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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).
One of the great eighteenth- to nineteenth-century thinkers, Pierre Laplace, wrote a book about the motion of the planets. He called it *Celestial Mechanics*, and he presented a copy of the book, in person, to Emperor Napoleon. Someone had told Napoleon beforehand that the book never mentioned God. The emperor took the book and said, “Mr. Laplace, they tell me you have written this large book on the system of the universe, and have never even mentioned its Creator.” Laplace, unflinchingly, responded, “I have no need of that hypothesis.”

This story is a metaphor for what’s been known as “the modern era,” an era in which logic, reason, and science have formed the foundation of all truth. According to this view, all reality can be reduced to formulas, to laws, and to scientific predictions. If it can’t be explained through logic, reason, and science, it isn’t real.

In recent years there’s been a backlash against this thinking. People don’t believe, and rightly so, that all reality can be explained in cold rationality alone. There’s something about us that no formula, no test tube, and no scientific law ever could capture.

This backlash has spilled over into all realms of life, including religion; however, as with most reactions, it has in some cases gone too far, even to the point of pushing aside or ignoring the concept of doctrinal truth. What’s important, we’re told, isn’t teachings or doctrine but experience. What does your faith do for you now—that’s what matters. Instead of saying, “Here are compelling reasons to believe in Jesus Christ and His promise of salvation,” the trend (again, a backlash) is to say, “Our community of faith invites you to join us in our venture of trust and commitment.”

Now, this doesn’t have to be all bad. Did not Jesus say that His truth would have concrete and practical results in our lives *(John 8:32)*? Of

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**Experience never should take away from the importance of correct biblical teaching.**
course. Truth is not just knowledge of doctrines and texts but something that influences the believer on a personal level. Truth affects the spiritual life and impacts how a person will relate to the challenges of daily living. There is a practical, life-changing aspect of our religion that never should be denied or denigrated. At the same time, the role of experience never should take away from the importance of correct biblical teachings.

This quarter we want to look at both aspects of our faith: doctrine and experience. In our study during this quarter we will focus on 13 essential themes of the Christian faith, 13 essential teachings. Each week’s lesson will attempt to maintain a careful balance between a correct biblical understanding of these various elements of our faith and how they impact our daily experience. It’s our hope that at the end of the quarter you not only will understand these themes better but also will have been enriched as far as your Christian experience is concerned. Each lesson is not just about truth but about “the truth as it is in Jesus.”

After all, He is the One who is the Alpha and Omega of our faith. There may be 13 different themes, but they will have one focus: the One in whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Reinder Bruinsma, born in the Netherlands, has served in various offices in his long career in the church. Bruinsma is the author of almost twenty books, some of which have been translated into a number of languages, and was president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Netherlands when he wrote this Bible study guide.
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.
LESSON 1  *March 28–April 3

Love

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Isaiah 53, Matt. 22:37–39, 1 Corinthians 13, 1 John 3, 1 John 4.

Memory Text: “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13, NIV).

It is only fitting that a study guide dealing with key concepts of the Christian faith should start with the topic of love. The apostle Paul points out that however important faith and hope and other elements of Christianity are, it all starts with love. Without love, we are, as he said, “nothing” (1 Cor. 13:2).

Some five centuries before Christ was born, the Greek philosopher Sophocles said, “One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life. That word is love.” True as these words are, this Greek sage still was ignorant about the depth of love that was to be proclaimed and modeled by our Savior.

God is love. Whatever else God is, and whatever He has done, is doing, and will do—everything is a manifestation of His love. This love is as comforting as it is difficult to comprehend. God’s love far exceeds what human beings usually label as love, which is sometimes a mere shallow feeling or temporary infatuation that’s often mixed with selfishness and greed. God does not just have love or show love. He is love.

The Week at a Glance: God’s love for humanity has been revealed in numerous ways, the greatest being the Cross. As followers of Jesus, we respond to His love by loving others as Christ loves us.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 4.
Love—the Fabric of Life

We need to eat and drink in order to stay alive. Without liquid to drink or food to eat, we come to an end soon. But in order to live in any real sense of the word, we also need love. Life without love is a subhuman kind of existence. There is a built-in need in us to receive love. We need the love of parents. We need the love of family and friends. We need to be part of a loving community. But just as much as we need to receive love, we also need to give love. We are not truly human if we cannot love. But let’s be clear: True love does not begin with us. The capacity for love is created in us by our Creator. (See Gen. 1:26 and John 3:16.)


God’s love always precedes our love. Whatever else we say about love, this point is crucial. True “love is not an impulse, but a divine principle, a permanent power. The unconsecrated heart cannot originate or produce it. Only in the heart where Jesus reigns is it found. ‘We love Him, because He first loved us’ [1 John 4:19]. In the heart renewed by divine grace, love is the ruling principle of action.” —Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 551.

The famous British author C. S. Lewis uses the terms “Gift-love” and “Need-love” to differentiate between God’s love and human forms of love. While God wants our love more than anything else, He does not need our love in the same way in which we need love from Him and from fellow human beings. “We [must] begin at the real beginning, with love as the Divine energy. This primal love is Gift-love. In God there is no hunger that needs to be filled, only plenteousness that desires to give.”—C. S. Lewis, The Four Loves (London: HarperCollins, 1998), p. 121. Our human love needs to be transformed by divine love, so that—while we will continue to yearn for love from others—we will be able to give love in a truly Christlike manner.

From your own experience, what is the difference between human love and God’s love? What kind of human love best exemplifies God’s love? How can we better manifest God’s love in our own lives?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Corinthians 13:13

**The Student Will:**

- **Know:** That God is love and that Jesus is the greatest expression of that love.
- **Feel:** The difference between human love and God’s all-encompassing, selfless love.
- **Do:** Allow God’s love to manifest itself in our lives through Christ.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Needing Love (Gen. 1:26)

1. **The Message** Bible translates this text as “let us make human beings . . . reflecting our nature.” Because we reflect God’s nature, and because God is love, we should reflect this love through our actions. How can we do this in our lives?

2. As humans, we all have the need to love and be loved. How is God’s love different from the love of others? Can you replace one with the other? Why, or why not?

II. Experiencing Love (1 John 3)

1. God’s extraordinary love is highlighted throughout Scripture. Creation, the gift of the Sabbath, the plan of salvation, and the Spirit of prophecy all affirm God’s loving nature. Share specific ways you have experienced God’s unfathomable love.

2. The gift of eternal life is the ultimate demonstration of love. What are other examples of God’s love?

III. Reflecting Love (Matt. 22:35–40)

Our reaction to the love of God should be love for one another. This can be hard to do in a world full of sin. How can you better reflect His love?

**Summary:** God is love. When we allow Christ to abide within us, this love will be revealed in our lives.
The Old Testament God—a God of Love

It is often said that God’s love is clearly manifested only in the New Testament, while the “Old Testament God” is a God of justice and wrath. But careful study of the entire Bible shows that God does not have such a split personality. Though God’s love was manifested in the fullest measure in Christ (as portrayed in the New Testament), the God of Old Testament times is just as much a God of supreme love. God does not change (James 1:17). He does not gradually evolve from a God of wrath or a God of justice into a God of love. God’s love is eternal. The words to His Old Testament people apply to all times: “‘I have loved you with an everlasting love’” (Jer. 31:3, NIV).

Take a look at a few important evidences of God’s love in Old Testament times as listed below, and add a few other clear evidences of His love found elsewhere in the Old Testament.

• God’s love in creation (Gen. 1:26–31, 2:21–25).

• Providing a solution for the sin problem (Gen. 3:15, 22:8, Isaiah 53).

• The gift of the Sabbath (Exod. 31:12–17).

• The continuous gift of prophecy (Amos 3:7).

There are stories and statements in the Old Testament that are, at least on the surface, difficult to understand. It is true that we read about bloodshed and war. But never forget that God is consistently portrayed as the covenant God who draws people to Himself and does not forsake them, in spite of the fact that they turn their backs on Him time and again.

What do you answer when confronted with questions about war and bloodshed in the Old Testament? How do you reconcile the divine commands to eliminate entire nations (for instance, Israel taking possession of the land of Canaan) with the concept of a God of love?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Love is God’s defining attribute. All of God’s actions, from Creation to Redemption, are motivated by His selfless, unconditional love for us.

Just for Teachers: In this lesson, we focus on the love of God for us. Help your students understand the central importance of love in our relationships with God and in our Christian lives. How can we emulate God’s love in our relationships with others?

Celsus, one of the many critics of Christians and Christianity in late antiquity, wrote sardonically, “‘These Christians love each other even before they are acquainted.’”—W. Carl Ketcherside: In the Beginning, chapter 11, “Fear of Love,” italics supplied, http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/wcketcherside/itb/chap11.html. Celsus found Christian love absurd. Yet, how much more absurd would someone like Celsus find the idea that although God is acquainted with us already and knows for a fact that we are not lovable, He loves us anyway?

Discuss With the Class: As the quote from Celsus suggests, there probably are as many distinct concepts of love as there are people. Ask each member of the class to define what love means and to give an example. How do these definitions measure up against God’s love for us? How do they help us understand God’s love better?

Consider This: God wants something from us in return for the wonderful and mystifying gift of love He showers on us: to let Him show this love to others through us. What can we do to make it easier for Him to do this work in our lives?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. “The Greatest of These” (Review with your class 1 Corinthians 13.)

In discussing the importance of love, Paul compares it to the gift of

CONTINUED
The New Testament God—a God of Love

Why did Jesus Christ come to the world? Why did He have to suffer, and was it necessary for Him to die on a cross? And why will He come again and restore this world to its original unblemished condition? Was there no other way? And if not, why does it take so long before the sin problem is fully dealt with? We are in no position to answer these questions. In His infinite wisdom God devised a plan to deal with the predicament of sin in the best possible way. Being a holy God, He could not overlook the rebellion against His perfect law; being love, He could not stand back and let His creatures perish without doing His utmost to save them.

“God’s holiness is his majestic purity that cannot tolerate moral evil. God’s love is his outgoing, tenderhearted embrace of the sinner. God’s holiness is his separateness from what is unclean and profane. God’s love is his willingness to identify with those who are unclean in order to help them. . . . [But] God’s wrath is provisional whereas his love is eternal.”—Donald G. Bloesch, God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), pp. 140–143.

What do the following texts tell us about the New Testament message of God’s love?

- God’s gift of His Son (John 3:16)
- The Son’s giving of Himself (Phil. 2:5–8)
- The availability of spiritual gifts (Eph. 4:11–13)
- The certainty of salvation (1 John 3:1–3)
- An eternal future in an environment of love (2 Peter 3:13)

How would you summarize the New Testament message about the love of God?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

How do the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12 fit in this overall New Testament theme of divine love? Ellen White speaks about the message of the third angel as the good news of justification by faith “in verity.” How does that all fit in with the theme of God’s love for humanity?
tongues, prophecy, and martyrdom. These gifts and experiences were tangible evidences to the early Christians that they were on the right path in spite of the world’s opposition and ridicule. But the gifts aren’t the point.

So, what is?

Love: love of God for human beings, love of human beings for God, and love of human beings for one another. The miracles, the mysteries, and what seem to be superhuman acts of devotion arise from love and serve the purposes of love. Otherwise they are just magic tricks and empty pretense.

**Consider This:** In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul describes the kind of person who gives the appearance of doing everything right. Do you ever find yourself just going through the motions? How can we guard against this pretense?

II. The God of the Old Testament Versus the God of the New: A Divine Split-Personality Disorder or a Case of Human Misunderstanding?
(Review with your class Genesis 1:26–31, 2:21–25, 3:15, Isaiah 53.)

Some people find it hard to reconcile the God of the Old Testament with the God of the New. They say the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath, the sender of plagues and of destroying angels, who would rather blot the name of His people out of His book of life than forgive. By the same token, it is said that the New Testament presents us with a radically different portrait of God: one of love, self-sacrifice, and inclusiveness.

How do we know that the Old Testament God is the same God of love we see in Jesus Christ in the New Testament? Perhaps, it is not the different halves of God that need reconciling but our view of Him. We would do well to remember that the same God who sent destroying angels also sent manna. The God of the Old Testament not only created us and preserved us—as seen in the texts above—He laid the foundation for our redemption. How could we even begin to know that Jesus was who He claimed to be unless the Old Testament first told us when, where, and how to expect Him?

**Consider This:** Jesus says that the Old Testament scriptures testify of Him (*John 5:39*). What does this suggest to us about the unity of the two Testaments in conveying God’s message of love?

III. A Response of Love (Review with your class Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 5:44, 22:37–40, 1 Peter 1:22.)

CONTINUED
A Response of Love

The tragic reality of this world is one of self-love, blind ambition, hatred, competition, corruption, and war. As long as the citizens of this world let themselves, knowingly or unknowingly, be guided by the principles of the prince of darkness, love will have no chance to blossom. Mother Teresa once said, “If you judge people, you have no time to love them.”

If we truly have been converted and become disciples of the Lord, the principle of love will reign in our lives. Whatever our weaknesses, we will steadily grow in our love for God and for our fellow human beings. In a very real sense conversion is reorientation—a shift away from the love of self to the love for God and to the love of others.

What underlying principle should we discern as we study the commandments that God has given us? Has this principle been operating differently since Christ came to this world? Deut. 6:5, 6; Matt. 22:37–40.

If we truly have been changed by Jesus Christ, His love will characterize our dealings with other people. Though we may not like some people, we are called to love everyone, even our greatest enemy. This not only will benefit the people we associate with but will also prove an enormous blessing for ourselves. Give love and unconditional acceptance to those you encounter and notice what happens.


“If church members will put away all self-worship, and will receive in their hearts the love for God and for one another that filled Christ’s heart, our heavenly Father will constantly manifest His power through them. Let His people be drawn together with the cords of divine love. Then the world will recognize the miracle-working power of God, and will acknowledge that He is the Strength and the Helper of His commandment-keeping people.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 940.

Are you naturally loving or naturally selfish and self-centered? What practical steps can you take to move away from self and manifest love toward others?
The Bible—Old and New Testaments—tells us to love God and to love one another. But as if being told so were not enough, God as Jesus Christ provides the example (Phil. 2:5–7), the motivation (2 Cor. 5:14, 15), and the means (John 16:12–15). All that remains is to allow Him to change us.

**Consider This:** It is easy to love people with whom we have something in common or people who make us feel good about ourselves. After all, as Jesus said in Matthew 5:46, even tax collectors—the yardstick of amorality at the time—could do the same. What about those who seem strange or alien to us or who frustrate or antagonize us? What examples can we draw from Jesus, the One who is “altogether lovely,” and from His life and ministry about how to love the unlovely and unlovable?

**STEP 3—Practice**

**Just for Teachers:** Use the questions below to help class members understand that love is crucial to life itself and that in God we see love in its perfect form.

**Thought Questions:**

1. Paul states that of the spiritual gifts—faith, hope, and love—love is the greatest (1 Cor. 13:13). Why is it the greatest? What is its relationship to the other two gifts?

2. Caring for someone or something because doing so somehow benefits us is a rather cynical definition—or practice—of human love. How would you define human love? What relationship does human love bear to divine love? Are the two related, even though human love is imperfect?

**Application Questions:**

1. In John 13:34, 35, Jesus states: “‘A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another’” (NIV). He leaves little doubt that fulfillment of this directive was to be the defining characteristic of the church He was leaving behind. Does love characterize the church as we see it today? What is our role in making the church more loving and less prone to judgmentalism and petty politics?
Love Personified

Jesus Christ is our ultimate Role Model. If we wonder what our love should be like, we need to look only at our Savior. In Him we see the perfect example. Humanly speaking, Christ had every reason to dislike or even hate a lot of people. The spiritual leaders were so envious of His success that they constantly harassed Him and eventually decided to eliminate Him. Why should He have loved these people? His own family was at times less than supportive. His disciples often fought among themselves and were absent when their presence would have counted most. How could He love them at those moments when they totally forsook Him?

Besides all this, Jesus also manifested His love in particular toward those who would not get much positive attention from the spiritual leaders of His day: women (including prostitutes), those who suffered from leprosy, people from Samaria, members of the occupying force, and tax gatherers.

Take a careful look at some concrete examples of Jesus showing unselfish love, in circumstances in which most people would have found it difficult to do so.

1. Luke 17:12–19
2. John 13:1–17

How should the manifestation of divine love in the ministry of Jesus impact our discipleship? 2 Cor. 5:14, Phil. 2:2.

The love of Christ compels us, the apostle Paul says (2 Cor. 5:14). The English translation is somewhat ambiguous, for the original Greek construction may be translated as the love that comes from Christ, as well as the love that we have for Christ. Both meanings are grammatically justified and also are theologically correct. When we grasp something of the magnitude of Christ’s love, it will create a loving response, and this will give us the intense desire to share that love with others.

Jesus also loved those who were despised by most other people and were generally considered rather unlovable. He went out of His way to show them His love. How do I show my love to the homeless, to people who live at the fringes of society, and to those who do not in any way represent the values that I treasure?
As Christians, we want to win people to the gospel. Cultivating a loving attitude toward others is one way of doing so. Yet, in many instances, Jesus Himself—the ultimate embodiment of love—failed to win His hearers over. How can we apply His example?

**STEP 4—Apply**

*Just for Teachers:* Suggest the following scenarios to your class in order to determine what a loving response would be in such a context. Remind them that the answer is not always to “grin and bear it.” Ask your class members to keep this important question in mind: When is silence the wisest response, and when is a loving but firm response an opportunity to open a door for someone to walk through to meet Jesus?

- You are having a conversation with someone on a random topic, and it becomes clear that he or she is interested in spiritual things. You share your beliefs. He or she politely but firmly asks you probing questions for which you don’t have ready answers. How do you respond?
- Someone is spreading wild and destructive rumors about you at church or work. As a result, you lose an opportunity for a promotion or a ministry you really wanted. You discover the source of the rumors. How do you handle this situation?
- You are a leader of a ministry at your church. You suspect that one of your volunteers is engaged in clearly improper or inappropriate—possibly illegal or immoral—behavior that bears directly on their role in the ministry. Your suspicions are correct. How do you confront this person?
- There he is at the same intersection every day on your route to work. His sign says, “Homeless, hungry, God bless.” You avoid making eye contact as he walks past and hope he doesn’t notice the fish symbol on your car that marks you as a caring Christian person. He asks you for money. What do you say and do?

*Just for Teachers:* Present these as questions or hypothetical situations, or role-play them if you think it would make more of an impact.

Discussion Questions:

1. One cannot escape the *why* question: If God is love, why is there so much suffering? It is not only the scale of suffering that causes people to question God’s love but also the fact that so much appears to affect innocent people, and so much appears utterly senseless. How do we, as Seventh-day Adventist Christians, deal with this reality? How does our understanding of the great controversy help us understand this difficult topic?

2. How can one love an abusing parent, a serial killer, or a totally selfish person? How did Jesus love those who were totally unloveable?

3. How can one continue loving if there is no response to that love? Again, how did Jesus continue to love those who would never love Him back?

4. Who are the outcasts, the despised, and the reviled in your own society? What kind of outreach and ministry does your church have for those people? What would it take to get yourself and your church involved in such a work?

5. In a real sense, true love demands a death to self, a willingness to put self aside for the good of others. What choices do we have to make in order to experience that death ourselves?

6. Besides the Cross, what are other ways that we can see God’s love for humanity?

Summary: God is love. This characteristic is the basis for everything God is and does. This loving God is already revealed in the Old Testament, but His love is seen in its ultimate form in the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation. This divine love finds a response in the love of the Christian. If we profess to be disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, our life will be marked by unconditional love toward our Maker and unselfish love for others.
Faith

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Eph. 6:10–18; Hebrews 11; James 2:18, 19; 1 Pet. 1:3–8.

Memory Text: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9, NIV).

Faith is not to be confused with rational conviction. Faith in the biblical sense is not based primarily on our reason (even though it is not unreasonable or irrational!); nor is it based on our emotions (though emotions do play a role). Faith is a deep-rooted assurance that affects the entire person. Faith is a principle that governs the life. Faith is the means by which we reach out and grab hold of the promises of a God we can’t see yet we know is there.

Hebrews 11:1 speaks about the “substance” of our faith. William G. Johnsson, an expert on Hebrews, suggests that the best translation is, “Faith is the title deed to what we hope for, the certainty of what we do not see.”—Hebrews, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), p. 204.

The Week at a Glance: Faith is the guiding principle in the life of a Christian. It’s how we are to live and to relate to God and to others. However important an intellectual assent to doctrines is, faith is so much more than just that. This week we’ll look at how much more.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 11.
Faith—a Gift From God

What is faith?
A simple definition could read something like this: “Faith is a confident and obedient trust in the reality, power, and love of God as revealed in His acts and in His promises to us.”

What a wonderful gift to have in a terribly fallen and broken world such as ours. No wonder many believe that faith is the most wonderful of all gifts humans could have.

Now, the question is, Have you ever tried to discover where your faith originated? Why is it that you have faith in God and in others you know don’t? Was it your upbringing? Did you have believing parents? Have you always attended church? Did your study of the Bible, and your reading of books about the Bible, convince you that there is a God who loves you? Did you find satisfying philosophical arguments that prepared you for the “leap” of faith? In the final analysis, faith is a miracle, a gift from God.


One thing is sure: Just as we cannot be fully human without love, we cannot be what we are intended to be without faith. “ ‘Without faith it is impossible to please God.’ . . . Note that Hebrews does not teach that without faith it is difficult to please God, or that without faith it will take a long time to satisfy Him. To the contrary, it claims that it is impossible. In short, faith has no substitute. It is by faith that God’s heroes lived in the past, and it is by faith that His people must live today.”—George R. Knight, *Exploring Hebrews: A Devotional Commentary* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2003), p. 198.

**How** can we position ourselves in a way that prepares us for the gift of faith? That is, what changes can we make in our lives to make us more receptive to that gift? *Rom. 10:17; see also Heb. 11:6.*

Sometimes you hear people say that they wish they had faith. What would you advise such people? What kind of changes might they need to make in order to be more receptive to receiving the gift? *See Mark 9:24.*
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Ephesians 2:8

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** That faith is more than just belief but an experience of trust and certainty.
- **Feel:** Your faith grow stronger through the study of the Bible and through a relationship with Jesus.
- **Do:** Let faith be the guiding principle in your life.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Finding Faith *(Hab. 2:4)*
- **A** Faith is more than just believing in a truth; it is living by that truth. How does your faith guide your actions every day?
- **B** Faith matures through study of the Scriptures and through personal experience. What is the basis of your faith? Why do you believe the way you do?

II. Living Faith *(Hebrews 11)*
- **A** Hebrews 11 often is referred to as the faith chapter. It reads like a “Hall of Fame” of the faithful: from Abel to Gideon, those of great faith are noted here. What specific traits set these people apart? How can we aspire to be like them?
- **B** Hebrews 11:6 says it is impossible to please God without faith. Why is it so hard to accept the gift of faith? What makes us waver at times?

III. Evidencing Faith *(James 2:14–17)*
- James tells us that faith without deeds is dead. What are some ways you can let your faith be evident in your actions?

**Summary:** Our faith experience should serve as our guide through life. By studying the Bible and developing a relationship with Christ, we can let our faith manifest itself in all aspects of our lives.
The Basis of Our Faith

A famous English hymn that has been translated in countless languages reminds us, “My hope is built on nothing less / Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness” (The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, no. 522). It is important that we never forget this truth. Jesus Christ is the ultimate foundation and source of our faith. But even though the gift of faith is a mystery that remains beyond our comprehension, we have been given some insights into how faith is awakened and strengthened. Some men and women in Bible times had a sudden experience that started them on the journey of faith. Paul is probably the most prominent example. Others tell of a much more gradual awareness of God’s leading in their life, which brought focus and direction in their pilgrimage of faith. No doubt, experience is an essential and powerful component of our spiritual life. But faith also must have content, and the revelation provided in the Scriptures plays the major role in establishing us in our faith.

What role do the Scriptures play in the faith experience of the believer? John 5:39, 2 Tim. 3:15.

Clearly, the Scriptures are of extreme importance, and if we neglect them it will be at our own peril. But how the Scriptures exactly help to awaken and build our faith cannot be expressed in any human formula. Not even the famous faith definition of Hebrews 11 provides this. “Hebrews 11:1 doesn’t give us a definition of pistis [the Greek word for faith] so much as a description of the way faith works. Certainly the apostle isn’t advancing a psychological explanation of faith. Rather, he sets out the two cardinal abilities that faith makes possible—turning hope into reality and the unseen into sight.”—William G. Johnsson, Hebrews, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier, p. 205.

What does James 2:18, 19 tell us about the character of faith? Why is faith more than intellectual assent to belief in the existence of God and other doctrines?

Why is Bible reading a life-changing experience for some people while others claim that it “does nothing” for them? What would you advise a person who reads the Bible and enjoys it as literature but claims not to hear the voice of God speaking in it?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Faith is trust in God that makes the Christian life possible. As with love, we can’t manufacture it for ourselves; God must give it to us.

**Just for Teachers:** In this lesson, we focus on the necessity of faith to the Christian life and how we can build faith in ourselves and others. You will want your students to have a working understanding of what faith is, why it’s important, and how it relates to their own lives.

The Greek philosopher Zeno famously argued in his “arrow paradox” that an arrow would never reach its target. His argument turned on the assumption that every object occupies a space that is just its own size. So, at every point in its flight, the object is “at rest.” Because the object is at rest, it is not moving, even though it appears that way. In this sense, it is indistinguishable from a motionless arrow in the same position. Thus, Zeno concluded, motion is an illusion.

According to Zeno’s logic, then, we could shoot an arrow at someone’s chest and safely predict that it would never pierce the heart. Right? Unfortunately, we’d be dead wrong—as would be our target. Regardless of how logical Zeno’s arguments may be, there is little doubt that anyone would be willing to volunteer for target practice to prove him right—especially Zeno (were he still alive).

Yet, Zeno’s paradox was meant to contradict, through logic and reasoning, some false ideas about the way people thought the universe worked. Since then, there have been a number of mathematical and philosophical attempts to solve his paradox about why the arrow reaches its target, even though, logically, it shouldn’t. (See Josh Paete, “Zeno’s Paradoxes,” article at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arrow_paradox.)

In the same way, faith also poses a paradox of its own for the Christian. We don’t know how or why the “reason to believe” becomes saving faith, but we know it does. But first, we must aim at the target: to know Jesus as our personal Savior.

**Discuss With the Class:** What circumstances, situations, discussions, books, sermons, and so forth, led you to have faith? At what point did knowledge about Christ become faith in Christ, and what did it feel like? What influences in your life now aim you toward Christ?

**CONTINUED**
Exercising Faith

In their telling of the stories of Christ’s healing miracles, the Gospel writers emphasized that the underlying factor was not magic but faith. The people who were healed were challenged to exercise their faith. “‘According to your faith will it be done to you,’” Jesus said (Matt. 9:29, NIV). Extraordinary experiences that carry an undeniable stamp of miraculous divine intervention do not always result in faith, however. The truth is that many people find ways of explaining such divine interventions away.

**Read** Luke 16:30, 31. What important point can we take from here?

Our faith will be strengthened by the experience of seeing God at work in our own lives and in the lives of others, but our faith often will precede God’s interventions in our life. Faith will expect God to show His hand. God has promised that He will act through us and on our behalf if we have faith in Him. In that trusting faith we must take Him at His word.

**How** do Romans 1:17; Galatians 5:6; James 2:17, 18; and 1 John 5:4, 5 reflect various aspects of this “living through faith”?

**What** is, on the other hand, the tragic result when faith is absent? Rom. 11:20, Heb. 3:19.

The context of Romans 11:20 makes it clear that Paul was speaking about the ancient Hebrews, who had received the promise of salvation in a covenant relationship with Him. They could have experienced the abundant life in Christ that faith brings to all who exercise it, but their experience, and failure, is a clear reminder to us that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6, NIV).

Though your faith is a gift, what good reasons do you have for it? Also, even more important, what are practical ways in which you can strengthen your faith? At the same time, what are sure ways of losing it?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Overview: Without faith, it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). This statement would be discouraging, except that by definition faith is something that can be achieved in no other way than to have God give it to us. All we have to do is reach out to take it (Eph. 2:8).

I. Invisible to Visible (Review with your class Hebrews 11:1–3.)

Faith, in order to be such, is the ability to believe in things that aren’t immediately apparent to the senses. When the Christian believes and trusts in God, the results of that faith make themselves known in the real world, coming from what is, to all appearances, nothing.

These things may include a marked change in the character and orientation of the individual, answers to prayer, or positive results from decisions that seem far-fetched or disadvantageous by worldly standards—decisions made solely on the basis of faith or the sense that it was what God wanted one to do.

The author of this week’s lesson compares this life change to God’s creation of the world itself, which, after all, brought the universe into existence from nothing.

Consider This: Ask class members to share past experiences of having to maintain faith in God when apparently there was no evidence to support it.

