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A woman, driving her vehicle, was pulled over by a few squad cars, and, when the police came out, they had their guns drawn. The woman was shocked. What had she done?

“You were weaving in and out of traffic,” one officer said, “making obscene gestures to other drivers and cursing them.”

“For that,” she replied, “you pull out your guns?”

“Well,” the officer said, “we saw the bumper sticker, which said you were a Christian, and we just assumed the car had been stolen.”

This silly story brings out an important point: Christians, by their very profession, are held up to a high moral standard. After all, look at the One whom they profess as their model, Jesus Christ.

How, then, should Christians live? How should we act in public and at home? The key is found in Galatians 5:22, 23, the subject of this quarter. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

We are going to look at this “fruit of the Spirit”; that is, we are going to look at what happens to those whose lives are surrendered to God and who thus allow the Holy Spirit to work in them. “‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’” (John 3:6, NKJV). The fruit of the Spirit is what grows in us when we are born of the Spirit; it is what happens when we are born-again.
Notice, Paul says that “the fruit of the Spirit is . . .” He’s talking in the singular. Paul is not talking about separate traits that operate independently of one another but about a single reality. The fruit of the Spirit is what the Holy Spirit creates within us; it defines the type of person we are to become in Jesus.

The fruit of the Spirit is like a precious jewel with many facets. Each facet is a characteristic of Jesus and represents a quality that He wants to produce in our lives. This is the heart of the matter. God’s purpose is to make us like Jesus, and He has sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us to make that change happen.

You will see as we study these lessons that the fruit of the Spirit is not a theory, though we have made it a study. It is not a lifestyle, though a person who is cultivating the fruit of the Spirit will not live as he or she did before. Instead, the fruit of the Spirit is a change of being. “Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). The fruit of the Spirit is the “new” in the life of a person who has passed from death unto life (1 John 3:14) in Christ.

The purpose of this quarter’s lessons is not to focus on how we can become more patient or more loving or more gentle or more faithful but on how we can let the Holy Spirit make us more like Jesus, who is patience, love, gentleness, and faithfulness personified.

You will be challenged to cultivate the graces of the fruit of the Spirit at all times, but especially at home. We will see that the key is surrender, a willingness to die to self and live for God and for others. Finally, we will see that all that we do, we must do under the realization that we are sinners in need of the covering grace of Christ, who loves us whether the harvest seems plentiful or sparse. We never must forget that the fruit of the Spirit is just that—the “fruit,” the result of salvation, not the means. The means is always Jesus and what He has done for us, which we claim by faith.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. 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? (Apply); 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—Apply:** 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—Create:** 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

"By Their Fruit..."

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Luke 13:7–9, John 11:4, 12:28, 15:1–10, 2 Tim. 3:5.

Memory Text: “Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:20, NKJV).

One of the most thrilling promises of the Lord is that if we will abide in Him and allow Him to abide in us through His Spirit, we actually will be different. Our lives will be changed, even radically.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17, NKJV).

This quarter we will study various facets of the fruit of the Spirit. The wonderful plan of salvation assures us that “we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18, NKJV).

Those who abide in Jesus always will bear fruit of the Spirit. Do you sometimes wonder if that promise really could be for you? The answer is a resounding Yes. We can be confident of this very thing, that He who has begun this good work in us will finish it (Phil. 1:6). Remember His words: “‘You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you’” (John 15:16, NKJV). And the best news yet is that the good work the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives is not just for now but for eternity.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 2.*
“‘Every Tree Is Known by Its Own Fruit’”

(Luke 6:44, NKJV)

Has anyone ever asked you if you have received the Holy Spirit? Usually this is a way of discovering whether you speak in “tongues.” For them, tongues-speaking is the determining factor for whether or not you demonstrate the indwelling of the Spirit. Jesus, though, warns us about looking at certain outward signs and miracles as proof of anything. Read His clear warning in Matthew 7:21–23 (see also Rev. 16:14). Jesus says plainly that undeniable miracles will be performed in Jesus’ name, but that does not prove that these people are His faithful followers.

In fact, we are told that in the last days professed followers of Jesus would have a form of godliness but would deny the power thereof (2 Tim. 3:5).

Read 2 Timothy 3:5. How do we see this truth manifested today?

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“‘For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush’” (Luke 6:43, 44, NKJV).

Jesus said we can know a tree by the fruit it produces. A person reveals himself or herself not so much by what he or she professes but by what he or she is. The gifts of the Spirit are given to the church for ministry. The fruit of the Spirit is given to the child of God so that his or her life might be changed.

Being a true Christian and bearing good fruit place the emphasis on being. A good actor can play the part of Mahatma Gandhi, but he can never be Mahatma Gandhi. We can look good, sound good, and even appear to do good. But unless the Holy Spirit gives us a new heart, we never can be good.

Dwell more on this distinction between doing good and being good. First, what do we mean by “good”? Second, can a person do good and not be good? Or, can a person be good and not do good? Work through your answers and bring them to class on Sabbath.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Matthew 7:20, NIV

The Student Will:

Know: Understand that growth in the Christian life is a process.
Feel: Experience confidence in the Holy Spirit, not self.
Do: Choose to engage fully in the process of spiritual growth, aided by God’s Spirit.

Lesson Outline:

I. Know: Jesus, the True Vine, the Only Means of Growth

A John 15:5 teaches that there is no growth apart from Jesus. How do we become a branch of the Vine? Why is pruning painful but an essential part of the growth process?

B What is the relationship between personal growth and discipleship? (Note: A disciple is a lifelong learner.)

C Stagnation means ruin and death. What causes stagnation in the Christian life?

II. Feel: Confidence in the Holy Spirit

A How does looking away from self to Jesus create an ongoing confidence in the work of the Holy Spirit?

III. Do: Fertilizing the Soul

A Why do we grow? What is the purpose in our honoring God? How do we become more mature in our Christian life?

B What is the greatest cause of stagnation and decay in the Christian experience? (See Heb. 2:3.)

C In what ways do prayer, meditation, witnessing to others, studying God’s Word, thinking, and memorizing Scripture work positively in our lives to promote growth?

D How do we evaluate growth?

Summary: Growth in the Christian experience takes time. Neglecting the means of growth brings stagnation and eventually ruin. Looking away from self to Jesus gives encouragement and confidence.
“‘Without Me You Can Do Nothing’”
*(John 15:5, NKJV)*

Two young boys were using a fruit tree to climb out of their second-story bedroom window and go to the swimming hole without their parents’ permission. One day they heard their father say he was going to cut the tree down because it was dead. Fearing they would lose their escape route, they went to the store and bought artificial apples, which they tied to the branches of the dead tree. The next morning their father expressed amazement that apples seemed to have grown overnight, especially since the tree was a pear tree!

**Read** John 15:1–5 and answer the following questions:

*Jesus declared Himself to be the True Vine. Why do you think He emphasized “true” vine? (See also Matt. 24:24.)*

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According to John 15:5, what does Jesus say we are? What does that mean on a practical level; that is, what does it tell us about how we should live?

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Verse 4 explains that a branch cannot bear fruit unless it is connected to the vine. This is a crucial point, one that we should not miss.

Picture a branch that has fallen off an apple tree. Suppose that branch had several apples just reaching maturity. What soon happens to the branch? To the apples? Would it make any difference if we painted the apples a deep red? Suppose we watered the branch or put fertilizer on the ground around it? Would the branch continue to bear more apples if we stuck the stem into the ground? Why, then, is being connected to the trunk (the vine) essential to the branch?

**How do you abide in Jesus? What does that mean? What would you have to change in your life to make this a daily experience? What practices and habits are you cultivating that make it more difficult to abide in Him?**
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The fruit of the Spirit in a Christian’s life is a result of God’s direct action and the Christian’s surrender to His will.

What results if one takes the seeds from a Red Delicious apple, puts them in the ground or in a pot, and successfully brings a plant to maturity? You have a Red Delicious apple tree, right? No. Red Delicious apples—as well as many other familiar varieties of fruit—are what are known as cultivars. Cultivars are among the earliest products of human tampering with nature. Some cultivars are merely the product of the selective growing of desired seeds or plant tissue found in the wild. Others—the Red Delicious apple, for example—are strictly engineered products, created by grafting or by the use of cuttings from existing plants. One cannot grow them from seeds.

In the same way, the fruit of the Spirit is a cultivar. A person will not miraculously be born and grow to maturity manifesting the fruit of the Spirit. Like the fruit we see in any market, the fruit of the Spirit is not self-originating. God must graft it onto each individual. But here is where the metaphor breaks down: we have an active role in the process. We must surrender to God and allow Him to grow the fruit of the Spirit in us.

Consider This: The first apples found growing in the wild probably were tiny and sour. It took some imaginative agriculturalist to see their potential and to work with them until they were edible and eventually palatable. What might this tell us about what we are and what God sees that we can be?

Why are even our best intentions insufficient to enable us to produce good fruit, or at least “good enough” fruit?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. A Harvest of Bad Fruit and No Fruit (Review Matthew 21:10–21, Mark 11:11–22, Jude 1:12 with your class.)

Bad fruit or no fruit is what one can expect from those who’ve had no

CONTINUED
“‘By This My Father Is Glorified’”
(John 15:8, NKJV)

“‘By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples’” (John 15:8, NKJV). What does this text mean?

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You have no doubt heard the saying, “It is possible to do the right thing for the wrong reason.” If this is true, is it possible to attempt to abide in Jesus for the wrong reason? Abiding in Jesus is not a means to an end; rather, it is an end in itself. The result of abiding in Him will be that we bear fruit, not to glorify ourselves but to glorify God. In other words, the fruit of the Spirit is not to make us look good but to make the Father look good.

Christ’s ministry, which included many miracles and good works, had a definite driving force. What was that force, and how should this idea influence what our motives should be? John 11:4, 12:28.

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Perhaps your church is looking for ways to do things in the community that will enhance the image of the church. And that’s good. At the same time, we need to be careful about what our motives and purposes are. What’s our ultimate goal in these endeavors? Is it to glorify self or to glorify God? How can we learn to make a distinction between the two? In many ways, it can be easy to mix these things, covering even the most self-aggrandizing actions under the false veneer of “glorifying” God.

Read Matthew 5:16 and 1 Corinthians 10:31. How can we create good will and give the glory to our Father in heaven at the same time? Bear in mind that it is possible to create good will and leave the Father out, taking the credit for ourselves. Examine your own heart and ask yourself what really motivates some of your actions. How might you be fooling yourself?
experience of, or teaching about, God. The absence of fruit becomes an issue when it appears among those who do have this experience and knowledge. The fig tree in the parallel passages of Mark and Luke usually has been taken to symbolize the Jewish nation, which had the outward trappings of being religious and God-fearing but was in reality too insular and obsessed with externals (the showy leaves of the fig tree) to have much impact on the world around it. Jesus held out hope for those who produced bad fruit (they could someday produce good fruit) or those who had not yet had the opportunity to produce fruit; but His response to the barren but visually appealing fig tree was to curse it and cause it to wither. The withering was an outward sign—and warning—of the ultimate end of a life that bears no fruit: the second death.

Another example of this can be seen in the false teachers referred to in Jude 12 as “autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead” (NIV). As autumn trees, they had their opportunity to produce fruit and maybe even had produced fruit at one point. But for whatever reason, they stopped. They were teachers, but they were no longer teaching the right things. Instead, they were obsessed with how enlightened they were and were teaching others to be the same. They were twice dead because they had been dead in sin but now had returned to their former state of spiritual death.

From these passages we can gather that a failure to produce fruit is a sign, as is bad fruit, that the Holy Spirit doesn’t live within the heart.

Consider This: What do you think these passages mean when they refer to the absence of fruit? Which is better: to produce no fruit or to actively produce bad fruit? Consider the following verses: Matthew 25:14–30.

II. Good Fruit (Review John 15:1–10 with your class.)

As stated before, in the absence of God, human beings will produce bad fruit or no fruit at all. In John 15:1–10, Jesus explicitly compares God to an agriculturalist cultivating a vine, and the Vine is a symbol for Jesus Christ Himself. The Vine in turn provides vitality and nourishment to the branches and enables them to bear fruit. This Vine is not just any Vine; it is a good Vine, and the branches, provided they are attached to the Vine, produce good fruit. Not because they are ordered to produce good fruit or because they try very hard to produce good fruit, but because they are
“‘That It May Bear More Fruit’”

(John 15:2, NKJV)

“‘Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit’” (John 15:2, NKJV). What is this pruning process all about? How have you experienced it yourself? When that specific process ended, in what ways were you different from before it began?

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At the end of every season, the farmer goes back into the vineyard and prunes away most of the vine. The farmer must be careful, however, because next year’s crop is directly dependent on which parts remain. The key to pruning is the balance between the crop and vine. One is grown at the expense of the other. If you overcrop by not cutting enough away, the following year’s growth will be weak and the fruit inferior. The skillful art is to find the right balance.

“God brings men into trying places to see if they will trust in a power out of and above themselves. He sees not as man sees. He often has to break up human connections and change the order which man has mapped out, which is perfect in his estimation. What man thinks is for his spiritual and temporal interests may be altogether at variance with the experience he must have in order to be a follower of Christ. His idea of his own value may be far out of the way.

“Tests are placed all along the way from earth to heaven. It is because of this that the road to heaven is called the narrow way. Character must be tested, else there would be many spurious Christians who would keep up a fair semblance of religion until their inclinations, their desire to have their own way, their pride and ambition, were crossed. When by the Lord’s permission sharp trials come to them, their lack of genuine religion, of the meekness and lowliness of Christ, shows them to be in need of the work of the Holy Spirit.”—Ellen G. White, In Heavenly Places, p. 266.

Have you ever had a trial that severely tested your faith, even to the point where you wondered if you really even had faith? Looking back, what lessons should you have learned from that experience? Most important, did you learn them?
good branches on a good Vine, and so the production of good fruit is the natural result of that connection.

Sometimes it happens that one of the branches becomes severed from the Vine or acquires a stray bit of wild pollen and produces bad fruit or no fruit. In such an instance, it must be grafted back into the good Vine and pruned so that it can produce good fruit again.

**Consider This:** John 15:2 discusses a pruning process for true disciples of Christ. What tests and pruning were awaiting the followers of Christ present at the time? What were its effects on them?

STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Use these questions to help your students to understand the significance of the fruit of the Spirit as a result of and signifier for the Christian life.

**Thought Questions:**

1. Popular understanding of the fruit of the Spirit (and the gifts of the Spirit, as well) is that they are in some way “miraculous.” In reality, as Paul catalogs these gifts in Galatians 5:22, 23, they seem quite mundane. And yet, can they be said to be genuinely miraculous in a sense?

2. Is the fruit of the Spirit identical with good works? Why, or why not?

3. Why does God want us to bear the fruit spoken of in Galatians 5:22, 23? Is it for our own good in this life? Is it a way for us to prove our salvation? Does it help to make us more fit for ministry?

4. What is the nature of the relationship that allows God to grow the fruit of the Spirit within us? What does it mean for Jesus to abide in us or for us to abide in Him? *(See John 15:4–10.)*

**Application Questions:**

1. Second Timothy 3:5 says that in the last days there will be Christians who have a form of godliness but deny its power. It is tempting to assume this text applies to other people, especially if they are in other churches or denominations. But be honest: in what situations does this text ever apply
“‘And If It Bears Fruit, Well. But If Not . . .’” *(Luke 13:9, NKJV)*

Between 1730 and 1745 the American colonies from Maine to Georgia experienced a religious revival known as the Great Awakening. Jonathan Edwards was a leader in this movement of spiritual renewal. In July of 1741 he preached a sermon entitled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” which, for some, has become a symbol of the bleak, cruel, and hell-bent outlook of many Christians. However polemical, this sermon did express the truth about the awful weight of sin, the attitude of an infinitely holy God toward sin, and the surety of a day of judgment.

**Read** John 15:1–10. What balance does Jesus present here in the context of bearing fruit?

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Notice how, on one hand, He said that if we would abide in Him we would bear much fruit, which is a product of being saved by Him. That is, if we abide in Him, by faith, we are assured of salvation because of His righteousness, which is credited to us. At the same time, He warns that if we do not abide in Him we will not bear fruit, and those who do not bear fruit will wither and at last be cast into the fire to be burned *(see 2 Pet. 3:9)*.

**What** is the lesson to be learned from the parable Jesus told in Luke 13:7–9?

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The point here is not salvation by bearing fruit, which would be just another manifestation of salvation by works. We’re not saved by bearing fruit; our fruit reveals the reality of the salvation we already have in Jesus, through faith in Him. Bearing fruit is an expression of salvation; it is not a means to attaining it. It is crucial that we understand this distinction. If not, sooner or later either we are going to become proud of what we deem our wonderful fruit, or we’re going to give up in despair at what seems to be a very paltry crop.
to the church and to us as individuals?

Today, as in Jesus’ time, many people claim to be miracle workers of one sort or another, although they may not use the word miracle. How can we know if these wonders and miracles, if they are genuine, are truly God-centered and God-directed? *(See John 11:4.)*

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** The following activity is an object lesson based on the biblical metaphor of fruit. The lessons emphasize the role of God in enabling us to produce good fruit by His guidance in our lives. Depending on your climate, you may need to collect photos rather than actual specimens through forays into nature.

**Group Project/Class Field Trip:** To return to the metaphor with which we opened the class, go into a wooded area or anywhere else you may find fruit trees in the wild. You might be surprised how many you find if you do the research necessary to recognize them. You probably failed to notice them because the fruit they produce bears so little resemblance to anything the average person would want to put in his or her mouth. If possible, gather a little bit of this fruit, which may even be stunted or worm-eaten, and put it next to an example of the same species from a farmers market.

**Compare:** Draw a comparison to what happens to our “fruit” if we don’t have God tending it.

Alternatively, you could draw attention to a species like the ornamental pear tree, a tree that produces beautiful leaves and flowers but no fruit to speak of.

**Compare:** What are the similarities between the ornamental tree and someone merely pretending to live a Christian life? What spiritual lessons can be drawn?
Further Study: “‘By their fruits ye shall know them’ (Matthew 7:20), the Saviour declared. All the true followers of Christ bear fruit to His glory. Their lives testify that a good work has been wrought in them by the Spirit of God, and their fruit is unto holiness. Their lives are elevated and pure. Right actions are the unmistakable fruit of true godliness, and those who bear no fruit of this kind reveal that they have no experience in the things of God. They are not in the Vine. Said Jesus, ‘Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the Vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing.’ John 15:4, 5.”—Ellen G. White, Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, p. 329.

“All who join themselves to the church but not to the Lord will in time develop their true character. ‘Ye shall know them by their fruits.’ Matt. 7:16. The precious fruit of godliness, temperance, patience, kindness, love, and charity, does not appear in their lives. They bear only thorns and briers. God is dishonored before the world by all such professors.”—Ellen G. White, The Faith I Live By, p. 90.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, go over your answer to Sunday’s question. What is the distinction between “being” good and “doing” good?

2. Read carefully Ellen White’s statement about how all those who join themselves to the church but not to the Lord will soon reveal their true character. What does that mean? Why should we each ask ourselves in which category we truly belong? How can we know for sure the answer?

3. Imagine two folk: One is a Seventh-day Adventist who knows and believes all the doctrines—state of the dead, Second Coming, 1844, and so on. This person, however, is mean, harsh, judgmental, and unloving. There’s another person who, while professing faith in Christ, has rejected all these teachings, accepting what we would deem as theological error. Yet, this person is kind, forgiving, loving, and nonjudgmental, everything the “orthodox” Adventist isn’t. Though, of course, we don’t know hearts, if you had to guess which one was closer to the kingdom of God, whom would you choose, and why? What does your answer imply about what you deem is important in Christianity?
The Fruit of the Spirit Is Love

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13, NKJV).

It is no accident that Paul’s list of the character traits that identify the fruit of the Spirit begins with love. Love is the paramount virtue for Christians because it is the trait that most characterizes God. It was love that motivated God to create us, to sustain us, to make Himself known to us, and to give us His Son in order to redeem us.

John says it so plainly and simply—“God is love” (1 John 4:16). Because love is so central to His character, love must be central to ours, as well. “He who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (vs. 16, NKJV).

Unfortunately, the word love is used very loosely today. We often say that we love the weather, we love our favorite food, we love our dog. But these kinds of love do not pass the test of true Godlike love (see 1 Corinthians 13). It’s something altogether different, something that impacts our entire existence, our way of life, our way of relating to others. The ingredients of love are a package, not a list from which we select those most appealing to us while we disregard the rest. That’s not, as we’ll see this week, what true love is all about.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 9.*
Love Is Multidimensional *(Deut. 6:5)*

“Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ ” *(Matt. 22:37–39, NKJV; see also Deut. 6:5).*

Bible translations, as with all written works, differ in word choice. For instance, “The bird was little” might read in one translation, “The bird was tiny,” or in another, “The bird was small.” And all these descriptions would be correct. Therefore, to study the fruit of the Spirit, it is helpful to define meanings by going to the original language of the word. In Deuteronomy 6:5, the Hebrew word for love is *ahab*, which has a similar range of meanings as *love* in English, everything from God’s infinite affection for His people to the desires of sinful beings. Men can *love* evil *(Ps. 52:3)*, but they can also *love* good *(Amos 5:15)*. The context determines which aspect of love is spoken of each time. The love in Deuteronomy 6:5, which Jesus speaks of in connection with the greatest commandment, is the noblest and highest form of self-sacrificing love which each person is commanded to have toward God and others *(see Luke 10:25-37).*

The Jewish people already knew that the number-one command was to love God with their whole heart, soul, mind, and, as Mark adds, strength *(see Mark 12:30).* In pointing out all four aspects of the human being, Jesus simply is calling together all that a person is. He is saying, “You need to love God with your entire being.” His intent is not to sort out the individual sense of each word; however, much could be gained by studying these four aspects.

**Read** Matthew 7:12 and Matthew 22:39. What’s the important point these texts make? How is this essential to the whole concept of love?

To love your neighbor as yourself means to love all people with your whole heart. The love spoken of in this “second commandment” is the same as in the “first commandment.” It is love in action, involving the will and intention. To love our neighbor as ourselves means to take care of someone else the same way you would take care of yourself.

*It’s easy to talk about loving others as yourself; what’s not easy is doing it. How well do you do in this area? How can you learn the hard lessons of death to self in order to minister to the needs of others?*
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Corinthians 13:7, 8

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Recognize that love comes from God.
- **Feel:** Trust in God’s love.
- **Do:** Express love to others.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **Know: God’s Love Comes to Us as His Gift**

   A First Corinthians 13 plainly states that God’s love is the greatest power in the universe.
   1. How can we define God’s love?
   2. How does God’s love fill our hearts? *(See Rom. 5:5.)*

   B Love must express itself. What are the evidences that love is working in our lives in relation to the following:
   1. Other people?
   2. God?


II. **Feel: God’s Love Is the Basis of Salvation**

   A What reasons are there for confidence in the reality and inextinguishable nature of God’s love?

III. **Do: God’s Love as Demonstrated in Christ Challenges Us in Our Relationship to God and to Other People**

   A Why are there no reasons for doubting the reality of God’s love for each of us individually?

   B If we ever feel we are so evil that God cannot love us, what is the remedy?

   C What harm and loss do we suffer if we doubt God’s love?

**Summary:** Love comes from God. It is inextinguishable. It brings peace, trust, and freedom to our lives. When God demonstrates it through us, it blesses and enriches other lives immeasurably. Loving, lovable Christians are priceless.
What Love Does (1 Cor. 13:4–8)

“Love suffers long and is kind; . . . thinks no evil; . . . rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” (1 Cor. 13:4–8, NKJV).

Love defined is the first step; love applied is the next. We must be careful not to glibly say we love; but rather, we need to analyze carefully how we live and how well we apply the principles of love as expressed in the Bible.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. Look at each individual aspect of what love is and ask, How can I apply these principles in my own home?

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Think for a moment of what our homes would be like if by God’s grace we consistently practiced the qualities of true love. Imagine the blessing of living in an environment where the family members are positive and affirming of each other. Perhaps you can’t get others to do this, but if you were to apply these principles, you might just see how powerful an impact they could make on others. You can’t argue against love; it’s the most powerful force in all of creation. People can argue against your theology, your lifestyle, your beliefs, your faith—everything. But what argument can they use against unconditional love, the kind of love revealed to the world through Jesus, the kind of love that we can, through His grace, manifest to others?

Which characteristics of biblical love do you find the most difficult to implement in your own life? How can you make a concentrated effort through God’s grace to cultivate more of this aspect of love? Why is it important that you do so?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Love is the greatest of the spiritual gifts because it underlies, guides, and informs the other gifts and everything we hope to accomplish as Christians.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize that love is not primarily a feeling but rather a consistent and disciplined way of relating to the world.


But love can be and has been misinterpreted. One shouldn’t presume to know what the Beatles meant—they conveniently forgot to define love—but the New Testament is quite clear that love is not primarily a positive emotion but a way of being.

**Discuss With the Class:** Whom or what do you love? How do you show it? For example, if you love God, do you make an effort to ascertain His will for your life and act upon it?

**Consider This:** If “all you need is love,” then is that necessarily good news for us as humans if we are to assume that love is more than merely having positive feelings about something or someone? Where do we get love?

STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** As 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 makes clear, love is the central principle of the Christian faith. To modern thinking, love is a nebulous concept. Emphasize that Paul clearly defines both what love is and what it is not. Much of his description—especially the negative, unfortunately—probably arose from his observation of behaviors in the Christian community.

Bible Commentary

I. Philia (Review 2 Timothy 3:4 with your class.)

The Koine Greek in which Paul wrote had four separate and distinct words
What Love Doesn’t Do

Go back over 1 Corinthians 13:4–8, only this time look at it from a different perspective. Look at what love does not do. Though these are stated in the negative, they are actually other positive characteristics of love.

Go through each one of the “negatives” in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 and write down their equivalents in positive terms. Also, as you do, ask yourself how well or poorly you manifest these aspects of love and how you might be able to do better.

Does not envy =

Does not parade itself =

Is not puffed up =

Is not rude =

Does not seek its own =

Is not easily provoked =

Thinks no evil =

Does not rejoice in iniquity =

As we contemplate the meaning of love detailed in the love chapter (1 Corinthians 13), we are able to appreciate the character of our heavenly Father, who is the personification of love. We also are able to see that the word love as used in the popular culture falls far short of a correct understanding of the love of God.
for love. These were **agape**, **philia**, **eros**, and **storge**. Of these, only **agape** and **philia** are used with any frequency in the New Testament. **Storge**, the needy love of a small child for his or her parent, is used only once—in the compound word *philostorgos* in Romans 12:10—to describe mutual love of parents and children or husbands and wives. **Eros**, while not necessarily referring to sexual love, does include it and appears only twice in Greek translations of the Old Testament (*Prov. 7:18, 30:16*).

**Philia** is the word that comes closest to the commonly understood meaning of the English word *love*. It refers primarily to the affection felt by someone toward another person, or possibly a thing or an idea. Most of us know, for example, that Philadelphia—the name of both an ancient and a modern city—means “brotherly love” or, more literally, “brotherly affection.”

Many commentators will say that **philia** is conditional love, and that is true in the sense that affection arises from appreciation of the qualities of its object. But it is not conditional in the sense that **eros** or **storge** are, both of which imply some selfish use of their object to satisfy needs or lusts.

