.

Many of these homes were owned by women such as Lydia, a businesswoman who traded purple cloth. Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke met her in Philippi, in Macedonia, when they worshiped on Sabbath with a group of women gathered by the river.

**Read** Acts 16:14–16. In what role do we see Lydia?

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What a rich story must lie behind these few words. In the space of two sentences Lydia accepts Jesus, witnesses about her newfound beliefs to her entire household, is baptized with her household, and opens up her home to the apostles. Lydia is the first recorded convert in Europe, and her home provides the base from which the apostles minister in the area.

**Read** Acts 18:1–3, 24–28; Romans 16:3–5; 1 Corinthians 16:19. From these various texts, how was the Lord able to use Priscilla for ministry?

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After some time in Corinth, Paul sailed to Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Here Priscilla and Aquila opened up their home to a Jew named Apollos and taught him about Jesus (Acts 18:24–26). Apollos later became a great help to the church in Achaia (vss. 27, 28).

**Look again at Romans 16:3–5.** Paul is expressing thanks to both Priscilla and her husband. She, obviously, had a crucial role, one that Paul wanted to acknowledge. How can we be more sensitive in affirming women in whatever role they are in?
THAT could also be used for God’s kingdom? Be sure to pray for opportunities to identify such people and for wisdom to respond appropriately.

STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

1. A Samaritan woman with a checkered past seems an unlikely candidate for an evangelist. Yet, Jesus saw other potential in her. How do you see God reaching out to people today—even unlikely ones—for His flock?

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2. If Jesus’ interactions with women demonstrate that old “rules” about how people are to relate can be overridden by God’s grace, what does that say to us, today?

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Application Questions:

1. Breaking barriers runs two ways in some of the examples here. Jesus surmounts old prejudices to reach people in need, in this case women and ethnic minorities. What barriers—racial, economic, or class—can we transcend to enlarge our fellowship?

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2. In the early church, women played a variety of roles and held many different positions. Should we not encourage everyone to do their part in building the church and in witnessing to the world around them?

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“I Commend to You Phoebe”

Although limited by social customs and expectations, many women in the early Christian church distinguished themselves through lives of service. The Bible rarely gives many details, but it is clear that women played an active role in the mission of the church.

Read Act 21:9. What important principle can we get from this one short text?

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Writing to the church in Rome, Paul commends to them a woman by the name of Phoebe—whom he refers to as “our sister” (Rom. 16:1, NIV). Phoebe belonged to the church in Cenchrea—a port city a few miles from the city of Corinth.

Paul describes Phoebe as “a servant of the church” (vs. 1). In his writings, Paul often uses the Greek word diakonos, translated here “servant” and in other places “deacon.” Whatever the correct word, the meaning is that Phoebe was one who served the church. Paul continues: “She has been a great help to many people, including me” (vs. 2).

Many other women in the New Testament are known for their good works. Look up the following texts. What can we gather from them and the ones already looked at about the various positions women held in the early days of Christianity? Acts 9:36; Rom. 16:7, 12; Phil. 4:2, 3; Philemon 2.

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Not only did women play an important role behind the scenes in supporting the early church; it appears that many played a leading role in the frontline work of sharing the good news. No doubt, in the closing work of the gospel, in the work of spreading the three angels’ messages to “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6), women will continue to have an important role.

Man or woman, what is the best way you can utilize your gifts in the work of ministry and mission?
Witnessing

Jesus’ selection of the Samaritan woman was shocking, even scandalous. Her life story didn’t reflect a career of piety or even purity. Isn’t our obligation in the church to reach those whom the rest of society has forgotten? Who’s going to tell the beggar in the street, the single parent struggling to make ends meet, the person at the grocery store, about Jesus?

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STEP 4—Apply

Some of the greatest spiritual truths were reintroduced to Christianity by a young woman whose formal education ended around the third grade. She’d never gone to college or seminary, had no advanced degree, and didn’t know the original Bible languages.

But Ellen G. White had something more important than a Harvard sheepskin: She had a heart and mind fully surrendered to God. “That I may know Him,” was her plea, and in following her own “steps to Christ,” she led the way for countless millions to follow.

Consider This: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus,” Paul writes in Galatians 3:28 (NIV).

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If we are “all one in Christ Jesus,” what’s the hassle about? Men, women, boys, and girls each have a role to play in advancing the kingdom of God. In short, it isn’t who we are—male, female, rich, poor—it’s whose we are. If we truly belong to Jesus and open ourselves to Him, we’ll find opportunities for service that we had never expected, at home and perhaps far away.
Further Study: “The Samaritan woman who talked with Jesus at Jacob’s well had no sooner found the Saviour than she brought others to Him. She proved herself a more effective missionary than His own disciples. The disciples saw nothing in Samaria to indicate that it was an encouraging field. Their thoughts were fixed upon a great work to be done in the future. They did not see that right around them was a harvest to be gathered. But through the woman whom they despised a whole cityful were brought to hear Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 102.

“The Lord has a work for women as well as for men to do. They can accomplish a good work for God, if they will learn first in the school of Christ the precious, all-important lesson of meekness. They must not only bear the name of Christ, but possess His spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, December 4, 1907.

Discussion Questions:

1. In some parts of the world, women rarely play any leadership roles in the church. This is often dismissed as just a cultural issue; others see it as a moral one. When do customs and cultural issues become moral issues?

2. Ellen G. White says that the woman at the well proved a more effective missionary than Jesus’ disciples did. What special strengths can women bring to the mission of the church? Without delving into the controversial issue of women’s ordination, how can we better affirm and use the women who are part of our movement and message?

3. As a class, talk about Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Take that story and put it into your own culture and context. Imagine Jesus ministering so readily to someone despised and hated by your own culture, someone many folk would not even talk to. What can you learn from this exercise about what the gospel commission is really all about?

Summary: Throughout the New Testament, women appear more in background roles. However, Jesus and the apostle Paul often commended women—for their acts of love and mercy and for advancing the mission of the church.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Daniel 1–3, 6.

Memory Text: “But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way” (Daniel 1:8, NIV).

Key Thought: The accounts of Daniel and his companions in Babylon offer us insights into faithfulness and mission that remain relevant even after twenty-six hundred years.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

In the darkest of circumstances, when things seem to be going totally wrong, we can comfort ourselves that in the end all things will work together for good. Not that all things are good but only that, with God, they can work together for good. We are not guaranteed it will be the way we want it; and we may never witness the good that does finally result. But the promise remains.