II. The Gift of Faith (Review with your class Ephesians 2:8.)

When we refer to faith as a gift, we come up against the popular concept of faith as belief in a set of propositions of varying degrees of plausibility. People believe in all sorts of things, and just about everyone believes in something that isn’t subject to rational or empirical proof.

But this is not the faith that is referred to here. Biblical faith is a result of the encounter with an infinitely good and trustworthy—that is to say, faithful—God. The gift of faith is truly the gift of God, because to truly
Growing in Faith

Faith will increase if, when brought in contact with doubts and obstacles, we press on, claiming the promises of God regardless of how we might feel at any given moment or regardless of how hostile the circumstances might be. Faith is more than a feeling; it’s a principle that transcends the fickleness of human emotions. Faith is doing what we know God asks us to do even though we don’t feel like doing it.

If you are growing in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ, you will improve every privilege and opportunity to gain more knowledge of the life and character of Christ; that is, you will do everything you can to grow in grace and increase in faith.

Faith in Jesus will grow as you become better acquainted with Him. This can happen by dwelling upon His life and love. You cannot dishonor God more than to profess to be His disciple while keeping yourself at a distance from Him.


How had the church in Thessalonica lived up to that challenge? 2 Thess. 1:3.

And how does the “shield of faith” help you to grow spiritually? How does faith relate to the rest of the “armour of God” as described in Ephesians 6:10–18?

The goal of the Christian is to become mature in faith. This is a lifelong process. While we experience the blessing of growth and “stand firm in the faith” (1 Cor. 16:13, NIV), we may at times wonder why others are still “weak” (Rom. 14:1). There is often a tendency to forget that it also has taken most of us considerable time before we arrived at where we are today spiritually. But whatever our reaction may be, it never should be one of pride and judgment (1 Cor. 10:12). God is the One who makes every seed of faith sprout, and He also is to be credited for any growth that takes place in our spiritual life. Yet, while that is a truth that must never be forgotten, we also must remember that by our personal choices we can help create the right kind of environment in which spiritual growth can take place.

Are there associations you have, places you visit, or certain kinds of media you expose yourself to that negatively impact your faith? If so, how willing are you to give them up? The answer depends on how important your faith really is to you.
know God is to trust Him. But in order to receive the gift of faith, we must make ourselves available to God.

**Consider This:** How can we better position ourselves to receive the gift of faith or increase what we have been given?

### III. Phoning It In
*(Review with your class Hebrews 11:6 and Romans 1:17.)*

“Phoning it in” is a phrase used by actors for a performance that technically is correct but obviously lacking in feeling or conviction. We can compare that to times when the Christian life is without faith. Without faith, we can’t please God, because we aren’t sure He exists and, therefore, we can’t love or trust Him.

Christians can go through the motions, but they will lack the conviction and joy that come from knowing why they are doing so. Because the Christian life is a long-term relationship, not a one-minute radio spot, eventually the person not anchored to Christ through faith will wander off to do something more immediately gratifying. And losing us to the world, the flesh, and the devil is what really hurts God.

**Consider This:** Most of us have had moments when we felt as if we merely were going through the motions of a Christian life, without faith. What or who helped you to find the way back?

**STEP 3—Practice**

**Just for Teachers:** Encourage your students to use these questions to think about faith as it manifests itself in their lives.

**Thought Questions:**

1. An adage states that “seeing is believing.” The eleventh century theologian Anselm of Canterbury wrote, “For I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this too I believe, that ‘unless I believe, I shall not understand’ (Isa. 7:9).”


2. What is the role of doctrine in the life of faith?
Faith in a Person

Doctrines are important. When we say that we believe in God, we will want to know more about God, and we will be eager to absorb what He has revealed to us. It only is natural that we want to provide a structured account of what we believe about our Creator and His dealings with us, and we want to be sure that we know His will. But though we believe that the doctrines of our church are true, our faith is anchored, not in a doctrinal system alone, but in Jesus. The doctrines are not an end in and of themselves. The doctrines help us better understand Jesus and what He has done for us.

In a sense, the role of doctrines in the Christian faith may be compared to the role of grammar. We can communicate through language only because there is a grammatical structure in the words we say and write. Similarly, we give a structure to the content of our faith through the doctrines. Anselm, a medieval theologian, spoke the famous words that theology is faith that seeks to understand itself.

What does the New Testament tell us about the importance of sound doctrine? 1 Tim. 4:16, Titus 2:1.

Sound doctrine is essential, but doctrine and theology that remain lifeless theory can save no one. One even can be a theologian without being a believer. Faith, ultimately, is not just holding a number of beliefs as biblically correct but is trust in the Person of whom these doctrines speak.

How is salvation in this life and the life beyond connected with faith in the Source of life? John 3:36, 6:35.

What is the fundamental conviction on which the church is built? Matt. 16:13–19.

The passage in Matthew 16 often has been used as proof that the apostle Peter should be considered the founder of the Christian church. This idea finds no biblical support. On the contrary, Christ is the Stone on which the church is built. (See 1 Pet. 2:4–8.) And it is the faith in this Stone—the unshakable conviction that Jesus, the Son of God, is our Savior—that makes the church what it is, not a human institution but the church of God.

Someone says, “I believe in Jesus, believe in the teachings, yet sometimes I can’t help struggling with doubt.” What would you say to that person? What help and counsel could you give?
Application Questions:

1. How does God work through people to build others’ faith?

2. Being as imperfect as we are, faith often coexists in us with doubt. How can we acknowledge the doubt and make sure faith has the upper hand?

STEP 4—Apply

Just for Teachers: This week we have learned that faith is something separate from both intellectual acceptance and from our own efforts. Yet, we do have a role in cultivating and strengthening the faith God gives us. The following activity is meant to emphasize how our actions and thoughts can build or diminish faith.

Give each class member a sheet of paper. Ask the students to draw a line down the middle, creating two columns. At the top of one, have them write “faith building.” At the top of the other, have them write “faith diminishing.” Have the students consult together in groups of about three to make lists in each column. Invite each group to discuss their conclusions.

Just for Teachers: Make sure to emphasize that this exercise is not necessarily a matter of drawing a line between “good” things that “good” people do, say, or think and “bad” things done, said, or thought by “bad” people. First Corinthians 10:23 is instructive in this context.

Or, as an alternative, consider the following discussion topic and exercise instead: media has become important in the lives of many people today, and the life of faith is no exception to this influence. We tend to focus on the negative here, and certainly there is no lack of that. But how can music, film, and so forth help and guide us in our journey of faith, as well as hinder and mislead us?

The week before you teach this lesson, invite class members to bring in CDs, DVDs, and so on that have encouraged or strengthened their faith. It probably is most convenient (though not strictly necessary) if you have means to play selections from some of these materials. Best of all might be if some of your class members are willing to sing or otherwise perform these songs as a way of closing the class.
Further Study: “Peter exhorts his brethren to ‘grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.’ 2 Peter 3:18. When the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. . . .

“By faith we may look to the hereafter and grasp the pledge of God for a growth of intellect, the human faculties uniting with the divine, and every power of the soul being brought into direct contact with the Source of light. We may rejoice that all which has perplexed us in the providences of God will then be made plain.”—Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, pp. 112, 113.

Discussion Questions:

1. Hebrews 11 provides a gallery of heroes of faith. Notice, though, how flawed in character and actions just about every one of them were. What encouragement can you draw from their mistakes and sins when you yourself are tempted to give up faith because of your own sins and flaws?

2. Many of us have at some time or another gone through a crisis of faith and have come out of this experience renewed. If this has happened to you, how did you survive the crisis? What can you do when it appears that members of your family or local church members are in the midst of a similar struggle? What did you learn from your own experience that could help them?

3. What are the challenges to your faith? Are they of an intellectual nature, that is in the area of science versus religion? Or are they related to the environment in which you live and work, or where you find your recreation? Or possibly in the area of relationships? Why is it important to meet these challenges head-on?

4. You don’t need faith to believe in what you can prove; you need faith to believe in what you can’t prove. Why is it important to realize that regardless of all the evidence we have for our beliefs, there will be things we just don’t understand?

Summary: Faith is experience. It has to do with certainty. And with trust. The Scriptures play a role in the awakening, the strengthening, and the sustenance of faith. But faith isn’t just belief; it is a principle that guides how we live our lives before God and others.
Hope

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Luke 21:25, 26; John 5:24; 1 Cor. 15:20–26; 50–55; Revelation 21.

Memory Text: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15, NIV).

The twentieth century began in a mood of great optimism. Since the beginning of the Enlightenment Era, optimism had dominated the way of thinking in the Western world. As human beings, we could not only discover all truth using reason, we also were capable of moral perfection. New inventions, new modes of travel, the dramatic increase of medical knowledge, the introduction of new machines, and the steady advancement of human morals would improve all lives. But after two world wars, the holocaust, the nuclear threat of the cold war, and worldwide terrorism as an ever-present danger, coupled with the realization that humankind is in the process of destroying the environment it needs for human survival, little reason for optimism remains.

However, there is hope, not in what we see or in what we can do but in what God has promised us through Jesus, His Son.

The Week at a Glance: As followers of Christ we can have hope even amid a world that in and of itself offers none. And that’s because this hope is not based on ourselves or on anything we or the world can offer. This hope is based solely on Jesus and His promises to us.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 18.
Hope Amid Our World

Life after September 11, 2001, has greatly changed. People will always remember the images of passenger airliners flying into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. We all realize that it can happen again. There is no way we can be fully protected from people who are prepared to die as they use an airplane, filled with men, women, and children, as a flying bomb or are willing to blow themselves up at a bus stop or in a supermarket. There is fear everywhere, and considering the world we live in, that fear is understandable.

What did Jesus single out as one of the characteristics of the time of the end? Luke 21:25, 26.

“Transgression has almost reached its limit. Confusion fills the world, and a great terror is soon to come upon human beings. The end is very near. God’s people should be preparing for what is to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise.”—Ellen G. White, Child Guidance, p. 555. Imagine what she would say were she alive in our post-9/11 environment!

Ours is a world of war, corruption, greed, and terror. And we know that many unpleasant things yet will occur in the future—in the world, and even in the church. But whatever happens, we have hope through Jesus. There may be anguish among the nations. People may even faint from terror—“apprehensive of what is coming on the world” (Luke 21:26, NIV)—but this will not be the case for those who have been expecting their Lord. None of these horrible things should take us by surprise. After all, the Bible has warned us all through its pages that we should expect toil, suffering, and trouble until Jesus returns. The fact that we see these things should only help confirm for us the truth of God’s Word.

Read Luke 21:28. What hope is Jesus offering us amid all the turmoil and fear of the world?

Why is it so fruitless, and empty, to place our hope in this world or in what this world offers? Why do we tend to do that, even though it should be obvious by now that if we are to have any hope, it must be a hope that transcends whatever this world can give?
The Lesson in Brief

►**Key Text:** 1 Peter 3:15

►**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Though we live in a sin-scarred world, we have hope of eternal life in Jesus.
- **Feel:** Assurance through fulfilled prophecy that God has a plan for our lives.
- **Do:** Live a life full of hope, focusing on the promise of eternity, and inspire others to do the same.

►**Lesson Outline:**

**I. Origin of Hope** *(1 Cor. 15:12–19)*
- A The basis of hope is in the resurrection of Jesus. What does Paul mean when he says, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable”? *(vs. 19).*
- B The promise of eternal life gives us reason to hope. What other elements of Christianity give us hope in an otherwise hopeless world?

- A The gift of prophecy shows us that God has a plan for our lives, despite the seemingly endless madness of the world. From this gift we take hope. How has God shown you His wisdom and understanding through the prophetic gift?
- B Our hope in eternal life is based in the future. In what ways does God mean for us to experience a real hope for our present lives now on earth?

**III. Embodying Hope** *(Ps. 31:24)*

Live your hope focused on the promise of eternity. Let your hope be seen in your attitude. How else can you make your hope shine in the way you live?

►**Summary:** The hope we have in Christ is an integral element of the Christian faith. Without it we are miserable. Let your hope truly affect your outlook on life.
Hope—Here and Now

The Christian hope has to do with the future: Christ’s return; the resurrection of God’s people; a new heaven and a new earth; eternity with God. But salvation is also a present reality. That kind of hope separates us from those without the certainty that life has meaning and that in Christ humanity has an eternal future. The apostle Paul reminds us of the radical change that takes place when we accept Jesus as our Lord. As long as we are separated from Christ, we are “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12, NIV). But all this changes when we are no longer “far away” from God but have been “brought near through the blood of Christ” (vs. 13, NIV).

In what terms did Jesus describe the radical change that takes place when we “hear” His Word and believe in Him? John 5:24.

What kind of life can be ours? John 10:10. What does this mean, and how should we be experiencing this promise?

“Life” is one of the key words of the Gospel of John. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke the concept of life is primarily eternal life. “But in the Gospel of John, life is particularly focused on the present reality of what Jesus does for those who believe in Him. . . .

“There are two keys to attaining life at its best. The first is to know that the source of that life is found only in Christ (John 14:6; 6:33–58; 1 John 5:11, 12). Wherever Jesus is, life is (John 11:25, 26). The second key to attaining life is believing (1:4, 12). It is through continuous relationship with Jesus that individuals appropriate the life that is ever present in Jesus (3:16, 36).”—Jon Paulien, John, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1995), p. 189.

How has Jesus changed your life for the better here and now? What do you have now that you didn’t have before coming to know Jesus and the hope He gives us?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The death and resurrection of Jesus give us as Christians reason to hope in a better life now and for eternity. This hope transcends present circumstances, because it is based not on probabilities but on certainties.

**Just for Teachers:** In this week’s lesson, we discuss and explore the role of hope in the Christian life.

Some time ago, the famous American humorist and poet Dorothy Parker was working on a movie script for producer Samuel Goldwyn, who requested that she give it a happy ending. Parker responded, “‘I know this will come as a shock to you, Mr. [Sam] Goldwyn, but in all history, which has held billions and billions of human beings, not a single one ever had a happy ending.’” —http://www.workinghumor.com/quotes/dorothy_parker.shtml.

One need look no further than the evening news to confirm just how much truth Parker’s quip holds. The stock market falls. Friends or spouses leave. And in the long run, as one bumper sticker pessimistically reminds us, we’ll all be dead.

But as Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we know that the world we see around us is not the only world we have to look forward to. In the real long run, we have the hope of eternal life.

**Discuss With the Class:** Arguably, anyone who wakes up every day has hope in something, whether he or she knows it or not. What are some of the things in which people place their hope other than God? Why are these replacements inadequate?

**Consider This:** Too often we may find ourselves turning to God as a last resort when all else fails. What can we do to make God our hope in all things instead of turning to Him as a last resort?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** We can take one of two possible attitudes toward the future: hope or fear. Emphasize that, as Christians, we have reason for hope in a world where fear often seems to be the dominant—and reasonable—attitude.

CONTINUED
Hope Beyond the Grave

Death comes to all of us (unless we are alive at the moment of Christ’s return). All of us have lost loved ones in death. We are daily confronted with the grim reality of death. We see it as we pass cemeteries, see hearses, or switch on the television news. But even worse, we face it up close as we say our final goodbye to a friend or relative. Death is our archenemy, but it is one that will be defeated.

What is the glorious truth about the reality of death? 1 Cor. 15:20–26, 50–55, 1 Pet. 1:3.

How does the certainty of the resurrection divide humanity? 1 Thess. 4:14.

The apostle Paul, in his famous chapter about the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15), stresses that the hope of the resurrection is an essential component of our total faith experience (vss. 12–19). If there is no resurrection, our faith is empty.

Of course, there are many aspects of the physical resurrection that we do not understand. But of one thing we can be sure: Our “resurrection” does not depend on the safekeeping of the present material substances of our bodies. It depends on the power of our Creator to safeguard our identity and to re-create us at a given moment with a new (perfect) body that will never need any cosmetic surgery or antiaging pills.

We have no idea how God is going to perform this miracle. But the God who could create life here to begin with certainly has the power to re-create the earth and fill it with the people whose identities have been safeguarded in the divine memory. Our hope is not based on anything we can verify with our intellect or our senses. The resurrection involves a realm of existence far beyond anywhere science can take us. But it is based on the fact that Christ has conquered death. As a result, the death of the believer is but a temporary “sleep” from which he or she will be raised and given eternal life.

Even with this great hope, the greatest any of us could have, we still hate death, we still fear it, and we still flee from it. This is only natural (for death is unnatural). At the same time, what can we do to nourish and strengthen our confidence in the great promise that we have regarding eternal life, a promise that alone can lessen our fear of death now?
Bible Commentary

Overview: Hope is a defining characteristic of people with faith. We have hope because our faith informs us that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, an infinitely good and powerful God is in control of the circumstances of our lives.

I. Hope and Fear (Review with your class Luke 21:25, 26, 28.)

According to Luke 21:26, the predominant reaction of people living on planet Earth in the end times will not be hope but fear. Given the list of natural disasters and strange happenings presented in the previous texts, this reaction can’t be said to be unreasonable. If one doesn’t know that such things are signs of something better to come, the signs appear to indicate that much worse things will come instead. It is only because of hope-inspiring faith that we can entertain the possibility of standing up and raising our heads because our redemption is drawing near (vs. 28).

Again, the skeptics of this world lay odds on the belief that there are no happy endings, that in the long run we’re all going to end up dead. But as Christians, we know that we have a better offer for the future.

Consider This: Based on the verses above, why are the end times a cause for hope, not fear?

II. Faith Without Hope (Review with your class Ephesians 2:12, 13.)

Paul refers to his readers as being “without hope” (NIV) before they come to Christ. It is worth noting that these people were not atheists in the regular sense of the word. Most people in the ancient world believed in some god or gods. They had a religion. But it was a religion in which hope for the future, or even a better present, did not exist. Theirs was literally a faith without hope. The traditional Greek view was that the shades, or spirits, of the dead resided in Hades—not hell exactly, but a dark, dreary, unpleasant place—until they just faded out. Philosophers and others rejected this belief or considered alternatives. Plato and Pythagoras, for example, believed in the immortality of the soul. They hinted at reincarnation, or survival, in another realm, even though no one could be certain of its existence.

As for improvement of the state of the world at large, the golden age—
Eternal Hope

How can finite beings ever understand what it is to be infinite? How can we, as mortals—most of whom will not live beyond 80 or 90 years—ever understand what it is to be immortal and live forever? Eternal life is not simply a continuation of our present life. That would in many ways more resemble “hell” than “heaven.” Eternal life has an altogether different quality. While we are still in our present mortal state, we will have to be content with a glimpse of what the future holds: We see but “a poor reflection” and “know [only] in part” (1 Cor. 13:12, NIV).

In what ways will eternal life differ from our present existence? 1 Cor. 15:42, 43, 52; Revelation 21. What things will be similar?

We are left with lots of questions as we contemplate the life that awaits us, questions that will never be fully answered here and now. But we can learn from Jesus’ own resurrection. It is important to note that the Christ who was raised from the dead was the same Person as the One who a few days earlier died on the cross. He arose with a “glorified” body that was no longer subject to the laws of nature in the way our present mortal bodies are. Yet at the same time, He possessed a continuity with the “human form” that He had prior to His death and resurrection. He was the same Person, recognizable by His outward appearance, His voice, and His gestures. That gives us good reason to conclude that in our new “glorious bodies” we will be recognized by those we knew in this life and who will enjoy the life in the beyond with us.

And yet, we can also experience some of that eternal life now. Paul explains to us (Rom. 8:10) that the Spirit will enter the person who has turned to Christ. The believer, therefore, is already touched by the eternal life that will become a full reality in the world to come. The presence of the Spirit is the pledge of our eternal salvation (Eph. 1:13, 14).

Try to imagine what life will be like in a new heaven, a new earth, with new bodies. Let your imagination soar; write out a paragraph based on what we find in the Bible, about what this new life will be like. How foolish to throw it all away for anything that this life offers us.
as the poet Hesiod suggested—was in the past and most likely wasn’t coming back.

Only the Jews and the Zoroastrians (the Magi of Luke 2 could have been Zoroastrians) foresaw a better world to come. And only the Christians could point to concrete evidence of such a future world in the form of Christ and His resurrection. (See *The Interpreter’s Bible* [Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press], vol. 10, pp. 652, 653.)

**Consider This:** What can you do to reach people who are nominally “religious” but are without the hope that Christ provides us?

### III. Eternity
*(Review with your class 1 Corinthians 15:42, 43, 52; Revelation 21.)*

As far as we know, humankind is the only species that is aware of his or her own impending death, and no one ever likes it. We want eternity, even if we aren’t quite sure what it is.

But if we really thought about it, few of us would want to continue to live infinitely long with our current imperfect and aging bodies, the tiresome natural laws of gravity and thermodynamics, and the boring and repulsive thoughts continually cycling their way through our befogged brains.

Fortunately, God has promised us a life not only everlasting but also qualitatively different from what we currently have. In 1 Corinthians 15:44, Paul contrasts our present physical body with the glorious spiritual body God has waiting for us. What is it like? We don’t know. But whatever it is, we can be certain that it is worth hoping and waiting for.

**Consider This:** Whatever physical or mental challenges you may have, God offers you a fresh, clean start and the promise of a better life with Him, now and in the future. How does that assurance make you feel?

## STEP 3—Practice

**Just for Teachers:** Encourage your students to use the following questions to think about the Christian hope as it relates to their own lives and to the world at large.

**Thought Question:**

A large part of the hope we have in Christ is the knowledge of the even-
Christ Our Hope

Long before Christ entered this world, His coming had been predicted. True to those promises, He did indeed come. Manifold are the promises that He will come a second time. He said so Himself: “‘I will come back!’” On the final page of the Bible this promise is repeated: “‘Yes, I am coming soon’” (Rev. 22:20, NIV). This is the corporate hope of Christian believers. It is “the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13, NIV).

**In** what sense does the hope of the Christian culminate in the second coming of Jesus? (Rev. 22:7, 10–12, 20). Why are these promises so crucial to us?

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**How** does the time aspect mentioned in 2 Peter 3:8, 9 impact our understanding of the term *soon* in connection with the Second Coming?

The ultimate solution for the sin problem and all the misery sin has caused is not found in anything humanity can invent or arrange but in the intervention of heaven through our Lord Jesus Christ. Our hope is not in human technology, clever politicians, or social and moral progress. These things never can solve the problem of death. And although it is important to know what will precede and accompany the coming of the Lord, it is even more important that we are sure of the One we expect. Our Lord will come soon. “It is just a matter of time, that’s all. And no one can change this fact. No tyrant can reach up and grab the world from His grasp. It remains firmly and forever in the hands of the Crucified One. None can undo Calvary anymore than they can undo their birth. . . . Since the cross, we live in time filled by the victory of Calvary—time determined by that goal. Hence, whether they know it or not, humanity does not merely advance toward a hoped-for goal in some distant day, with the possibility that it may never come. No! Humanity moves triumphantly from a goal Jesus has already reached.”—Norman Gulley, *Christ Is Coming* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1998), p. 540.

A philosopher named Martin Heidegger once said that “only a god can save us.” Whatever he himself might have meant by that idea, why is it so true? Where are you placing your hope? If it’s in anything but the true God, why is this hope a false one?
tual triumph over our enemy, death. What would we say to those who insist that death is an inescapable part of life and nature (evolutionists, for example) or that death is not real and that no one really dies (as maintained by most other spiritual or religious communities)?

Application Questions:
What is our role in making our present world better, given that our hope is in the next one? How should we work for peace, a cleaner environment, and so on? Or do such attempts show a lack of faith? Explain why you answer the way you do and discuss, as a class, the reasons for your differences.

STEP 4—Apply

Just for Teachers: This week we have learned that God provides us with a sense of hope that enables us to face the struggles of each day, as well as anything the future might bring. The following activity is intended to get your students to articulate this hope in their own words and to bring it into their minds daily.

• Even though our world is in many ways a tragic and wounding place, God has left us with many examples of His loving presence. Have your students list the things in their lives or in the world at large that convince them that God is still in control and is still trying to communicate hope to those who look for it.
• There are at least two ways you can do the previous exercise with your class: (1) have each student list items on an individual sheet of paper or (2) use a “brainstorming” format in which the students mention the items out loud, and the instructor writes them on a chalkboard or similar media.

Consider This: What do your answers tell you about the importance of hope? How do your examples help renew your hope and trust in Jesus? How can you share this hope with others you encounter in the coming week?
Further Study: Norman Gulley’s book *Christ Is Coming* is probably the most complete Adventist book in recent times about last-day events and the second coming of Christ. You may want to scan the book and read a few chapters, in particular the chapter titled “The Greatest Rescue of All Time” (pp. 538–552). For the classic description of the moment when our hope will be fulfilled, see Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (in particular, pp. 662–678).

Try to commit the following majestic words to memory: “The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

Discussion Questions:

1. In class, read your depictions of what you envision eternal life in a new earth will be like. Compare and discuss what was presented.

2. How do you respond to those who say that this hope Christians have of another existence causes them not to care deeply enough about the woes of this existence?

3. How can you remain hopeful, even when everything seems to go against you?

4. How do we experience, here and now, some of the hope that we have in Christ? How should lives differ now because of this hope? What can we do, in a real and visible way, to show others the immediate fruit and benefits of being a follower of the living God?

Summary: Hope is a vital component of the Christian life. It is firmly based on what Christ accomplished on the cross. The Christian’s hope has to do with the here and now, for the kingdom that is to come is, in principle, already present in the believer. Yet, the full realization of the blessed hope is future. We know that the world is still affected by the results of Satan’s rebellion, but the outcome is secure: Our Lord reigns, and His eternal kingdom will soon be realized in all its glory. Our hope is to be citizens of that kingdom forever.
LESSON 4  *April 18–24

Life

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Gen. 2:7; Ps. 139:13, 14; John 1:1–3; 3: 10:10; 2 Cor. 5:17; Phil. 2:1–5.

Memory Text: “‘I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full’” (John 10:10, NIV).

People nowadays live much longer than in previous generations, especially people in the so-called developed world. And that’s, of course, good. Yet, it’s one thing to live a long time, but what about the quality of life itself? Sometimes doctors perform all kinds of heroic actions to artificially keep a person alive even if the person has very little, if any, quality of life left.

But quality of life is not restricted to an acceptable level of physical well-being; it has a wider application. What do we do with the years that we have been given? Do we live with a purpose and in harmony with others? Do we live in satisfying relationships with fellow human beings and, most of all, with our Creator? These are important questions for all who have been given the gift of life.

The Week at a Glance: Life is a gift from God only. Now that we have this life, what does it mean for us? How are we to live it? Because it’s a gift, we are under a divine obligation to take care of our lives, both physically and spiritually. At the same time, our belief in Jesus brings us into the community of other believers, and we become part of a new family, both in heaven and on earth, all of which should impact the quality of life we have here now.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 25.
The Gift of Physical Life

How did life originate? Some people point to a godless evolutionary unfolding of human existence. Others argue for a divine role in the slow process of millions of years during which “simple” forms of life somehow made their appearance and, subsequently, developed into more complex organisms, including humans. This theory, however, creates more questions than it answers (and besides, nothing in the Bible even hints that God used evolution to create humanity). Meanwhile, several renowned scholars have in recent years convincingly argued that this theory is in a deep crisis. But even the staunchest supporters of evolutionary thinking must admit that life remains as great a mystery as ever.

At the same time, those who believe in God as the Creator of this world and of all the universe do not have all the answers either. But the creationist approach is far more logical and coherent than the improbable theory that human life resulted from chance.


What is true for the mystery of life in general is also true for each human life. Although we possess a lot of scientific knowledge about the processes involved in the conception and growth of human life, each new parent who holds a newborn child in his or her arms knows intuitively that this new life is nothing less than a miracle. It is a fundamental Christian conviction that life—and human life in a very special sense—is sacred.

In what words does David describe the miracle of human life and the magnificent design of the human body? Ps. 139:13, 14.

Who does not know the words of the well-known song that says God has “the whole world in His hands”? This applies to the universe and to our entire planet. But also to each one of us individually; whoever we are and wherever we are, God holds us in His hands. We owe our physical life to Him, all of it—from beginning to end.

What difference does it make that God is the Creator of all life, including our own? How should our stance on the origin of life impact our views about things such as the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: John 10:10

The Student Will:

Know: That life comes from God and God alone.
Feel: The transformation that occurs when Christ enters your life.
Do: Allow His presence to shape your choices daily.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Gift of Life (John 1:1–3)

A God is the Source of life for everything on earth. Does this amazing gift obligate us to respond in any specific ways? Why or why not?

B God has given us many guidelines for taking care of our bodies: dietary recommendations, as well as broader lifestyle instruction. What do these guidelines say about the value God places on human life?

II. An Abundant Life (2 Cor. 5:17)

A Just as God gave us life in the beginning, we are born again into a new life in Christ. What has changed in your life as a result of your relationship with Jesus? Explain.