The writers of the New Testament regarded **philia** as a serviceable and somewhat morally neutral word and used it many times to describe everything from “love of money” (*philarguria; 1 Tim. 6:10*) to love of God (*philotheos; 2 Tim. 3:4*).

**Philia**, however, was first and foremost a “feeling” word. To describe the love of God as shown in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the New Testament needed a different word, one that existed but was rarely used. That word was **agape**.

**Consider This:** Why is **philia** love not sufficient to describe the love of God? *(See Matt. 5:46, 47.)*

**II. Agape** *(Review 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 with your class.)*

The word for love used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 is **agape**. While this word had a history as a Greek word, it was little used. It referred to love as a general emotion, as opposed to the particularity and partiality of **philia**. In the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, **agape** was used quite frequently to render the Hebrew **ahaba**, possibly because of the similar sound of the words.
The Test of Love (Matt. 5:43–48)

**Read** Matthew 5:43–48 and then paraphrase in your own words what Jesus said. What’s the main point Jesus is telling us about love?

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If we are to love our enemies, we had better discover who exactly are our enemies. If an enemy is only the one who threatens your life, you may think this text doesn’t apply to you, inasmuch as you probably have not had your life threatened lately.

But by definition, an enemy is an opponent, a rival, a competitor, a challenger, a contender. An enemy is one who hates you or who mistreats you. It might even be a spouse or another member of the family. There may be times when a family member isn’t very loving. He or she may even look for ways to irritate you—or worse. When that happens, it is easy to get caught in the trap of retaliation and pettiness.

Sometimes you may experience conflict on the job, and those you have worked with side by side over the years may begin to think of you as an opponent. An enemy could be someone you have cared a great deal for or even may be someone in your church.

We need to realize that the enemy Jesus referred to is not limited to someone who would threaten our lives but is anyone who causes us enough consternation to tempt us to retaliate.

**Read** Proverbs 15:1, 25:21, and 1 Peter 3:9. How do these texts help us understand this important principle regarding love?

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Loving our enemies? Many folks have a hard time showing love to their friends, much less their enemies. How can we learn to follow Jesus’ example here? How can our hearts be changed so that we can love our enemies? How might praying for them play a large role in helping us reach this Christian ideal?
Agape probably was used so extensively in the New Testament for two reasons. First, the early Christians for whom Paul and other New Testament authors wrote were either Greek-speaking Jews or Greek Gentiles who drew most of their knowledge of the Old Testament from the Septuagint. Second, the word agape best conveyed the generality and impartiality of God’s love as seen in Christ.

Perhaps the best illustration of the difference between philia and agape is the conversation between Jesus and Peter in John 21:15–17. In English this sequence is very nearly incomprehensible. It might appear that Jesus is repeating Himself for emphasis or is doubting Peter’s sincerity. Or possibly Jesus is giving Peter a chance to affirm Him three times whereas he had denied Him three times before. While there may be some validity to these interpretations, it is important to know that the first two times Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him, he uses the word agapeo, and Peter answers with the word phileo, indicating that his devotion is not quite what it should be. Imagine telling God that you like Him a lot. Why is Peter hurt when Jesus asks him a third time whether he loves Him? Because Jesus pointedly uses the same word Peter uses, phileo, indicating that he notices Peter’s less-than-complete commitment.

Consider This: What does Peter’s use of the term philia tell us about his commitment up to that point? Might it shed some light on his behavior in the events surrounding the Crucifixion?

For other factual information, see “Love in the OT” and “Love in the NT,” The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), vol. 3, pp. 164–178.

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Love is crucial to life itself, and in God’s love we see love in its perfect form.

Thought Questions:

1. Given that love as defined in the Bible is more a matter of will, mind, and actions than of emotion, it still would be rather sterile and cold if it did not involve the emotions at all. What is the place of the emotions in

A seminary professor set up his preaching class in an unusual way. He scheduled each of his students to prepare a sermon on the story of the good Samaritan. One by one they were to go from classroom to classroom, preaching love and compassion for others. There was only a short break between classes, which forced the would-be preachers to rush in order to meet the schedule. Each of the preacher students had to walk down a certain corridor and pass by a beggar who had been deliberately planted there by the professor.

What happened was a powerful lesson! The number of would-be preachers who stopped to help this man was extremely low, especially those who were under the pressure of time. Rushing to preach their sermon on the good Samaritan, almost all walked right past the beggar at the heart of the parable!

In yesterday’s lesson, we talked about the question of Who is my enemy? Today the question is, Who is my neighbor? How does Jesus, in Luke 10:25–37, answer that for us? How does this parable tie into the whole question of what true love is? Also, as you read this parable, ask the question, Why did Jesus specifically place religious people, even religious leaders, in the role of the “bad guys”? What lesson is there for us, as well?

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Consider these words: “I was hungry, and you formed a humanities club to discuss it. I was imprisoned, but you complained about the crime rate. I was naked, and you debated the morality of my appearance. I was sick, and you thanked God for your health. I was homeless, and you preached to me about the shelter of God’s love. You seem so holy and so close to God; but I’m still hungry, lonely, cold, and in pain. Does it matter?”

Be honest. What kind of lifestyle changes should you make so that you can become a good Samaritan to others? Whom do you know right now who is at this moment on the other side of the road in the world of hurt? How much death to self will it require for you to treat this person as a “neighbor”?
the biblical scheme? Why is it fair to say that they should be subject to will, mind, and actions, rather than guiding them?

2 Jesus said to love one’s enemies (Matt. 5:44). Who were Jesus’ enemies? How did He show love to them?

Application Questions:

1 Jesus says we should love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:39). As such, it is assumed that we love ourselves and that it is right and proper that we do so. What does it mean to love ourselves? How does it fit in with the advice to die to oneself given in Romans 8:13? How is the biblical love of self different from the selfishness and self-indulgence people take to be love of self?

2 According to John 13:35, Christ’s disciples will be known by the fact that they love one another. Arguably this may be the distinctive point of Christian life and practice. And yet, it is the hardest thing to do. In fact, many of us find it easier to “love bomb” strangers and prospective converts than to show common kindness to church members or family members we have known for years. Why is this? How can we make a habit of showing our love and appreciation for one another?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The following activity is meant to emphasize the centrality of love to the Christian life and experience in such a way as to make love real in the approach to one’s own life.

Look at the positive and negative qualities of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. Create a short skit to dramatize one or more of these qualities. For example, you could portray someone reading this verse in a church service and then leaving the pulpit and doing or saying something blatantly envious, boastful, etc. The character in the skit is then confronted with his or her behavior. Does he or she rationalize it away? Does he or she get offended? Does he or she repent?
**Further Study:** Scientist Arthur Zajonc filled a box with light. But he did it so that none of the light reflected off any internal surface. Inside the box was light, and light alone. Now, if you looked inside, at the light, what would you see? What does light look like?

Pure darkness, that’s what you’d see. Unless reflecting off of something, or unless you stare directly into it, light is invisible.

Zajonc then took a rod and moved it through the darkness of the box. The rod itself, on the side from which the light entered, was illuminated. It looked as if a thin light was shining on just the rod, nothing else, even though light was everywhere in the box (as if filled with water). Only when it reflected from something (the rod) did it become visible. Otherwise, the light was darkness.

On earth, sunlight pouring down on the sky turns it blue, gray, or red, depending upon the weather and time of day. On the moon, no matter how much sunlight pours down, if you looked up you’d see what you’d see in Zajonc’s box, pure darkness, the darkness of empty space. And that’s because the moon has no atmosphere, no air, no moisture, and none of the gases and fumes that, reflecting sunlight, turn it into the panoply of color that reigns overhead here.

Light, unless reflected from something, appears as pure darkness.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What spiritual lessons about love might we be able to draw from what was written above about the nature of light? See 1 John 1:5, 2:9–11, 4:8, Luke 11:35.

2. Luke 23:34 says, “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’ ” (NKJV). Do you pray for your enemies? It is difficult to have the right attitude toward those who hate us, mistreat us, or persecute us. But praying for our enemies has a way of changing our hearts and attitudes toward them. When we pray for our persecutors and those who hate us, we will begin to see them as people in need of God’s grace just as much as we need it. It will give us the power and the desire to bless them when they curse us and do good to them when they hate us. How can we cultivate the attitude of praying for those whom we would really rather curse?

3. A person saw someone with a broken-down vehicle. He pulled over, offering to help, and for his trouble was beaten and robbed. “That’s it,” he said. “I’ll never go out of my way to be a good Samaritan again.” How would you respond to this person?
The Fruit of the Spirit Is Joy

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Psalm 139; Luke 15:4–24; John 15:10, 11; Heb. 11:16.

Memory Text: “‘These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full’” (John 15:11, NKJV).

Joy and happiness are not necessarily the same thing. Happiness is the result of favorable circumstances; joy, in contrast, is the result of being—as in being connected to Jesus, the True Vine.

In Psalm 4:7, joy and happiness are contrasted: “You have given me greater joy than those who have abundant harvests of grain and new wine” (NLT). The “greater joy” comes from knowing and trusting God; happiness is a result of pleasant circumstances, such as an abundant harvest. Inward joy is steady as long as we trust God; happiness is as unpredictable as a harvest. Inward joy defeats discouragement; happiness covers it up. Inward joy is lasting; happiness is temporary.

Joy is a delight in life that runs deeper than pain or pleasure. This type of joy stems from an awareness of God’s presence in our lives, allowing us to rise above circumstances and focus on the goodness and love of God. At the core of Christian joy is the fact that God has acted and is acting to save those who trust in Him.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 16.
The Command to Rejoice (Phil. 4:4)

Many believers allow themselves to be victimized by their circumstances and consequently vacillate between spiritual highs and lows. For them, to rejoice seems unreasonable, even impossible. That is why the command is to rejoice “in the Lord” (Phil. 4:4).

We can’t always rejoice in our circumstances or in other people, because both of these elements may be negative. However, we can rejoice in the Lord, because He is always good, and He never changes.

Our spiritual stability is directly related to our knowledge of and commitment to God. Knowing Him helps us live above our circumstances and provides stability. That’s why the psalms were written in poetic form and meter and set to music—so the people of Israel could memorize Scripture and sing hymns in order to deepen their knowledge of God. Knowing Him makes everything else seem less significant.

Read Psalm 139; Romans 8:28; and 1 Peter 1:8, 9. What reasons are given there for us to rejoice? How can we learn to rejoice in these promises of God?

Do you need other reasons to rejoice? How about because God saved us, adopted us, and promised to give us an inheritance in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:1–11)? When Christ returns, we will enjoy His presence and the heavenly place prepared for us (John 14:2, 3). Until that time, it’s a joy to know that God has promised to supply all our needs (Phil. 4:19). Furthermore, we have the privilege of serving the One we supremely love. That includes sharing the good news with the lost and encouraging fellow Christians to increase their love and service for Him. It is also a joy knowing we can pray to God at any time (Heb. 4:15, 16). Finally, we can rejoice knowing that death does not have the final word (1 Cor. 15:54).

Despite these promises, and despite all the reasons we have to rejoice, we all struggle with sadness, discouragement, and pain. These are the “facts of life” here and now. No matter our circumstances, how can we learn to find the joy that’s offered us in Christ? What choices are we making that can greatly impact whether or not we avail ourselves of the joy that could be ours?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: John 16:33

The Student Will:
Know: Reflect on the truth that joy comes from doing the will of God.
Feel: Express gratitude and gladness in all situations.
Do: Cultivate a positive influence in personal and social relationships.

Lesson Outline:

I. Know: Joy in Living for Christ
A Fellowship with Jesus provides us with immense resources to overcome every difficulty and circumstance. How do we access these resources in our own life?
B How can we always rejoice in difficult experiences?
C How does focusing on our problems, apart from God, make them worse?
D In what ways can we bring joy to God? How do we allow Him to live out His gift of joy in us?

II. Feel: Practicing an Attitude of Praise
A How can gratitude, thankfulness, and praise bring us joy?

III. Do: Living the Joy
A How does praise please God and bring Him honor?
B How does being loved by God contribute to our joy?
C In what way does obeying God make us joyful?
D The expression of praise, gratitude, and thankfulness promotes mental and physical health. As a class, list three ways of expressing joy to God.

Summary: Joy comes from doing God’s will. Obedience brings us into harmony with the laws of life. Gratitude and gladness for salvation inspire joy. Expressing joy in social and personal relations commends our faith to others and acts to encourage them, bringing honor to God.
The Joy of Christ

To understand fully a Christian’s joy, we must look at the joy-filled lifestyle of Christ. Where did His joy come from? What were the principles by which He lived?

What role does joy have in three of the most popular parables Jesus told? What’s the common element in all three stories?

The Lost Sheep (Luke 15:4–7)

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The Lost Coin (Luke 15:8–10)

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The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–24)

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These three parables give us insight into the heart of God. It is a heart that is willing to celebrate. It is the pure joy of God, the joy of reaching the lost. No wonder that, despite His trials and suffering, Jesus was anointed with joy, for He knew that—because of what He would accomplish—many people would be saved.

Consider the significance of the words recorded in Hebrews 12:2, 3. Prayerfully contemplate the words: “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” (NKJV). Write some of the thoughts that come to your mind as you meditate on the meaning of these words. What was the joy that was set before Him? Why would the salvation of lost souls be so important to God?

How would you reconcile the idea that Jesus was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3, NKJV) yet at the same time was a man of joy? Pick a specific problem in your life that causes you sorrow and grief. How, despite this sorrow, can you experience for yourself the kind of joy that Jesus experienced?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Joy is the logical response to God’s love and care, as seen in what Christ did and continues to do in, and for, us.

Just for Teachers: In this lesson we focus on joy as a fruit of the Spirit. Focus on the difference between happiness (which is a reaction to positive circumstances) and joy. Emphasize that if we trust God and have a consistent sense of gratitude toward Him, joy is a natural result.

How happy are you? According to the best research, 50 percent of your capacity for positive feelings may be genetic. Another 10 to 15 percent can be attributed to socioeconomic status, marital status, health, income, and similar factors. The remaining 35 to 40 percent is the result of unexplained variance. To sum it up: happiness is something that happens—or fails to happen—to you, maybe even before you’re born.


Discuss With the Class: One can argue that most human activity ultimately is intended to bring about happiness. What is missing from most of these efforts?

Consider This: In what way is Christian joy the natural response to the security and stability that comes from God’s unconditional love for us?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Stress that the Bible indicates that God wants us to approach the Christian life with an attitude of joy. Help your students to understand what biblical joy is and is not. Emphasize especially that being a joyful person does not mean that one is always outwardly joyful, although an outward expression of joy has its place.
Joy in Obedience *(John 15:11)*

**Read** John 15:10, 11. What is Jesus linking joy to? How, in a practical sense, does this work; that is, why should this lead to joy?

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“But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night” *(Ps. 1:2, NKJV).*

“I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart” *(Ps. 40:8, NKJV).*

There is no greater joy than the joy of being obedient to the will of God. While it may seem to some that an emphasis on obedience to the law of God simply serves to exacerbate an already guilty conscience, the fact is that obedience to the will of God is liberating. Remember, it was disobedience that brought war to heaven and sin and death to this planet. All human pain and suffering are the result of humans stepping outside the will of God. It will be, then, obedience to the will of God through faith that helps restore joy.

**Read** Psalm 19:8, Jeremiah 15:16, and Matthew 7:21–27. How do they link obedience with joy?

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How have you experienced for yourself the joy that comes from obedience? Or to ask the question negatively: How have you experienced the pain and suffering that come from not obeying the Lord?
Bible Commentary

The main words in the New Testament usually translated as “joy” or “joyful” are *chara* and *chairo*, respectively. *Chara* refers to the outward state of being joyful or rejoicing, while *chairo* refers to a calm, inner state of joy. These words, like our word *joy*, don’t necessarily have spiritual significance, although only God can provide the constant inner joy that the Christian has. The main difference between Christian joy and generic joy or happiness is what the Christian rejoices in. A Christian always can be joyful, knowing that what he or she rejoices in is constant and unchanging.

I. Outward Joy (Review Psalm 98:4–6 and James 5:13 with your class.)

The people of the Bible were demonstrative. When they felt joy or gladness about something, they were not shy about expressing it. Not only did the various biblical authors not frown on this, they encouraged it. Sometimes they commanded it. For example, Psalm 98:4 tells all human-kind and nature to make “a joyful noise” to the Lord *(ESV)*. To avoid any possible misunderstanding, the psalmist goes on to specify the different varieties of blatantly loud musical instruments one might consider using to do it: lyres, trumpets, horns.

It also is significant that the psalmist summons nature to praise God by doing what it does anyway, the sea roaring, for example. It should be the same for the Christian. We don’t really need to be told to rejoice. How can we not rejoice?

The Bible also indicates that it is completely appropriate to express joy at positive circumstances. Aside from the many instances in the Bible in which important figures rejoiced in times of good fortune, James 5:13 tells us that if we are happy, we should sing songs of praise. Here is a key concept: be happy; rejoice in good circumstances, *but remember where they come from*. Remember that although they are nice, they are not the only thing, or the main thing. The God who gave them to you is the main thing, and He’ll be there in bad circumstances, as well as the good ones.

**Consider This:** Both passages we’ve examined associate joy with a response of worship, whether of God just for being God or because of particular things He may have done for us in our lives. Should all worship be marked by expressed joy? Should all joy be expressed as worship?
Joy in Tough Times *(John 16:33)*

“‘These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’” *(John 16:33, NKJV).*

A long-held belief suggests that if a person is passing through difficulties it is because either that person must be doing something wrong or does not have enough faith. What a crude and cold view of God! Jesus said clearly that in this life we would all have troubles, both the believer and the nonbeliever. However much we love the story of Daniel in the lions’ den, the fact is that most of the Christians thrown to the lions were torn to shreds by the beasts. The same with the three Hebrews who survived the fiery furnace; most Christians tied to the stake were, indeed, burned there!

**Read** Galatians 6:9, James 1:2–4, and 1 Peter 1:6. What hope, what promises can we take from these verses that could help us during painful times?

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Consider the possibility that many believers today do not have joy simply because they are self-centered. However real our problems, by focusing solely on them, we only make them worse in our own minds. In reality, we do have reasons to rejoice, not in ourselves but in God.

After all, doesn’t God say that “the very hairs of your head are all numbered”? *(See Matt. 10:30.)* Think of the promise inherent in those words. If, knowing our security is in Jesus, we would reach out and minister to someone else during our times of trial, we would know that self-pity can be turned to joy by a simple act of the will. “And the Lord restored Job’s losses when he prayed for his friends” *(Job 42:10, NKJV).*

No matter what you might be struggling with now, reach out to someone who is, perhaps, going through something hard, as well. Surely you know someone who needs help, encouragement, and support. How can bearing someone else’s burdens lighten your own?
II. Joy Inside (Review Ecclesiastes 3:1–4, John 16:33, Romans 12:15, and 1 Peter 1:6 with your class.)

In psychology, one symptom of psychosis is “inappropriate affect,” or showing the wrong emotion for a given situation. For example, giggling when describing how one was abused as a child. The truth is that there are situations in life that cannot be met with smiles, laughter, or loud music. The same Bible that tells us to “rejoice always” also tells us that there is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh” (Eccles. 3:4, NKJV). At other times it might be more appropriate to calmly, quietly appreciate what we have.

For the Christian, what all these situations have in common is that our lives are built on the solid foundation of God’s finished work for us in the past, His continuing presence in our lives, and what we know He will do in the future. So, whatever current circumstances may require from us, we can approach life with an underlying sense of joy.

Consider This: According to the Bible, when is it appropriate to mourn? (See Matt. 5:4 and James 4:8, 9.)

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Emphasize that while joy, as such, is not the central goal of the Christian journey, it certainly is inseparable from it. Where Christ is, we find joy, as well. And what joy it is to know that God guarantees He will take us through anything this world sends our way.

Thought Questions:

1 As the fourth-century church father John Chrysostom points out, nowhere in the Bible do we have evidence that Jesus specifically smiled or laughed. As such, what biblical evidence do we have that Jesus was Himself a Man of joy? How did He display His enjoyment of God, life, and other people? (See Matt. 9:14–16 and 11:18.)

2 According to the Bible, what causes the Christian to be joyful? (See Ps. 40:8.)

3 How does the Bible suggest that we approach difficulties that by human logic could cause us to lose our joy or happiness? (See Luke 6:22, Rom. 8:28, and Phil. 4:4.)
Joy That Lasts *(Heb. 11:24, 25)*

“By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin” *(Heb. 11:24, 25, NKJV)*. **What principles of the Christian life are found in these verses?** *(See also Luke 9:23, Acts 14:22, Phil. 1:29.)* **How can we link those above verses with the promise of joy?** *(See Heb. 11:16, 1 Pet. 1:6–8.)*

Moses’ decision to turn his back on the throne of Egypt was definitely not politically correct. He might have decided to stay in Egypt and become the next Pharaoh. He might have rationalized such a move to be God’s will for him. After all, it might not have been that hard to do, because there are often so many “good” reasons to make a wrong decision.

**Think** upon the last time you made a wrong decision based on “good” reasons. What hard lessons did you learn?

While joy comes from knowing we are within the will of God, the immediate consequences often may be difficult and painful. To believe that when we accept Jesus and obey His Word all our problems will disappear can lead to disillusionment. Becoming a committed Christian is no assurance of money, fame, and influence. Each year thousands are persecuted, some even martyred, for their faith.

**In the end, our hope, our salvation, everything has to depend upon something greater than this world, greater than what this world offers. How crucial that, no matter what we are going through, we focus on what Jesus has done for us and what He has promised us. Otherwise, we have nothing else but what this world in and of itself offers, and as we all know, what it offers can at times be very bitter.**
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Application Questions:

1. Philippians 4:4 can be seen as a commandment to rejoice. If we are to assume that rejoicing is emotionally based, how can we be commanded to rejoice any more than we can be commanded to feel any other emotion? If not, what is the author trying to say?

2. While we can’t necessarily will ourselves to feel joy, we can adopt habits and attitudes that will make it easier to approach life joyfully. What might some of these attitudes and habits be?

3. How did the people of Israel display their joy in the Lord? What can we learn from these modes of expression, and how can we adapt them to our given cultural context?

4. What is the role of Scripture in helping us to cultivate our capacity for Christian joy?

5. Many people are afraid or find it an unpleasant or an intimidating experience to witness to others. How can a correct understanding of Christian joy make it easier and more comfortable to share our faith with others? How might a detectable sense of joy make others more receptive to our message?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The following activity is meant to emphasize the centrality of joy to the Christian life and experience in such a way as to make joy real in the approach to one’s own life. Choose the activity that is most suited to your class’s capabilities or temperaments.

1. Resolve to spend at least one evening during the following week doing something for others. Visit lonely neighbors; volunteer at a soup kitchen or perform some other community service; involve yourself in something civic, such as a community meeting. Attend your church’s weekly prayer meeting or Bible study. Start your own Bible study, alone or with others. The possibilities are endless. Compare how you feel after this to your feelings after allowing yourself to fall into inertia, for instance by watching television. How do you feel about yourself? How do you think God feels about you? Remember it. Do it again. Report back to the class.

2. Resolve as a class to perform some simple community-service project. For example, place flyers around the immediate neighborhood of the church requesting that cans and nonperishable food items be placed in bags to be collected the following week. After distribution of the items, return to a potluck meal. Discuss how it made you feel.
Further Study: “It is the duty of Christians to convince the world that the religion of Christ disrobes the soul of the garments of heaviness and mourning and clothes it with joy and gladness. Those who receive Christ as a sin-pardoning Saviour are clothed with His garments of light. He takes away their sin and imparts to them His righteousness. Their joy is full. . . .

“Who have better right than Christians to sing songs of rejoicing? Have they not the expectation of being members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King? Is not the gospel good tidings of great joy? When the promises of God are freely and fully accepted, heaven’s brightness is brought into the life.”—Ellen G. White, *A Call to Medical Evangelism and Health Education*, p. 26, emphasis supplied.

Discussion Questions:

1. Go through the Bible and focus on the lives of a few well-known characters. How much joy do you think they experienced? How about Noah or Abraham or Joseph? What about Daniel or David or Jeremiah? Or Paul or John the Baptist? What can we learn from their experiences, both the good and the bad, about what Christian joy is really about?

2. What are some worldly ways to find happiness? How well do these things work? What have you learned about worldly ways of achieving happiness? Are they all bad, or can and should they have their place in our lives?

3. How much happiness or even joy could or should we expect in this life, even as Christians who live with the knowledge of God’s infinite love? That is, when all around us we see sickness, suffering, and death, and when we know that many souls are going to be eternally lost, how much happiness should we have? Isn’t it kind of selfish to rejoice in our good fortune while we know that others will perish? Explain your answer.

4. Why is it that the more self-centered we are, the more miserable we tend to be?

5. Why is the hope and promise of eternal life in a whole new earth so crucial to our whole Christian experience? What would we have without it? How important, then, is it that we keep that hope always before us? After all, even if we have it good here in this world and in this life, it’s not going to last, so how ultimately satisfying could it be?
SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “‘Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid’” (John 14:27, NKJV).

As a champion of peace, Paul wrote, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3, NKJV). The Greek word translated “endeavoring” is an imperative, excluding any passivity, any “wait and see” attitude. We must be proactive. If we fight and bicker in our homes, if we fall into factions at church, if we refuse to love and honor others, then we are denying the peace of God in Jesus Christ, which He established on the cross.

How ironic that you have to fight for peace. Eleanor Roosevelt, in a Voice of America radio broadcast, said, “It isn’t enough to talk about peace; one must believe in it. And it isn’t enough to believe in it; one must work at it.” The peace that Christ won for us also requires effort, hard work, and constant self-examination.

As we study this week, we should ask ourselves: Have I availed myself of the peace that Jesus won for me on the cross? How can I cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He engrafts that peace into my daily life?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 23.
Peace With God *(Rom. 5:1)*

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” *(Rom. 5:1, NKJV).*

To have peace with God is more than to feel comfortable in His presence. It means that we, who once were “alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds” *(Col. 1:21, ESV)*, have been reconciled and restored to fellowship with God. Once we were at war with God, but by His death on the cross, Jesus has made it possible for the hostilities to cease and for us to be God’s friends and not His enemies.

In one sense, this peace is not something we grow in, as in starting out with just a little bit of peace. Rather, we are reconciled to God, once and for all, by the cross of Christ. It is an accomplished fact.

In another sense, though, in which we do grow in peace with God. The more clearly we see God’s ways and walk in them, the more we appropriate His power to live as His sons and daughters. In this sense, peace with God is indeed a fruit of the Spirit. As we grow to maturity as children of God, we experience more and more the blessings and benefits of living in His kingdom until we can say, “Great peace have those who love Your law, And nothing causes them to stumble” *(Ps. 119:165, NKJV).*

Colossians 1:20–22 reveals that sin did not cause God to be merciful and pardoning; rather, it revealed that He has been that way from eternity. The plan of salvation demonstrated that God loved us and was willing to forgive even from the beginning.

**Read** Romans 5:1–11 and summarize what you believe the crucial points are here.

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Dwell on this idea that only because of what Jesus has done, because of His perfect life credited to you by faith, can you stand pardoned, forgiven, and accepted before God, regardless of your past. Why is this teaching so important to us if we are truly to know peace?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Philippians 4:7

The Student Will:

Know: Trust that God’s peace keeps and guards our hearts and minds.
Feel: Embrace the peace that comes only from God.
Do: Demonstrate peacefulness in relationships and difficult situations.

