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The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Manuscript Evaluation Committee, whose members serve as consulting editors. The published guide reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).
History, secular or sacred, is not told in terms of statistics, programmatic statements, tables, or figures. It often is told through stories. Jesus Himself was a storyteller, and He told them with great power too (Matt. 7:28, 13:3).

All of this quarter’s lessons are about stories but not always the common and well-known ones with such “stars” as Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah, Daniel in the lions’ den, or David and Goliath. We will look, instead, at characters who did not make the headlines but who existed in the background, the ones easily overlooked and forgotten.

Our focus this quarter will be on background characters in the Old Testament. Some are the good guys of the story, some are not so good. Though not much is written about them, enough is written that the careful reader can learn from these characters—which include women, power brokers, servants, and royalty.

In their stories the challenges that confront these characters are not very different, in principle, from the challenges that we face today. However different their culture and background from ours, they, too, felt the pain of living in a sin-stained world, a world struggling amid the great controversy between good and evil. What makes this battle even more difficult is that it’s not always easy to discern just what is the good and what is the evil, for sometimes the line between them can appear to be blurry.

Often in the context of the big picture, the lives of these background characters
might not seem so important. This is a feeling with which many of us can identify. How easy to think, *After all, in the scheme of things, what do any of us, as individuals, matter?* In the end, however, these “minor” characters made it into God’s master story, and from their stories we can learn things that can help us to write a different and better story for ourselves.

Of course, it is not always easy to pay attention to the supporting cast. Instinctively, when we read or listen to a story, we tend to follow the main story line and focus on the main characters. That’s common and understandable, which is why this quarter we are going to look at the “little people” and thus get a fuller understanding of the biblical text.

Unfortunately, in our contemporary world we are beginning to lose our capacity to listen carefully—too much action on the screen, too many quick cuts in the video clip, too much noise from the radio. We miss so much. Through focusing on the shadow characters of the Old Testament, we will read Scripture afresh, looking beyond the obvious to discover the joy of learning new truths from God’s Word.

Finally, as we look over the shoulders of the biblical authors and at the supporting cast, it is good to remember the power of our own lives and examples. More than anything else, people in the twenty-first century want to see something work before they consider all the intricate ins and outs of a particular cause. Our neighbors, our friends, and our family first want to see our personal story before they are ready to listen to our testimony and to biblical doctrines and beliefs.

In this sense, our stories can become powerful tools in our witness to others about what God has done for us. As with these background figures, we can become part of the great story of salvation, even if we might not be the main characters in the grander scheme of the cosmic drama that unfolds around us.

*Gerald and Chantal Klingbeil, together with their three daughters, Hannah, Sarah, and Jemima, have lived in Africa, South America, Europe, and Asia. Currently, Gerald Klingbeil is an associate editor of the Adventist Review®.*
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.
Story and History

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 39:6–12, Josh. 3:9–17, 1 Sam. 24:1–6, 1 Kings 12:1–16, Job 1:1–12.

Memory Text: “Every Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17, NET).

Though most folk harbor no great love for the study of history itself, most people do love a good story. Every civilization has a rich repertoire of stories that explain (or claim to explain) the origins, values, relationships, and structures of its culture. These stories, told over generations, are often teaching tools.

In the modern age, storytelling was downplayed: people looked for facts and scientific answers to explain life. However, facts alone could not answer life’s most important questions. Today a new generation, often dubbed “postmodern,” has rediscovered the power of stories.

In that sense, the Bible is contemporary because it is full of stories. Not legends, not “cleverly devised myths” (2 Pet. 1:16, ESV), but historical and personal stories that reveal truth about God and His interaction with fallen humanity. These stories describe real people, battling with real-life problems and interacting with the living God, who offers answers to these problems.

Every story needs a setting. This week we will explore different settings and their historical contexts in order to understand better the characters we’ll be studying all quarter.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 2.*
People and Plots

Plot is defined as the succession of events that lead to a conclusion. Everyone is born, lives, and one day will die. These are the broad parameters of the plot of life. In between, life consists of many smaller plots that often are motivated by conflict or tension. Looking for a plot means trying to connect all the relevant parts of the story in order to see the big picture. In the book of Job, for example, there are two plots.

Identify the two plots in the story of Job. See Job 1:1–12.

If we want to understand the story of Job, we need to understand its two-dimensional plot. As a matter of fact, the Bible has no one-dimensional plots, because God always is active in history and human lives, even if working behind the scenes. In the first two chapters of Job, we can imagine changing channels, as on a TV set, as we jump between the earthly and the heavenly plots.

Stories, however, are more than plots. People make stories.

Describe in as much detail as you can the prophet Huldah as described in 2 Kings 22:14.

Characters are closely connected to the plot of the story. How we understand the character(s) depends to a large degree on the information given by the narrator, who may even be one of the characters. Let’s take Huldah as an example: Is she one of the main characters in the story? No. This story actually is about the discovery of the book of the Law during the reign of King Josiah. Though Huldah may not be a main character, every character in a story is vital to the development of the story. Does Huldah have children? How old is she? We don’t know the answers to these questions. Biblical narrative tends to be very concise and often abbreviated. This means that we need to pay close attention to every piece of information we are given. Huldah was regarded as a reliable prophetess of the Lord. The biblical author gives us information about her husband’s family, because women during Old Testament times were identified with their husband’s families. Her address also is given. As in modern times, official documents always require a name and an address to prove that a person is who he or she claims to be.

What is your plot? What kind of character are you? If your story was written as a Bible narrative, how might it read in contrast to how it ought to read?
**The Lesson in Brief**

**Key Text:** 2 Timothy 3:16, 17

**The Student Will:**

- **Know:** Recognize how characters, plots, settings, points of view, and historical backgrounds create memorable stories in the Bible.
- **Feel:** Treasure the opportunity to become acquainted with Bible characters and learn from their life lessons.
- **Do:** Take to heart the life lessons recounted in Scripture and allow the Holy Spirit to use them to transform their lives.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Stories Critical for Today**

- **A** Like other stories, Bible stories contain characters that act and react within circumstances and settings. How are Bible stories unique? Why are these stories, set in times and places so different from ours today, so important?

II. **Feel: Treasure Trove**

- **A** The authority of Scripture as God’s Word gives Bible stories an edge that most other stories don’t have. What points of view make them invaluable?
- **B** How do the stories of Bible characters speak to us about our own lives?

III. **Do: Buried Treasure**

- **A** Buried treasure does no one any good. How do we unlock the valuable lessons in Scripture stories and bring them to life in our own circumstances?
- **B** Why is it critical to have the Holy Spirit interpret these stories?
- **C** What quandaries in life do we face that need to be informed through the life lessons of Bible characters?

**Summary:** We can benefit from an examination of Bible characters and how they faced the challenges in their lives, considering how they applied—or didn’t apply—godly principles in their life choices. Their stories can teach us to rely on God’s way to meet the challenges we face daily.
Where and How?

Setting conveys reality to the story and gives it atmosphere and mood. For example, why, in Ruth 4:1, 2, does Boaz locate his legal case in the gate and not in his home or in the house of the mayor of the city of Bethlehem? Obviously, the gate—being the most public place in ancient times—adds an important legal element to the story. Setting also can give us a clue about the time period in which the narrative unfolds. If we hear a story that is located inside a car or in an airport terminal, we know without much reflection that the story does not come from the time of David or Martin Luther.

Compare the settings of the following two stories: 1 Samuel 24:1–6 and Genesis 39:6–12. How do the settings contribute to the plots of the stories?

Settings help us to better understand the action of the story. David and his men are alone with Saul, who is unprotected and extremely vulnerable. The setting highlights the stellar character of David. He does not take advantage of this ideal opportunity to rid himself of Saul before Saul seeks to rid himself of David, a fact that reveals David’s respect for God’s anointed leader.

The setting in the story of Joseph also paints an opportunity. Joseph is handsome and in a position of power. His master’s wife is infatuated with him, and they are alone in the house. Joseph, like David, shows his sterling character in resisting this opportunity.

But setting is not the only important element of a story. We need to look at the point of view of the narrator, as well. We see the story unfold through the narrator’s eyes, which usually provides us with important information but sometimes may withhold information from us. This particularly is true in secular stories. Though we do have points of view in biblical accounts, we must read them on the assumption that they are inspired by the Holy Spirit and that the truth revealed is God’s truth.

Think of David and Joseph in those particular settings. How easily they could have rationalized doing something other than what they did. The fact that they didn’t tells us so much about their character. How often do you rationalize your wrong actions?
Learning Cycle

▶STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God is active not only in the broad sweep of history but also in the lives of individuals.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize that while God is concerned with the fate of nations and peoples and planets, He also is capable of attending to the details of our lives if we submit ourselves to Him.

“Finding patterns where none exist.” A search of this phrase on Google yields numerous hits. If you investigate the results, you will find, naturally, a plethora of advertisements from people who want to sell you things you don’t need, from refrigerators to Angora rabbits. But if you move past the tables and wares of the cyber merchants, you will find examples of the many ways human beings attempt to discover patterns and meaning in the universe and in their own lives. The thirst for meaning and patterns incarnates itself in endless forms, from the superstitious to the downright strange: astrology birth charts, bizarre speculations about the ancestry of the British royal family, and quizzes and tests that will presumably tell us why we are the way we are. In other words, we tell ourselves stories that explain things.

The good news is that God never gives us the desire for something that doesn’t exist. Meaning and patterns are out there, but deriving them from anything less than a divinely inspired narrative is a way to, usually, get the story wrong. We are part of God’s story, and God wants to be in our story. Here’s a better phrase: “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.”

**Discuss With the Class:** In what ways do you see God’s story in your story? How does your life reflect God’s plan? How does it fit in with the larger story of salvation?

▶STEP 2—Explore

**Bible Commentary**

I. The Plot: “Have You Considered My Servant Job?” *(Review Job 1:1–12 with your class.)*
From Victory to the “Dark Ages”

For the rest of this week we will take a closer look at a few crucial periods of Israel’s history that will function as the backdrop for all the individuals we will be studying. We begin with Israel’s entry into the Promised Land.

After God’s mighty acts during the Exodus and the wilderness journey, the people of Israel have for a second time reached the border of the Promised Land. Under their new leader, Joshua, they are about to cross over the Jordan on dry land (Josh. 3:16, 17), a miracle that echoes the crossing of the Red Sea during the time of the Exodus (Exodus 14).

Read Joshua 3:9–17. What is the purpose of this miracle?

Canaan was not taken by Israel because of Joshua’s military genius or Israel’s valiant efforts. Victory over the inhabitants of the Canaanite city-states was achieved only by God’s powerful intervention. When Israel was obedient, God gave victory; however, when the Israelites relied on their own strength, they failed hopelessly.

After the death of Joshua and the elders, some sections of the Promised Land still were dominated by the Canaanites (Judg. 1:27, 28). It seems that the Israelites’ faith grew smaller as their vision shrunk. Instead of seeing the whole Promised Land in their possession, they became preoccupied with their own livelihoods and lost the larger vision and ideal that God had for Israel as a people. Many scholars call the following centuries the “dark ages” of Israel.

Read Judges 17:6. What kind of moral climate does it reveal?

When we lose the big picture of what God has in mind for us, minors become majors. Israel lost its perspective as a nation; tribalism took over. Throughout the book of Judges, the various tribes and clans were ready and willing to fight one another. Religious practices were fused according to personal convenience, and compromise with the surrounding cultures was widespread. According to the author of the book of Judges, this was caused by intermarriage with the Canaanites who were still living in the land (Judg. 3:3–7). As a result of this spiritual decline, Israel slipped into a cycle of domination by foreign powers, liberation, idolatry, and, again, domination.

What’s so dangerous about compromise is that it comes quietly, slowly, and almost imperceptibly. How differently do you live now than a few years ago? Might some of these changes be a result of compromise?
The book of Job concerns a region and a historical period that are peripheral to much of the Old Testament. For example, the exact location of Uz is disputed. Job is one of the few protagonists in the Old Testament who was neither an Israelite nor ancestral to the Israelites. Yet, nowhere else is the juxtaposition between the activity in human and divine realms so clear.

Job is described as a man who “feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1, NIV). In our world as it is, these characteristics aren’t always rewarded or esteemed. “Nice guys finish last,” we are told. People lose their careers for telling the truth or for following their conscience rather than the crowd.

This was not the case with Job. Job was “the greatest man among all the people of the East” (vs. 3, NIV). In a world in which riches and power are often mistaken for wisdom, intelligence, and virtue, Job was rich, powerful, wise, intelligent, and virtuous. And he knew where it came from, even if he could not have known about the spiritual war that was raging around him as casus belli.

Job, while he feared God and consulted Him even on the “minor” things in his life, probably never imagined himself as the topic of dinner conversation in heavenly realms. However, at the moment recounted in Job 1:6–12, the great controversy suddenly was specific. And it was specifically focused on him. Job’s reaction to evil was to shun it, to have nothing to do with it. This reaction was the right attitude; but it didn’t guarantee that the feelings were mutual. If God is active in our lives, Satan will try to be also. Any of us, like Job, can become disputed territory in the struggle between good and evil that we call the great controversy. This is the plot pervading even the most seemingly mundane stories found in the Bible.

Consider This: How literally should we take the idea of spiritual forces working behind the scenes as portrayed in Job 1:1–12? Why does it matter?

II. Character: What—and What Not—to Do and Be (Review Genesis 39:6–12 with your class.)

As stated before, the stories in the Bible are not merely stories. All Bible stories are about constructing a life that finds its center in the presence of God while living in a world that does not. Sometimes the protagonists recognize this imperative; other times they fail to. Either attitude—as well as the courses of action dictated by them—has consequences that can be
Of Kings and Princes

Though given so much by God, and promised so much more—were they to obey—the Israelites were influenced negatively by the surrounding culture. For instance, they saw in the surrounding kingdoms a very different political structure. All of these nations had a king. Combined with the fact that Samuel’s sons did not emulate their father’s behavior and leadership but “took bribes, and perverted justice” (1 Sam. 8:3, NKJV), the tribal leadership of Israel felt that it was time to appoint a king over Israel (vss. 4, 5). Samuel is not at all happy with this decision but is told by the Lord to comply (vs. 7).

The Benjamite Saul is anointed as king by Samuel (1 Sam. 10:1) and begins his reign in Gibea. However, as already foreseen by God, things are not easy for the new king. Tribal tensions continue. Israel’s very existence is in jeopardy due to pressure from the powers surrounding her. The new king is not committed to following God’s requirements (1 Sam. 15:3, 8, 9), and as a result, God finally rejects Saul.

Afterward, David is anointed as the future king of Israel. As expected, Saul does not want simply to hand over the power to the new military champion, David, and the next decade is marked by internal strife, with David always being on the run.

The next major turn in Israel’s history comes when Saul and his sons are killed in battle against the Philistines (1 Sam. 31:1–6). David is first made king over Judah and then, seven years later, over all of Israel. David establishes Jerusalem as the new capital of the united monarchy. His military exploits are successful; he extends the borders of the kingdom. After a forty-year reign, David dies in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:4; 1 Kings 2:10, 11). Similar to our own lives, David’s reign is marked by great victories, some bad choices, and a lot of God’s grace. He is succeeded by his son Solomon, who also reigns for forty years (1 Kings 11:42).

Solomon is not a warrior or conqueror. Instead, he seeks and receives divine wisdom (1 Kings 3:3–13); he constructs the Lord’s temple in Jerusalem; he designs efficient administrative structures that control and organize Israel; but, toward the end of his life, he turns away from the Lord, following the religious practices of his many wives (1 Kings 11:1–8).

Read 1 Samuel 8:7–20. How does this passage show that God’s ways are better than human ways? How often do we find ourselves doing the same thing, wanting to do things our own way instead of God’s?
In the portion of Joseph’s story found in Genesis 39:6–12, we have a typical account of a young man succeeding against the odds, a “fish out of water” in “a world he never made.” But Joseph’s success was not merely because he was brave, intelligent, and resourceful, although success predicated on these qualities would be believable by the world’s standards. The Bible counters this thinking of what constitutes success by revealing to us the key to Joseph’s success. God “blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake” (Gen. 39:5, NKJV).

As in the book of Job, the presence of goodness and God’s blessing attracted their opposite, in the form of Potiphar’s wife and her special plans for Joseph. To a certain type of person, this might have appeared to be just another bit of luck. But faced with this dilemma, Joseph looked at the situation first from God’s point of view and from what he stood to lose eternally should he succumb to seduction.

**Consider This:** God is always a character in the stories of the Old Testament, even if He appears not to be acting directly. His point of view always is represented. Is God’s point of view always represented in your life?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

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

**Thought Questions:**

1. Why are the truths that God wants us to know often best communicated through narrative or story? This method of delivery is true in the New Testament, as well as the Old, as the basis of the Christian message is the four Gospels, all told as stories, and containing stories within stories, for instance, in parables.

2. Identify the larger narrative underlying all the narratives of the Bible. The names change. So do the characters, but the great controversy theme
Rehoboam’s Folly

Solomon’s death marks another important turning point in Israel’s history. The strong-handed administrative approach, the labor-conscription laws, and the experiments in religious pluralism all led to great tension at the beginning of the reign of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon.

Read 1 Kings 12:1–16 and try to capture the drama of the situation. As we look at Rehoboam’s leadership, what can we learn from this story about our own attitudes toward whatever power we possess in various life situations? What can we learn from his mistake?

After the division of Judah and Israel, God’s once-united people began to go different ways. Seeing that the center of worship, sacrifice, and adoration was located in Judah, King Jeroboam I of Israel had two golden calves made (1 Kings 12:26–29) and set up two places of worship with altars—one in Bethel and the other in Dan. Things did not look good for Israel, and over the next two hundred years the Israelites had a roller-coaster experience. Some kings followed (at least halfheartedly) God’s call to repentance; others stubbornly refused to listen to the prophets. Dynasties changed, and political assassination abounded. Twenty kings reigned from Jeroboam I to Hoshea, the last king of Israel in Samaria, signaling the unstable condition of the kingdom. Finally, in 722 B.C., Samaria was captured by the Assyrians, and Israel was taken into captivity.

On the other side of the border, things did not look much better. The Davidic dynasty was maintained, but not all the descendants of David could emulate the faith of their forefather. Some kings, such as Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah, tried to return to the Lord and in the process also bring Judah as a whole to repentance. Their efforts were aided by scores of prophets who spoke to particular situations and specific spiritual and social needs in Judah.

In 586 B.C. Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. The leadership and much of the city’s population were taken to Babylon. The temple was destroyed. The royal “experiment” had come to an end.

One would think that, with the disaster of the Babylonian destruction and captivity, that was the end of the Jewish people. What does their restoration after this calamity tell us about God’s patience and grace? In what ways have you seen that same patience and grace in your own life? What should your reaction to this grace be?
threads through the fabric of each story. What is the benefit in telling the same narrative in different forms?

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

**Application Questions:**

1. Many people today regard the stories of the Bible as taking place “long, long ago, in a galaxy far, far away,” to borrow a popular phrase. Indeed, the events that the Bible records took place in a world quite different from our own, especially if we live in the secular West, where both religion and tradition generally have a weaker hold. How can we get past the initial resistance many people have to taking Scripture seriously in order to introduce them to its full, life-transforming power?

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

2. As Christians, we all have our own stories about how God has worked in our lives. What is the power of telling them, both for others and ourselves? Why do we ourselves sometimes need reminding of our own stories?

__________________________________________________________

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**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** The following activity is meant to emphasize the centrality of the master narrative of the great controversy to all the other stories and narratives of the Bible.

**Activity:** Review the essentials of the great controversy theme. Emphasize that it is a conflict between the agenda represented by Satan—for example, selfishness, the willingness to advance oneself without regard to God or others, the belief that the ends justify the means, and so on—and that represented by God, especially self-sacrifice, patience, peace, and humility.

Ask the class for examples of Bible stories and ask the members to summarize them as best they can. Ask them who or what in the story represented the satanic view of life and who or what represented God’s view. How did the events of the story mirror the great controversy? How did they fit into the larger narrative?
Further Study: “The Lord calls upon all to study the divine philosophy of sacred history, written by Moses under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The first family placed upon the earth is a sample of all families which will exist till the close of time. There is much to study in this history in order that we may understand the divine plan for the human race. This plan is plainly defined, and the prayerful, consecrated soul will become a learner of the thought and purpose of God from the beginning till the close of this earth’s history. He will realize that Jesus Christ, one with the Father, was the great mover in all progress, the One who is the source of all the purification and elevation of the human race.”—Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases, vol. 3, p. 184.

“In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what God has wrought, I am filled with astonishment and with confidence in Christ as Leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history. We are now a strong people, if we will put our trust in the Lord; for we are handling the mighty truths of the word of God. We have everything to be thankful for.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, bk. 3, p. 162.

Discussion Questions:

1. God’s active involvement in history is a very important concept in Scripture. Read Daniel 2:21. What does this passage say about the interaction between God and human history? Why is this reality so important for us to keep in mind today, for us who are living near the true “end of history”?

2. Why do we like stories so much? What makes a good story? How can stories be very effective tools in teaching truth? Who are some of your favorite storytellers, and why do you like them?

3. The ancient Israelites had been called to be witnesses to the whole world of the true God and of His message regarding salvation by grace for everyone. Yet, look at how internal fighting so weakened ancient Israel. What lessons might we be able to draw for ourselves today from that sad historical truth?

4. Background is so important for understanding any situation. Yet, in most cases there’s much background information that we just don’t know about. Because so much is hidden from us, why is it so important that we not judge others? How often have you hastily judged someone before knowing important facts about the person and his or her circumstances? How often have you been judged by those who didn’t know all the pertinent facts about you?
Lesson 2 *October 2–8

Caleb: Living With the Wait

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Numbers 13, 14, Joshua 14, Judg. 1:12–15.

Memory Text: “My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption” (Psalm 130:6, 7).

He saw the best of times and the worst of times. Caleb knew what slavery was like. He had been there when the Lord had led His people out of Egypt with a mighty hand. He had seen the sea open before Israel and swallow the Egyptian chariots and army. He had been with Israel at Mount Sinai and had seen Moses descend from the mountain with God’s law. He had been one of the first to see the land of Canaan. And through no fault of his own, he had to spend his best years wandering in the desert with the Israelites. He had watched all of his generation die there too. At last, as an old man, he was able to enter into the land of Canaan. Even then he shows courage and faith in God.