B In the memory text for this week, Jesus says He came that we may have life more abundantly. How has He made your life more fulfilling?

III. A New Life in Christ (2 Pet. 3:18)

With Christ in our lives, we can live with purpose and meaning. Second Peter urges us to grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus. In what tangible ways can you strive to do that every day?

Summary: Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be reborn (John 3:1–21). Do all you can to start each day reborn in Christ.
Physical Education

If we owe our existence to our Creator, it stands to reason that we also owe it to Him to be careful with what He has entrusted to us. There is ample evidence in the Bible that God is interested in our physical well-being. He manifested His care for the people of Israel time and again. He gave His people numerous instructions about healthful eating and sanitation. He gave them manna in the wilderness. He looked after Elijah when there was famine in the land. These are just a few of many examples of God’s care for our physical well-being.

This truth becomes even clearer in the ministry of our Lord. Even a cursory reading of the Gospels leaves us in no doubt that Jesus’ understanding of religion was very much practice-oriented.

In what ways did Jesus show interest in His own physical well-being and that of the people around Him? Take a look at the following passages and analyze what implications they have for us today.

- healing (Mark 5)
- rest (Mark 6:30–32)
- feeding (Mark 6:33–43; esp. vs. 34)
- Sabbath (Luke 4:16)

In what other areas did Jesus show His concern for the physical well-being of people?

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The way we treat our body has everything to do with stewardship. Whether our material possessions, our time, our talents, or our body—it is all God’s property, and thus, we are required as faithful stewards to look after these gifts. But care for our body also is intimately related to the biblical view of the human person. Many Christians believe that we consist of an immortal soul that inhabits a mortal shell of flesh and blood. The Bible, however, depicts humanity as a unity of body, soul, and spirit, which cannot be separated. Our religion, therefore, does not concern just an immortal “something” but our entire being. It impacts all aspects of our existence.

While the Bible indicates that some foods are unsuitable for human consumption (see, for example, Leviticus 11), the kingdom is not to be reduced to a question of what we eat and drink (see Rom. 14:17). How do we strike the right balance, not just in diet but in all areas of healthy living?
TEACHERS COMMENTS

Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God gives us not only life but a way of life. He created us and redeemed us. As such, our lives are not our own. We are responsible to God for the uses to which we put the life He gives to us.

Just for Teachers: In this week’s lesson, we discuss and explore the meaning of life itself as a gift from God.

The age-old question What is the meaning of life? has sparked endless debate and conjecture from the beginning of time. Some scientists say the answer is survival of the species. Atheist Richard Dawkins, who wrote The Selfish Gene (1976) proposes that life is just the way genes choose to replicate themselves. Other answers to the meaning of life range from the sublime to the absurd: enlightenment, individual success, power, pleasure, and even the number 42 (as Douglas Adams humorously proposes in The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy). Still other minds question whether the concept of “the meaning of life” itself has meaning.

When we ask how life came into being, ideas tend to be clearer and more distinct but still mutually contradictory and often full of gaps. Evolutionists, such as Dawkins, say evolution is as indisputable as gravity, but critics of evolution still persist in casting doubt on it. Theorists closer to the fringe of acceptable belief suggest that life on earth was seeded by extraterrestrials, but they don’t generally explain where the extraterrestrials came from. Advocates of intelligent design say there must be an Intelligent Designer, but in the current legal climate (at least in America), their lawyers won’t let them say who that is.

As Christians we turn to the Bible, where we find clear, distinct, and coherent answers to both these questions. God created us to love and serve Him and to be loved and served by Him. We don’t have all the answers to the mysteries of life, but His love for us is a very good start.

Discuss With the Class: The Bible says that Christ is the Alpha and Omega—the Beginning and End—of life and time (Rev. 1:11). What does this belief mean in our individual lives and for life itself?

Consider This: How do you demonstrate that the focus of your life is to love and serve God?
Spiritual Life

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

What is your understanding of what that text means? How are we a “new creature” in Jesus?

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All inhabitants of this earth, whether they ever realize it or not, are God’s by birth. Yet, the life we all share in this world, as we all know, is very temporary. Sin has brought decay and death not only to every human being but to all life on the planet. Nothing is immune to the crushing devastation caused by sin.

The good news, however, is that we have a choice as to whether this life is all we have or whether we will accept the wonderful gift of eternal life.

This eternal life, however, demands a turning around, a conversion. The Bible uses several metaphors to describe this crucial experience. The most graphic is that of a new birth, the image used to depict the turning point at which a person accepts the gift of eternal life in Christ. When this happens, the “old person” dies, and a “new person” is born.

Nowhere in the Bible is the need for this new birth described with greater clarity than in John 3. Read the section (vss. 1–21) that relates Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus. What does it tell us about the nature of this new birth? What is your own understanding of the new birth?

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The new life of the follower of Jesus, who has turned around from a life of self-service to a life of commitment to the kingdom, will be characterized by growth. The newly born spiritual person needs to feed on the right kind of spiritual food and must gradually mature. The apostle Peter encourages us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18, NIV).

If someone were to ask you, “Have you been born-again?” what would you reply? What does your answer say to you about your walk with Jesus?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The following passages convey the fact that God is concerned and involved in all aspects of our lives and that we, in turn, should be always mindful of His presence in all that we do.

Bible Commentary

Overview: The Bible regards God’s Creatorship as self-evident. God’s greatness and goodness are proven by the things He has made and the way He has made them. The evidence includes our own bodies. As such, our own existence should serve—the Bible suggests—to remind us of God, His love for us, and His plans for our destiny.

I. Abundant Life (Review with your class John 10:10.)

Ever wonder why God created light before He created a light source? The sun doesn’t show up until day four of Creation week, nearly a hundred hours after light has been shining without it. Perhaps God wanted us to remember that before there was anything else, He—the Light of the world—was already there. His power, love, goodness, and the fullness of His life are underived; all stem from Him and from His very nature as God.

God has given us the fullness of His life through His Son. When Jesus says that He has come so that we “‘may have life, and have it to the full’” (John 10:10, NIV), He is referring not just to physical life in its various aspects but to spiritual and eternal life, as well. The Gospel of John is quite emphatic from the beginning that Christ is the Source of that life (John 1:3, 4). John goes on to say that this Life is the “light of all people” (vs. 4, NRSV). Here John equates life with light, God’s first creation, suggesting that life shares the qualities of light. Even now we use it to symbolize wisdom and understanding, revelation and inspiration.

Consider This: How has the Lord of light revealed Himself to you in the events and in the course of your life?

II. Intricately Wrought in the Depths of the Earth (Review with your class Psalm 139:13, 14.)
Social Life

Humans are, by nature, social beings. Of course, there are moments we like to be alone. We need private time for prayer and contemplation. Some need more private space and private time than do others. But we tend to feel sorry for people who are always alone, and particularly for those who do not have sufficient social skills to establish bonds of friendship and who consistently fail to enter into meaningful relationships.

The Bible pictures people as parts of various social networks. The family, friendship, ethnicity, community, and church are dominant themes. The Bible points to Jesus’ Father as the Father of all humankind, which means we all are brothers and sisters in a very real sense *(Acts 17:26)*. Living in relationships is the essence of human life. When Adam was created, God immediately created a partner for him. Family life was a divinely devised model for human happiness. The Bible repeatedly underlines the tremendous value of genuine friendship and the blessings of belonging to a wider community.

**What is the key to successfully managing of our social relationships?**

**How well do you manifest these principles?** *Phil. 2:1–5.*

The various aspects of our Christian life are blended in our membership to the body of Christ: the church. The church is more than a place where like-minded people meet and enjoy fellowship. Nonetheless, for many the church is indeed the focal point of their social life. This has both positive and negative aspects. Without Christian friends we have few, if any, role models. Associating with others who also serve God and also have adopted a biblical lifestyle will help us to remain faithful and to grow in our Christian relationship. But if we have no friends outside the circle of fellow believers, we will have few opportunities for witnessing. In many parts of the world friendship evangelism is the most successful method of church growth.

Studies have shown that most new Adventists lose virtually all their non-Adventist friends within seven years. Take a look at yourself. Is this the pattern you see? What are the reasons? Why is it worth investing time and energy to build friendships with non-Adventists, or even with non-Christians?
According to The Interpreter’s Bible, some scholars propose that Psalm 139:15 is possibly “a reflection of the idea that the human fetus was made by God elsewhere before being introduced into the womb” (vol. 4, p. 716). It is easy to get caught up in such idle speculation and overlook the larger purpose of the psalm: to serve as a testimony to God’s omniscience. God was aware of us and had plans for us even before the physical elements of our existence had come together in the unique combinations that make us who we are.

We also can consider that God’s awareness of us is a poetic recognition of the fact that our “physicality” and “spirituality” are intertwined. Thus, we are not spirits that come down from some mysterious realm and plant ourselves in physical bodies. Our physical bodies are us, and we need to respect them as God’s house.

**Consider This:** Because God created us as physical beings with bodies, what should our attitude be toward our bodies, and how should we display this attitude in all that we do?

### III. Life Is With People *(Review with your class Philippians 2:1–5.)*

The harmony and order that still can be seen in life, existence, and the natural world point to God as their Originator. In the same way, the body of believers known as the church—God’s new creation—also should display the harmony that God intended among the beings He created. How do we display this harmony? The answer is simple. Put aside the self-seeking and self-promotion that the world tells us are necessary for survival. Love others more than self and seek to do them good. Embrace the selfless life of Christ as your own.

**Consider This:** Churches are very similar to families in that members may have relatively little in common with other members. List the ways in which we can ease the tensions that inevitably arise. How can we promote harmonious relations with one another?

**STEP 3—Practice**

**Just for Teachers:** Encourage your students to use the following
Fullness of Life

John 10:10 records Jesus’ famous statement that He has come to give us life “to the full” (NIV). Other Bible translations speak of “abundant life.”

Here is a partial list of important components of this “full” life. Try to add other components to that list and find scriptural support for these various aspects:

1. It is a life full of possibilities.
2. It is a life with a purpose.
3. It is a life of inner peace.
4. It is a life with a mission.

As we grow in our Christian life, we become more and more convinced that Christ does indeed offer us life “to the full.” We often have, however, a hard time explaining this to those who have not committed themselves to Christ. For them the Christian life appears to be rather boring. They dislike the fact that it seems to bring all kinds of restrictions. But Christians have learned that not all experiences one might have actually make our lives richer. Many things we might do carry a minus sign rather than a plus sign and contribute to an inner emptiness rather than a fullness of life.

**What** are some kinds of experiences we’re all better off without, and why?

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“Life to the full” is not a combination of good health, good looks, satisfactory education, and a nice income. And although strong, loving relationships are certainly part of it, there is considerably more than these things. Life “to the full” is the kind of life that has meaning. It is a life that issues inner peace. Its happiness does not depend primarily on external, material circumstances. It is a life that is connected to the Source of life and will, therefore, be eternal.

Why does all this talk of an “abundant life” sound pleasing? What about those who seem to have an “abundant life” but don’t know Jesus and don’t seem to have the slightest interest in knowing Him? How do we understand this phenomenon, especially when we all know Christians who are suffering terribly now? See 2 Cor. 4:18.
questions to think about God in Christ as the Source of life and as something that directs our attention to God.

Thought Questions:
1. Most people have at least a passive belief in the existence of a Creator God. Why is it important to believe in the young-earth creationist account, rather than, say, theistic evolutionism?

2. Many or most of Jesus’ miracles deal with healing, which indicated that both He and His hearers viewed healing as a holy act. What does this idea suggest for us about the importance of our physical well-being to God?

Application Question:
As Seventh-day Adventists, we know that God intends us to be healthy. Vibrant health is one aspect of the abundant life He offers. Sadly, the health message often is perceived as a rigid set of restrictions, or worse, as justification for those who follow it to consider themselves superior to others who don’t. How can we present the health message in such a way that people understand that God intends it for our happiness and well-being?

STEP 4—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** This week we have learned that God gives us not only life but also a way of life. Use the following activity to encourage your students to explore and discover what this way of life means to them.

- Psalm 139:13, 14 states that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” And it’s true; virtually any of our organs is a marvel of design and engineering. The possibility of any of them emerging by chance is extremely remote. Examine one of these organs or systems with your class. The eye is a popular example (here is a site with reproducible material on the topic: http://www.bibleprobe.com/humaneye.htm).

- One of the purposes of our lives is to be a blessing to others, particularly in our own community. Do you know someone in your church or in your community experiencing difficulty performing basic functions in his or her life? What exactly are the needs of this person, and how can you help? Example: doing something for the house or yard of an elderly or ill person; making bag lunches to give to the homeless. What other examples can you think of? Schedule a time as a class to help this person or persons.
Further Study: Ellen G. White’s famous book *Steps to Christ* focuses on our life in Christ. If, in the context of this week’s lesson, one has to choose one particular chapter, one might well go to chapter 8: “Growing Up Into Christ” (pp. 67–76). “A life in Christ is a life of restfulness. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there should be an abiding, peaceful trust. Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. Your weakness is united to His strength, your ignorance to His wisdom, your frailty to His enduring might. So you are not to look to yourself, not to let the mind dwell upon self, but look to Christ. Let the mind dwell upon His love, upon the beauty, the perfection, of His character.”—Page 70.

Discussion Questions:

1. When people are severely disabled or terminally ill, the question often asked is whether their life still has “quality.” Should the quality of life be defined primarily in physical terms, or are other aspects also important, or possibly even more essential? How, too, does our understanding of the origin of life influence our answer?

2. For many people the looming specter of death robs life of all meaning and purpose. After all, if sooner or later we’ll all be dead and every memory of us forgotten, what can this life possibly mean? How has Jesus answered that question for us and eliminated this concern?

3. What aspects of your contemporary culture rob life of its full meaning? That is, what kind of ideals and moral values are being promoted that reduce life to something less than it should be? How can we as Adventist Christians respond to these challenges?

4. In what ways can our health message and principles of better living play into the promise of an “abundant life”? Might we be shortchanging ourselves on this promise?

Summary: This week’s lesson focused on the “full” or “abundant” life found in Jesus Christ. It is a life lived in a responsible way, caring for our physical life as best we can. It is also a life lived in relationships, for God designed humans to live in communion with others. Most of all, it is a life totally renewed in Jesus, a life that will be changed and growing in God’s grace.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Exod. 7:1–6, Ps. 19:1–4, Rom. 1:18–20, 2 Tim. 3:14–16, Heb. 1:1–3.

Memory Text: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (Hebrews 1:1, 2, NIV).

For some people, God is a distant power who at a remote moment in the past set the world in motion but no longer interferes with what happens here. That, of course, is not the God portrayed in the Bible, who instead is consistently shown to be a loving Father, the Creator who continues to take an intimate interest in His creatures. He is the Covenant God, and He seeks to establish a bond between Himself and the people made in His image.

This God is a great Communicator. Human words cannot adequately explain who and what God is, but the fact that He constantly is referred to as speaking to His people is utterly significant.

As soon as Adam was created, God spoke to Him. Immediately after the first human inhabitant of this world had sinned, God called to him, Adam, “‘where are you?’” (Gen. 3:9, NIV). And ever since, God has spoken to humankind in various ways (Heb. 1:1). Even on the final page of the Bible we find confirmation of this in the divine appeal, “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’” (Rev. 22:17, NIV). This week we’ll look at various ways He speaks to us today.

The Week at a Glance: The God who spoke the world into existence speaks to all who are willing to listen.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 2.
God Reveals Himself Through Nature

Read Psalm 19:1–4 and Romans 1:18–20. These are the two most cited texts when the concept of God’s revelation through nature is under discussion. Summarize in your own words what these two passages teach us.

“God has surrounded us with nature’s beautiful scenery to attract and interest the mind. It is His design that we should associate the glories of nature with His character. If we faithfully study the book of nature, we shall find it a fruitful source for contemplating the infinite love and power of God.”—Ellen G. White, The Adventist Home, p. 144. Those who believe in the Bible will be confirmed in their convictions that when they look at the starlit sky or see the majestic trees in the forests and the beauty of the setting sun behind snow-covered mountaintops, they are seeing the works of a loving and powerful Creator. When they see an eagle in flight, admire a tulip, or marvel about the intricacies of the human body, they see evidences of God’s invisible qualities and agree that nature indeed declares the glory of God.

But the Bible passages take us a step further. They also suggest that the nonbeliever, by looking at nature, will somehow catch a glimpse of a divine Power that designed and made all that is. In today’s world many close their eyes to this aspect. They have imbibed evolutionary thinking and want to explain all that exists in terms of chance and necessity. But, increasingly, scholars are admitting that there is so much evidence of intelligent design that this can be ignored only by those who stubbornly close their eyes to it.

Ask yourself a simple question: What is the more logical and reasonable explanation for the beauty and complexity of life: pure chance or a purposeful and planned-out creation? Defend your answer.

Read Psalm 19:1–4 and Romans 1:18–20 again. To what extent is God revealed in nature? At the same time, what things about God does nature not tell us? However revealing nature is, what else do we know about God that we can’t find by looking at the glories of creation?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Hebrews 1:1, 2

The Student Will:

Know: That God speaks to all who are willing to listen.
Feel: The many ways God communicates with you.
Do: Become receptive to the Spirit’s voice by spending time with God.

Lesson Outline:

I. God Speaks (1 Sam. 3:1–10)

This text is just one example of God’s willingness to speak to us directly. In this case, God calls out to Samuel four times before he responds. What does this say about God’s desire to communicate with us?

II. Man Listens (Heb. 1:1–3)

A God speaks to us in a variety of ways. We can see His glory through nature, His knowledge in prophecy, and His love through Jesus. How does God speak to you personally?

B The Bible often is referred to as God’s letter to us. How can we make Scripture more relevant in this modern world?

III. God and Man Commune (John 5:36–40)

A Jesus says that the only way to the Father is through Him (Matt. 11:27). No matter how much you study the Word or understand prophecy, without Jesus, you can’t know God the Father. How can you invest your time this week communing with God?

B In what ways can you listen to God’s leading and let yourself be more receptive to what He has to say?

Summary: God loves us so much that He wants to have an ongoing dialogue with us. He speaks to us through many means, the most powerful of which is Jesus.
God Speaks Through Our Conscience

“Conscience” is sometimes defined as the faculty, or inward principle, that helps us decide between right and wrong. Even those who do not believe in God usually possess some insight into what is morally acceptable and what must be rejected (Rom. 2:14, 15). The Christian believes that God is the supreme Lawgiver and that He has placed in humanity a conscience, even though sin has blunted this God-given tool for moral decision-making. In most Bible translations we do not find the word conscience in the Old Testament, though it occurs numerous times in the New Testament. But whether or not the term is used, the concept is present throughout Scripture.

Name a few stories in which we can see the impact of conscience on the lives of people. (See, for instance, Gen. 42:18–23, Daniel 5, Matt. 27:3–5, John 8:1–9.)

Important though our conscience is, it is not always totally trustworthy. We notice that people in good conscience often come to very diverse conclusions about what to do in particular circumstances. The apostle Paul was aware of this, as his remarkable statement in 1 Corinthians 4:4 shows: “My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me” (NIV). The same apostle also warns that we can resist the pull of our conscience. In fact, some people appear to have seared their consciences with a hot iron (1 Tim. 4:2) or have corrupted them (Titus 1:15). On the other hand, there are ways of sharpening one’s conscience. Being in tune with God by regularly reading His Word and by frequently communicating with Him in prayer will make us more sensitive to the voice of the Spirit, who can speak to us through our conscience.

How do you arrive at important moral decisions? Do you listen to your conscience? How can you be sure that your small, inner voice is not overruled by other voices in and around you? How can you know whether or not you can trust your conscience? When was the last time you let your conscience be your guide and ended up making a wrong moral decision? What did you learn from that experience that could help you not to repeat it?
**Learning Cycle**

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God reveals Himself and His plan for our lives through a number of sources, including nature, the conscience, His prophets, the Bible, and, most of all, Jesus.

Sugar’s rather villainous reputation is enough to leave a sour aftertaste in the mouth of someone with the biggest sweet tooth. There’s no denying that when sugar occurs naturally in nutritious foods, such as honey and papayas, it is, of course, beneficial. But it’s no secret that too much sugar can have detrimental effects on the body.

However little or much of it we may use, we all crave sugar, and there’s just no denying it makes certain foods taste better. We know that sugar is present in candy or cake, but did you know that it also can be a “hidden” ingredient in soups and sauces, ketchup, and even some meats? When sugar is included in foods in which you might not expect to find it, sugar’s sweetness often is disguised by less sugary names, such as lactose, maltodextrin, high fructose corn syrup, sorbitol, and xylitol.

Like sugar, a knowledge of God and His will also can be obtained through abundant sources. God reveals Himself to us through nature, our conscience, His prophets, the Bible, and, ultimately, through Jesus Christ. One has only to avail oneself of these sources in order to “taste and see that the Lord is good,” as the psalmist says (Ps. 34:8). The difference, however, is that giving in to the soul’s craving for a knowledge of God—unlike too much sugar—actually is good for you.

**Consider This:** When you want something sweet, what do you usually crave? Mangoes? Coconut custard pie? Baklava? Chocolate cherry chunk ice cream? Granted, everyone’s taste buds crave something different, and we might find ourselves reaching for chocolate instead of an apple more often than we’d care to admit, but our cravings for sweet foods actually may have something beneficial to teach us about our cravings for spiritual things. Too often we may fill this “God hunger,” or craving for spiritual things, with other kinds of stimuli that do not feed or satisfy our soul. How can the different ways that God reveals Himself to us offer the true nourishment and sustenance the soul needs most?
God Speaks Through Prophets

Many people have a very restricted view of the gift of prophecy. Prophecy is mainly seen in terms of predictions, and the prophets they are aware of are those who have given their names to a number of books in the Bible. The facts are different. God used prophets on a much wider scale than one would think. And prophecy is not only about predictions. It stands for much more.

**How does the relationship between Moses and his brother Aaron illustrate the key meaning of the word prophet?** Exod. 7:1–6.

The passage of Exodus 7:1–6 highlights the true work of a prophet. Moses, who himself is referred to as a great prophet (Deut. 34:10–12), was assisted by his brother, who served as his spokesperson. “Moses is like God to Aaron, who is like a prophet to Pharaoh. The clear idea is that prophets don’t manufacture their own speeches but only pass on what they have heard from God.”—Jon Dybdahl, Exodus, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), p. 80.

A prophet is a man or a woman who speaks on behalf of God. Those words have authority because the message comes from God, even though the prophet may choose his or her own words to convey that message. God used this manner of communicating with His people quite extensively, as Amos underlined when he stated, “The Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7, NIV).

**What does Scripture say about the continuation of the gift of prophecy beyond Old Testament times?** Look at the following sample of the New Testament evidence. What do you conclude?

2. The abiding gift (1 Cor. 12:28, 14:1–5)
3. False prophets (2 Pet. 2:1, Rev. 2:20)
4. A characteristic of the remnant church (Rev. 12:17, 19:10)

What has been the impact of the writings of Ellen G. White (who had the gift of prophecy) upon your own life? How has God spoken to you through her ministry? In what ways could you better avail yourself of the blessings of this gift?
**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

I. **Seeing Is Believing** *(Review Psalm 19:1–4 and Romans 1:18–20 with your class.)*

**Consider This:** How is God revealed in nature?

“The invisible things of God may be clearly perceived by the mind with the help of the created works of nature. Even though blighted by sin, the ‘things that are made’ testify that One of infinite power created this earth. All around us we see abundant evidence of His goodness and love. Thus it is possible for even the heathen to recognize and acknowledge the power of the Creator.” *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 478.

Still, as beautiful and potent a witness as nature is, it alone cannot reveal the plan of salvation. For the fuller picture, we must turn to other sources, such as the Word of God and the revelation of God through Jesus.

**Consider This:** What do we need to know about God that nature cannot tell us?

II. **Taking God at His Word** *(Review Hebrews 1:1–3 and 2 Peter 1:19–21 with your class.)*

**Consider This:** What gives authenticity to a prophet’s words? Why do we know that we can trust the Bible prophets?

We can trust God’s prophets because “true prophecy is a revelation from God. . . . He decides what shall be revealed and what shall remain concealed. Unless the Holy Spirit impresses the mind, man is incapable of prophesying—of speaking forth for God—no matter how ardently he may wish to do so.” *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 602.

**Consider This:** What is the Holy Spirit’s role in revelation and inspiration?

III. **In the Flesh** *(Review Hebrews 1:3 and John 14:8, 9 with your class.)*

Have you ever met a child who looked, sounded, and acted just like his or
God Reveals Himself in His Word

Many of the things God has revealed through His prophets in the past have not been handed down and have not, eventually, found their way into the Bible. But some of those revelations from God, which were received by a few dozen people during a period of more than fifteen hundred years, were written down. The compilations of these writings is our Bible. Jesus and His contemporaries treasured the writings that we today refer to as the Old Testament. Today our Scriptures include also the Gospels and other apostolic writings from the first period of the church.

Paul commended Timothy for his diligent reading of God’s Word, which, he said, has the capacity to make you wise for salvation. How does he in this context further describe the influence of the Written Word of God? 2 Tim. 3:14–16.

“As we contemplate the great things of God’s Word, we look into a fountain that broadens and deepens beneath our gaze. Its breadth and depth pass our knowledge. As we gaze, the vision widens; stretched out before us, we behold a boundless, shoreless sea. Such study has vivifying power. The mind and heart acquire new strength, new life.

“This experience is the highest evidence of the divine authorship of the Bible. We receive God’s Word as food for the soul through the same evidence by which we receive bread as food for the body.”

More Bibles are sold today than ever before. New versions for specific target groups keep appearing. We have Bible versions that are more easily accessible to beginners, while we also have versions that lend themselves to liturgical use. And this is a good thing. But that does not necessarily mean that the Bible also is more widely read. In fact, there are indications that Bible reading among Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, is on the wane. Many do not know their Bible as a former generation once knew it. But only at our own eternal peril can we ignore the Word of God, which has the power to speak to us afresh every time we open it.

How much time did you spend with your Bible during the past week? In the past month? Is Bible reading a prominent feature in your daily program? If not, why not? Compare the time you spent in front of the TV with the time spent reading the Word. What changes might you need to make?
her parent? It can be an unsettling experience. You may have even felt as though you were in the presence of the very person the child resembled, though, of course that was not the case.

Jesus resembled His Father in character even more than any earthly parent and child ever could resemble each other. He and the Father are One. Jesus’ presence here on earth was the most complete revelation of God ever given to humanity. “Christ was the express image of His Father’s person.”—Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 148. Additionally, “Christ came to the world to reveal the character of the Father and to redeem the fallen race. . . . He made known in His words, His character, His power and majesty, the nature and attributes of God.”—Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 38.

**Consider This:** How can we grow to “look more like” God? What is the relationship between growing in Him and growing to look like Him? What can we learn from Jesus’ own example? What does His closeness or oneness with the Father reveal about how we may attain God’s character attributes?

**STEP 3—Practice**

**Thought Questions:**

1. What is the best way to get to know someone or for someone to get to know you? Make a list. How can these ways be compared to the ways that God reveals Himself to us? What can we learn from them about the ways in which we come to know God?

2. Romans 1:18–20 tells us that the “invisible things” of the eternal power of God and the Godhead are revealed so clearly through nature that an ignorance of Him or a refusal to acknowledge Him is “without excuse.” Pretty powerful words. Put them to the test. What specific example or examples can you find in nature that reveal God’s “eternal power” or that illustrate the concept of the “Godhead”? Explain your answer.

**Application Questions:**

1. Think of someone who knows you very well. How did that understanding come about? Did it develop through letters, phone calls, e-mails, IMs (Instant Messages), face-to-face conversations, shared experiences, or all of
Christ—God Comes to Us in Person

Getting letters from someone on a regular basis can go a long way toward getting to know that person more intimately. Receiving a picture will reveal another dimension of that person. But you will not really know that person until you actually have spent time face-to-face.

Because of sin, God could no longer commune with us as He had done with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Though He has communicated with us very effectively in various ways, He wanted to give us a fuller picture of Himself. And this He has done through Jesus.

**How did God provide us with this full picture of Himself?** John 1:1, 2; John 14:9; Heb. 1:1–3.

The precise wording of John 1:1 is important. John does not say that God showed Himself in the flesh, or appeared in the flesh. Rather, John says that Jesus became flesh at a definite point in time. Jesus came from above and became flesh; that is, He took on Himself our humanity. That our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became flesh for our salvation is probably the one tenet of the Christian faith that is basic to all Christian denominations.

**What relationship is there between God’s revelation in Scripture and His revelation in Jesus Christ?** John 5:36–40.

For some the study of the Bible is an end in itself. Indeed, many gifted Bible scholars don’t believe in God at all. Yet, reading the Bible without seeking to know the Lord whom it reveals can no more lead you to salvation than reading a recipe can fill your empty stomach.