Lesson Outline:

I. Know: God’s Peace in Christ

A The peace that comes from God is found in fellowship with Jesus, not in isolation from God. What insight does taking His yoke upon us shed on our understanding of how we make peace with God?
B Jesus invites us to learn of Him. What is the relationship between learning about Jesus and enjoying His peace?
C We say “Like begets like.” How does peace in us create peace in others?
D The key text tells us that God’s peace guards us. How are we to understand what it means to be guarded by peace?

II. Feel: Peace With God

A Jesus has given us peace as a here-and-now inheritance. How do we make it our own in situations of conflict and provocation?

III. Do: Making Peace

A Making peace has many dimensions. How do we make peace with God? With each other? In our own hearts?
B Why is it true that if we do not know peace in our own lives we will not make it in others?
C How would we describe the absence of peace in a person’s life?

Summary: We are kept guarded and enjoy peace only in fellowship with Jesus. Peace first must live in our hearts before it can create peacefulness in our relationships.
Finding Peace: Part 1  (Matt. 11:28, 29)

On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 is very peaceful, 10 is very anxious), how would you rate your life? People are increasingly frustrated in their search for personal peace. In Matthew 11:28, 29, Jesus makes an invitation. Though He doesn’t use the word peace, He does use a word that means “to give rest, to refresh, to give one’s self rest, to take a rest.”

Read the following verses: “‘Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls’”  (Matt. 11:28, 29, NKJV). What is Jesus saying to us here? How can we experience for ourselves the reality of this wonderful promise?

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From what Jesus is saying in these verses, is He proposing to give us peace as a gift, or does He mean to show us how to obtain it? Is not Jesus teaching that personal peace is a result of some cause and inviting us to learn that cause from Him?

“It is the love of self that brings unrest. . . . Those who take Christ at His word, and surrender their souls to His keeping, their lives to His ordering, will find peace and quietude. Nothing of the world can make them sad when Jesus makes them glad by His presence. In perfect acquiescence there is perfect rest. The Lord says, ‘Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee.’ Isa. 26:3.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 330, 331.

How does love of self lead to personal unrest and unhappiness?

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How can we learn to die to self and to rest in Jesus? What choices can we make, every day, that can help make the promise of peace in Christ real? That is, what things are we doing, or not doing, that keep us from having the peace that Jesus offers us?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: When we are at peace with God—made possible by His sacrifice, which brought about our reconciliation with Him—we will be at peace with ourselves and those around us.

Just for Teachers: Emphasize that, while we are not naturally peaceful, God has given us the means to become peaceful.

A few years ago, one of the earliest of the “viral videos” now so ubiquitous on the Internet showed two drivers squaring off over a parking space. After a series of maneuvers worthy of the demolition derbies in their heyday, the battered, defeated driver sped away, wheels squealing. The final frame of the video showed the rear bumper, sporting a sticker informing us that “war is not the answer.”

While obviously an exaggeration, this video reveals an unpleasant fact. We all want peace, but we’re incapable of achieving it, even in our most basic reactions to the world around us.

We’re not at peace with ourselves or with others because we’re not at peace with God. The good news (or gospel) is that for the past 2,000 years, God has been at peace with us. All we need to do is recognize it. Then we can be the peacemakers God wants us to be, spreading His message of reconciliation through our words and our examples.

Discuss: What does it mean to be at peace? How does God give us peace? Why do we have to work to be peaceful? Discuss whether peace is a natural result of being reconciled with God or some combination of what already has been mentioned in step 1.

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Emphasize that what we seek most is best described as peace. And yet, peace seems to be harder to achieve than anything else. What, according to the Bible, is at the root of our failure to be at peace? Discuss.
Finding Peace: Part 2 *(John 14:27)*

The story is told of two painters. Each painted a picture to illustrate his concept of rest. The first chose for his scene a still, serene lake among the far-off mountains. The second painted a thundering waterfall with a fragile birch tree bending over the foam; at the fork of a branch, almost wet with the cataract’s spray, a robin sat on its nest.

Which best portrayed the essence of rest? It is not often in this world of turmoil that we find the rest of a lone mountain lake. More often we must find our rest amid the turmoil of real life.

Read the story recorded in Matthew 8:23–27 of Jesus and His disciples on the Sea of Galilee. *(See also Mark 4:35–41, Luke 8:22–25.)* However unique the situation, what can we take away from this account for ourselves; that is, what is the message for us, and how can we apply it to our lives, regardless of our situation?

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Why do you think Jesus was concerned that His disciples have peace? Jesus left us with a beautiful promise about peace: “‘Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you’” *(John 14:27, NKJV).* How does the peace the world is trying to give differ from the peace Jesus offers?

One thing we mustn’t do is equate peace to a life without problems. Rare is the person, even the most faithful Christian, who goes through life without trials, pain, and suffering. Indeed, some folks have, it seems, more than their share of suffering. Peace, though, has more to do with how you handle these situations than with the situations themselves. Peace has to do with the deepest trust in a loving and caring God who knows what you are going through and has promised not to forsake you, no matter what comes your way.

What types of things upset you? Talk to God about your deepest fears. Call them by name. Ask the Lord to help you get in touch with the fear and identify it. Then take time to allow Him to begin to speak peace gently to those fears.
Bible Commentary

I. Peace in the Old Testament *(Review Isaiah 26:2–4, Ezekiel 37:26, and Deuteronomy 28 with your class.)*

The principal word translated *peace* throughout the Old Testament is *shalom*. It can refer to peace in one’s personal life in relations within society, among peoples and nations, and in the ideal relationship with God. Peace was considered to be necessary for individual and collective health and security, as well as economic prosperity, all of which were seen as results of a right relationship with God.

One example of this can be seen in Deuteronomy 28, where the blessings for obedience were essentially blessings of peace, while the curses for disobedience involved warfare—disruption of the personal, natural, and social orders, and chaos.

The word *shalom*, as well as its cognates in other Semitic languages of the region, implied wholeness or completeness. This linked it to health, or, literally, “wholesomeness.” Peace meant to be at one with oneself, with others, and with one’s environment. For example, peace in the literal sense of absence of war meant one had to be in “one accord” with one’s potential opponent. Physical wholeness or peace meant that the body was “whole,” that all the parts worked together to guarantee an optimal state of health.

The poignant fact is that the people of the Old Testament idealized peace and wholeness while achieving it only rarely and fleetingly. The story of Adam and Eve in Genesis can be seen as, among other things, an explanation of why peace was so rare and fleeting. This was, of course, because the original state of wholeness and unity that God had intended for His creation was disrupted by the first act of disobedience.

**Consider This:** How is the idea of peace central to the promises of the Old Testament, and how are these promises fulfilled in the New?

II. Peace in the New Testament *(Review Romans 5:1–11 and 12:18 with your class.)*

The Greek word for peace used in the New Testament (and the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint) is *eirene*. As an ordinary Greek word, it had a
Peace at Home (Heb. 12:14)

“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18, NKJV). What can we learn from the life and example of Jesus that can make these admonitions real in our lives? What are we doing (if anything) that makes them difficult, if not impossible, to become real for us?

Strange as it may seem, the most difficult place to be a Christian is at home. How tragic, when home should be the one place in all the world where we all should have peace.

Two young men were in a battle during the days of the Vietnam War. The bullets were flying, and the bombs were exploding. All of this didn’t seem to faze one of the soldiers. When his friend asked how he could be so calm, he replied that it reminded him of home!

Study Romans 12:9–21. Identify verses in the passage that, if implemented, would help to bring peace to the home. Give a practical application for the verses you chose.

As Christians, we are called to follow an incredibly high standard, the standard presented by Jesus Himself. All of us have fallen short of that goal. That being said, it doesn’t mean that we can’t still reflect the principles revealed in the life of Jesus—principles of love, self-sacrifice, and an uncompromising attitude toward evil and sin.

Imagine what our homes would be like were we to, indeed, reflect these principles! Imagine what it would be like if we would learn to think of others before ourselves; imagine if we showed others unconditional love, even when folks didn’t deserve it. Imagine if we forgave those who hurt us. Imagine if we were as concerned about the well-being of others as we were about our own selves. Though implementing these principles wouldn’t solve all our family problems, no doubt they would greatly help!
much more limited scope than the Hebrew word *shalom*, referring only to the literal absence or cessation of war or hostility. Yet, in the Septuagint and the New Testament, it was used in the same way as the Hebrew word.

As in the Old Testament, peace was seen as the prerequisite of all things good; thus, we see Jesus following the universal custom of the time and place by greeting disciples, followers, and others with wishes for peace (*Mark 5:34, Luke 7:50, John 20:19–21*). Many of the New Testament epistles of Paul and others also begin with wishes for the peace of the readers or hearers.

The New Testament makes explicit what is only implicit in the Old Testament. The Old Testament clearly recognizes that the presence of peace is a sign of the presence of God (*Num. 6:26, for example*). The New Testament goes further and recognizes that the absence of peace, typical of the human experience, is a sign that humankind is literally in a state of hostility or war with God, from which all other lack of peace stems. Seeing that humankind is in no way ready to take the initiative, God therefore makes the first move by sending His Son (*Rom. 5:1–11*). By making peace with us, God makes us peaceful and also *peacemakers* (*Rom. 12:18*).


**Consider This:** How does the New Testament expand and deepen the ideal of peace also found in the Old Testament? (*See Matt. 5:43, 44.*)

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Use these questions to challenge your students to take hold of the spiritual gift of peace God gives us and to be a vehicle to transfer that gift to others.

**Thought Questions:**

1. In John 14:27, Jesus says that the peace He leaves with us is different from what the world calls peace. How is it different? Why is the peace given by Jesus more permanent? Why is the peace given by God more than the absence of strife or conflict?

2. What does it mean that Jesus calls us to be peacemakers (*Matt. 5:9*), in light of the fact that permanent peace almost certainly never will be attained this side of the millennium? How and with whom are we to make peace?
Peace in the Church (Matt. 5:23, 24)

“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23, 24, NKJV). What basic principle is Jesus teaching us with these words? Why do we find it so hard to implement this principle in our lives?

It is evident that Jesus takes more seriously our relationships with one another than we do. It is not uncommon for bitterness and resentment to exist for years between members of a church. Imagine how different things would be if we all followed this teaching.

**Identify** a characteristic of the children of God as recorded in Matthew 5:9. What does it mean?

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**According** to Colossians 3:13–15, what are three ways we are to relate with one another as fellow members of the church? What does each one mean?

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Notice the flow of Christian graces in James 3:17: “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (NKJV). What would our churches be like if we would allow the Holy Spirit to nurture these qualities in our fellowship? What things would be noticeably absent?

Think about the last time you had a problem with a fellow church member. Did you follow Christ’s words in Matthew 5? If not, analyze the reasons why you chose the “easy,” worldly route as opposed to the path that would have required humility and self-denial. How can you learn to do what Jesus calls us to do in such situations?
How do we reconcile this mission to be peacemakers with the fact that Jesus (Matt. 10:34) specifically says that not only will He and His message be a cause of conflict, division, and strife but that this is His intent (for instance, He says that He brings “not . . . peace, but a sword”)? What notion of peace does Jesus hope to disturb, and how is it different from the peace He hopes to give to us?

Application Questions:

1. Philippians 4:7 refers to the “peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (NKJV) that results from our acceptance of Christ. Yet, we all know people who have accepted Christ and yet fail to be assured of their salvation. We probably have felt that way, at least from time to time. How would you go about helping such a person to gain the assurance that brings that peace?

2. We are told “if it is possible, . . . live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18, NKJV). This is a reflection of the peace with, and given to us by, God. Yet, clearly there are situations in which it is not possible to be at peace, or at least to avoid confrontation with others. Under what circumstances should the Christian embrace confrontation, and how can we confront while remaining peaceful people?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Like other aspects of the Christian life, the gift of peace is something that exists inside us; yet, if it exists only inside us, it is irrelevant. The following activity is meant to give your students a practical means of spreading peace and reconciliation in their immediate circle of friends, acquaintances, coworkers, family members, church members, etc.

Someone somewhere said, “Peace begins with you,” and it does. While your peaceful attitude is no guarantee that your external environment will be peaceful, the lack of such an attitude virtually guarantees that it will not.

Ask your class to consider ways in which they can make it easier for themselves to claim the peace that God has for us. These can include proactive techniques (starting the day a certain way, for example), ways of dealing with people or situations that push one in the opposite direction of one’s nature and inclinations, choices of music or literature, and so on. Write suggestions on a blackboard, flip chart, or dry erase board. Ask class members to share their experiences with any of these methods.
Further Study: Pss. 4:3, 119:165, Isa. 26:3, Rom. 8:6, Phil. 4:7.

“Shortly before His crucifixion Christ had bequeathed to His disciples a legacy of peace. ‘Peace I leave with you,’ He said, ‘My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.’ John 14:27. This peace is not the peace that comes through conformity to the world. Christ never purchased peace by compromise with evil. The peace that Christ left His disciples is internal rather than external and was ever to remain with His witnesses through strife and contention.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 84.

“Strife for the supremacy makes manifest a spirit that, if cherished, will eventually shut out from the kingdom of God those who cherish it. The peace of Christ cannot dwell in the mind and heart of a workman who criticizes and finds fault with another workman simply because the other does not practice the methods he thinks best, or because he feels that he is not appreciated. The Lord never blesses him who criticizes and accuses his brethren, for this is Satan’s work. Manuscript 21, 1894.”—Ellen G. White, Evangelism, p. 102.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are ways you can work in your local church to help keep peace among members when inevitable tensions and disagreements arise?

2. What are the common situations we face in our daily lives that threaten our peace? What Bible promises can we claim when each one arises?

3. Of course, it’s easy to talk about trusting the Lord no matter our circumstances and from that trust deriving peace. And that’s true. At the same time, what concrete and practical steps can we take to change the circumstances that make peace difficult? In other words, how often might our unease and fear be the result of choices that we make?

4. What practical things can we do to help others through circumstances that make peace difficult to achieve?

5. How much peace should we realistically expect to have in a world filled with such strife, chaos, suffering, and turmoil?
The Fruit of the Spirit Is Patience

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 6:3; Exod. 34:6; Mark 4:26–29; Rom. 15:5; Eph. 4:1, 2; James 1:2–4.

Memory Text: “For you have need of endurance [patience], so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise” (Hebrews 10:36, NKJV).

In the Greek, two words express the meaning of “patience,” another fruit of the Spirit. The first is hupomone, translated “endurance, steadfastness, and fortitude” in circumstances that cannot be changed. The second word, makrothumia, means “great” or “long tempered.” It is the opposite of short-tempered, impatient, and easily frustrated. In general, it means being able to stick with things and not to be derailed by adversity. The word is usually applied to having patience with people.

A patient person is mild, gentle, and constant in all circumstances. The real test of patience is not in the waiting but in how one behaves while waiting. “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:4, NKJV).

Reaching this point in one’s life takes practice, takes God’s grace, and takes a willingness to put aside self and to surrender to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The good news is that if we learn patience, we are in a position to receive many other blessings from God, as well.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 30.*
Patience Is an Attribute of God (Exod. 34:6)

“And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth’ ” (Exod. 34:6, NKJV).

One of the many Bible stories illustrating the patience of God was His dealing with Nineveh. The prophet Jonah recognized God’s patience: “‘Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm’ ” (Jonah 4:2, NKJV).

Note some of the other qualities that patience is combined with in Exodus 34:6. God’s grace, mercy, lovingkindness, goodness, and truth protect and sustain even the most hardened sinners in order to give them the maximum time and advantage to turn their lives around. If God struck out at people as quickly as humans frequently do, we’d all be dead.

Why is God patient with sinners? (See 2 Pet. 3:8, 9.) How have you seen the reality of this truth manifested toward yourself or toward others?

If someone were to ask you how you picture God in your mind, how would you describe Him? This is revealing, because the way a Christian thinks of God has a lot to do with his or her worldview and how we treat others. If we see God as angry and quick to punish, how would we likely treat others in the church and in our homes?

How can we learn to do what the Lord calls us to do in Romans 15:5?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** *James 1:2–5, NIV*

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Accept the reality that exercising patience can be difficult.
- **Feel:** Earnestly desire to develop patience.
- **Do:** Practice patience in situations of trial and difficulty.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **Know: Learning Patience**
   - The key text joins together two gifts of the Spirit: joy and patience.
     1. How do we know we need patience? Why do we find it difficult to show patience? In what situations is it most difficult to exercise patience?
     2. Ask the class members to recount situations in which they have been impatient. How do they think the situations could have been avoided?
     3. Where does joy enter into situations that demand patience?

II. **Feel: The Need for Developing Patience**
   - The development of patience, like all the gifts of the Spirit, calls for the exercise of choice. How can we deal with failures to show patience?

III. **Do: Practicing Patience in the Midst of Conflict**
   - Because conflict is often an inevitable part of life, how can we most usefully prepare for it?
   - James tells us to know, or understand, that enduring the trial of our faith leads to patience and spiritual maturity. How can we respond to testing in a way that helps us to avoid becoming impatient? How is a preoccupation with self at the root of impatience?

**Summary:** Developing patience is often difficult. Contemplating God’s patience with us helps. Understanding that egotism or self-centeredness is a major hindrance to growth leads us to seek God’s grace to become spiritually mature.
Patience Required (Eph. 4:1, 2)

Read Ephesians 4:1, 2. Look at the elements Paul presents for those who are to “walk worthy” of the Lord. Among them is patience. How is patience linked with the other attributes presented? That is, how do they feed into each other?

The church is made up of a mixture of people from various backgrounds and cultures. It also includes people who are on different rungs of the maturity ladder. Patience is necessary to be able to get along where there are so many differences. It is a temptation for those who are mature to be impatient toward those less so. In spite of the fact that it took years for them to arrive at their present level of knowledge, often the mature are unwilling to give the immature the same amount of time and study to reach their level of knowledge and understanding.

What is Paul’s counsel on how we are to deal with those who may be weak in faith? Rom. 14:1, 15:1.

Patience in the church is one thing. But what about patience at home? What are some of the things that make us impatient with other members of our family? How long should we pray for family members who are out of the faith? Have you ever known anyone who had to pray for a loved one for many years before the person gave his or her heart to the Lord? What are practical ways in which we can learn to cultivate patience with family members? Why is death to self so important here too?

If we can be patient at home, with those who are always “in our face,” then we likely will be patient with others, as well.

Think about how patient the Lord has been with you. How does keeping that reality constantly before you help you learn to show patience with others? If the Lord treated you as you treated others, what do you think would be your fate?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Patience is a godlike trait that bears long with weakness. It gives us the opportunity to learn, grow, and turn to God.

Just for Teachers: In order to demonstrate patience in action, locate someone who is willing to demonstrate, as an object lesson, some process of a craft that takes care and time. Take some time with your class to observe the process, or a part of it, and discuss it. Then share the following quote:

“All who in this world render true service to God or man receive a preparatory training in the school of sorrow. The weightier the trust and the higher the service, the closer is the test and the more severe the discipline.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 151.

Consider This: It takes patience and carefulness and much time to craft something of quality. God has put all those things into His work with us. A skillfully handcrafted item generally is highly valued. Why is this so? How does God value the work of His hands? How do His long efforts with us give us patience to work long and carefully with others?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: We are pilgrims on a heavenward journey. An important part of our spiritual walk is patience. Lead your class this week to focus on the following questions: What is patience? How is patience related to God’s character? Why is patience so important for our spiritual walk and growth?

Bible Commentary

The apostle Paul in Galatians 5:16–26 presents the Christian life as warfare between the life of the flesh and the life of the Spirit. After warning Christians to renounce the works of the flesh, the apostle charges them to live so as to bear the “fruit of the Spirit.” Fruit bearing is an essential part of the salvation experience and spiritual growth. After describing three
Patience in the Gospel  \( (2 \text{ Tim. 4:2}) \)

Preaching and teaching the gospel is one of the most difficult areas in which to exercise patience. Most of us are too impatient with people who don’t know the truth or who don’t seem to care about it. But in a world full of false doctrine and prejudice against truth, we must be longsuffering as we seek to lead people to Christ. It is too easy to shake our head and say, “Why don’t they understand? The truth is so plain.”

The truth always is plain to the person who is not looking at it through glasses tinted by false doctrine, tradition, family, and so forth. We must be patient as we seek to open minds and untie the tentacles of prejudice and false teaching that bind them to error and tradition.

Read Mark 4:26–29. What are some practical lessons from this parable about patience in the area of soul winning?

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We are prone to think that when someone studies a particular Bible doctrine and doesn’t accept it immediately, it must mean the person has rejected the truth. That, however, is not necessarily the case. The fact is that conversion can be a long, complicated process that could take years in some instances. Though many of us might be eager to see the immediate fruit of our labors, it doesn’t always happen that way. What’s important is that, in our zeal, we don’t become a hindrance to someone; that is, we must not push so hard that the person gets turned off. Most important, we never must condemn or judge someone who doesn’t make a commitment to the truths that we love and care so deeply about at the precise time that we think the person should. Your labors, your work for the person, could very well be an important step in a process that might not bear fruit for years. You just don’t know. The crucial thing is not to ruin it all by being condemnatory or judgmental.

What crucial point found in 1 Samuel 16:7 should we always keep in mind in this context (and in all contexts, really)?

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aspects of this fruit—love, joy, and peace—the apostle stresses a fourth significant aspect: patience.

I. Patience: A Biblical Definition (Review Galatians 5:22 and Exodus 34:6 with the class.)

The New Testament uses two words for patience. First, *hupomone*, translated as “patience or endurance” (*Rom. 5:3, 2 Cor. 6:4, 2 Thess. 1:4*). Patience here means endurance of every affliction that one confronts on one’s spiritual journey. Second, *makrothumia*, translated as “long-suffering,” a fruit of the Spirit (*Gal. 5:22*). The word, also translated as “patience,” indicates a characteristic that a Christian should have toward others, even if they are hostile, provocative, and vengeful. Without patience we cannot walk worthily of our Christian calling (*1 Cor. 13:4, Col. 3:12, 1 Thess. 5:14*).

As a virtue to be developed in a redeemed person, patience cannot have its origin in human beings. The very nature of humans is sinful (*Rom. 3:23*), and as such, human nature is prone to anger, haste, impatience, and intolerance. On the other hand, a redeemed person with a new life in the Spirit is expected to have its fruit: patience.

Patience is more than tolerance; it is *makrothumia*—long-suffering in a world noted for quick revenge and senseless retaliation. For example, 2 Corinthians 6:3–10 mentions how the “long-suffering” fruit of the Spirit will motivate the Christian to face life’s testing trials and annoying hurdles. Long-suffering is turning the other cheek (*Matt. 5:39*). It is patience with a redemptive purpose. It is a garment of the Spirit, given to the Christian to set forth a new fashion of moral conduct (*Col. 3:12–17*).

**Consider This:** Some people may consider patience as a characteristic of weakness, but the Bible presents patience as a virtue. Discuss the two positions.

II. Patience: God’s Character (Review Exodus 34:6 with the class.)

In one of the most awesome and intimate self-revelations of God, God reveals Himself as “merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth” (*Exod. 34:6*). If His mercy and grace seek to save us, if His goodness and truth establish us in the path of righteousness, it is His long-suffering that enables us to walk the long and narrow way, to place our confidence in Him, who, even when we fall, has given to us “an advocate
Patience Has Its Limits (Gen. 6:3)

No greater demonstration of patience can be found than that shown by God toward humans. But we must understand that even God’s long-suffering has a limit.

The long-suffering of God lasted for 120 years in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared (1 Pet. 3:20). But the time came when the stubbornness of the people exhausted the long-suffering of God, and He destroyed the earth with a flood.

Read Genesis 6:3. What important principle is seen there?

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In the cases of Sodom and Gomorrah, Israel in the wilderness, and the Babylonian captivity, what attitude on the part of the people prompted the consequences that the people suffered? Deut. 31:27, Ps. 95:8, Jer. 17:23.

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It might be argued that, inasmuch as God ran out of patience, this gives us permission to do the same. But when we study the history of God’s long-suffering, it becomes evident that His patience was not for a day, a week, or even a year. Often generations would pass before His long-suffering would be exhausted, which, of course, is not an option open to us.

Is there a point where our patience legitimately can run out when dealing with folks in a difficult situation? It depends on what that means. We might decide that we’ve had enough of a certain situation and conclude that it has to end. But that’s not the same thing as being judgmental, unloving, or cruel in the process. It might be time to take action, but that action never must be out of harmony with the principles of kindness, love, and caring.

Dwell on situations in which your patience ran out legitimately and illegitimately. What was the difference between the two? What have you learned from these experiences? If you had to do them over again, what would you do differently?
Learning Cycle  CONTINUED

with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). God’s patience enables saints’ perseverance.

Consider This: God is holy, just, and righteous. He also is loving, gracious, and long-suffering. How do these two sets of characteristics complement each other?

III. Patience: The Spirit’s Mandate to the Christian (Review Romans 15:5; 1 Timothy 6:11, 12; and James 1:2–4 with the class.)

The Christian walk and growth mandate that our conduct reflect God’s character. Hence Paul’s prayer that “the God of patience” grant us “to be likeminded one toward another” (Rom. 15:5). This command to be patient is to be reflective of the God of patience, with neither limit nor frontier (Rom. 15:5; James 1:2–4; 1 Tim. 6:11, 12).

Thus, the “man of God” is called to “pursue” patience along with “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, . . . gentleness” in order to finish the fight of good faith that leads to eternal life (1 Tim. 6:11, 12, NKJV). Without pursuing patience, Christian growth and maturity will not reach their glorious consummation (James 1:3, 4).

Consider This: The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering. In what sense can the last one be linked to the first three?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Divide the class into small groups and ask each group to give examples of things that try their patience most in the following areas: with themselves, with their families (parents, siblings, children), at their workplace, in the church, and in the community. Ask for one or more groups to role-play a situation that tests their patience. Discuss how to relate to these situations with godly patience, using examples from the biblical stories to inform the discussion. Write suggestions from the class on a blackboard.

Even though David had been anointed to become king, it took many years of waiting and living a dangerous, rough, hard life before he was able to take the throne (1 Samuel 16–24). He learned to depend completely on God for comfort and support. Often he wouldn’t make a move before he sought counsel from God. But these long years of leaning on God for every need taught David the lessons he needed to be a wise and God-
How to Develop Patience *(James 1:2–4)*

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” *(James 1:2–4, NKJV)*. What has been your own experience with the reality of these verses? What have you learned from the various trials you have faced that, in the end, has made you a better person, one who better reflects the character of Jesus?

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The Greek word for “trials,” sometimes translated “temptations,” is the word *peirazo,* which has the broader significance of “proving” or “testing.” The devil tries us or tempts us to do evil. The tests and trials that God allows to come into our lives are for the purpose of developing our characters.

“The trials of life are God’s workmen, to remove the impurities and roughness from our character. Their hewing, squaring, and chiseling, their burnishing and polishing, is a painful process; it is hard to be pressed down to the grinding wheel. But the stone is brought forth prepared to fill its place in the heavenly temple. Upon no useless material does the Master bestow such careful, thorough work. Only His precious stones are polished after the similitude of a palace.” —Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing,* p. 10.