Caleb was a leader who seemed to work more behind the scenes than in front of an audience. This week we will learn from his gentle leadership style. We will get to know a great leader willing to take risks and to lead by example, someone who was generous and encouraged leadership in younger people. But beyond the many positive character traits of Caleb, we will study a story relevant to us, who live at the end of earth’s history, as we wait to cross over into the heavenly Canaan.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 9.
The “Facts”

About 15 months earlier, Israel had left Egypt. Tents dot the desert of Paran, close to the border of Canaan. Everyone is excited to know about the land that is soon to be their home. At God’s direction, 12 explorers are chosen. Caleb is to represent Judah as one of the 12 who will conduct a fact-finding mission to Canaan. The spies spend 40 days exploring the land, and finally they return and prepare to give their report.

Read Numbers 13:26–14:2. What lesson can we learn from this account about living by faith and not by sight?

The spies bring along something that they can see, smell, and taste. Although the 12 spies are all exposed to the same facts, they come to very different conclusions.

Ten of them interpret the fertile land and great cities to mean that they are doomed, that there is no way these wandering ex-slaves can take the land. Conveniently, they seem to forget that they would not be standing on the border of the Promised Land if it were not for the miracles of the plagues in Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the water from a rock, and the daily manna that they received for more than a year. God did all these things for them, and now, for some reason, they fail to trust Him and His promises, going by what they see instead of what God has promised. How easy for all of us to do the same thing!

What we see, and how we interpret what we see, can have very direct personal consequences. Our interpretations of “facts” form the building blocks of our daily decisions, and these “facts” so often interact with our emotions. The idea that we can believe whatever we like without those beliefs affecting who we are and what we do is a myth.

Facing the “facts” without God’s Word will lead to interpretations that point away from God and toward faithlessness. Facing the facts with God will lead to evidence that will help us to trust God and strengthen our faith in Him.

Why is it so easy to live by sight and not by faith? When was the last time you faced something similar to what we have read today? How did you respond, and what did you learn from your response and all that followed about trusting in God and in His promises, despite the “facts”??
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: *Psalm 90:12–17*

The Student Will:

**Know:** Identify the patterns of Caleb’s behavior in which he is described as serving God “wholeheartedly.”

**Feel:** Long to live just such a life of faithfulness as Caleb did, in the midst of family and friends who might choose to live differently.

**Do:** Model single-mindedness toward God’s purposes in servant leadership, regardless of the consequences.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Warrior Leadership

A. Where others saw impossibilities, Caleb saw opportunity. What evidence of faith did Caleb reveal in his words and actions?

B. How did Caleb’s faith affect his leadership when he was in the desert, as well as when he was claiming the territory that God had given him in the Promised Land?

II. Feel: A Lonely Road

A. It can be a thankless and isolated journey when we follow God’s way while almost everyone else feels no compunction to travel the way with us. How did Caleb respond when he was faced with a complaining and rebellious mob?

B. How did Caleb relate to the punishment that Israel deserved but that he didn’t?

III. Do: Single-minded, Servant Leadership

A. Caleb chose to take some of the most difficult and challenging property as his share of the Promised Land, though he was much older than most of Israel. What aspects of our lives could use a good dose of Caleb’s courage and determination to follow where God leads?

B. How can we model faithfulness to those who follow us?

Summary: Caleb never swerved from honoring God’s purposes and modeling faith and obedience, though he was in the minority of those faithful to God.
Standing Tall When It Counts

It is not always easy to stand out and stand tall. Group pressure is a tremendous force. The sheer power of thousands of people cheering in a stadium for the home team carries an energy that is very intimidating to opponents. Not many of us would be foolish enough to shout for the opposing team or wave the other team’s colors in the middle of the opposition. This is the reason supporters of opposing teams, such as in soccer, often are kept apart during games. When they do meet, reason steps aside and violence often results.

For the Israelites, though, this was no game. Their future and their survival seemed to be threatened, and they all wept. To witness thousands of people weeping together must have been very moving. And here Caleb, who normally seems to be in the background, steps forward.

**Focus** on Numbers 13:30. What can we learn about Caleb and about trusting in God’s promises from what he said?

The same information can be conveyed in many ways. *How* we say something is as important as *what* we say. Caleb shows a lot of character by not arguing with or insulting the faithless ten spies in public and not remonstrating with the people for their lack of faith. Instead, Caleb talks courageously and calls for trust and action. However, the people do not want to hear this. They have made up their minds and try to stone Moses, Joshua, and Caleb.

**Read** Numbers 14:1–10, 20–24. What do we see here as an end result of rejecting God’s Word and thus coming to a faulty interpretation of the “facts”?

Caleb must have been bitterly disappointed. He had seen the good land. He was faithful and ready to enter. But now he must wander in the desert for 40 years because of everyone else’s fault. Caleb, however, has a strong sense of community and realizes what it means to be part of a whole. He leads by example and encourages. Caleb does not break away and start a new movement. The spirit of simply leaving when there is trouble or lack of faith may be a current phenomenon, but it is not biblical. In Caleb we see a man who stays on, even during the punishment years, without a spirit of “I told you so.”

In what ways have you suffered from other people’s bad choices? How have you handled yourself in these situations?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** We must learn to view our world through the eyes of faith, in good times and bad.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize that faith helps us to perceive and act upon our circumstances correctly.

We all know how hard it is to keep the faith when times are hard and when God seems far away. In such circumstances, faith conflicts with logic. We have to maintain our belief in God and in His promises, even when no reason for hope or faith is apparent.

The time in which Caleb lived was the opposite. God had just brought the Israelites through the desert with many and daily examples of miracles and supernatural manifestations, capped off with a reprise of the parting of the Red Sea. Few of us ever have experienced such clear evidence of God’s care and guidance. So, it seems quite inconceivable that the Israelites would assess the situation, determine that it was hopeless, and huddle in the proverbial fetal position. Yet, they did! Caleb was one of the few who took God at His word.

The other Israelites probably viewed themselves not as pessimists but as realists. But in the light of their recent experience, it was Caleb who was the realist. May God help us to be realistic enough to believe in His miracles!

**Discuss With the Class:** Most of us believe that God can help us with the struggles in our lives, whether physical, spiritual, financial, and so forth. Indeed, most of us can—if we think about it—point to many times in which God has helped us in these areas. Why then do we, as did the Israelites of Caleb’s time, have such difficulty believing that God will help us in the future?

STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Note that God has plans, and we have a place in those plans. We are, in some sense, both the object of the plans and the means by which they are accomplished. Sometimes we are the means by which they are impeded or delayed. Of course, we all can see when others are impeding or delaying them. Caleb’s anger toward, and resentment of, his fellow Israelites would have been
Claiming God’s Promises

Forty years have passed. The Israelites have crossed over the Jordan into the Promised Land. Like hungry people eyeing a table loaded with good food, they gaze toward the Promised Land. Campfire discussions center on what the best sections of land are and who is going to get them. Long before entering the Promised Land, Moses already had recognized the potential for infighting and left directions for the division of the land. The division of the land is touched on in Joshua 14.

Read Joshua 14. What request does Caleb make, and why do you think he made it? What does this tell us about him and his faith?

Amid the dividing of the land, Caleb steps forward and, surprisingly, asks for land. This is to be land not for his tribe but rather for him personally. At first glance this meeting between Joshua and Caleb, the two oldest men in Israel, seems a little out of character. Even though Caleb insists that he is strong and ready for battle, first and foremost he wants to claim a promise given to him by God. Caleb obviously is unafraid to claim God’s promises. Caleb’s request is not motivated by selfish ambition. The principle of “getting to give” is deeply entrenched in the old man. Caleb does not make claim to the nicest, most lush areas; rather, he chooses the area inhabited by the sons of Anak—giants. That is, the land he is asking for isn’t yet conquered. These very giants had made the Israelites so afraid 40 years earlier (Num. 13:33).

Caleb, perhaps, is eager to see that the current generation does not make the mistakes of their forefathers. Now Caleb demonstrates his faith in God by choosing the most challenging, instead of the easiest, territory.

Once again, Caleb is leading by example. In the process, he is living an object lesson. He is, in effect, saying: “If God can use one of the oldest men to drive out the giants, then the rest of you need not fear. God can and will give the victory.” Joshua 15:13, 14 records Caleb’s victory over Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak. What had terrified a whole nation was conquered by one old man who trusted in God’s power.

Read Joshua 14:14. What does it mean to serve the Lord “wholeheartedly”? What kind of things in our lives, if not constantly put down, will make this difficult for us to do?
exceptionally well-founded. Yet, he didn’t give in to it. We have no evidence it even existed. What does this say to us?

Bible Commentary

I. Lost in Place (Review Numbers 13:30, 14:20–24 with your class.)

One thing almost everyone knows about the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt is that the Israelites wandered for 40 years. What is not generally known is that this was not necessary. The Sinai desert—assuming traditions about the setting are correct—did not take 40 years to cross. The Israelites were not so directionally challenged as to get lost in a tiny strip of desert and take 40 years to get their bearings. It was not dictated by the Bible’s preoccupation with the number 40; if it were, 40 days, weeks, or months would have been sufficient.

No, God was quite ready to give them the land of Canaan right away. But the Israelites didn’t believe it was possible. Only Caleb responded with confidence, saying, “‘Let us go up at once and possess it’” (Num. 13:30). The others looked at the challenges and magnified them. The faithless, pessimistic “realists” were the ones seeing mythical beings from bad science fiction, all to avoid the obvious conclusion that God could do what He said He would do.

And this after God had demonstrated His power in dramatic, supernatural ways ten times (Num. 14:22). God, who had every right to test them, allowed them to test Him ten times, humbling one of the greatest empires in the ancient world in the process. And still they didn’t believe in His ability to give them the land that had been promised to them since the time of Abraham. Given a choice between trusting God and circling around the same conglomerate of sand and rock formations for decades, they chose the latter.

Knowing, as we do, how the story ends, it’s easy to deride the children of Israel. But what about us? How many times have we, in the full knowledge that God wanted something new, different, and better for us, gone back to the things that were “safe,” the things that we knew? Addictions that we wanted taken away but not quite yet? Refusing to grow spiritually because we didn’t want the responsibility that came with it? Avoiding real intimacy with God because we weren’t sure what He would ask from us or
Passing on the Legacy

In some cultures old age is highly respected, and older people are well integrated into society and looked to for advice and wisdom. In others, senior citizens are seen as no longer productive and are ignored and marginalized. The latter view seems to be growing worldwide. Caleb gives a wonderful example of the positive use of one’s old age.

Caleb avoids the extremes normally associated with the senior years. He does not allow himself to be intimidated by others because of his years. He does not simply give up on life and withdraw. He does not use his age as an excuse for not being involved in his community. Neither does he hang on to his position and see all attempts of younger people to lead as personal threats.

What does Psalm 92:12–15 say about old age?

It has been said that God has no grandchildren. As long as God remains the God of my fathers, He has nothing to do with me personally. Caleb knows that every generation must have its own experience with God. The Israelites, collectively and individually, could not live off the miracles of Egypt or even the wilderness experience of their parents. Caleb sees it as his duty to create an environment for the younger generation to take their first steps of faith.

What sort of experience is Caleb facilitating in Judges 1:12, 13?

The people of Judah are taking possession of their land. The tribes of Judah and Simeon cooperate and work together in faith in order to make good on God’s promises. But on coming up against the fortified city of Kirjathsepher (vs. 12), they face a tremendous challenge. We know from archaeology about the often elaborate design of Late Bronze Age fortification systems in Palestine. However, instead of focusing on the walls, Caleb sees this challenge as an opportunity for growth. Here someone can claim God’s promises and have the victory. Although it may sound strange to us, Caleb offers a wonderful incentive. Whoever conquers the city would become his son-in-law. Othniel, Caleb’s nephew (Judg. 1:13), takes up the challenge, and God gives him victory. Through Caleb’s nurturing, a new hero is born. Caleb’s investment would pay rich dividends in later years. God would use this young man as Israel’s first judge and deliverer (Judg. 3:7–11).

As you have matured, how have your attitudes changed? What have you learned simply by experience? How can you avoid getting entrenched in wrong habits and attitudes?
how other people would react? Aren’t those same rock formations losing their appeal the five hundredth time around?

Consider This: God gives us a chance to go somewhere new and be something new, just as He did the Israelites. What is standing in the way of our claiming the promises He has made to us? How can we set them aside and attain the better things He has for us?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Emphasize that although life is a struggle and that there are people who don’t wish the best for us and that there are circumstances that can wear us down, God is equal to all of them.

Thought Questions:
Strictly defined, a miracle is a perceptible contravention of the laws of nature, such as might occur through direct divine intervention or through the medium of a holy person or “miracle worker.” Have you personally experienced miracles or divine intervention? How did they affect your conduct of life from that point?

Application Questions:

1 Life is full of dangers and potential negative outcomes. As such, it is only natural that we take such possibilities into account and plan for worst-case scenarios. On the other hand, the Bible implicitly and explicitly cautions us against worry (Pss. 37:1, 5; 91:1, 2). What is the difference between worry and prudence? Given that worry is both an emotion and a habit, how can we control a tendency to worry? What is lost when we give in to it? What is at the heart of worry? How do we uproot our unbelief?
Giving Freely

Read Judges 1:14, 15. What more does this tell us about the character of Caleb?

Inheritance was very important to the Israelites. Owning land to pass on to your heirs was seen as a way of ensuring that your legacy would not die out. As a matter of fact, this was so important that detailed laws were given to provide for an heir if a man died childless, so that someone would take the deceased’s name and continue his legacy (see the Levirate laws in Deut. 25:5–10).

At Caleb’s age, he would have been thinking seriously about his own inheritance. The later genealogical records show that Caleb had sons. He would have been eager to leave them as much as possible. Although Acsah was his daughter, any land that was given to her would leave Caleb’s immediate family and become part of her husband’s property. We do not know exactly what prompted Acsah’s request for land, but we do know that refusing her request would have been acceptable and in line with the social norms of protecting one’s own inheritance.

The surprising thing is that Caleb not only gives her the field but then also gives the springs of water, too. And not just one spring of water but both the upper and lower springs.

Generosity works both ways. Proverbs 11:25 states that “a generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed” (NIV). When we are not ready to give freely, it is perhaps a sign that we have not yet received.

What implications does this story have for our spiritual life in, for example, the area of forgiveness? Read Matthew 6:15 and 18:21–35.

We can give only what we have. If we are unable to forgive, then it is a sure sign that we have not claimed God’s forgiveness for ourselves. Caleb had received blessings from God and was happy to share them. He showed a generosity far beyond the social norms of his time.

How generous are you with what you have? Do you find that the more you have, the more willing you are to share with others, or do you tend to hoard? How can you learn to be more willing to give of yourself for the good of others?
An extreme tendency to worry, and to fully expect the worst—to the extent that we leave God out of the equation—is something we see very clearly in the behavior of the other spies in the story of Caleb. But is it possible to err in the direction of a denial of existing reality and presumption in the face of future challenges? How can we distinguish this presumption from faith, especially when others may try to guilt-trip us into doing things or going along with courses of action we may feel to be unwise?

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**STEP 4—Create**

*Just for Teachers:* The following activity is meant to emphasize the fact that God is equal to any of the troubles or fears that we face now or in the future.

Cut up scrap paper into roughly equal-sized bits, at least enough for the maximum number of people who might appear at your class. Bring a medium-sized box or other container.

**Activity:** Mention that we all have fears and worries about things that might happen or that might not happen or that might not turn out as we hope or expect. Pass around the slips of paper and ask each member to write down anonymously something he or she fears or worries about. Pass around the container and have each class member put the slip of paper into the container. When it comes back to you, lead the class in a free-form prayer over the contents of the container, asking God to resolve these issues. You can pray the prayer yourself, or you can solicit input from class members. Follow this with a disposal of the slips of paper in whatever manner you choose.

Alternatively, you may perform the same exercise without supplies. Invite class members to construct the worry box in their minds. Next ask them to imagine writing their worry on a slip of paper, folding it up, and putting it into the box. Now ask them to imagine nailing the box shut and then burning the box until there is nothing left. Tell them that this is what God wants to do with our worry. Invite them to construct the worry box in their minds anytime they find themselves worrying and to pray that God will give them the strength to put their worries inside it and nail the lid shut. Remind them to pray to our God, who is a “consuming fire,” that He will burn the box and its contents to ashes.
Further Study: “Caleb’s faith now was just what it was when his testimony had contradicted the evil report of the spies. He had believed God’s promise that He would put His people in possession of Canaan, and in this he had followed the Lord fully. He had endured with his people the long wandering in the wilderness, thus sharing the disappointments and burdens of the guilty; yet he made no complaint of this, but exalted the mercy of God that had preserved him in the wilderness when his brethren were cut off. Amid all the hardships, perils, and plagues of the desert wanderings, and during the years of warfare since entering Canaan, the Lord had preserved him; and now at upwards of fourscore his vigor was unabated. He did not ask for himself a land already conquered, but the place which above all others the spies had thought it impossible to subdue. By the help of God he would wrest his stronghold from the very giants whose power had staggered the faith of Israel. It was no desire for honor or aggrandizement that prompted Caleb’s request. The brave old warrior was desirous of giving to the people an example that would honor God, and encourage the tribes fully to subdue the land which their fathers had deemed unconquerable.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 512, 513.

Discussion Questions:

1. As Christians we are constantly bombarded with “facts” that are interpreted in ways that contradict our faith. Notice, the key word is interpreted. What are ways that we can confront these challenges without making fools of ourselves and yet at the same time maintain our integrity?

2. Dwell more on the idea that how we interpret “facts” isn’t always correct. For instance, we look at matter and see it as solid; yet, in reality, matter is almost all empty space. We look at the ground and judge it to be unmoving, even though it is moving very quickly through space. We can be in a closed, empty room and hear nothing, even though the air in the room is filled with radio waves carrying all sorts of sounds that we, left to ourselves, can’t hear. What lessons can we draw from this about what it means to live by faith and not by sight?

3. Drawing on the life of Caleb, how can we nurture new believers, young people, and children to fill positions of leadership and responsibility in our church?

4. Caleb stuck with his people, even amid their gross sins and mistakes. What lessons does this have for us today as Seventh-day Adventists?
Lesson 3  *October 9–15

Hannah: Learning to Be Someone

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: 1 Samuel 1; 2:1–11, 21; Job 2:12, 13; Matt. 6:19, 20; Luke 12:16–21.

Memory Text: “Then Hannah prayed and said: ‘My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God’ ” (1 Samuel 2:1, 2, NIV).

One of the great struggles that many people face is the sense of their own self-worth. What are we worth in this world? What can one life mean amid teeming billions? We read about wars in which millions have perished, often without a trace. Every day thousands are born and thousands die. We sense massive forces over which we have no control, which can run over us and our dreams as quickly as a truck does a bug on the road. How, amid such overwhelming power, can we get a sense of our own meaning and purpose? Do we even have any?

The Bible, of course, teaches that we do, that we are beings created in the image of God. We’re important because we are important to God. Who cares what others think of you, if the God who holds the whole world in His hands loves you? His love, above all, is what counts.

This week, by looking at the life of Hannah, a woman without any claim to political or religious greatness, we will catch a glimpse of a God who loves us intimately and personally and of a God who tells us that we are somebody, even though it’s easy to get the message from the world that we are nobody.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 16.
What Am I Worth?

Read 1 Samuel 1:1–16. Why was Hannah so distraught over not having children, even though she knew that her husband loved her?

Hannah’s feelings shouldn’t be that hard to understand, especially in her culture, where to have no male child meant to have no security in one’s old age. Having no child at all was understood as a divine curse. Both in the public and in the family sphere, a woman without a child had to live with a stigma of supposedly being cursed by God. Obviously, this affected her value in the eyes of society, her own self-esteem, and her relationship with God. Hannah must have wondered often what she had done to deserve this. Why was this happening to her?

To understand the depth of despair that barrenness brought to women in the world of the Old Testament, look at the actions and statements of Sarah (Gen. 16:1, 2) and Rachel (Gen. 30:1). How do they help us understand how strong that sentiment was back then?

Sarah’s action is reasonable in the context of the social and cultural customs of her time. However, it also provides us with a glimpse of the despair she must have felt and the burden she must have carried. What woman would encourage her husband to have relations with another woman in order to have children? Meanwhile, Rachel’s heartfelt cry to Jacob echoes a bit of Hannah’s emotion and the turmoil of her feelings.

For Hannah, jealousy and the sense of “being nobody” created an explosive mix of emotions that finally blew up when she poured out her heart before the Lord. What made matters worse was that Hannah was not getting younger. Time was against her, and, apparently, so was God.

Remember also that in Hannah’s time, a woman’s role in society was associated primarily with child bearing and rearing. There were no other career possibilities. A woman could not just change careers and find fulfillment in another occupation. We have examples of woman judges and female prophetic leadership in the Old Testament, but these are indeed limited and depended on God’s direct call. It was only through children that Hannah could count the worth of her life and leave a legacy. To her, without children her life had no real meaning.

A man had lost his child to leukemia. He told the pastor that he believed his son had died because he hadn’t kept the commandments faithfully, especially the Sabbath, and so God punished him. What’s wrong with that kind of thinking? How can we protect ourselves from getting caught up in that same kind of rationale?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 1 Samuel 2:1

The Student Will:

Know: Examine the aspects of Hannah’s life that illustrate God’s idea of what makes our lives significant.

Feel: Sense that even the simplest duties have infinite worth in God’s sight.

Do: Trust God with every detail of our circumstances through prayer and praise and faithfully discharge the responsibilities He has entrusted to us.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Significance in Simplicity

A For some time, Hannah was denied motherhood. How did God turn her life around? How did she respond to God’s answer to her prayer?

B What evidence do we have that Hannah was faithful in parenting the son God gave her?

II. Feel: Faithful Parenting

A Even though Hannah had her son with her only a short time, it is evident that she raised him to honor and serve God. How did Hannah’s faithfulness in parenting make a mark on the history of Israel?