Jesus Christ is the focus of the Scriptures. The Bible is about Him, about what He has revealed to us regarding the nature and character of God. The Bible doesn’t save us, but it is the authoritative source of truth about the only One who can, Jesus of Nazareth.

**It’s one thing to read the Bible; it’s another to know the Bible; and it’s another to recite texts by memory. But do you know the Lord revealed in the Bible? What are ways in which you can read the Bible in order to come away from it knowing God better?**
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

the above? Which way made the greatest contribution to intimacy with that person? What do these answers tell us about what is involved in getting to know God?

2 Think about how you came to know God personally. Was it nature, prophecy, the Bible, or the life of Christ that made the greatest impact? Which revelation will you explore now to deepen your intimacy with God? Give reasons for your choice.

3 Read John 17:3. Discuss how important it is to get to know God. Keep a journal this week describing the ways in which God reveals Himself to you.

Role-playing: Have a class member pretend to be someone who does not believe in God. He or she would ask, “How do you know that God exists?” Have another class member answer the question based on what you learned in class this week.

STEP 4—Apply

This week’s lesson has explored ways in which God reveals Himself to us. Let’s look at ways to make this revelation more personal.

1 Find a historical event that has been a direct fulfillment of Bible prophecy within the past five hundred years. For example, the sun darkened, the moon turned to blood, falling stars, the great Lisbon earthquake (these four events fulfilling Matthew 24:29 and Revelation 6:12, 13), and so forth. Take the opportunity to share with someone who may not be familiar with the prophecy how its fulfillment has deepened your faith.

2 Tell, act out, or rewrite in a contemporary setting your favorite Bible story that portrays the character of God.

3 Note the names of Jesus mentioned in Isaiah 9:6. Write each one in a separate column. Then, under each, write how that particular name has been meaningful in your life. For example, under “Prince of Peace” you might write about a time that you were troubled about something and God gave you peace about it, and so on.

4 Spend time as a class in nature, if possible, or bring some objects of nature into class. How do the things of the natural world “declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1) as the Creator?
Further Study: “Many are the ways in which God is seeking to make Himself known to us and bring us into communion with Him. Nature speaks to our senses without ceasing. The open heart will be impressed with the love and glory of God as revealed through the works of His hands. The listening ear can hear and understand the communications of God through the things of nature. The green fields, the lofty trees, the buds and flowers, the passing cloud, the falling rain, the babbling brook, the glories of the heavens, speak to our hearts, and invite us to become acquainted with Him who made them all.”—Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, p. 85. Read this entire chapter in Steps to Christ, titled “A Knowledge of God” (pp. 85–91).

Discussion Questions:

1. To what extent does nature help us find God? Does nature teach us anything about the God of the Bible, or does it merely impress us that there must be Something or Someone out there?

2. In class, talk about the importance of following one’s conscience. Then talk about the dangers that are involved. What are ways we can help others know if and when they can trust the prompting of their conscience?

3. What role do culture and upbringing have on the shaping of your conscience? In what ways has your culture influenced your concepts of right and wrong? How can you learn to transcend culture when you need to, that is, when your culture teaches something that is against the clear teaching of the Word of God?

4. If the gift of prophecy is a spiritual gift to God’s church, should we expect it to play a prominent role in our day and age? May we expect God to raise up other prophets similar to the way He called Ellen G. White more than a century ago? Discuss.

5. What are ways that we can study the Bible in order to come away knowing God better? What are ways to study the Bible and come away not knowing God any more than when we first started reading?

Summary: God wants to communicate with us. He does so through nature and by speaking through our conscience. Throughout the ages He has used prophets, and He has made the prophetic gift available even for His church today. The Bible, God’s Written Word, remains the divine Guidebook for our pilgrimage. Its focus is on what God has done for us, most sublimely in entering this world in the Person of His Son, to which all Scriptures testify.
Sin

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Isa. 14:12–14, Matt. 23:23, 25:45, Phil. 2:6–8, Heb. 1:1–5, Rev. 5:9–12.

Memory Text: “Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men” (Romans 5:18, NIV).

The solid optimism of former generations that everything in the world will get better and better no longer rings true today. Even after the cold war, the world is far from being a safe place. The threat of terrorism has made us all feel extremely vulnerable. Science, which was supposed to be the harbinger of a better world, now threatens to wreak havoc on that world. The common sources of energy are being depleted. The icecaps are melting. Crime is a sad fact of life everywhere. Human beings show little, if any, signs of moral improvement over past generations. The gap between rich and poor constantly is widening. Our daily installment of news almost invariably tells us about atrocities and moral decay. No wonder someone once said that the Christian teaching of human sinfulness is one teaching that is easily verifiable. That is, that’s one doctrine we don’t need to take on faith.

Yet, as bad as sin is, it’s not the end of the story. Sure, sin is real, but so is divine grace.

The Week at a Glance: Sin, and the results of sin, are a painful reality in human life. Thank God for Jesus, who has made a way of escape for us all.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 9.
Sin Is Rebellion

What is the essence of sin? How does the Bible define it? First John 3:4 (NIV) states, “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.” The New Living Translation reads, “Sin opposes the law,” while the traditional KJV rendering defines sin as “transgression of the law.” But it is not just any law that humanity has broken—it is God’s law. Humans have rebelled against their Maker, pretending that they themselves are the measure of all things rather than in humble trust submitting to the wisdom and love of God.

What do the following Bible passages reveal about the essence of sin?

Why did God punish Adam and Eve for what seemed to be an insignificant matter? It may have seemed unimportant, but there was a crucial principle involved. “There was nothing poisonous in the fruit itself, and the sin was not merely in yielding to appetite. It was distrust of God’s goodness, disbelief of His word, and rejection of His authority, that made our first parents transgressors, and that brought into the world a knowledge of evil. It was this that opened the door to every species of falsehood and error.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 25.

What will be a major characteristic of God’s people in the time of the end? Rev. 14:12. How does the issue of obedience come into play here?

God has done for us all that infinite love could. In return He asks of us love and obedience. In a time in which the world is plagued by rampant lawlessness and a relativistic philosophy—which claims that good and evil depend simply on cultural circumstances and communal and personal preferences—there must and will be a people who will staunchly defend God’s standard of holiness, the Ten Commandments.

We tend to think of rebellion as an outright attack and rejection of authority. Yet, it can come in much more subtle forms. How could you tell if, perhaps, you yourself are harboring some rebellious attitudes toward God?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Romans 5:18

The Student Will:
Know: That sin is a painful reality inherent in our nature.
Feel: The freedom from sin available exclusively through Jesus.
Do: Accept the divine grace God has offered us.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Reality of Sin (Rom. 7:21–24)
   A Sin has pervaded our world so much so that it has become part of our nature. It is an everyday struggle to eschew our sinful tendencies and reflect Christ. What can we do to overcome these inclinations?

   B It is so easy to slip into sin. Scripture refers to different types of sin: lawlessness, rebellion, sin of thought, sin of omission. To avoid these traps, we must understand the dangers they pose to us. What are the differences between these sins? How do we, sometimes inadvertently, commit them?

II. Freedom From Sin (Acts 4:12)
   A Just as sin came into this world from the actions of one man, God provided an escape through one Man, His Son. Why is Jesus the only escape from the sin problem?

   B How does your realization of the enormity of this gift affect the choices you make?

III. Refuge in Christ (John 3:16)

   The way God has dealt with sin entering this world reveals much about His character. His divine knowledge, love, and infinite grace are evident in His actions. He has done so much for us. What can we, in turn, do to accept His gift of grace more fully into our lives?

Summary: In a terrible, sin-ridden world, God in His mercy offers us a way out through Jesus. Accept this gift and live accordingly.
Missing the Mark

The seriousness of sin is often played down. “Ah, we cannot all be perfect!” people say. But sin is serious business. “The full seriousness of sin can only become apparent when we have understood the full potentialities of human existence as created in the image of God.” —John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (London: SCM Press, 1966), p. 238.

Sin does not only have to do with wrongfully committed acts. It also includes the desire and the fantasizing about things that we know are wrong (Matt. 5:28).

What have you fantasized about in the past 24 hours? Would you be ashamed to have those thoughts made public? What should your answer tell you about where your heart is? See Rom. 8:6.

There also is a category of sin that usually is referred to as “sins of omission.” This refers to the willful neglect of duty, the conscious refusal to do something one knows ought to be done.

In Matthew 23:23 and Matthew 25:45 we find statements made by Jesus that deal with sins of omission. Read these verses in their context. What are the implications of these statements?

Also in chapter 25 of Matthew’s Gospel, we find the parable of the talents (vss. 14–28). What happened to the servant who had hidden his one talent? What is the significance of this for our discussion?

We all have been given certain talents. It is part of the concept of stewardship that we utilize our talents to the full. We must answer to God for what we fail to do with what He has given us. Let us remember the words of the apostle Peter: “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Pet. 4:10, NIV).

Sins of omission, sins of thought—who hasn’t been guilty of them all? Dwell on the promise of forgiveness that we can have in Jesus. Why should this mean so much to us?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Sin affects all of us. Getting rid of it is bigger than our problem-solving skills can handle. Fortunately, a solution has been provided in Jesus Christ—God’s Son.

Just for Teachers: The following activity illustrates just how helpless we are to fix the sin problem. Plan to do an actual demonstration if you can.

Even someone with the most rudimentary knowledge of the laws of physics safely could predict what would happen when a dish towel is placed in a jar full of water. Eventually, the water would soak through the dish towel.

What then happens when food coloring is added to the water? The dish towel soaks up the coloring, of course, and changes color.

Simple and straightforward as this demonstration may seem, it yields a rather profound insight: our spiritual lives have a bit more in common with that dish towel than might be expected. As long as we exist on this planet, we will be affected by sin. Sin will be in our natures, and its destructive effects will be all around us. And unlike the saturation of the dish towel in the jar of water, the degree to which sin’s invasive and pernicious effects will harm us is not something we safely can predict.

So, how can we get the dish towel white again? Perhaps the only way to clean it would be with some bleach. Likewise, accepting Jesus as our Savior and receiving the power in His blood is the only solution to our sin problem.

Consider This: How do the jar of water and the dish towel help to demonstrate just how vulnerable we are to sin? In what ways does Jesus’ blood serve as a spiritual bleaching agent to help us, “though our sins be as scarlet,” to be “white as snow” again?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Father Knows Best (Review Genesis 3:1–7 with your class.)
“Original” Sin

Theologians often distinguish between the sinful acts that we commit and the sinful nature that we possess. We all have been corrupted by Adam’s fall; we all are deemed sinners even before we sin. The widespread rite of infant baptism is linked closely with the acknowledgment of this belief. The idea is that a newborn child who dies without having been baptized will be lost eternally because the child is a sinner, and if this sinfulness is not somehow taken care of, the child loses eternal life.

There is no scriptural support for this practice, nor for the idea that a child who dies is automatically condemned to destruction. Now, it is true that the “original” sin of Adam and Eve has had all-pervasive consequences that impact everyone. Sin entered the world through one person, and through this sin death came to “all men” (Rom. 5:12, NIV).

How does the apostle Paul describe the powerful tendencies toward sinful behavior with which all of us are born? Rom. 7:21–24; 8:7, 8. How have you experienced the reality of these tendencies in your own life?

Through the ages some Christians have declared that they achieved a state of perfection. Yet, those who claim perfection delude themselves. It is contrary to the clear words of Scripture. Quoting Psalm 106:6, Paul stated, “‘There is no one righteous, not even one!’” (Rom. 3:10, NIV). His fellow apostle John is just as adamant: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8, NIV).

“Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, or a day. It is a continual growth in grace. We know not one day how strong will be our conflict the next. Satan lives, and is active, and every day we need to earnestly cry to God for help and strength to resist him. As long as Satan reigns we shall have self to subdue, besetments to overcome, and there is no stopping place. There is no point to which we can come and say we have fully attained.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 947.

Suppose you reached a point where you truly had victory over sin; that is, you weren’t committing any known sin. More so, you were always kind, loving, generous, and living in accordance with all the light you had. Suppose you “perfectly” reflected the character of Jesus. Why, though, would you still need a Savior whose righteousness alone can allow you to stand with “no condemnation” (Rom. 8:1) before God?
Learning Cycle

Why did the simple act of eating a piece of fruit bring such dire consequences to all humankind? How did such a small, trivial act constitute a great sin? After all, wasn’t Eve, in eating the fruit, giving nourishment to her brain and nerve cells? Wasn’t she making good blood? What made the vitamin C and the fiber in this fruit so lethal to body and soul?

Sin is deadly. When we willfully engage in any sin, from the most innocuous act to the vilest, we are, in essence, telling God that we know better than He does. Sin is the equivalent of telling God He deserves no supremacy in our lives. The true horror of sin is trusting in our own wisdom.

Consider This: Compare the attitude of trusting in our wisdom to Satan’s attitude found in Isaiah 14:12–14. What are the similarities?

II. Inside Out (Review Matthew 5:28 with your class.)

The power of thought distinguishes human beings from the rest of the animal world. But all too often Satan perverts this most powerful gift and uses it for our destruction and to alienate us further from God.

Jesus knew that sin begins in the thoughts, which is why He warned us, in Matthew 5:28, to guard the mind. Our thoughts, whether positive or negative, have a powerful impact on our bodies and eventually lead to action (see Matt. 15:19). James 4:8 also advises us to guard our thoughts. David must have struggled with this problem, as well, as we see in Psalm 19:14. David pleads with God for help to keep his thoughts pure. It is a prayer that all of us should pray daily. Think about it. Wrong deeds, wrong words, wrong actions all begin with wrong thoughts. Keep the thoughts right, and the words, deeds, and actions will be, as well.

Consider This: Read David’s plea again in Psalm 19:14. Why is it such a struggle to keep the thoughts pure? Why is it necessary to do so? What hope is there for us if we fail?

III. The Battle of Good and Evil (Review Romans 7:18–25 with your class.)

Most of us are familiar with the timeworn expression that the apple does not fall far from the tree. We use it to mean that children often will make the same choices their parents make, whether good or bad, simply because of the genes that they have inherited. Likewise, because we have inherited a sinful nature from Adam, we are in constant battle with our fallen natures.
Corporate Versus Personal Sin?

Ever since the Fall, the world has been tainted by sin. The results of sin are visible in nature. They are visible also in wars, in the evil of slavery and other forms of exploitation, and also in the ways in which we ravage natural resources. The world of the past and of the present is full of materialism, egotism, injustice, and perversion.

These facts raise many difficult questions. Foremost among these is whether we as individuals carry any responsibility for these things and if we should assume any guilt for this corporate state of sinfulness. The following considerations may help us to deal with this dilemma.

1. Consider how corporate wrongs in our world may be seen against the background of the great controversy. “Behind the rise and fall of nations and the play and counterplay of human interests lies the unseen struggle between the Godhead, together with the host of loyal angels, and Satan with his hosts of fallen angels—a struggle that directly impacts all human activity.”—Frank Holbrook, “The Great Controversy,” in Raoul Dederen, ed., Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), p. 995.

2. Consider the totally destructive nature of sin. Sin wants to destroy everything that has any value. Sin and death are synonymous, and they are everywhere. There is, therefore, no hope for this world without divine intervention, because the power of sin and death far exceeds our human abilities to deal with them.

3. But also consider that we all have some influence. We can all make small decisions that at times may increase or diminish, however slightly, the evil in this world. We can work for peace and justice. We can do acts of compassion. We can choose to cooperate with all who want to protect the environment. What do such passages as Ecclesiastes 9:10, Luke 16:10, and Philippians 4:8, 9 contribute to our understanding of this issue?

It’s so easy just to throw your arms up in despair and say, “The problems are too great. What can little, old me do to help?” Nevertheless, how should the example of Jesus and the good He did healing the sick and comforting the poor (which, considering all the sick and the poor in the world at that time, was comparatively small) influence our decisions to try to make the world a better place?
Along with this legacy from our first parents, we inherit a genetic legacy from our biological parents: traits such as eye color, hair color, height, and smile that define our faces and forms. Unfortunately, our birth parents also gave us many other traits that we all too often wish they hadn’t: a predisposition to overeat, to get impatient, to flare up easily, or to be oversensitive. We even may joke that our poor character traits are a result of the “bad blood” on one side of the family tree or the other. But there’s more truth to this statement than we might think. It is our blood that carries the genetic material that makes us who we are.

Fortunately, this fact is good news when we recall that from our heavenly Parent we receive, by faith, the potent gift of the blood of Jesus. Read in Romans 7:18–21 how the apostle Paul describes the efficacy of Jesus’ blood in the warfare with our fallen natures. Jesus helps us to put to death our sinful natures. He renews a right spirit within us. His blood cleanses us from all sin. And what is more, it delivers us from the stranglehold of sin in our lives. Victory over self is more than possible by accepting the power in Jesus’ blood. (See also vss. 24 and 25.)

Consider This: How does the power in Jesus’ blood, as Paul says in Romans 7:18–25, give us victory over our genetic and cultivated tendencies toward evil? What must we surrender to Jesus in order for this victory to be possible in our lives?

STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

1. Discuss the difference between our sinful natures and the sinful acts we do. Why do we still have sinful natures even when we are not sinning but doing right?

2. There are sins of commission (doing things that we should not) and sins of omission (not doing things we know we should). Why is it not enough to refrain from wrongdoing? Why must we embrace rightdoing, also?

Application Questions:

1. Read Matthew 23:23. Use a cross-reference Bible to do a study on three words: judgment, mercy, and faith. Jesus used these three words when He told the Pharisees that they had omitted those things. What do you learn
The Only Solution for the Sin Problem

There is no easy or cheap solution to the sin problem. Sin cannot be overcome by human determination and perseverance. Sin is larger than we are. The solution must therefore also supersede our possibilities. There is a lot of confusion among people about the issue of salvation. Many claim there are many different roads to the kingdom. The roads differ, they say, but they all lead to the same destination. But they are wrong.

*What* is the clear testimony of Scripture regarding the one and only road toward salvation? *John 10:7, 14:6, Acts 4:12.*

We do not know who will enter through the gates of the kingdom. Thank God, that decision is in the hands of the One to whom judgment has been given, the One who is love and justice personified. But we do know one thing: Those who receive eternal life do so only because Christ died for them. Some may never have had the privilege of learning about their Savior. But that takes nothing away from the fact that if they are saved it will be through the name of Christ, even if they have never themselves heard that name.

*Why* was Jesus the only One who could save fallen humanity? *Phil. 2:6–8, Heb. 1:1–5, Rev. 5:9–12.*

“The divine Son of God was the only sacrifice of sufficient value to fully satisfy the claims of God’s perfect law. . . . Upon Christ no requirements were laid. He had power to lay down His life, and to take it again. No obligation was laid upon Him to undertake the work of atonement. It was a voluntary sacrifice that He made. His life was of sufficient value to rescue man from his fallen condition. “The Son of God was in the form of God, and He thought it not robbery to be equal with God. He was the only one, who as a man walked the earth, who could say to all men, Who of you convinceth me of sin? He had united with the Father in the creation of man, and He had power through His own divine perfection of character to atone for man’s sin, and to elevate him, and bring him back to his first estate.”


Think of just how bad sin must be that it cost so much, the death of Jesus Himself, in order to atone for it. How can keeping this amazing truth before you help you in your own struggle with sin?
about these three attributes from your study? After completing your study, write at least one example of how the attributes of judgment, mercy, and faith can be displayed in your life.

What does the Bible mean by talents? Review Matthew 25:14–30. What does the Bible teach about the number of talents each person has? Why is it so important to develop our God-given talents and abilities?

**Questions for Witnessing:**

1. Suppose you are out running errands. You are approached by someone who says that he is collecting donations to protect an endangered species or to preserve a wilderness or forest. What is the Christian’s duty toward preserving the environment and the wildlife of our planet? How involved should Christians become in these “movements”? What are the ways in which Christians, in good conscience, can take care of our planet?

2. A friend tells you that he or she has not knowingly done anything wrong and therefore has not sinned. What texts could you use to show her that we all need a Savior?

**STEP 4—Apply**

**Try This:**

1. Find the song “Trust and Obey,” number 590, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*. Prayerfully read over the words, asking God to help you truly to trust Him. Then sing or hum it whenever you get a chance. If you don’t have a hymnal, you can find it on www.cyberhymnal.org and learn it there.

2. The effects of sin are all around us—sickness, suffering, death. Find one or two things that you can do to help alleviate any negative effect in someone or in the environment. For example, you could plant flowers in a common area that is looking drab. Or send a note to someone who is suffering from depression or loneliness.
**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Fall of Satan,” “The Fall of Man,” and “The Plan of Salvation,” pp. 145–153, in *Early Writings*. These three short chapters are about the origin of sin in heaven and on earth and about the first revelation of the plan of salvation.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. As Seventh-day Adventists, we know that the world is not going to get better but worse—much worse, in fact. The question is, How are we to relate to the world’s problems? Do we just shrug them off, saying, “Well, God said that things were going to be bad, and they are, so what can we do about them?” Or do we get so involved in trying to solve the world’s problems that we forget our calling to point people to the only solution: that is, Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and is coming back? How do we strike the right balance?

2. Should our church be clearer in its condemnation of the corporate evils in this world? Or would this have little impact and only detract from the commission to take the gospel to every individual? At the same time, if we keep quiet about many of these big issues, where is our moral credibility?

3. Of all the horrible effects of sin, death has to be the worst. Absolutely nothing we as humans can do can reverse it. Sin has had such devastating effects that only the supernatural intervention of God can solve it. What should that tell us about how important it is that we strive against sin with all our God-given strength?

4. As Seventh-day Adventists, central to our understanding of the whole question of sin and evil is the great controversy scenario, the idea that onlooking intelligences from other worlds are watching what is happening here and seeing how God will deal with sin and its consequences. Imagine being a sinless being from another part of the universe who has seen what sin has done to us. What would they see? What would they be thinking? What lessons might they be learning from what they see us going through here? Imagine how incomprehensible and irrational some of our actions must seem to them.

**Summary:** Sin has infected all spheres of life. We are faced with the reality of something that far exceeds our ability to deal with. But it does not exceed the power and the love of God. He has decisively dealt with the sin problem through His Son, Jesus Christ.
Lesson 7

*May 9–15

Grace

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Exod. 25:8; Isaiah 53; Rom. 5:18, 19; 2 Cor. 3:16–18; Eph. 2:4–10; Titus 2:11–14.

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

During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of returns from death. The debate went on for some time until Christian writer C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. “‘What’s the rumpus about?’ he asked and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity’s unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, ‘Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.’”—Philip Yancey, What’s So Amazing About Grace? (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), p. 45.

Last week we were confronted with the dreadful phenomenon of sin, the “secret power of lawlessness” (2 Thess. 2:7, NIV). In the final section we saw that through divine intervention a solution has been provided. What that intervention was, and what it accomplished for us, will be the focus of this week’s study.

The Week at a Glance: What are some of the images God uses to teach us the plan of salvation? What is atonement? How central is the concept of substitution to our understanding of the Cross?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 16.
God Provides Salvation

The story of how Abraham’s loyalty was tested is well known. God asked him to sacrifice his son Isaac. Unaware of what God had told his father to do, and thinking that they were simply going to offer a sacrifice somewhere, Isaac asked why they had not taken an animal with them. Abraham then replied with the prophetic words that found their echo throughout the pages of the Old, as well as the New Testament: “‘God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering’” (Gen. 22:8, NIV).

What was the prophetic significance of Abraham’s words to his son?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Where else in the Old Testament do we find texts that point to the redemption that was to come through Christ? What are those texts, and what do they say? See, for example, Gen. 3:15, Exod. 25:8, Isaiah 53.

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Jesus Christ is the center of the Old Testament. Indeed, the whole purpose of the earthly sanctuary service was to point to the coming of the Messiah (see Hebrews 8, 9). Everything prior to His entrance into the world was a mere prelude to the Cross. God waited until the right moment. Then, when “the time had fully come” (Gal. 4:4, NIV), Christ came to live among us.

“Through every age, through every hour, the love of God had been exercised toward the fallen race. Notwithstanding the perversity of men, the signals of mercy had been continually exhibited. And when the fullness of the time had come, the Deity was glorified by pouring upon the world a flood of healing grace that was never to be obstructed or withdrawn till the plan of salvation should be fulfilled.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 37.

Think how many long centuries had passed between the promises of the coming Messiah and His coming. What should that tell us—beings who usually live only eighty short years or so at best—about patience, about trusting in God though things seem to take so long?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Romans 5:8

The Student Will:

Know: That Christ’s sacrifice ensures us eternal life if we accept Him.
Feel: Secure of your future with Him as your personal Savior.
Do: Respond to God’s grace by following Him.

Lesson Outline:

I. Understanding Grace (Isaiah 53)

A Jesus is the central point of the entire Old Testament. What does this say about the importance of grace and salvation in God’s message to us?

B “He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (vs. 12, NIV). It is through His suffering on our behalf, that we can claim eternal life. Does this seem just to you? Why, or why not?

II. Accepting Grace (Eph. 2:8)

A The greatest thing about grace is that it is free. This is a hard concept for many to comprehend. God recognized this difficulty and used many different illustrations to help us better understand grace. How do you best relate to grace?

B How does the idea of grace make you feel? Do you feel guilty accepting such an undeserved gift? Do you feel a security in the promise of eternal life? Are you thankful for God’s love? Explain. What might your answers tell you about your relationship with God?

III. Changed by Grace (1 Cor. 15:10)

As grace changed Paul, it can change you. We are required to believe and accept His gift. How has grace changed you?

Summary: Christ died so that we can have eternal life. We are lost without Him.
Pictures of the Miracle of Grace

How do you explain to a three-year-old child what electricity is? How do you explain to those deep in the African jungles, who have never traveled more than 25 miles from where they live, what traffic lights are for and how an elevator works? How can a physicist ever hope to explain Einstein’s relativity theory to a person whose education remained limited to elementary school? God faced a communication gap that went far beyond these examples of human communication barriers. The divine love demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus Christ cannot be captured fully in human words. Yet, God wanted us to have an adequate idea of what is involved in His plan of salvation. God inspired the authors of the Scriptures to use a number of different word-pictures, each of which gives us further insight into the mystery of His grace. None of these images should be used in isolation from the other perspectives. Taken together, however, they will leave us with a sense of wonder and immense gratitude.

**What** is one of the most prominent word-pictures God used to help us catch some profound glimpses of the mystery of grace? *Isa. 53:7, John 1:29.*

**What** other symbolism is used to illustrate a further dimension of the truth of the atonement? *Matt. 20:28, Acts 20:28, 1 Cor. 6:20.*

We must be careful not to use one particular symbol to the exclusion of other word-pictures. When we combine everything that is said about the atonement, we arrive at as full a picture as we finite human beings can absorb. Nevertheless, the image of a ransom, of a high price paid for us, is a powerful one. “Christ redeemed us from sin, that is, He bought us back from sin. . . . What the metaphor intends is that (a) the means of our salvation is costly and that (b) we have passed from one state to another—from the state of slavery to the state of nearness to God. A redemption means the passing over of ownership at a cost.”—Edward W. H. Vick, *Let Me Assure You* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1968), p. 33.

**Dwell on the implications of this idea that the Creator of the universe, the One who made all that is (John 1:1–3), voluntarily went to the cross as the only means of saving us from eternal ruin. Why should the reality of this truth heavily influence how we live? Think how foolish it is to let anything earthly turn us away from the Cross.**
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Only God’s grace has the capability to transform our sin-scarred lives.

**Just for Teachers:** If possible, bring a few before-and-after digital images to share with your class to illustrate the transforming power of digital imagery.

Digital photography’s ability to transform how we see reality verges on the mind-bending. A digital photographer can take an imperfect subject and make him or her appear perfectly beautiful. Skin can be airbrushed to look flawless. Chipped teeth can be made to seem whole again or gapped teeth brought close together. Moles or other blemishes can be erased as easily as pencil from paper; wrinkles can be removed forever. Shadows, too, can be deleted from a picture, and a crooked nose can be made straight. As a matter of fact, most of the flawless portraits we see have been digitally enhanced. (That is one reason we never will look as fabulous as the people in advertisements, no matter how hard we try.)

God’s grace in our lives works a lot like digital photography. Yet, as powerful as digital photography is, it changes only the likeness of something, not the thing itself. But God changes us into His likeness by revealing His character in us. Acceptance of Jesus as our Savior covers our blemishes and defects and presents us perfect before God. The transformation goes deeper, too. God’s grace has the ability to remove our spiritual blemishes in order to restore us to the original image of His perfect likeness.

**Consider This:** God’s eye is like a camera lens that captures us for who we are. Yet, despite what He sees, He wants to transform us into who we were meant to be. How does grace, like a digital camera, restore us to His likeness? What does it mean to be in His likeness?