This doesn’t mean, however, that every trial is in God’s providence. Often we bring suffering upon ourselves through disobedience; often, too, trials and suffering are just the results of what it means to live in a fallen, sinful world where we have an enemy who hates us *(1 Pet. 5:8)*. What this does mean, however, is that through a complete surrender of ourselves to the Lord, to grasping hold of Him in faith and obedience, no matter what we go through, we can come out better or more refined if we allow God to work in us. No one said it will be fun. Life here often isn’t fun, but we are given this wonderful promise: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” *(Phil. 1:6)*.
fearing king. “It was through the training in the school of hardship and sorrow that David was able to make the record . . . that he ‘executed judgment and justice unto all his people.’ 2 Samuel 8:15.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 152.

**Consider This:** What experiences have you been having that are teaching you patience? How might they be useful in your future service for God?

**Life Application:** Where do limits to patience enter the picture? What is the difference between tolerance and patience? Some parenting dilemmas deal with questions of how long to be patient with kids learning lessons and when to use consequences and tough love. Similar situations occur in adult situations in which a peer or family member makes bad choices, and we need to set boundaries at some point or another. What principles come into play in these situations? (A good resource on this topic is Henry Cloud and John Townsend’s book, Boundaries [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992].)

STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Draw a simple outline of a piece of fruit on a piece of paper and title it “Patience.” Make enough copies for each member of your class, or hand out paper and have them draw an outline of a fruit themselves. Or, alternately, draw the fruit on a blackboard. Ask class members to identify a situation in their lives in which they need to work on patience. Ask them to write out a favorite text on patience in the center of the fruit, as well as a reference to a particular Bible character who models the type of patience they need.

Discuss how to write out an action plan that helps your class members identify the steps by which they focus on God’s character and learn to transfer their thoughts from feelings of frustration, which lead to loss of patience, to dependence on God for an attitude adjustment. Part of their action plan may include setting boundaries and setting limits on patience.

**Closing Activity:** Go back to the texts and promises regarding patience. In a symbolic gesture of claiming those promises, ask class members to place their hands on the texts and promises in their Bibles or on their papers as someone prays for the fulfillment of those promises in the coming week.
Further Study: “In His dealings with the human race, God bears long with the impenitent. He uses His appointed agencies to call men to allegiance, and offers them His full pardon if they will repent. But because God is long-suffering, men presume on His mercy. ‘Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.’ The patience and long-suffering of God, which should soften and subdue the soul, has an altogether different influence upon the careless and sinful. It leads them to cast off restraint, and strengthens them in resistance. They think that the God who has borne so much from them will not heed their perversity. If we lived in a dispensation of immediate retribution, offenses against God would not occur so often. But though delayed, the punishment is none the less certain. There are limits even to the forbearance of God. The boundary of His long-suffering may be reached, and then He will surely punish. And when He does take up the case of the presumptuous sinner, He will not cease till He has made a full end.” —Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 3, p. 1166.

Discussion Questions:

1. To say that God is patient is not the same as to say that He is tolerant. What is the difference between patience and tolerance, and why is it easy to confuse the two?

2. As we look at the life of Christ, how does He reveal what patience means? What are some powerful examples that He gives of patience? What examples does He give, if any, of situations in which patience was no longer appropriate?

3. Dwell more on the question of trials and character. Sure, trials can make our character better in many cases. At the same time, what happens when trials embitter people, turn them away from God, and make them cynical and doubtful? Have you ever seen that happen to someone? If so, what can you learn from that experience?

4. Besides trials, what are other ways the Lord can teach us patience? How have you learned (or are still learning) the lesson of patience?

5. Is there someone you need to apologize to because of your lack of patience? Why not humble yourself and make the apology and do whatever else it takes to make things right? Isn’t that what being a Christian is all about?
The Fruit of the Spirit Is Kindness

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 2 Sam. 9:1–13; Prov. 15:1–5; 25:11–15; Matt. 5:43–48; Luke 6:35, 38; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12–14.

Memory Text: “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering” (Colossians 3:12, NKJV).

When Paul illustrated how love behaves, patience came into his mind first: “Love suffers long” (1 Cor. 13:4, NKJV). Immediately after patience, he wrote that love “is kind,” showing that love and kindness so belong together that without kindness no act is truly done in love!

Patience, we saw, is love forbearing. Kindness, on the other hand, implies a more active expression of love. Often patience might be manifested by doing nothing; kindness, in contrast, is manifested by what we say and do and, more important, by how we say it and do it and, even more important, why we say and do it.

Kindness is not beyond the reach of any, although it may require the sacrifice of time and energy. Kindness is a verb that reveals itself in numerous ways. And like its close cousin “love,” kindness contains incredible power; it is a witness in and of itself of what our God is like.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 6.*
The Model of Kindness (Matt. 5:43–48)

Jesus clearly illustrates in the Sermon on the Mount the kindness and goodness of God. Read Matthew 5:43–48 and answer the following questions:

• To what high standard is Jesus calling us here?

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• What reason does Jesus give for calling us to this standard?

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• Notice Christ’s use of the word *perfect* in verse 48. What is the meaning of *perfect* here, and how can the use of the word here help us understand what it means to be perfect like “our Father in heaven” is perfect?

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God’s gracious gifts are just that, gracious gifts. They are unearned and unmerited by all human beings, all of whom have willingly sinned against Him and either ignored or neglected Him. In this sense the greatest sinner is in the same boat as the holiest saint: neither deserves the kindness and goodness that God gives to us all.

With these verses, Jesus is calling us to be “perfect,” even as perfect as God is. How so? By loving our enemies, by praying for those who mistreat us, by being kind to those who have not been kind to us. This is how Jesus defines being “perfect.” Try to imagine what our church would be like and what our homes would be like were we to die to self so that we actually could live this way! We would have a power and a witness against which the gates of hell could never prevail. What’s the only thing stopping us? Nothing but our sinful, vengeful hearts, which, more often than not, cause us to act like “publicans.”

What painful and deep changes must you make if you are going to follow Christ’s words in these verses?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Ephesians 4:32

The Student Will:

Know: Meditate on the truth that kindness is a hallmark of the genuine Christian.
Feel: Express a desire to respect the feelings and behavior of others.
Do: Determine to show kindness to others in all relationships.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Kindness—A Sign of a Converted Heart

A Respect for other people was a distinctive feature in the life of Jesus. In what way is this true for us, as well?
B How did Jesus treat those who opposed Him? Judas? The high priest?
C While it may be true that we best express kindness to others when we experience it ourselves, why is their treatment of us not to be the basis for how we treat them in return?
D How effective could kindness and respect be in witnessing?

II. Feel: The Effects of Unkindness on Others

A How can understanding that unkind words and actions hurt and diminish people help us:
   1. To be kind?
   2. Feel pain for our acts of rudeness?

III. Do: Showing Kindness

A The key text relates how God’s kindness to us should motivate us to behave in the same way to others.
   1. In what way is kindness on our part as Christians important?
   2. How would being nasty, rude, and hurtful affect our influence?
   3. Is being kind an option or an obligation?
   4. How would you support your choice?
   5. How do character traits developed in acts of kindness have positive influences in our life?

Summary: Kindness is essential to Christian culture. Being rude and nasty hurts us as well as others. God’s mercy to us motivates us to practice mercy toward others. Christ’s kindness is our model.
Kindness to a “Dead Dog”

Read 2 Samuel 9:1–13. How did David show kindness here? How did he, by this act, reveal the character of God?

“Through reports from the enemies of David, Mephibosheth had been led to cherish a strong prejudice against him as a usurper; but the monarch’s generous and courteous reception of him and his continued kindness won the heart of the young man; he became strongly attached to David, and, like his father Jonathan, he felt that his interest was one with that of the king whom God had chosen.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 713.

David’s kindness to the house of Saul reveals that he sought to use God as the pattern for what he wanted to do for Saul’s house. He recognized that he, a sinner like all of us, had received undeserved mercy and kindness from the hand of God and was going to reflect that kindness to others.

Before we can pass on God’s kindness to others, what must we first recognize? See Luke 7:47. What crucial principle is found here that can play an important role in helping us understand the whole question of kindness to others?

Think for a few moments about the goodness and kindness of God toward you. Do you deserve it? Is it something that’s owed you? Are your thoughts, your deeds, your words so selfless, so holy, so loving and accepting that God is merely doing to you as you have done to others? Most likely the answer is No. And herein is a crucial point. When we realize how much God has forgiven us, when we realize that God loves us despite what we are and what we have done, then we truly can understand what it means to be kind and loving to those who don’t deserve our kindness or our love. How important, then, that we keep the Cross and what it means to us, individually, before us at all times.

What things has God forgiven you for over the years? How should that realization help you treat those who have done things to hurt you?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Kindness, as in gentle, courteous, thoughtful treatment of others, whether they deserve good treatment or not, is a trait modeled after God’s treatment of us.

**Just for Teachers:** Divide your class into small groups and ask each group to think of several examples of kindness in the Bible. Then ask each group to choose one of these stories to act out as a charade for the rest of the class. Have the rest of the class guess the stories as they are acted out and list these stories on a chalkboard.

**Consider This:** What would be unkind reactions in these same situations? What makes the difference between a thoughtful or thoughtless reaction to a situation? Have you ever made a conscious choice between being kind or unkind in a response? What thought processes preceded your choice?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** As you discuss the Bible stories below, write the title of each story on a chalkboard and list aspects of the story that are important in modeling kindness.

**Bible Commentary**

I. Since God has treated us better than we deserve, we should treat others with the same generosity and kindness. (*Review Luke 7:36–50 with your class.*)

Neither Judas nor Simon responded kindly to Mary’s gift of perfume or to a woman of Mary’s reputation touching Jesus. Jesus’ response, however, in striking contrast, was one of appreciation so generous that He spoke of a memorial to Mary that would last as long as the story was told. In connecting her story with His, Jesus’ tribute to Mary’s act of kindness was an eternal one.

Mary’s treatment of Jesus came from a heart overflowing with love, and Jesus attributed her gratitude to being forgiven much. Jesus is willing to forgive all of us, including Judas and Simon. But neither Judas nor Simon had recognized or appreciated the depth of His patience and tender-
Kind Words (Eph. 4:32)

Ephesians 4:32 begins with the words, “And be kind to one another” (NKJV). Look at how this verse fits in perfectly with what we saw yesterday, about treating others as God has treated us!

Kindness is to mark the Christian at all times. But there are at least three specific needs that call for three specific kinds of encouragement.

First, we are to show kindness to spiritual babies. “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children” (1 Thess. 2:7, NKJV).

Second, we are to show kindness and encouragement to the weak. “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Rom. 15:1, NKJV).

Third, we are to serve as a nurse to the spiritually sick (2 Tim. 2:24, 25).

A businessman was once heard to say, “I can’t wait to get home at night—I get so tired of being kind all day!” What a sad attitude to have toward human life.

Kindness, especially in our homes, is crucial. And one of the most important ways we can manifest kindness, especially in our homes, is in the way we talk to each other. The atmosphere of the home largely is determined by the words we speak. So many problems, so many hurts, so many tensions and outright fights could be avoided if we were careful not only with what we say but how we say it. Oftentimes one could say something and not hurt or offend, or one could say the exact words to the same person and greatly hurt and offend. The key is how we speak. Human speech is more than just the meanings of words themselves; tone, facial expression, body language, and stress are all part and parcel of conveying our thoughts, emotions, and ideas to others.

Read Proverbs 15:1–5 and Proverbs 25:11–15. What important principles about what you say and how you say it are revealed in these texts? As you read them, ask yourself about your use of words when talking to others. In what ways could you be kinder in your verbal communication with others?
ness with their faults and how much He was willing to forgive. If they had, they, too, might have offered some gift of gratitude rather than begrudg-
ing Mary’s gift. Their responses to Christ’s remarks were very different, however. Judas took Jesus’ comment as an insult and was hardened in his determination to betray Jesus. However small-minded and selfish Simon had been, when he saw how well Jesus knew him yet refrained from sham-
ing him in public, he responded to Jesus’ gift of love. “Simon was touched by the kindness of Jesus in not openly rebuking him before the guests. He had not been treated as he desired Mary to be treated. He saw that Jesus did not wish to expose his guilt to others, but sought by a true statement of the case to convince his mind, and by pitying kindness to subdue his heart.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 567.

**Consider This:** What makes the difference between our hearts becoming hardened and being softened by God’s kindnesses to us? How does the way God loves us translate into how we love others?

### II. The Importance of Kind Words

(Review 1 Samuel 25 with your class.)

David had been insulted, and he rashly vowed to repay insult with violence. Abigail met him on the way. She bowed down before him, treating him like a king, and her kind words and humble address changed an angry man’s course. “The piety of Abigail, like the fragrance of a flower, breathed out all unconsciously in face and word and action. The Spirit of God was abiding in her soul. Her speech, seasoned with grace, shed a heavenly influence.” —Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 667.

With her kind, respectful words, Abigail was able to make David see how foolish and impulsive his passion for revenge was, and David trembled when he realized how close he had come to taking rash action against someone who had slighted him. These were not just the words of a wise woman, however. They were evidence that God’s Spirit was living in her heart and shaping and molding her words.

**Consider This:** What situations do we face in which our calm, kind words may intervene in a volatile situation and perhaps prevent trouble? How may our words shed a heavenly influence?
Kindness Returned *(Luke 6:38)*

“‘Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you’” *(Luke 6:38, NKJV).* What is Jesus saying here? What principle of life is He talking about?

So often, how we treat others comes back on ourselves. That is, when we are kind, it’s so much likelier that others will be kind to us. It works the other way, too: be mean to others, and others will be mean to you, as well.

Of course, it doesn’t always happen that way. (Look at Jesus and how He was treated!) But whether it does or doesn’t, in one sense it doesn’t really matter. As Christians, we always should be kind, even if that kindness is not given back to us. In fact, as we have read, being kind to those who are unkind to us is a hallmark of being a true follower of Jesus. In general, however, how we treat others will impact how we ourselves are treated. “‘Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets’” *(Matt. 7:12, NKJV).*

**Read** Luke 6:35. How does this fit in with what we’ve been talking about all week?

It’s always easy to be kind to someone who could be of benefit to you down the road. Anyone will do that. What’s harder, however, is to be kind, especially when it costs you something, to those who can never do anything for you in return. That’s the real test.

Examine yourself. Is your kindness motivated by selfless and self-sacrificial love, or is it motivated even slightly by a desire to look out for number one? If it’s the latter, how can you change?
Naomi had been a stranger in Moab, and Ruth was a stranger in Bethlehem. Ruth didn’t have to return to her mother-in-law’s land, and once she was there, she bore the brunt of providing for Naomi and for herself in strange fields where she was likely to face abuse. How relieved she must have been to find kindness in Boaz. And he, who was so kind himself, was quick to recognize it in the woman who was gleaning in his fields.

There are many other stories of hospitality in the Scriptures. There is the story of the couple who fed and sheltered Elisha, gestures the prophet much appreciated and God rewarded (2 Kings 4:8–37). Abraham, Lot, and perhaps others, in caring for strangers, “entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb. 13:2, NIV); we are advised to do the same.

Jesus Himself, even as He was caught in the throes of the most agonizing crisis the universe has known, thoughtfully provided for His mother (John 19:25–27). Acts of kindness should grease the wheels of all our interactions with others, but especially at home. “Those who cherish the spirit of Christ will manifest politeness at home, a spirit of benevolence even in little things. They will be constantly seeking to make all around them happy, forgetting self in their kind attentions to others. This is the fruit which grows upon the Christian tree.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 423, 424.

**Consider This:** How does it feel to know that the Judge of all the earth does His best to speak kindly to and about each of us, excusing our weaknesses as far as possible? How tender should we be to those who are struggling, who are weak and tempted?

- *What opportunities do we have to be kind both at home and abroad?*

**STEP 3—Apply**

The sentence “Practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty” is said to have been coined by peace activist Anne Herbert, who apparently wrote it on a place mat in a restaurant in 1982 or 1983. Many movies, books, and Web sites have taken up the phrase or been based on the concept, including the 2000 movie *Pay It Forward* and the 1993 book *Random Acts of Kindness*, published by Conari Press.
Put on Kindness *(Col. 3:12–14)*

**Read** Colossians 3:12–14 and then rewrite it in your own words. In what ways do these verses reveal the essence of what it means to be a follower of Christ (notice the use of the term *perfect* or *perfection*)? Also, think about how powerful our witness to the world would be were we to put these words into practice.

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Alexander Maclaren, noted London clergyman of the late nineteenth century, wrote, “Gentleness is the strongest force in the world. You take all the steam hammers that were ever forged and battle at an iceberg, and except for the comparatively little heat that is developed by the blows and melts some small portion, it will still be ice, though pulverized instead of whole. But let it move gently down to the southward, there the sunbeams smite the coldness of death, and it is dissipated in the warm ocean. Kindness is conquering.”

As Seventh-day Adventists, we have very powerful scriptural evidence to back up our positions. (If we don’t, then what are we doing here?) And that’s, of course, important. But we need more than just correct teaching, don’t we?

“If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 189.

When we teach the doctrines of the church, we include the Sabbath, the state of the dead, the origin of sin, and other defining beliefs. But are we as careful about emphasizing the importance of kindness and the other fruit of the Spirit, along with the Sermon on the Mount and 1 Corinthians 13? Knowing that the Sabbath is the seventh day or that the dead sleep until the resurrection or that Christ’s righteousness covers us now and in the final judgment is all fine and important. But having knowledge alone isn’t the same thing as knowing the truth as it is in Jesus *(John 14:6)*, for the truth sets us free *(John 8:32)*; that is, the truth changes us and makes us more like Christ. Could one then ask, Do we really have the truth if the Truth, Jesus, doesn’t have us?
Thought Questions:

1. Jesus said that Mary’s act of kindness would be spoken of as a memorial to her. As a group, reminisce about acts of kindness you have experienced. What makes these acts memorable?

2. As a group, recount some of the kind, generous, thoughtful things that God has done for you. What kind acts of God are most memorable to you?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: You may choose to make copies of several of the ideas below and challenge your class members to try one of the ideas during the following week. Suggest that if they have some interesting experiences, they can e-mail you with their stories to share with the class the following week.

1. Take a walk in nature and examine your surroundings for random acts of kindness that God didn’t have to provide but that He did anyway.

2. The Web site for the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation, http://www.actsofkindness.org, offers suggestions, stories, and quotes on kindness. One story, offered anonymously, goes like this: “I was just in the mood to make someone’s day. So I went out and bought some flowers, and I put a flower in the plastic newspaper bags in the neighborhood. I put flowers in everyone’s bag I could find until I ran out of flowers. The next day my neighbor said, ‘I got a flower in my newspaper!’ and I just said, ‘Someone cares for you!’ ” What kinds of anonymous things would be fun to do for people in your neighborhood?

3. Christ asked the disciples for a kindness in the Garden of Gethsemane that they were too weak to supply. He was lonely for recognition and appreciation, especially by the ones for whom He was offering this greatest of all sacrifices. However, He remembered Mary’s kindness to Him, even as He entered into the dark time of His trial and crucifixion. That act was a strength and comfort to Him. While we cannot retrieve those lost opportunities to serve Christ, examine Matthew 25:34–46. Every little thing we do for others, Christ counts as doing for Him. “Christ values acts of heartfelt courtesy. When anyone did Him a favor, with heavenly politeness He blessed the actor. He did not refuse the simplest flower plucked by the hand of a child, and offered to Him in love.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 564. What kindness can you offer Christ this week?
Further Study: “From every Christian home a holy light should shine forth. Love should be revealed in action . . . showing itself in thoughtful kindness, in gentle, unselfish courtesy. There are homes where this principle is carried out—homes where God is worshiped and truest love reigns. From these homes morning and evening prayer ascends to God as sweet incense, and His mercies and blessings descend upon the suppliants like the morning dew.”—Ellen G. White, The Adventist Home, p. 37, emphasis supplied.

“There are many who regard the expression of love as a weakness, and they maintain a reserve that repels others. This spirit checks the current of sympathy. As the social and generous impulses are repressed, they wither, and the heart becomes desolate and cold. We should beware of this error. Love cannot long exist without expression. Let not the heart of one connected with you starve for the want of kindness and sympathy.”—Ellen G. White, The Adventist Home, p. 107, emphasis supplied.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, go over the final question at the end of Thursday’s study: “Do we really have the truth if the Truth, Jesus, doesn’t have us?” What are the implications of your answer?

2. “Love cannot long exist without expression.” What does that mean, and why does it represent a principle that’s so important for us as a church?

3. Review the texts this week that talked about us being “perfect.” How should we understand what this idea means? What are the common problems and misconceptions that we as a church have struggled with over the use and meaning of this term?

4. Trace in your own experience how the attitudes of other Adventists have affected you and your faith. That is, were folks kind to you and, if so, how did that kindness impact you? On the other hand, were folks unkind to you and, if so, how did that impact you? Share your stories with others in the class. What can you take away from these experiences that can help the class better understand how important kindness is in our witness?
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Ps. 51:10, 11; John 14:9; Rom. 3:12–20; 7:7–12; Titus 2:14; Heb. 1:2, 3.

Memory Text: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10, NKJV).

In Scripture, “goodness” involves not only exhibiting right behavior but also avoiding its opposite, evil. Goodness is holiness put into practice. Goodness is what we do; otherwise, it’s not “goodness” at all.

The word translated “goodness” (agathosune) in Galatians 5:22 denotes an active, even aggressive, goodness. More than an excellence of character, it is character energized, expressing itself in good deeds.

We often hear that someone has a “good heart” or that someone is a “good soul.” However problematic that idea is theologically (see Jer. 17:9), it’s even more so in reality. A “good heart” or a “good soul” in and of itself means nothing. Instead, a “good heart” is revealed in good actions, good deeds, in concrete, practical acts of goodness that benefit others. Good intentions, good thoughts, good motives are fine and have their role, but in the end, goodness is to do good. We fool ourselves into thinking otherwise.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 13.*
God Is Good

In the Bible the most profound and absolute sense of “good” is predicated on God alone. Thus, although the term good is used freely in many circumstances, although there are good and bad individuals (Matt. 5:45), although it is possible for Christians to do good works (Eph. 2:10), although everything that God created He pronounced very “good” (Gen. 1:31), Jesus declares that God alone is “good” (Mark 10:18). Only God’s goodness is absolute. All others have degrees of goodness as measured against this absolute standard.

What do the following texts reveal about how the goodness of God can be revealed in our lives? Exod. 33:19, Pss. 25:8, 86:5, 107:21, Nah. 1:7, Rom. 8:28.

What is the greatest revelation of God’s goodness given to humanity? John 14:9; Heb. 1:2, 3.

God, however, doesn’t just tell us that He is good; He has revealed that goodness to us in numerous ways.

We can see the goodness and love of God in creation. Even in a fallen world, even with sickness, pestilence, and natural disasters, the goodness of God is still revealed in nature.

Think of human relationships, love, concern, caring for others. We are capable of these wonderful and good things only because God created us with the potential for this, and He did so because He is good.

Human sexuality, though, of course, having been perverted in horrific and unimaginable ways, nevertheless at the core reveals the goodness of God and His love for human beings.

Write down all the ways in which you yourself have come to understand the goodness of God. That is, despite whatever trials you have gone through, how have you come to know for yourself the goodness of our Lord? How can God’s goodness be reflected in your own life? Share your answers with the class on Sabbath.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Titus 2:11–14

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Understand how good works are inextricably bound up with the Incarnation, the sacrifice, and the return of Jesus.
- **Feel:** Sense a need to receive the blessing that comes from doing good.
- **Do:** Engage actively in helping others.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: How to Avoid the “Pitfalls” of Doing Good

- Doing good exposes us to two possible dangers: false pride and salvation by works.
  1. How is taking false pride in the action of doing good a form of legalism and self-righteousness?
  2. Good works do not save us. Yet, what place do they have in the Christian walk?
  3. How does the Christian avoid both of these pitfalls? How may the answer be found in the contemplation of the sacrifice of Jesus to save us from our sinfulness?

II. Feel: The Positive Benefits of Doing Good

- How does selflessly doing good have a positive benefit upon the doer and the receiver?

III. Do: Actively Helping Others

- God is good. It is written that Jesus was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and “went about doing good . . . because God was with him” (Acts 10:38, NIV).
  1. What things can motivate us to do good?
  2. How is obedience to the law a good work?
  3. What degree of intelligence or education is required to act kindly?
  4. What do giving a glass of water, visiting a lonely or ill person, or speaking encouragement to a child reveal and demonstrate about the giver of these good works?

**Summary:** Good works demonstrate Christian living. Done unselfishly, they bless the doer and the recipient. Acts of goodness may be apparently small in the eyes of the world but large in God’s eyes when done for His honor and glory.
All Have Sinned

**Read** Romans 3:12–20. How do we see the reality of these words manifested all around us? How do you see it manifested in your own life?

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One of the sad facts of life is that there can be some very gifted and talented people, charming people, charismatic people, people of great skill and insight whom we often label as “good” when, in fact, they are rotten to the core. The word *good* can, like the word *love*, be so readily and cheaply thrown around that it loses its true meaning. When we keep the idea of God’s goodness before us, we can much better understand what human goodness is really, and ideally, about.

**How** often we hear non-Christians say that they don’t understand all this Christian talk about humans being naturally sinful and so forth. Aren’t there, after all, people who do good things, who express kindness, selflessness, and unconditional love? Haven’t we all seen people who are like that? How would you respond to this kind of argument?

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Years ago, Russian writer Feodor Dostoevsky wrote a book about his time in a Siberian prison camp, where some of Russia’s worst criminals were incarcerated. Among the prisoners were those who had committed some of the most vile and heinous crimes imaginable. Yet Dostoevsky wrote about how, at times, these men were capable of doing some of the gentlest and kindest acts. The point is that even the worst people can do kind deeds. And at the same time, who hasn’t seen really good people, when pushed, do some pretty bad things?

**What about yourself? Are you not capable of doing some very kind and loving deeds? Are you not capable of doing some very cruel and evil ones too? What do your answers tell you about yourself and your need of Jesus?**
Learning Cycle

▶ **STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Goodness is a godly quality demonstrated by good deeds, which are necessary to glorify God. But since we are not good in ourselves, in order to do good deeds we must be united to Christ, as the branch is an outgrowth of the Vine.

**Just for Teachers:** Bring several things to class to demonstrate something good, such as a beautiful piece of fruit, flowers, a kitten, etc. Ask your class to identify what aspects about each item are good. Now hold up a mirror before other members of the class and ask them if they would describe themselves as good.

**Consider This:** Why do we have a problem describing ourselves as good? Jesus noted that only One was good (see Luke 18:18, 19). What has happened that God’s creation, such as the fruit, flowers, or kitten is good, but we are not good? What about us is good, and what about us is not good? Review Romans 3:12–20.

▶ **STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Prepare an outline of a large tree on poster board or on a chalkboard with cutouts of fruit. Tape the fruit to the tree. Also provide a picture of the Ten Commandments.