III. Do: Prayer and Praise

A What challenges do we face that we need to entrust to God?

B What lessons regarding Hannah’s approach to God in prayer, as well as her approach to praise, can we apply to our own relationship with God?

C What duties has God entrusted to us that require faithful and prayerful attention?

Summary: In response to prayer, God made the life of a miserable woman rich with blessings. In turn, she responded with praise and, in faith, dedicated her son back to God.
With Friends Like These . . .

Living under the supposed curse of God and feeling that her life had no real value must have been hard enough for Hannah. What added problem did she have? 1 Sam. 1:6, 7.

Those who are closest to us often know how to hurt us most. With Peninnah’s constant provocations, it is not surprising that Hannah’s life became bitter. The biblical text emphasizes the repeated nature of the provocations. Year in and year out, the same old story. It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word for the action of Hannah’s rival (“provoked” [NKJV], “taunt” [NJB]) often is used in the Old Testament to describe grave sins that provoke a direct divine reaction (see Deut. 9:18, 31:29). This was not just a quick, sly remark. This seemed to have been a premeditated and conscious strategy by Peninnah to provoke Hannah into doing something stupid. After all, Hannah was her only rival for Elkanah’s affections (1 Sam. 1:5).

Though Peninnah’s taunts were meant to hurt, perhaps the worst hurts come from those who don’t intend harm. Who, in the midst of terrible pain, hasn’t been made to feel worse by well-meaning people who just happened to say or do the wrong thing?

Skim through the first five or six chapters of the book of Job. Job’s friends were truly sorrowful for what he experienced (see Job 2:12, 13). Yet, how did they make the problem worse for him? Why was this exactly how someone shouldn’t react to another’s grief?

Loss of material possessions or of people close to us causes deep hurt. Illness or the circumstances of our lives may seem daunting and cause us to despair. Sometimes it is living with unfulfilled deep longings that drains our lives of any sense of hope. Things go from bad to worse when we have to face not only deep hurt or bad circumstances but also people who seem to specialize in making our life unbearable. This combination of unfulfilled dreams and constant tensions and provocation triggered Hannah’s cry before the Lord. Sometimes we need to shout out our hurt and frustrations before God. When we hit rock bottom, we need to search for answers outside of ourselves.

What are ways that we can encourage and uplift those who are going through trial and calamity right now? What would you like people to do for you if you were going through something terrible? Whatever that would be, why not do it for someone else?


**Learning Cycle**

▶ **STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Regardless of how society or other people view us, each of us has unique value to God.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize that God never gives up on us, and He will bless us as long as we make Him first.

In 2009, the world was abuzz about a woman named Susan Boyle. Boyle, a rather plain, middle-aged woman from a village in Scotland, somehow beat daunting odds to stand before a jury of celebrities on the British reality show *Britain’s Got Talent*. Her ambition? To become a professional singer. An audible snicker arose from the audience. The judges smirked. Susan Boyle gave a flawless rendition of “I Dreamed a Dream,” from the musical *Les Misérables*, sending the smirks and snickers back into the seemingly distant past. The world was astounded to discover, after a steady diet of airbrushed, seemingly genetically engineered pop idols, “the [as satirist Andy Borowitz put it in rather snarky terms] surprising presence of talent in an ugly person.” But it was no surprise to people who knew her and grew up with her.

God knows you, and He’s not smirking. He knows you’re capable of great things, however unpromising you may look to others or to yourself. Trust Him. Give Him everything you have, and He will give you abilities beyond anything you—or anyone else—ever expected.

**Discuss With the Class:** How does the biblical story of Hannah provide hope to those of us who may feel like “nobodies”? What are the parallels of feeling like a nobody to the story and lineage of Jesus Christ Himself?

▶ **STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

I. “The Bows of the Mighty . . .” (*Review 1 Samuel 1:12–18 with your class.*)

Napoleon Bonaparte is said to have observed that in war “God fights on the side with the best artillery.” A look at the world around us often

CONTINUED
Pouring Your Heart Out

Human nature can take only so much. Eventually action must be taken. For some, this action can be irrational and even dangerous.

**How** did Hannah handle her pain? Read 1 Samuel 1:9–16 and describe the steps that Hannah took to deal with her pain.

This prayer was no formal petition or general “please help me” kind of prayer. The biblical author describes Hannah’s prayer as “pouring out [her] soul to the Lord” (1 Sam. 1:15, NIV). The term *pouring out* normally is associated with the pouring of liquids, particularly blood and water in connection with sacrifices (cf. Lev. 4:7, 12, 18, 25, etc.). It often is used to refer to God’s actions. God can pour out judgment or blessings (Pss. 69:24, 79:6, Isa. 42:25, etc.). It has connotations of abundance and fullness. In some Old Testament passages, the term is used in connection with prayer (Pss. 42:4, 5; 62:8, 9; Lam. 2:19). This pouring-out prayer is perhaps the most intimate kind of prayer. It involves being absolutely honest with God, expressing our deepest pain and fears. Hannah was so absorbed in her prayer that she became oblivious to those around her and to what they might think of her. She was, in fact, clinging to God the way Jacob clung to his nocturnal assailant (Gen. 32:26, 27).

**Describe** the immediate results of Hannah’s prayer. 1 Sam. 1:17, 18.

While God does not always answer our prayers immediately, when we pour out our hearts before Him we can be assured that He hears and will answer us (Ps. 37:4) in His own time and way. This can give us hope and confidence as we wait to see God’s leading in our future.

In 1 Samuel 1:11, Hannah makes a big promise. Should God hear and answer her prayer and give her a son, she would give him back to God. In the Old Testament we find many people making vows to the Lord. As a matter of fact, vows often are seen in the context of worship and seem to belong to the same category as prayer and adoration.

Hannah’s vow is huge. The hoped-for son was to be given up. What would happen to her position as the wife of Elkanah? What would be her standing in the larger context of the family?

**How often do you pour out yourself to God in prayer? Why is that so important for your spiritual walk? What keeps you from doing this as often as you need? Why not do it now? Surely you have painful and pressing needs. Who doesn’t?**
seems to confirm this cynical wisdom. The rich get richer. The “beautiful people” can afford to keep their beauty well into old age with the help of expensive plastic surgeons. How easy to believe that the rich are happier than the rest of us.

How then can we say, as Hannah does, that the Lord “raises the poor from the dust” (1 Sam. 2:8, NKJV)? We must change our perspective. We must place ourselves on God’s side (He already is on ours). If we are on God’s side, we are standing with the One who (figuratively speaking) set the earth on its foundations (vs. 8).

For us to position ourselves on the Lord’s side, it is necessary to recognize that our own resources are not enough. Hannah realized that it was not in her power to will herself to have a child. When she went to the sanctuary, she literally had run out of options. The thought of not getting what she wanted was intolerable. But when she walked out of the sanctuary, she was at peace. Nothing in her circumstances had changed. Eli, the priest, had blessed her, and that was, no doubt, significant. But even he could do no more than wish her well. We don’t know if she was sure that God would grant her wish in the way she wanted it. But we’re told that “her face was no longer sad” (1 Sam. 1:18, NKJV). What had changed was that she had aligned herself with God.

Hannah did get what she wanted. It would have been easy enough for her to believe that it was because of her own merit or because she prayed especially eloquent and powerful prayers. In both the secular and religious worlds, there are many people who secretly (or not-so-secretly) come to believe that they deserve what they have. Yet, Hannah’s response was to worship God, acknowledging that “‘there is no one holy like the Lord’” (1 Sam. 2:2, NIV) or, as it would be stated later, “‘There is none good but . . . God’” (Matt. 19:17). Everything that had come to her was the result of God’s mighty acts, which were not subject to chance or the mathematics of power relationships or wealth or personal charm and worthiness. It was all, instead, God’s grace.

Consider This: Most of us have wishes or desires that for whatever reason have failed to come to fruition. What prevents us from turning them over to God and claiming His peace? What pleasant surprises does Hannah’s story help us believe that He has in store for us when we do?

II. Hannah’s Prayer (Review 1 Samuel 2:1–10 with your class.)
Singing His Praises

Are you someone who sings when you are happy? The Bible often records people bursting into song at key moments in their lives. Miriam and the women of Israel sing at the shores of the Red Sea after having witnessed God’s mighty salvation (Exod. 15:20, 21). In wonderful poetic language, Deborah and Barak extol God’s power over human kings and armies (Judg. 5:1–31). When Mary visits her relative Elizabeth, she breaks out into a song of praise about God and His incredible plan of salvation (Luke 1:46–55). All of these songs share one common denominator, even though they appear in different historical contexts and under distinct circumstances: they all describe what happens when God intervenes in human history and responds to the pleas of His children.

Read 1 Samuel 2:1–11. What is the main theme of Hannah’s song?

Hannah now knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is fully able to control the circumstances of history, as well as her own personal experience. She sees her life from a totally new perspective. Things that others strive for and take as an absolute are in reality very flimsy and could be gone tomorrow. In her song, Hannah makes surprising contrasts to underline the fact that life’s circumstances are not always as they appear. The arrow of the mighty warrior breaks, while the feeble are “girded with strength” (1 Sam. 2:4). Things we give value to are often not as permanent as they appear.

Hannah has found that true security depends not on circumstances but on knowing our God, who does not change. He is the One who tells us that we each are special. He is the One who gives us value.

Some struggle with verse 6 in Hannah’s song. How do we understand that? Is God arbitrary in His goodness or His judgments? In order to understand these verses, we need to remember the basic Old Testament premise about life. This is so different from the modern worldview: God is the Creator of life, and as Creator He has the right to do whatever He wants with His creation. In other words, nothing on this planet is beyond His control. This means that in the biblical worldview, even negative things are subject to God’s control. Often the biblical authors describe this perspective in a way that could suggest God’s active involvement in the design of bad things happening to humanity. In other words, what God allows, God “does.”

What can you sing about? Write a list of things that you would like to praise God for. The more you praise God, the more thankful you will become for what He has done for you. That’s why praise is so important.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

In the story of Hannah, we see three parts to prayer. As we have noted in the previous section, the most basic aspect of prayer is giving our concerns and desires to God, as Hannah did in the sanctuary. Ideally, this should be more than just asking for what we want or even what we think we need. We also are throwing off the burden of our concerns and desires. We are expressing confidence that God is equal to them.

The other parts of prayer are praise to, and adoration of, God and thanksgiving for what He has done for us. We find these elements in Hannah’s prayer, recorded in 1 Samuel 2:1–10.

Why does God need to be praised and adored? Is it because He will work on our behalf only if we’ve massaged His giant, celestial ego? Is God insecure? Certainly the gods of pagan peoples had all these weaknesses, and mythology recounts many instances in which “gods” did many things for the sake of ego, lust, revenge, and similar things. But that is not the God we worship. Our God does not have a fragile ego. He doesn’t need us to praise Him; we need to praise Him. The ego problem is ours. That issue is magnified by our short memory. Even the most intense and striking experiences of God’s power tend to slip from our memories as life goes on. So, we need to praise God to remind ourselves who God is and how dependent on Him we are for everything, including our very existence.

Closely related is the prayer of thanksgiving. Here, we are acknowledging not only who He is but what He has done specifically for us as a result of who He is. Everyone has at least some smaller general reasons to be thankful to God. And if we think about it, most of us can find one or two huge, personal, specific reasons. But again, we forget unless we make a sustained effort to remember. If we all made that effort to remember what God has done for us, few would doubt God or His intentions for us.

To praise and thank God is also to reject the idea of a universe based on blind chance or inexorable natural law (i.e., God is on the side of those with the best artillery). We are acknowledging God as the Master of natural law, with the authority to bend or break it when it serves His will, like the “bows of the mighty” (1 Sam. 2:4).

Consider This: What are some of the attributes for which Hannah praises God in this prayer? How does God work in the world?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Emphasize that God wants to give each of us what we want and need according to His will, and that prayer is our way of communicating these things to God.
God’s Investment Plan

Even though Hannah leaves the tabernacle singing, she also leaves behind little Samuel. She no longer has the stigma of barrenness, but she still goes home to an empty house. With her son dedicated to God and working for Him, who will look after her in her old age? She has, in simple faith and trust, given her most precious possession to God. In this sense, Hannah reminds us of Abraham, another hero who was prepared to offer his son to God. As we already noted, the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham and Sarah also involved a long period of barrenness. However, God “tests” Abraham’s faith when the boy is already older, while Hannah has decided herself to give her son, should she have one, to God’s service, even before the child is born. After the boy is weaned, he is brought to Shiloh. Can you imagine the feelings that his mother must have felt when she waved him good-bye, especially considering the fact that things were not going that well in the household of Eli, who would now function as the mentor and guide of young Samuel?

**How** does God honor Hannah’s expression of faith and love? 1 Sam. 2:21.

Hannah could have refused to give her boy to the Lord and selfishly clung to him as her only security. However, by giving him to God, she not only received five more children, but her giving Samuel to the Lord also had a profound influence on Samuel himself. In time, he became God’s special mouthpiece and one of the greatest educators and leaders of Israel.


God is in the business of taking whatever we give to Him, multiplying it, and giving it completely new dimensions that we never would have dreamed of. Hannah learned that the greatest treasures are really secure only when given to God. That which we hoard for ourselves here can, in an instant, be gone.

Hannah knew who she was in God’s eyes. This sense of her own worth gave her the freedom to give.

We must remember that everything we have, all that we are, and all that we own, are ours only because of God’s grace and goodness to us. How should that thought help us be more willing to give back to the Lord rather than hoard for ourselves? What does hoarding tell us about ourselves, our character, and our lack of trust in God?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Thought Questions:

1. In the time in which Hannah lived, childbearing was pretty much the only path to what society regarded as real or successful womanhood, just as being able to father a son to whom one could pass on property and perhaps a trade was a measure of successful manhood. What are some of the comparable measures of success in today’s society?

2. Although God does want good things to happen to and for His people, sometimes they fail to happen; or, on the contrary, sometimes very negative things do happen. How can God turn negative occurrences or circumstances into positive ones?

Application Questions:

1. In the Old Testament, we are shown many examples of people who have had prayers answered by God in just the ways they wanted, Hannah being a prime example. Of course, in many cases these instances of fulfillment have been preceded by years of waiting and even suffering. Most of us have examples of things we prayed for that just didn’t happen or that did not turn out to be what they had seemed at first. How can we avoid disappointment and bitterness?

2. How can actively praising God in our daily lives improve both our attitudes and our circumstances? What are some ways we actively can cultivate an attitude of praise?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The following activity is meant to emphasize the role of praise of God in the Christian life.

Activity: Emphasize that all of us have things to praise God for and that praise has less to do with circumstances than it does with intentional cultivation of an attitude. Ask the class about things they may do in their lives to generate this attitude of praise. Or you might pose the question more hypothetically, asking what one can do to cultivate such an attitude. You might focus on one particular area, such as music, challenging class members to think of new and innovative ways in which music can be used in worship and shared with others as praise to God.
**Further Study:** “Parents, give your children to the Lord, and ever keep before their minds that they belong to Him, that they are the lambs of Christ’s flock, watched over by the True Shepherd. Hannah dedicated Samuel to the Lord; and it is said of him, ‘Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words [the Lord’s words through Samuel] fall to the ground.’ 1 Samuel 3:19. In the case of this prophet and judge in Israel are presented the possibilities that are placed before the child whose parents co-operate with God, doing their appointed work.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 143.

“What a reward was Hannah’s! and what an encouragement to faithfulness is her example! There are opportunities of inestimable worth, interests infinitely precious, committed to every mother. The humble round of duties which women have come to regard as a wearisome task should be looked upon as a grand and noble work. It is the mother’s privilege to bless the world by her influence, and in doing this she will bring joy to her own heart. She may make straight paths for the feet of her children, through sunshine and shadow, to the glorious heights above. But it is only when she seeks, in her own life, to follow the teachings of Christ that the mother can hope to form the character of her children after the divine pattern. The world teems with corrupting influences. Fashion and custom exert a strong power over the young. If the mother fails in her duty to instruct, guide, and restrain, her children will naturally accept the evil, and turn from the good. Let every mother go often to her Saviour with the prayer, ‘Teach us, how shall we order the child, and what shall we do unto him?’ Let her heed the instruction which God has given in His word, and wisdom will be given her as she shall have need.”—Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, p. 138.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **Who in your church is experiencing difficult circumstances at home or in their personal lives? How can you as a group and individually help to support these people? How much of yourself are you willing to sacrifice in order to help?**

2. **What are some cultural stigmas that abound in your society; that is, what are things that are deemed terrible by your culture? Ask yourself, Are these things that God Himself also sees as bad? Are we, as a people, in danger of stigmatizing, because of culture, things that God doesn’t? What are some examples where we might have done that? How can we know the difference between what is cultural and what is biblical?**
Jonathan: Born for Greatness

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 1 Sam. 14:6–13, 24–46; 1 Samuel 18; 1 Samuel 19; 31:1–7; 2 Sam. 1:5–12; 2 Kings 6:8–17.

Memory Text: “Jonathan said to his armor bearer, ‘Come on, let’s go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised men. Perhaps the Lord will intervene for us. Nothing can prevent the Lord from delivering, whether by many or by a few’ ” (1 Samuel 14:6, NET).

By all accounts, Jonathan should have been a spoiled, greedy, and selfish young man who believed that, as the child of privilege, everything was owed him. And why not? He was the oldest son of the first king of Israel. He was popular and well-loved by his people. He was an excellent public speaker and a top soldier and military leader. By the world’s standards, he had it all. He was born for “greatness.”

Heaven, though, uses a different measure for what’s great—and Jonathan, interestingly enough, was one of the few who was willing to turn his back on what the world sees as great and, instead, seek a different kind of “greatness”—God’s kind.

In the life of Jonathan, we learn to evaluate our lives through heaven’s eyes. What makes a life great? What makes it worthwhile? What are the important things in this world, and what aren’t?

Jonathan’s story helps answer these questions for us. It also tells us that if we choose, we, too, can be great in the eyes of God—regardless of where we were born, who our parents are, and how much wealth and talent we have.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 23.
The High Office of Friendship

Friendship is unlike most other relationships, which often are legally regulated and controlled. In many cultures parents choose marriage partners for their children. Of course, none of us gets to choose our parents, siblings, and wider family relations.

However, we can choose our friends. Friendship crosses all frontiers. Friendship can influence other relationships, as well. Song of Solomon 5:16 shows us the role of friendship in a marriage relationship. True friendship is a completely voluntary relationship, which perhaps is why it is so binding. It does not involve meeting the letter of the law but focuses, rather, on giving ourselves.

First Samuel 18:1 describes the friendship between Jonathan and David. It says that “the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself” (NASB). What characteristics of friendship are highlighted in Exodus 33:11; Job 16:20, 21; Proverbs 17:17; 27:9; Ecclesiastes 4:10; and John 15:13–15?

Most of us would expect a mother to be prepared to die in order to save her child’s life or a man to protect his family at whatever cost to himself. These strong relationships are admirable, normal, and a reflection of God’s love for us. But this is an instinct that we share with many animal species.

Friendship is much more than instinct. True friendship must be nurtured by communication. Friends are there to help in all the challenges of life, not just to share the “fun” times. We can shape our friends’ present life and future through wise counsel, encouragement, and prayer for them. Jonathan shows these characteristics in his friendship with David. In 1 Samuel 20, Jonathan shows that friendship involves more than just talk; a friend is ready to give practical help, even at great personal risk. Jonathan often interceded for David with his father, King Saul (1 Sam. 19:4). Jonathan took the time and the trouble to find David when he was a fugitive and to encourage him in the Lord (1 Sam. 23:16).

Have you ever betrayed a friend? Have you ever been betrayed by a friend? What lessons have you learned? What character traits do you need to change in you in order to be a better friend?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Samuel 1:6

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Recognize what God honors as great in Jonathan’s style of servant leadership.
- **Feel:** Cherish those attitudes of fidelity and friendship that Jonathan showed both his untrustworthy father, Saul, and the young man, David, who was anointed to take his throne.
- **Do:** Practice servant leadership, whatever humiliation and challenges we may be called to suffer in the process.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Servant Leadership**
   - Jonathan was a brave, capable, and God-fearing leader; yet, God chose a supporting role for him. How did Jonathan respond to God’s assignment? What about Jonathan’s response is great in God’s eyes?

II. **Feel: Loyal Son and Friend**
   - Jonathan supported both a failing father and a friend who was destined to rise to a greatness that Jonathan could not share. How would we feel under these circumstances? Despite these challenges, how did Jonathan demonstrate his unselfish love to God, father, and friend?

III. **Do: Suffering Servant**
   - Christ is the greatest example of Suffering Servant. What circumstances might we face in which we are called to suffer as Jonathan and Christ suffered, giving our lives as a sacrifice on God’s altar?
   - How do we respond in both attitude and deed to the position of service God has called us to?

**Summary:** By taking a supporting role with both his father and best friend, even to the point of suffering his father’s fate in battle, Jonathan demonstrated the unselfish, loving devotion of a servant leader.
A Great Victory

Israel lives in a moment of extreme crisis. The Philistines have assembled to fight Israel with chariots and soldiers that seem to be as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore. The Israelite army is numerically inferior and very poorly equipped. Only Saul and Jonathan are said to have had iron swords or spears, for the Philistines tightly controlled the blacksmith industry. Indeed, all Israelites had to have their tools fixed or sharpened by Philistine blacksmiths (1 Sam. 13:19–22). Can you imagine the motley Israelite militia, equipped with sticks, axes, and slings, facing a vast Philistine army with state-of-the-art weaponry? No wonder Saul’s army had a record desertion rate.

Think about the true balance of power in our battles if we are surrendered to the Lord (see 2 Kings 6:8–17). What hope can we take from that account for ourselves?

Jonathan is not intimidated by what others think. He does not lament the lack of faith and trust in Israel. Instead, he determines to do something about it. Jonathan is not out to save the day, but rather, he knows that God is so much bigger than the problem Israel faces. Jonathan does not see himself as a type of savior or hero. He knows that God can save by any means He chooses, and so Jonathan makes himself available to God. God chooses to use Jonathan and his armor bearer; an incredible victory follows.