STEP 2—Explore

**Bible Commentary**

I. Trading Places *(Review Romans 6:23 and Hebrews 9:22 with your class.)*
What Happened at Calvary?

There is a lot of discussion among theologians about the doctrine of atonement. Two main concepts are promoted. Some opt for an objective view of the atonement while others defend a subjective view. What does this mean? The first school of thought emphasizes that something actually occurred at a historical point in time on a hill just outside of Jerusalem, a concrete, historical event that provided the basis for our salvation. Other theologians underline the fact that our response to the demonstration of Jesus’ love and self-sacrifice on the cross is the crucial point: We are changed when we contemplate a love so great! Both perspectives are true and, understood together, complement each other.

How does the Bible explain the relationship between what Christ did for us and what we as sinful beings, in fact, deserve? Isa. 53:4, 5; Rom. 5:18, 19.

The idea that Jesus Christ died in our place, so that we will not suffer eternal death but become partakers of the life that He offers, is usually referred to as the concept of substitution. To many this is an abhorrent idea. They do not like the legalistic language often used or the concept of divine wrath against sin. But whatever we may like or dislike, the grandiose truth is that God has dealt with the sin problem in the way He decided was suitable. Being just, He could not ignore sin; being love, He could not abandon the sinner. We should have paid the penalty of eternal death ourselves because we are the guilty ones. But Jesus was willing to take our place! That’s what happened at the cross. This actual event, that of His substitution in our stead, became the basis for our redemption.

Then, as a result of what Christ has done for us, as a response to His substitution in our place, we are drawn to Him, we respond to Him, we change our attitude toward Him and other human beings, as well. This is the complementary, subjective side to the plan of salvation (John 12:32, Rom. 5:1).

Think about all the bad things you have done and (perhaps) might still do. Then realize that Jesus, at the cross, suffered the punishment that you deserve for those actions. How do you feel, knowing that He suffered in your stead? What should your response be, knowing what Jesus went through on your behalf?
Romans 6:23 declares that the wages of sin is death, and Hebrews 9:22 tells us that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. Consequently, when our first parents sinned, someone’s blood needed to be shed as a payment for the sin debt. The only one qualified for that position was Jesus. He willingly volunteered to pay the debt.

“As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour. Christ knew that He would have to suffer, yet He became man’s substitute. As soon as Adam sinned, the Son of God presented Himself as surety for the human race.” —Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1084.

**Consider This:** Why is blood the only way for sin to be cleansed or remitted? What does the shedding of blood symbolize? Why was Jesus the only One qualified to pay the sin debt?

**II. What’s Your Worth?** *(Review 1 Peter 1:18, 19 with your class.)*

According to a recent article published in *Fortune* magazine in October 2007, Indian tycoon Mukesh Ambani overtook Mexican telecommunications mogul Carlos Slim and American billionaires Bill Gates and Warren Buffett for the number one slot as richest man in the world. Some say Ambani’s status as the world’s richest man is only on paper. With the rise and fall of the stock market, analysts warn that Ambani’s star is short-lived.

But as wealthy as Ambani, Slim, Gates, and Buffet are combined, the poorest person on earth is worth far more in God’s eyes. Plus, our worth is revealed not by something as fluctuating as the world economy but by something infinitely more stable: the blood of His Son, the guarantee of His grace.

Peter reminds us that we are bought, not with corruptible things that would perish or even silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus. Jesus’ blood brings us far more than material riches. It brings us, under the direction of the Spirit, a renewed life that is filled with peace and happiness in spite of our present, temporary circumstances.

**Consider This:** We have an expiration date—thanks to sin. We break down. We make mistakes. We steal. We kill. We lie. Yet, despite these flaws, God estimates us as worthy recipients of eternal riches. Why? How does the blood of Jesus pay our sin debt and spiritually enrich our lives?
A Change of Heart

The unparalleled manifestation of divine compassion and grace on Calvary has changed millions of hearts. From the very moment He hung dying on the cross, people were changed by beholding the love of Christ. One of the criminals crucified with Him noticed that Jesus was someone special, with a future beyond this ignominious death (Luke 23:39–43). And even the Roman centurion noticed that Jesus was no criminal (vs. 47).

How should our lives be changed by beholding Jesus and what He has done for us? 2 Cor. 3:16–18; Heb. 12:2, 3.

“How well do her words reflect your own experience with Christ? What could be holding you back from a deeper experience with Him? How much time do you spend contemplating Calvary?

Theologians propose various theories of the atonement. But when everything is said and done, there is no one theory or combination of theories that will do justice to the marvel of God’s grace (see 1 Cor. 1:20–25). It is good to talk together about the passages of Scripture that reveal different aspects of Jesus’ sacrifice. But what Jesus did for us should be not only a topic of debate but prayerfully contemplated and experienced. Though there’s much we can’t understand, we have been given enough so that we should marvel at what God has done for us in Christ.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 3—Practice

Just for Teachers: Solicit from class members what their experience has been with making bread with and without yeast.

Object Lesson:

Characteristically, a ball of dough mixed with yeast rises and is bigger than dough unmixed with yeast. God’s grace works in much the same way. Grace activates the growth of our spiritual lives. All people on earth are recipients of God’s grace. Though His justice demands the death penalty for the human race, His mercy intercedes for us, granting us reprieve. That is grace.

Unfortunately, sin, too, has leavening qualities. A little bit of it, the Bible says, “can leaven” or raise the “whole lump” of dough that is our lives. The only hope we have against the leavening power of sin is God’s grace.

Those of us who have accepted Jesus as our Savior have received God’s mercy and pardon for sins and will continue to do so as long as we ask for forgiveness. That is also grace. So, as yeast makes dough rise, likewise, those who have accepted God’s grace should rise above sin and live a life transformed from the old life they lived before.

Thought Questions:

1. In what areas of my life am I displaying God’s grace? How does grace help us to rise above sin in our lives? Give specific examples.

2. In what areas does God’s grace need to be more manifested in the church? How can we allow grace to work its transforming power in us as individuals?

Parable:

A man falls over the side of a boat at night. When his head shoots above the water, the boat is gone. The water and the sky are a disorienting black. He can see nothing. He calls out, but no one answers. The man is a good swimmer, but after several hours of treading water, his arms are too tired to keep paddling, and his body is numb with cold. Exhausted, he shuts his eyes, floating on his back. A sudden wave pulls him under. He claws his way back up to the surface, taking a desperate breath, before the water plunges him under again. This time his head does not reappear. But a lifeboat reaches him
Christ Our Salvation

It’s easy for Christians to get sidetracked. For some, the focus of their faith is either on the Bible, or on the church, or on the traditions or doctrines of their church. While all these have their role, they can be very problematic if they turn us away from Jesus, who alone is the Source of our salvation.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we often refer to the “truth” as the focus of our faith. There is nothing wrong with that, as long as we do not reduce our concept of truth to a list of doctrines to which we intellectually ascribe. Our faith should find its center in the truth as we find it in Jesus. We believe in a Person who has revealed our God to us, who has come to redeem us, who presently is our heavenly Mediator, and who will return to take us home. This must be of primary importance to us.

What do such passages as Ephesians 2:4–10 and Titus 2:11–14 teach us about the centrality of Christ in our faith?

Ephesians 2:4–10 is an extraordinarily rich passage. It underlines several times that we are saved by grace. This grace is described as “incomparable riches” (vs. 6, NIV), which issue from God’s “great love for us” (vs. 4, NIV). This grace is gratis, free. It cannot be earned. Our works do not bring us eternal life. If they did, we would have reason to boast about our own goodness. It is God’s grace that will bring visible changes in our daily lives and that will enable us to do “good” works (vs. 10). But even these good deeds are, essentially, God’s work in us.

What magnificent description of the centrality of Jesus Christ to our faith do we find in Paul’s words as recorded in Acts 17:28? See also Gal. 2:16–20.

How should the doctrines we have as Adventists help us better understand what Christ has done for us? Suppose, for instance, that you believed in eternal torment in hell. How would that, or other false teachings, impact your understanding of Christ? Why then are correct doctrines so important in helping us come to know Jesus better?
before he drowns. The crew pulls his unconscious body from the water. Another boat appears and takes the crew away, but they leave the man alone, half-conscious, in the lifeboat on the open sea with a bottle of water and enough food for three days.

**Consider This:** Most rescue stories typically do not end this way. After all, how crazy it is to rescue someone from death only to abandon that person to certain starvation? But, had God merely stopped at not eliminating the human race when they sinned, then the outcome for us would have been no different than the all-too-certain fate of the man in the lifeboat: he was temporarily saved from drowning, but he was not given enough food or water to save his life.

Typically, during a successful rescue, the hapless victim is pulled or carried to shore and given immediate medical attention until restored. God did nothing less for us. Instead of leaving us stranded, He bodily sent Jesus to answer our distress call. Jesus came not only to save us from drowning in our sins but to row us all the way to the shores of eternal life.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Just as the Bible uses word pictures, or images, to symbolize truth, the elements of this story represent different aspects of grace. Identify the following: Who is the swimmer? How are we like the swimmer?

2. What does the boat represent? What does the swimmer being taken to shore symbolize?

3. God’s grace saves us from sin by making us blameless before God. How does God’s grace continue to work in our lives to help make our characters like His?

**STEP 4—Apply**

**Try This:**

1. Do some research on John Newton, author of the song “Amazing Grace.” (See Kenneth Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories.*) Sing the song while meditating on the power of God to change this man’s life, as well as yours and the lives of others around you.

2. Can you think of anyone who has wronged you? Then ask God to help you show His grace by offering that person forgiveness. Ask God to help you forgive this person in your thoughts and in your actions.
Further Study: The book Seventh-day Adventists will almost automatically refer to when asked about the atoning work of Christ is Ellen G. White’s *The Desire of Ages*. Chapters 78 and 79 (pp. 741–768) are particularly relevant in the context of this week’s study. Note the statement on page 751: “As Jesus, crucified with the thieves, was placed ‘in the midst,’ so His cross was placed in the midst of a world lying in sin. And the words of pardon spoken to the penitent thief kindled a light that will shine to the earth’s remotest bounds.”

Discussion Questions:

1. Some people are offended by the idea that God demanded the life of His Son as a “payment” for the sins of humankind. That, though, is one of the images used by the Bible, so we must take it for what it says. What should the image tell us about the seriousness of sin and how costly our redemption was?

2. If there is one doctrine many contemporary people object to, it is the atonement. Many do not accept the idea that our problem should be solved by an intervention from the “outside.” Should not each person accept responsibility for what he or she has done? How do you explain the need for divine intervention to such people? Also, ask these people about the problem of death. How is that problem going to be solved if not by divine intervention?

3. Those who are saved by grace must also show grace to those around them. How do we as individuals show that our lives are embedded in grace? How does a church model this divine grace?

4. Why is the “subjective” side of the Cross so important, as well? That is, how should the realization of Christ’s death for us change us? What should it teach us about forgiveness, about humility, about patience, about love for the unlovable? What are some concrete and practical ways we can reveal the reality of what the Cross means to us?

Summary: Theologians have developed many theories about the atonement. Most are deficient or at least one-sided. They may be compared with pictures taken from different sides of the Himalayas. They all show the mountains but do not provide a complete picture. The miracle of grace must not be reduced to a formula to which we give intellectual assent. It is the ground of our faith. Christ died for us so that we can have eternal life. Without Him, we are lost. With Him as our Savior, our future is secure.
**SABBATH AFTERNOON**

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Gen. 2:2, 3; Deut. 5:12–15; Isa. 58:12–14; Ezek. 20:12; Heb. 4:9–11.

**Memory Text:** “Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath’” (Mark 2:27, 28, NIV).

*If there is anything in the Christian faith relevant for people living at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is the Sabbath. It is the medicine badly needed by millions in societies plagued by stress, heart problems, and burnout. It offers escape from the never-ending pressures of modern life. It provides a possibility to recharge our empty batteries and to refocus on the real priorities in life. The Sabbath tells us that there is a time to close the door of our home and our mind to the clutter and noise of the world and to come into the presence of the One who made us and who knows what we need.

“If there is any command hurried and hassled modern people need, it is the Sabbath. We are so busy trying to create meaning in our own life and serving ourselves that we forget that God is the only One who can give meaning to our lives. We show our ‘resting’ in Him by resting on His day.”—Jon L. Dybdahl, *Exodus, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), p. 186.

**The Week at a Glance:** Why is the Sabbath so important for us? Why did God institute the Sabbath? What is holy time? Who or what makes the Sabbath holy? How can we make Sabbath keeping a delightful and meaningful experience?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 23.*
God’s Gift for Busy People

Two basic institutions for all humankind date from the first week of earth’s history: marriage and the Sabbath. They are an intrinsic part of the divine program for human happiness. No wonder that both have, through the ages, been so much under attack from the evil one. God knew what humanity would need, and He therefore created time with a perfect cycle of six “normal” days plus one extraordinary day, the Sabbath. And ever since, those who have respected this divinely instituted rhythm have been blessed by it.

Why did God Himself rest on the seventh day after the creation of the world? Gen. 2:2, 3.

With what term does the prophet Ezekiel refer to the Sabbath? What do you think that means? Ezek. 20:12.

“After resting upon the seventh day, God sanctified it, or set it apart, as a day of rest for man. Following the example of the Creator, man was to rest upon this sacred day, that as he should look upon the heavens and the earth, he might reflect upon God’s great work of creation; and that as he should behold the evidences of God’s wisdom and goodness, his heart might be filled with love and reverence for his Maker.

“God saw that a Sabbath was essential for man, even in Paradise. He needed to lay aside his own interests and pursuits for one day of the seven, that he might more fully contemplate the works of God and meditate upon His power and goodness. He needed a Sabbath to remind him more vividly of God and to awaken gratitude because all that he enjoyed and possessed came from the beneficent hand of the Creator.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 47, 48.

What is your experience with the Sabbath? Do you enjoy it? Do you come to a deeper appreciation of God through contemplating the marvels of His creation? If not, what changes could you make that could help you have a more fulfilling Sabbath experience?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Mark 2:27, 28

The Student Will:

Know: The Sabbath allows us to separate ourselves from the world in order to rest and commune with God.
Feel: The joy provided for us through the Sabbath.
Do: Experience the Sabbath as God intended.

Lesson Outline:

I. Remembering the Sabbath (Lev. 23:3)

A We live in a hectic world. It is a blessing to have a day to rest! How do you spend your Sabbaths? What elements of the day contribute to rest and refreshment? What is your idea of the ideal Sabbath?

B The Ten Commandments tell us to keep the Sabbath holy. Define holy.

II. Enjoying the Sabbath (Mark 2:27)

A The Sabbath is a day dedicated to rejoice in our Creator and take a break from the normal rhythms of the world. Why is it then easier to make the Sabbath a day of rules rather than communion with Jesus?

B It is very easy for Sabbath observance to become legalistic, with constant questioning of the appropriateness of a particular activity. How can we distinguish what is Sabbath-appropriate?

III. Sharing the Sabbath (Luke 4:16)

A To experience the Sabbath as God intended, we must look to His Son as an example. What did Jesus do on the Sabbath?

B How can we apply His observance of the Sabbath to our lives?

Summary: The Sabbath is a holy day set apart from the rest of the week. It is our time to rest and commune with God.
Holy Time

The word *holy* occurs in the Bible in different settings. People are sometimes referred to as *holy*; so are objects or time periods. The core meaning is “to set aside for a specific use.” Priests were *holy* people because they were singled out for service in the sanctuary. They handled *holy* vessels and instruments, which were withdrawn from secular use for a specific ritual purpose. Similarly, *holy* days are marked by God for a specific purpose. Once they have been singled out as *holy*, they are no longer available for common use, because they have been destined for a higher purpose. The activities on such *holy* days must correspond with the purpose God has attached to such days.

**We** must “remember” to keep the Sabbath *holy*. Do we or does God make the day *holy*? What difference does that make? *Gen. 2:3, Isa. 58:13.*

“The [S]abbath is a powerful testimony to the sovereignty of God. Only he can create, and only he can make something holy. This is why Adventists object so strongly to the change from [S]abbath to Sunday as the Christian day of rest and worship. Without a clear divine mandate, such a development is nothing less than an affront to God.” —Richard Rice, *The Reign of God* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1997), p. 403.

**How** does the weekly *holy* seventh-day Sabbath impact those who choose to obey the command to keep the Sabbath according to God’s appointed day of *holy* time? *Exod. 31:12, 13.*

Keeping the Sabbath combines internal with external aspects. When our Sabbath keeping is only a matter of external behavior, following a list of rules, we have missed its true meaning. But, at the same time, our Sabbath keeping is visible to others. It tells other people that we are separate and different. It is a sign of our loyalty to our Creator and Redeemer.

**God wants His people to be “holy”;** that is, He wants people who have consciously separated themselves from the things of this world. How should keeping the Sabbath help you in a concrete way to be “separate” from the world? How should the reality of the approaching Sabbath each week serve as a reminder to you when facing temptations during the week, that we are supposed to be a holy people, a people separate from the defiling things of the world?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The Sabbath is a time for resting in Jesus apart from the everyday cares of the world.

Just for Teachers: If you can, bring in symbols, logos, or pictures of images or signs to stimulate discussion regarding what these items symbolize. What is the power of symbols? How do they manage to mean something without using any words to get their message across?

No competent sailor of the Spanish Main (today’s Caribbean Sea) failed to know what the white grinning skull and crossbones on a black flag meant: pirates. The sight of that flag on an approaching ship needed no words to explain what most likely would follow if the ship pursued could not escape in time, and that was plunder and mayhem. And a deadly fight for the ship’s cargo of sugar, emeralds, or rum—with the ship itself as the ultimate prize. And when the smoke of gunpowder cleared from the decks, those unlucky enough to still be alive would be given the dubious honor of either joining with the pirates or being eaten by the sharks. All these thoughts flooded the minds of the crew of a merchant ship as the maniacally grinning flag known as the Jolly Roger approached. That was the power of the symbol, without the pirate captain ever needing to speak a word of challenge.

Symbols don’t need to be terrifying to be powerful. For Sabbath keeping Christians, the Sabbath is also a powerful sign or symbol, but unlike the Jolly Roger, it is one of peace and rest. Keeping the Sabbath is a sign to the world that we are created by God, redeemed by Him, and that He has the ability to make us holy, now and forever.

Consider This: Before attacking another ship, pirates hoisted, or raised, the Jolly Roger up their ship’s mast in order to strike fear in the hearts of the other ship’s crew. The Sabbath, in a way, is also like a flag, but one with a vastly different effect. How is it a visible sign of our allegiance to God? In what ways can we as Sabbath keepers “hoist” the Sabbath so that all may see our intentions to honor our Creator? What can the way the pirate flag was used tell us about the power of symbols to affect others? In what way can the Sabbath be observed to influence others positively? How can our lives be living symbols of the Sabbath?
Experiencing the Joy of the Sabbath

When we talk about the Sabbath commandment, we usually refer to the version we find in Exodus 20. There the commandment is anchored in the Creation of the world. Every Sabbath we are reminded that God is our Creator and that we are His creatures, with all that this glorious truth implies. But in the version of the Ten Commandments in the book of Deuteronomy we discover an additional aspect. The weekly Sabbath is also a commemoration of Israel’s delivery from Egyptian bondage and thus, by extension, of every kind of slavery from which God’s grace has set humanity free.

*Read* Deuteronomy 5:12–15 carefully and compare it with Exodus 20:8–11. What do they add to each other? How do they complement each other? Are there possibly still other things we ought to “remember” in our Sabbath keeping? If so, what might they be?

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The Sabbath is a sign not only of creation but of redemption. It points us to the salvation we have in Jesus, who not only re-creates us now (2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 6:15) but offers the hope of an eternity in a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet. 3:13). In fact, the Jews have seen the Sabbath as a symbol of the “world to come”; that is, the new heaven and the new earth. It’s a weekly foretaste of what we will have for eternity and should serve as a special reminder of what we have been given in Jesus.

On a more practical level, the Sabbath helps to free us from the slavery of the clock and the calendar. Many are slaves of computers and mobile phones also. For many people it has become incredibly difficult to separate work time from leisure time. It seems that modern life requires that we can always be reached and always must be ready to switch into our work mode. The Sabbath is the perfect antidote to this disease, which threatens every form of true rest, both physical and spiritual.

“Setting aside a holy Sabbath means that we can cease our productivity and accomplishments for one day in every seven. The exciting thing about such a practice is that it changes our attitudes for the rest of the week. It frees us up to worry less about how much we produce on the other days. Furthermore, when we end that futile chasing after wind, we can truly rest and learn delight in new ways.”—Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), p. 19.
STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Review the first question in Sunday’s study with the class. Class members should come to the conclusion that God rested on the seventh day to celebrate His created works.

Bible Commentary

I. Whose You Are (Read Genesis 2:2, 3 with your class.)

The Sabbath is intrinsically linked to God as Creator. As this text shows, the Sabbath was instituted right after God had completed His work of Creation, when He came aside to celebrate that work. “The observance of the Sabbath is then a mark, or sign, that he who honors the day acknowledges Jehovah as his God, for only to Him do these facts of creation apply.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 646. The Sabbath then is also a safeguard against all other false theories of our existence. Why is that so important today, especially at a time when evolution popularly is taught?

Consider This: Discuss the connection between the Sabbath and our Creator God. How does the Sabbath serve to safeguard us against false ideas about our origins?

II. Free Indeed (Review with your class Deuteronomy 5:12–15, noting especially verse 15. Also look at Exodus 31:12, 13 and Ezekiel 20:12.)

Just for Teachers: Emphasize for your class members that the primary theme in the texts is that God makes us holy.

In Deuteronomy 5:15, we see that the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt is tied in with Sabbath keeping. Likewise, as we keep the Sabbath week after week, we are reminded of God’s power to deliver us from sin and make us holy. “The Sabbath thus becomes for the Christian a memorial not only of creation but of the re-creation of the image of God in his own heart and mind. . . . The Sabbath is thus a ‘sign’ of redemption as well as creation.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 972.

Consider This: What is the Sabbath meant to remind us of? Discuss the ways in which the Sabbath acts as a memorial.
Modeling Sabbath Rest to the World

Read Isaiah 58:12–14. What principles can we take away from these verses about Sabbath keeping that help us better experience the blessings God has for us if we remember the Sabbath properly?

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It is an extremely unfortunate reality: Many Adventists do not truly enjoy God's Sabbath. Some remember with utter frustration the ways in which the Sabbath was kept in their parental home. Even in Adventist institutions, Sabbath keeping can leave much to be desired. Rules and regulations are supposed to ensure that the Sabbath is kept “holy.” Some of these rules are based on biblical principles, but many have, in actual fact, more to do with tradition and culture than with a “Thus says the Lord.”

The Sabbath never must be a day mainly associated with prohibitions and restrictions. If we are looking for a model to follow, we must let ourselves be inspired by the example of Jesus.


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“Heaven’s work never ceases, and men should never rest from doing good. The Sabbath is not intended to be a period of useless inactivity. The law forbids secular labor on the rest day of the Lord; the toil that gains a livelihood must cease; no labor for worldly pleasure or profit is lawful upon that day; but as God ceased His labor of creating, and rested upon the Sabbath and blessed it, so man is to leave the occupations of his daily life, and devote those sacred hours to healthful rest, to worship, and to holy deeds. The work of Christ in healing the sick was in perfect accord with the law. It honored the Sabbath.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 207.

Try to imagine what the “perfect” Sabbath would be like. How would you keep it? What would be available to you that you could not have during the workweek? Bring your description to class on Sabbath.
III. To Rest or Not to Rest (Review Isaiah 58:12–14 with your class.)

In following God’s example and His injunction to keep the Sabbath, we also rest or cease from our labors. However, the Sabbath is about more than a list of dos and don’ts. To rest in Jesus means to be in active communion with Him.

“God requires not only that we refrain from physical labor upon the Sabbath, but that the mind be disciplined to dwell upon sacred themes. The fourth commandment is virtually transgressed by conversing upon worldly things or by engaging in light and trifling conversation.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, p. 703.

If we truly keep the Sabbath in the way that God intended, we will be blessed in all areas of our lives—physically, mentally, socially, and financially. We truly will ride on the high places of the earth and be uplifted more than we ever can imagine.

Consider This: How should the Sabbath be kept holy? Why is abstaining from work not enough? What does true rest mean?

STEP 3—Practice

Just for Teachers: Ask for a volunteer to read the parable aloud to the class. Then answer the questions that follow.

Parable:

Suzie’s cell phone vibrated with a text message from Ted: “CAN’T WAIT TO SEE YOU SUNDAY AT 1.” Ted was at another university, but on Sundays he would drive the 50 miles so that they could spend two or three hours together.

Suzie woke up very late on Sunday. She had stayed up late the night before, studying for an exam. When Ted knocked on the door, Suzie gave him a hurried hello and asked if he wouldn’t mind waiting while she finished her laundry. A half hour later, they rushed out the door.

At the diner, Suzie ran into a friend from high school whom she hadn’t seen in years. They did a lot of catching up. Ted looked bored, but Suzie thought, I still have some time left to spend with him. Besides, I can make it up next Sunday. The friend barely had left when Suzie’s cell phone rang. It was Sarah, telling her that today was the last day for the sale on those fabulous black patent leather pumps they had been wanting. Reluctantly, Ted went with Suzie to the mall. But by the time they were done shopping, it was time for Ted to head back.
The Sign of Rest

As Sabbath keepers we often are accused of trying to work our way to heaven by keeping the Sabbath. We hear that all the time. How should we respond?

Read again the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20. What does it tell us to do? It tells us, as well as our sons, our daughters, our servants, our animals, and even the strangers among us to rest. It’s all about rest.

Now, a simple question: How is it that the one commandment devoted to rest, the one commandment that specifically expresses rest, the one commandment that gives us a special opportunity to rest—how has this been turned into the universal “New Covenant” symbol of works? The only commandment that, by its nature, is all about rest has become, for many, the metaphor for salvation by works.

What’s wrong with this picture?

Indeed, far from being a symbol of works, the Sabbath is the Bible’s eternal symbol of the rest that God’s people have always had in Him.

Read Hebrews 4:9–11. What is the message to us here about the Sabbath?

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From the pre-Fall world of Adam and Eve’s Eden to the New Covenant rest that God’s followers have in Christ’s work of redemption for them, the Sabbath is a real-time manifestation of the rest that Christ offers to all. In Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus calls us to rest in Him. He will give us rest, and that rest finds one expression in His universal Sabbath day. Anyone can say that they are resting in Christ: anyone can say that they are saved by grace. But the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath is a visible expression of that rest, a living parable of what it means to be covered by His grace. Our weekly rest from our secular, worldly works stands as a symbol of our rest in the completed work of Jesus for us.

Our obedience to this commandment is a way of saying, “We’re so sure of our salvation in Jesus, we’re so firm and secure in what Christ has done for us, that we can—in a special way—rest from any of our works because we know what Christ has accomplished for humanity through His death and resurrection.”

Sabbath is a very real, very expressive, very visible expression and manifestation of the rest that we have in Jesus and what He has done for us. We don’t have to say it; we can express it in a real way, a way that those who don’t keep the Sabbath can’t.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Where did all the time go? Suzie wondered, as Ted drove away. Oh well, she promised herself, I can make it up to him next week. . . .

Discussion Questions:

1. How is keeping the Sabbath similar to a relationship?

2. How do you think Ted felt after that date? How do you want God to feel after each Sabbath with you? What can you do to improve the time you spend with God?

3. Why do you suppose that Suzie acted the way she did? How are we often similar to Suzie in the way we treat God?

4. Each Sabbath carries a reminder that the great God of the universe wants to spend time with us personally. What can we do to make our time undivided and purposeful?

STEP 4—Apply

Just for Teachers: Help your class to understand that the best way to enjoy the Sabbath is to prepare for it.

Friday is the preparation day for the Sabbath, but if we begin preparing ourselves, physically and spiritually, from Sunday, we will be able to enjoy more fully the blessings of the Sabbath and be a blessing to others, as well.

Try This:

1. Make a list of all the things that you need to do to be ready for Sabbath. Now do something from that list starting on Sunday and ending on Friday.

2. Prepare a special dish on Friday to be enjoyed at the beginning of the Sabbath.

3. Have a Friday night vespers or a Sabbath afternoon sing-along. Learn some songs that celebrate the meaning of the Sabbath.

4. Draw a picture or do a painting of what Sabbath means to you. Hang it in a place where all who enter your home will be blessed by it.
Further Study: Read the comments made by Ellen G. White on
the giving of the Ten Commandment law in *Patriarchs and Prophets*,
pp. 303–310, and on the story about Jesus’ Sabbath keeping together
with His disciples in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 281–289.

A rich source for additional information is, Walter F. Specht, “The
Sabbath in Scripture and History* (Washington, D.C.: Review and

Note in particular this passage: “In Mark’s account (chap. 2:27), Jesus
then raised the issue of the purpose of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was not
an end in itself. . . . It was designed to be a blessing to man, a day of
physical rest, but also a day devoted to spiritual exercises. The Pharisees
treated the day as though man were created to serve the Sabbath, rather
than the Sabbath meeting the needs of man. R. Shim’on ben Menasya
about A.D. 180 made a similar statement [to the statement made by
Jesus]: ‘The Sabbath is given over to you but you are not surrendered
to the Sabbath.’ ”—Page 96.