**Bible Commentary**

I. How Do We Know That God Is Good? (Review Psalm 34:8 with your class.)

The most important illustration of God’s goodness comes from Jesus’ life. Jesus came to show the radiance of God’s glory. However, He didn’t describe God through a showy, glitzy portrayal of all God’s power and wealth. Just the feeding of the thousands on the hillsides was enough to rouse the people to crown Him king, but Christ wasn’t looking for people who would follow Him for those reasons. The kingdom of heaven that Christ wanted His friends to experience and accept was a kingdom of the heart. “Come to Me,” Jesus says. “Take My yoke upon you. Eat My body, the bread of life, and drink My blood, My life poured out for you. Act on
God’s Law and Goodness

**Read** Romans 7:7–12. What point is Paul making about the law here? Why does he stress that the law is good?

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The problem some have with the law of God is a misunderstanding of its role in the plan of salvation. When we go to the doctor with an ailment, there must first be a diagnosis before there can be a treatment. The problem comes when folks confuse the diagnosis with the treatment. The law of God not only serves as the standard, it also occupies a diagnostic role in the salvation process. Paul states simply that without the law he would not have known what sin was. The law, then, diagnoses us all as sinners. Without this diagnosis, there is little incentive to come to Jesus for healing.

In the plan of salvation, the law of God is indispensable, because without the law there is no sin, and without sin there is no need for a Savior.

**In** Psalm 40:8, David writes, “I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart” *(NKJV).* Why, then, might some people believe that keeping the law is a burden?

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We sometimes think of law as a prohibition—a “thou shalt not.” And there is some truth to that. Yet, at the same time, there are infinitely more things that we can do than we cannot do. Think, too, of all the practical benefits of keeping God’s law. Think of the ways it improves the quality of our lives here and now. Shouldn’t we trust in God’s goodness enough to know that if He forbids it, then it must not be good for us?

**Do you find keeping the law to be a burden? If so, why? If the Bible says that keeping the law is a delight, what are we doing wrong if it’s a burden to us?**
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

My words. And I will give you rest and peace and the fullness of eternal life.” (See Matt. 11:28–30 and John 6:53–58.)

If we know of God and His good ways only by reputation, because we have heard or read about Him but never experienced what He can do to change our lives through His forgiveness and renewing grace, He can only say to us, “I never knew you.” All our knowledge, without experience, will not help us to become transformed by the healing power of God’s love and goodness.

Consider This: What about God is good? What did Jesus do to help people see how good His Father is?

How does one have an experiential religion? What kinds of experiences with God change lives?

II. Is the Law Good? (Review Psalm 19:7–14 with your class.)

Just for Teachers: Show your class a picture of the Ten Commandments as part of your discussion.

The Psalms are full of expressions of praise for God’s ways, His words, and His law. The Message Bible compares the law to the sun, signposts, life-maps, gold, a diamond set between emeralds, and strawberries in the spring. His law warms our hearts, pulls our lives together, and shows the pathway to joy. There aren’t enough superlatives to describe the wonder and the greatness of God’s law.

There are limitations to this wonderful law, however, as Romans 7 reminds us. It acts as a teacher, a mirror, illustrating what is good and righteous. It describes God’s character as good and perfect, but the law cannot make us good or righteous. However, God can save only those who are righteous; so human beings, who are all born with sinful natures and are unable to make ourselves righteous, are left in a dilemma. The law cannot save us. We need a Savior who can meet the requirements of the law for us and in us.

Consider This: How does Christ propose to save us? Why is He the only One who can?
Walking in Goodness

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jer. 13:23).

The text above makes a simple point about human nature, which is that we don’t change easily, especially the bad aspects of our character. (Ask most married folks about how easy it is to change a spouse!) With this thought in mind, we can perhaps better understand why the scriptural concept of goodness is immensely deeper and its use much more restricted than is commonly used in the world. The fruit of the Spirit that is goodness is more inward, touching on every thought, word, and action of the godly person. This demands that motives be right before we call any action “good.” It means that the good person is one from whom righteousness (right doing) flows from inward devotion and love toward God.

“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word” (Ps. 119:9, NKJV).

What is the message of these texts in regard to how we can become “good”?

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Compare those texts to what Paul says in Romans 7:18. How are all these texts related?

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In chapter 7 of Romans, Paul expresses his disappointment that in spite of his best intentions he has no strength within himself to do good (vss. 18, 19). But in chapter 8, verses 1–4, he reveals the Christian’s secret to overcoming this dilemma. What is the secret? Discuss what it means to “walk in the Spirit.” How can we do this?

It’s one thing to acknowledge that we are sinners, in need of grace, and that our good works cannot save us. At the same time, why must we be careful not to use this teaching as an excuse to live in the flesh? Do you find yourself doing just that? If so, why is that attitude treading on very dangerous ground?
III. God’s Goal for Us (Review John 15:1–7 with your class.)

Like an apple tree, we were created to bear fruit. We were designed to do good works, but on our own we can’t do anything good, and we certainly can’t bear good fruit. Since we can’t do anything good by ourselves, we must remain in Christ. When we unite our weakness to Christ’s strength, our emptiness into His fullness, then we will have the mind of Christ. This isn’t an on-again, off-again connection. The communication to us of Christ’s life, His strength, and His power to produce fruit is as constant as the sap that flows continually from the roots to the tips of the branches.

Sometimes we are like trees that look healthy and leafy and should have plenty of fruit, but we don’t have any. This isn’t a simple “oops”; the barren fig tree is spoken of as flaunting its “pretentious branches in the face of heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 614. There is a specific work God expects us to do, and He looks to us to do it. There can be no “Well, I meant to, I tried, I could have if . . .” God has made all the provision possible in heaven and on earth for us to bear fruit. If we don’t bear it, we must answer for the consequences, just as the fruitless fig tree was found wanting. It is a crucial matter to learn what God’s purpose is for our lives and fulfill it.

**Just for Teachers:** Display the drawing of the tree and pass out the outlines of fruit to members in your class. Ask them to write down the names of the spiritual fruits—in this case, the qualities of character—they long most to bear, and bring them up and tape them on the tree. Read the qualities of character written on the fruits of the tree.

**Consider This:** What is the individual work God has given you to perform for Him? How can you bear this fruit for Him?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Life Application:** Compare and contrast Matthew 7:21–29 and Matthew 25. What makes the difference between those who do good works that God does not recognize and those who serve Christ through their good works to others? Consider this quote: “The Lord claims the strength of brain, bone, and muscle; but it is too often withheld from Him and
Goodness Expressed

While it cannot be said that we are saved by works, it can be said that, as blood-bought sons and daughters of God, we are saved in order that our lives might manifest good works. Jesus pointed out that as a tree is known by its fruit, we will be known by the kind of lives we live. Jesus carries the importance of good works a step further when He declares that those whose lives lack in good works will not be allowed to enter the kingdom of heaven (see Matt. 25:41–46).

Read Ephesians 2:10 and Titus 2:14. What common message exists in both these texts, and why is that message so important for anyone who professes the name of Christ?

As human beings we are sinners; we have violated God’s law; we all need a Savior. But at the same time, we have been given promises in the Bible that if we surrender to Jesus, if we choose to live in the Spirit and not in the flesh, we can overcome and live a life that reflects the goodness of God. We can live in what Paul calls the “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4), because just as we have been by faith “buried with” Christ “by baptism into death” (vs. 4), we can “likewise reckon” ourselves “to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (vs. 11).

We can be “good” in the biblical sense of the word, not “good” as if we deserve salvation but “good” in the sense that our hearts, our motives, our deeds reveal to the world the reality of the God whom we profess to serve. Sure, it will take dying to self, it will take a willingness to serve others, it will take a daily struggle with the flesh, and it will take a humble heart of contrition and repentance when we fail, but we can and must live out the faith that we confess.

How well are you availing yourself of all the promises of a victorious Christian life? What is holding you back from claiming what’s yours, what’s been offered to you at such a great price?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

given to the world.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 613. What kinds of good works have we been doing that have been given to the world rather than to the service of God?

Witness:
How can you use your own experiences with God to help someone else understand what it means to taste and see that God is good?

STEP 4—Create

1 Supply your class members with an outline of a tree on a sheet of paper. Ask them to draw pictures of fruit on the tree to represent the good deeds they believe God has created them to do.

2 Plan for an experiential relationship with God. What experiment can you undertake in the next week in order to experience the power of God in your life? The following list is gleaned from Ellen G. White’s Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, pp. 221, 222:

a. Heed the warnings and instructions of the Holy Spirit.
b. Put forth earnest efforts to claim your heavenly inheritance.
c. Make any sacrifice necessary to obtain the character of Christ.
d. Make peace with God.
e. Act on God’s promises.
f. Forsake the way that God has forbidden you to go.
g. Avail yourself of the refuge God has offered.
h. Apply God’s remedy for sin.
i. Deny self and follow Christ’s example through difficult as well as good times.

3 Because Christ claims your brain, muscle, and time, how can you recognize the priorities of His claim this week in your work?

Closing Activity: Often when our hearts are full of God’s goodness to us, they overflow in psalms and songs. Close your Sabbath School lesson study with a psalm such as Psalm 8, 9, 23, or 34. Songs to use from The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal include “Now Thank We All Our God” (number 559) or “Let All Things Now Living” (number 560).
Further Study: “It is not only by preaching the truth, not only by distributing literature, that we are to witness for God. Let us remember that a Christlike life is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Christianity, and that a cheap Christian character works more harm in the world than the character of a worldling.” —Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 21.

“The badge of Christianity is not an outward sign, not the wearing of a cross or a crown, but it is that which reveals the union of man with God. By the power of His grace manifested in the transformation of character the world is to be convinced that God has sent His Son as its Redeemer. No other influence that can surround the human soul has such power as the influence of an unselfish life. The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.” —Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 470.

Discussion Questions:

1. In class, read and discuss your answers to the question in Sunday’s study about how God has revealed to you His goodness.

2. What are some practical ways in which we as individuals or as a church can express and reveal the goodness of God to others? Is your church doing good in the community where it is located? If your church were to move, would the neighbors miss it?

3. The Bible says that God’s law is good. And we know that it is. How, though, can it be used as something bad? In what ways can the law be misused, and what are the sad consequences of such a misuse?

4. Ponder this age-old philosophical question: Is something deemed good because God says it’s good? Or does God deem it good because it already is good?

5. In class, discuss Luke 18:18, 19. What was Jesus saying here? How are we to understand His words?

6. In class, stage a discussion. Have half the class argue the point that human beings are basically good at heart; let the other half take the position that humans are basically bad. Argue your positions, not from the Bible but from what you see in the world as a whole.
Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Matt. 25:1–13; Luke 16:10; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24; 2 Tim. 3:1–5; Hebrews 11.

Memory Text: “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Galatians 6:9, NKJV).

The fruit of the Spirit known as “faithfulness” could also be called “fidelity.” It speaks of endurance, a firmness of purpose, especially when the going is tough.

Faithfulness implies steadfast adherence. Synonyms include loyalty, implying undeviating allegiance; constancy, suggesting freedom from uncertainty; staunchness, implying such a strong allegiance to one’s principles or purposes that they cannot be turned aside; and resoluteness, stressing unwavering determination.

“Faith” and “faithfulness,” though closely linked, are not the same thing. Faith is that indefinable power, a gift from God, through which we can believe in a reality that yet remains unseen. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Faithfulness, in contrast, is the working out of this inner-belief system. When we have faith in God, we act in faithful ways. Acts of faithfulness are a demonstration of our faith, and such acts are the threads holding our belief and behavior system together.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 20.*
God Is Faithful

“O Lord God of hosts, Who is mighty like You, O Lord? Your faithfulness also surrounds You” (Ps. 89:8, NKJV).

As with all the fruit of the Spirit, God Himself is the model we must study for examples of faithfulness. God is as faithful now as He was three trillion years before creating the earth. He will be just as faithful three trillion years into the future as He was when He set the decrees in eternity past. Nothing will deter Him or alter His course.

Note some of the attributes of God’s faithfulness:

• God’s faithfulness is far-reaching in its extent—“Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds” (Ps. 36:5, NKJV).
• God’s faithfulness is sure—“Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail” (Ps. 89:33, NKJV).
• God’s faithfulness is great—“Great is Your faithfulness” (Lam. 3:23, NKJV).
• God’s faithfulness is set in heaven—“For I have said, ‘Mercy shall be built up forever: Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens’ ” (Ps. 89:2, NKJV).

Identify the blessings that come to us as a result of His faithfulness:

1 Cor. 10:13

1 Thess. 5:23, 24

2 Thess. 3:3

Heb. 10:23

Why is the faithfulness of God so important to the Christian’s life? Recount a time in your life when knowing that God was faithful brought you through a crisis. On a day-to-day basis, which of the blessings of God’s faithfulness listed above is the greatest help to you?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Hebrews 11:6

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Recognize that faithfulness is faith in action. Its motivation is trust in God.
- **Feel:** Express confidence and trust in God’s faithfulness.
- **Do:** Believe that faithfulness is our witness to the world of God’s power in our lives.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Living Gift of God’s Faithfulness

   A. Our trust, obedience, and submission to the will and purposes of God are founded on His trustworthiness.

      1. In what way do our acts of faithfulness serve God?
      2. In what ways can our unfaithfulness limit God’s power?
      3. Recall acts of faithfulness in Scripture and personal experience that demonstrate:
         a) How God was able to reveal His power.
         b) When God’s ability to act in behalf of His people was compromised by their rebellion against Him.

II. Feel: The Emotional Effects of Expressing Faithfulness

   A. Positive effects are produced by acts of faith. So then, how should we deal with the negative effects produced by a spirit of unfaithfulness?

   B. Egotism and self-centeredness are fatal to faithfulness. In what ways does being so concerned with what others think of us endanger our faithfulness toward God?

III. Do: The Test of Faith

   A. Faith never can be static. It either grows by exercise or dies from neglect.

      1. In what ways do Sabbath observance and tithing develop faithfulness?
      2. How does the wise use of time and finances develop a godly character?

**Summary:** Faith’s foundation is God’s faithfulness. In trusting Him, we act out faith in what we do, say, and believe.
Faithlessness: A Sign of the End

Read Luke 18:8. What is implied in Jesus’ question here?

The apostle Paul writes that “evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13, NKJV). People today are like what they were when Moses wrote the Pentateuch or Paul his epistles. One could argue, however, that our society today makes it easier to sin, that it all but encourages it. In other words, our environment grows ever more amenable to sin, and our fallen human natures naturally will take advantage of it. Self-centeredness constantly is promoted. Advertising hammers away at us to gratify ourselves: why wait, why deny ourselves, why sacrifice, why not go along with everyone else? Constantly we hear, “Indulge yourself because you deserve it” or the like.

Read 2 Timothy 3:1–5. What is the first characteristic found there? How do we find it so overtly manifested today?

While this generation is hardly the first to be selfish, it is unique in that selfishness actually is recommended. “Look out for number one,” “Love yourself first,” is the cry. Self-centeredness has spawned another phenomenon, which is irresponsibility. This generation could well be the one of which it was written, “There is a generation that curses its father, and does not bless its mother. There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness” (Prov. 30:11, 12, NKJV). It would seem that everything wrong with everyone is now laid at the foot of someone else, most often the parents.

How has the mass media contributed to unfaithfulness, even among church members? Be honest with yourself: how has it affected your thinking? Try to step back and ask yourself, How might the things I read, watch, and listen to be negatively affecting my own faithfulness to God?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Faithfulness is the long-term product of faith in the heart. It is expressed as the constancy of a life devoted to God, a loyalty to Him that remains steadfast through both prosperity and adversity.

Few animals can match a dog for faithfulness and devotion. And history furnishes us with enough examples of canine loyalty to convince us of this truth. Greyfriars Bobby was a Skye terrier whose master was a policeman. When his master died on February 8, 1858, Greyfriars Bobby kept watch at his grave for 14 years until he died.

Delta’s remains were found across the body of a small child near ancient Pompeii. According to Delta’s collar, she had saved her small master three times: once from drowning, once from four robbers, and once from a wolf. But Delta couldn’t save him from the hot ash of a volcano, though it is evident that the dog tried (information retrieved from http://www.rusticgirls.com/animals/most-faithful-dogs-in-history.html).

These stories touch our hearts, especially when faithfulness is displayed even when there is no hope. How much more inspiring are the lives of men and women who stay faithful throughout their lives and are rewarded at last, by seeing the Object of their love and loyalty return for them, to take them home forever!

**Consider This:** Discuss with your class the definition of *faithfulness*. What is the difference between faith and faithfulness?

STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Find someone to dramatize Elisha’s life, or even better, do it yourself. Dress up as Elisha, wearing Elijah’s cloak, a robe, a skin, and sandals. Tell the story from 1 Kings 19:19–21 and 2 Kings 1, 2 about how Elijah came to you while you were plowing a field and tried hard to discourage you from following him just before he was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot. Describe the cloak coming down to you.
Models of Faithfulness *(Hebrews 11)*

Read Hebrews 11, the list of characters who are given as examples of faithfulness. Pick three characters and write down how their faithfulness was revealed, even amid struggles, trials, and temptations. That is, what did they do that revealed their faithfulness? At the same time, what were their struggles, their trials, their temptations? More so, in what ways, however different the variables, are the principles involved the same for us today as they were for the characters in Hebrews?

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Think how easy it could have been for some of these people to have become discouraged. Think of Joseph in the dungeon or Sarah waiting and waiting for the promised child or Moses tempted with the riches of a kingdom as opposed to suffering “affliction with the people of God” *(vs. 25)*. We sometimes tend to look at these people as if they were larger than life, kind of superhuman, and yet, they were just as real as we are, just as prone to sin, just as prone to question and to fear and to fall. Despite all their own weaknesses and mistakes, however, they showed faithfulness, they acted out the faith they professed, and they were able to be used by God to do remarkable things.

**What are the things that challenge you in your desire to be faithful? Put them into two categories: (1) the things you can do nothing about and (2) the things you can remove from your life.**
Bible Commentary

I. The Foundations of Faithfulness \((\text{Review 1 Kings 19:19–21 with your class.})\)

Elisha was plowing a field when Elijah found him and called him to serve God. These were simple duties, but in working on his father’s land, doing the duties of an obedient son, Elisha was receiving a training that was fitting him for leadership.

Elijah did not ask Elisha to follow him right away; Elisha was to count the cost and decide for himself whether he wanted to accept the call. But he took the oxen he was using to plow, made a sacrifice, and followed Elijah. Like the disciples who left their nets and followed Jesus, Elisha accepted the call from God that had come through His prophet Elijah. He left his father’s farm and entered God’s work as a servant of Elijah. First in Elisha’s heart was God’s work. Even as he was doing farm work, he was consecrated to doing God’s will in everything, and when the call came to leave his home, he was ready.

It was through this daily consecration and faithfulness in every small duty that his character developed noble symmetry, and he gained strength of purpose and knowledge of God’s ways. This character development prepared him to take up God’s call to service.

Consider This: How did Elisha’s early years of home life prepare him for service? What did he do just before he left to join Elijah that illustrated the strength of his relationship to his family and community?

II. A Life of Faithfulness \((\text{Review 2 Kings 13:14–21 with your class.})\)

How many leaders of Israel started off faithfully but didn’t stick to God all the way? Jeroboam was raised from obscurity to be king but didn’t follow God \((1 \text{ Kings 14:7–9})\). Jehu did some of God’s bidding but failed in the long run \((2 \text{ Kings 10:30, 31})\). Jehoash followed God but only as long as the high priest who raised him was alive \((2 \text{ Kings 12:1, 2})\). Asa \((2 \text{ Chronicles 16})\) and Uzziah \((2 \text{ Chronicles 26})\) had a checkerboard history.

However, Elisha never wavered or lost trust in God. Even though the kings and people around him were engulfed in the dark shadows of long years of idolatry and apostasy, Elisha remained faithful through many long years as a teacher of righteousness to all around him. When the way seemed
Faithfulness in Daily Living

“‘He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much’” (Luke 16:10, NKJV). How have you seen this principle manifested in your own life? After all, if we are not faithful in the little things, why should we think we would be in the larger ones?

“The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 57.

The following words are some of the components of faithfulness:

**Dependability**—Dependability means people can count on you. When was the last time someone let you down? Do you remember how that made you feel? What does it say about your character if you lack dependability?

**Honesty**—Honesty is truthfulness. It means you are not going to lie or cheat or steal. Honesty is a cardinal building block of a strong character and should be in play every day of our lives.

**Integrity**—Integrity is like a code of honor. If you have integrity, you have certain values and beliefs that you live by. It also means you respect the values and beliefs of others. Integrity is also one of the building blocks of character.

**Loyalty**—Loyalty is allegiance. It means standing by someone even when times get tough. Loyalty is an important part of friendship. But does loyalty include doing something wrong for a friend? Does loyalty have limits? How might someone take a good thing, loyalty, too far?

Take a closer look at these elements. How well do you fare in these different categories? Where can you do better? Most important, what changes do you need to make in order to be more faithful to what you know is right? How can you make the needed changes?
closed before him, he moved forward in faith, and God honored his trust. Even during the illness of his last days, by faith he held on to God’s promises. He wasn’t taken up into heaven as a grand finale to his work as Elijah was, but through faith he knew that he constantly was attended and comforted by heavenly messengers right to the end of his life.

This is the life God calls us to. Like Elisha, God calls us to devote our whole life to His work. He is looking for men and women who have the moral courage to stand for God’s cause, who have a deep, ardent love for people, and who don’t give up in their labors with God for lost lives. “Such workers will find no task too arduous, no prospect too hopeless; they will labor on, undaunted, until apparent defeat is turned into glorious victory. Not even prison walls nor the martyr’s stake beyond will cause them to swerve from their purpose of laboring together with God for the upbuilding of His kingdom.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 263.

**Consider This:** How does the story of Elisha inform us about what it takes to stay faithful throughout a lifetime?

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**STEP 3—Apply**

**Activity:** Study Hebrews 11 and make a list, on a blackboard, of the people mentioned. In another column, make a list of the challenges each person faced in order to be faithful. Which faith warriors faced challenges similar to those you face today?

**Application Questions:**

1. Review Matthew 25:1–13 and Matthew 24:44–50. What qualities did the five wise virgins have that were similar to those of the five foolish virgins? How were they different? What is the challenge to faithfulness that comes with what appears to be a delay in Jesus’ second coming? What does it take to live a life of faithfulness during these last days, when we are surrounded by apostasy?
Faithful Until the End

Could it be that we are suffering another Great Disappointment? Not that we fixed another date for the coming of Jesus, but something just as real, if more subtle, and that is a diminished emphasis on the Second Coming, if for no other reason than that we expected it to have happened by now.

Read Matthew 25:1–13. Notice that everyone who was waiting for the bridegroom went to sleep. When the bridegroom finally arrived and all awakened, it was too late for five of them. In what ways could we, in the twenty-first century, be in danger of doing the same thing?

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Read Matthew 24:44–50. Notice how the evil servant changes his lifestyle when he becomes convinced that his master is not coming back as soon as he had expected. What is the message to us who feel there has been a delay in the coming of Jesus?

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Things have not happened as soon as we expected, but we take comfort from the promise in Galatians 6:9, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (NKJV).

The issue that confronts God’s people in the twenty-first century is not “Will God be faithful?” We should know by now that He is faithful to all that He has promised. The crucial issue is, “Will I be faithful until the end?”

In many ways the answer to the question about the future (“Will I be faithful to the end?”) can be found in the present. What is the basic trend of your spiritual life now? Are you daily committed to the Lord, growing in grace and faithfulness, or are you slowly, bit by bit, easing up, growing more accustomed to the world and its ways? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your walk with the Lord?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Reflect on the lives of other leaders, such as Joseph and Moses and Samuel. How did their early background and life experiences prepare them for lives of faithfulness? What challenges did they face?

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STEP 4—Create

1 “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much” (Luke 16:10, NKJV). What are the areas of your life in which you are challenged to be faithful in that which is least? Consider such things as habits, the use of money and time, diet and other areas of health, the way you treat family at home or those whom some might consider insignificant. Consider devoting these “weak links” to God and asking for His help in being faithful.

2 What do you need to do this week in order to be faithful to what God has called you to do in His service? If you were to “allow no day to pass without doing something to advance His work in the earth,” what would you need to do?—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 221.

3 Elisha recognized that he could not proceed in his work without the Spirit that had guided Elijah. What role does the Holy Spirit play in your work? What can you do to improve that role?

4 What call have you received for service? What do you need to place on the altar in order to follow the call?

Closing Activity: “God Has Spoken by His Prophets,” number 413 in The Seventh-Day Adventist Hymnal, acknowledges our debt to faithful prophets who have gone before us, as well as the role of Christ and the Spirit, in strengthening our faith. “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” number 100, extols God’s faithfulness to us. Choose one of these songs to sing or read as a poem before closing your Sabbath School class with prayer.
Further Study: “But like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God’s purposes know no haste and no delay. Through the symbols of the great darkness and the smoking furnace, God had revealed to Abraham the bondage of Israel in Egypt, and had declared that the time of their sojourning should be four hundred years. ‘Afterward,’ He said, ‘shall they come out with great substance.’ Gen. 15:14. Against that word, all the power of Pharaoh’s proud empire battled in vain. On ‘the self-same day’ appointed in the divine promise, ‘it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.’ Ex. 12:41. So in heaven’s council the hour for the coming of Christ had been determined. When the great clock of time pointed to that hour, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 32, emphasis supplied.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the things in your own culture that present challenges to those who want to be faithful to Jesus? How can we meet those challenges? How can we help one another in this struggle?

2. Dwell on the things that you have read, watched, or listened to for the past twenty-four hours. Were they the kind of things that could encourage you in your faith, or were they things that worked against it? What are the implications of your answer?

3. Look at the question of loyalty. In what contexts is loyalty good? Is it always good? When might being loyal to someone mean being disloyal to God?

4. What kind of danger, if any, could arise from being overtly obsessed with faithfulness? That is, in what ways could it be taken too far?

5. What are practical ways that we can keep alive in our churches and in our homes the reality of the Second Coming? It is true: The longer it takes, the easier and easier it gets to forget about it and fall into wrong habits and patterns of thought. How can we instill, especially in those who have been in the church a long time, the importance of keeping the reality and promise of the Second Coming passionately before us?
The Fruit of the Spirit Is Meekness

Read for This Week’s Study:  *Gen. 50:20; Matt. 5:5; 11:29; Rom. 12:3; Gal. 6:1; Phil. 2:2, 3; 1 Pet. 3:4.*

Memory Text: “‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth’” (*Matthew 5:5, NKJV*).

Meekness is a fruit of the Spirit that seems very much lost in our aggressive, self-centered culture. Because people associate it with weakness, most do not admire others for being meek. Yet, it is what we are called to be.

What is meekness? It’s an attitude of humility toward God and gentleness toward people—when we recognize that God is in control and that we can trust Him, even when things don’t go the way we would like, which is so often the case (Is it not?). To be meek, one needs confidence, not in oneself but in the Lord.

Although weakness and meekness may look similar, they are not the same. Weakness is due to negative circumstances, such as lack of strength or lack of courage, hardly the words to describe Jesus, who said, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (*Matt. 11:29*). Meekness, rather, is the result of a person’s conscious choice to trust in God and lean on Him, as opposed to pushing for one’s own ways. Thus, meekness arises out of strength, not weakness.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 27.*
Meek and Lowly in Heart

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matt. 11:29). What is Jesus telling us here? How can being meek and lowly in heart bring rest to our souls?

Meekness is the absolute ceasing to fight for our agenda and believing that God will fight on our behalf for His. Meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God’s goodness and control over the situation. The meek person is not occupied with self (see Luke 22:42)—an attitude that’s key to the promise of finding rest for our souls. After all, aren’t our turmoil and agitation so often due to seeking only for ourselves and what we want? In the truest sense, then, a meek person is one who has learned to die to self, and that takes faith, courage, and perseverance, not necessarily traits the world would associate with meekness.