This week we will focus on God turning bad into good in the experience of four young Jewish men who, through no fault of their own, were exiled to a foreign country. Yet, because of their unswerving commitment, God was able to use them as witnesses for His purposes and power. Through various ordeals, such as a fiery furnace and a den of lions, God not only displayed His care for Daniel and his friends, but He demonstrated His power beforepagans who knew only their idols. Who but God knows the eternal results of the faithfulness displayed by these young Hebrews?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 13.
A Spiritual Foundation

Most of us know the basic story of Daniel and his friends, who were taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, about six hundred years before Christ. Through their faithfulness, God used these young men to further His plans and mission in Babylon, the world’s most powerful nation at the time. Yet, to a large extent the stories of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are a tribute to the faithful training by their parents.

Jewish families were not to take lightly the duty of instructing their children. Much of this took place through storytelling, an important part of family life. Parents were to tell and retell the stories of God’s leading in the history of their nation. Children were to learn how following God’s commandments leads to life, while disregarding them leads to death.

Read Deuteronomy 6:6, 7 (see also Deut. 4:9). What spiritual principle is found here that is important, not just for children but for all of us? In what ways is daily, personal devotions a means of applying this principle in our own lives?

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The parents of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah could not have predicted what would happen to their children. But through faithful, daily religious instruction, they provided a strong spiritual foundation for the rest of their lives. How important that parents seek to do the same for their own children today. At the same time, the constant dwelling upon God, the constant recounting of the miracles, the goodness, and the love of God can be as much a benefit to the parents as to the children. Even for those who do not have children or for those whose children are gone, how important to keep the reality, goodness, and power of God before us at all times. After all, how can we share with others what we, ourselves, have not experienced?

How consistent are you in your personal devotions? How can they help strengthen faith and make us better witnesses?
**The Lesson in Brief**

**Key Text:** Daniel 1:8

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** What it was that changed Daniel from an unknown prisoner of war into the prime minister of the conquering nation.
- **Feel:** A motivation to follow Daniel’s example.
- **Do:** Figure out a plan in your circumstances that matches what Daniel did.

**Learning Outline:**

I. The Resolution *(Dan. 1:8)*

- **A** This attitude is apparent throughout the story of Daniel.
- **B** His three friends had the same attitude *(Dan. 3:16–18)* as did Daniel himself later in life *(Dan. 6:13)*.
- **C** What’s the difference between taking pagan names, and eating pagan food? (See Tuesday’s lesson.)

II. Contemporary Resolutions *(Acts 4:19, 20)*

- **A** Have the class list some contemporary issues that might parallel those of Daniel’s time.
- **B** What about Seventh-day Adventists in military, governmental, or business positions today?

III. Translatable Principles *(Phil. 4:8, 9)*

- **A** How does Daniel’s attitude translate into specific actions and attitudes in contemporary situations?
- **B** Have the class discuss these words from Ellen G. White (see Friday’s lesson): “In the smallest as well as the largest affairs of life, He [God] desires us to reveal . . . the principles of His kingdom.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 357.
- **C** Case Study: Have the class devise a case study that involves the principles in this lesson.

**Summary:** In Daniel, four young men, in the face of massive challenges, remain true to principle and to their God. The same should be true of us today.
The Early Tests

Immediately after the boys arrived in Babylon, it was clear that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah would face many temptations and negative influences.

Read Daniel 1:4. Where does the first potential attack on their faith occur? Why could it be so deadly?

It is all too true that what we read, what we are exposed to, cannot help influencing our thoughts. Perhaps for the first time in their lives, these young men were exposed to literature that espoused values and beliefs opposed to what they had been taught. In Babylonian literature they were confronted with astrology, false gods, and myths of various descriptions. The battle for their minds, and hence their souls, had begun (see Phil. 4:8). And it was a battle for their bodies, as well, which, as modern science has aptly shown, is linked intimately with our minds.

Read Daniel 1:8. What key word there shows why Daniel and his friends (see vss. 12–14) did not want to partake of the king’s food?

The key word is defile, which in Hebrew means just that, to “pollute, defile.” Thus, for these young men, the issue was not just healthful living or a mere preference. It was a moral issue.

What kind of excuses could they have made to themselves to justify eating the food?

From the beginning of their time in Babylon, the four young men resolved to stand for principle, no matter what the cost. It set the pattern for the rest of their time in Babylon, where more than once they were tested for their faith. Through their faithfulness, they bore a strong witness to the God of heaven.

It is a human tendency to make excuses for bad choices or wrong behavior. In what areas of your life do you rationalize what you do? What steps can you take to deal with this spiritually dangerous tendency?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

No one can look at the story of Daniel, I believe, without getting a chill up and down one’s spine. This is a thrilling story of four young men who could have elected to “go with the flow,” but instead held fast to the Lord their God and won promotion and honor for it!

You could argue, perhaps, that the story of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—the Jerusalem four—is in fact the Christian message. Here we find young men totally dedicated to serving God. They won’t compromise principles at the dinner table. We see each of the four unwilling to “adapt” their faith to their new situation; telling King Nebuchadnezzar they’d rather die than dishonor God!

God delivers them in the midst of it all. Not everyone today, of course, will face the same earthly success that these four received. People are killed for their faith. But for every believer, there’s hope that God is true to His promises and that we can trust them, no matter our earthly fate.

May our love for Jesus and the crying needs of the world around us motivate us to “dare” something great for God.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Preparation Yields Promise (Review Deut. 6:6, 7 and Deut. 4:9 with your class.)

From their earliest days, young Jewish children are taught not only the commandments of God but also the importance of worshiping Him. The God of Israel describes Himself as “jealous” nine times in the Old Testament (Exod. 20:5, Deut. 4:24, etc.), and He wanted His people to remember His deliverance and goodness.

This wasn’t because God was lonely or needed approval. He wants only the best for all of us, and He knows that if we keep Him first in our lives, we’ll live in a manner that glorifies His name.

That’s why young Hebrew men such as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were able to do what they did when they arrived at Nebuchadnezzar’s court. Where others might have been overwhelmed by
No Compromise

The biblical story clearly shows God’s involvement in the lives of the Babylonians—interacting with King Nebuchadnezzar and later with King Cyrus. He is portrayed as the God not only of the children of Israel but of all nations.

Read Isaiah 56:1–8. Think of the time when it was written. What is the crucial point made there?

Read Daniel 1:6, 7. What is going on here? What reasons did their captors have for doing this?

The meaning of names was important to Jewish families, and children were named carefully. The names Daniel (God is my Judge), Hananiah (God has favored), Mishael (who is what God is), and Azariah (Jehovah has helped) reflect the high priority the parents placed on their children’s spiritual lives.

Nebuchadnezzar’s top official, Ashpenaz, gives the four young Jewish men new Babylonian names—Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—which were mainly tributes to Babylonian gods.

But that is the closest these four men would get to idolatry, names over which they had no choice but to go by. Under God’s blessing they soon moved into prominent positions in the court and government of Babylon.

After their period of preparation, Ashpenaz presents the four young men to the king. The king talks with them and “found none equal” to them (Dan. 1:19, NIV). “In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom” (vs. 20, NIV).