What are the steps that Jonathan undertakes before climbing up to the enemy outpost? 1 Sam. 14:6–13.

Sometimes the line between faith and presumption can seem very fine. Jonathan does not depend on his own impressions exclusively. He consults with another God-fearing person and shares with him his plans and ideas. Jonathan understands that God is not limited, and so he does not try to manipulate Him. Jonathan is willing to stay or go as God will reveal through the sign that he proposes. Finally, when Jonathan gets the go-ahead, he does not hesitate but immediately engages himself in the challenge.

What are your own personal battles? How can you learn to trust God in these situations? How can you learn to trust God even when things don’t work out as you had hoped or prayed?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** In the Christian life, faithfulness trumps “finishing first.”

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize that we are called to seek a standard of greatness that may not match the world’s expectations, one that may not seem like greatness at all by worldly standards. We even may have to reject those standards explicitly, facing persecution and ridicule.

“Nice guys finish last.” “Greed is good.” These are just two of the maxims that have seemed to guide our thinking as society has grown less Christian and more Darwinian. The worst thing you can call someone is a “loser.” Yes, we penalize cheating. Or more precisely, we penalize getting caught cheating. Sometimes we vilify winners who are too odd and unpleasant. But we really hate and punish failure, which can be defined as “failure to grab all you can.”

So in light of this, what do we call someone who is born into royalty, has intelligence, good looks, talent, charisma, leadership qualities, military genius, and an indisputable title to the throne (if that person should choose to claim it)? Clearly one of life’s winners, someone you would want to know. Maybe some of it might just rub off on you, or perhaps you could at least get some valuable “access” or “face time.”

But wait! What do you call that person if he or she is so honest and pure that he or she angers his or her ruthless, slightly unstable father and has to hide in the woods with a shepherd? And what if this person acknowledges, too, that this shepherd is really the one with the right to the throne?

Sounds like the plot twists in a pulp-fiction adventure novel? No. It’s the story of King Saul’s son, Jonathan, and his best friend, David—the future king, and the one through whom the Messianic line was founded.

**Discuss With the Class:** Most of the time we would agree that one has a right to achieve as much as he or she can in the world. But as Christians, we implicitly recognize that this isn’t the highest value. How can we recognize when God is calling us to something else?
Parent-Child Relationship

Read 1 Samuel 19:1–7. How would you describe the relationship between Jonathan and Saul? What kind of conflict does Jonathan face between loyalty to his own father and loyalty to a friend?

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Exactly what type of father Saul was when Jonathan was a child we do not know, but we do know that in later life Saul was not someone to look up to. Saul was very selfish, moody, jealous, irrational, and at times neurotic. Jonathan, however, gives evidence in his life and relationship to his father of a practical application of the command given in Exodus 20:12, which tells us to honor our parents.

Read 1 Samuel 14:24–46. How could Jonathan, had he wanted, used this incident as an excuse to stop honoring his father? Have not people turned on their own parents for less? What does this tell us about the kind of person Jonathan was?

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Honoring our parents means a lot more than an occasional card or gift. Jonathan stands by his father in his time of crisis; he stands by him, too, despite what his father wanted to do to him.

We, too, honor our parents when we stand by them in times of crisis, such as illness or the loss of a job. We have a biblical obligation to support our parents emotionally and also materially (see 1 Tim. 5:8). Honoring our parents is not a subjective, passive activity. Jonathan demonstrates that this often involves giving respectful yet sound advice. Honoring our parents does not mean suspending our own judgment or defending our parents’ errors, nor blindly following or condoning evil. It does mean, though, that we have special obligations to them, regardless of the kind of people they might be.

Following the example of Jonathan, what practical things can you do to improve your relationship with your parents, siblings, or other family members, especially if they are not believers?
Bible Commentary

I. “Nothing Can Prevent the Lord From Delivering . . .” (Review 1 Samuel 14:1–13 with your class.)

Today we hear a lot about genetics and environment as they shape and influence human behavior. Nature or nurture? By either measure, Jonathan was doomed. Saul was indecisive—except when he made the wrong decision, as in 1 Samuel 13:8–12. He took credit for others’ accomplishments, as when he “allowed” people to think that the attack on the garrison at Gibeah was his (1 Sam. 13:4). He blamed others for his failures with a facility not seen since the early chapters of Genesis (vs. 11). And he later showed himself to have what would be recognized today as a mental illness caused by severe biochemical imbalances.

Jonathan easily could have followed his father’s example. What choice did he have, after all? The same choice we all have. The choice to rely on God rather than himself and to rely on God to make up for the shortcomings we may have inherited from a fallen nature or from flawed nurture.

Consider This: Given that Saul really was not competent to be king, why do you think God would not have chosen to pass the kingship on to Jonathan, who clearly was competent and displayed the qualities necessary for kingship?

II. Attack on Gibeah (Review 1 Samuel 14:1–14 with your class.)

In this chapter, we once again see Jonathan taking the initiative. The author obviously wants us to know that this took place without Saul’s knowledge or that of anyone else in his camp (vss. 1, 3).

Why? Perhaps Saul and the other Israelites weren’t really ready to commit themselves to the “national liberation struggle.” We can see a hint of that point of view in 1 Samuel 13:4, in which it is said that the attack on the garrison made Israel an abomination—literally, “a stench”—to the Philistines, whereas before they had been a harmless object of Philistine aggression. At first, Israel’s reaction to the attack was adulation. It quickly became naked fear when it became clear there were plenty of Philistines left.

Also, Jonathan’s mission could have seemed legitimately foolhardy.
Taking Second Place

One of the main trends in current society is to blame one’s parents for most (if not all) problems in life. To be sure, some folk do carry a lot of heavy emotional baggage from their parents. We can’t deny that fact.

However, it seems that the past decades have seen an incredible increase in this unfortunate tendency. We blame not only our parents but sometimes siblings, teachers, circumstances—anything or anyone else in order to avoid taking responsibility for our own circumstances.

Though we all are subjected to, and even victims of, circumstances beyond our control, Jonathan’s life shows us that we can work through them, at least to some degree. Jonathan would have had a right to blame his father for most of his troubles. If Saul had been faithful, then Jonathan would have had the throne. Jonathan chooses not to play the blame game, though. Jonathan has a good sense of self-worth. Instead of letting himself become bitter and resentful, he trusts that God knows best, and so Jonathan chooses to do what he can with what he has. It probably was not easy for Jonathan to maintain this faith and trust in God when he realized that God had chosen David, rather than him, to become the next king.

Describe Jonathan’s reaction to the fact that David will be king in his stead. What does this tell us about Jonathan? 1 Sam. 23:17. Contrast his attitude to those displayed in Isaiah 14:13, 14; 1 Kings 1:5; and Mark 10:35–37. What is the difference?

When we have our identity secure in God, we are able to face rejection or criticism without being devastated or losing our sense of self-worth. A big part of having our own identity secure in God involves our experience and relationship with Him. Jonathan had already had a dramatic personal experience with God in his victory over the Philistines in 1 Samuel 14.

The later story of David’s family is marked by rebellions and internal strife. Absalom and Adonijah both seek to usurp the throne from their father, David. They are unwilling to allow God to choose the new king. Jonathan’s attitude stands in total contrast to this “I” spirit. He is willing to take second place. He tries to inspire harmony and reconciliation between his father and his friend David (1 Sam. 19:4). He truly stands as an example of a servant leader prepared to take second or even third place.

Use Jonathan as an example to determine what you can do when you don’t get the job, position, or respect you feel that you are entitled to. How can you control feelings of rejection, envy, and hate?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Jonathan was not only a member of the royal family; he was possibly the most able general in the Israelite army.

So, how do we know that Jonathan was not merely impulsive and reckless? First, Jonathan placed his confidence in God, not his military skills. In fact, he was ready to give up and walk away (1 Sam. 14:9, 10) if it was clear that the Lord was not with him. When it became clear that the Lord was with him, he and his armor bearer proved able to do what an entire army was afraid even to talk about.

Consider This: The story told in 1 Samuel 13 and 14 suggests that Saul and the other Israelites were ambivalent about challenging the status quo. They were afraid of being a “stench” to the Philistines.

How often are we satisfied with the status quo in our spiritual lives? Is our Christianity the kind that doesn’t challenge or make other people uncomfortable? Does it ever motivate us to confront our own fears or preferences? In a culture in which Christianity often is synonymous with “niceness,” are we terrified that other people might dislike us for living our Christianity?

III. “As His Own Soul . . .” (Review 1 Samuel 18:1 with your class.)

God’s love for us and vice versa is a form of friendship. First, it is voluntary. There is no reason that God is required to love us. As a bilateral relationship, it requires nurturing and communication, at least on our part. Our friendship with God—at least in its ideal state—presupposes a commonality of interests and goals. We ask and seek for His will to be done, as seen in the Lord’s Prayer. Conversely, God tries to fulfill our sanctified goals and desires. We speak of Christ being in us—or of ourselves as being in Christ, just as David and Jonathan are described as being of one soul. The difference is that human friendship always can fall to human weaknesses. But God’s friendship never leaves us.

Consider This: How has God built the need for friendship and companionship into the human condition?

STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

1 Jonathan definitely satisfied worldly criteria for greatness. He was born
When Life Isn’t Fair

**Read** 1 Samuel 31:1–7 and 2 Samuel 1:5–12. What kind of end did Jonathan have? How do we understand this?

Most of us have been taught that good always wins in the end and that we reap what we sow. We often take this further and believe that a good person should have a good, long life and that a bad person can expect a troubled, short life. And while we know that good will win over evil in the end when Jesus comes again, the reality of the matter is that good people do not always get good in this life and that bad people do not always get bad. Sometimes we even are punished for doing the right thing. God does often step in and miraculously save and protect His children, but this is not always the case.

**Who** are some Bible characters who, though faithful, did not get what they deserved? Gen. 39:10–20, Job 1, 2.

Jonathan had been a true and faithful friend to David. He was a negotiator and tried his best to bring peace between David and Saul. Jonathan was not proud and was willing to give up his right to the throne. He was just as willing to accept David as king. He was also a good son. God had used Jonathan before to put a whole army on the run, and now the Israelite army once again faced the Philistines. Perhaps Jonathan wondered if God would once again perform a miracle to save Israel. Jonathan would fall that day on the battlefield (1 Sam. 31:2).

Like John the Baptist, Jonathan is an example of those who do not get what they seem to deserve now. They often suffer, lose positions of honor for the sake of Christ, and sometimes even fall at their post of duty. However insignificant or even useless their lives and sacrifices may appear, they are nonetheless key players in God’s plans. They are motivated and sustained by Jesus’ love and presence. They are born for greatness—not necessarily the kind of greatness that the world understands or portrays but a greatness that goes way beyond our human concepts and expectations.

So much happens that doesn’t, from our perspective, make sense or seem fair. The promise, however, is that one day all things will be made right, and we will have answers to what now seems so unfathomable.

**Read** 1 Corinthians 4:5, 13:12, Romans 8:28, and Revelation 21:4. What hope can you draw from these passages as we face difficult questions, not just for Bible characters but perhaps for ourselves, in the struggles and trials that, at least for now, do not always have happy endings?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

to royalty, he had charisma and leadership ability, and he had the personal character and integrity that made others want to trust him and follow him. But not everyone with these qualities lives up to his or her potential in God’s eyes. What do you think distinguished Jonathan in God’s point of view?

2 Jonathan was one of the relatively few Old Testament figures who lived an exemplary life and yet met the most ignominious end. Why would this happen? How did his choices impact his future? Discuss the reasons for your answer. How do you think he would have been viewed if he had taken another course of action that might have led to a different result? Keep in mind that this most likely would have meant abandoning Saul to his fate.

Application Question:

One of the most distinctive characteristics of Jonathan was his humility, even though he had every reason to be conceited. Early on, he attributed his military successes to God, not his own prowess, although certainly his prowess had something to do with it. He did what he could to help David survive, even though he knew that David’s survival meant he could never become king. And he ultimately put his loyalty to his profoundly undeserving father above life itself. How does this humility exemplify the ideal attitude we should have toward Christ, who is infinitely more deserving than either David or Saul?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The following activity is meant to emphasize the qualities of true greatness—greatness as God measures it—rather than the qualities that make a person “celebrated” in the human scale of values.

Activity: Bring posters or photos of well-known personalities from the news, entertainment, or sports. Put them on the walls before class members begin to walk in.

If possible, avoid commenting on the pictures. Go through the initial part of your class as usual.

When time comes to get into the activity, point to one of the photos or posters and ask why that given individual is so well known. Next, why might people admire him or her? Finally, what is genuinely good about these qualities, and what is not? How would these qualities be manifested in a godly context?

Alternatively, to do this exercise without pictures, ask class members to name famous persons they admire. Then ask them the questions listed above.
Further Study: “On the record of those who through self-abnegation have entered into the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings, stand—one in the Old Testament and one in the New—the names of Jonathan and of John the Baptist.

“Jonathan, by birth heir to the throne, yet knowing himself set aside by the divine decree; to his rival the most tender and faithful of friends, shielding David’s life at the peril of his own; steadfast at his father’s side through the dark days of his declining power, and at his side falling at the last—the name of Jonathan is treasured in heaven, and it stands on earth a witness to the existence and the power of unselfish love.

“John the Baptist, at his appearance as the Messiah’s herald, stirred the nation. From place to place his steps were followed by vast throngs of people of every rank and station. But when the One came to whom he had borne witness, all was changed. The crowds followed Jesus, and John’s work seemed fast closing. Yet there was no wavering of his faith. ‘He must increase,’ he said, ‘but I must decrease.’ John 3:30.”—Ellen G. White, Education, pp. 156, 157.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do we differentiate between faith and presumption? When and how do we go about asking for signs in order to know God’s will for us?

2. Some cultures promote passiveness as a virtue, while others see it as something negative. Jonathan was willing to take second place. Is this the same as being passive? Should a Christian be passive? If so, when? If not, why not?

3. How can you explain to a non-Christian friend the benefits of being a Christian if he or she sees that you too get sick, lose your job, or suffer the loss of loved ones?

4. Discuss the life of Jonathan in the light of Hebrews 11:32–40. What can you take away from those texts that perhaps could help you in situations that, at least from your perspective now, have dismal outcomes?

5. How does, for instance, a woman who had been sexually molested by her father show honor to him? What about physically abusive parents? How are we to respond to the command to honor them?

6. What are things that the world deems “great” that God doesn’t? What are things that God deems great that the world doesn’t? How can we know the difference between these two ideas of “greatness”?
Abigail: No Victim of Circumstances

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 1 Samuel 25, Isa. 28:23, 53:12, Dan. 9:15–19, Matt. 15:10, Rom. 8:34.

Memory Text: “Wisdom rests in the heart of him who has understanding, but what is in the heart of fools is made known” (Proverbs 14:33, NKJV).

Have you ever felt a victim of circumstances? Have you ever wished you could be somewhere else? Or that you were someone else? Consider, then, the character for this week: Abigail.

She was an intelligent and beautiful woman but, unfortunately, married to a selfish, short-sighted, and mean man, Nabal—a descendant of Caleb, but nothing like his esteemed forefather. Nabal may have been wealthy, but his name or nickname, which means “fool” or “foolish,” accurately reflected his character.

In the time of Abigail and Nabal, marriages were prearranged, and so Abigail probably had no choice in the matter. Circumstances seemed to speak against her in such a marriage as this. Conditions were not favorable, but in the glimpse that we are given into the life of Abigail, we are encouraged not to become victims of circumstances.

Abigail did not try to escape reality. She was realistic about her situation (1 Sam. 25:25), but she did not let circumstances ruin her. She decided to grow where she was planted.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 30.*
Someone Who Will Listen

Most folk have no problem talking. If the truth be known, most of us talk too much. How much better it would be if we learned to be good listeners. There are seminars given on how to be better listeners. After all, a lot is going on around us. How important, then, for us to listen.

Read Isaiah 28:23, Matthew 15:10, and James 1:19. What are they telling us to do, and why?

David and his men were on the run from Saul. While living in the wilderness of Paran, they met up with the herdsman and animals of the wealthy landowner Nabal. Instead of helping themselves to the animals, David and his men protected the herdsman and animals. At last the sheep-shearing time arrived, and a festive spirit was in the air. This was the time for saying thank you and giving gifts. Knowing this, David sent ten of his men to ask for provisions.

Read 1 Samuel 25:1–11. Why is David so insulted by Nabal’s reply? What does David hear?

Nabal truly is making good on his name. He sneeringly calls David’s men runaway slaves and sends them packing empty-handed. Nabal makes it very clear that he thinks David is a nobody. In his mind, David is so insignificant that knowing where he comes from or what he is doing is not really worth the asking. Though David has demonstrated amazing self-restraint with murderous King Saul, he, like us, feels deeply wounded when told that he is a nobody and amounts to nothing. This is compounded by the fact that he had shown kindness and was being rewarded with insults and humiliation.

Nabal is unaware totally of whom he is dealing with. He does seem to know some of the facts. He knows who David’s father was and that David is on the run from Saul, but Nabal is so self-centered and conceited that he is unable or unwilling to listen to his servants. Nabal’s servants have lived near David’s men and know that they are a fighting force to be reckoned with. The servants recognize that their master “is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him” (1 Sam. 25:17, NIV). And so they turn to someone who will listen—Abigail.

When was the last time your lack of attentive listening caused you or others trouble? How can you learn from your mistakes?
The Lesson in Brief

►Key Text: 1 Samuel 25:41

►The Student Will:

Know: Contrast Abigail’s courteous tact with Nabal’s foolish insults and David’s angry impulses.

Feel: Allow the Holy Spirit’s presence to nurture a sense of peace, comfort, and light in our hearts that can spill out in blessings to others.

Do: Wisely and compassionately intercede in the lives of others as God provides the opportunity and direction.

►Learning Outline:

I. Know: Sweetness and Light

A How does what we say and how we act reveal the Spirit at work in our hearts?

B How was Abigail not only thoughtful and courteous but brave and responsible in her responses to Nabal and David?

II. Feel: Track of Light

A What was the source of Abigail’s wisdom?

B How did she bring calm and sanity back to the situation between David and Nabal?

C How did David respond to Abigail’s counsel that showed he had a teachable spirit and was responsive to God’s leading?

III. Do: Intercession

A The ability to counsel wisely and tactfully is a tool God can use to bless others. What do we need to do in order to be able to be used of God as Abigail was?

B What areas of our lives need to be faced with courage and responsibility?

C How might God use us to intervene in the lives of others?

►Summary: Abigail, though the wife of a wicked man, was full of God’s Spirit. She wisely and humbly intervened with tactful counsel and prevented bloodshed when David was set on revenge.
Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Read 1 Samuel 25. What is the essence of the story? What lessons immediately can be drawn from it? What questions remain?

After having heard the report of the servant, Abigail immediately begins preparations. Abigail does more than listen; she acts. The narrator in 1 Samuel 25:18, 19 details the list of supplies she readies: raisins, figs, sheep ready to be cooked, roasted grain, bread, and wine. These supplies were luxurious and probably more than David’s ten men had expected.

The next part of the story is full of movement and action. The writer of the passage moves between different scenes, building the tension. We wait and hold our breath for the moment of contact. In the heat of the moment, without pausing to listen to God or reason, David and his men march out to take revenge because of an insult. The number of men that David takes with him reflects just how angry he is. David is pulling out two thirds of his fighting force.

When we react in anger, it is very difficult to make an appropriate response; we normally overreact. Abigail does not just send the gifts off and then wait to see what happens. She saddles up and rides to meet David. Despite the fact that she has been married to an overbearing and rash man, she has not allowed him to crush her spirit. She has not let herself be victimized. She still holds to her sense of self-worth and is ready to risk her life in order to protect her household. The odds are something like the young David facing Goliath: a woman with donkey loads of food and a few servants, going to face 400 armed and angry men.

Meanwhile Nabal, the fool, is also busy. While his brave wife is going out to face an angry army, he is at home having a dinner party and getting drunk.


Talk may be cheap, but our actions confirm or contradict our speech. The actions of Abigail, David, and Nabal speak volumes about what they thought, who was important to them, and which spirit motivated their actions.

If someone were to draw conclusions about you and the kind of person you are solely by your actions, what conclusions would they draw, and why? What does your answer tell you about yourself?
Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Abigail’s example of handling two difficult men illustrates how the inward beauty of a nature, imbued with the grace and atmosphere of heaven, can mediate in difficult circumstances and influence others for good.

**Just for Teachers:** Use this opening discussion and activity to help your students examine the dynamics of unequal marriages and how Spirit-led spouses can relate to their mates.

Abigail’s marriage to Nabal probably was arranged, as some marriages still are today in many parts of the world. Though some arranged marriages do well, others simply are vehicles for socially sanctioned abuse. But even marriages that we choose for ourselves can sour miserably, and two people who are very different can find themselves yoked together.

**Activity:** Illustrate popular notions of romance with examples of cards, boxes of candy, and flowers. Or alternatively, ask class members to discuss such notions as they exist in their culture.

**Discuss:** To what extent do popular notions of romantic love and marriage illustrate the relationship between Nabal and Abigail?

**Consider This:** What godly principles promote happy marriages? What can marriage partners who are unequally yoked together do to improve their marriage?

►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Help your students compare and contrast the effects of foolish and wise words on the ones to whom they are spoken.

I. Nabal *(Review 1 Samuel 25:1–15 with your class.)*

In Bible times, spring was usually the season when sheep were sheared. Nabal’s 3,000 sheep would have produced a wealth of fleeces, most likely...
A Time to Talk

In a mountain valley or ravine, Abigail meets up with David’s forces. She bows before David and treats him as though he were already king.

Read carefully Abigail’s speech in 1 Samuel 25:23–31. Contrast that to Nabal’s reply (vss. 10, 11). What does this tell us about the difference between the two of them?

Abigail addresses David as “my lord.” Perhaps this in itself serves as a reminder to David that he should behave as would befit God’s anointed king and not as the leader of a marauding band. Abigail is able to promote nobleness in David, because she has not lost her own sense of self-worth. This enables her to see the best in David and encourage godly behavior in him.