Discussion Questions:

1 In class, compare your descriptions of what a “perfect”
Sabbath would be like. What can you do to come as close as possi-
ble to that ideal?

2 Earlier in the week it was suggested that some of the rules and
restrictions we apply to the Sabbath are rooted more in tradition
than in the Word of God. As a class, discuss what these human-
made rules might be, as opposed to what the Bible says. How can
we know the difference?

3 Dwell more on the idea expressed in Thursday’s lesson. How
can we better show the world that the special rest that we enjoy
in Jesus through the Sabbath reveals the reality of Christ’s grace
in our lives? What things might we have done that give others the
wrong impression?

Summary: The Sabbath is God’s gift to humanity. It is the perfect antidote
for today’s restlessness and stress. It is a very specific weekly amount
of time that God has made “holy” for us. The day can, if approached
with the right attitude, be a source of physical and spiritual rest and a
time of great joy. The ultimate Example of true Sabbath keeping is
Jesus, who referred very significantly to Himself as the Lord of the
Sabbath.
Heaven

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Eccles. 9:5, 6; Col. 1:10–14; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; Rev. 21:1–4, 8.

Memory Text: “‘In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you...I will come back and take you to be with me’” (John 14:2, 3, NIV).

For many the word heaven has become meaningless, a concept that belongs to the realm of fairy tales. We delude ourselves, they say, if we think there is some kind of life beyond this earthly existence. Some go so far as to say that it is positively wrong to tell people that there is a heaven. They argue that it keeps people from putting all their efforts into what they could achieve in life here and now.

Even many Christians struggle with the concept. They are not so sure that heaven is a real place. Should heaven, rather, be interpreted as a state of mind? On the other hand, there are many who believe that at death the soul is released and enters heaven to live with God. They are confident that their father, mother, husband, wife, or child—who has preceded them in death—is now with God in heaven and that a few years at most separate them from a reunion with their loved ones.

What’s the truth on this important topic?

The Week at a Glance: Why is the promise of heaven so important to us? What will life be like there? How can we experience a foretaste of it now? What destiny awaits those whose choices exclude them from heaven?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 30.
When Do We Get to Heaven?

It is quite astonishing that the idea of an immortal soul—which is separable from our physical body and which ascends to heaven right at death—has become so dominant among Christians. Satan’s lie in Eden was: “‘You will not surely die’” (Gen. 3:4, NIV).

What do the following passages teach us about the true nature of death?

- 1 Kings 11:21
- Ps. 13:3
- Eccles. 9:5, 6
- 1 Cor. 15:51

When we die, we enter into a state of unconsciousness that the Bible compares to sleep. Unaware of what happens in the world, we await the morning of the resurrection. Only then will the great multitude of the redeemed enter heaven to join the very few, such as Enoch and Elijah, who have preceded them! But it is not going to be a long wait. The moment we close our eyes in death, the next thing we know will be Christ at His second coming. In other words, as far as those who die in Christ are concerned, it will make no difference whether it was 3,000 years ago or the day before Christ returns. They close their eyes in death, and the next thing they are conscious of is Jesus returning to get them. It will seem, to them, instantaneous.

What is the glorious truth about our future entrance into the heavenly realm? John 14:1–3, 1 Thess. 4:13–18.

“In the New Testament the blessed hope never focuses on individual death, but always on the return of Christ and the resurrection and translation of the saints to meet Him together, at the same time. It is in this future, and not what happens at death, that saints can find comfort.”—Norman Gulley, Christ Is Coming (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1998), pp. 293, 294.

Why is the promise of heaven so important to us? If there were no heaven and this life were all there was, then what hope does anyone have at all?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: John 14:2, 3

The Student Will:
Know: What Jesus meant by saying that the kingdom of God is within you.
Feel: Encouraged knowing that life on earth is but a transient phase.
Do: Be focused on the face-to-face communion with your Creator God that awaits you when this life is over.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Kingdom Within Us (Luke 17:21)
When the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come, He responded that the kingdom was within us. What did He mean by that statement?

II. Not of the World (John 15:19)
We are God’s children, and we are “not of the world.” Yet, we are called to live in this world until Jesus returns. How can you best represent the kingdom of heaven while here on earth?

III. Focused on the Kingdom (1 Cor. 13:12)
A Because of our inability to comprehend the reality of heaven, we tend to place importance on tangible, earthly, material things. Satan uses our lack of comprehension to skew our view of life and our value system. Identify specific elements in your life that monopolize your time and attention.

B What can you do to stay focused on heaven despite the fact there is so little we know about it?

Summary: Jesus assured His disciples that He was “going to prepare a place” for them. When discouragement and pessimism creep into your life, remember that your Creator is getting a place in heaven custom-ready just for you.
Heaven or Hell?

Not all people will be saved. Some will be eternally lost. Human beings have been created with a free will. Someone once expressed it like this: There are just two kinds of people—those who say, “Lord, Your will be done,” and those to whom the Lord says, “I have to respect your choice; your will be done!” In the end, no one asked to be born. We’re here only because we’ve been created without our consent. God offers us the hope of eternal life, if we choose it. If we don’t, then we will go back to the nothingness out of which we came. It’s, in the end, our own choice.


Heaven is a reality. It is a place. It is where God lives together with the other Members of the Godhead and a host of unfallen angels. It also is where we will live if we remain on God’s side. When Christ returns and the first resurrection takes place, the resurrected saints will accompany their Lord to heaven, where they will remain for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4–6). After the thousand years a series of events will take place, culminating in the creation of a “new heaven” and a “new earth” (Rev. 21:1), where the redeemed will then live forever.

But hell also is a reality. The popular belief in a place where sinners will be tormented and burn for all eternity does not have biblical support. But neither has the popular idea that in the end all people are going to be saved. Those who reject the good news of salvation and refuse to be obedient to God will be judged and condemned and will face a death from which there is no resurrection ever. Those who believe that all people will be saved argue that a God of love will not allow anyone to lose out on eternal bliss. They have a point to the extent that God is, indeed, love personified and wants to save all men and women. But tragically, not all people want to be saved. Christ could not have expressed it any clearer: “‘I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned,’ ” but He also added that “‘those who have done evil will rise to be condemned’ ” (John 5:24, 29, NIV).

It remains our choice. Heaven can be ours if we choose to believe in God and are willing to become disciples of His Son, Jesus Christ.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: This week’s lesson points to heaven’s reality and challenges us to live that hope.

Is there life after death? This question has been a persistent one throughout history. More than a third of the world’s population believes in reincarnation, the endless cycle of birth and death. Many would deny any future after death. But Christians take the future seriously and believe in heaven, although their views may differ.

When the gospel reached Thessalonica, believers accepted it wholeheartedly and believed that Jesus would return soon to take them home. But saints were dying, and Jesus had not come. Was their hope an empty dream? The First Epistle to the Thessalonians was penned to address that very question.

Consider This: Discuss what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–16 about living with Christ forever.

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: From the moment Adam and Eve lost the Edenic paradise, every generation of God’s people has waited for the new heaven and the new earth as their eternal home. This hope is not a figment of imagination but a reality based on God’s promises. Peter wrote: “We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13, NIV). Explore with the class the relationship between God’s promises and heaven’s reality.

Bible Commentary

Overview: The future is a major concern of Scripture; it views the future as part of God’s strategy to conclude the great controversy. Heaven is God’s promised destination for His people. Even as we await this finale in God’s plan, we need to reaffirm what heaven is and what its joys are.

I. Heaven: What Is It? (Review Revelation 21:1–3 with your class.)

Scripture provides two primary meanings to “heaven.” First, heaven is the
The Kingdom—Now and Then

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, we enter into a new kind of existence. Although still subject to the results of sin—aging, sickness, and the temporary “sleep” of death—we have already, in a very real sense, received eternal life. It is important never to lose sight of that crucial fact. We have been born again and have a new life “in Christ.” Those who have declared their allegiance to Christ are “children” of God (1 John 3:2, NIV). They have “‘crossed over,’ ” Jesus declares, “‘from death to life’” (John 5:24, NIV). They become children of God as they have incorporated the kingdom values into their lives. They now have a different Master, and their ultimate focus is no longer on the things of this world but on the eternal city.

**How** did Jesus express the reality of the citizenship of the kingdom for His followers even in this world? *Luke 17:21, John 14:27.*

**What** confirmation of this truth do we find in the words of Paul? *Rom. 14:17, Col. 1:10–14.*

But this is not where it stops. What we experience of the reality of the heavenly kingdom while we are still on earth is only a foretaste of the “inheritance” that is to come. It makes us long for more. When Jesus comes in His glory, “all the nations” will be gathered before Him (Matt. 25:32, NIV). “‘Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world”’ ” (vs. 34, NIV). That is the moment God’s children have been waiting for. They will be home at last!

“Better than all the friendship of the world is the friendship of Christ’s redeemed. Better than a title to the noblest palace on earth is a title to the mansions our Lord has gone to prepare. And better than all the words of earthly praise will be the Savior’s words to His faithful servants, ‘Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’ Matt. 25:34.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 374.

Go back over the texts for today. How have you experienced the reality of what is promised in them? What choices are you making that could be hindering you from truly enjoying what Christ offers you even now?
dwellings place of God, from where He reigns and acts (*Deut. 26:15, 1 Sam. 2:10, Pss. 11:4, 53:2, 103:19, Isa. 6:1–4, 63:15, Matt. 5:16, Rev. 3:12, 11:13, 20:9*). Heaven is His throne, and earth is His footstool, with His rulership extending to all created order (*Isa. 66:1, Acts 7:49*). Heaven is the place where angels worship God continually and await to do His bidding (*Ps. 103:19, 20; Matt. 18:10; 22:30; Matt. 24:36; Rev. 3:5*). From heaven Jesus came (*John 3:13, 31; 6:38, 42*), and to heaven He ascended and functions as our Mediator (*Heb. 8:1, 9:24, 1 Pet. 3:22*). It is from there He will come again (*John 14:1–3*).

Second, heaven is the home of the redeemed (*John 14:1–3, 1 Thess. 4:17*). The plan of salvation reaches its final stage when the redeemed enter into the joy of the new heaven and the new earth where God Himself “will dwell with them” (*Rev. 21:1–3*).

The ultimate definition of heaven, then, is where God dwells. At the end, the new heaven and the new earth will become God’s dwelling place (*Rev. 21:1–3*) and the inheritance of the redeemed. Wouldn’t that be heaven, at last!

**Discussion:**

1. What are some of the differing views Christians have on heaven?

2. When do the saints inherit heaven?

**II. Heaven—Its Joys!** (*Review Revelation 21:1–8 with your class.*)

Four times in Revelation 21:1–8, John argues that the initiative and the fulfillment of this eternal home of the redeemed rest with God. He has staked His name, nature, and authority to validate His promises. To deny this possibility is to deny God. Where lies the joys of this heavenly home?

First, God Himself will dwell with us (*Rev. 21:3, 4*). The biblical concept of the new earth throbs with the single most important idea that God would be the dynamic of that order. The earth renewed will become the locus of His throne. Fellowship with God will be fully restored. That face-to-face communion will be the source of utmost joy and happiness for the saints (*Rev. 22:4*).

Second, former things—all associated with sin—will pass away (*Rev. 22:5, Isa. 65:17*). No more tears. No more pain. No more death. No more
Beyond Our Wildest Expectation

Have you ever wondered how it will be in heaven and on the new earth? Will we recognize each other? Will we have eternal youth? What will we do when there? Will we have our own occupations? Or will we only sing God’s praises? Will we travel to other places in the universe? How much will we remember of our earthly existence? We are not the first ones to ask such questions!

**What did the Sadducees want to know about the life in the hereafter?**

**What did Jesus reply?** *Matt. 22:29, 30.*

The statement of Jesus that is recorded in Matthew 22 was part of a discussion with the Sadducees. They were a group of Jewish leaders who denied the possibility of a bodily resurrection. It is clear that it was not Jesus’ intention to give a full description of the conditions of eternal life. The context makes clear that Jesus wanted to emphasize that death has been conquered. He points beyond the reality of death and resurrection. Those who die are safe in His memory, and He can therefore still be called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Nonetheless, Jesus’ remark also clearly indicates that, in spite of all continuity, we will be raised with the unique identity that we had in this temporary life; there also will be plenty of discontinuity.

**What are some of the things we will no longer experience in the earth made new?** *Rev. 21:1, 4, 22–27; 22:5.*

Those of us who love vacationing on the seaside may be disappointed to learn that the sea will be “no more.” However, to the people who first heard these words, the sea was a threat. Israel never was a seafaring nation. For good reasons, it feared the dark depths of the oceans. And we know from several Gospel stories that even crossing the Sea of Galilee could be a scary experience. John the revelator tells us that in the new world that God will create, everything that could possibly be a threat to us will have been removed and everyone who could present a danger to us will be absent. We will be eternally secure!

Try to imagine a world without sickness, death, fear, loss—a world in which we only keep growing in knowledge and love. What things here give us hints at what it will be like there? Let your imagination seek to grasp what this new existence will be like. What are you especially anticipating?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

unfairness and injustice (Isa. 65:21, 22). Work will have its dignity and fulfillment (Isa. 65:23). Sickness will vanish, and perfect health shall characterize the inhabitants: “The leaves of the tree [of life] were for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2; see also Ps. 46:4). Perfect peace, perfect enjoyment of God, perfect worship, and joyful obedience will mark the life in the new earth (2 Cor. 6:16, Heb. 8:10, Zeph. 3:9).

Third, harmony and righteousness shall characterize land and life in the new earth (2 Pet. 3:13). With the abolition of the curse upon the earth (Rev. 22:3; cf. Gen. 3:16–19), creation would be freed from its bondage and decay (Rom. 8:18–22). The desolate will be transformed like the Garden of Eden (Isa. 30:23; 35:1, 2, 7; 65:17; 66:22; Hos. 1:10; 2:18; Zech. 8:12). Peace will characterize the environment: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together” (Isa. 65:25).

Discuss: Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God as already come and as yet to come (Matt. 6:10, Luke 17:21). How do you distinguish between the two?

STEP 3—Practice

Just for Teachers: “As through Jesus we enter into rest, heaven begins here. . . . Heaven is a ceaseless approaching to God through Christ. . . . As we walk with Jesus in this life, we may be filled with His love, satisfied with His presence.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 331.

Discuss: Your home is known for its joy and happiness, a little heaven on earth. But recently your teenage son has shown a rebellious attitude and has made some lifestyle choices that you are not comfortable with. Your little heaven on earth is disturbed. How would you apply the thought given in the quote from The Desire of Ages to your home situation?
Meeting the Lord of Heaven

We have every reason to believe that on the new earth we will be able to recognize those we knew in this life. Our resurrection bodies will resemble that of the risen Lord. When He appeared to His followers after His resurrection, He clearly was recognizable to those who had been with Him prior to His death. What an inexpressible joy it will be to be reunited with those we lost in death. But the supreme experience will be to meet the Lord of the universe. Our songs will come true: “Face to face shall [we] behold Him, far beyond the starry sky!” What a privilege it will be to stand before the Alpha and the Omega of the universe.

What assurance do we have that we will meet the Lord of lords? I Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 21:22, 23.

We cannot yet imagine what it will be like to meet our Savior. How many questions will we want to ask! The why question, which has so often been on our lips, finally will receive its definitive answer. We will at last understand why God permitted particular trials and temptations into our earthly existence. Never again will we doubt God’s wisdom and goodness. All distrust will dissipate as we learn why God allowed certain things to take place. And only then will we realize fully how we have been protected from all kinds of dangers.

What will be a dominant aspect of eternal life? Rom. 14:11, 1 Tim. 1:17, Rev. 5:13.

Eternal life is singing eternal praises and worshiping the King. Why? Because He is worthy of our adoration. “That the Maker of all worlds, the Arbiter of all destinies, should lay aside His glory and humiliate Himself from love to man will ever excite the wonder and adoration of the universe. As the nations of the saved look upon their Redeemer and behold the eternal glory of the Father shining in His countenance; as they behold His throne, which is from everlasting to everlasting, and know that His kingdom is to have no end, they break forth in rapturous song: ‘Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His own most precious blood!’ ” —Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, pp. 651, 652.

What will it be like when you meet Jesus face to face? What do you think you will say to Him, and why? What do you think He’ll say to you?
**STEP 4—Apply**

*Just for Teachers: To some, heaven is a true but distant reality, too removed from the daily grind of life to impact much. To others, it is a comforting mythology; to still others, it is an opiate that numbs the pain of the present. As a believer, how do you relate to heaven’s reality?*

While in India, a man hailed a taxi to take him to an Adventist college. As he got out of the taxi, the driver took a long look at him and asked him if he was the pastor who had held an evangelistic series earlier that year. The man replied with some surprise that, yes, he was. The driver’s next question was if the man recognized him. The pastor did not. But the driver jump-started the pastor’s memory by relating an incident that had occurred at the evangelistic series. The driver and his wife had brought their three-year-old son every day for special prayer. The pastor had prayed for divine healing so that this beautiful child could walk.

“Yes, now I do know you. How is the child doing?” the pastor asked.

“He is doing well,” the cab driver said with joy. He then explained. “In your last sermon, you spoke about heaven where there will be no more sorrow, no more pain, no more death. You even read from the Bible, in Isaiah 35:6, ‘Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing’ [NKJV]. That hope is the reason for my joy."

**Discuss:** How can the promise of heaven be as real to you today in your daily Christian walk, as it is for this man?

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For Further Study: Ellen G. White has written a lot about heaven and our entrance into the heavenly kingdom. The final chapters of *The Great Controversy* are a sublime description of what will be ours. But the compilation *The Story of Redemption* also captures this topic admirably. See the last four chapters, pp. 418–433.

“‘And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.’ Rev. 21:1. The fire that consumes the wicked purifies the earth. Every trace of the curse is swept away. No eternally burning hell will keep before the ransomed the fearful consequences of sin. One reminder alone remains: our Redeemer will ever bear the marks of His crucifixion. Upon His wounded head, His hands and feet, are the only traces of the cruel work that sin has wrought.”—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 430.

Discussion Questions

1 How do we deal with the question of salvation for those who have never heard the name of Jesus? How should the fact that Jesus died for the sins of all humanity, even those who never heard of Him, help us trust that God has not forgotten those folk either?

2 The Bible describes death as a sleep, a state of unconsciousness. How can one then explain “near-death” experiences in which people claim to have seen heavenly beings in a dazzling light or dead friends and relatives? How can we help these people realize that what they experienced might not be what they are judging it to be? In other words, how can we help them realize that what they saw couldn’t be what they think it was, no matter how real it seemed to their senses?

3 How have people abused the promise of eternal life in ways that allowed them to manipulate others for personal or political gain? What are some ways we might be guilty of doing the same thing, if on a less dramatic scale?

Summary: We are people with a destiny that extends far beyond our short existence in this present world. We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom. This kingdom is both present and future. It already is with us but will be realized fully in all its glory when Christ returns to take us home. Then eternal life in God’s presence will be ours.
Read for This Week’s Study: Exod. 18:13–27, Matt. 4:19, 9:9, Mark 3:13–19, 8:31–38, Rom. 8:18.

Memory Text: “‘This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples’” (John 15:8, NIV).

It is important that we use our intellectual capacities to grasp as much as is humanly possible of what God has revealed to us. Yet, perfect knowledge of all doctrine is not a prerequisite for salvation. We are, though, commanded to do all the things that we have been instructed to do. To be a disciple is to be a lifelong learner and follower of the Master.

What is a disciple? The SDA Bible Dictionary defines it, basically, as “one who, as a student or adherent, follows the teaching of another, especially of a public teacher. In the NT ‘disciple’ is the translation of the Gr. mathētēs . . . which is related to manthanō, ‘to learn,’ hence means ‘a learner,’ ‘a pupil,’ ‘an adherent.’” —Page 288. Let’s look a little closer at what it means to be a disciple.

The Week at a Glance: A disciple is a lifelong learner. When Christ calls us, we are to follow, wherever He leads and no matter the suffering involved, for it will involve suffering if for no other reason than it must involve sacrifice. In human terms the rewards of discipleship seem rather meager. But when the true dimension of life in Christ is discovered, we realize it’s worth suffering for, no matter the cost here and now.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 6.
Followers and Leaders

Read Exodus 18:13–27. What principles of leadership can be found in these verses? What can we learn from them about leaders and followers?

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Although all people are fundamentally equal in the eyes of God, there are major differences in the manner in which they function. Some have the gift of leadership. Our society, and every organization within society, would soon collapse if there were no leaders. Even in heaven there appears to be a distinct differentiation in roles: There are, for instance, angels and archangels! When God called His people out of Egypt, He appointed leaders. When He organized a sanctuary service, He made sure there would be adequate leadership. God worked through judges, prophets, kings, and so on.

But leaders are useless without followers who are willing to accept their leadership. In particular, they need a group of close associates who are willing to learn from their leader and to assist in the realization of the goals of their leader.


There was nothing extraordinary about the fact that Jesus had a group of disciples. It was customary for teachers to have a following of “interns.” What was remarkable, however, were the kind of men Jesus chose. Jesus saw potential in these men that most of us would not have discerned! What also is remarkable was their instant willingness to leave their daily business and follow this Carpenter from Nazareth. They apparently saw something extraordinary in this Man that even most of His own relatives had not discovered yet.

It should, however, be noted that although the Twelve are a very special group, there are also many others referred to in the Gospels as “disciples.”

There tends to be in some societies an antileadership attitude; in contrast, in some societies people all but blindly follow their leaders. What’s the tendency in your society, and how do you strike a proper balance?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: John 15:8

The Student Will:

Know: Discipleship is a lifelong reflection of Jesus.
Feel: The Holy Spirit guide you through your journey of discipleship.
Do: Persevere through the sufferings that come as a result of a life devoted to Christ.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Work of a Disciple (Matt. 28:19)

Matthew 28:19 often is referred to as the Great Commission. Here Jesus gives His disciples their most important task, to make more disciples in His name. What do you see as your role in the Great Commission?

Spreading the gospel is an important part of discipleship. But the apostles did much more than that. Their ministry spread to many other areas. How is discipleship more than just conversion, baptism, and adding to the church?

II. The Guide of a Disciple (Acts 1:8)

Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit. The Spirit guides us as disciples. How have you been influenced by the Holy Spirit in your life?

III. The Motivation of a Disciple (Rom. 8:17, 18)

Paul, a great example of discipleship, acknowledges the suffering associated with following Christ. Yet, despite that suffering, he was a devoted disciple of Christ. What convicts you to be the same?

Summary: A disciple’s life is filled with the presence of God. It is a lifelong devotion. Make or renew this commitment, and honor it regardless of trials.
Marks of Discipleship: Obedience and Loyalty

Jesus did not just share knowledge with His disciples, although it must have been a tremendous privilege to constantly hear Jesus explain the Scriptures and answer the numerous questions with which the spiritual leaders of His day bombarded Him. They quickly noticed what others also perceived. He taught with an authority that surpassed the scholars of His day. He separated lifeless traditions from the real-life issues that God’s Word addresses. However, there was more the disciples needed to learn. They also needed to learn to make their own will and desires subject to the will of the Almighty.

What principles of discipleship can we find in the following texts? 
Matt. 4:19, 9:9, Mark 8:34.

“Yes, follow Him through evil as well as through good report. Follow Him in befriending the most needy and friendless. Follow Him in being forgetful of self, abundant in acts of self-denial and self-sacrifice to do others good; when reviled, reviling not again; manifesting love and compassion for the fallen race. He counted not His life dear, but gave it up for us all. Follow Him from the lowly manger to the cross. He was our example.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, p. 178.

How did Peter react when many followers deserted Jesus? John 6:60–70.

Not all disciples stayed with Jesus. Many turned away. Peter spoke for the disciples when declaring their allegiance. With the exception of Judas, they eventually did prove to be faithful followers, and they became leaders in the early church, even though they had moments of grave doubt and disillusionment when their Master was taken prisoner and crucified. Their experience gives us great comfort. Many of us have had moments when our resolve to be disciples was at low tide, but as in the case of the apostles, this does not mean that we cannot overcome our temporary lapse.

If someone were to ask you, “How loyal are you to Jesus?” how would you respond, and why? What outward evidences do you give of your loyalty to Him?
Learning Cycle

★STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Answering the call to discipleship means leaving the old life behind to follow Jesus.

The burly fisherman rushed to his home and announced, “I’ve got a new job. I’m not going fishing anymore.”

His wife looked puzzled and suspicious. What would that new job be? After all, her husband was just a fisherman.

Peter, however, was sure of his calling. “I’m going to be a fisher of men,” he said.

But the voice from the kitchen revealed a mixture of sarcasm and anger: “We don’t eat men; we eat fish.”

Undeterred, Peter left the nets and followed Jesus. Such is the cost and compulsion of discipleship.

Consider This: Disciple means a follower. Peter and Andrew (Mark 1:16–18), two disciples of the Baptist (John 1:35–37), Matthew (Matt. 9:9), Philip (John 1:43), and indeed, all the disciples (Matt. 19:27) left everything and followed Jesus. Leaving and following are thus essential prerequisites to discipleship. What have you left? To what extent are you following?

★STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Socrates had Plato. Gamaliel had Saul. Leaders of various religions had their devout followers. The difference between discipleship in such cases and the discipleship of Jesus is that the former is based on the content of a philosophy or teaching, whereas the latter is rooted in the accomplishment of Jesus. What Jesus achieved is redemption from sin through His death and resurrection. Thus, Christian discipleship rests not so much on Christ’s teachings as on what He did for the salvation of humanity. Hence, Jesus bids all His followers to identify themselves fully with Him and take up their cross and follow Him (Matt. 10:38, Mark 8:34; see also Luke 9:23). Without walking in the footsteps of Calvary, there is no Christian discipleship. (Stress this point as you teach today.)
Sacrifice

Most of us like to be with important people. Meeting a head of state or a government minister or a celebrity provides us with a much-coveted conversation topic. Knowing someone important, or even knowing someone who knows someone important, somehow seems to endow us with a halo of glory. It seems a natural desire to climb up the social ladder rather than remain near its base. Jesus’ disciples were no exception to this unfortunate human trait.

How did some disciples (and their relatives) hope that following Jesus would enhance their status? What was Jesus’ reply? Matt. 20:20–23, Mark 10:35–41. What does this attitude remind you of? Isa. 14:12–14.

Rather than promising His disciples material prosperity and social status, Jesus prepared them for a different kind of reality: Following Him is a costly business.

Read Mark 8:31–38. What do you learn in this passage about the cost of discipleship?

In his famous book The Cost of Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the young German theologian who was martyred by the Nazis in 1945, emphasizes that divine grace does not come cheap. And following Christ is not an easy thing to do. It inevitably will involve suffering. Just as Christ said that He “must suffer,” so must we. If we want to identify with Him in His life, we must also do so in His suffering and death. “To endure the cross is not a tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ. When it comes, it is not an accident, but a necessity. . . . Only a man . . . totally committed in discipleship can experience the meaning of the cross. The cross is there, right from the beginning, or he has only got to pick it up; there is no need for him to go out and look for a cross for himself, no need for him deliberately to run after suffering. Jesus says that every Christian has his own cross waiting for him, a cross destined and appointed by God.”—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1965), p. 98.

What is the cross that God has given you to bear? What has following Christ cost you? If your answer is “Nothing, really,” maybe you need to take a closer look at how closely you are following the Master.
Bible Commentary

Overview: The word disciple occurs some 269 times in the New Testament, mostly in the Gospels and Acts. To be a disciple of Jesus is the most life-fulfilling experience one can have. It energizes the spirit, challenges the mind, and demands our utmost in our relationship with God and our fellow human beings. It is important, therefore, to explore what makes a disciple and what are the marks of discipleship.

I. The Making of a Disciple (Review Matthew 28:19 with your class.)

Discipleship is not self-made. It is a result of responding to the call of Jesus. He “called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him” (Mark 3:13, NKJV). Although originally Jesus called the Twelve, He also called the Seventy (Luke 10:1–20) and then commanded His disciples to “‘make disciples of all the nations’” (Matt. 28:19, NKJV). Thus, discipleship is not restrictive: it is governed by the same “whosoever” principle that operates in God’s plan of salvation (John 3:16).

Whoever heeds His call, experiences His forgiveness, and commits himself or herself to Christ’s service is His disciple. Christian discipleship is an operative link between the saved and the Savior—the former to live, obey, relate, experience, and serve within the will of the latter. Thus, Paul could say, “‘I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me’” (Gal. 2:20, NIV).

Discuss: The Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) requires that we make disciples of all nations. What areas of life are affected by the “all nation” concept? How would you relate to those areas?

II. Marks of Discipleship (Review Luke 9:23 with your class.)

At least four marks of discipleship must be emphasized.