What a tremendous testimony to what God could do through four faithful young men. Taken from obscurity in Jerusalem to the court of the most powerful person in the world, they rose to the occasion and stood before the king as witnesses to the power of God.

Why was it acceptable for the four Jewish young men to take pagan names but not acceptable for them to eat pagan food? How do we draw the line in our own lives between what are merely cultural issues and what are moral or religious ones? Be prepared to discuss your answer in class.
the luxurious surroundings and tempted by the exotic “food” displayed before them, they vowed to remain faithful.

**Consider This:** It’s not just young people who need this kind of training in faith; it’s new believers of any age. How can we encourage youngsters, new believers, and even those long “in the way” to develop good faith habits?

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II. Faithfulness Fulfilled!

**Consider This:** The ten-day “Daniel diet” paid off. They were stronger and healthier than the others in their group, and they went to the “head of the class”! Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah got important jobs, because even Nebuchadnezzar saw the value of serving Jehovah.

During the Second World War, a young Seventh-day Adventist Christian, Desmond T. Doss, entered the U.S. Army, but not to fight. He wanted to serve as a medic, but he refused to carry a weapon. Fellow soldiers mocked Doss when he would kneel to pray; they’d even throw their boots at him.

When the going got tough, however, Doss remembered his duty to God and to his fellow man. Under fire in Okinawa, “Doss refused to take cover from enemy fire as he rescued 75 wounded soldiers . . . lowering [each] over the edge of the 400-foot Maeda Escarpment. He did not stop until he had brought everyone to safety nearly 12 hours later. Doss would later credit knot-tying skills learned in an Adventist youth group, the Pathfinders,” read the March 24, 2006, Adventist News Network obituary. For this, Doss became the first conscientious objector to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor, presented personally by U.S. President Harry Truman.

**Consider This:** We may never face the challenges of standing before a king and disobeying his command, or the heat of battle. How can we
Interpreter of Dreams

Daniel and his companions had made it to the highest levels of the court in Babylon, the greatest empire in the world at that time. However, as in most of the courts of power, perils awaited them.

**Read** Daniel 2:1–13 and answer the following questions:

1. How were the wise men trying to fool the king? 

2. How did the king ensure that their tricks would be of no avail? 

3. What words of the wise men revealed the impossibility of what the king asked? Why would those words later help witness to the power of God? 

God had earlier given Daniel the gift of interpreting dreams and visions (*Dan. 1:17*), but Daniel was not going to be presumptuous and take anything for granted. He gathered together his three friends and urged them to pray (*Dan. 2:18*), for clearly without divine intervention they were going to meet the same fate as the charlatans and frauds in the king’s court.

**Read** Daniel’s prayer of thanksgiving (*Dan. 2:20–23*). What is the essence of his prayer? What hope and encouragement can you take from it for yourself, whatever situation you are facing?

Most of us know the rest of the story (if not, then read the chapter). Think about what it meant for the monarch of the greatest empire in the world to bow down and worship a foreign captive in his court (*vss. 46–48*! The king was obviously impressed, no matter how much more he had to learn.

Through Daniel, then, God spares the lives of the wise men throughout Babylon, leads a pagan king to at least the beginnings of belief in the true God, and advances Daniel and his friends to positions of authority, where they can be greater witnesses for Him.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

recognize our service opportunities and help others to be ready for theirs?

III. Whatever Happens, We’ll Be Faithful (*Review Dan. 3:16–18 with your class.*)

When the king commanded for the furnaces to be heated seven times hotter, there was no mistaking his murderous intentions. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah knew exactly who’d be the main attraction at this Babylonian cookout!

Are we preparing ourselves, our children, and our fellow believers for any challenges that may lie ahead? How can we help strengthen our faith, and that of others, to be ready to live out what we believe?

►STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

1. Why was the reaction of the “Jerusalem Four” so automatic? How is it that they were able to, instinctively it seems, know the right thing to do and then do it?

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2. What in obeying the Lord can we do that demonstrates our faithfulness in a winsome way? Do we make our host feel bad when someone puts out an unwelcome dish? Or do we gently handle such issues, trying to be friendly?

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Application Questions:

1. In many societies, it’s relatively easy to follow God’s health and dietary laws. What other precepts of God are tougher to obey in today’s
Two Life-or-Death Tests

Two more major tests give Daniel and his three friends opportunity to witness to the true God in a public and influential way.

As much as your time allows, read through Daniel 3 and the test of faith the three Hebrew boys faced there.

**Read** Daniel 3:16–18. What is the essence of what they were saying? How is the principle still important for all believers today? *See also Matt. 10:28.*

Read Daniel 3:28–30 to see just how impressed the king was regarding what he had seen. Though the king still had a lot to learn, through the faithfulness of these young men, a powerful witness for the living God was spread through the pagan world.

Again, as much as your time allows, read through the story of Daniel in the lions’ den (*Daniel 6*), another test of faith but now in a new kingdom.

**What** evidence can you find in the chapter that shows that the king already knew something about the power of Daniel’s God?

**What** kind of testimony does Darius give about Daniel’s God? How accurate a testimony is it? What does this show about what God can reveal to pagans about His power and wisdom without the Written Word?

Imagine if in both stories these Jews would have compromised to save their own lives. Again, how easy in both situations it would have been to rationalize doing the easy thing. Instead, they remained faithful, and as a result, they helped spread a knowledge of the true God.

**In the past,** have you sought the easy way out and compromised what you knew was right? How did you feel? How can you fortify yourself in faith so that whenever the next test comes, you do what you know is right?
world? How do you handle these situations?

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Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah each faced death for obeying God rather than obeying human beings. Desmond Doss was ridiculed and harassed during wartime for refusing to carry a gun. Yet, these believers made a deep impact on their societies by refusing to bend to fashion. What can we do that strengthens the faith of others who see our actions?

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Witnessing
Perhaps the greatest lesson Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah can teach us is the value of consistent Christian witness. As a result, they received honor and promotion in a hostile environment. Today, living for the world six days a week and putting on a “holy face” on the seventh won’t impress anyone for very long. But living for God, even when it seems that no one is watching, will soon attract people to you.

STEP 4—Apply

The song, after all, is “Dare to Be a Daniel,” not “Dare to be a Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.”

Does that mean that Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are unimportant? Hardly! They probably encouraged each during all their trials. That is, they remained companions in faith, no doubt encouraging each other. How important that we do our best, in every way, to encourage one another in faith. How important that we by our lives show that we truly believe what we profess to believe. How important that we never utter a word of doubt to anyone.

We might not be called to such trials as were these four young lads. But sooner or later we all have to stand up for what we believe, even when it could cost us something. We can prepare for that time, day by day, by not only talking our faith but by acting on it.