What is the first thing Abigail says to David? What do her words remind you of? What is she attempting to do? Exod. 32:32, Esther 7:2–4, Isa. 53:12, Dan. 9:15–19, Rom. 8:34.

Intercession is marked by one common denominator: the person interceding must closely identify with the person he or she is interceding for, whether or not the interceding person stands to gain anything from the transaction. The person must be willing to put aside his or her own selfish interests and ask for what would be best for someone else. Abigail could have seen this threat on Nabal’s life as a way of getting rid of her husband and regaining her freedom; instead, she chooses to identify herself with him and pleads for his undeserving life.

Perhaps the very best form of intercession is intercessory prayer. We pray for people who are unable or unwilling to pray for themselves. We have to put our own wants, needs, and wishes aside and talk to God for these people. Our prayers give God the excuse to move deep into Satan’s territory. It is in praying for others that we realize the immense compassion that God has for us. We can learn how to bless those who curse us and pray for those who mistreat us (Luke 6:28).

Have you ever had someone intercede for you in a situation in which you couldn’t take care of yourself? How did that situation help you to understand better what it means that we have Jesus interceding in our behalf?
the largest source of his income. Such a time of financial success brought
on festivities, and Nabal should have been in a good mood. However, in
response to David’s courteous message of congratulations and request for
a gift of food in recognition of his part in protecting Nabal’s flock over
the winter, Nabal insolently suggested that David was just a ne’er-do-well
who didn’t deserve kindness, much less a reward.

A servant, reporting to Abigail on her husband’s message to David,
ended with the prediction that David would be furious, the camp would
be in immediate danger, and that Nabal was “such a wicked man that no
one can talk to him” (1 Sam. 25:17, NIV).

Good speech, it would seem, begins with being a good listener. And
it is clear in Nabal’s case that he is doing all the talking and that none of
it is good.

David’s son, Solomon, wrote a good deal about the effects of wicked
words. He noted in Ecclesiastes 10:12, 13 that a fool’s words may at first
just be nonsense, but they end up as “wicked madness” (vs. 13, NIV).
Proverbs 12:18 declares, “Reckless words pierce like a sword” (NIV).
We may excuse our careless words as “just talk,” but thoughtless speech
quickly can spiral into rude, insulting, and abusive language.

The New Testament is just as strong as the Old in condemning reckless
speech. Some of the most harrowing language in the Bible on the dam-
age that words can do is found in the book of James. The Message Bible
paraphrases James 3:6 this way: “By our speech we can ruin the world,
turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world
up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.”
Unless we are deeply conscious of how our words may affect those listen-
ing to us and carefully guard our speech, our words may set off wildfires
far beyond our control. Just look at the one Nabal’s words ignited.

**Consider This:** Do you know anyone who is so insolent and disagree-
able that no one can talk to him or her? How do we respond to persons
who often are unreasonable and bad-tempered?

**II. Abigail and David** *(Review 1 Samuel 25:16–31 with your class.)*

Abigail immediately packed a feast for David and his men and went to
meet what she must have known would be an angry, vengeful warrior and
his band.

When she met David, she bowed before him and addressed him as if
he were already king. “With nothing of ostentation or pride, but full of the
What Abigail Won’t Do

People often are afraid of an abusive person. They are ready to cover for the abuser and will lie and pretend in order to appease the abuser.

Read 1 Samuel 25:25, 26. What does it say about Abigail that she was so open about her husband’s faults? How does this make her intercession in his behalf that much more remarkable? If someone were interceding for you right now (which there is), what might be said about you?

Although Abigail is ready to risk her life to save her household, she also has personal integrity. She does not lie for Nabal. She knows that he is the one with the problem, and she is not afraid to say so, even in public.

Someone in an abusive relationship often begins to feel responsible for the abuser’s actions and feels guilty. Abigail does not do this. She has a strong sense of self-worth. This sense of worth is grounded in her sense of mission. She does not give herself credit for intercepting David and bringing the gift but sees herself simply as God’s instrument in changing David’s mind. Because Abigail knows who she is, she is able to encourage David to be all he can be. She reminds him that he is to fight the Lord’s battles and not waste his time and energy in seeking revenge for personal insults. Abigail’s observation that “evil [has] not been found” in David (1 Sam. 25:28, NKJV) is both a statement and a warning that David has not (yet) disqualified himself from the great office that he has been anointed for—to be king.

Abigail also reminds David that with his life firmly bound up in God, he has no need to “save face” or defend his honor. God would do it for him.

Remember, too, that in Abigail’s world divorce and even separation were not options for a woman. From an earthly point of view, she would “belong” to her husband until the day of her death. However, Abigail does not see her life as useless or as a permanent prison. She believes that God will deal with her husband in His own good time.

Abigail’s speech shows that wisdom can be found in any life situation in which we surrender ourselves to God. Wisdom is not a theory but a practical way of living and reacting to the people around us.

What does it mean to surrender ourselves completely to God? How does one do it? If someone were to say to you, “I want to give myself completely to the Lord, but I don’t know how,” how would you respond?
wisdom and love of God, Abigail revealed the strength of her devotion to her household; and she made it plain to David that the unkind course of her husband was in no wise premeditated against him as a personal affront, but was simply the outburst of an unhappy and selfish nature.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 666.

Abigail’s humility is evident in a number of ways. As the wife of a wealthy man, she could have let the gift of food speak for itself or sent a message to David by one of her servants, as David had done to Nabal. Instead, she herself accompanied the gift. Abigail didn’t take credit for any of her wise counsel but acknowledged that it was God who kept David from avenging himself. She graciously accepted the blame for David’s resentment and tactfully implied that David should be fighting God’s battles instead of seeking revenge for himself.

David accepted the reproof with praise to God for Abigail’s wise counsel. Rather than being impatient and holding a grudge, he allowed Abigail’s calm, respectful words to work on his heart.

Pleasant words, words offered with restraint at the right time, are “sweet to the soul, and healing to the bones” (Prov. 16:24, NIV). They are reliable and bring instruction. They are like a fountain, bubbling with fresh water (Prov. 18:4, NIV), “like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Prov. 25:11). And wise words can turn away anger, quenching the wildfires of wrath that wicked words have started. How important it is to allow God’s Spirit to mediate our speech, giving us courage to respond to evil and imbuing our words with His gracious wisdom, fresh beauty, and sweet healing.

**Consider This:** While Abigail did not excuse her husband’s foolishness, how did she take responsibility for the situation? How did her tact allow David to save face?

- David could have continued to hold a grudge. Instead, he allowed God to teach him a lesson through a woman’s gentle courtesy. How did this teachable spirit enable David to respond to other lessons he needed to learn throughout his career as leader?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Help the class to look at their own cultural assumptions as they contemplate scriptural models for relationships.
In and Out

Unlike many of us, David could take constructive criticism, and he observes in Abigail’s words the workings of God. In a moment he sees the consequences of his proposed actions in perspective, and he is thankful that God has intervened to prevent a bloodbath. Abigail arrives home to discover that her husband is once again in no condition to listen, and so she wisely waits until the next morning to inform him of what has happened.

Nabal is terror-stricken. He most likely suffers a stroke and dies ten days later. David has not forgotten Abigail and sends men to make a marriage proposal for him.

Consider Abigail’s last recorded words in the context of this week’s study (1 Sam. 25:41). What do they tell us about Abigail? What other biblical examples can you find of the same principle in action?

Abigail was a woman of influence. She had five maids, and yet, she was willing to serve. Much later Jesus would say, “‘The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve’” (Matt. 20:28, NKJV).

Abigail’s life was no fairy tale, even after her marriage to David. As was the custom in those days, David had many wives, and his family life was far from God’s ideal. Abigail was David’s second wife, and he had to be constantly on the run from King Saul. At Ziklag she, along with the other men’s families, was captured by the Amalekites and later rescued. Here Abigail finally disappears from the biblical narrative. We would all expect to see this wise and beautiful woman at King David’s side, playing an important role as David’s story develops further, but there’s only silence. All we know about her further is that she had a son named Daniel (1 Chron. 3:1) or Chileab (2 Sam. 3:3), who was second in line to the throne by birth order. However, both Abigail and her son disappear from the picture. Some scholars believe that both she and her son died violently. Given the later rapes, murders, revolts, and rebellions that David’s oldest sons were involved in, an early death was perhaps not the worst that could happen.

As followers of Jesus, our lives are not necessarily fairy tales, either. God knows the end from the beginning, and so all the turns of our lives do not need to make sense to us. We need, instead, to trust in the goodness of God.

Submission to others, even when appropriate, is not usually easy, for it requires a sense of humility and dependency. How well do you fare in that area? How can you learn to submit when necessary? How can we learn from Christ’s incredible examples of submission?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Thought Questions:

1. What examples have you encountered wherein women have faced unfair circumstances in the workplace, in domestic abuse, or when applying for justice or protection? There are still many opportunities to help women improve their status in every country of the world. What can be done in your own home and community?

2. Often cultural traditions may dictate many of the injustices we have grown accustomed to seeing. How can we bring the sanctifying lens of Christ’s example to bear on our own assumptions of proper relationships between men and women?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Suggest the following ideas to help your students put the class discussion into practice during the following weeks or months.

1. Examine the media, books, magazines, and other means by which we transmit cultural expectations to both boys and girls in regard to proper relationships between men and women. How can we militate against the unhealthy effects of these messages in our homes, schools, and workplaces?

2. How can you model a balance of submission, leadership, and tender care in your marriage?

3. Outline the principles of mediation illustrated by Abigail’s intercession with David. How can these principles help you respond to a difficult situation that is challenging your life?

4. The description of Abigail’s influence in Patriarchs and Prophets compares her piety to “the fragrance of a flower, breathed out all unconsciously in face and word and action” (p. 667). How might you surround yourself and others with the uplifting inspiration that comes from flowers?
Further Study: “[Abigail’s] words could have come only from the lips of one who had partaken of the wisdom from above. The piety of Abigail, like the fragrance of a flower, breathed out all unconsciously in face and word and action. The Spirit of the Son of God was abiding in her soul. Her speech, seasoned with grace, and full of kindness and peace, shed a heavenly influence. Better impulses came to David, and he trembled as he thought what might have been the consequences of his rash purpose. ‘Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.’ Matthew 5:9. Would that there were many more like this woman of Israel, who would soothe the irritated feelings, prevent rash impulses, and quell great evils by words of calm and well-directed wisdom.

“A consecrated Christian life is ever shedding light and comfort and peace. It is characterized by purity, tact, simplicity, and usefulness. It is controlled by that unselfish love that sanctifies the influence. It is full of Christ, and leaves a track of light wherever its possessor may go. Abigail was a wise reprover and counselor. David’s passion died away under the power of her influence and reasoning. He was convinced that he had taken an unwise course and had lost control of his own spirit.

“With a humble heart he received the rebuke, in harmony with his own words, ‘Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil.’ Psalm 141:5. He gave thanks and blessings because she advised him righteously. There are many who, when they are reproved, think it praiseworthy if they receive the rebuke without becoming impatient; but how few take reproof with gratitude of heart and bless those who seek to save them from pursuing an evil course.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 667.

Discussion Questions:

1 Spouse abuse is a big problem. As a church we have a responsibility to help. That’s why every year, on the Seventh-day Adventist calendar, the fourth Sabbath of August is “Abuse Prevention Day,” which gives us a special opportunity to educate fellow members and create awareness about this problem. What can we do to help those who are suffering from this terrible scourge?

2 “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matt. 5:9). Drawing on this week’s lesson, what are the characteristics of peacemakers? How can we make peace without compromising our principles?
Imagine that you are buying a train ticket. You stand in line for a long time and worry about missing your train. Finally you pay, receive your ticket, and run to the train. On the way, you count your change and discover that you have been given far too much. What do you do? Stand in line again to return the money and perhaps miss your train, or simply consider this your lucky day and move on?

What you do in this situation will depend on your understanding of right and wrong. Ethics is the way that we apply this understanding in our everyday lives. Nowadays the most popular type of ethics is situation ethics, which suggests that there are no moral absolutes. It often means doing whatever is most beneficial for oneself in a particular situation.

This week we’ll see a powerful contrast of ethics between those of King David and of the soldier Uriah. However horrible David’s actions are, they appear even worse contrasted with those of Uriah. Though we aren’t told much about Uriah, what we discover of him and his unfortunate fate can teach us what it means to live out one’s faith as opposed to just talking about it.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 6.*
The Slippery Slope

Read 2 Samuel 11 and ask yourself, How could someone so honored of God stoop so deep into sin? What warning should this present to all of us?

We cannot study the story of Uriah without looking at David. In David’s association with Uriah, we can see David at his worst. The author of Samuel does not sing the hero’s praises while ignoring his sins. The story of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah marks a turning point in the life and reign of David. Up to this point, David is portrayed as someone going from strength to strength. Second Samuel 11, however, depicts the beginning of David’s downfall.

Some may want to see in David’s sin an excuse for their own. However, the narrator emphasizes that sin has consequences and shows how many lives one particular sin affected. The first to suffer as a result of David’s sin is Uriah, followed by the child born to David and Bathsheba. David loses credibility in his family, and the repercussions spread from a family problem to a problem of national proportions. The chain reaction that David’s sin has set in motion widens to include rape (2 Sam. 13:14), murder (vss. 28, 29), and many lives lost in a rebellion (2 Samuel 15). Even if repentance gains God’s mercy, the author of the book of Samuel clearly points out to us that sin has grave consequences (2 Sam. 12:13, 14).

The story of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah is told in a carefully structured way. The biblical author uses action words (often involving the verb to send) in order to contrast Uriah’s and David’s behavior. Let’s have a look at the structure of the story, based on the main action.

• David sends Joab to fight the Ammonites (2 Sam. 11:1).
• David inquires about and sends for Bathsheba (vss. 3, 4).
• David commits adultery with Bathsheba (vs. 4).
• Bathsheba sends a message about her pregnancy (vs. 5).
• David sends for Uriah (vs. 6).
• Uriah refuses to sleep with Bathsheba (vs. 13).
• David sends the death warrant with Uriah (vss. 14, 15).

As can be easily seen, “sending” is a very important activity in 2 Samuel 11. When we send someone around, we normally have power over that person. Looked at from this angle, David is truly the most powerful character in our story. He does most of the sending. He controls the members of the cast. He shapes and destroys their lives. He looks like a typical ancient Near Eastern absolute monarch of his time. However, there is one thing that David does not control: sin. Although he seems to control the outward action, sin controls his choices and motivations.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 2 Samuel 11:11

The Student Will:
Know: Compare and contrast Uriah the Hittite’s fidelity to God and to his country with King David’s collapse of morality.
Feel: Sense our vulnerability to fall into temptation without the constant presence of God’s grace.
Do: Throw ourselves daily on God’s mercy and saving power.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Faith and Faithlessness
A In the face of Uriah’s integrity, David fell deeper and deeper into sin as he tried to cover his wrongdoing with Bathsheba. What evidence of Uriah’s faithfulness to God do we have?
B How did David come to such a state of unprincipled action?
C What were the end results of Uriah’s faithfulness? What were the long-term results of David’s sin?

II. Feel: But for the Grace of God
A If David, a man after God’s own heart, could fall into such sin, how vulnerable are we to temptation?
B What was David’s response when God confronted him with his sin? What is our only hope?

III. Do: Daily Surrender
A Though David sinned, he recognized God’s power to forgive and cleanse, and he threw himself entirely on God’s mercy. How can we make David’s prayer our own?

Summary: Uriah’s whole focus was his duty to God. All the persuasive power of a mighty king couldn’t move him to violate his conscience, and because of it, David had him killed. David had lost his integrity and committed great sins. Yet, in humility and repentance, he sought God’s forgiveness, and God saved him.
No One Is an Island

The entire story of David and Uriah is set against the backdrop of a war with the Ammonites. Read 2 Samuel 11:1 carefully. What subtle criticism of David does the author include?

David decides to stay home and sends out his army under Joab. This was, of course, David’s first mistake. He had somehow begun to believe that he really was more special than his men and was, therefore, not to put himself in danger. David had not learned yet that the greatest dangers are almost always from within, not from without. The great problem with power or authority is the way it easily leads us to distort our own self-perception. We think that we are somehow better than others and above the laws or rules that hold for others.

Compare the forms of leadership that David exercises in the story of 1 Samuel 26:5–11 and in 2 Samuel 11. What difference do you see?

In the stories describing how David spared Saul’s life, David leads by example and asks for volunteers. But now, in the time of 2 Samuel 11, instead of being out with his troops and leading them, and depending on God for guidance and personal safety, David finds himself on a hot, humid evening up on the flat roof of his palace (in order, perhaps, to catch the evening breeze). The palace, probably built on the highest section of the fortress city, has a commanding view of most of Jerusalem. David scans the rooftops and sees a woman bathing. Then he sends someone to find out the identity of the woman. He sends for the woman, knowing full well that she is the wife of Uriah, the Hittite. The Hebrew verb that is used to indicate David’s command to Bathsheba is very strong. In other contexts it is used to indicate that something is taken by force (Gen. 14:11). David follows his desires and, while the hormones are pumping, he completely brackets out what he knows about right and wrong. Little does David imagine, in that moment, the far-reaching effects that will follow from this personal decision he makes. By deliberately flaunting his power, he will directly affect the lives of Bathsheba, Uriah, an unborn child, and the course of Israel’s history.

Think about the decisions you make. Are they based mostly on reason, rational thinking, and logic, or are they based on emotion and passion? Which way of thinking seems to dominate you? Is there a right balance between these motives, and if not, how can you find it?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Like Uriah, we should march toward obtaining a holy character to match the holy cause we are fighting for.

**Just for Teachers:** Without becoming a “David story,” a telescoping study of Uriah offers a rich abundance of material. Allow Uriah “his moment” by spotlighting his rock solid, upward components of character that may shine light toward an understanding of our own.

Of the Hittite tribe, Uriah was a native of Canaan, which had been invaded by Israel, and yet he ended up fighting side by side with the Jewish infantry in the Israeli-Ammonite war.

Of the Oneida tribe, Chapman Schanandoah was a native of America, which had been invaded by Europeans. Upon allegiance to the American government, he fought side by side with the United States Navy seamen in the Spanish-American War. See www.oneidaindiannation.com.

Of Jacob’s 12 tribes—either naturally or symbolically—we are natives of the fallen world, invaded by hope. Upon adoption (Rom. 8:14, 15) we fight side by side with God’s army in the great controversy.

Clearly, Uriah’s story of changed allegiance and subsequent enlistment in the army of the opposition is not unique. Given the similarities in the narratives of the warriors listed, why is Uriah’s story of allegiance to a “turn-it-upside-down” invading government so intriguing? What can we spiritually learn from Uriah?

**Consider This:** Ponder the foreignness of Uriah. Geographically, he was a native of Canaan and a resident of Israel. Spiritually, he was already adopted by God (vss. 15, 16) before his change in citizenship. Was Uriah, then, a foreigner in either sense of the word? Why, accordingly, do we continue to categorize him as an outsider?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Using 2 Samuel’s account, guide the class into sketching a character profile of Uriah, particularly the exemplary components that we want to assimilate into our own characters.

CONTINUED
A Foreigner in Israel

Throughout this chapter Uriah is referred to as Uriah the Hittite. So who were the Hittites? The Hittites of Palestine were an ethnic group with an uncertain relationship to Neo-Hittite states to the north. In the Old Testament world, culture, nationality, race, and religion were very much interconnected. For this reason, the Old Testament strongly criticizes and prohibits intermarriage between Israel and the surrounding nations. The prohibition given in Deuteronomy 7:3 is repeated at each major revival in Israel. A key to understanding the prohibitions against intermarriage is religion. The Old Testament is full of examples of foreigners who accept the God of Israel, and the Bible regards their assimilation to Israel positively. In the case of Uriah, the assimilation is in the form of marriage, as well as religion.

What are some examples of foreigners who were assimilated into Israel? Josh. 6:25, Ruth 1:1–16, Esther 8:17, Isa. 56:3–7.

Ruth, the Moabitess, left her land, people, and religion and went with her mother-in-law back to Israel. Her famous words underline the important concept of adopting not only another people but also another God: “ ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God’ ” (Ruth 1:16, NIV). The assimilation includes not only exemplary daughters-in-law but also lying prostitutes. Remember Rahab, the prostitute who rescued the two spies? Here was someone who responded very positively to the little light she had and chose to believe that the God of Israel was powerful and faithful. Sometime after the fall of Jericho, Rahab marries Salmon and, together with Ruth, is included in the genealogy of Christ (Josh. 6:25, Matt. 1:5).

Uriah was not the only Hittite to have served David. First Samuel 26:6 mentions Ahimelech the Hittite. However, Uriah became one of David’s elite warriors (1 Chron. 11:41). Interestingly, if Eliam the father of Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:3) was the same Eliam who was the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite (2 Sam. 23:34), then Uriah had indeed married into a very influential family. His father-in-law also would have been an elite warrior and son of David’s esteemed counselor. This could explain the proximity of Uriah’s house to the palace, and it may provide a reason for Ahithophel’s later defection to Absalom’s conspiracy. It may well be that he held a grudge against David for the treatment of his granddaughter Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah.

Read Ephesians 2:19. How can Ruth’s, Rahab’s, and Uriah’s assimilation into Israel help us to establish our personal spiritual pedigree? How does this passage help us understand that no matter our background, through Christ we can be accepted into “the household of God”? 
Bible Commentary

I. “I Will Not Do This Thing” (Read 2 Samuel 11:11, 1 Samuel 1:26, and 2 Kings 2:2 with your class.)

The ultimate revelation of Uriah’s sterling character is his declaration (2 Sam. 11:11, NKJV): “As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.” Whose conviction does Uriah seem to echo? (See Genesis 39:9.)

Uriah is referring to spending the night with his wife, which—obviously—no commandment forbids. Is loyal compassion for his comrades all that’s going on? Or in addition to the problem of the ark being housed in a tent, is there an even deeper matter here?

Yes! Jewish tradition has it that, as a measure to conserve strength, Israelite soldiers took an oath not to have sexual relations the evening before, or during, battle or while their unit fought. Thus in the words of Angus MacGregor, Uriah “honors his oath of no sex while his unit is in battle” (www.hidenwood.com).