Read Romans 12:3. How is the idea of meekness represented here? In what ways is this the key to being meek?

Ephesians 4:2 is another text that helps us understand what meekness is. Notice how it’s related to Romans 12:3, in that both texts emphasize in their own way why arrogance and selfishness are contrary to the Christian’s walk. After all, why should any Christian be arrogant about anything? Are we not all sinners? Would we all not be doomed to eternal destruction were it not for Jesus? Are we not all utterly dependent upon God for every breath, every heartbeat? Does not every gift and talent we have come from God? What then do we have to be proud about? Nothing! Indeed, considering all that it cost to save us, Christians should be the meekest and humblest folks on earth.

Think about how utterly dependent you are upon God for everything. Where, then, do that pride and arrogance in your heart come from, and how can you get rid of these?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Matthew 11:29

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Reflect on the truth that meekness is likeness to Jesus. It is not cowardice, fear, or weakness.
- **Feel:** Experience the restfulness and assurance that come from enacting Christ’s meekness in your life.
- **Do:** Relate with maturity to difficulty and conflict.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: The Meekness of Christ**
   - **A** To manifest meekness is to behave in a manner that honors Christ. This requires confidence in God and courage in the face of danger, conflict, and provocation.
   
     1. In what ways does meekness serve to defuse conflict?
     2. How is aggressive behavior generally an indication of self-centeredness?

II. **Feel: The Deep Sense of Peace That Comes From Behaving Meekly**
   - **A** How does behaving with meekness in the face of provocation help us to see the foolishness of aggressive behavior?

III. **Do: The Promised Inheritance of the Meek Is Life in the Paradise of God**
   - **A** In what way does the exercise of meekness contribute to Christian maturity?
   - **B** How do aggression and self-assertiveness hurt us?
   - **C** In what way does meekness bring honor and praise to God?
   - **D** In what way is there a definite correlation between meekness in the here and now and meekness in the new earth?

**Summary:** When Christians are confronted with strife or provocation and respond with meekness, they are behaving in a Christlike manner. Meekness is not cowardice. It is the expression of confidence in the lifestyle preparing for heaven. It has the power to diffuse hostility and create peace and harmony. It is an antidote to egotism.
Models of Meekness

Remember the crisis that Abraham faced in deciding with his nephew Lot how to divide up the land? (See Gen. 13:8, 9.) In view of the fact that God had promised to make of his descendants a great nation, what might have been Abraham’s justification in taking the best for himself? Instead, Abraham allowed Lot to choose first, saying that he would take what was left over. How was this action a characteristic of meekness?

Most everyone knows the story of Joseph being sold as a slave into Egypt by his brothers. Read again the story of their coming to him, now second in command in all Egypt, and begging to be able to purchase food (Genesis 45). How did Joseph’s meekness determine how he treated his brothers? Had he not been meek, what would he probably have done? How is Genesis 50:20 an example of the worldview of those who are meek?

As a young man David had been anointed to be the next king of Israel. King Saul became insanely jealous and for years pursued David and his men with the intent to kill him. On two occasions David had an opportunity to kill Saul (1 Sam. 24:3–7, 26:7–12). If David had not been meek, what might have been his rationalization for killing Saul? Why is it so easy for us to use a spiritual excuse for doing something that is in our own interest?

In Numbers 12:3, Moses is described as the meekest man of his time. Yet, his decisive actions do not seem to fit the popular concept of meekness. His demand to Pharaoh to let Israel go was forceful and followed up with action. When Israel worshiped the golden calf, his “anger burned,” and before it was over he had taken the calf that they had made, burned it with fire, ground it to powder, and made the children of Israel drink it (Exod. 32:19, 20). How are we to understand the meekness of Moses?

Jesus, of course, is the greatest of all models of meekness (Matt. 11:29). What are some of the examples of His meekness? How, for instance, was His meekness revealed in John 18:21–23? Or how about Matthew 26:39? At the same time, we find examples of Jesus doing things that don’t appear to be meek, such as when He drove the money changers out of the temple or all the times He confronted the Pharisees and others regarding their hypocrisy. How do these examples help us understand that meekness can be manifested in some very bold ways?

What can you find in common among these examples of meekness? What can you learn from them that could help you understand what meekness is and isn’t?
Learning Cycle

▶ **STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Christlike meekness comes from a humble dependence on God’s way and is reflected in a gentle, peace-loving treatment of others.

**Just for Teachers:** Write the word H-U-M-I-L-I-T-Y on the left side of the blackboard. Ask your class members to come up with phrases that define and describe humility, each starting with one of the letters in the word.

Discuss the difference between humility and low self-esteem, meekness and weakness. You may write humility and meekness on one side of the board and low self-esteem and weakness on the other, and ask your class members to compare and contrast the terms. For example, was Jesus meek during His trial and crucifixion? (See Matthew 27.) What did this meekness look and sound like? Did Jesus respond this way because He was weak or had low self-esteem? How would someone who was timid or didn’t value himself or herself respond in similar situations?

▶ **STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Provide pictures of Bible characters who are models of meekness, such as Jesus (maybe a short video of His birth or trial), Joseph, or Moses, as an introduction to this section of the lesson.

Bible Commentary

I. Jesus, Meek and Lowly *(Review Matthew 11:29 with your class.)*

Jesus’ birth to humble parents in a stable was an indication of the place He was to take among humanity. Because of the unique circumstances of His birth, Jesus would be labeled, to the day He died, as an illegitimate child. The mob around Him at his trial were more than cruel in their insults on this point. His parents were from among the poor working class, as indicated by the less-expensive sacrifice of two young pigeons or turtledoves offered at the temple 40 days after His birth. Jesus Himself would work as a carpenter in a small, insignificant village until He was 30.

CONTINUED
The Importance of Meekness

“Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger” (Zeph. 2:3, NKJV). Meekness is the opposite of pride. There is much emphasis today on the importance of having self-esteem. When does self-esteem go over the edge and become pride?

Meekness is necessary for receiving God’s Word. “Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21, NKJV). A person who does not have a humble spirit cannot receive God’s Word because there is a conflict of interest. Why is this so?

Meekness is necessary for effective witnessing. “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15, NKJV).

“Our influence upon others depends not so much upon what we say as upon what we are. Men may combat and defy our logic, they may resist our appeals; but a life of disinterested [unselfish] love is an argument they cannot gainsay. A consistent life, characterized by the meekness of Christ, is a power in the world.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 142.

Meekness gives glory to God. First Peter 3:4 says, “even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.”

“It is right to love beauty and to desire it; but God desires us to love and seek first the highest beauty, that which is imperishable. No outward adorning can compare in value or loveliness with that ‘meek and quiet spirit,’ the ‘fine linen, white and clean’ (Revelation 19:14), which all the holy ones of earth will wear. This apparel will make them beautiful and beloved here, and will hereafter be their badge of admission to the palace of the King. His promise is, ‘They shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy.’ Revelation 3:4.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 523, 524.

How does putting emphasis on external beauty potentially conflict with the development of the fruit of the Spirit, particularly with the fruit of meekness? As the fruit of meekness grows in you, how should your life be different from what it was before? In the area of meekness, what changes have you seen in your life since you’ve accepted Christ? What attitudes might you be harboring that make it difficult for you to be meek?
Jesus not only identified with the poor and those often insulted because of the circumstances of their birth, but He took on their lot in life. How can anyone ever born on this earth justly claim superiority because rank or class or bloodlines when the King of the universe, who is in every way superior to the highest-born mortal, accepted the lowest position in human circles? Jesus’ quiet, meek acceptance of His place gives dignity and hope to everyone, however humble and ignominious their circumstances. His life illustrated the fact that it is God’s goodness and His value for us that make each of us of infinite worth.

**Consider This:** What other examples from Jesus’ life illustrate His willingness to identify with the poor, the scorned, and the weak? How do learning about Jesus, the meek and lowly one, and taking on His yoke help us find rest?

**II. Joseph: From Slave and Prisoner to Prime Minister** *(Review Genesis 37, 39, and 50 with your class.)*

In some ways similar to Jesus, Joseph had once had a favored position as an honored and much-loved son of a wealthy man before he was sold by his brothers to become a slave in a foreign country and from there to become a prisoner. Joseph could have exacted revenge on his brothers if he had wanted to; his meekness certainly was not the result of weakness or low self-esteem. When his brothers came to Egypt seeking grain, Joseph used his position and power to question and test his brothers thoroughly before he gave in to the longing to be reunited with them and with his father. When they expressed sorrow and repentance, however, Joseph responded with all the warmth and passionate love of a brother longing for reconciliation.

**Consider This:** How did Joseph model true humility? How can we practice the kind of humility that has enough confidence in God’s way over the long haul that we can afford to forgo our own short-term plans and comfort? What qualities of meekness did Joseph portray as mentioned in Matthew 18:21, 22; 2 Timothy 2:24, 25; and Galatians 6:1?

**III. Moses, the Meekest Man on Earth** *(Review Numbers 12, 16, and 20 with your class.)*

When Moses’ authority was questioned by his brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, what they really were questioning was God’s authority to appoint
Practicing the Fruit of Meekness

Meekness will be manifested in how we relate to others. That is, it’s something that is active, something that will reveal itself in our words, attitudes, and actions. You might think that you are meek, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that you are. To be meek is to manifest meekness.

How do the following texts show us how meekness is to be revealed in our lives? Why is meekness so important in these situations?

Matt. 5:39

Matt. 18:21, 22

Gal. 6:1

2 Tim. 2:24, 25

Titus 3:2

Phil. 2:2, 3

As we’ve been saying all along, meekness is wrongly associated with weakness. It is anything but. In fact, go back over the verses we’ve looked at today. Can you not see how it takes strength, moral and spiritual strength, to reveal meekness in most of these situations?

Of course, if meekness is a fruit of the Spirit, it’s something that comes to us from God and not from ourselves. Nevertheless, we need the daily surrender to the Lord, the daily willingness to obey in faith, in order for meekness to be made manifest in our lives.
Moses as leader of the people. Moses’ authority often was questioned not only by his closest family but by other leaders in the camp and the people themselves. However, Moses did not respond with wounded, angry pride over these questions of his right to lead the people. “Their accusations were borne by Moses in uncomplaining silence. . . . Moses ‘was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth,’ and this is why he was granted divine wisdom and guidance above all others.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 384.

By depending on God to defend him and interceding for Miriam and the rebellious followers of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, Moses illustrated the selflessness of one who rests securely in the place God has put him, who seeks only to discharge the duties God has given him, with God’s love in his heart that has no need of approbation or honor from others.

Moses was not always meek, however. The young man who lost his temper with the bully in the desert at the beginning of his career was also the man who lost his temper at Meribah with a people he had led for 40 years through the desert to the Promised Land. This was such a serious matter that it kept Moses from entering Canaan. The people of Israel tried God Himself with their complaining and rebellion, but their difficult behavior was no excuse for Moses and Aaron to lose their tempers.

**Consider This:** What was the difference between Moses’ response to the people at Meribah and his previous responses to rebellion? What principles does this illustrate about responding to frustrating situations with anger versus meekness?

**IV. Special Need for Humility in the Last Days** *(Review Ezekiel 9 with your class.)*

As Ezekiel watches in vision those who are grieving and lamenting about the detestable things being done in Jerusalem, instructions are given to put a mark on them and to destroy all those in the city who do not have the mark, beginning at the sanctuary. Those who are marked because of their lowliness of heart and deep sorrow and humiliation over sin are sealed, hidden safely in God when probation closes. As they draw near to Jesus and keep their eyes fixed upon His perfect purity, they recognize how terrible sin really is. As they search their hearts and humble themselves before God during the closing moments of the great Day of Atonement, He is able to clothe them with Christ’s robe of righteousness. “Their contrition and self-abasement are infinitely more acceptable in the sight of God than is the self-sufficient, haughty spirit of those who see no cause to lament, who scorn the humility of
The Reward of the Meek

E. D. Hulse said, “Humility is a strange thing. The minute you think you’ve got it, you’ve lost it.”

A small town wanted to recognize and reward its meekest citizen. A survey was taken of their small community, which eventually identified the person. In a ceremony attended by all the important people, the meekest citizen was presented with a ribbon on which were inscribed the words, “The Meekest Man in Town.” However, the next day they had to take the ribbon away from him, because he was wearing it!

**How** do you understand the promises and rewards mentioned in the following texts?

*Ps. 22:26* ______________________________________________________________________

*Ps. 25:9* ______________________________________________________________________

*Ps. 37:11* ______________________________________________________________________

*Ps. 147:6* ______________________________________________________________________

*Isa. 29:19* ______________________________________________________________________

*Matt. 5:5* ______________________________________________________________________

These verses are comforting because there are times when the meek are taken advantage of. But we have learned in this study that a meek person isn’t concerned with lifting himself or herself up before men but rather lifting God up. As a result, God promises to exalt the one who is meek. The rewards can be experienced now and, most surely, in the new heaven and new earth of eternity.
Christ... Meekness and lowliness of heart are the conditions for strength and victory.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 475.

**Consider This:** Why is a meek and humble spirit so crucial in these last days? How important is it to continually seek Christ’s face in humility, to abase ourselves before Him, and to accept His white robe of purity in place of our dirty rags?

**STEP 3—Apply**

1. A meek and quiet spirit is a powerful argument for Christ. Why is this so? Discuss examples of the power of humility you have witnessed in others, both in the home and in the workplace.

2. A meek and quiet spirit makes us lovely and beloved here on earth, and those adorned with this spirit will be admitted to the palace of the King of the universe (see 1 Pet. 3:4). What are the temptations for external adornment here on earth, and why are we directed toward obtaining the higher beauty of inward adornment?

**STEP 4—Create**

1. What aspects of your life have been difficult to bear, in terms of poverty, scorn, and humiliation? What can you learn from the lives of Jesus, Joseph, and Moses about how to handle these situations in the upcoming weeks?

2. Moses made a bronze serpent on a staff, and all who were bitten by poisonous snakes could look on it and be healed. This was a visual prophecy of Christ in His most humiliating office, a cursed object on a cross, lifted up for our healing. What visual might you create of the humility and lowliness of the King of the universe, who suffered and died for you?

3. Consider using calligraphy to write out verses from Ephesians 2 about how we should imitate Christ’s humility in our relationships with others.
Further Study: “Christ is not to be hid away in the heart and locked in as a coveted treasure, sacred and sweet, to be enjoyed solely by the possessor. We are to have Christ in our hearts as a well of water, springing up into everlasting life, refreshing all who come in contact with us. We must confess Christ openly and bravely, exhibiting in our characters his meekness, humility, and love, till men shall be charmed by the beauty of holiness. It is not the best way to preserve our religion as we bottle perfumes, lest the fragrance should escape.”—Ellen G. White, Counsels on Health, p. 400, emphasis supplied.

“The peace of Christ, the peace of Christ—money cannot buy it, brilliant talent cannot command it, intellect cannot secure it; it is the gift of God. The religion of Christ—how shall I make all understand their great loss if they fail to carry its holy principles into the daily life? The meekness and lowliness of Christ is the Christian’s power. It is indeed more precious than all things which genius can create or wealth can buy. Of all things that are sought, cherished, and cultivated, there is nothing so valuable in the sight of God as a pure heart, a disposition imbued with thankfulness and peace.”—Ellen G. White, Counsels on Health, p. 403, emphasis supplied.

Discussion Questions:

1. God promises to increase joy in the lives of those who are meek. Why do you think meek people can be joyful? Give several reasons. How will cultivating the fruit of the Spirit that is meekness improve your everyday life?

2. What are ways in which meekness can be misconstrued as weakness?

3. All this talk about meekness raises important questions: are Christians never to stand up for their own rights? Do we allow ourselves to be doormats, constantly stepped on without doing anything in our own defense? Is there a balance here, and, if so, how do we find it?

4. Nietzsche argued that Christianity was a religion born from those who were weak, who didn’t have power, and thus who took traits such as humility and meekness and made them appear like something good, something to strive for. How would you respond to such an argument?
The Fruit of the Spirit Is Self-Control

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Judges 13–16; 1 Cor. 9:24–27; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:1–10; Heb. 12:1, 2; 1 John 2:15, 16.

Memory Text: “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27, NKJV).

Though listed last by Paul in Galatians 5:22, 23, “self-control” (sometimes translated “temperance”) is surely not the least of the fruit of the Spirit. It could easily have been first, because it plays a major role in the maturing of other spiritual fruit. It might be said that self-control is the glue that holds all the other qualities together.

Like other fruit of the Spirit, self-control is a gift of grace. It has been called “disciplined grace”: grace because it is free, disciplined because there is something for us to do.

Self-control may sound negative, but it is an integral part of grace itself. If we don’t control ourselves—our feelings, our appetites, our drives—then they control us. Thus, it’s either self-control under the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, or it’s being controlled by someone or something else. We, ultimately, decide.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 6.*
The Paradox of Self-Control *(Phil. 2:12, 13)*

Synonyms for self-control include self-discipline, strength of mind, and willpower. This fruit of the Spirit extends far beyond simply restraining Christians from doing what’s prohibited but includes enabling us to do what’s good.

**First** John 2:15, 16 admonishes us to stay away from three lusts. What are they, and, more important, how could they be manifested in our lives if we aren’t careful?

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**Philippians** 4:8 lists items that should be the focuses of the Christian life. What are they, and how can doing what Paul says here protect us from the dangers listed in 1 John 2:15, 16?

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There are obviously dos and don’ts in the Christian life. There is a constant struggle with self, with the flesh, with the ways of the world. Paul shares this dilemma in Romans 7:15–18, when he talks about the struggle between what he knows he should do and what he’s tempted to do. However, in Romans 8:1, he gives us the answer: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” *(NKJV).*

He’s talking about walking in the Spirit. A life without the Spirit is incapable on its own of developing the fruit of the Spirit. Though we have the will, Paul speaks for all of us when he says that we don’t have the power. The answer to the dilemma of Romans 7 is not when can we overcome but how. And the how is found through faith in Jesus. We give ourselves to Jesus, we claim His righteousness, we are no longer condemned, and we surrender ourselves to Him and choose to walk in the Spirit, choose to follow His will, claiming His promises of victory. The key is holding onto the promises; here’s where the power comes from. We cannot do it alone. We have to make the conscious choice to overcome in His name. The struggle is as much vertical (reaching up in faith) as it is horizontal (battling the clamors of the flesh). We need to do both.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Philippians 4:8

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Understand the relationship between thinking and behavior.
- **Feel:** Desire to strive to master emotions.
- **Do:** Walk in the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Know: The Positive Power of Right Thinking

- Behavior, whether deliberate or unconscious, follows a definite path. Thought is followed by speech and actions. We behave out of what is stored in our mind bank.

  1. What truths are found in the psalmist’s statement, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee”? *(Ps. 119:11.)*
  2. How does living according to God’s Word keep the heart pure?

II. Feel: Mastery Over Self Is Possible

- The lusts of the flesh, the eyes, and the pride of life—all have to do with our emotions and feelings.

  1. How does this indicate that feelings can be dangerous if they are not sanctified in Christ?

III. Do: Modifying Thought and Behavior

- The issue of self-control often is vexing to the Christian. If wrongly practiced, it can lead to the possible pitfalls of legalism, fanaticism, spiritual discouragement, and depression. As the attacks of Satan are lifelong, so is the development of self-control.

  1. How will allowing the Scriptures to inform our thinking help us defeat evil?
  2. In what ways can our understanding of God’s grace and righteousness by faith develop a spiritually mature and balanced way of thinking?
  3. How would neglecting to maintain a devotional life affect our thinking and behavior?

**Summary:** Right thinking leads to right living. Dependence upon feelings has dangers. Self-control is developed by allowing Scripture to inform our thinking.
Joseph and the Immediate Results of Righteousness

Betrayed by his own family, sold into slavery, Joseph had very good reasons to doubt the love and care (even the existence) of the God that he had been taught about since childhood. That’s not, however, what he did.

Read Genesis 39:7–20. In these verses, where do we find the key to why Joseph acted as he did?

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How was Joseph “rewarded” for his refusal to yield to temptation? 
Gen. 39:20. He was falsely accused and thrown into prison. Is that what he gets for being faithful?

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This is an important point to remember. Can we expect that our determination to do what is right, no matter the cost, will mean that things will turn out OK for us in the short term? What about folks who have lost their jobs, their spouses, their families, indeed, even their lives because they refused to compromise with sin? We have examples of this in the Bible, and perhaps you know people who have gone through something similar. Or perhaps you have gone through it yourself: In the end, suppose Joseph had spent the rest of his life rotting in jail? Would he still have done the right thing?

“For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Gal. 6:8, NKJV). What is this text telling us? What is placed in contrast to what? What is at stake? Why, then, is the issue here of paramount importance? How does what Paul writes here help us to understand why, no matter the immediate results, Joseph did right?

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Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The Holy Spirit gives us self-control so that we can make good decisions that allow us to be of use to God, others, and ourselves.

**Just for Teachers:** In this lesson, focus on the necessity of self-control in a life of freedom in Christ.

High-fructose corn syrup: If you’ve been following health and nutrition news over the past few years, you may know that this ingredient in soft drinks and junk foods has been linked to the proliferation of obesity and related ills in many parts of the world. Why? High-fructose corn syrup is so calorically dense that it doesn’t switch off the hunger mechanism the way other foods do. One may still feel hungry after consuming a gargantuan number of calories in the form of, say, a small soda. We have internal regulators that tell us when to stop eating, but high-fructose corn syrup deftly bypasses them.

This is just what the world, the flesh, and the devil do to our vaunted “free will.” We have enough free will to know right from wrong—and occasionally to do the right thing—but not enough to consistently do the things that please God. The things of this world know how to switch off our control mechanisms and walk right in.

**The Good News:** God has a new control mechanism for you, one that actually works. All you have to do is acknowledge that the one you have now is faulty and claim the fruit of the Spirit, which includes self-control.

**Consider This:** In a world in which we are encouraged to gratify every desire, why is it often hard to look at self-control as a positive thing? But what is the alternative if we do not?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Self-control *(Review Galatians 5:23 with the class.)*

*Egkrateia* is the Greek word translated as “self-control” in Galatians 5:23.
Samson and the Fruits of Failure

In Judges 13–16, the Bible gives us the story of Samson. Read through the texts (as much as time allows), keeping in mind the idea of self-control and temperance. There are plenty of powerful lessons we can learn from Samson’s example. How tragic that someone with so many gifts and so much promise could get so easily sidetracked.

“Samson in his peril had the same source of strength as had Joseph. He could choose the right or the wrong as he pleased. But instead of taking hold of the strength of God, he permitted the wild passions of his nature to have full sway. The reasoning powers were perverted, the morals corrupted. God had called Samson to a position of great responsibility, honor, and usefulness; but he must first learn to govern by first learning to obey the laws of God. Joseph was a free moral agent. Good and evil were before him. He could choose the path of purity, holiness, and honor, or the path of immorality and degradation. He chose the right way, and God approved. Samson, under similar temptations, which he had brought upon himself, gave loose rein to passion. The path which he entered upon he found to end in shame, disaster, and death. What a contrast to the history of Joseph!”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1007.

**Read** Judges 13:24, 25. Considering what we know about Samson, what important message, and warning, is found in those two texts?

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Despite his great promise, Samson allowed his passions and lusts to overcome everything good. Who hasn’t struggled with the reality of this conflict? The great controversy isn’t just a symbol; it depicts the battle between Christ and Satan that is waged, not simply as some cosmic conflict in the heavens but in every human being, as well. Though Christ paved the way for all people to share in His victory, the battle for our hearts and flesh is being fought, indeed, in our hearts and our flesh. Sure, Christ won it all for us. But we have to choose to claim His victory all the time and, by the choices we make, we are deciding for one side or the other in the great controversy.

How are you experiencing the reality of the great controversy in your own heart and flesh? What choices are you making? What do these choices tell you about which side you really are on?
The concept was popular with Stoic philosophers of the time, who saw it as a way of claiming personal autonomy in face of the impersonal forces of life and nature, including the cold, impassive Being that Stoics imagined God to be.

In contrast, Paul imagined a personal, deeply engaged God who gave us the ability to master ourselves in a way that we otherwise did not have. Paul saw that some of the forces that batted us around at will (those mentioned in 1 John 2:15, 16, for example) existed inside ourselves. We needed Someone outside ourselves to give us the self-control the Stoics desired, and that Someone was the Holy Spirit.

Consider This: What is the likely result of our attempts to become self-controlled by means of our own willpower and good intentions? (See Rom. 7:18–25.)

II. The World (Review 1 John 2:15, 16 and Romans 12:2 with your class.)

The first step in Christian self-control is the desire to be governed by God rather than what is referred to in the New Testament as the world. John 3:16 famously tells us that God loved the world. We also are told in Genesis that God created the world and saw that it was good. Why, then, does the author of 1 John tell us that love of the world and love of God cannot exist together in the same heart?

The word used for world in all these instances is the same, kosmos. Kosmos is actually a fairly neutral word, meaning “order.” This order can be the order that God created in Genesis and for which He (John 3:16) sacrificed His Son; or it can be a false order, a specious system of values and priorities. Clearly the world, or kosmos, referred to in 1 John 2:15, 16 or Romans 12:2 is the latter.

Used in this context, the world is not merely the place in which we live. It’s the assumptions that govern the actions and beliefs of people who don’t know God. First of all, the world is concerned with the temporary (literally, time bound), while God and His people are concerned with the eternal. Things that are specifically not concerned with God or the eternal are referred to as secular. The word secular comes from the Latin word for age. Secular things are those things having to do with this present age, as opposed to eternity. Such things may be necessary for us to attend to and may even have some value in their own right, but if we love God, they are not our ultimate purpose.
Paul’s Long Race

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:24–27, NKJV).

Read prayerfully and carefully Paul’s words here to the Corinthians. Notice how much in this he talks about himself and his struggles. We should find comfort in seeing that even a faithful Christian such as Paul, one of the true giants of faith, had to struggle with self, with sin, and with the flesh. We are not alone in our battle. Heaven is going to be filled with people who knew the clamors of the flesh.

Based on the texts above, answer the following questions:

- What analogy does Paul use to help us understand the battle with self and sin that we all struggle with? What are the crucial differences, though, between the analogy and the reality he’s referring to?

- How confident was Paul regarding the race he was in? Where did his confidence come from? Why should we have the same confidence?

- Though Paul shows confidence, he’s also aware of the possibility of failure. How does he describe it, and what is his solution? How does his answer fit in with the theme this week?
Consider This: How should we interact with the world and the things in it? (See John 15:19.)

III. Under Foreign Management (Review 1 John 2:16 with your class.)

When the world and the things in it become our ultimate purpose, we are controlled by them, not by ourselves, and certainly not by God. We become subject to the lusts mentioned in 1 John 2:15, 16. Lusts of the flesh, while having a rather steamy connotation today, were not necessarily sexual in nature. We succumb to them when we value physical comfort and pleasure—or their attainment—as our main goals in life.

The “lust of the eyes” implies desires aroused by sight. Again, this is not necessarily referring to pornography or the viewing of things of a prurient nature. Nor is it referring just to things we literally see. Another word for it might be what we call superficiality, a tendency to attribute value to things on the basis of outward appearance, or seeming. One even could regard this as the force behind religious hypocrisy, since the hypocrite is interested mainly in seeming religious by outward appearance. The same might be said of some forms of legalism, since it often is primarily concerned with how people are seen doing the right things or, typically not doing things that appear to be wrong.