“As God called Daniel to witness for Him in Babylon, so He calls us to be His witnesses in the world today. In the smallest as well as the largest affairs of life, He desires us to reveal to men the principles of His kingdom. Many are waiting for some great work to be brought to them, while daily they lose opportunities for revealing faithfulness to God. Daily they fail of discharging with wholeheartedness the little duties of life. While they wait for some large work in which they may exercise supposedly great talents, and thus satisfy their ambitious longings, their days pass away.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, pp. 487, 488.

“The tidings of their wonderful deliverance were carried to many countries by the representatives of the different nations that had been invited by Nebuchadnezzar to the dedication. Through the faithfulness of His children, God was glorified in all the earth.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 512.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, talk about your answers to the question at the end of Tuesday’s lesson.

2. The stories in Daniel are powerful lessons of how, by staying faithful to God in trying circumstances, these men were able to witness to others about the Lord. At the same time, how many of us have heard stories of folk doing crazy things in the name of God, even to the point of losing their lives? When faced with a difficult situation, how can we know whether we should stand firm or whether we could be a more effective witness for God by showing our willingness to compromise with the given situation?

3. For every Daniel in the lions’ den story, there is a story of John the Baptist. How are we to understand these different endings?

Summary: The book of Daniel describes the experience of four young men who, in the face of massive challenges to their faith, remain true to principle and to their God. Their faithfulness is a dramatic witness not only to the people and rulers of Babylon but also to people of surrounding nations.
Gifted for Service: Philip

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Acts 6:3; Acts 8; Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:1–11, 27–31; 1 Tim. 3:8–12.

Memory Text: “And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did” (Acts 8:6).

Key Thought: Through Philip’s ministry, Samaria is turned upside down by the good news, and an influential Gentile Ethiopian comes to Jesus. When we surrender our lives to God, there is no limit to what He may choose to do through us to advance His kingdom.

Fleeing persecution, confronting a sorcerer, casting out demons, healing those crippled and paralyzed, converting a rich Ethiopian from the royal court, being physically transported long distances by the Holy Spirit—life for Philip was anything but dull.

When many people think of Christianity, they picture long sermons in church, lists of do’s and don’ts, and bored-looking people with long faces. These stereotypes, of course, could not be further from the truth. Following Jesus is the most exciting life possible.

For example, this week we will be looking at the exciting life and mission of Philip, a man whose world took on a totally new dimension when he was ordained for service. Chosen as one of the seven deacons for the early church, Philip took a course he could never have predicted. He personally shared the good news of Jesus in Samaria and, indirectly, with the continent of Africa.

What can we learn from his story?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 20.
Called to Service

The church in Jerusalem chose Philip and six other men to serve as deacons, or servants. The Greek word translated here as deacon, *diakonos*, is translated as servant in other parts of the New Testament (in the King James Version and many other translations). Speaking to the crowds and to His disciples, Jesus said, “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant [or your deacon]” (Matt. 23:11). And in predicting His death, He said, “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant [or deacon] be” (John 12:26).

**Read** Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8–12. From these scriptures, what assumptions can we make about the character of Philip?

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**Read** Acts 2:46, 47; 4:32, 33. What kind of picture do these texts present of the church at that time?

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The good times did not last, however. Eventually, a major crisis arose (see Acts 6:1). Although at this stage almost all the new believers were Jewish, there were two major types of Jews: the Grecian Jews, who were not born in Israel, spoke Greek, and approached things from a Greek cultural outlook; and the Hebraic Jews, who spoke Aramaic and/or Hebrew and their worldview was strictly Jewish. As the church grew rapidly, the Grecian Jews complained that when food was distributed, their widows were overlooked in favor of those of the Hebraic Jews.

Faced with their first major problem from within the community, the 12 apostles met together and implemented one of the key strategies of good leadership: delegation. The role of deacon was created.

How much time does your local church waste dealing with members fighting among themselves? How can you help the local church direct its energy toward reaching the lost?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Acts 8:6

The Student Will:

Know: The history and contribution of Philip to the rise and progress of the early church.

Feel: An affinity to Philip and his mission.

Do: Resolve to do ministry as Philip carried out his.

Learning Outline:

I. Philip the Evangelist (Acts 8:6)

A Evangelism is a specific spiritual gift (Eph. 4:11) given by the Holy Spirit.

B Philip is an outstanding New Testament example of an evangelist.

C Emphasize to the class, however, that not all Christians are evangelists, but all Christians are witnesses.

II. Call to Discipleship (John 12:26)

A All Christians are also called to discipleship.

B Discipleship means a person becomes available, willing, accountable, and responsible in the cause of the Lord.

C Have your class identify these aspects of discipleship in Paul’s calling in Acts 9.

D How can your class witness in an effective way even though few members may be called as evangelists?

E Have the class devise a specific outreach plan (if you don’t already have one) that they can put into practice as a class unit.

Summary: Philip provides another powerful example of what God can do through somebody who has dedicated his or her life to Him.
Missionary to Samaria

When Philip reappears in the biblical record, we find him in Samaria, the area north of Judea. Jesus had predicted that His followers would become missionaries not only in Jerusalem but “‘in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 1:8, NIV). Now Philip is part of the fulfillment of this prophecy but perhaps not in the way he and the other believers would have predicted.

The leaders did not send Philip to Samaria as a missionary. He was not part of the early church’s Global Mission plan to reach unentered areas.

Read Acts 8:1–5. What events caused Philip to flee to Samaria? What did the scattered believers do when they fled?

As they scattered, these believers “preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4, NIV). Ironically, persecution ensured that the good news spread more widely. What other examples of this happening can you think of?

This was a terrible time for the early Christians—forced from home, scattered to foreign areas, living in fear of further attacks. Philip was the father of four daughters, and no doubt this would have been a stressful time for his family (Acts 21:9). And yet, despite their difficult circumstances, Philip and the other Christian believers continued to share the good news of Jesus faithfully.

Despite the trials, the believers worked hard to spread the message. Why? Because they had a sense of mission, of purpose. Why are so many of us lacking that same sense of mission? Could it be because we are too busy looking inward and not outward, too busy thinking of our own needs and not the needs of a lost world? Think about this and be prepared to discuss your thoughts on Sabbath.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Ironically, *The Good Shepherd* is the title of a 2006 motion picture about a fictional American who helps start the Central Intelligence Agency, a spy service that may have reached its apex during the Cold War between America and the former Soviet Union. The life portrayed is one of substance and shadow, disguises and deceptions, all packed with drama.

For a life of intrigue, suspense, and thrills, however, you don’t have to look much farther than Philip, plucked from the ranks of day-to-day church members in Jerusalem, first to help serve meals, then to break the bread of life to others. His ministry crossed deserts, was carried (by others) into Africa, and even touched the “untouchable” land of Samaria. Philip “got around” and brought hope and help to people in need. His active partner was God the Holy Spirit, and the results were something to behold.