That Uriah was honoring an oath is evident by his phrase “as you live, and as your soul lives.” It was customary in Israel to swear oaths by the life of the person addressed.

The permanence of keeping a vow was not to be trifled with (Num. 30:2 and Deut. 23:23), even if keeping it meant a person suffered loss in order to keep the vow (Ps. 15:4). So deeply was Uriah’s oath ingrained in the Lord’s honor and his own that, even in spite of David’s making Uriah drunk (2 Sam. 11:13), Uriah was not swayed to break it! (Note: Some sources infer that Uriah was declaring an oath, not repeating a former one. Whether the oath was invoked on the spot or not, Uriah’s strong conviction was that the oath was necessary and not to be revoked.)

Uriah, indeed, believed that he was fighting for a holy cause. A strong hint that Uriah’s holy character came before the holy cause—rather than the cause serving as a wake-up call to character—is uncovered in the meaning of Uriah’s name chosen by his parents: “my light is the Lord.” What does that imply about the childhood home he grew up in, which could account for his sterling character?

Consider This: Consider the following responses to the question, What temptations might have been going through Uriah’s mind during his dinner with the king?

• “I am married.”
What’s in a Name?

Names were very important in the biblical world. A name told of the person’s cultural heritage and beliefs or pointed to the wishes of the parents for the child. Often a change in life circumstances or beliefs was indicated by a change of name.

Note the following biblical characters’ new names and mark the reason given for the name change:

Abram (Gen. 17:5)

Jacob (Gen. 32:27, 28)

Daniel (Dan. 1:7)

After Jacob’s night of wrestling with the celestial visitor, he experienced perhaps one of the most far-reaching name changes in all sacred history. Out of a “deceiver” (Jacob) became a “may-God-strive-for” (Israel), and all of his descendants became known as “Israelites,” or the children of Israel.

In the case of Daniel, the name change had a different purpose. King Nebuchadnezzar wanted to make sure that the young exiles knew who was in control. He also wanted to brainwash them somehow. Daniel’s name was changed from “God is my Judge” to “protect the life of the prince” (Belteshazzar) in an attempt by the heathen king to undermine Daniel’s allegiance to his God.

The name of Bathsheba’s husband is not unique in biblical history. During the time of King Hezekiah, a prophet by the name of Uriah communicated God’s judgment against Jerusalem (Jer. 26:20–23). Interestingly, Uriah’s name is Hebrew and could be translated as “my light is the Lord” or “flame of the Lord.” While he may have been a Hittite by birth, by choice he belonged to the God of Israel. Uriah’s ethnic background underlines the fact that God does not look at the outside but knows the heart. Having family members in prominent church positions or great godly ancestors does not give us a better standing before God. Neither does our family history or even our past personal history affect our acceptance with God.

By dying for all humanity, Christ tore down all barriers between all people (Gal. 3:28). The Cross proves us all equal before God; Christ’s death was for every human being, for every human being is of infinite value in His eyes. Sure, God has at times given different groups special tasks and callings, but that’s not the same as saying some people are of more value to God than others. The Cross proves that point wrong.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

• “The king himself told me to go to her.”
• “Sure, I feel bad for the guys on the battlefield, but their situation tonight won’t improve a whit by what I do or don’t do here in Jerusalem tonight.”
• “How would my fellow soldiers ever find out?”
• “And after all, the soldiers don’t really understand the pressures on a captain—how badly we need some creature comforts.”

Nevertheless, Uriah’s bottom line was, “But this is not upright. I would know. The Lord would know.” What would be our response?

II. Uriah Was Brave (Read 2 Samuel 23:39 with your class.)

Uriah was one of King David’s 37 most valiant, honored, military men, one of the king’s own elite bodyguard. To what military force might the 37 be compared?

When Joab put Uriah’s unit right up to the gate of the enemy’s wall, Uriah had to know that in so hopeless a situation death was imminent if he did not flee. Uriah fought to the finish.

Consider This: For what or whom are we willing to fight to the finish, and why?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: This activity applies the rungs of the Christian growth ladder in 2 Peter 1:5–7 to this lesson’s Key Concept.

If we are to fight individually for a holy character as did Uriah, why is it not only enlightening but also crucial to evaluate occasionally where we perceive ourselves on the climb?

Can we do this if we are not even familiar with the order of the rungs?

With this thought in mind, prepare a double-sided handout, if supplies are available, with the rungs in random order on side one, perhaps alphabetically, and, on the reverse side, the correct sequence, beginning with faith, at the bottom.

Activity: Ask the class members to rearrange the random list in the order that they, in human insight, would suppose is the ascending order.
A Man of Principle

In the biblical narrative Bathsheba appears as a passive character, and the biblical author refrains from making any comments about her accountability or involvement. However, even though she appears to be passive in the entire account, she too will pay a high price. Her baby son will die. The only time that Bathsheba speaks is when she sends a message to David to tell him that she is pregnant (2 Sam. 11:5). David figures that if he can get Uriah home for even one evening, then it would appear that the baby was Uriah’s, and David’s sin would go undetected. And so David sends for Uriah, who has to make a tiring 40-mile (approximately 65-kilometer) trip to Jerusalem. After making some small talk, David sends Uriah home with a veiled command that he go and sleep with his wife (2 Sam. 11:8). In an effort to appear generous, he even sends a gift to Uriah’s home, thinking that the situation is all taken care of. However, Uriah, being a man of principle, cannot be manipulated. The next morning David hears that Uriah spent the night in the gate with the servants of the king. The situation is quickly slipping out of David’s control. David sends for Uriah. He is becoming frustrated. Uriah is showing him up badly. David, who was once a man of integrity, now cannot seem to understand Uriah’s integrity.

What does 2 Samuel 11:10–13 tell us about Uriah’s motives? What other examples can we find in the Bible of those who acted with the same kind of integrity?

Uriah’s answer shows that he was not a nominal believer but had completely identified himself with the God of Israel and his comrades. Uriah believed that it was wrong to use his situation for personal comfort or advantage. The same David who once showed complete loyalty to King Saul (even though Saul was persecuting him) now cannot understand the loyalty and faithfulness of Uriah.

David resorts to a disgusting scheme. He deliberately gets Uriah drunk in an attempt to break down his principles. It is interesting to note that the same scheme was used by the two daughters of Lot, and it led to the origin of the Ammonites (Gen. 19:30–38)—the very people that the Israelite army is fighting. Despite his impaired reasoning, Uriah refuses to compromise his values and again spends the night among the king’s servants.

Read Psalm 51 in the context of 2 Samuel 11. What can we learn from it about the nature of sin, of repentance, and of God’s grace?
Alternately, make a list of the rungs and scramble the order. Read them to
the class, asking it to prioritize the rungs in the order it thinks the rungs must
come on the ladder of Christian growth.

Then ask, Does the ascending order of the “real” list come as a surprise?
Read Isaiah 55:9 and 1 Samuel 16:7.

The exercise invokes intriguing questions: Are brotherly kindness and
love even more difficult than godliness? Why does knowledge come after
faith? (Clue: What is the difference between whom we know and what we
know, and why does the distinction matter?) At which level comes bap-
tism?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Prepare the following double-sided handout to
distribute, with the heading, “My Spiritual Ladder for November 1–5,
2010.” In the column to the left, list the eight ladder rungs, followed by
a blank line for notes. Side two comprises the examples below to which
they may wish to refer. Alternatively, to do this exercise without the
handout, read out loud to your class the eight ladder rungs, also known
as the godly graces, encouraging members to think of ways to climb
each rung.

Activity: Invite the class members to do the following: for each character
component, you might wish to fill out a “goal” for this week that you hope
to accomplish.

Faith I will memorize a stellar faith Bible verse.
Virtue I will make right this wrong: ________.
Knowledge I will cover my Bible study guide lesson thoroughly.
Temperance I will limit my food intake to nourishment.
Patience I will finally make that difficult phone call.
Godliness I will study a chapter of Jesus’ life/example.
Brotherly kindness I will send an encouraging e-mail.
Charity I will draw close to ______, who’s hungry for friend-
ship.

What recognizable “division” of steps is there below and above your spiri-
tual climb? In what ways is that potential division recognizable to others?
Further Study: “The Bible has little to say in praise of men. Little space is given to recounting the virtues of even the best men who have ever lived. This silence is not without purpose; it is not without a lesson. All the good qualities that men possess are the gift of God; their good deeds are performed by the grace of God through Christ. Since they owe all to God the glory of whatever they are or do belongs to Him alone; they are but instruments in His hands. More than this—as all the lessons of Bible history teach—it is a perilous thing to praise or exalt men; for if one comes to lose sight of his entire dependence on God, and to trust to his own strength, he is sure to fall.

“It is impossible for us in our own strength to maintain the conflict; and whatever diverts the mind from God, whatever leads to self-exaltation or to self-dependence, is surely preparing the way for our overthrow. The tenor of the Bible is to inculcate distrust of human power and to encourage trust in divine power.

“It was the spirit of self-confidence and self-exaltation that prepared the way for David’s fall. Flattery and the subtle allurements of power and luxury were not without effect upon him. Intercourse with surrounding nations also exerted an influence for evil. According to the customs prevailing among Eastern rulers, crimes not to be tolerated in subjects were uncondemned in the king; the monarch was not under obligation to exercise the same self-restraint as the subject. All this tended to lessen David’s sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. And instead of relying in humility upon the power of Jehovah, he began to trust to his own wisdom and might.”—Ellen G. White, Conflict and Courage, p. 177.

Discussion Questions:

1. In your class, have individual members identify roles or positions in which they have or have had power or influence. Discuss what can be done to safeguard against a misuse of power in these positions. How can we help someone who we see is in danger of misusing authority or influence?

2. Look at the ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic makeup of your Sabbath School class. How welcome would people from other groups or nonchurched people feel in your class? What could you do as a Sabbath School class to reach out to “foreigners”?

3. Uriah—honest, loyal, principled—gets murdered by the king he faithfully served. David—dishonest, treacherous, deceitful—gets a beautiful woman as a wife and lives many years. Discuss.

4. As a class, go over Psalm 51 and discuss what it teaches about forgiveness. How can we learn to accept forgiveness for ourselves when we might be guilty of sins as bad as David’s?
Abiathar: The Priest

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Exod. 28:6, 39:2–7, 1 Sam. 21:1–9, 22:6–23, 2 Sam. 15:13–29.

Memory Text: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV).

Priests played a very important role in the life and history of Israel. And not just in Israel but in the surrounding nations, as well. In Mesopotamian culture the king was considered a priest; thus, he combined both political and religious power. Priestly guilds represented powerful interests at the court, and in many instances priests were king-makers. In the Old Testament especially, the role of the priesthood was central to the life of faith of Israel. Sacred history shows the influential roles of the priests in New Testament times, as well.

The priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9), an idea that came to prominence in the Protestant Reformation, is not entirely a New Testament concept (see Exod. 19:6). It seems always to have been God’s ideal that believers would be holy and serve others by interceding for them and by communicating the plan of salvation.

This week we’ll look at Abiathar’s story, which gives us some important glimpses into the Old Testament priesthood and tells us that priesthood is not based just on pedigree or education but on personal commitment to the Lord. As in the case of Abiathar, wrong choices can disqualify a member of the priesthood.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 13.
Lies and Tragedy

Read 1 Samuel 21:1–9 and 1 Samuel 22:6–23 and answer the following questions:

• What lie did David tell to Ahimelech about why he was there?

• What happened to Ahimelech as a result of his trust in David?

• How did Saul seek to turn his own men against David? What kind of argument did he use?

• How did Ahimelech respond to Saul regarding the character and faithfulness of David?

• What does this story tell us about just how fallen and degenerate and vengeful King Saul had become?

• Why do you think Doeg, a foreigner, would do what the servants of Saul refused to do?

• How did David respond to the news of the massacre? In what ways was his response correct?

• What promise did David make to the one son of Ahimelech who managed to escape the slaughter?

Look at the contrast in this story between honor and dishonor, faithfulness and faithlessness. Look at the havoc wreaked from dishonesty and sin. What kind of moral questions are you facing right now; what kind of moral choices must you make? Think through the consequences of your actions before you take them.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Peter 2:9

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Identify how the choices of Abiathar the priest affected his qualifications for priesthood in what he did both for, and against, David.

**Feel:** Value the importance of loyalty to God’s purposes as a critical qualification for service in God’s work.

**Do:** Stand on God’s side as members of a people chosen to serve as a royal priesthood, praising God and serving in the priestly role of intermediation.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: On the Run

Abiathar (the sole survivor of Saul’s massacre of the priesthood) and David found common cause in escaping Saul’s tyranny. Abiathar served David many years, but what act of disloyalty to God’s anointed eventually disqualified Abiathar as a priest?

II. Feel: Friend and Betrayer

Abiathar was loyal to David during both Saul’s persecution and Absalom’s rebellion. Near the end of David’s life, however, Abiathar abandoned David for another royal son who wanted David’s throne. What might have caused this betrayal? How can one act undo a life of service?

III. Do: Royal Priests

We, too, are chosen as priests, to serve God in prayer, praise, and intermediation in good times and bad. How may we disqualify ourselves as Abiathar did?

Is there something we must do to qualify ourselves for service in God’s royal priesthood? Why, or why not?

**Summary:** After a long life of service as a priest, Abiathar disqualified himself for ministry by betraying his king and supporting a usurper to the throne.
Abiathar, the Priest

We’re not told how Abiathar escaped the slaughter of his family. We’re told only that he escaped and made his way to David. However, before fleeing, Abiathar managed to save the ephod (see 1 Sam. 23:6), one of the most important objects of priesthood (a sacred vestment worn by the priests; see Exod. 28:6, 39:2–7), which was used to seek God’s will when making decisions. On at least two occasions, the biblical author reports that David called for Abiathar and the ephod (1 Sam. 23:9–12; 30:7, 8).

In contrast to many of us today, the people in Abiathar’s days had little access to God’s Written Word. There were only a few handwritten copies of the Book of the Law (the Pentateuch), so most people had little opportunity to study the Word of God for themselves. Most of us are privileged to have access to the Bible for ourselves. God has promised to give us the Holy Spirit to explain the Word to us, personally and collectively (John 14:26). God also uses people to give us godly advice (Prov. 20:18) and works through circumstances too (Rom. 8:28).

**What were some of the functions of Abiathar when he was priest?**

1 Sam. 23:9–13, 2 Sam. 15:24, 17:15–22.

Besides functioning in these roles, Abiathar had experienced personal trauma and, like David, was a homeless refugee—which somehow prepared him even better to serve the future king of Israel, who also was constantly on the run. He could understand the frustrations, fears, and betrayals that David and his men must have often felt in the face of continued persecution.

This motif of personal identification with a person or a group of people is important in the New Testament’s concept of priesthood. The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus can be our High Priest because He fully can empathize with us (Heb. 2:17).

**Read 1 Peter 2:9.** The New Testament clearly teaches that all of us have the responsibilities of priests in our communities. Ours is no self-calling. Jesus said: “‘You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name’” (John 15:16, NIV). God’s calling to us does not make us into Old Testament priests or New Testament apostles but challenges us to intercede for our families, communities, and all those around us.

How can you better serve in the role of “priest”?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Christians are called to be a nation of priests and priestesses, distinguished by their sacred calling, royal lineage, and holy conduct.

Just for Teachers: Using 1 Peter 2:9, lead your class in a discussion of the following question: Who is part of the chosen generation, royal priesthood, and holy nation, referred to by Peter?

Peter’s special designation for members of the then fledgling Christian church, and those who would accept Jesus as Savior in succeeding centuries, harkens back to Exodus 19:6, when God gave Moses the following message to give to the Israelites: “ ‘And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel” (Exod. 19:6, NKJV). It was always God’s vision that a special, called-out group of human beings would participate with Him in the task of spreading the gospel to the world.

Consider This: Why did God choose to use fallen human beings to help Him reach other fallen human beings? What does this tell us about God?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: As you examine the priestly calling that rests upon followers of Jesus Christ, make the point that the called owe God much in return for saving them and giving them a privileged work. Therefore, we must participate with God in the work of reaching lost men and women. It is the least that we can do to show our gratitude to God for His grace.

I. Chosen Above All Others (Read 1 Samuel 22:20–23 and Zechariah 3:2 with your class.)

The murder of the Lord’s priests and their families at the command of Saul is a powerful testament to the unspiritual depths to which he had
Absalom’s Revolt

Second Samuel 15–18 tells the sad story of Absalom, David’s son who revolted against his father’s rule. At one point Absalom’s army is on its way to Jerusalem. This must have been a nightmare for Abiathar. David has decided to flee rather than turn Jerusalem into a battlefield and cause a bloodbath. All of David’s faithful followers prepare to flee with him. Abiathar must have remembered his flight after the massacre of his family and village under King Saul. He gets ready to leave with David.

Read 2 Samuel 15:13–29. What does this passage teach us about the character of David, even at this time of peril? What role does Abiathar play in this episode?

Taking the ark of God, Abiathar and the priests prepare to leave the city, but David orders that the ark stay. David has learned that carrying the symbol of God’s presence does not necessarily mean that God is with you. Wearing a cross, displaying a religious slogan, or keeping a set of rules does not guarantee God’s presence or compliance. God cannot be manipulated. The ark was to stay where it belonged. Leaving the ark there was also an act of faith on David’s part. He trusted that God would save him and bring him back to Jerusalem once again.

The ark of God is set down, and Abiathar offers sacrifices (2 Sam. 15:24) until all the people have finished leaving the city. In this particular moment the priests, Abiathar and Zadok, become intercessors for David and his people.

The story of David’s intelligence network makes for exciting reading (2 Sam. 17:15–29). Abiathar and Zadok become David’s eyes and ears in the city. Abiathar’s and Zadok’s sons wait for word outside Jerusalem. People are not what they seem to be. An unsuspicious female servant brings the message out to the young men. A young lad innocently standing around proves bright enough to figure out what is going on and tells Absalom. The priests’ sons are chased by Absalom’s men and find a sympathizer and climb into a well. A woman makes things appear what they are not by throwing a cloth over the well and sprinkling grain over the top, reminiscent of Rahab’s method of hiding the two spies under flax stalks (Josh. 2:6).

In our own context, things are often not what they seem either. Many an aching heart is hidden by a smile. As Christ’s followers, we are called to be His representatives. We become God’s hands to reach out to those around us. We must be open and sensitive in order to look beyond appearances and see people and situations for what they really are, and we must be willing to sacrifice of ourselves to help.
sunk. Miraculously, providentially, Abiathar escaped the slaughter and made his way to David’s side. It is a truth that all who have been saved from certain peril owe something to the one who saved them. For every Christian, certain peril has a name—Satan. The Bible makes clear in 1 Peter 5:8 that our “adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (NKJV).

When God saves us, He literally takes us from the jaws of a powerful adversary bent on our destruction. This was the case with Abiathar. Like Abiathar, Israel had been saved from Egyptian bondage and captivity through the miraculous intervention of God (Exodus 7–14). The apostle Paul honed in on this penchant of God’s for rescuing fallen humanity when he wrote, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9, NKJV). We are the products of God’s amazing grace, and as such we owe God an affirmative answer to His call to service.

**Consider This:** What does it mean to be called out? What special characteristics bind the called-out ones to Jesus Christ and to one another? (Gal. 3:26–28).

**II. A Royal Priesthood** *(Read 1 Peter 2:9 with your class.)*

The idea that God is willing to share royalty with those who are His subjects should fill us with wonder. Incidentally, royalty is one of the unique gifts Christians share with their God. While the gods of other faiths reserve royalty for themselves, God offered it to ancient Israel and likewise now to all, Jew and Gentile, who believe in Jesus (1 Peter 2). This gift comes, however, with several high expectations. Perhaps we can understand what God expects from us by seeing what He required of ancient Israel.

“According to the divine plan and purpose the Israelites were to be both a royal and a priestly race. In an evil world they were to be kings, moral and spiritual, in that they were to prevail over the realm of sin (Rev. 20:6). As priests, they were to draw near to the Lord in prayer, in praise, and in sacrifice. As intermediaries between God and the heathen, they were to serve as instructors, preachers, and prophets, and were to be examples of holy living—Heaven’s exponents of true religion.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 595.

**Consider This:** Many Christians today want what they perceive to be the accolades and blessings that come from being God’s royal representatives on earth. In many Christian quarters, there is a distinct emphasis on mate-
Abiathar’s Choice

We have no record of Abiathar’s personal opinions, politics, or religious views. Everything that he says is recorded as God’s Word to David. But his actions speak louder than words. Even though he is not recorded as saying anything, just being there makes a powerful statement.

In the time of David, the firstborn son was traditionally considered his father’s main heir. For a king, that would mean that the firstborn son would inherit the throne. God is, however, never bound by tradition. As a matter of fact, during the history of Israel He often overlooked firstborns to call others, sometimes by divine decrees and sometimes by the circumstances and choices of the firstborn themselves (see Gen. 4:1–5, 21:8–12, 25:21–36, 48:8–19, 1 Sam. 16:6–12).

Read 1 Kings 1:1–8. What could have caused Abiathar, who had been so loyal to David, to do what he did here?

Solomon was not the oldest son and so by custom would not normally have succeeded his father as king. The oldest son, Amnon, had been killed by his brother Absalom. Absalom, in turn, had been killed during his unsuccessful coup attempt. And now the fourth-oldest son, Adonijah, felt that the throne was rightfully his. Adonijah conferred with Joab and Abiathar, and they gave him their support (1 Kings 1:7).

Solomon was younger than Adonijah and had a shameful family background. His mother was none other than Bathsheba, the former wife of Uriah the Hittite, who was murdered in order to cover David’s affair with Bathsheba. But in spite of his shameful background, Solomon was loved by God (2 Sam. 12:24), and it was clear that God had chosen him to be David’s successor (1 Chron. 22:9, 10). In the face of this uncomfortable choice, it may be that Abiathar could not reconcile himself with the public scandal that the choice would cause, and so he resorted to tradition as opposed to God’s revealed will.