Closely allied to this is the “pride of life,” which is the overwhelming desire to appear to be superior to other people, in fact, to believe oneself to be superior or at least notable. We see this today in the desire of many people to be famous for something, and preferably on television. It might be most accurately referred to as the pride of this life, since the victim of this drive regards the achievement of high status and notability in this present age as most important.

Consider This: Even as Christians we are capable of entertaining and becoming captivated by these “worldly” lusts and drives. How are we to react to them when they present themselves? (See Rom. 13:14.)

STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

1. Self-control as taught by the Stoics and others in the ancient world was ascetic and meant to assert the individual’s autonomy. How does this
How to Grow in Self-Control

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1, NKJV). Paul here again uses the race analogy that we saw earlier. What are some of the “weights” that are holding you back?

Read Colossians 3:1–10. These verses give us rules for holy living as new persons in Christ. From these verses we learn several important things we must do to develop self-control in our lives. What do you find listed there, and how can you apply them to your own life in a way that they will help get victory over the sin that so easily encumbers us?

Every skill has to be practiced. Self-control doesn’t come in a day. It comes in hits and misses, in successes and failures, as we try to practice it day after day. “Fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12, NKJV); “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me” (Phil. 3:12, NKJV).

Don’t constantly put yourself in places where your weaknesses will be tested, where your most-difficult-to-control drives will be out on the firing line of temptation. We must avoid even the appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22). “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom. 13:14).

What are some areas of your life where self-control is definitely lacking? Why is it sometimes easier to get “victory” over dessert than to get victory over a spirit of bitterness and resentment? What changes can you make that will help you have more self-control?
compare with the biblical rationale? *(See 1 Cor. 9:27.)*

2 Compare Joseph and Samson. Joseph faced great trials and misfortunes from an early age yet overcame them to become a great man in both a spiritual and worldly sense. Samson was born with many advantages and yet ended his life as a slave. What does this teach us about how we should use our circumstances to improve ourselves spiritually and glorify God?

Application Questions:

1 We probably will fail at least some of the time as we attempt to learn self-control. How should we react? *(See Prov. 24:16.)*

2 In spite of the fact that self-control is described as a gift, and it is implied that God will help us to learn it, it often seems to be a lonely and difficult process. How can we maintain the connection to God that will make it easier?

3 What are the results of the lack of self-control we see in the world today? Do our society and economic system encourage people to control their impulses and delay gratification, or do they encourage the opposite? How can we insulate ourselves from the multitude of voices goading us to do or buy things that will harm us physically, spiritually, and financially?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** To learn how to control ourselves, we need to know ourselves. We need to know our weaknesses and our strengths and how to minimize the former and maximize the latter. The following activities are meant to give your students the tools to do so.

1 Pass around slips of paper to your class. Ask your students to list anonymously, from one to ten, the things that most cause them to lose self-control. These can be things (food, money, etc.), emotions (frustration, anger, sadness, etc.), situations or people (no individuals, please).

   Have everyone pass their slips to the front. List each item on a blackboard and tally the number of times a given thing is mentioned. Your students will see that they are not alone in their struggles and that perhaps they can rely on each other for help.

2 Have members, who are willing, share how they managed to achieve victory over a sin or a problem and how they have managed to maintain it. It can be a big thing or a small thing. What activities, people, or things make them stronger? Weaker?

“The divine promise to Manoah was in due time fulfilled in the birth of a son, to whom the name of Samson was given. As the boy grew up it became evident that he possessed extraordinary physical strength. This was not, however, as Samson and his parents well knew, dependent upon his well-knit sinews, but upon his condition as a Nazarite, of which his unshorn hair was a symbol. Had Samson obeyed the divine commands as faithfully as his parents had done, his would have been a nobler and happier destiny. But association with idolaters corrupted him. The town of Zorah being near the country of the Philistines, Samson came to mingle with them on friendly terms. Thus in his youth intimacies sprang up, the influence of which darkened his whole life. A young woman dwelling in the Philistine town of Timnath engaged Samson’s affections, and he determined to make her his wife. To his God-fearing parents, who endeavored to dissuade him from his purpose, his only answer was, ‘She pleaseth me well.’ The parents at last yielded to his wishes, and the marriage took place.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 562.

Discussion Questions:

1. G. Gordon Liddy was one of the infamous Watergate conspirators. Liddy ended up serving more jail time than anyone else in this scandal, which rocked the United States in the 1970s. One time, when trying to recruit a young woman for criminal activity, Liddy invited her to a restaurant. During the discussion, she asked how she could trust him; that is, suppose he were caught, how could she know that he would not turn her in? In order to prove to her his self-control, Liddy placed his finger over a lit candle at the table, and held it there long enough for his flesh to start burning before he removed it. His point was to show her just how much self-control he had. How does that kind of self-control compare with the fruit of the Spirit we have looked at this week? Can we find something noble and worth emulating in that kind of self-control? Are self-control and discipline always necessarily good?

2. In what ways might self-control become a means to fanaticism? How could we avoid the danger of making self-control a form of legalism?

3. Do you know someone who is suffering because of principle; that is, when tempted, they exhibited self-control like Joseph did and are now suffering some difficult consequences? How can you, either as a class or as an individual, help this person through his or her difficult time?
Lesson 11
March 6–12

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Righteousness

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled’” (Matthew 5:6, NKJV).

Last week we finished our study on nine branches of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). The next two weeks we will study two more: “for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth” (Eph. 5:9, NKJV). In this verse, Paul repeats the reference to “goodness” while he adds righteousness and truth. This week we look at what this “righteousness” is.

We understand righteousness in two ways. First, there is the imputed righteousness of Christ, which is what Jesus has done for us, the righteousness that covers us and that is our title to heaven. Second, there is the imparted righteousness of Christ, which is what He does in us, through the Holy Spirit, to mold us into His image. Thus understood, righteousness has two inseparable components, even though it’s all really one righteousness—the righteousness of Christ, without which we would have no hope of salvation.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 13.*
The Necessity of Righteousness

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28). “For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright” (Ps. 11:7, NKJV). “The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but He loves him who follows righteousness” (Prov. 15:9, NKJV). “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24, NKJV). “That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4, NKJV). “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33, NKJV). “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him” (1 John 2:29, NKJV).

Referring to the texts quoted above, respond to the following questions:

• If we cannot be justified by the law, how then are we justified?

• Although we know that God hates sin but loves sinners, what wrong conclusions must we avoid?

• What does “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us” mean? Can we ever keep the law well enough to fulfill it? Or does Paul mean something else? If so, what?

• How should our lives be changed when we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness?

• What does it mean “to do righteousness”? Can we be righteous without doing righteousness? Justify your answer.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Romans 10:3

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Affirm that righteousness is found only in Jesus.
- **Feel:** Desire peace with God and self.
- **Do:** Surrender completely to God’s will in Christ.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Know: Jesus—the Only Source of Righteousness

- Righteousness that saves and sanctifies is found only in Jesus. There is no alternative. This foundational truth is expressed variously in Scripture.

  1. In His parable of the vine, how does Jesus illustrate that only in Him can we be righteous?
  2. How does a high view of holiness help us to understand that righteousness is unobtainable by human effort?
  3. In what ways does self-righteousness victimize us?

II. Feel: Peace With God

  - How does justification by faith lead to peace with God?
  - What feelings arise out of turning away from self-righteousness and turning to Christ?

III. Do: Righteousness and Obedience

- The Jewish nation did not submit to the righteousness provided in Jesus but placed confidence in obedience to the law.

  1. Because obedience is a product of righteousness by faith, in what ways is there a danger that it could lead to a legalistic formalism in behavior?
  2. The majority of the gifts of the Spirit find their expression in our relationships with other people. What connection is there between love, peace, kindness, gentleness, and righteousness by faith?
  3. How should we understand the definition of righteousness as doing right and avoiding legalism?

**Summary:** Righteousness only in Jesus—there is no other way to Christian victory. Surrender to Christ and obedience to His will result in growth.
Do-It-Yourself Righteousness

“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3, NKJV). What do you think Paul was writing about here? About whom was he writing, and how might these folks have tried to establish their “own righteousness”? Given human nature, why is that impossible, anyway?

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A “do-it-yourself” activity is one in which a person does or makes something (as in woodworking or home repair) without professional training or assistance. In its broadest sense it is an activity in which one does something oneself or on one’s own initiative. We sometimes refer to a particularly successful person as a self-made man or woman. According to the Bible, however, a “do-it-yourself” approach to true righteousness is impossible. There is nothing that we can do of ourselves, no matter how hard we try, to be righteous before God. Our righteousness is as “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). In fact, seeking to make ourselves righteous often leads to the opposite result.

Read Matthew 5:20 and 23:25–28. How does Jesus here pinpoint the problem that comes from those who seek to make themselves righteous?

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The crucial thing for Christians to understand is how utterly dependent they are upon Christ for their righteousness. What makes them holy before God is what Christ has done for them, not what they do. The moment someone loses sight of that truth, it’s so easy for self-righteousness to rise up, along with pride and inner corruption. The scribes and Pharisees were prime examples of how that happens. So concerned with their outward deeds of piety, they lost sight of what really matters.

In what ways might you be guilty of the same sin as the scribes and Pharisees? How might this trap be more subtle than we think?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The righteousness of Jesus Christ is the only righteousness that satisfies God’s standard of holiness. Humanity is powerless to match it—or duplicate it. It is the free gift of God, made operational in the life of the believer through the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit.

Just for Teachers: The teacher’s calling this week is to help the class understand that God has provided us the power to live righteously right here on earth. But to do so, we must accept the gift of Christ’s righteousness and surrender unreservedly to the leading of the Holy Spirit as He brings the life of Jesus into the life of the believer. The promise of God is that all who “hunger and thirst for righteousness . . . shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6, NKJV) with Jesus!

There is no greater challenge in the life of the believer than how to produce works that match one’s profession of faith. For many the struggle is something akin to that of Sisyphus, the Greek mythological figure whose eternal curse was to roll a huge boulder up a hill each day, only to watch it come tumbling down again. The apostle Paul captured the Sisyphean struggle of the believer when he wrote, “For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do” (Rom. 7:15, NKJV).

Consider This: Discuss with your class the following question: How can the Holy Spirit’s work be measured in the life of the believer as He teaches him or her how to live righteously?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: The goal of this week’s Bible Commentary section has three parts: (1) to emphasize that Jesus alone fills our hunger and thirst for righteousness, (2) to demonstrate the dangers of misunderstanding the gift of Christ’s righteousness, and (3) to stress that a knowledge of Christ’s ministry is not enough to grow the believer in grace.
Christ Our Righteousness (Rom. 5:17)

Read Romans 5:17–19 and summarize in your own words what Paul is saying here. How are we condemned, and how do we become righteous?

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If the righteousness of Jesus is a gift, how do we obtain it? Gal. 3:6, James 2:23.

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In Romans 5:19, notice the emphasis on disobedience and on obedience. One man’s disobedience, Adam’s, led to all of us becoming sinners. This is basic biblical teaching. Adam’s sin brought the downfall of the human race. We’re all, each of us, every day of our lives, living with the results. No one is immune.

The same verse, however, also talks about obedience. Whose obedience? Of course, the obedience of Christ, who alone has the righteousness needed for salvation, the righteousness given to all those who will “receive the abundance of grace.” Indeed, in that same verse Paul says that those who receive this grace get “the gift of righteousness.” Notice, it is a gift. As a gift it must be unearned and undeserved. The moment it’s earned, or deserved, it’s no longer grace (Rom. 4:4).

Yet, it’s not a blanket gift. The righteousness of Christ isn’t automatically bestowed on everyone (Rom. 5:17, NASB). Paul is clear. It comes to those who will receive it; that is, it is given to those who claim it by faith—such as Abraham, who believed God, and it was “accounted to him for righteousness” (Gal. 3:6).

Do you really understand what it means to be saved by faith? How well do you grasp the idea that it’s only the righteousness of Jesus, credited to you by faith, that allows you to stand righteous and justified before God? What can you do to better grasp this wonderful provision, the foundation of the gospel?
I. He’s All We Need (Review Matthew 5:6 and John 6:32–35 with your class.)

Jesus knew the audience that had gathered before Him to hear what later would be called the Sermon on the Mount. These everyday people knew the perils of living in a place with very little annual rainfall. They understood the dangers of getting lost in the semiarid desert of the ancient Near East. With little vegetation and a scarce water supply, knowing where to find sustenance was never taken lightly. Yet, Jesus spoke of a deeper hunger and thirst, a paucity of the soul that never could be filled by anything earthly.

Several months later in another discourse, Jesus unfolded what He only had hinted at in the Sermon on the Mount. In John 6, Jesus revisited the hunger for righteousness motif, but this time He offered a way to fix the problem. He offered Himself as the Bread of Life. Jesus seems to say, “All you need is in Me.”

Consider This: To those hungering and thirsting for righteousness—both that which is imparted and that which is imputed—Jesus doesn’t offer a list of dos and don’ts. He offers Himself. Why is this? Why didn’t Jesus simply give humanity a code of conduct to follow, such as the law, and wish them good luck?

II. Lethal Ignorance (Review Romans 10:3 with your class.)

Ignorance may be bliss when considering some subjects, but it is not true of the work of Jesus. Ignorance is never more lethal than when humans fail to understand the meaning of Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection—in short, the good news of salvation.

Monday’s lesson study makes the point that many believers try to construct a do-it-yourself righteousness to somehow make themselves acceptable to God. This waste of time and effort stems from misunderstanding what Christ accomplished for us through His earthly ministry. The good news is that Christ has obtained salvation completely and fully for all humanity! We simply need to accept it for ourselves.

In Romans 10:3, Paul is referring to the ignorance of the Jews, who should have known that they were powerless to construct a righteousness of their own. They had a “zeal of God” (vs. 2), but it was not according to knowledge, so they established, or set up, a righteousness of their own, a righteousness driven by their own works.
**Righteousness and Obedience** *(1 John 2:29)*

Though we are covered by the righteousness of Christ, that righteousness must be revealed in our lives. Righteousness isn’t just a legal declaration. It also becomes a reality in the life of the person who has it.

How carefully we should heed John’s words: “Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous” *(1 John 3:7)*.

**What** might we be deceived about in regard to what it means to be righteous?

Righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit that is connected to obedience. To some people, obedience is inconsistent with salvation by faith. On occasion one might hear, “Now that you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, won’t you accept Him as the Lord of your life?” The implication seems to be that our obedience to the will of God and our salvation are separate issues. That’s a radical misinterpretation of what salvation is. John wrote that living a righteous life is a verifiable indicator of those who have salvation.

**Read** 1 John 2:3–6. What’s John’s point there?

When the subject of obedience is raised, it is not unusual for someone to point out that we are not saved by works. While there can be no doubt that Lucifer’s obedience to the will of God did not put him into heaven, we must bear in mind that it was his disobedience that caused him to be expelled. The same can be said for Adam and Eve. Their obedience did not put them into the Garden of Eden, but their disobedience to the will of God resulted in their being put out of the garden.

“Righteousness is right doing, and it is by their deeds that all will be judged. Our characters are revealed by what we do. The works show whether the faith is genuine.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 312.

**How well do you manifest the fruit of righteousness in your life?**

**What practices might you need to give up that are hindering the fruit of righteousness in your life?** (Be careful not to try to rationalize them away!)
**Consider This:** Why did some of the people of Paul’s day fail to understand and accept the righteousness of Christ? In what ways do we repeat the same mistakes? What is the antidote to avoiding them?

### III. Be Transformed

(Review Isaiah 64:6 and Romans 12:1, 2 with your class.)

Is there a more difficult truth in Scripture for believers to accept than the one found in Isaiah 64:6? Humans do a few things well, but meeting God’s standard of righteousness is not one of them. But there’s good news, so we need not despair. What is it? Jesus didn’t just save us from the ultimate penalty of sin by dying the second death for us; He also saved us from a life of sinful living. He is able to produce good works—righteousness—in us.

In Paul’s discussion of the Jewish penchant for trying to make themselves righteous through good works, he mentions their failure to submit themselves to God (Rom. 10:3). They “prided themselves upon their knowledge of God and the divine law (Rom. 2:17–20) but in actuality they were refusing to conform to God’s will. . . . No obstacle to salvation by grace is so great as the self-righteousness of a sinner.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 595. The Jewish knowledge about God was not matched by a willingness to obey and be transformed by God.

The good works that many Christians yearn to produce from day to day can come about only as they submit to God’s leading through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings the life of Christ—along with good works—into the life of the believer and makes the believer’s efforts effectual.

**Consider This:** Is it difficult to submit one’s entire life to God? What does it mean to surrender to the leading of the Holy Spirit? What role does God’s Word play in the process of submission and surrender?

**STEP 3—Apply**

Thought Questions:

1. What does a righteous life look like? Describe in your own words what it means to live a righteous life. If you had to explain to a nonbeliever what
The Righteous Life

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:1–3).

How does John tie in the love of God with the love other fellow believers have and with keeping the commandments? Why would he link all these together?

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“The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God.”—Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, pp. 97, 98, emphasis supplied.

And what better way to inspire a desire to be loyal to God than through contemplation of His incredible sacrifice in our behalf on the cross? There’s no power in telling people that they have to keep the law. The power comes in pointing people to Jesus and to His substitutionary death in our behalf. The power comes from letting sinners know that their sins can be forgiven through Jesus, and that they can stand perfect before God in the robe of Christ’s righteousness.

Love of God, and not the fear of hell and condemnation, should be the power that motivates our lives, and nothing will cause us to love God more than focusing on the Cross and the riches and promises that are ours through it.

Do you really love God? If so, how do you know? (Might you be deceiving yourself?) What do you do or say that reveals the reality of this love? In other words, what evidence is there that this love is real?
Learning Cycle  Continued

it means to live a righteous life, what would your definition be? Take time to write it out.

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2 Some have described the life of the Christian as one never-ending battle. Others take the opposite view: all one has to do is accept what Jesus has done for us through His birth, life, death, and resurrection, and submit moment by moment to the Holy Spirit’s leading. Where do you fall on this continuum? Is your Christian walk easy, difficult, or a mixture of both?

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Application Questions:

1 Living a victorious Christian life really means allowing Jesus to live out His life within us. This process requires the disciple of Christ to submit to the discipline brought into the life by the prompting of the Holy Spirit. How do spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, Bible study, service, meditation, and witnessing, help us to live the life of Christ?

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2 In John 15:1–8, Jesus implored His disciples to remain in Him and to abide in Him. List at least three practical ways in which believers can abide in Christ.

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STEP 4—Create

Activity for the Coming Week: Ask your students to create a quiet space during the coming week where they can spend uninterrupted time with God. They may spend this time contemplating the sacrifice of Jesus, the gift of salvation, or the rest that Jesus offers. The key to this exercise is for them to meditate on what Jesus has done and is doing in their lives.
Further Study: “It is not enough for us to believe that Jesus is not an impostor, and that the religion of the Bible is no cunningly devised fable. We may believe that the name of Jesus is the only name under heaven whereby man may be saved, and yet we may not through faith make Him our personal Saviour. It is not enough to believe the theory of truth. It is not enough to make a profession of faith in Christ and have our names registered on the church roll. ‘He that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us.’ ‘Hereby we do know that we know Him if we keep His commandments.’ 1 John 3:24; 2:3. This is the genuine evidence of conversion. Whatever our profession, it amounts to nothing unless Christ is revealed in works of righteousness.”—Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, pp. 312, 313.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can we avoid the trap of legalism, that of thinking that our works will save us or that of cheap grace, thinking that our works have nothing at all to do with our salvation? How do we strike the right balance here? Which ditch do you tend to lean more toward, cheap grace or legalism?

2. What is the inherent danger of having our lives driven by the desire to do good works? What can this lead to, and how can we avoid it?

3. Think of a person you know who seems to be “righteous.” What is this person like? How does he or she act? How does he or she treat people? What does this person talk about? What can you learn from this person?

4. We tend to think of righteousness in individual terms, which is correct. But is there not a community element, as well? Can our church community be “righteous”? If so, how? What would a “righteous” church community look like? How does yours compare with the ideal that you’ve come up with?

5. If salvation by faith means more than merely making a profession of faith in Christ and having our names registered on the church roll, then what does it really mean? What is “faith” in the biblical sense of the term?
The Fruit of the Spirit Is Truth

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 2 Chron. 25:2; Ps. 51:17; Jer. 29:13; John 7:16, 17; 14:6; 17:3; Heb. 5:14.

Memory Text: “And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13, NKJV).

The Greek word for truth, aletheia, has two meanings. One is objective truth (actual facts, verity, or principle), and the other is subjective truth (truth as a personal excellence—a candor of mind that is free from affectation, pretense, dissimulation, falsehood, and deceit). Truth, then, is what we know, the objective “facts on the ground,” as it were. But there’s the subjective element of truth, as well, which entails how we individually respond to what we learn. When both of these are real in our lives, we will manifest truth as a fruit of the Spirit.

That’s why both elements are crucial to the Christian walk. We need to know the basic objective truth as it is found in Jesus, and then we need the personal subjective experience of having our lives changed by that truth.

Look at Judas. He was with Jesus for more than three and a half years. Judas had all sorts of truth revealed to him. He saw things the rest of us only can read about. And yet, in the end, look what good it did him.

May we all take heed.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 20.
“I Am . . . the Truth”

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’ ” (John 14:6, NKJV). Write out a short paragraph explaining what you think this text means.

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On one level, this text radically challenges the relativism (the idea that truth is only subjective and personal) so current in much of the world today. Jesus’ words leave no ambiguity: There’s none of this “Each finds his own path to God,” and so forth. With these words, Jesus establishes the reality of objective truth. Here is Truth. Period. Few verses in the whole Bible are more contrary to the sentiment of relativism than this.

At the same time, there’s a whole other element, as well. The Truth is a Person. You come to truth through a relationship with a Person. This is a radically different idea from the notion of truth being only a group of facts. Jesus, a human being, is the Truth; thus, if you want to know truth, you have to know Jesus.

How does what’s written above help us understand Christ’s words in John 17:3?

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We have to be careful, however, with this notion that all our religion means is having a relationship with God. Everyone lives in a relationship with God, one way or another. Folks who deny His existence live in relationship with God. Pilate had a relationship with Jesus; so did Caiaphas. Even the devil has a relationship with Jesus—he hates Him. The gospel is not a call to have a relationship with Jesus but to make a commitment to Him. Nicodemus, for instance, had a relationship with Jesus, one in which he eventually committed his life and all that he had to Christ. That’s the kind we all need!

No question, you have a relationship with Jesus. The questions you need to ask yourself are, What kind do I have? And, How can I make it better?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: John 17:3

The Student Will:
Know: Comprehend that truth is found supremely in Jesus.
Feel: Express delight in the freedom that truth brings.
Do: Live his or her life to show that Scripture is the ultimate guide for salvation, life, and hope.

Lesson Outline:

I. Know: Jesus Defines Truth

A The truths found in Scripture are revealed truths. They cannot be deduced by reason, but they are not hostile to reason. They are accepted by faith.

B Spiritual truth is defined by Jesus. There is no higher authority.
   1. List some truths that cannot be known by reason.
   2. Why do we believe truth is defined by Jesus?
   3. How do we understand Jesus’ claim that He was the only Way to God and that He was Truth and Life?
   4. How does the Holy Spirit guide us into truth?

II. Feel: Freedom and Truth

A Jesus says the truth sets us free. What are some of the freedoms that truth brings?

B Jesus defines eternal life as knowing “the only true God” and Jesus Himself. How do we understand what knowing means?

III. Do: Making Truth Our Guide

A The understanding of truth as revealed in Scripture requires close thinking and effort. Yet, essential as understanding is, it is of no real value unless we are willing to submit to truth.
   1. In what way does Scripture become the guide for our daily life?
   2. What is the relation of truth to hope?

Summary: Scripture is revealed truth as defined by Jesus and understood by submission to the Holy Spirit’s guidance; it is the guide for life.
The Spirit and Truth

“‘However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth’” (John 16:13, NJKV).

In view of what we learned yesterday, it is obvious that the work of the Holy Spirit is to point us to Christ and to help us abide in Him. “‘But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me’” (John 15:26, NKJV).

Look at this powerful insight: “The preaching of the word will be of no avail without the continual presence and aid of the Holy Spirit. This is the only effectual teacher of divine truth. Only when the truth is accompanied to the heart by the Spirit will it quicken the conscience or transform the life. One might be able to present the letter of the word of God, he might be familiar with all its commands and promises; but unless the Holy Spirit sets home the truth, no souls will fall on the Rock and be broken.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 671, 672.

What emphasis is Ellen G. White placing on the work of the Holy Spirit here?

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What we see in the work of the Holy Spirit is both the objective and subjective aspect of Truth. The Spirit comes, and He testifies of Jesus and reproves “‘the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment’” (John 16:8). These are hard facts about the world, about God, about reality.

At the same time, the work of the Holy Spirit doesn’t end simply with teaching us these truths. Our lives need to be changed by our understanding of them. These objective and eternal truths will do us no good unless our lives are transformed by them, and part of that process (perhaps even the most important part) is for us, as Ellen G. White wrote, to be broken on the Rock (see Ps. 51:17).

How were you broken (or were you ever)? What happened? What changes came? What did you learn about life, about suffering, about God from that experience? What other lessons might you still need to learn?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Truth is a Person, namely Jesus Christ. Both objective and subjective truth come together in Jesus. For the believer to know and understand truth, he or she must possess Jesus. For the believer to live a life of fealty to the truth, he or she must possess Jesus.

Few human beings have desired to live a life of truth more than Gandhi, the great twentieth-century catalyst of Indian liberation through the ethic of nonviolent civil action. Perhaps this is why he subtitled his autobiography “The Story of My Experiments With Truth” and why he endured extreme trials and persecutions for the sake of truth. Yet, Gandhi understood that the pursuit of truth requires the help of a perfect seer, a knowing one. Gandhi never embraced Christianity or Jesus, but he sure captured the dilemma of pursuing truth minus a Helper.

Jesus minced no words when He declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Jesus does not just help us to find truth; He is Truth. That’s the central message students need to take away from this week’s study.

Consider This: Many religious faiths differ in their understanding of truth. Are those faiths wrong in their understanding and interpretation of truth? Why, or why not? Why would a follower of Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam even consider becoming a follower of Jesus? What makes the Christian’s truth attractive?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. We Can Know Truth (Review John 14:6 and John 8:32 with your class.)

Before Jesus declared to His disciples that He was the Truth, He told them that it was possible to know the truth and that knowing the truth would “make you free” (John 8:32). Of course, they had no clue about the deeper meaning of His words. They were literally walking and talking, eating and sleeping, with
“With All Your Heart”

“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13, NKJV).

“With all your heart” means “sincerely,” true in word and act. The word sincere comes from two Latin words—sine (without) and cera (wax). Apparently in the past, less-than-honest sculptors would secretly fix the flaws and cracks in their work by plugging them with wax, which, of course, doesn’t hold. Hence, sincerity means being real and genuine, not artificial. It means speaking or acting “from the heart” and meaning it.

Read 2 Chronicles 25:2. What is that text saying? What important point is being made about what’s inside us?