Philip was a good shepherd of the people he served, but, of course, he wasn’t the “Good Shepherd” that Jesus was. However, Philip’s readiness to tackle new projects and difficult tasks is one we would do well to emulate. There are people waiting!

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. A Gift With a Purpose (*Review Acts 6:3, 8; Rom. 12:6–8 with your class.*)

You’ve seen this on television perhaps, or heard about it, or possibly have witnessed it in your community: a “preacher” or “healer” comes to town, sets up an elaborate meeting, and proceeds to “cure” those who have serious, sometimes life-threatening diseases. But after the event is over, those who have been “healed” find that it was a temporary phenomenon at best.

When God truly gives a spiritual gift to someone, He does it for a specific purpose—not for show. Philip received his spiritual gifts to accomplish the work of evangelism; signs and wonders were needed in the early church to confirm the message. Today, God still equips those He calls, but with the gifts suited to the immediate task.
Opportunities for Witness

As Adventists we often speak of finding an entering wedge for our mission. In many places we cannot, because of prejudice, immediately start speaking about Jesus or the Bible. People often put up barriers as soon as we start talking about spiritual things. The health message often has broken down barriers in many parts of the world. Personal friendship is perhaps the most effective entering wedge. When we become friends with people, they often start to ask us about our Christian beliefs.

Read Acts 8:26–39, the story of Philip and the eunuch, and then answer the following questions:

1. What prompted Philip to go where and when he did? What important message is there for us in your answer?

2. What entering wedge did Philip use in order to start witnessing to this person? That is, what need did he help fulfill for the eunuch? What important lesson can we take away from this, as well?

3. What was required of the eunuch in order for him to be baptized? What message can we take away from this for ourselves?

The Ethiopian had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and the chances are that he was returning disappointed. He would have quickly discovered that, as a Gentile and as a eunuch, he was doubly disqualified from worshiping in the court of the Jews (see Deut. 23:1).

Now, new light breaks through his discouragement as he learns of the One who, through His death, has “broken down the middle wall of partition” (Eph. 2:14). In response to the wonderful news he hears, the eunuch asks Philip to baptize him. And here we read of the first recorded Gentile convert to Christianity—a wealthy and powerful African.

How often do you have opportunities to witness for your faith? How well do you use those opportunities? What could you do better?
Consider This: Philip also prepared himself, through diligent service and worship, to receive God’s call and God’s gifts. What can we do to be ready to answer a call, and what preparations can we help others make?

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II. Service Specified

Consider This: Philip was called to service in a new church job—deacon—because of the needs of a growing congregation. What roles does your church see developing as it grows or changes?

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Less than ten years after the birth of the group that was to organize itself as the Seventh-day Adventist Church, our pioneers recognized that young people and others needed training in the ways of God that extended beyond a sermon or lecture.

“In 1853—only a few years after the first group of Sabbathkeeping Adventists was formed in Washington, New Hampshire—James White, one of the founders of the Adventist Church, organized the first regular Sabbath School in Rochester, [New York],” stated a September 30, 2003, Adventist News Network article entitled “150 Years of Sabbath School Celebrated Where It All Began.”

Consider This: Are there innovations we can consider that will help us to serve others in our church—in the world church as a whole?

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III. I Was Led of the Lord (Review Acts 8:26–39 with your class.)

We read earlier of Philip’s preparation for service. It wasn’t intentional, he didn’t attend the “early church school of theology and ministry,” but it was preparation nonetheless. Now we see that he was able to be used of God to reach a key government official and introduce the Christian faith to an
Gifted for Service

Each of us as followers of Christ is given spiritual gifts to accomplish the mission God has for us. Spiritual gifts were vital in the life of the early Christian church and fired the missionary zeal of the new believers. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers and told them that he did not want them to be ignorant about spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:1). The Greek word Paul uses for gifts, *charismata*, emphasizes that these are gifts of grace—totally unearned by us.

The fifth fundamental belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit, says: “He extends spiritual gifts to the church.” This is an important concept. Although the gifts are given through the believer, they are really gifts for the church. Spiritual gifts are never given merely for the benefit and edification of individual believers. They are always given in the context of mission and service. Spiritual gifts are given to believers in the context of the wider church community, so they can benefit the church in its mission to the world.

The account of Philip’s experience in Samaria (Acts 8:4–8) is not detailed. At some stage God gave him extra spiritual gifts, and he changed from Philip the deacon to Philip the evangelist. It must have been a significant step for Philip to go from administering the church in Jerusalem to casting out demons and healing the sick in Samaria.

The two main biblical sources for our understanding of spiritual gifts come from Romans 12:6–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:1–11, 27–31. Read these passages and compare with Acts 8:4–8. What spiritual gifts did Philip display, and how did he use them?

“...When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said” (Acts 8:6, NIV). Even if we are not able to perform miracles, as did Philip, what principle is seen here? What is it about us, our lives, our teachings, that would cause anyone to pay close attention to what we say?
entire nation!

No one knows the destinations, or destinies, God has in store for us in this life. However, with planning and an open heart, we can be led to places we never thought we’d go and to people who need Him!

**STEP 3—Practice**

**Thought Questions:**

1. What was the “seed” that blossomed into a new role within the church—and a new leader for the nascent movement? How does this translate to our day—are there needs we can help fill creatively?

2. We read of miraculous occurrences in the life of Philip. But miracles are happening today all over the world as God’s good news is shared by Adventist Christians every day. What are some of today’s miracles that you’ve seen or heard about?

**Application Questions:**

1. Does service belong only to the pastor? The head elder? A select group of people? Or does service, and witnessing, belong to every member of the church? How can you better serve the brethren and your community?

2. Philip prepared himself by serving. When the opportunity arose, God the Holy Spirit selected and equipped him. How can we model Philip’s quality of service and where can we best serve others?

**Witnessing**

It’s wonderful to have ambitions and a desire to improve your situation
Philip and Simon Magus

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard of the tremendous success in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to visit Philip and the new believers. They both arrived in Samaria at a providential time to support Philip. They first prayed for the new believers to receive the Holy Spirit—something that, apparently, Philip had not done. Then they helped Philip deal with a former sorcerer named Simon.

Read Acts 8:9–25, the story of Simon, Philip, Peter, and John, and then answer the following questions:

1. Why are miracles and other supernatural manifestations not absolute proof that God is directly behind what is happening?

2. Simon wanted the right thing, just in the wrong way, or so it seemed. (After all, what is wrong with wanting to bestow the Holy Spirit on others?) Judging by Peter’s reaction, what might have been the true motive for Simon’s request?

3. In what way was Peter’s reaction to Simon similar to Jesus’ reaction to Peter? Matt. 16:21–27.

4. Where do we see, in this section, the grace of Christ and the gospel of forgiveness?

No matter how gifted Philip was, even he needed help, which explains why Peter and John came. The important point is, no one is good enough or gifted enough to do the work of the Lord alone. We all need the help of others.