Tradition can be very comfortable, as it saves us from taking responsibility to think things through in the light of God’s revealed will. It is much easier and “safer” just to say, “We’ve always done it like this.”

How often do we let tradition get in the way of God’s leading? At the same time, why must we be careful not to judge things automatically as mere “tradition” and then brush them off?
Learning Cycle  CONTINUED

rual blessings as evidence of one’s connection with the Divine. How are we to counteract this false idea of what it means to be a member of God’s royal priesthood?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: As you discuss the thought and application questions below with your class, focus on developing practical answers to the questions. For instance, part of the answer to the first thought question should include hands-on things members can do as God’s ambassadors on earth to cultivate a culture of care for all people. Focus on finding concrete ways to apply the answers to life.

Thought Questions:

1. Israel’s high priest wore the sacred ephod with a breastplate, holding 12 precious stones, each representing one of Israel’s 12 tribes. The tribes were always to be near the priest’s heart. Of course, we lack the visual aid of the ephod and breastplate to remind us of the close tie to exist between priest and people today. So, then, how do we, ourselves “priests,” carry God’s people—all people—near our hearts?

2. Followers of Christ are chosen and royal, but they also are called to be holy (Matt. 5:48, 1 Pet. 1:16). What does it mean to be holy? What role does Christ play in our ability to live a holy life? What role does the Holy Spirit play in making us holy?

Application Questions:

1. Wednesday’s study makes the point that Abiathar’s decision to support Adonijah may have been the result of following what he believed to be the succession tradition in ancient Israel. From your perspective, what are some of the traditions in the church that may be hindering our understanding of God’s will?
Abiathar’s Fate

After the death of David and the ascension of Solomon to the throne, certain issues needed to be resolved. After Adonijah was put to death (1 Kings 2:13–25), there was still the issue of Abiathar the priest, who had so faithfully served Solomon’s father. What was to be done with him for his part in the insurrection against Solomon?

Read 1 Kings 2:26, 27. How does Solomon deal with Abiathar, and what reasons does he give?

A superficial reading of the verse may give the impression that Abiathar is dismissed because of a prophecy made to Eli more than a hundred years before (1 Sam. 2:30–36). But really what we have here is a demonstration of the way God knows our future free choices. God knows what free choices we and our descendants will make, and so He is able to prophesy the future. God knew that just as Eli’s sons disqualified themselves from the priestly office by their behavior, their descendant, Abiathar, also would disqualify himself from the priestly office by being unwilling to accept God’s choices.

Read Matthew 26:14–16, 20–25. Explain this prediction in the light of Abiathar’s demotion from the priesthood. What similar principle is operating in both cases?

The fact that Jesus knew all along that Judas would betray Him did not cause Jesus to push Judas away. Judas was included in the inner circle of the Twelve. He experienced the power of God firsthand. But Judas, like Abiathar, was not prepared to accept God’s will. It seems that he also shared with Abiathar some ideas about kingship and how issues of power and control should be handled. Judas wanted to see Jesus crowned king of an earthly kingdom. Frustrated, he turned to the traditional leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, and betrayed his true King.

Divine foreknowledge does not automatically translate into divine predestination. People have choices, as did Judas and Abiathar. God’s foreknowledge of these choices doesn’t limit our freedom in making them.

Free choice is one of the most sacred gifts God has given us. It came with a great cost, too: the death of Jesus on the cross. (Had we not been given free choice, we could not have chosen to sin, and Jesus would not have died for us.) How carefully do you think through and pray through the decisions you make?
As one of God’s priests or priestesses, what can you do to remain faithful to God until the end of your life, or until He comes?

Witnessing: Think of three people who don’t seem to be in a saving relationship with Jesus, yet whom you would love to see in heaven. Write their names in a place where you can be reminded of them each day. During the next week, ask God to show you one thing that you can do for each of these people that would help lead them to Christ. If the opportunity arises, share the testimony of the difference that God has made in your life. Don’t worry about being rejected as you share. Instead, tell God that you want to fulfill your role as His special emissary to these special people.

STEP 4—Create

If we ever are perplexed about how to fulfill God’s holy calling for us, we need look no further than the life of Jesus. Jesus lived a life of daily devotion to the will and dictates of His Father. He exemplified the life of service and sacrifice with which members of the ancient priesthood were familiar.

As a class, peruse several local newspapers to get a sense of the issues challenging the community that surrounds your church. Then make a list of specific ways in which your class might help the community meet these challenges. Choose one idea from the list and implement it during the coming month. Set aside a short period of time for reports on how the project is progressing.

Consider This: Hebrews 7:25 states, “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them” (NKJV). Jesus intercedes for us, but do we intercede for others? Sure, we pray for people, but is this all there is to intercession? To intercede is to plead or make a request on behalf of another. Do children caught in the juvenile justice system need our prayers alone, or do they also need our advocacy on their behalf? Similarly, is prayer enough for the single parent struggling to make ends meet, or are we also called to reach out and help provide for him or her? In light of these rhetorical questions, discuss why there’s much more to intercession than prayer, as Jesus showed us.
Further Study: “God has chosen you for a great and solemn work. He has been seeking to discipline, to test, to prove you, to refine and enoble you, that this sacred work may be done with a single eye to His glory which belongs wholly to God. What a thought that God chooses a man and brings him into close connection with Himself, and gives him a mission to undertake, a work to do, for Him. A weak man is made strong, a timid man is made brave, the irresolute becomes a man of firm and quick decision. What! is it possible that man is of so much consequence as to receive a commission from the King of kings! Shall worldly ambition allure from the sacred trust, the holy commission?”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 2, p. 167.

Discussion Questions:

1. Drawing from other parts of the Bible, dwell on the life of Saul and the question of how someone who had been given so much could have squandered it all. What lessons can we take from his story for ourselves? What mistakes did he make that started him down a path that led him to the kind of actions we saw this week?

2. Dwell more on the idea of how Jesus in His humanity is able to sympathize with us in our struggles. Why is the humanity of Christ so important to us?

3. Drawing on the experience of someone in your class who has faced bereavement, what are ways that you as a class can help? That is, what can you do beyond just speaking consoling words? Are there cases in which nothing else can be done other than “just” speaking consoling words?

4. One of the great questions that has challenged Christian thinkers over the centuries is the idea of God’s foreknowledge and our free will. If God knows our choices beforehand, are we really free in making them? If not, then where is personal freedom, and if we don’t have freedom, how can we justly be judged or punished for our actions? Some, to get around this conundrum, argue that certain of our actions have to be unknown to God, or else those actions couldn’t be free. Others see no problem: God’s knowing what a person will do doesn’t in any way affect that person’s freedom to make the choices. In class discuss these questions, realizing that you might not readily solve the issues. What’s important to know is that we are free beings, and yet, even while respecting our free choices, God is in control.
Joab: David’s Weak Strongman

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 2 Sam. 2:17–23, 3:23–27, 11:15–25, 20:7–11, 1 Kings 1.

Memory Text: “All a man’s ways seem right to him, but the Lord weighs the heart” (Proverbs 21:2, NIV).

Joab’s story is a story of power politics, intrigue, misguided loyalties, jealousy, and stubbornness; Joab’s time is a time during which survival is not guaranteed by a strong central administration and a comprehensive retirement plan. Strong people survive; weak people quickly seem to fade away. It is during Joab’s tenure as David’s strongman and caretaker that Israel truly becomes a nation. After the clan feuds and tribal rivalry that characterized the period of the judges, it is the figure of the king (beginning with Saul and later on, to a much stronger degree, with David and Solomon) that unites Israel, even though the Bible makes it clear that centuries of clan thinking will not be done away with in a matter of 30 or 40 years. Joab’s life, as depicted in the Bible, is marred by wars, feuds, and even genocide.

Though we might not be involved in the kind of things that Joab was, we may come to face some uglier sides of our own character when we look at his story. It is here that, through the negative example of Joab—the weak strongman of David—we may be able to identify some of our own character faults and seek the only answer to them: Jesus.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 20.*
A Family Affair

Even though Joab, linked to David’s family (see 1 Chron. 2:13–17), had the responsibility of being in charge of David’s troops, we get a glimpse of his true character for the first time in 2 Samuel 2. Saul and Jonathan had been killed in battle. Judah readily appointed David as king. Joab’s counterpart in King Saul’s army was Abner, who somehow survived the battle in which Saul and his sons had fallen.

Abner and David had a history. It was Abner who had led Saul’s troops on numerous manhunts for David. Abner was not about to accept as king the man he had been hunting. Accordingly, Abner puts Ishbosheth (vss. 8, 9), the fourth son of Saul, who was not in the battle, on the throne of Israel and starts a war against Judah and David. Although Israel was numerically stronger, David’s kingdom went on from strength to strength.

Read 2 Samuel 2:17–23 and summarize what takes place.

During the skirmish Joab’s younger brother unwisely chases Abner. Abner warns him off repeatedly, but the rash young man won’t hear of it, and Abner kills him in self-defense. Joab never forgets this event.

After a while, Abner realizes that things are going nowhere under Ishbosheth, who is a very weak king. And so he defects to David and offers to bring over the other tribes (2 Sam. 3:1–22). Meanwhile, Joab has been away. On returning home, he learns of these new developments, which greatly unsettle him.

How does Joab cope with this change that he did not initiate? 2 Sam. 3:23–27. Contrast what Joab says to David and the reason Joab ultimately kills Abner. See also 2 Sam. 3:30. How does Joab attempt to portray Abner’s motives? What does this reveal about him?

Perhaps Joab truly believed he was acting in David’s best interest when he killed Abner. This brings out an important point: think about your actions. What are the real reasons for some of the things you do, as opposed to reasons you use to justify them in your own mind? How can you learn to know the difference between the two when they are, indeed, different?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Proverbs 21:2

The Student Will:

Know: Identify the strengths that made Joab valuable as the general of David’s army and the grave weaknesses that undermined his leadership.

Feel: Sense the futility of worldly scheming, deceit, jealousy, and intrigue in achieving justice even for a worthy cause.

Do: Rely completely on God’s ways and means to accomplish God’s purposes, even when events seem unfair.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Power for Good and Evil

A As general, Joab held an important place in David’s support group. What good things did Joab do for David throughout David’s life?

B How did Joab’s jealousy and underhanded methods undermine and eventually destroy his usefulness to David?

II. Feel: Family and Clan Loyalties

A While family loyalty can be very important, how did Joab’s family loyalties override principles of honor and justice?

B What crime did he commit in order to gain revenge for the loss of a brother?

III. Do: The Test of Faith

A How are we tempted to follow our own ideas of making things happen the way we think they should instead of waiting for God to act on our behalf?

B What areas of our lives do we need to commit to God for justice?

Summary: Joab served King David as general for many years and, at times, gave him good counsel. However, by taking revenge into his own hands and acting in jealousy to the point of murder, Joab eventually brought the sword on himself.
The Cost of Sin

It seems that David is not in a position to do anything about the murder of Abner at the time, even though he publicly mourns for Abner and rebukes Joab’s actions (see 2 Sam. 3:28–35). To avoid future reprisals, Joab tries to ingratiate himself as closely as possible with David. He sets about to make himself indispensable. He is ready to do the dirty work for David. But striving to make oneself indispensable rather than focusing on doing the right thing often involves violating one’s conscience. If that happens again and again, the voice of our conscience becomes duller and duller, until we are unable to stand up when it really counts.

Sin also breaks credibility. We see this principle repeated several times in the life of David. Because of his sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah, David, even though he has been forgiven, is unable to discipline his sons. When his oldest son rapes his half sister (2 Samuel 13) and his second son becomes a murderer (2 Sam. 13:23–39), David stands helplessly by, knowing that he is guilty of similar sins.

Read 2 Samuel 11:15–25. What does this passage tell us about Joab?

Joab has the same problem. Having the blood of Abner on his hands makes him unable to react appropriately and help save a good man’s life. And so Joab adds to his list of crimes by becoming, in effect, Uriah’s assassin. Notice in 2 Samuel 11:17 that Uriah is not the only victim. Joab sends some other men along on this foolhardy expedition in order to make the whole thing look more authentic. Although we know from the life of David that God is merciful and forgives us when we repent, the consequence of a ruined credibility and a lack of integrity is still something that we will have to carry with us.

In the previous example Joab obeyed David’s orders. Now read 2 Samuel 18:5–15. What does his action here tell us about him? How might he have rationalized this deed, as well?

It is interesting to note that Joab follows David’s orders even when they violate God’s commands, but he has no trouble disobeying the king’s express orders when he stands to gain personally. After all, had Absalom succeeded in his revolt, Joab probably would have been killed himself (2 Sam. 19:5, 6). Joab seems to be looking out for no one but himself.

How easy it is to fall into the same trap!
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Unless we surrender our hearts to the truth as it is in Jesus, we will fall prey to the sinful machinations of the human heart.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson study peers into the life of Joab, King David’s enforcer, and shows us a man driven by unholy ambition and self-promotion. Joab’s thirst for power and prestige is not unlike that of the Wall Street wizards whose greed nearly destroyed the world’s financial system, plunging it into a global recession in 2008. Your goal in Step 1 is to get the students thinking about what motivates human action.

Opening Activity: Share and discuss the following familiar story with your class. Late in 2008 and onward, economies around the world seemed destined for financial ruin. Currencies were devalued, towering financial institutions such as Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers disintegrated, countless people lost their jobs and retirement savings, and governments appropriated trillions in taxpayer funds to help shore up a broken financial system.

What caused such a worldwide catastrophe in the financial markets? The culprits were many, but it is generally accepted now that the lion’s share of responsibility rests with a relatively small group of elite financial wunderkinds in New York whose desire for monetary gain had outstripped all ethical and rational considerations. They created risky financial instruments that made them wealthy at the expense of their corporations, shareholders, and everyone else.

Ask your students to share how their lives were impacted by the financial crisis. Then, together with the class, create a short list of unethical and/or dishonest practices that led to the crisis. Discuss with your class whether these practices were the result of lapses in judgment or the outgrowth of a deeper unspiritual condition.

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The goal of this Explore section is to examine the
Joab the Politician

Second Samuel 13 tells the story of Absalom’s premeditated murder of his half-brother Amnon. Absalom flees the country and bides his time. David is once again in a difficult situation. Amnon was guilty of the rape of his half sister Tamar, Absalom’s sister. It seems that David—paralyzed by the memory of his own sin—is unable to administer justice. By taking things into his own hands, Absalom avenges the rape of his sister and restores the family honor. (Honor and shame were two very important elements of the value system during the time of David.) Second, and as a nice benefit, once Amnon, David’s oldest son, is dead, Absalom is now in line to inherit the throne. David’s heart is torn between his grief for his dead son, his love for Absalom, and the keen knowledge that all of this mess is somehow rooted in his own sin.

Amid all this, Joab decides to become involved. However, since he does not see a direct way to put this item on the agenda of King David, he resorts to cunning and uses a wise woman of Tekoah.

Read 2 Samuel 14. What does the woman of Tekoah’s story communicate about God’s love and forgiveness? At the same time, what does this passage also tell us about Joab?

The story that Joab put into the mouth of the woman suggests that Joab knew about God’s great love toward the sinner. His theology was correct. Unfortunately, for Joab this remained head knowledge only. His own life continued to be characterized by revenge and a lack of forgiveness. Joab had become immune to God’s love in his own life. For him, everything, even religion, had a political end and could be used for self-promotion. Joab recognized Absalom’s potential and wanted to begin to ingratiate himself with the future king. It seems, however, that Joab met his match in Absalom. Joab receives no Thank-you notes for his initiative in bringing Absalom home. Absalom simply wants to use him and quickly shows Joab that he can be every bit as cunning and dangerous as Joab can be. He did this by burning Joab’s fields in order to force him to arrange a meeting with David (2 Sam. 14:28–33). The point is that thanks to Joab’s interference, the stage was now being set for an awful rebellion that would lead to civil war.

How easy is it to let personal ambition, pride, and desire for self-supremacy motivate your actions? How can you learn to recognize these things in yourself? How can you, through God’s grace, defeat them before they lead to your ruin?
I. Matters of the Heart (Read Proverbs 21:2 with your class.)

The truth expressed in Proverbs 21:2 was shared by someone who had experienced Joab’s duplicity from close range. We don’t know whether Joab’s treachery inspired this particular musing from the Bible’s great sage, but the truth of this verse applies to all humanity. No matter how much we delude ourselves in the belief that our actions are right, the ultimate Judge of whether they are or not is God.

Furthermore, God’s chief concern is not our actions, our appearance, or any other surface consideration. He is most concerned about the condition of our hearts, the soil from which our actions grow. This is the message that God sharply communicated to Samuel as he looked upon Eliab, David’s eldest brother. Eliab’s height and noble bearing suggested that he was king in waiting (1 Sam. 16:6), but God thought otherwise. He said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (vs. 7, NIV).

As dastardly deeds go, David’s failures were not better than those of Joab, but there was one characteristic that separated the two. When shown his sin, David always was willing to repent and do the will of God. He had the human weaknesses that we all suffer with, but God said of him, “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will” (Acts 13:22, NKJV).

When confronted with his crimes, Joab schemed his way to a false solution. He killed Abner in a fit of cold-blooded revenge but claimed that he was protecting David from Abner’s duplicity (2 Sam. 3:30). He put Uriah and several other brave soldiers on the front lines of the battle to die and felt justified in his actions because the king ordered him to do it.

Consider This: How do we assess the actions and behaviors that seem right in our own eyes? If God is the One who evaluates our hearts and the actions that flow from them, how can we acquaint ourselves with His standard for holy conduct and behavior? The lesson notes that even after repentance there is a price to be paid for sin. How does God express His mercy in cushioning the blows that are the natural results of our sins?
Living by the Sword

**Read** 2 Samuel 20. What role do we find Joab in again? How was Joab’s treachery justified?

Amasa and Joab were cousins (2 Sam. 17:25). Amasa was commander of Absalom’s forces. After Joab disobeys David’s orders in the case of Absalom (2 Sam. 18:5, 14), David wishes to rid himself of Joab and promises Amasa the high command of his army (2 Sam. 19:13). After all, it was Joab’s scheming and planning that set the stage for the rebellion. Obviously, David’s design is not motivated only by anger toward Joab (who had consciously disobeyed the king’s order and killed his son). Amasa’s appointment was also a political move that would signal reconciliation to the rest of the pro-Absalom forces.

**What** does 2 Samuel 20:1, 2 tell us about the political situation in Israel?

David ignores Joab, for he has promised the command to Amasa, and now he sends Amasa to round up the troops in order to deal with a new revolt. Amasa is not able to do this in time. David then sends for Abishai, the brother of Joab, and turns to him rather than to Joab in this time of crisis. Joab and Amasa finally meet, and, borrowing a leaf from Abner’s assassination, Joab murders Amasa. The biblical writer emphasizes the total unexpectedness of the attack (2 Sam. 20:8–10). Joab coolly murders his cousin, simply because he has been passed over and is no longer number one.

One of Joab’s men tries to legitimize Joab’s actions by linking Joab to King David. The people are being led to believe that loyalty to David means loyalty to Joab (even though the king has explicitly distanced himself from Joab), and being loyal to Joab means that Joab’s right to be judge, jury, and executioner in the case of Amasa cannot be questioned.

**Look at Joab’s duplicity in how he betrayed Amasa. How careful we need to be that we don’t betray someone who trusts us, using that trust to do them dirty. How easily Matthew 7:12 should apply here.**
II. The Darkness Within (Read Jeremiah 17:9 and Proverbs 4:23 with your class.)

From the murder of Abner to Joab’s flight to the sanctuary in search of security from Solomon’s death decree, the picture painted of Joab’s interior life is a dark one. There are no bright hues of personal devotion to God. There are no serene tones of personal reflection. To be sure, there are moments that Joab seems to express a deep understanding of God’s dictates, such as when he sends a woman to King David to plead for the forgiveness and return of Absalom (2 Samuel 14). But even this noble deed is undertaken in a duplicitous manner, since Joab interjects himself in the matter to position himself for future power after David is off the scene. Every action he undertakes is calculated for his own benefit. There appears to be no consideration of God’s will.

God, through Jeremiah, tells us that the human heart is deceitful above all things (Jer. 17:9)—not exactly a ringing endorsement of humanity’s core. God is stating here that the human heart is given to cheating and deceiving. It is deliberately misleading and deceptive. Furthermore, God makes clear that we cannot even “know” it. Such a statement flies in the face of our self-help culture with its belief that we can indeed know ourselves and modify our behavior. We may make valiant attempts and even experience positive changes in our lives, but lasting change comes only from a transformed heart that abides in Christ (John 15:1–5). The carnal mind cannot submit to the law of God (Rom. 8:7).

Consider This: King Solomon urges, “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23, NKJV). How do we “keep” the heart so that our motives and actions are pure? What principles of “heart maintenance” might we find in Psalm 51, for instance?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: One of the central points made in this week’s lesson is the toll that duplicity takes on the life of one whose heart is not surrendered to God. This apply section seeks to examine the role that truth plays in saving us from the inevitable destruction that comes from a life that lacks integrity.
Joab’s Last Stand

The timing seems to be perfect. David is a very old man now, who cannot keep warm at night. A beautiful young woman is found who becomes King David’s personal attendant. The biblical author specifically emphasizes the fact that David has no sexual relations with her (1 Kings 1:1–4), which further underlines the feeble state of the king. David does not “know”—not only young Abischag but also what’s happening in his kingdom. Adonijah, as the oldest remaining son, now decides that it is time to arrange his coronation.

Read 1 Kings 1. What is Joab up to now? What more does this tell us about him?

First Kings 1:7 makes it clear that Joab is one of the key players in this coup attempt. Joab, as he has done several times before, simply goes ahead and acts, thinking that old King David will be powerless to do anything about it. However, this time David, with the help of Bathsheba and the prophet Nathan, does act. He foils Joab’s and Adonijah’s plans by publicly declaring Solomon as his co-regent.

Joab seems to take God completely out of the equation. While he may have all of the theological knowledge about God, God doesn’t seem to have relevance in his life. Joab thinks that he always can live as he pleases and escape the consequences. He forgets that God is not David. God cannot be fooled; even though retribution may not come immediately, it will one day come—if not in this life, then in the final judgment. However, often at the end of the day in this life, even a very long day, “a man reaps what he sows” (Gal. 6:7, NIV).