First, the priority of Jesus. “‘If anyone desires to come after Me,’” said Jesus, “‘let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me’” (Luke 9:23, NKJV). All relationships, activities, hopes, and dreams
The Rewards of Discipleship

Jesus left His disciples with no doubt that following Him would require sacrifice. He was totally up front with them in regard to what they should expect.


**What specific “promise” did Jesus have for Peter?** *John 21:15–18.*

**What does this tell us about the cost of following Christ?**

The disciples, except Judas, eventually became the apostles. From the first chapters of the book of Acts, it is clear that these men had learned many lessons. They had been with Jesus, and now, with the power of the Spirit, they were able to deal with opposition and persecution. Although we cannot be sure about the details, there is good reason to believe the strong traditions from the early church era which say that all apostles eventually suffered martyrdom. All supposedly suffered a violent death, except John, but his imprisonment on Patmos was not a luxurious vacation, either. He also was a “brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus” *(Rev. 1:9, NIV).*

**What aspect of discipleship outweighs all suffering that might come our way as we follow Christ?** *John 10:10, Rom. 8:28–39.*

Those who follow Christ will face numerous challenges. If they stay focused on their Master, they will be able to deal with whatever happens. They will have something that is precious beyond words. He gives them His peace, which is unlike the imperfect and transient kind of peace the world offers *(John 14:27).* It is the peace that transcends all understanding *(Phil. 4:7).* That peace is the hallmark of the abundant life that Christ gives to His disciples *(John 10:10).* In spite of all trials and temptations, this is the kind of life that satisfies at a level beyond the reach of those who choose to live without Christ.

And yet, even more so, faithful followers of Christ have the assurance of eternal life, the assurance that whatever they struggle with now can’t be compared with the promise of eternity that awaits them.

*Read Romans 8:18. What hope and comfort can you draw from this promise for yourself? Why should it tell you to never, never give up?*
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

must come under the lordship of Christ daily and perpetually. Nothing can come between the disciple and the Master (Matt. 10:37–39). A disciple’s ever-binding motto will be, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21, NKJV).

Second, abiding in Jesus. “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed” (John 8:31, 32, NKJV). Christian discipleship is a call to continually live in Jesus and to let His Word be the constant guide to faith and conduct. Doctrinal faithfulness, lifelong obedience, and fearless witness to the Master will set a disciple apart from others.

Third, loving one another. “A new commandment I give to you. . . . By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34, 35, NKJV). In Jesus’ new commandment (vs. 34), the newness does not refer to love but to the object of love. We do love, but we love the lovable, our own. But Jesus expects His disciples to love as He did—love sacrificially, love at all costs, love without barriers, love inclusively, love to build the community, love to enlarge God’s kingdom, and love to make disciples.

Fourth, fruit-bearing. “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples’ ” (John 15:8, NKJV). Far from being a theoretical construct, discipleship is a practical witness to what Christ has done to a sinner. He has forgiven, redeemed, and empowered so that the once feeble and guilt-ridden are freed from condemnation to live lives of obedience and ones that are fruit-bearing. Disciples are overcomers and reflectors of Christ’s righteousness.

Discuss: Read Acts 11:19–27. Preachers call this narrative the Antioch effect—the effect of grace that produced disciples out of both Jews and Gentiles and made a common family known for the first time as “Christians.” What lessons can you draw from this narrative?

STEP 3—Practice

Just for Teachers: Discipleship involves a commitment (Mark 8:34–36). The commitment is total, lifelong, and costly. It involves our
The Lordship of Jesus Christ

Being a disciple implies the recognition of having a master, of allegiance to someone we are willing to follow and serve. Our relationship to others usually finds expression in the manner in which we address them.

**What was one of the titles given to Christ by His followers?** *John 20:28, 1 Cor. 16:22.*

The New Testament uses a variety of names for Jesus. He is called “the Son of God” but also “the Son of Man” or “the Messiah.” Hundreds of times Jesus is referred to as “the Lord.” This word, which initially was quite general in its application, became a highly significant term for the early Christians. The Roman emperor claimed divinity and wanted to be addressed as “the Lord.” To confess that Christ was their ultimate Lord rather than the Roman Caesar was not just expressing an opinion. It literally could be a matter of life or death. Those who lived in the Roman realm should only have one *Kyrios* (lord), and to apply this title to any person other than the emperor could well end in torture and death.

Thus, it required faith and dedicated discipleship to call Jesus “Lord.” But today it also is no small thing to call Jesus our Lord and truly mean it. If He is our Lord, He is the Sovereign over our whole life, over all that we say and do.

**What is the key element that reveals how genuine we are in calling Jesus “Lord”?** *Matt 7:22, 23; Luke 6:46.*

It’s one thing to call Jesus our Lord and our God and to profess faith, love, and allegiance to Him. It’s quite another to truly live it. Jesus was clear: Our fidelity to Him will be manifested by our obedience to Him and to His commands. In fact, the word for “iniquity” in Matthew 7:23 means “lawlessness.” No question, a true follower of Jesus, a true disciple, will obey His commandments (*John 14:15*).

**Try to imagine how different our church would be if everyone who professed to follow Christ was truly a disciple of Jesus. What differences would we see?** While you can’t change others, what difference could you make were your life one of true conformity to Jesus’ will?
money, time, talents, and family. It may get in the way of our pride, self-sufficiency, and desires. What is your commitment readiness like?

Distribute slips of paper to your class. Ask each member to consider prayerfully areas in which their discipleship commitments need to be refined, and then list those areas. Let them place the list in their Bibles and review it during their private devotions.

**STEP 4—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Share with the class the following story that imagines what transpired immediately upon Jesus’ return to heaven. Then follow up with the discussion questions.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, jubilant angels welcomed the triumphant Conqueror with a rousing chorus of praise. Jesus told the angels of His victorious mission to earth and what it cost in terms of His suffering and death. Seeing the nailprints on His hands, angels were moved at the love that the Father and the Son showed toward sinners.

One angel may have asked Jesus, “After You have done so much for humanity, what plans have You left behind so that all the world will know about God’s love and Your redemptive action?”

Jesus may have answered, “I have left Peter, James, John, and others and told them to go and make disciples of all men and women. My work on earth is done, but its completion rests with My disciples.”

**Discuss:** How do we know that we are disciples of Jesus? What kind of disciples does Jesus wish us to be? How can we be the kind of disciples that Jesus can count on to tell others what He has done for them?

Heaven’s costliest mission demands our faithfulness in discipleship. How can we commit to a deeper faithfulness as His disciples?

What work has Jesus left for us to finish in His name?
**Further Study:** For comments on the calling of the disciples, read Ellen G. White, “‘We Have Found the Messias,’” pp. 132–143, in *The Desire of Ages.*

“It was not enough for the disciples of Jesus to be instructed as to the nature of His kingdom. What they needed was a change of heart that would bring them into harmony with its principles. Calling a little child to Him, Jesus set him in the midst of them; then tenderly folding the little one in His arms He said, ‘Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ The simplicity, the self-forgetfulness, and the confiding love of a little child are the attributes that Heaven values. These are the characteristics of real greatness.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 437.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **As a class, go over the question of what it costs to be a true follower of Christ. Ask those who are willing to discuss it, what it costs them to follow the Lord. Ask, too, why they believe it is worth it.**

2. **What can we do to help the new believers among us become better disciples of Christ? Why is being a disciple so much more than just intellectually consenting to a number of doctrines, or even more than believing that Jesus died for your sins?**

3. **We are called to be disciples of Jesus. But on the human level, we also have role models. Is it legitimate to consider ourselves also disciples of a human leader we respect and consider a role model? If so, how could we do this while at the same time not forgetting to whom we owe our ultimate allegiance?**

4. **How can we fight the sinful human desire for more self-glory, more adulation, more power and prestige? Why are such desires so contrary to all that it means to be a disciple of Christ?**

**Summary:** To be a disciple of Christ is no small thing. It requires a lot of conviction and stamina and a willingness to follow the Lord, regardless of the suffering involved. To be a disciple of Christ means to live by faith, to trust God even in the hardest of times. It means to be willing to die to self and live for the good of others and for the glory of God.
Stewardship

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Deut. 8:18; Ps. 50:12; Matt. 24:46; 25:14–30; Luke 4:16; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20.

Memory Text: “‘Everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance’” (Matthew 25:29, NIV).

Stewardship is not limited to caring for financial resources and to making sure that God gets His 10 percent. Though that’s certainly part of it, so much more is involved.

“The term steward is misunderstood and even foreign in our society. We do not have any terms in our modern vocabulary that carry the richness of this term. Caretaker fails to capture the responsibility laid on the steward. Manager seems inadequate to describe the relationship between the owner and the steward. Custodian is too passive a term. Agent is too self-serving in our day. Ambassador is too political, and it lacks the servant aspect. Warden is too administrative and loses the sense of the personal. Guardian is too closely tied solely to parental responsibilities.”—R. Scott Rodin, Stewards in the Kingdom (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 27.

The Week at a Glance: How do I use my talents, my time, my material resources, all the things that God has given me stewardship over? How do I truly live my responsibilities toward my Maker and Redeemer? This is what stewardship is all about.

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

If there were a prize given for the clearest explanation of an all-encompassing profound concept, Jesus would have easily won it with His parable of the talents.

Read Matthew 25:14–30. What basic message about stewardship do you take from Jesus’ words here?

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Reality number one: We all have talents. Note in the parable that all the servants receive one or more talents. No one is left without some talent. That is the first truth Jesus wanted to impress upon His disciples.

Reality number two: We do not all have the same number of talents. It is a fact of life that we will have to accept. Some people are gifted in many ways while others are not so multitalented. Those who have several talents should never look down upon others who have fewer talents. Jesus’ point is clear: The quantity of our talents is not the most important; what we do with whatever we have been given is what matters.

Reality number three: Some refuse to use their talents. Some never recognize the talents they have. Sadly, no one reminded them of their gifts. Or they did realize their gifts but, for a variety of reasons, refused to invest any energy in developing them.

Reality number four: Not using your talents is a serious business. The “worthless servant” gets no second chance. He is thrown “ ... into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 25:30, NIV)—the symbolic description of the utter nothingness of eternal death. Not using what God has entrusted to us not only impairs us in this life but jeopardizes our eternal life. This means that the issue of being faithful stewards is not something that belongs to the periphery of our Christian experience—it is the vital characteristic of discipleship.

What are your gifts? Even more important, what are you doing with them? Are you using them to serve only yourself and your own desires, or are you using them also in service to the Lord? Why is this question so important?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Matthew 25:29

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** That stewardship is a lifestyle.
- **Feel:** The joy that comes from living a life of stewardship.
- **Do:** Manage the resources with which God has entrusted you.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. A Life of Stewardship *(Luke 16:1–12)*

- **A** This passage is one of the most cited parables when discussing stewardship in which talents are equated with money. But stewardship is more than a prudent use of money; stewardship is about making God a priority over everything else in life. What are some aspects in your life of which you can be a better steward?

- **B** Jesus accomplished so much in His three-and-a-half years of ministry, balancing ministry with family, friends, and personal spiritual growth. In what ways can you emulate Jesus’ stewardship in your life?

II. The Joys of Stewardship *(Rom. 12:1)*

- **A** Paul urges us to become living sacrifices, dedicated to pleasing God. What steps can we take in our lives to make Paul’s words a reality?

- **B** A life of stewardship is a continuous state of worship. What joys do you get from knowing that you are worshiping God through your actions?

III. The Balance of Stewardship *(Eccles. 3:1)*

- **A** The Bible teaches that there is a time for everything. This teaching suggests a life of balance. In what ways is stewardship a kind of balancing act?

- **B** We, too, must strive to achieve a balance in all we do. How can we achieve the same balance in life that Jesus did?

**Summary:** Stewardship is vital to discipleship. Prioritize your responsibilities and values in life and live in accordance with God’s plan.
Time

There is a plethora of books and courses on the subject of time management. They have helped millions of people make better use of their time. Many Christians would do well to read some of these books or attend a good seminar. But there are aspects to a Christian use of time that one will learn only by reading the Bible and, in particular, by studying the life of Jesus.

What do we learn from the Gospels about Jesus’ use of His time? What are some of the elements to be noted, apart from His busy schedule of preaching and healing? What other passages can add further information?

Matt. 4:23_______________________________________________

Mark 1:29–31_____________________________________________

Luke 4:16_______________________________________________

John 2:1–11_____________________________________________

John 12:2_______________________________________________

In today’s stressful world, the example of Jesus is as refreshing as it is worth imitating. Jesus worked hard and was fully committed to His mission. But He made sure that He did not miss the blessings of the Sabbath. The Gospels make it abundantly clear that He had time for His Father, for His friends, for relaxation, and for a good meal. This type of time management (or rather, time stewardship) will prove a blessing for all who practice it.

The Bible does not praise workaholics, nor does it have any commendations for those who always take it easy. As always, there is a balance, one in which we get done the things we need to get done, while at the same time we don’t burn ourselves out emotionally or physically. God has the first claim on our time. We manifest this in our keeping of the Sabbath and our daily time for prayer and worship. Our loved ones also are entitled to a fair share of our time. Then there is time for work, for leisure, and for a host of other things. The church also claims a substantial part of our time. But there must always be a balance so that we don’t fall into one trap or another.

Where do you lean, toward doing not enough or toward doing too much? How can you live a more balanced life in regard to the stewardship of your time? Why is it important that you do?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God has made each of us stewards of specific gifts to be used in His service.

Just for Teachers: The gifts God has given us are unique to each of us individually and, in some ways, are similar to what He gives all His children. Introduce these gifts to your class members in a way that reminds them of the gifts’ divine origin and of God’s interest in their development.

Opening Activity: Prepare four gift bags. In one bag, place a clock, timer, or watch to symbolize the gift of time. In the second bag, place an anatomical model of some part of the body, a sculpture, an artist’s model, or picture of the human body to symbolize our bodies. In the third bag, place various tools, such as brushes, calculator, wrenches, and so on to symbolize talents and skills. In the fourth bag, place such items as a toy car, toy house, money bank, or wallet to symbolize material possessions.

Invite different class members to open each bag. (You might pick members whom you would like to draw closer to the group.) Stress that while the sizes and types of items in each bag may be different for each person, we each have all four of these gifts, and they are from God. Discuss the similarities and differences in our gifts. For example, though we each have 24 hours in a day, some of us are single, some are married, and some have families. Some work for the church, and others don’t. Some of us live longer than others. How do these factors affect the gift of time we each have? Discuss the paradox of how these are gifts yet also investments God has made, and what He expects for the development of these investments.

Optional: Prepare four gift cards for each member of your class. On the front of each card, have a picture or cutout of a gift package. Inside or on the back of the cards, write the names of the gifts. Give the cards to your class members to take home as reminders of your discussion.

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The story of the talents not only speaks to stew-
Stewards of Our Body

In the secular world, most people regard their bodies as their own property. They believe they have total say over what happens to it. This applies not only to vast numbers of women who claim that they should be free to decide whether or not they will have an abortion but also to all who feel they have the right to harm their bodies by the use of illegal substances or by eating large quantities of junk food or by having sexual relationships with as many partners as they choose.

Read and pray over 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20. What do these verses tell us about how we use our bodies? What are practical ways we can put these words into effect?

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The immediate context indicates that the apostle Paul was, in particular, referring to the abuse of our body through sexual immorality. Unfortunately, this is as relevant today in many parts of the world as it was in ancient Corinth, a city known for its perversities.

But the basic idea is that we should not “sin against our body,” because we are not our own. First, we have been created by God through Jesus Christ. He is our Maker, and we therefore are responsible to Him for all we do. Second, He is our Redeemer, the One who has bought us “at a price.”

Stewardship of our bodies implies taking good care of our health, too. It has to do not only with what we eat but also with the amount of rest we take and with keeping fit through adequate exercise. And there can be no question of using substances that are addictive or otherwise harmful.

Yet, again, there is need for balance. “Health itself is not to be a preoccupation. It should be a part of the Christian pattern of life and rather automatic in operation. An overriding preoccupation with health can be a form of idolatry that gets in the way of a satisfying relationship with God. Health is to enable service to God, but is not an end in itself.”—Leo R. Van Dolson and J. Robert Spangler, Healthy, Happy, Holy (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1975), p. 43.

Take a good look at all your health habits, not just diet. What do you need to improve on? What changes can and should you make? What holds you back from doing what you know is right?
ardship but also relates to several other stories Jesus told about our relationship to His gifts. In this section of the lesson, explore with your class how these stories present principles of stewardship.

Option: After discussing the story of the talents, you may choose to divide your class into three groups, assigning each group one of the other stories to compare and contrast with the story of the talents. Then end by asking each group to share points from their discussions with the rest of the class.

Bible Commentary

I. The Master and His Property (Review Matthew 25:14–30 with your class.)

In the parable of the talents, the property clearly belongs to the Master. He entrusts His servants with His property, but these are not gifts; He clearly expects an account of His property, and its return, when He comes home from His trip. Why is the Master so upset with the third servant who merely returned His Master’s property without improving it?

**Consider This:** Why is careful stewardship rewarded with more property to invest whereas lack of stewardship is cause for the removal of the property that we have?

II. The Sheep and Goats (Review Matthew 25:31–46.)

This story follows hard on the heels of the parable of the talents. What are the material and temporal blessings that both the sheep and the goats have? Neither the sheep nor the goats recognize how the use of their blessings has affected their King, but the King directly acknowledges their stewardship with the consequences of eternal death and life, as did the Master in the parable of the talents.

**Consider This:** Why is stewardship a life-and-death matter?

III. The Ten Virgins (Review Matthew 25:1–13.)
Our Material Possessions

Christian stewardship is emphatically not just about money. But, just as emphatically, it also is about money. Money is an essential part of our lives and does play a central role in stewardship.

Read the following texts: Lev. 27:30, Deut. 8:18, Ps. 50:12, Mal. 3:8–10, Matt. 6:31, Matt. 23:23. What lessons do you draw from them? Compare your answers with what follows below.

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Fact number one: Everything begins with God. God owns everything. And He gives us the strength to work and make a living. Those who say, “It is all my own hard work,” forget a vital truth, which is that it was God alone who enabled them to earn what they did.

Fact number two: God takes first place in all we have and do, including our use of money. Before you spend any part of your money, make sure you have set aside your tithes and offerings. Then spend the rest responsibly, always aware that stewardship extends to the use of whatever money you have been entrusted with.

Fact number three: God expects His people to return to Him at least 10 percent of their wealth. That was the rule in the Old Testament, and that principle has never been rescinded. In Old Testament times the tithes were received by the priests and used for the support of the sanctuary services. Likewise, today our tithes are received and used for financing the worldwide gospel commission that God has entrusted to His church.

Fact number four: The more we give, the more we are blessed. Try it, and you’ll see for yourself the truth of the words that “‘it is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35, NIV).

There’s an old English saying, “Let him put his money where his mouth is.” The idea is that people can talk about how much they believe in something, but unless they are willing to put some of their money into it, the talk is meaningless. How does the act of giving tithes and offerings reveal where our heart really is? What does your giving reveal about your faith?
In this parable, the oil is not a gift; it must be purchased. In this case, the currency is not cold, hard cash but faith that buys the gift.

The oil’s presence or absence has eternal consequences for the ten virgins. Notice, too, that the parable is about ten virgins, five foolish and five wise, rather than about five wise virgins and five foolish prostitutes. Why virgins? What do they symbolize? Obviously, virgins are a symbol of purity. One could say that the fact that they are all virgins signifies a purity of religion. But what distinguishes the wise ones from the foolish ones is their actions. The wise virgins not only have faith, but a living faith. The wise virgins keep their lamps full of oil, backing up belief with action. They are good stewards, or custodians, of the light they have been given.

In the light of day, it might be hard to tell the difference between the foolish and the wise virgins. But in the darkness, the difference between the lamps with oil and those without shines forth. The ones without oil have no light or warmth to impart to others. A lamp without oil in it is useless; so, too, a life without the Holy Spirit to inspire us to act as diligent stewards of all with which we’ve been entrusted.

Consider This: What problems with stewardship do both wise and foolish virgins face? How have the wise virgins made provision for unforeseen events? What principle of stewardship does this parable illustrate?

**STEP 3—Practice**

**Just for Teachers:** Use the gift packages from your introduction to help your class recognize that while these gifts from God are precious, they should not be the focus and end-all of our lives.

**Class Activity:** Use a chalkboard to write out a list of some things that are more important than our time, material possessions, body, or talents. These things might include salvation, life, love, and so on. Discuss the relationship between the gifts God gives us and these eternal values. The gifts God gives each of us are like currency; we can use them to develop character, to serve, to spread the gospel of salvation—or we can spend them on trivial things.

**Parable:**
A poor old woman who had lived long in the neighborhood, and barely managed to scrape by, finally passed away. Those who came to take care
While We Are Waiting

There is an important dimension in the parables about the talents and the pounds that we must not miss. In Matthew 25 “the master” (vs. 19, NIV) went on an extensive journey and returned after a long time to settle the accounts with His servants. In Luke 19 we are told that the “man of noble birth” (vs. 12, NIV) went to a distant country. While on His mission, He was made King and then “returned home” (vs. 15, NIV).

Jesus clearly referred to Himself. He wanted His disciples to know that He was going away and that it would take a while before He would come back. But when He returns He will ask for an account of what was done with what we have been given.

What should characterize our waiting for the second coming of Christ? Matt. 24:42–46. What do these verses mean for us in the practical sense of how we live?

While we wait, we live with a purpose. It is not a waiting in idleness, but we wait as dedicated disciples who are keen stewards over all we have been given. “We are to be vigilant, watching for the coming of the Son of man; and we must also be diligent; working as well as waiting is required; there must be a union of the two. This will balance the Christian character, making it well developed, symmetrical. We should not feel that we are to neglect everything else, and give ourselves up to meditation, study, or prayer; neither are we to be full of bustle and hurry and work, to the neglect of personal piety. Waiting and watching and working are to be blended. ‘Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.’”—Ellen G. White, The Adventist Home, p. 23.

We are waiting for the Owner of everything to return. Soon He will come and will want to know what we have done with our gifts, our time, our physical strength, and our material resources. The fact that He comes to inspect the results of our faithful stewardship should not in any way frighten us. The accusation of the servant who had buried his talent and refused to employ it usefully, that the master was a “hard man” who wanted to harvest where he had not sown, was totally false. Note that the servants who had been faithful stewards did not share this negative view. Every effort they had put into their stewardship assignment was fully worth it when they heard their master say, “Come and share your master’s happiness” (Matt. 25:21, NIV).

If Jesus came back next week, what do you think He would say to you regarding what you have done in the past week with the things He entrusted to you?
of her affairs were cleaning out some drawers when they came upon a stack of checks. A distant relative faithfully had sent her money, but the old woman, either unknowingly or purposefully, never had cashed the checks. She lived and died in desperate poverty, never taking advantage of the blessings that faithfully had been provided for her.

**Life Application:** In what ways can we fail to take advantage of the blessings God has provided for us? What could be the cost to ourselves and others around us?

### **STEP 4—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Suggest the following activities as ways your class members can practice stewardship in the weeks to come.

1. Consider keeping a log of what you are doing every 15 minutes for one or more days out of the next week. At the end of the week, analyze how much of your time is spent in work, recreation, family, exercise, devotions, and so forth. Hunt for lost time the way you would hunt for treasure. Do you need to reevaluate how you prioritize your use of time? Because God is the Creator of your time and has invested so much in this gift to you, what expectations does He rightfully have for your use of time?

2. Make a list of your physical body assets, such as your strength, eyesight, mobility, and so forth. List your material, social, and mental assets, as well as your talents and skills. How have you used these assets in God’s service? How have these assets increased over the years? In what new ways might they be used for God?

3. Consider investing one of your assets in God’s service. Plan how you could dedicate this asset to God. Write out a one-month, three-month, one-year, and five-year series of steps toward this investment goal. Keep your plan updated on your calendar. Most important, remember to lay all your plans daily before God.
Further Study: A mine for further explorations on the topic of stewardship is the compilation *Counsels on Stewardship*, in which Ellen G. White’s comments on this issue have been assembled. See, in particular, Section VIII, which deals with the right motives for giving (pp. 195–206).

“The Lord will not require from those who are poor that which they have not to give; He will not require from the sick the active energies which bodily weakness forbids. No one need mourn because he cannot glorify God with talents that were never entrusted to him. But if you have only one talent, use it well, and it will accumulate. If the talents are not buried, they will gain yet other talents.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1100.

Discussion Questions:

1. How are we to understand the whole question of stewardship and accountability to God in the context of salvation by faith alone? Are we saved by what good stewards we are? Or does our stewardship reveal the reality of our faith? And even if we make mistakes here, why should we not give up in despair?

2. What’s wrong with what’s been dubbed the “health and wealth gospel,” the idea that if you live right, God will give you lots of money and good health? How is this a perversion of true principles of stewardship?

3. Discuss the following statement: “The greatest, most gifted people are useless if they don’t make themselves available to be used by God. In short, availability is more important than ability.”—Mike Nappa, *The Courage to Be a Christian* (West Monroe, La.: Howard Publishing Co., 2001), p. 164.

4. What advice do you give to a church member who, struggling through hard financial times, says that he or she just can’t afford to pay tithe, much less give offerings? What various approaches could or should be taken with this person?

Summary: We all have been given one or more talents. We have been entrusted with resources. As stewards we are expected to “manage” these resources to the best of our ability, in grateful recognition that all we have, in fact, comes from God. Stewardship should not be a hard duty but a joyful prioritizing in all aspects of our lives.
Community

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 11:1–4, 12:1–3, 1 Cor. 12:12–27, Eph. 4:1–13, Rev. 22:1–6.

Memory Text: “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27, NIV).

Humans are social beings. God could have created a hundred million perfect human beings as “stand alones,” each of whom would pursue his or her own independent goals. Instead, He first created one male and one female and stated that it would not be good for man to be alone. The first couple was to complement each other. And they were to multiply and create a community of family members and eventually larger social units.

One of the most important social units to which people can belong is their church. Unfortunately, many people no longer recognize the social benefits of church membership. Of course, the church is more than a club for men and women who happen to share a certain interest. The church is a community of believers who share in the ultimate experience of salvation and recognize Christ as their Lord.

The Week at a Glance: Believing and belonging are closely linked. God wants us to be part of the community that He has initiated. It is a privilege to belong to that community, but it also carries responsibilities. We all have our unique contribution to make to the body of Christ.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 20.
God Wants a People

In Genesis 11 we find the record of an experiment in community building that did not meet with God’s approval. When, after the worldwide Flood, the descendants of the original survivors decided to stick together and build a city with a huge tower in the southern part of what is now Iraq, God was extremely displeased. This was not what God had intended. Yet, in the following chapter—Genesis 12—the idea of community building is once again brought into focus, but now in a very positive sense. God told Abraham (who at that time was still called Abram) that He wanted to form a people whom He would call His own.

What was the major difference between the Tower of Babel initiative at community building and God’s plan to make Abraham and his posterity into His people? Compare Gen. 11:1–4 with Gen. 12:1–3.

From the story of the calling of Abraham onward, the Old Testament centers on the experiences of the people of God, their failures and their triumphs. The people of Israel had the mission of making their covenant-God known to all other nations. They were to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. We know how, as a people, Israel failed to accomplish its task. When the Messiah came, He was rejected and killed as a criminal by certain leaders who should have welcomed Him as their Redeemer. At the same time, many remained faithful to the Lord and formed the nucleus of what was to become the Christian church.

Read 1 Peter 2:9, 10. What’s the message to us today?

God’s New Testament people consist of Jews and Gentiles, of men and women from every nation, tribe, and linguistic group. Like Israel in Old Testament times, they now have the responsibility of teaching others about divine grace. Like Israel of old, they, too, belong to a special community of believers.

What parallels can you draw between ancient Israel and the church of today? What lessons should we learn from them? What mistakes should we avoid?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Corinthians 12:27

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** That being part of a church community comes with responsibility to that community and to the world.
- **Feel:** A sense of belonging and privilege within the church body.
- **Do:** All you can to maintain unity in Christ within your church.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Community of Responsibility *(1 Pet. 2:9, 10)*

Throughout the Bible, God has had a chosen people. In the Old Testament, it was the Israelites. In the New Testament, it was the early church. Today, we are God’s chosen people. And we have the responsibility of being good stewards of God’s church. How are we living up to that responsibility?

II. Community of Christ *(Eph. 4:16)*

A This verse, as well as our memory text, calls the church the body of Christ. Each part of the body has its purpose. Where do you fit in the body of Christ? How do the different parts work together? In what ways can your church work together more effectively?

B As part of the body of Christ, how can you do your part in spreading the gospel?

III. Community of Unity *(Eph. 4:3–6, 11–13)*

The primary unifying element in the church is Jesus Christ. However, unity thrives on support and encouragement of one another; a church with deep divisions can be doomed. What can you do to promote unity within your local church?