Wanting to buy the power to bestow the Holy Spirit? Come on! Yet, Simon was said to be a believer, and he was even baptized. What kind of foolish things did you once believe early in your walk with God that you now know better about? How could this help you be more tolerant of those who, in their ignorance, might be holding foolish beliefs, as well?
in life. That’s what education and hard work can help anyone accomplish. But along the way, don’t forget to help others, both by instruction and by service. As is often said, “People won’t care about how much you know, until they know how much you care!”

STEP 4—Apply

Philip’s story is fascinating, exciting, and, as we’ve said, miraculous. But it’s not one we often go to when considering the great heroes of the Bible. Philip isn’t of royal heritage, he never bested a giant, and there’s no book of the New Testament that bears his name.

Yet, even the “everyday” people, such as Philip, can be mightily used by God. It wasn’t Peter or James or Paul who was sent to a top national leader from Ethiopia, it was the “deacon,” or “servant,” named Philip!

Consider This: “Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong” (1 Cor. 1:26, 27, NIV).

The pioneering founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were not listed in any social register of the prominent and powerful. Ellen White was barely out of her teens; her husband, James, an itinerant schoolteacher; and Joseph Bates was a weather-beaten old sea captain. Yet, these people had a passion to know God’s will and to obey His commands. Because they were teachable and submitted to God, the movement they helped found has grown tremendously.

Today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a global reach far beyond anything the pioneers saw in their lifetimes. In 2006, some 15 million were baptized members and at least another 10 million worshiped with those members every week. Our global network of schools, colleges, universities, and hospitals has made the name Adventist recognized for quality work around the globe.

It all started, though, with a band of “ordinary” people who were committed to God’s Word. Just think where your commitment can lead!

“In this instance we have an illustration of the care of God for his children. He called Philip from his successful ministry in Samaria, to cross the desert and go to Gaza to labor for a single inquiring soul. The promptness with which the eunuch accepted the gospel and acted upon its belief should be a lesson to us. God designs that we should be prompt in accepting and confessing Christ, prompt in obeying him, and in answering the call of duty. The eunuch was a man of good repute, and occupied a high and responsible position. Through his conversion the gospel was carried to Ethiopia, and many there accepted Christ, and came out from the darkness of heathenism into the clear light of Christianity.”—Ellen G. White, The Spirit of Prophecy, vol. 3, p. 305.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, talk about your answer to Monday’s final question. In fact, before you do that, it would be better to discuss your answer to Sunday’s question.

2. Early on in the Lord’s church, ethnic divisions arose. Even today, in various parts of the world, similar tensions exist among church members. What about in your own local church? How can you as an individual help your church see just how contrary to every principle of the gospel these attitudes are?

3. Philip baptized the eunuch immediately after he accepted Jesus as his Savior. Why does the Adventist Church not do the same today? Should or should we not? Justify your answer.

4. What are some of the needs in your community that your church could use as an entering wedge in order to reach people with the gospel of Christ? How could you help your church in the crucial area of outreach?

Summary: Philip provides another powerful example of what God can do through somebody who has dedicated his or her life to Him. Whether witnessing to the eunuch, sharing with the Gentiles in Samaria, or converting Simon the sorcerer, Philip’s one goal was to uphold the name of Jesus.
**SABBATH AFTERNOON**

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Lev. 16:30, 17:11, Isa. 6:1–10, 49:6, Jer. 3:22, Matt. 28:18–20, Heb. 1:2.

**Memory Text:** “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me’” (Isaiah 6:8, NKJV).

**Key Thought:** Isaiah was a powerful eighth-century prophet who spoke out against sin and corruption, championed justice and righteousness, and prophesied the coming of the Messiah. What parallels can we find for ourselves today?

A central part of Isaiah’s mission was to reform the southern kingdom of Judah. He spoke out against sin and corruption and the nation’s rebellion against God.

But Isaiah’s mission extended further than just reform within Judah. He envisioned a day when Judah’s mission would be to represent God to the world. Judah was not to remain inward-looking; it had a mission to all other nations. Isaiah quotes God as saying, “‘I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles’” (Isa. 42:6, NIV).

This large vision of mission extending to the whole world was lost sight of in following years. Not until Jesus’ own ministry, and the ministry of the apostles in the book of Acts, do we see this vision of the gospel to all the world put into action, a vision that we are called to be part of in our day and age, as well.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 27.*
Woe Is Me!

**Read** Isaiah 6:1–6. What was happening to Isaiah?

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God transports Isaiah through vision into the heavenly throne room, where he sees God Himself seated on a throne, “high and lifted up” (Isa. 6:1).

In his vision of God’s throne room, Isaiah is treated to an amazing spectacle. He sees the train of God’s robe filling the temple and six-winged flying beings called seraphim. He hears them calling to each other in praise to God. Their voices must have been powerful, because they caused the doorposts to shake and the temple was filled with smoke.

**Compare** Isaiah’s vision with these others who had an experience of seeing God. What was the common reaction? What important lesson can we take from these reactions about ourselves and our relationship to our Creator? Exod. 20:18, 19; Judg. 13:22; Job 42:5, 6; Rev. 1:17.

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In response to his vision of “the King, the Lord of hosts,” Isaiah cries out, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5, NIV).

*Damah*, the Hebrew word for undone, means “cut off” or “finished.” The King James Version also translates the word as “perish” (Ps. 49:12, 20) and as “destroyed” (Hos. 4:6). This word indicates that the experience totally devastated Isaiah. The vision of God helped Isaiah understand what he, himself, was really like in contrast to his Maker.

What was it about seeing God that caused this reaction? How does this help us understand why Jesus came in human flesh to reveal to us what God is really like?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Isaiah 6:8

The Student Will:

Know: The parallels between Isaiah’s time and message and our own contemporary message.

Feel: The need to experience the same sense of awe and cleansing as did Isaiah. (See Lev. 16:30.)

Do: Resolve to seek this cleansing and response of God’s call to you and the class members.

Learning Outline:

I. Seeing God (Isa. 6:1–10)

A We have studied about how various biblical people were “called.” Is there anything unique about Isaiah’s call?

B Monday’s lesson says that this experience affected “all of Isaiah’s senses.” Discuss with the class what that means.

II. Cleansing + Call (Isa. 6:8)

Tuesday’s lesson points out that Isaiah answers the call before he got an assignment. Discuss the significance of this with the class. What does it have to do with us?

III. Tough Assignment (Isa. 6:8)

A Why did Isaiah need to go through this experience recounted in Isaiah 6? He was already a priest and religious leader.

B Ask the class how they feel about God calling a person to such an unpromising situation as Isaiah’s.

C What does the phrase “a light to the Gentiles” (Isa. 49:6) have to do with us?