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The Hebrew word translated in some versions as “perfect” comes from the root slm (from which shalom is derived). It means, basically, “full,” “complete,” or “at peace.” Thus, we have here a king who did the right thing but not with a heart that was in the right place. He wasn’t sincere in his actions. This raises the possibility that a person could be doing the right things for the wrong reasons. Though we may be able to fool some of the people some of the time, and ourselves all the time, we can’t fool God any of the time. How interesting that when David prayed for his son, the first thing he wanted him to have was “a perfect heart” (1 Chron. 29:19, NASB).

Sincerity is important because the one who isn’t sincere, the one whose heart isn’t committed to what’s true and right, is someone with a divided heart. There surely is something else pulling on such a person, and as long as he or she doesn’t let go, as long as this person still allows those other allegiances a place, the heart cannot be slm, complete, or perfect before God. The key, then, is complete surrender to the Lord, a complete letting go of self. It’s not easy; in a real sense, to have that happen, you need to be, as we saw yesterday, broken on the Rock.

How sincere are you in your faith? We’re not talking about occasional doubts, or having deep unanswered questions (everyone at times has doubts, and all have deep unanswered questions), nor are we talking about struggling with sin. Instead, we’re talking about your heart. Is it fully committed to God, “complete” before Him, or is it divided between God and something of the world? If it is the latter, what choices must you make?
Truth, but they were unaware of the subtle transformation that had begun in their lives. They were getting to know the Truth.

The word know used by Jesus in John 8:32 comes from the Greek word ginosko, which means to perceive, understand, recognize, gain knowledge, and come to know. It is knowledge of truth that begins as perception and progresses to full attainment. It is truth gained through personal experience. This concept of knowing truth radically is different from mastering a set of facts. It is relational.

Prior to the First Advent of Jesus, truth had become obscured by many “creative” spiritual practices. People groped in spiritual darkness, so much so that even when they read the Old Testament they could not comprehend it or the One to whom the ancient prophets pointed (2 Cor. 3:14, 15). Today we cannot fully appreciate how radical it was for Jesus to say that truth could be known by the average noncleric of His day. This truth in itself, set many free in His day.

Consider This: How does the truth as it is in Jesus still set us free today?

II. The Big Dig (Review 2 Timothy 2:15 and John 5:39 with your class.)

The Bible, God’s Holy Word, reveals who Jesus is. It is the means by which we understand the great metanarrative of human existence—the great controversy between God and Satan, the plan of salvation, the end of sin and Satan forever. It is therefore impossible to know the Truth—Jesus—minus God’s Holy Word.

Paul counseled Timothy to study God’s Word diligently, so that He might rightly divide it and never be put to shame. With lives hanging in the balance, a clear-eyed knowledge of the objective facts of the truth would be essential to the young Timothy’s ministry. Those who profess a love for Jesus will be found diligently plumbing the depths of God’s Word.

Consider This: If studying God’s Word is essential to knowing and rightly dividing truth, why did Jesus rebuke the Pharisees of His day for searching the Scriptures? (See John 5:39.) Make the point that the Pharisees believed that they could be saved by their knowledge of the Scriptures. They felt no need for a Savior. This partially explains why they were so ready to have Jesus killed. In light of this, what was it
A Conscience Seared

Last week we saw how Jesus had sharp words for the fake “righteousness” of the scribes and the Pharisees (see Matt. 23:27), calling them “hypocrites.” The word *hypocrite* in the original language (*hupokrites*) means “actor.” Jesus was letting them know that He could discern their inner feelings and secret sins. It was as though He was telling them, “You act one way but inside you are another, as though you were acting in a play. Cannot you be real?” Another time Jesus said, “‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me”’” (Mark 7:6, NKJV). His meaning is obvious.

**Read** 1 Timothy 4:2 and Titus 1:15. What important point is Paul talking about here? Our conscience is the place where the Holy Spirit makes contact with us. What can happen to us if we constantly are doing wrong?

No question, the more we continue in evil, and the more we do what we know is wrong, the more defiled our conscience becomes and the further from the Truth we get. Again, you can have more than enough head knowledge to be saved. The final fires will, unfortunately, have way too many folks who knew more than enough objective truths to be saved. But, as we are saying, objective truth alone is not a fruit of the Spirit. Truth lived out in our life, that’s the fruit we need to bear.

**Read** Hebrews 5:14 and John 7:16, 17. How do these texts help us better understand the idea of truth as a fruit of the Spirit?

What’s your own experience of a “seared conscience”? How long did it take until the act that had, at first, seared your conscience barely touched it at all? Why did that happen, and why is it so spiritually dangerous?
specifically about the study habits of the Pharisees that merited con-
demnation from Jesus?

III. Unfolding the Infinite *(Review John 15:26 and John 16:13 with your class.)*

Both of these texts underscore the pivotal role that the Holy Spirit plays in helping the believer know and live the truth as found in Jesus. No matter how earnest our efforts, no amount of digging for truth will avail much without the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Why do we need the Holy Spirit? For one, the human mind is finite and severely weakened by sin. Infinite truth can be comprehended only by finite minds at a limited rate. For this reason alone, we need the Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide us “into all truth.” On the face of it, that is terrific news, but there’s more to Jesus’ words than the eye first perceives. This promise refers not only to truths that will be unfolded while we are here on earth but also to truths unfolded in the world to come. It must, for God’s truth is infinite. The fact that the redeemed continually will be learning the truths of God may give us a hint about the role of the Holy Spirit in heaven’s educational plan for the redeemed.

**Consider This:** We’ve learned so far that Truth is a Person—Jesus—and that Truth is unfolded to the believer through the person of the Holy Spirit. It is possible to get to know Jesus, the Truth. How is it likewise possible to know the Holy Spirit? How can we distinguish the Spirit’s voice amid the chorus of voices shouting for our attention?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. We are urged in Scripture to commit our lives to Jesus, to go beyond a mere profession of truth to a full embrace of it. Why is it not enough simply to live the truth without ever openly confessing it?

2. Many well-meaning believers use their knowledge of truth to bludgeon those who may not share their beliefs. If the Truth is Jesus, how does this behavior impact the nonbeliever’s view of Jesus?
Walking in Truth

“I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father” (2 John 4, NKJV). “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1 John 1:6, NKJV). What important point is being made in both these texts regarding what it means to have a saving relationship with Jesus?

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“Truth, as a fruit of the Spirit, isn’t just what we know—it’s what we do. Living in God’s light means more than just knowledge. Look at how John explains what walking in darkness is like: “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:9–11).

Thus, walking in the light, walking in the truth, is more than just keeping the Ten Commandments, at least according to the letter of the law. In the end, when all is said and done, isn’t living in the truth basically manifested by how we deal with people and how we treat them? If we are sharp, cross, unforgiving, vengeful, hateful, unsympathetic; if we treat people as means rather than as ends, if we are trampling upon others in an attempt to advance ourselves, then we are walking in darkness, no matter how strictly we keep the Sabbath, no matter how faithfully we adhere to the health message, no matter how much we profess faith in Jesus, pay tithe, and go to church. In one sense, it’s often a lot easier to learn correct doctrine and theology than it is to be kind, selfless, and giving to others, is it not?

Think about your interactions with folks in the past twenty-four hours. How have you treated them? What kind of words did you use? How comfortable would you be if your attitudes and actions toward them were made public (one day they will be; see Matt. 10:26). What does your answer tell you about what changes you need to see made in your life?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Application Questions:

1. If you were to embrace completely the truth already revealed to you by the Holy Spirit, how would your life change? For instance, would your attitude at work be different? What about your speech? Would you need to change your driving habits? What about your entertainment choices? What are you doing with the truth that God has already revealed to you?

2. Complete the following statements.

   The truth that I want God to help me live this week is:

   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

   I am choosing to live this truth because:

   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Ask the class members, “What do the following activities teach me about why Jesus is the living Truth and the only road to heaven?”

Jesus came to remove the veil from the hearts of the people concerning their lack of understanding of the Old Testament and to open their eyes to the truth. Invite a class member, or members, who are musically inclined to write a song in the coming week that describes how Jesus removes the veil from our hearts and takes away our spiritual blindness. Open or close the class with the song. Or teach the song to the class. Discuss how the words of the song deepen our understanding of how Jesus opens our minds and hearts to the truth.

MapQuest will give you directions from any beginning point to any destination in the world. GPS (global positioning system) technology beams your exact location to your vehicle from a satellite positioned up in space. Both of these navigational tools help you to get where you need to go more efficiently and accurately. If the Bible is our atlas to heaven, what would be on the “map” that gets us there? If you were to give someone directions to get there or draw a map to heaven, what turns, road signs, and spiritual landmarks would those directions include? For those who wish to take it a step further, what would such a map look like? Discuss your ideas as a class and draw it out on paper. Provide markers and paper or draw your map on a blackboard.
**Further Study:** “It is not the length of time we labor but our willingness and fidelity in the work that makes it acceptable to God. In all our service a full surrender of self is demanded. The smallest duty done in sincerity and self-forgetfulness is more pleasing to God than the greatest work when marred with self-seeking. He looks to see how much of the spirit of Christ we cherish, and how much of the likeness of Christ our work reveals. He regards more the love and faithfulness with which we work than the amount we do.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 402, emphasis supplied.

“The service rendered in sincerity of heart has great recompense. ‘Thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly.’ By the life we live through the grace of Christ, the character is formed. The original loveliness begins to be restored to the soul. The attributes of the character of Christ are imparted, and the image of the Divine begins to shine forth. The faces of men and women who walk and work with God express the peace of heaven. They are surrounded with the atmosphere of heaven. For these souls the kingdom of God has begun. They have Christ’s joy, the joy of being a blessing to humanity. They have the honor of being accepted for the Master’s use; they are trusted to do His work in His name.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 535.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Is there any sense at all in which truth could be relative; that is, it may not apply all the time to every situation? If not, why not? Are there certain truths, perhaps, that could be relative while others aren’t?

2. Dwell more on this idea of what it means to be sincere in your faith. However crucial sincerity is, why is that not enough? After all, folks who strap bombs to themselves and blow themselves up are, it would seem, sincere. What else is needed?

3. Why is spending time in the Word so important if truth is more than head knowledge? What are ways in which we can learn to study our Bible so that the Truth in there can impact and change our lives for the better?

4. How can you help someone whose conscience has been so hardened in sin that they don’t feel their need of help?

5. In class, discuss this question: What’s better, to do the right thing for the wrong reason or the wrong thing for the right reason?
The Fruit of the Spirit: The Essence of Christian Character

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Matt. 6:33, John 15:8, Rom. 3:20–26, 14:17, 1 Tim. 6:11, 1 John 2:15.

Memory Text: “To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27, NKJV).

When Moses asked God to show him His glory, it was then that the Lord revealed to him His character as merciful, gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth (Exod. 34:6). And so when “we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, [we] are changed into the same image from glory [character] to glory [character], even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

“By believing in Christ, the fallen race he has redeemed may obtain that faith which works by love and purifies the soul from all defilement. Then Christlike attributes appear: for by beholding Christ men become changed into the same image from glory to glory, from character to character. Good fruit is produced. The character is fashioned after the divine similitude, and integrity, uprightness, and true benevolence are manifested.”—Ellen G. White, My Life Today, p. 54.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 27.
Seek First the Kingdom of God

So often our prayers are more about what we can get as opposed to what we should become. Think about your own prayers, or about the prayers that you hear others pray. No matter how legitimate the concerns are, what category do most of them fall under: What can I get, or what can I become? How do we understand this tendency in light of what Jesus says to us below?

“‘But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you’” (Matt. 6:33, NKJV). What does Jesus mean when He tells us to seek “first” the kingdom of God? Why seek that first? See Matt. 16:26.

How does Romans 14:17 help us understand what the kingdom of God is?

Notice that righteousness, peace, and joy are the fruit of the Spirit. Therefore, we should seek first the fruit of the Spirit before anything else. In the end, we can have everything the world offers, but what does that mean if we don’t have righteousness, peace, and joy?

If someone were to ask, “But does this mean that Jesus isn’t interested in my physical or financial well-being?” How would you answer in the light of Christ’s command to put the fruit of the Spirit before physical or material needs?

A concerned mother said, “Pastor, please pray for my boy. He is out of the faith, and he has lost his job. Pray that he will find work.” Was this concerned mother seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness for her son? Keeping in mind that the priority of the Christian life is not to get but to become, what should her request for her boy have been?

What are your main concerns as revealed not just by your prayers but by your life in general: getting what you want for yourself or becoming what God wants you to become? What does your answer tell you about your priorities?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Romans 14:17

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Contemplate the benefits of salvation.
- **Feel:** Experience joy and peace.
- **Do:** Grow up in righteousness through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Know: Salvation’s Benefits
   - A Righteousness in Jesus is the essence of salvation. What does righteousness consist of?
   - B Life in Christ should not be joyless. Why might following Christ be described as difficult?
   - C The Holy Spirit majors in the central truths of salvation: righteousness, joy, and peace. Our key text cautions against giving food and drink a role they do not have. What is the purpose of this caution?

II. Feel: Peace and Joy
   - A There are people who seem afraid, unable, or unwilling to express joy and peace in Christ. What might be the cause of this gloomy attitude?

III. Do: The Deepening of Fellowship
   - A How is salvation to be enjoyed rather than endured?
   - B How does obedience in an ever-deepening fellowship with Jesus develop our Christian lives?
   - C The fruit of the Spirit is never found apart from the Holy Spirit. In what ways can we cooperate in order to bear fruit?
   - D A study of this quarter’s Bible study guide shows us the possibilities available to us for Spirit-filled lives. What are the most likely things that limit and block God’s power in our lives?

**Summary:** The fruits of salvation are enjoyed in the Holy Spirit. They bring freedom from a negative life. They are cultivated through the Holy Spirit’s guidance and deepen our fellowship with Christ.
Other Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22, 23 and Ephesians 5:9 are not the only texts that list the fruit that constitute the essence of Christian character. Many of the fruit are repeated in 1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Timothy 3:10, and 2 Peter 1:5–7, where qualities are added, such as godliness, virtue, and knowledge. It is interesting to note that 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 echoes the qualities of love and states many of them using the negative word not: “does not envy; . . . does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity” (NKJV).

It should be clear by now that there is not one official checklist when it comes to the fruit of the Spirit. There are many different aspects and nuances of Christian character. What the apostles do in each case is to list those that are especially applicable to their readers. What led Paul to the enumeration in Galatians was doubtless his pastoral knowledge of the particular needs of the congregation to which he was writing.

The fruit of “godliness” is mentioned in 1 Timothy 6:11. In the original language, the word godliness means “reverence, respect, and piety toward God.” Romans 5:4, 5 mentions the quality of “hope.” What role does hope play in the Christian character? When all is said and done, our Christian faith offers us nothing if not hope.

Second Peter 1:5–7 is a list of qualities, among them “virtue,” which is not mentioned in the list in Galatians 5:22, 23. Virtue is associated with moral goodness, as are modesty and purity. Why is this quality indispensable in the Christian life? How does this quality relate to the seventh commandment?

Second Peter 1:5, 6 adds “knowledge” to the list. Though the word that is used, gnosis, signifies general knowledge and understanding as fruit of the Spirit-filled life, what role would knowledge play? How would knowledge relate to, for instance, the gift of discernment?

Peter did not call his list in 2 Peter 1:5–7 the fruit of the Spirit, but essentially that’s what the qualities listed are, because they reveal what kind of people we should be as followers of Jesus.

How well are these characteristics manifested in your own life?
If you are discouraged by what you see, what’s your one hope?
What’s the only place you can flee to, and what can you find there?

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Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: When we bear the fruit of the Spirit, the Spirit takes over our entire being. Such a connection makes it possible to reflect the character of Christ through our actions, a result of total submission to God.

Just for Teachers: Before ascending to heaven, Jesus gave His disciples one last commission—to go and spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. Paul reiterates this in 2 Corinthians 5:20: “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us” (NIV). What a powerful statement—Christ’s ambassadors, instruments of God. Emphasize to class members that it is our sacred responsibility, as Christians, to bear the fruit of the Spirit.

Opening Activity: In Matthew 7:15–23, Jesus is warning the people of the false prophets soon to come. He says they will be disguised, but there will be one way to distinguish them—by their fruit. “‘A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. . . . So then, you will know them by their fruits’” (vss. 18–20, NASB).

We also are known by our fruit. Our words, our actions, our lives all speak to our character. This week’s lesson calls love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control the essence of Christian character. How do you grow such fruit in your life?

Consider This: List other ways you can identify Christians. What constitutes Christian behavior, personality, perspective, and lifestyle? How can you bear more fruit? What would be the ideal characteristics of a Christian ambassador?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Jesus: Our Best Example (Review John 3:34 with your class.)

Jesus’ ministry began with a special anointing in which the Father gave Him the
Perseverance in Faith

Yesterday’s discussion question brought up the question of how well we are doing in cultivating the fruit that is our privilege to bear for the honor and glory of God. No doubt, as one looks at all these qualities of character and then compares oneself to them, it would be easy to get discouraged. After all, shouldn’t we be bearing more fruit than we are?

That’s a fair question, one that we should all seriously think about. “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith” (2 Cor. 13:5). We need to take stock of ourselves, of how we are living and of what kind of witness we present to the world.

At the same time, too, we can face a danger. As Christians, we have the example of Jesus, the only sinless human being who ever lived. As we compare ourselves to Him, how easy it could be to get discouraged. How easy to see His sinlessness and perfection in contrast to our sinfulness and weaknesses. We do have a perfect standard to follow, a perfect law to obey, and a perfect Savior to emulate. As we all know, we often fall far short of that standard, of that law, and of that Savior. How easy it can be, too, after falling and falling, after not seeing the kind of growth we would like, to get discouraged, even to the point of giving up, thinking, “Why bother? I just can’t do it.”

Here, though, is where we need to understand fully what salvation by faith is about. Here is where we need to understand where our salvation lies, and here is where we need to understand what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross.

Read Romans 3:20–26. What message is there for us about salvation? Why is this truth so important to cling to, especially when we feel discouraged about the state of our own fruit?

No matter how earnestly we seek to live the Christian life and fight the battle against sin and self, as long as we keep before us, every day, every moment, the reality that our acceptance with God is found in Jesus and His righteousness, which He worked out for us and which He credits to us by faith, we will never give up. Why should we? Our salvation remains secure, not in ourselves but in Jesus.
Holy Spirit and His gifts without measure. It was this constant presence of the Holy Spirit and His fruit that empowered and enabled Jesus to overcome sin.

Jesus is our best Example of how to live a Spirit-led life. His close communion with the Father shone through all aspects of His life. Tempted by Satan himself, Jesus showed self-control and remained strong (Matt. 4:1–11). Falsely accused and beaten, He was calm and gentle (John 18:1–11). Pleading with God in despair, He remained faithful (Mark 14:35, 36). Put to death by His own people, He forgave (Luke 23:33, 34).

Jesus manifested what it means to bear the fruit of the Spirit. He was so in tune with God that all these things became a natural part of His character.

Consider This: Who else embodied the fruit of the Spirit in the Bible? What similarities do they share with Jesus? What struggles did they face, and what was their response?

II. Growing in the Spirit (Review 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 with your class.)

Second Timothy 3:16, 17 tells us that Scripture completes a man. Time spent daily in prayer and study is the food we need to develop the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Jesus was well versed in Scripture. He taught regularly in the synagogue. And when tempted in the wilderness, He was quick to quote Moses (Deut. 8:3, Matt. 4:4). He consciously took time away from life’s distractions to commune with God. In His most desperate times, He sought the Father. And when things were good, He thanked Him. It was this deep connection with God that enabled Him to reflect the Spirit so fully.

Just as Jesus made a conscious effort to take time away to be with His Father, our spiritual growth is proportionate to how much work we put into it. The joy of living the Christian life is to know that you never are done being used by the Lord. With the changing seasons of life and time and skills and needs, God has a purpose for each of us.

Consider This: It is a struggle to remain in constant communion with God as Jesus did. There are so many distractions that seem to get in the way of maintaining that connection. What are some ways in which you can make time for prayer and communion with God? How can you strive to be more aware of God’s will in your life?
The Challenge of the World

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15, NKJV). What is this text saying? Does it mean that God doesn’t love those who love the world, or that those who love the world don’t love God? Explain.

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“At times the longings of the soul go out for holiness and heaven; but there is no time to turn aside from the din of the world to listen to the majestic and authoritative utterances of the Spirit of God. The things of eternity are made subordinate, the things of the world supreme. It is impossible for the seed of the word to bring forth fruit; for the life of the soul is given to nourish the thorns of worldliness.” —Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 51.

While we must be aware of the dangers of legalism, ancient Israel always backslid when it tried to contemporize itself and become like the nations around it. First John 2:15 warns that love of the world makes impossible a heartfelt love for God. How careful we need to be as a church in making sure that, in our attempts to reach the world, we don’t become enamored by it and swept into it, all in the name of the Lord!

How can a person know when his or her love for the world has superseded his or her love for God? What signs should we look for?

The danger of loving the world more than God takes on new meaning in James 4:4: “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (NKJV). Why would James use the metaphor of adultery for church members who are swept up with the world? Notice, too, how in 1 John 2:15 John leaves no room for compromise. It’s either God, or it’s the world.

What aspects of the world do you struggle with the most? What things do you find alluring? How can you learn to fight the fight of faith and not get swept up in something that, in the end, cannot satisfy and will destroy you?
III. Submitting to the Spirit *(Review John 3:6 with your class.)*

The most basic, and vital, way to cultivate spiritual growth is complete submission to God. Paul says, “Having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” *(Rom. 6:18, NKJV)*. It is this kind of absolute submission that is essential to spiritual growth.

Sin is in our nature. Galatians 5:17 says that our “sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit,” that “they are in conflict with each other” *(NIV)*. If we are to truly bear the fruit of the Spirit, we must submit ourselves fully to God. We cannot persevere through life’s trials alone; without God we will fail. We bear the fruit of the Spirit when we are fully surrendered to God and the Holy Spirit is allowed to work in us. “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit” *(John 3:6)*.

**Consider This:** Oftentimes our human nature gets in the way of total submission to God. How can we overcome our natural tendency to do things ourselves? Jesus tells us, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God . . . and all these things shall be added unto you” *(Matt. 6:33)*. How does this counsel apply to the fruit of the Spirit?

> **STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Jesus’ life on earth exemplified the marriage of the law and love. When He left, the Holy Spirit filled this void. The presence of the Spirit in our life amplifies the message that the congruence of law and love is vital to Christian living. The fruit of the Spirit enables us to live in such a manner.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Bible study and prayer are good ways to strengthen your relationship with God and to practice submission. But what are some other tangible ways you can learn to submit to God?

2. Second Corinthians 13:5 tells us to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith. But like Paul, we often find ourselves falling short the closer we get to Christ. How can you keep from being discouraged by slow growth?

3. Jesus was tested at all points during His ministry. Satan tempted Him. The Pharisees despised Him. His closest friends failed to understand Him.
How to Grow the Fruit of the Spirit
*(John 15:8)*

Although we cannot make a seed grow, there are definitely things we can do that will facilitate growth until it bears fruit. So it is in the Spirit-filled life. While the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer is a part of the great mystery of life itself, Scripture has given us definite instruction on how to encourage that growth so that we may fulfill Jesus’ desire that we bring forth much fruit to the glory of the Father *(John 15:8)*.

What follows below are some ways to encourage the growth of the fruit of the Spirit:

**Through study of the Word of God.** What does 2 Timothy 3:16 declare that the Scripture is profitable for? As a result, what will be accomplished in our lives? *(See vs. 17; see also Ps. 119:105.)*

**Through prayer.** “Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is the secret of spiritual power. No other means of grace can be substituted, and the health of the soul be preserved. Prayer brings the heart into immediate contact with the Well-spring of life, and strengthens the sinew and muscle of the religious experience. Neglect the exercise of prayer, or engage in prayer spasmodically, now and then, as seems convenient, and you lose your hold on God. The spiritual faculties lose their vitality, the religious experience lacks health and vigor.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, pp. 254, 255.

**Through the right kind of thoughts.** “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” *(Phil. 4:8)*. How can we learn to keep our minds on elevated thoughts?

**Through our Christian witness.** The man that Jesus healed of demons requested to go with Him. Jesus denied his request and instead asked him to return to where he lived and tell what the Lord had done for him *(Mark 5:18–20)*. How does sharing our faith contribute to the growth of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives?

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**The fruit of the Spirit aren’t going to happen on their own. Your own choices will determine your destiny. What changes do you need to make in your lifestyle, in your associations, in anything and everything you do that can better allow for your spiritual growth?**
Yet, whatever the circumstance, He always responded in a loving manner. How do you deal with situations that test your Christian character?

4 Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness in communion with God. Disappearing for a month is not practical in today’s world. What are some ways you can make time for personal communion with God?

5 There are many who have never heard of Jesus but who are moral, patient, and kind. Discuss whether or not these people are driven by the Spirit. Do they bear the fruit of the Spirit? Why or why not? In the context of Galatians 5:17, how does the motivation behind actions make a difference?

6 Galatians 5:18 says, “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (NKJV). What does this verse mean to you? Does it free us from the consequences of sin? What law is Paul referring to?

7 When Jesus ascended to heaven, He looked at His troubled disciples and said He would send them the Great Comforter, the Holy Spirit. In what ways does the Holy Spirit bring comfort to your life? What role, if any, does the fruit of the Spirit within you bring comfort to your everyday life?

STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Challenge the class to come up with action plans that cultivate spiritual growth in different settings.

**Closing Activity:** Divide the class into groups. Give each group one of the following scenarios: home, work, peers, and church community. Instruct them to come up with at least two practical action plans that encourage growth of the fruit of the Spirit. These plans easily should be carried out within their respective settings. To help guide their planning, have students answer the following questions:

1. What are the unique needs of this setting?
2. To whom are you ministering?
3. What are some things that would promote bearing fruit of the Spirit within this setting? What would discourage it?
4. What can you specifically do to foster an environment better suited to spiritual growth?
5. How would Jesus minister in this situation?

To conclude, have the groups share their action plans.
Further Study: “God bids us fill the mind with great thoughts, pure thoughts. He desires us to meditate upon His love and mercy, to study His wonderful work in the great plan of redemption. Then clearer and still clearer will be our perception of truth, higher, holier, our desire for purity of heart and clearness of thought. The soul dwelling in the pure atmosphere of holy thought will be transformed by communion with God through the study of the Scriptures.

“And bring forth fruit.” Those who, having heard the word, keep it, will bring forth fruit in obedience. The word of God, received into the soul, will be manifest in good works. Its results will be seen in a Christlike character and life. Christ said of Himself, “I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart.” Ps. 40:8. “I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me.” John 5:30. And the Scripture says, “He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.” 1 John 2:6.”—Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 60.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a church, with a mission to spread the three angels’ messages to the world, we often struggle to find ways to make ourselves and our message relevant to the culture around us. What inherent dangers do we face when we do that? History shows that more often than not, the church through the centuries ends up getting converted to the ways of the world, as opposed to the world getting converted to the ways of the church. What about us, as Adventists? Do we fool ourselves into thinking that this isn’t happening to us, or that it can’t happen to us? Do we see evidence of this already happening? And, if so, what can we do?

2. In the twenty-first century, in your own culture, what are some of the greatest challenges to growing the fruit of the Spirit? What specific aspects of the culture must you unflinchingly fight against?

3. Why is the Cross so central to the whole question of the fruit of the Spirit and character development? What does the Cross offer us that’s indispensable in character development? After all, without the Cross, what would even be the purpose of bearing this fruit?

4. Why do our character development and good works bring glory to God? What’s that all about?