**Summary:** As members of the body of Christ, we have the privilege of serving Him as a church family. We must strive to remember our purpose and maintain true unity in Christ.
The Privilege of Belonging

Laurence J. Peter, an American educator and author, once said, “Going to church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than going to the garage makes you a car!” Truly belonging to Christ’s church is more than having one’s name on the church’s record book. It implies a realization of what the church is and of one’s own role in the church.

In numerous places Paul refers to fellow believers as saints (Eph. 1:1, Phil. 1:1, Col. 1:2). This word has today acquired a meaning that it did not have in Bible times. Saints are not perfect or holy people; they certainly are not people who have been declared to be “saints” after a long and complex ecclesiastical procedure long after they die.

“For Paul [and for other Bible writers], the term saint had none of the stained-glass window connotations that it has for us. A saint was not some ancient, larger-than-life, perfect Christian, but anyone called and set apart by God who became part of the community of faith.” —John C. Brunt, Romans, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1996), p. 42.

What major role is given to those who belong to the church—the “body of Christ”? How should each “saint” relate to all others?
1 Cor. 12:12–27.

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A church member is not to be reduced to a statistic. Every member of the church has a unique role to play and a particular contribution to make. No one can be missed without causing at least a measure of dysfunction of the body. At the same time, no member can claim that his or her contribution is far superior to that of someone else. The metaphor of the body with its many members sublimely illustrates this truth. Some parts appear to be more vital than others. The heart, the brain, the lungs, and the stomach may seem among the most prominent parts, but the functioning or malfunctioning of some minor gland often also proves to be a matter of life and death.

How do you fit in with your local body? Are you content with the role you play? Are you jealous of someone else’s role? Are you a dead, lifeless organ? Are you trying to take on more than you should? How can Paul’s words help you better understand what your role should be?
**Learning Cycle**

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God-designed communities of faith were created to be a blessing—both to themselves and to the world.

Dwain met Gladys at the funeral of her granddaughter. Later he sought out an opportunity to encourage her and get to know her better. They talked about her granddaughter’s untimely death, but then the conversation turned when he asked her about the changes she had seen in the area in which she had lived her entire life.

“Son,” she began, “I’ve seen more changes than I’d like to see.

“I remember when you could walk the streets late at night and never worry,” she reminisced. “I remember that my mother and the other women would take care of new mothers when they brought their babies home. Adults would look out for kids, and kids would respect adults. People cared about one another.”

Then with resignation in her voice she added, “It’s not like that anymore.”

What Gladys was lamenting was a loss of community. As she spoke, it struck Dwain that God created His church to meet just such a need.

**Consider This:** Ask your students to share their memories of times when they experienced the healing power of a loving community.

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

1. **God Wants a People** *(Review with your class Genesis 11:1–4 and Genesis 12:1–3.)*

The Bible can be viewed as a record of God’s efforts to create a people who would serve as living advertisements for Him instead of themselves. In Genesis 11:1–4, the Babel builders formed a community with the sole intention of self-exaltation. Genesis 12:1–3 also captures the birth of a community. God calls out Abraham and promises, “‘I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you’” *(vs. 2, NIV).* To that wonderful promise,
The Responsibility of Belonging

Belonging to the body of Christ is a great privilege. Another figure of speech underlines this great truth: We all are part of God’s family. “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1, NIV). But privileges always are accompanied by responsibilities.

**What** does the image of the church as the body of Christ, and of each of us being members of that body, imply as far as our personal responsibilities are concerned? Eph. 4:1–13.

“All must move like parts of a well-adjusted machinery, each part dependent on the other part, yet standing distinct in action. And each one is to take the place assigned him and do the work appointed him. God calls upon the members of His church to receive the Holy Spirit, to come together in unity and brotherly sympathy, to bind their interests together in love.”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 276.

**What** are some other key responsibilities for all church members? 1 Cor. 16:2; 1 Thess. 5:14, 17, 25; Heb. 10:25; 1 Pet. 3:15.

Many people live in consumer societies and, as a result, tend to bring this consumer mentality into their church. The first question often is, *What is in it for me?* rather than, *How can I contribute with my talents and gifts?* When John F. Kennedy was inaugurated in 1961 as president of the United States, he spoke these immortal words: “‘Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.’” These words also are applicable to our attitude toward the church. Even though the church can and does do a lot for those who faithfully attend and join in its many activities, we should first of all constantly ask ourselves, How can I serve better? How can I encourage others? How can I be a role model for our youth? How can I contribute to making my local church into a spiritual home in which many can find the inner peace and nurture they need?

Ask yourself these questions and honestly look at your answers: What is my main motive for going to church? What I can get, or what I can give?
God adds, “‘I will make your name great’” (vs. 2, NIV).

Notice God’s ultimate objective in making of Abraham a great nation: “‘All peoples on the earth will be blessed through you’” (vs. 3, NIV). God-created communities of faith truly are designed to bless the world.

**Consider This:** What, if anything, did Israel’s “most favored nation” status—and the blessings inherent therein—have to do with their failure to bless the world? How can we, spiritual Israel, live up to our favored status? *(See 1 Peter 2:9, 10.)*

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**II. The Privilege of Belonging** *(Review with your class 1 Corinthians 12:12–27.)*

Perhaps no other passage in Scripture captures the essence of unity and equality that ought to exist in Christ’s body, the church, than that of 1 Corinthians 12:12–27. All members are important no matter how seemingly insignificant their contribution to the body of Christ. Indeed, Paul seems to argue that “those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor” *(1 Cor. 12:22, 23, NIV).*

**Consider This:** How should a church respond to members who make moral or ethical mistakes?

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**III. The Responsibility of Belonging** *(Review with your class Ephesians 4:1–13, Matthew 20:20–28.)*

The Ephesian believers to whom Paul addresses his letter were normal, everyday folk who had come to know Christ as Savior and were learning how to make Him Lord of their lives. In Ephesians 4:1–13, the apostle Paul implores them to “live a life worthy of the calling” *(vs. 1, NIV)* they have received by being patient, gentle, unified, prayerful, humble, and accepting of the roles assigned them by God.

Paul rightly understood that to “prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” *(vs. 12, NIV)*, required a spirit of sacrifice. This spirit of sacrifice was one way of preparing God’s
Unity in Diversity

Many Christians strive for greater unity among the many denominations. They speak of the “scandal” of division and disunity and remind us that Christ repeatedly called for unity among His followers. Unity also is a key theme for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which is threatened by fragmentation and polarization from within. But the unity Adventists seek cannot be reduced to mere organizational unity or uniformity in worship styles and other traditions. It must go much deeper.

What are key qualifications for true Christian unity? John 14:6; Eph. 4:3, 13.

To be united in Christ means to be united in the truth. Christ defined Himself as the Truth. That is not to say that there cannot be true unity between people who differ with regard to certain theological views or in the interpretation of certain passages. But true unity does require a common commitment to the Scriptures as the Word of God and to its fundamental teachings, and a common desire to practice what the Word teaches. It does not require, however, that all members think alike and worship in exactly the same way. It does not annul the wonderful cultural diversity that so much enriches our worldwide church community.


The New Jerusalem refers to something concrete and real that God creates for His people, even if the description is highly symbolic. What strikes us as we read it is the emphasis on diversity. No wonder, because the redeemed will come from “every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9, NIV; cf. Rev. 7:9).

The peoples who will enter the gates of the New Jerusalem and will populate the new earth are like the many branches that issue from the same vine. “In the branches of a vine there is diversity, and yet in this diversity there is unity. Every branch is united to the parent stalk. Every branch draws its nourishment from the same source. When we are branches of the true Vine, there will be no quarreling among us, no strife for the supremacy, no disparaging of one another.”—Ellen G. White, General Conference Bulletin, April 25, 1901.

If there is to be such diversity in heaven, why is there ethnic strife in our churches today?
people for “works of service” (Ephesians 4:12, NIV).

**Consider This:** What would happen in our churches if together we fervently engaged in the responsibilities of membership found in 1 Thessalonians 5:14, 17, 25; 1 Corinthians 16:2; and Hebrews 10:25?

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**IV. Unity in Diversity** *(Review with your class John 14:6; Ephesians 4:3, 13.)*

Ephesians 4:13 summons God’s disjointed body to a beautiful end: “unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God” *(NIV)* that the body might “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” *(NIV)*. If this is the glorified end that God envisions for His church, then Jesus alone is the means to that end. He is the Way!

But it is critical to bear in mind that our God-given diversity ceases to be a blessing and becomes a curse when Christ is made subordinate to the mores of our cultural heritage and practice.

**Consider This:** If Jesus is the Vine and we are the branches (John 15:1–17), what nourishment do we get from Him that might help us use our diversity as a strength instead of a weakness?

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**V. The Church’s Foundation: Jesus Christ** *(Review with your class Matthew 16:18.)*

“‘Upon this rock,’ said Jesus, ‘I will build My church.’ In the presence of God, and all the heavenly intelligences, in the presence of the unseen army of hell, Christ founded His church upon the living Rock. That Rock is Himself,—His own body, for us broken and bruised. Against the church built upon this foundation, the gates of hell shall not prevail.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 413.

**Consider This:** If Jesus has founded the church upon a firm foundation and empowered it to do His will, what then accounts for its luke-warmness? *(See Revelation 3:13–15.)*

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**CONTINUED**
The Church’s Foundation: Jesus Christ

We often speak of our church. We have many reasons to be proud of our church. On the other hand, we realize that our church is not perfect. We have invested a lot of ourselves, of our talents, time, energy, and money in the church and have good reasons to have a clear sense of ownership. However, in the final analysis, the church is not ours. It is God’s. And that makes a decisive difference.

What did Christ Himself state in answer to the question about to whom the church belongs? Matt. 16:18.

The statement by Christ about the rock upon which God’s church was to be built has been grossly misunderstood by many. When the full context and all other biblical evidence is taken into consideration, there is no ground for suggesting that Peter was the rock upon whom the church was founded and that special authority was transferred from him to the future bishops of Rome. Peter’s confession of Christ as the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16) was the rock upon which God founded His church.

Consider the meaning of some other symbols used to underline the same truth, that is, that the church is built on Jesus Christ and that it is His church rather than ours. Eph. 2:20; 4:15, 16; Rev. 1:12–16, 20.

Like so many passages in the book of Revelation, the description of Jesus Christ in 1:12–20 is full of Old Testament imagery. Christ is presented as walking in the midst of seven lampstands, clothed as the High Priest. Our mind automatically goes back to the symbol of the lampstand in the ancient tabernacle that proclaimed God’s presence among His people. Before the book of Revelation goes into detail about “what must soon take place” (1:1, NIV), it makes sure that we see everything from the right perspective. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, our heavenly High Priest, who is not some distant, static deity but the One who walks in the midst of His church.

If, ultimately, the church belongs to God, what is our role in it? Are we, then, not stewards of it? What kind of responsibilities does this place on us? How well are you living up to this responsibility? What can you do better?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

1. Is the body of Christ, described in 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, or does it include believers of other faiths, as well? Explain.

2. How does Matthew 5:13, 14 inform our understanding of the role we are to play in the world?

Application Questions:

1. What does Matthew 20:20–28 teach us about Jesus’ struggle to unify His disciples?

2. List three ways in which your local church can work in tandem with a Seventh-day Adventist church of another cultural heritage to serve the wider community.

Witnessing:

What can we do to expose unbelievers to the joys and blessings of belonging to God’s community of faith?

STEP 4—Apply

While many class members may feel a sense of belonging to the body of Christ, many may have understood for the first time their unique role in, and responsibility toward, that body. Ask the class to share something new that they learned from this week’s study. Then ask a few volunteers to share ways in which they can better serve members of God’s community.

“Jesus answered Peter, saying, ‘Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven’ [Matt. 16:17, KJV].

“The truth which Peter had confessed is the foundation of the believer’s faith. It is that which Christ Himself has declared to be eternal life. But the possession of this knowledge was no ground for self-glorification. Through no wisdom or goodness of his own had it been revealed to Peter. Never can humanity, of itself, attain to a knowledge of the divine. ‘It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?’ Job 11:8. Only the spirit of adoption can reveal to us the deep things of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 412.

Discussion Questions:

1. Is church membership a necessary condition for salvation? Or do we join the church for other reasons? If so, what are they? What great advantages do we have being part of a body? At the same time, what things must we be careful of and watch out for?

2. Some people say, “I have stopped going to church. When I attended, it left me empty. When I go out in nature, I have a deeper religious experience than when I listen to an uninteresting sermon.” What would you reply to such a person?

3. Dwell more on the questions raised in Wednesday’s lesson regarding ethnic diversity in our church. Why, of all people, should Christians be the most accepting and loving of others, regardless of ethnic differences? What could be done to help us better live up to what we know the Lord would have us do regarding the important question of racial and ethnic harmony?

Summary: The church is a divine initiative. It is God’s church rather than our church. We are members of the body of Christ—each of us with our own distinct function—but must always remember that He is the Head. We are not called to uniformity but must do all we can to maintain true unity in Christ.
Mission

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:46, 47; John 14:6; Eph. 4:11–15; 2 Pet. 2:1–3; Rev. 14:6–12.

Memory Text: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15, NIV).

Mission is not an old-fashioned word associated with tropical helmets (hats) and six-year terms in isolated places around the world. The term mission refers to a core aspect of the Christian life. “The words mission and missionary come from Latin words meaning send and one sent. . . . The English Bible usually uses the noun apostle, which also comes from the Greek word that means one sent. . . . Thirty-nine times the Gospel of John says that Jesus was sent by God. Thirty-nine times, then, Jesus is defined in that book alone as a missionary or apostle.”—Jon L. Dybdahl, “Missionary God—Missionary Church” in Erich W. Baumgartner, ed., Re-Visioning Adventist Mission in Europe (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1998), p. 8.

We, as followers of Christ, are fellow missionaries with Jesus. As He was sent to this world, so we are sent to represent Him and to preach the three angels’ messages to every person. The longer we are here, however, the greater the danger of our becoming inward-focused, seeking to maintain our structures and institutions at the expense of what we are called to do, which is to preach to the world the present-truth message that God has given us.

The Week at a Glance: Mission is the heart of the church. The destiny of people, far and near, is at stake. Mission is not one among many programs of the church. It is the very reason for its existence. Each Christian is called to be a missionary.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 27.
People Will Be Lost, Unless . . .

Theologians through the ages have debated whether or not God eventually will save all people. Some say God’s love guarantees that, eventually, no one will be lost. Others say that people who have never heard of Christ will get an opportunity to come to believe after death. Others again defend various alternative theories. The problem with theories, however, is that often they try to explain everything when, in fact, we must simply be content with what God has revealed to us. There are questions to which we do not know the answers. But we know that He is totally just in what He does and, at the same time, is limitless in His love. He also has made clear that people have a free will and that it is possible to be lost. In the end there will be a separation between those who are saved and those who will face eternal death. And we know also that the gospel must be preached as quickly as possible to as many people as possible.

What do the following texts tell us about the importance of preaching the gospel to the whole world?

- John 14:6
- Acts 4:12
- 1 John 5:11, 12

John 3:16 is one of the best-known texts in the Bible. “‘God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’” (NIV). The text speaks about the love of God, which found expression in the sending of His Son to this earth. It promises eternal life to all who believe in Him. But it also clearly points to the alternative. Those who do not listen to the gospel call and refuse to accept Christ will perish. The decision as to who will perish and who will receive eternal life is not ours. We may be in for some real surprises when we see the roll call of the saved. Without overriding people’s will, God will do everything possible to reduce the number of those who will perish. And—amazingly enough—He has, in His wisdom, given us a role in that process.

What is your own role in the church’s mission? How seriously do you take the call to reach others with the gospel? What more could you do?
**The Lesson in Brief**

**Key Text:** 1 Peter 3:15

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** That missions are a focal point of the church.
- **Feel:** The urgency to spread the gospel.
- **Do:** Make a concerted effort to be an active missionary.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Importance of Missions *(Mark 16:15, 16)*

A. The Great Commission is a priority for the Christian. The salvation of many depends on our ability to spread the news of God’s grace *(vs. 16)*. How is each of us called to be a missionary?

B. As a church, how can we improve our missions?

II. The Need for Missions *(John 3:16)*

A. Although the Adventist Church is very cognizant of the 10/40 Window, the designation for that area of the world in which the majority of people have not heard about Jesus, it is imperative that Jesus is known to all in our own communities. In what ways do we sometimes allow our zeal to get the gospel to the ends of the earth to adversely affect witnessing in our community?

B. What can we do to change that mind-set?

III. Your Role in Missions *(1 Cor. 12:28)*

The trend in recent years has been to take inventory of the spiritual gifts within a church family and to use those gifts in specific ways to implement a mission strategy. Jesus did the same by giving His disciples tasks that complemented their abilities and furthered the gospel commission. Identify specific ways you can use the gifts you have to further missions in your church.

**Summary:** It is our responsibility to participate in the gospel commission. Commit yourself to the challenge.
The Great Commission

The command to take the gospel to the entire world is found in all four Gospels, as well as in the book of Acts. They show, of course, clear parallels, but there are also some significant differences. One needs to read all versions to form a complete picture of everything that is implied in the Great Commission.

**Read** the passages in which the Great Commission is recorded and note how they complement each other. What are the specific details in each of these passages?

- **Matt. 28:19, 20**
- **Mark 16:15, 16**
- **Luke 24:46, 47**
- **John 20:21**
- **Acts 1:8**

The gospel is to be preached “to all nations.” According to General Conference statistics, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is now proclaiming its message in more than two hundred countries. This means that there are only a few countries in which our church does not have an official presence. Among these are several large ones: North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen; most of the others are small, with less than one million inhabitants. So, one would be tempted to conclude that the Adventist Church almost has “finished the work.” That, however, would be false. For even though we must give thanks to our Lord that our church continues to grow rapidly in many parts of the world and that many new territories constantly are being entered, the challenge is still enormous. When the New Testament speaks about “nations,” it uses a word that would be more correctly translated as people groups or “ethnic groups.” Our work, therefore, is not completed until all people groups have been reached. There is considerable debate about how many such people groups exist. The number quoted by specialists varies between some twelve thousand to more than twenty thousand, depending on the definition one uses. But, whatever definition is used, several thousand of these people groups have not yet been reached.

Think about all the unreached people in your own community, whatever their ethnic background. What difference has your existence made in reaching them? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your role in the mission of the church?
**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God has summoned His people to accept the good news of salvation and share it with others.

Life needs to have purpose for it to feel truly worth living. No one wants the epitaph on their tombstone merely to read: USED UP OXYGEN, TOOK UP SPACE. The longer we live, the more we sense a need to live a life beyond ourselves. Perhaps Horace Mann, the brilliant politician and noted educator, captured this yearning best when he said, “Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity.”

Human beings were created with a divine hankering for a mission greater than themselves, a calling that helps broken people traverse this life through the good news of salvation and gives them hope for the future. In fulfilling this mission, we find a deep inner peace with God and ourselves.

**Consider This:** Ask a few volunteers to share the kindest deed ever done for them and who did it. Ask for a volunteer to tell briefly who first shared the gospel with them.

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**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

1. **People Will Be Lost, Unless . . .** *(Review with your class John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:11, 12.)*

The Bible establishes an unambiguous route to salvation. “‘No one comes to the Father,’” but through Christ *(John 14:6, NIV)*; salvation is found in “‘no other name’” *(Acts 4:12, NIV)*; and we can know whether or not we have eternal life, because it is “in his Son” and “he who has the Son has life” *(1 John 5:11, 12, NIV).*

Notice in 1 John 5:11, 12 that God does not ask us to earn eternal life. God has given it to all who have placed their trust in Jesus as their personal Savior. God has one Way to eternal life, and He has not only given it to us, He has provided the means to get there. Hence, the choice to accept Jesus

CONTINUED
A Witnessing Church

What special message is to be proclaimed by God’s people in the time of the end? Rev. 14:6–12. What is your understanding of that message? Paraphrase it in your own words.

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The passage in which we find the messages of the three angels is found in a context that clearly focuses on the end of time. It is immediately preceded by a vision of the “firstfruits” (vs. 4) of the redeemed and followed by a vision of the “harvest” (vs. 15) of all the saved. It is important to know what these messages entail. But also we need to understand who these “angels” are that bring this “eternal gospel” (vs. 6, NIV). The fact that the word angel in prophecy is a symbol for human messengers, leaders, and church members is also underscored by Ellen G. White: “The angels are represented as flying in the midst of heaven, proclaiming to the world a message of warning, and having a direct bearing upon the people living in the last days of this earth’s history. No one hears the voice of these angels, for they are a symbol to represent the people of God who are working in harmony with the universe of heaven. Men and women, enlightened by the Spirit of God, and sanctified through the truth, proclaim the three messages in their order.”—Life Sketches, p. 429.

Just as in the Great Commission, we find in the opening statement of the three angels’ messages a strong emphasis on the challenge to take the gospel to every person on earth. Yet, a great danger that we face, especially the longer we are here, is shifting from the missionary mode to the maintenance mode. We can easily lose sight of our mission to witness to the world and focus more on protecting and sustaining our own institutions. When that happens to us, or the churches or institutions we represent, then we are losing the reason for our existence.

Think about this potential problem, that of focusing more on self-preservation than on mission. How does this happen? How can we recognize when it does, and what can we do to keep from falling into this trap?
as Savior and Lord is the most important decision we make in life.

**Consider This:** Other faiths also claim to be the chosen route to God. How would you defend your faith as the only true route to salvation?

II. The Great Commission (*Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:46, 47; John 20:21; Acts 1:8.*)

The “Great Commission” passages, in the four Gospels and in the book of Acts, show us the picture of a God who, like a commanding general, prepares His troops for battle. In Matthew 28:18–20, Jesus bestows power on the disciples (*vs. 20*); Jesus authorizes the use of His power in clearly defined ways (*vss. 19, 20*); Jesus promises to back up His disciples in times of need (*vs. 19*); Jesus prepares them before He sends them out (*vs. 20*). With a commander like Jesus, how can we possibly fail?

**Consider This:** If Jesus can do all these things for us, why does He bother to include us? What is our role in His great work?

III. A Witnessing Church (*Review with your class Revelation 14:6–12.*)

The three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12 are some of the most hopeful missives ever given by God to the human race. Sometimes we sacrifice the hopeful aspect of God’s messages in our desire to share these present truths.

Ellen G. White notes: “The time of God’s destructive judgments is the time of mercy for those who have no opportunity to learn what is truth. Tenderly will the Lord look upon them. . . . Large numbers will be admitted who in these last days hear the truth for the first time.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 5, 1906, p. 9.
Personal Witness

It is not so difficult to agree with the statement that the church must be mission-minded. But who is the church? The church is not primarily an organization; rather, it is individuals who are, without any exception, called to be witnesses.

Why should we be confident that we can be witnesses for our faith? 1 Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11–15.

Not all of us have the gift of preaching or teaching. But we all have been gifted in some way so that we can be what we are called to be—disciples always prepared to talk about the hope that is ours (1 Pet. 3:15).

What is the ultimate resource for those who are willing to witness for their faith? John 14:26; Acts 1:4, 8; 2:1–4.

The fact that Christ has promised the presence of the Holy Spirit to His followers and that we can receive spiritual gifts does not mean that it is not necessary to make any preparations or to undergo any training. The apostles were disciples who for more than three years underwent the most intensive training possible. Likewise, disciples today must be intentional about receiving training for Christian witness, and the church must make it a priority to constantly prepare relevant training materials and opportunities to equip the members for their task. But training alone will prove insufficient. God’s people today need the presence and endowment of the Holy Spirit if they want to be successful in their outreach to others.

One simple truth, however, will always remain: You cannot give what you do not have. Unless we make sure that we have a living relationship with God, we cannot hope to lead others to that same experience.

What is a vital condition for all who want to be witnesses for their faith? 2 Pet. 3:18.

A church that responds to its calling will be a growing church. But growth should not be limited to numerical growth. Individually and corporately we must be “growing in grace” if our witnessing truly is to be productive.

What’s your understanding of what it means to grow in grace? How can you tell if you are? What criteria do you use? Share your answers in class on Sabbath.
Consider This: Read Matthew 5. Why was Jesus so effective in sharing present truth with the lost of His day?


IV. Personal Witness (Review Matthew 10, 1 Corinthians 12:11–28, 1 Peter 3:15.)

In God’s marvelous master plan to spread the gospel, He has devised a strategy that is both corporate and personal (1 Cor. 12:11–28). There is one body, but that body is constructed of many members working harmoniously to achieve the end of sharing the good news of salvation with a dying world.

When the body is working for the salvation of others, something wonderful happens to its individual parts. “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph. 4:14–16, NIV).

Consider This: Read Matthew 10 and list three specific directives Jesus gave that were meant to comfort His disciples and prepare them for their mission.


V. Sharing the Lord (Matthew 15:9; 16:18; 1 Timothy 1:9, 10)

The apostle Paul explained to the fledgling Timothy that the law of God addresses those who behave contrary to “sound doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:10). The Greek word for sound, as used here by Paul means “to be healthy.” It is the word from which we get the term hygiene.—See The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 289.

In the preaching of the gospel, many specious beliefs are added by well-meaning, and not-so-well-intentioned, people. It is these unclean, human-
Sharing the Lord

There is no doubt that sharing the message of the crucified and risen Christ, who is now our Intercessor with His Father, also implies a faithful teaching of the important doctrinal truths that God has revealed in His Word.

**How important is it to teach and adhere to sound doctrine?** *Titus 2:1, 2 Pet. 2:1–3.*

If we want to believe in the God of the Bible and have decided to follow Christ, we will want to know as much as we can about Him, about His character, and about what He expects from us. We try to summarize what we learn in the Bible in a series of doctrines and teachings. To some people, doctrinal statements are no more than irrelevant mental baggage. That is a tragic misunderstanding. Without sound doctrines our faith soon will become unfocused and shallow. Rather than growing in our faith, we eventually will discover that our faith becomes less and less meaningful. Unsound doctrines often will point us away from Christ, to ourselves or to something else that supposedly can contribute to our salvation. When we fail to ground our faith in sound biblical teaching, we are in grave danger of straying from the center of our faith: Jesus Christ our Lord.

**What is to be the centerpiece of all our preaching and witnessing?** *1 Cor. 1:23, 2:2.*

The stress on the importance of sound doctrine must be complemented with the unconditional determination to anchor all we say in Jesus Christ. Everything we believe and state as doctrine must be related to the One in whom we are assured of our eternal salvation. If there is no connection with Jesus Christ, a doctrine will be no more than a piece of technical information, which may be interesting and intellectually challenging, but nothing more. But if rooted in Jesus Christ, a doctrine will help us better understand the plan of redemption and will enhance our relationship with our Lord.

**Think about some of the false teachings that exist in the Christian world: eternal torment in hell, the predestination of some people to be saved and others to be lost, the belief that Jesus Christ was not divine but merely a great man. How could these and other false teachings negatively impact our understanding of God and the plan of salvation?**
made doctrines that Jesus denounced as “‘rules taught by men’” *(Matt. 15:9, NIV).*

**Consider This:** Paul determined to anchor his preaching in Jesus *(1 Cor. 2:2).* How is Paul’s message to the Corinthian church similar to, and yet different from, his message to the pagan thinkers at Mars’ Hill in Athens *(Acts 17:16–31)*?

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**STEP 3—Practice**

**Thought Question:**  
Peter exhorts us always to be ready to give every man a reason for the hope within us *(1 Pet. 3:15).* What are two different ways we can share the hope that Christ has given to us with our coworkers?

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**Application Question:**  
The call to be witnesses first where we currently live is established in Acts 1:8. Yet, the Internet and other electronic media have shrunk the world, so to speak, allowing a single person to witness on a global scale. In what ways can we use technology to share Jesus?

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**STEP 4—Apply**

Ask your class to read “The Call by the Sea,” chapter 25 of *The Desire of Ages* by Ellen G. White. Ask God for the power of His Spirit to accept anew Jesus’ call to discipleship and service.

“The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to ‘the principalities and powers in heavenly places,’ the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, talk over your answer to the final question on Wednesday. What are the different perspectives of what it means to grow in grace?

2. Take a good look at your local church. Where is the main emphasis? Is it on the church itself and ministering to the needs of the congregation itself, or is it on mission and on witnessing? How do we strike the right balance; that is, how do we disciple those who have joined us, while at the same time not neglect the call to reach all people? Where does your church stand on this topic, and in what ways can you help the church improve where it needs to?

3. How do we as a church protect ourselves from many of the dangerous theological trends that constantly are seeking to infiltrate and pollute our teachings? At the same time, how do we remain open to growing and advancing in new light that can help us better understand our Lord and our mission?

Summary: The gospel of Jesus Christ must be preached in all the world. This is the responsibility of all who call themselves disciples. All of us have received certain relevant gifts, and all of us have the promise of the Spirit to further equip us. The preaching of the gospel should be based on sound doctrine, but everything we proclaim must be rooted in the One whom the gospel is all about.