Summary: The prophet Isaiah accepted a mission from God that was unpopular. And yet, through his ministry, lives were changed, and the power of his words is still felt today.
Thy Sin Is Purged

Isaiah’s encounter with the Divine is an extraordinary occasion. He describes it as an experience that affects all his senses: He sees the six-winged seraph and God on His throne; he hears the seraphims’ thundering voices; he smells the smoke in the temple; and he feels and tastes the live coal the seraphim places on his lips (Isa. 6:1–6).

As we saw in yesterday’s lesson, after this experience of seeing God, Isaiah is overcome by his own unworthiness. Indeed, his utterance in Isaiah 6:5 is a confession of his sin and that of his people.

Why the emphasis on “unclean lips”? Was Isaiah’s and his people’s only sin that of what they spoke? What might that have been a symbol of? See also Prov. 13:3, Matt. 12:37, Luke 6:45.

As soon as Isaiah confesses, a seraphim takes a live coal from the heavenly altar, flies with it to Isaiah, and touches it to his lips.

Read Isaiah 6:6, 7. What happens here? What is symbolized by this act? What message can we take from this for ourselves?

In and of himself, Isaiah, a man of unclean lips, has nothing to offer God. But through the work of the Lord Himself, Isaiah’s sin is purged. The Hebrew word translated purged comes from the root qaphar, commonly translated in the Old Testament as “atone” or “atonement” (see Exod. 29:36, 30:10, Lev. 16:30, 17:11). The point is that Isaiah, without divine intervention, without his sin being purged or covered (qaphar has also been understood to mean covered; see Gen. 6:14) would not have been able to do anything for the Lord. He had to be made right with God first; only then could the Lord use him.

What things in your own life are standing in the way of God’s being able to use you? What must you submit to in order to have your sin purged?
STEP 1—Motivate

Have you ever experienced a dramatic change in perspective? In 1543, astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus published a theory that would transform how humans viewed themselves and their place in the universe. Copernicus used mathematics and astronomical studies to disprove the belief that the earth was the center of the universe, around which all planets and stars orbited. Instead, he argued, the earth is just one of a number of planets that travel around the sun. Today we know that earth is an infinitesimal speck in the vast, unfathomably huge universe. But for the religious and intellectual leaders of the sixteenth century, Copernicus had advanced an unwelcome theory that required a shocking change in perspective. It was not something easy for people to grasp, and it took awhile before his position became accepted. Old and set ideas are not easy for anyone to give up, no matter how wrong they are!

Radical changes in perspective are rarely comfortable. In Isaiah 6 the prophet encounters the unfathomable vastness of God's majesty, and it becomes a defining moment in his life; his perspective of God, himself, and his mission changes in an instant. Have we also had an encounter with God? Take a few moments to consider how our knowledge of God changes our perspective, priorities, and understanding of our place in the universe. Think about how our views, as Adventists, radically differ from those who believe that we live in a godless universe and that our existence here is purely by chance!

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Uncertain Times

Under the 52-year reign of King Uzziah, the kingdom of Judah flourished politically and economically. But the later years set the stage for Judah’s decline into captivity (2 Chron. 26:16). At the time of Isaiah’s vision, the kingdom was also becoming increasingly vulnerable to the military aggression of its neighbors.
“Here Am I! Send Me”

When Isaiah hears the call from God, he immediately responds, “Here am I! Send me” (Isa. 6:8). Notice that Isaiah answers the call before he knows the details of the assignment (see also Heb. 11:8).

Isaiah does not respond because he believes he has the necessary gifts and talents or because he knows that he will do a good job. And he does not respond because it is a task that appeals to him (he does not even know what the task is). Isaiah responds because he knows that although he is unworthy, God is worthy. Although he is powerless, God is all-powerful. Although it may not be a mission he would have chosen for himself, it is a mission God has chosen.

Read the Great Commission to go and teach all nations—perhaps the most important commission in all of Scripture (Matt. 28:18–20). Read carefully the first part of this commission. Why is this an important section that we must not overlook?

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The “therefore” is critical. The only reason we can go and teach all nations is because we go in the power of the One who has all authority in heaven and on earth. If we had only our own strength, we could not go. If we relied on our own skills, we could not go. Our mission is fired by Jesus, who owns “all authority” (NIV) or “all power” (KJV) in the universe (see Acts 17:28, Heb. 1:2, Col. 1:16).

If we are willing, God gives us the power we need to accomplish the mission He gives us. He purifies Isaiah’s unclean lips (Isa. 6:7); He gives Mary the Holy Spirit and “‘the power of the Most High’” (Luke 1:35, NIV); Jesus prays for Peter (Luke 22:32); He anoints Saul with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17, 18); He puts words in Jeremiah’s mouth (Jer. 1:9). Should we expect any less for ourselves, now at this crucial time in earth’s history?

What, if anything, is holding you back from doing more for the Lord? What changes must you make? How can you learn to rely on God’s power and not your own gifts, whatever they are?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

**Consider This**: Isaiah’s encounter with God comes at a time of personal and national insecurity. Why is uncertainty so often a catalyst for personal re-examination? How does God work through these events to connect with us?

**II. A New Perspective: Of God** *(Review Isa. 6:1–4 with your class.)*

The terrifying grandeur of Isaiah’s vision reveals a God with incomparable power and majesty. The imagery emphasizes God’s absolute transcendence, His holiness.

**Consider This**: Why did the angels cry “holy” and not “love” or “salvation”? Could it be that “holiness” defines every other part of God’s character: His love is a holy love; His power is a holy power? How does this influence our understanding of God?

“When perils encompass God’s people . . . God calls them to look up to Him, seated on His throne and directing in the affairs of heaven and earth, in order that they may take hope and courage.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 128.

**III. A New Perspective: Of Self** *(Review Isa. 6:5–7 with your class.)*

**Consider This**: Why does the angel touch Isaiah’s mouth to represent his redemption? Why are the lips, tongue, or mouth so often used as symbols in Scripture to indicate the state of the heart *(Prov. 12:13, 14; Matt. 15:8–10; James 3:6)*?

Isaiah’s reaction to the holiness of God is an overwhelming sense of his own unworthiness. Review encounters others have had with their Creator *(1 Kings 19:11–13, Dan. 4:28–37, Matt. 28:5–10, Acts 9:3–9)*.

**Consider This**: How do these encounters differ—either in the way God presents Himself or in an individual’s reactions? What circumstances do you think contribute to these differences?

**IV. A New Perspective: Of Mission**

**A. Motivation for Mission**

In Isaiah 6:8, God asks, “Whom shall I send?” Did He really have no one in mind? In asking the question, God provides space for Isaiah to
Isaiah’s Call

Read God’s commission to Isaiah (Isa. 6:9, 10). How are we to understand what God was telling Isaiah here?

Most translations of the Bible, including the King James Version, make these verses sound as if God is purposely aiming to dull the people’s hearts and minds. Yet, if you read the texts carefully, you can see a bit of sarcasm, a bit of irony, in them. Why would God—who otherwise is constantly pleading with His people to listen to Him, to understand Him, to open their hearts to Him, to know Him, to look to Him, to return to Him, and to be healed by Him—say what He was saying unless He meant something else?

Read the following texts. How are we to understand them in light of the texts we have just seen?

Deut. 30:6

Prov. 2:5

Jer. 3:22

Jer. 4:1

All through the Bible, God was calling His people to listen, to obey, to return to Him, to be healed by Him. And yet, as we know, many did not listen. Thus, what seems to be happening here is that God is simply stating how the people will respond to Isaiah; He is not saying what He wants to happen or what He will cause to happen. As the people continually reject Isaiah’s warnings, their hearts naturally harden. But this does not mean that Isaiah or God wanted this result. On the contrary, the whole Bible is a call of God to people to do all the things Isaiah said to do; as we know, however, many did not.

What about us today? How different are we from the folk in Isaiah’s time? And though, perhaps, there is not much we can do about others, what about ourselves, individually? How can we make sure we do not fall into the same spiritual trap as those depicted in Isaiah?
respond with a willing, eager heart.

**Consider This:** Isaiah volunteers before he even knows his assignment. Why? What sets apart those who undertake God’s work willingly from those who are reluctant *(Ps. 51:12, 13; Mark 5:18–20)*?

“Those who are the partakers of the grace of Christ will be ready to make any sacrifice, that others for whom He died may share the heavenly gift. They will do all they can to make the world better for their stay in it. This spirit is the sure outgrowth of a soul truly converted.” —Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 78.

**B. A Pointless Mission? (Review Isa. 6:9, 10 with your class.)**

God’s description of Isaiah’s mission sounds like a recipe for frustration—to preach to those who will refuse to understand or accept his message.

**Consider This:** What is the point of Isaiah’s mission if its outcome is already known? How should we define success in mission today? Should it be by the number of baptisms or churches established?

Isaiah was not the only one who preached to those who refused to listen. Ask someone in the class to read John 12:37–41 to see how Isaiah’s experience is explicitly echoed in the ministry of Jesus.

**STEP 3—Practice**

**Thought Questions:**

1. Could the stubbornness of Judah *(Isa. 6:9, 10)* have parallels within our own churches? Is there a danger that those who have grown up with the gospel become resistant to its power? What “spiritual symptoms” could indicate calloused hearts and dull ears?

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A Light to the Gentiles

Isaiah’s mission was far larger than just reforming Judah. He also cast a vision of Jerusalem as a light on a hill, a witness to all nations about the one true God, and His commandments: “the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established . . . and all nations will stream to it” (Isa. 2:2).

How do we, as Adventists, understand our role in the outreach to the world? See Rev. 14:6.

Read Isaiah 42:6, 7. What role does God call Judah to play? How do we see ourselves in that role today?

Read Isaiah 49:6. What does this have to do with us, as Seventh-day Adventists?

It was not until the late 1860s that the Seventh-day Adventist Church realized it had a mission to foreign lands. Early Adventists had assumed the gospel commission extended only to the various people groups within North America. America was a multicultural society, and early Adventists thought they were reaching out to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people right there at home. Arthur Spalding suggests that it was a “comforting rationalization” for the early Adventist Church to assume that its mission was only to North America.


But it was not long before the young church realized that its vision was too limited, and it launched out and began establishing the church in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Pacific, and all over the world, a work that we, individually, can be a part of, one way or another.

What are ways you, or even your local church, could be more involved in outreach, in bringing “salvation unto the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47)?
Read the following two quotes to your class:

“You were born to win, but to be a winner, you must plan to win, prepare to win, and expect to win.”—Motivational speaker Zig Ziglar, “Developing and Maintaining the Right Attitude,” Dec. 11, 2006.

“Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all’” (Mark 9:35, NIV).

Society says that humility is not the path to success. Yet, Isaiah had to see himself as he really was—hopelessly sinful, a failure—before God could use him. Discuss the tension between these different definitions of success. Divide into groups and ask each group to list the attributes of a “successful” follower of Christ. How do these attributes help us in our mission to share Christ with others?

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STEP 4—Apply

The basis of mission is a true understanding of God and His grace. It depends on an encounter with God that changes our perceptions and priorities.

Consider This: This week, how can we open ourselves more fully to an experience with God? Offer the following suggestions and ask class members to add their own ideas.

• Consider moments when you have strongly sensed God’s presence and majesty. Choose a time and place this week to deliberately focus on who God is and what He has done in your life.

• Choose a favorite hymn or psalm that portrays God’s majesty and love. Say the words out loud as a prayer and ask God for a deeper understanding of His will for your life.

• Take time each day to pray, “Here am I, send me!” Whether it’s speaking a word of encouragement, offering practical help, or talking about your faith, be alert to God’s call to mission.

“This assurance of the final fulfillment of God’s purpose brought courage to the heart of Isaiah. What though earthly powers array themselves against Judah? What though the Lord’s messenger meet with opposition and resistance? Isaiah had seen the King, the Lord of hosts; he had heard the song of the seraphim, ‘The whole earth is full of his glory’ (verse 3); he had the promise that the messages of Jehovah to backsliding Judah would be accompanied by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit; and the prophet was nerved for the work before him. Throughout his long and arduous mission he carried with him the memory of this vision. For sixty years or more he stood before the children of Judah as a prophet of hope, waxing bolder and still bolder in his predictions of the future triumph of the church.”—Ellen G. White, “The Call of Isaiah,” Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, March 11, 1915.

“The exhortations of the prophet to Judah to behold the living God, and to accept His gracious offers, were not in vain. There were some who gave earnest heed, and who turned from their idols to the worship of Jehovah. They learned to see in their Maker love and mercy and tender compassion. And in the dark days that were to come in the history of Judah, when only a remnant were to be left in the land, the prophet’s words were to continue bearing fruit in decided reformation. ‘At that day,’ declared Isaiah, ‘shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel.’ Isaiah 17:7, 8.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 320.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is a prophet never popular? Imagine if Isaiah came back to life and functioned as a prophet to the Adventist Church. What do you think he would have to say? Would his message have changed? What about our views toward Ellen G. White? Are many of us, perhaps, doing the same thing to her that many in Israel did to their own prophets? Discuss.

2. Just what role do we have in the worldwide mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? How do we balance our own local needs, our own local outreach, with the divine call to spread this message to the world? How can we be faithful to both callings?

Summary: The prophet Isaiah accepted a mission from God that was unpopular and, in many ways, unrewarding. It was also a mission that ended with his being sawn in half. And yet, through his ministry, lives were changed—and the power of his words is still felt today.