Before final judgment, there always is mercy. Joab gets a last chance, in that Solomon does not punish him for his scheming with Adonijah and allows him to retain his position. However, Joab shows no remorse and makes no apology, and he is involved in a second coup attempt. When this does not work, Joab finally realizes the gravity of his situation. He flees to the sanctuary and takes hold of the horns of the altar. Joab forgets, however, that the altar provides asylum only for those who have killed unwittingly (Exod. 21:14). Joab’s unconfessed past has finally caught up with him. The man who lived by the sword now dies by the sword (1 Kings 2:28–35).

However scheming, ambitious, and deceitful Joab was, everything he did could have been forgiven by the Lord had Joab come to God in faith, humility, and repentance. What about you and your defects? Forgiveness is there if you are willing to claim it for yourself.
Thought Questions:
1. What role does truth play in helping us to live a life of integrity? How can we know what truth is and apply it to each dilemma we face in life?

2. Jesus declared, “‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (John 14:6, NKJV). In this scripture Jesus makes clear that truth is a Person. He is the Truth. How does Jesus’ sinless life, death, resurrection, and ascension help us live lives of fealty to the Truth? What impact does Jesus have on the day-to-day decisions we make in life?

Application Questions:
1. Have you ever manipulated a situation to benefit yourself at the expense of others? How did the situation turn out?

2. How does your day-to-day decision making affect your character? Can you be ethical in certain areas of life and unethical in others? Why, or why not? What are the dangers of a compartmentalized life?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Share the following activity with your students. While most of us never will be in a position to make the decisions that Joab did while military commander of King David’s forces, each day presents us with ethical dilemmas nonetheless. Ask the students to apply what they’ve learned this week to help solve the following dilemmas. Or think of others.

Activity:
1. Your manager is very difficult to deal with. Her language often is abusive, and she sometimes attaches her name to your hard work and claims it as hers. While reading through a document that she has prepared for the boss, you notice a glaring error that would cause her major embarrassment or worse. What should you do, and why?

2. You are shopping in the grocery store when you notice a young woman carrying a two-year-old child who appears to be quite sickly. The woman looks around furtively but doesn’t notice you. She then proceeds to stuff two bottles of baby medicine into the inner pocket of her coat. What would you do—alert security, offer to pay for the medicine, or let the theft go unreported—and why?
Further Study: “We should not only take hold of the truth, but let it take hold of us; and thus have the truth in us and we in the truth. And if this is the case, our lives and characters will reveal the fact that the truth is accomplishing something for us; that it is sanctifying us, and is giving us a moral fitness for the society of heavenly angels in the kingdom of glory. The truth we hold is from heaven; and when that religion finds a lodgement in the heart, it commences its work of refining and purifying; for the religion of Jesus Christ never makes a man rough or rude; it never makes him careless, or hard-hearted; but the truth of heavenly origin, that which comes from God, elevates and sanctifies a man; it makes courteous, kind, affectionate, and pure; it takes away his hard heart, his selfishness and love of the world, and it purifies him from pride and ungodly ambition.”—Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, May 9, 1878.

Discussion Questions:

1. How far should we go in our expression of loyalty to our families, employers, and country? What are the limits to these important relationships?

2. Reread the Ellen White quote in Friday’s lesson study. What evidence can you see in your own life that the truth has taken hold of you? While it’s important to focus on Christ and not on ourselves, we also need to be honest with ourselves about where we stand in regard to the faith (2 Cor. 13:5).

3. Many evil acts have been done throughout history by those who said, “I was only following orders.” How are we as Christians to deal with situations in which we are ordered to do things that we know are wrong? More important, how can we develop the kind of faith we need to stand firm, even when it means defying orders, when it could be very costly to ourselves and to our loved ones?

4. Is it practical or even possible to forgive and forget when we have been hurt? What principles can we learn from this week’s study about forgiveness, lack of forgiveness, and the consequences of not forgiving?

5. Oil tycoon John D. Rockefeller used unscrupulous business practices in order to buy out competitors. He would justify his actions by telling competitors that they needed to sell their companies to him and let him take on the risks of the oil business for them. “Get into the ark,” he would tell them, making it sound as if he were doing something charitable for them when, in fact, he was swallowing them up. What lessons can we learn from this about how easy it is to justify immoral deeds?
Lesson 9  *November 20–26

Rizpah: The Influence of Faithfulness

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study:  Deut. 30:19, 2 Sam. 3:6–11, 21:1–9, Mark 13:13.

Memory Text: “He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart” (Psalm 91:4, NIV).

The story of Rizpah is the story of an outsider playing an insider’s role. Only two biblical passages mention her explicitly, and both are connected to the early time of David’s reign, probably before the affair with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). Most Bible commentators agree that the events in 2 Samuel 21–24 do not unfold sequentially after 2 Samuel 20, but rather, they provide further information that does not fit into the general storyline of David’s life.

Rizpah exists on the edge of King David’s story. As a woman and a concubine of an earlier king, she had few options. As a matter of fact, her prospects looked bleak and dreary. Her two sons dead, the larger family of her deceased “husband” at the brink of annihilation, she nevertheless acted nobly, instead of sitting in a corner and lamenting her bad fortune. Her presence in two crucial moments of David’s history makes her a kingmaker and a nation builder. We can all learn something incredibly important from Rizpah: faithfulness is not conditioned by circumstances or good (or bad) fortunes. Faithfulness is an unconditional commitment to do what’s right regardless of the cost.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 27.
The King’s Concubine

There are many references to concubines in the Old Testament (Gen. 25:5, 6; Judg. 8:30, 31; 2 Sam. 5:13–16; 1 Kings 11:2, 3). What can we learn about them from these and other references?

Concubines often were taken from the ranks of female slaves or maids of a family. Their express purpose was to produce heirs, and once they had produced male offspring, their status and social standing were similar to those of regular wives. A man was regarded as his concubine’s husband (Judg. 20:4), and their children appeared in genealogies (Gen. 22:24) and would receive a part of the inheritance (Gen. 25:5, 6). It is interesting to note that concubines appear mostly in the patriarchal period; during the early monarchy, concubines were connected to royal households.

Read 2 Samuel 3:6–11. What can we learn about Rizpah and about her circumstances in that particular time?

Rizpah, whose name means “live coal” (see Isa. 6:6, which uses the same word), is part of the royal household of Ishboseth (“man of shame”), the only remaining son of Saul, who, through the help of Abner, has been made king over Israel and has moved across the Jordan to Mahanaim (2 Sam. 2:8–10). The mere fact that the biblical author included information about Rizpah’s father (“daughter of Aiah”) suggests that her family must have been important and that she was not a slave. Ironically, the name of the son of Saul appears in another form in the genealogy of Saul, as Eshbaal, “the man of Baal” (1 Chron. 8:33). The form used in 2 Samuel 2:8–10 seems to be a subtle insult by the biblical author: the man of Baal is an embarrassment to the house of Saul and thus a “man of shame.”

Rizpah’s personal circumstances are far from ideal. She belongs to the household of Saul, and even though the able general Abner is propping up Ishboseth, the weak descendant of Saul, as Saul’s concubine, Rizpah has no security. Her fate seems totally out of her hands, controlled by forces and circumstances way beyond her authority or control.

Jesus tells us that if a man lusts after a woman, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matt. 5:28). However, many men of God had concubines in the Old Testament. How do we reconcile this fact with what Jesus said? (As you think of an answer, remember that just because something is mentioned in the Bible as being practiced doesn’t mean God approves of it or that it is the best way to live.)
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 2 Samuel 21:10

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize how the faithfulness of Rizpah, a relatively insignificant concubine of a failed king, influenced significant events in the nation of Israel.

Feel: Perceive how determined Rizpah was to do what little she could for her family, despite her great losses and powerlessness.

Do: Commit our energies to being faithful in whatever role God places us.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Bereaved Mother

A. Rizpah was the mother of two of Saul’s sons who were hurled to their deaths as part of the just dealings God required of David and Israel. How did Rizpah respond to this sentence?

B. What action did her faithfulness awaken in David, and what was the end result for Israel?

II. Feel: Brave Defender

A. Alone with her dead on a mountainside, this mother bravely fended off bird and beast day and night for many weeks. What must she have been feeling? What are we tempted to feel and do under such hopeless circumstances?

III. Do: Bleak Duty

A. We may feel powerless and insignificant, but we still may choose to respond faithfully, whatever our circumstances. What challenges are facing us today in which we need to do our duty, though the outlook seems bleak?

Summary: Though Rizpah suffered terrible loss, she courageously defended the bodies of her sons from marauding animals until King David responded by burying the bones of Saul and his sons, bringing both justice and peace to Israel.
The Mention of Her Name

Things are not going well for Ishbosheth in the war between the house of Saul and the house of David (2 Sam. 3:1). In contrast to the deteriorating situation at Ishbosheth’s court, the biblical text inserts at this point in the story a list of the sons of David that are born during this time in Hebron (2 Sam. 3:2–5). The list reflects David’s increasing strength, since sons mean a future and security.

As we have seen (2 Sam. 3:7–10), Ishbosheth, the “man of shame,” accuses his general, Abner, of having slept with the concubine of his father, Saul. Judging from Abner’s strong reaction, this was a very serious offense.

Read the following verses and explain what sleeping with a wife or concubine of a powerful man meant in the time of the Old Testament. 2 Sam. 16:21, 22; 20:3; 1 Kings 2:21, 22.

Rizpah is not very active in the story, which focuses on Abner and Ishbosheth. After all, she is just the concubine. She seems to be another pawn in the power play between two men. The biblical text is not clear about whether Abner really slept with Rizpah in order to try to usurp the throne. The fact that he so quickly changes sides suggests that it was just a bad rumor that had made the rounds at the improvised royal court in Mahanaim. If he really wanted to be king of Israel, would he have been so ready to join forces with David, the “anointed of the Lord”?

Abner makes good on his threat of defecting to David (2 Sam. 3:9, 10, 12). Ishbosheth’s accusation moves the major power broker of the house of Saul to swear loyalty to the house of David, which all but ensures the demise of the house of Saul. This, in fact, came shortly after (see 2 Samuel 4). It is really the mention of Rizpah’s name that has effected this change. Although Rizpah is not active in the narrative, she is highly significant.

Without Abner’s reaction to Ishbosheth’s accusation, the war between the two parties most likely would have lasted much longer. We don’t know what happened to Rizpah next. She reappears only in David’s memoirs in 2 Samuel 21:1–14, where she plays a subtle but incredibly important role in the bringing together of tribes and factions.

So often we find ourselves caught up in circumstances that we cannot control. What, though, can we always control, and why, in the end, is that the most important thing? See Deut. 30:19, Mark 13:13.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Faithfulness is the true measure of a person’s spiritual commitment.

**Just for Teachers:** Help class members learn that faithfulness to God, even in things we deem small, is more important than human applause, earthly recognition, or personal accomplishments.

It has been said that God calls us to faithfulness, not to success. William Carey, sometimes referred to as the “Father of Modern Missions,” worked for seven years before winning his first convert in India. Robert Morrison, in China, and Adoniram Judson, in Burma, also waited more than five years to welcome their first converts. Similar stories can be told about work elsewhere. Had these missionaries been more concerned with signs of outward success than they were with faithfulness, they easily might have given up their calling in discouragement. Discouraging and frustrating as it must have been, they chose to be faithful to their calling and work. Their success was the eventual outcome of their faithfulness; we might even say that their faithfulness, not their converts, was the true measure of success. Had they not been faithful in very trying and challenging circumstances, they never would have experienced the joy of seeing the kingdom advance through their efforts.

**Opening Activity:** Using a flipchart, markerboard, and so forth, ask the class to make a list of things in nature that are very dependable. Examples might include such things as “the sun comes up every day,” “gravity pulls things down to earth,” “trees bring forth new leaves in spring,” and so forth. Discuss the biological and ecological consequences if nature failed to be dependable in these areas. While dependability is a measure of our trustworthiness with others, faithfulness expresses our desire to be trustworthy. Discuss the importance of becoming persons on whom God can depend, comparing our dependability with the examples from nature.

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** In one of the parables in Matthew 25, three servants are entrusted with varying degrees of responsibility. One receives...
An Eye for an Eye or a Convenient Solution?

There is a bad famine in Israel. The Hebrew text emphasizes the long period without any rain (“for three years, year after year”). This was not normal. People considered God directly responsible for giving rain and withholding rain. David sought “the face of the Lord.” We are not told by what means he received God’s answer, but its content was very clear: “There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house” (2 Sam. 21:1, ESV).

Read 2 Samuel 21:1–6. Why should Saul’s descendants suffer for their forefather’s guilt? Does this not contradict Deuteronomy 24:16; Jeremiah 31:29, 30; and Ezekiel 18:1–4?

This is a hot issue and causes debates among scholars. Where is God’s justice here? Is justice something collective or something individual? Some commentators suggest that David used the famine as a convenient excuse to get rid of possible rivals for the throne and that the “[speaking] of the Lord” in 2 Samuel 21:1 was a clever manipulation of divine messages for David’s own purpose; yet, there is no indication in the biblical text that this was David’s motivation. What the text clearly states is that Saul sought to annihilate the Gibeonites, who are connected with the “Amorites,” the original inhabitants of Canaan before Israel took control of Palestine.

The text highlights a very important principle of Scripture: although salvation may depend on our decisions, our actions and choices affect those around us and never take place in isolation. When faithful kings reigned in Jerusalem, Judah followed God’s law and sought to live accordingly; on the other hand, unfaithful kings brought down many in Israel.

In the historical texts of the Old Testament, there are no references to Saul’s attempt to destroy the Gibeonites. However, the example of Saul’s revenge on the priestly town of Nob (1 Samuel 21) suggests that Saul was capable of this. Saul’s zeal looks good from the outside (after all, the Gibeonites were foreigners), but the divine evaluation of this act underlines God’s high regard for faithfulness (Josh. 9:15–21). God expects us to honor our promises. As we will see, Rizpah gives us (and King David!) an object lesson in faithfulness.

Though we don’t fully understand why there should be a famine because of Saul’s sins, we must always remember that our actions come with consequences—always. Yet, as Christians, shouldn’t we avoid doing wrong, not because of the potential consequences of the act but because of the wrongness of the act itself? What keeps you in line more: fear of the consequences of your wrong actions, or your desire not to do wrong, period?
five units, another two, and still another, one. Regardless of the amount, each one was expected to be faithful. The first two were faithful and were acknowledged by the landowner when he returned from his journey. The last was not. Humanly speaking, we may be tempted to excuse the last servant, thinking that he received comparatively small responsibilities. Should it matter that much, since there were fewer opportunities for him? God, however, does not operate that way. Faithfulness is not merely expected but required from everyone sharing in the divine distribution. Rizpah, a barely noticed character inside Scripture’s pages, offers our current narcissistic generation a solid example of faithfulness, even though being largely unnoticed. Like the temple widow who faithfully deposited her pittance into the temple treasury, Rizpah inspires future generations through her dependability regarding the mundane and nonglamorous.

Bible Commentary

I. The King’s Concubine (Review 2 Samuel 3:6–11 with your class.)

Perhaps it is true that the most difficult instrument to play is “second fiddle.” Such was the predicament of concubines in ancient civilizations. Never fully accepted as wives, valued primarily for their capacity to produce offspring, these women existed as chattel, with few opportunities and negligible rights. Often doormats for male-dominated cultures, they could expect that their children would be overlooked for the offspring of full wives, that full marital relationship would be perpetually denied them, and that the “abundant life” was reserved for someone else.

Generally speaking, this was Rizpah’s lot in life. Complicating her situation, her husband was killed in disgrace, she was implicated in an illicit relationship with the ranking general, plus her sons—the primary means of support for a husbandless concubine were executed at David’s command. Seldom have prescriptions for despondency and even suicide been more potent! Despite these foreboding circumstances, however, Rizpah is remembered for faithfulness in the teeth of despair!

Consider This: How does my faithfulness rank when I am passed over for church leadership positions even though my qualifications clearly exceed those of people chosen ahead of me? Or although my importance ranking within society is minimal, how can I exhibit faithfulness? Or how did an “unimportant” slave girl influence history by
Faithfulness Is a Way of Life

David consents to the request of the Gibeonites, and seven descendants of Saul are found. It is here that we meet Rizpah again. Her two sons by King Saul are among the ones selected to be executed so that “atonement” can be achieved. Second Samuel 21:3 uses the Hebrew word *kaphar*, which functions as a technical term to mark atonement and also appears in contexts such as the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16.

**Read** 2 Samuel 21:1–9. How are we to understand this passage? Or can we understand it? In what ways is this an example of something in Scripture that we can’t fully explain but that we simply need to trust the Lord on? What other examples like this (of things that we don’t fully understand) can you find in the Bible in which, despite our lack of understanding, we need to trust in God’s goodness and mercy anyway?

David remembers his promise to his friend Jonathan (*1 Sam. 20:12–17, 42*), and consequently, he does not surrender Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth to the Gibeonites. This emphasizes an important point in the biblical text: even though Saul broke Israel’s vow to the Gibeonites, David honors his vow to Jonathan, even after his death.

**What** does Rizpah do when her sons are killed? *2 Sam. 21:9, 10.* What does this tell us about her?

The author emphasizes his high regard for Rizpah’s actions by again mentioning her father’s name (*cf. 2 Sam. 3:7*), in contrast to David, who is not referred to as king or by his lineage. We only can imagine Rizpah’s pain and grief as she watches over the seven bodies of the executed. She builds a makeshift hut from sackcloth, and there, under the open sky, she camps close to the decomposing bodies and protects them from desecration by birds and animals. Rizpah does not do this for one day or seven days, but it appears that she watches over the bodies for many weeks, until the autumn rains begin. Not only is Rizpah a devoted mother, but she stands out as an example of faithfulness in the midst of a story dominated by men who are not always faithful.
faithfully sharing her faith with the slave master Naaman? Or how was a civilization preserved through the faithfulness of a slave named Joseph?

II. Faithfulness Is a Way of Life (Review 2 Samuel 21:1–9 with your class.)

“In the ancient Near East it is common for the king to be understood as the embodiment of the state and representative of the people. During the reign of the Hittite king Mursilis, a twenty year plague was determined to have been the result of offenses committed by his predecessor, and attempts were made to appease and make restitution.”—John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, The IVP Bible Background Commentary (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 350. While David’s attempt to rectify Saul’s misconduct against the Gibeonites may scandalize the modern mind as barbaric, it must be recognized that he was trying, within his contemporary cultural milieu, to repair a breach of faithfulness occasioned by Saul. However we may disdain David’s means and question his motives, this passage suggests that Christians should consider their obligations to be faithful to what they have promised to do as individuals.

Additionally, the narrative of 2 Samuel 21:1–9 prompts a sobering question that Christians also must ask themselves: to what extent do promises made by their government, culture, and ancestry oblige them to faithfulness?

Consider This: What responsibility might we have for being faithful to the promises of bygone generations? Why should we exercise care about obligating future generations by promises we make?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: When Rizpah protected the corpses of the executed, it was brought to David’s attention. Apparently he was impressed by her noble actions. While not enjoying status, celebrity, or notoriety, we may be placed by the Lord in positions in which we may influence government officials and leaders of society. God’s people may be unaware that they are being observed by society’s elite; their faithfulness, however, has changed the course of history more than once.

One unassuming person who profoundly influenced his nation was Desmond Doss, the World War II hero who was awarded the Medal of Honor. Credited with saving hundreds of lives during multiple engagements in the Pacific
Building a Nation

Rizpah’s example of faithfulness comes to David’s attention. The biblical author again includes the complete pedigree of Rizpah when David is told about her action. She is not just any mother; she is the daughter of Aiah and the concubine of Saul. Her being on the mountain “before the Lord,” close to the seven bodies, seems to motivate David to consider a very important act: he orders the proper reburial of Saul, Jonathan, and the descendants of Saul.

Read 2 Samuel 21:11–14. How was David affected by Rizpah’s actions?

Many of Israel’s neighbors considered a proper burial to be essential to the deceased’s ability to reach a place where the gods would mete out judgment. The pyramids in Egypt were huge tombs, testifying to the importance of burial in Egyptian culture. In contrast, Israel’s burial practices were not elaborate, because the biblical authors considered death to be a state of no consciousness (Eccles. 9:5, 6). This funeral, however, is very significant, as it marks the end of intertribal fighting and lays the foundation for a united Israel.

Read again 2 Samuel 21:1–14. What caused the end of the famine?

The famine does not end after the seven descendants of Saul are executed. God responds to the plea for the land only after David has provided a respectable resting place for the remains of Saul and his descendants. In other words, although justice and righteousness are important elements of our interaction with one another, reconciliation is required as well. Rizpah’s example of faithfulness, even under hopeless and desperate conditions, appears to have brought about faithfulness and reconciliation on a much larger scale, resulting in an Israel that can begin to heal the wounds of intertribal warfare. Rizpah’s role in this crucial part of David’s reign teaches an important lesson that echoes through the centuries: circumstances alone do not make or break a child of God; rather, we determine by our choices, for good or bad, whether we will be pawns or whether our quiet faithfulness will powerfully influence the lives around us. By living faithfully, Rizpah subtly influenced the outcome of a nation.

Look at the power of example: through Rizpah’s actions, the concubine of David’s enemy greatly influences David. What should this tell us, regardless of who we are, about the power of our influence? Think about those whom you are influencing. How might you be a better influence than you are right now?
Theater, he nearly lost his own in the Battle of Okinawa. Although ridiculed and harassed for being faithful to his convictions regarding non-combatancy and Sabbath observance, he nevertheless earned respect from his commanders and fellow soldiers.

Thought Question:
The same attitude that caused Doss to refuse to fire a weapon was the same one that caused him to act so bravely in the face of danger. What attitude was that, and why is it so important?

Application Question:
In what ways are we called to do something similar, regardless of how different the immediate circumstances?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Faithfulness in things considered small often forms the basis for faithfulness in the bigger decisions of life. Faithfulness in the simple matter of choosing an appropriate diet prepared Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego for the history-changing showdown regarding worship on the plain of Dura. It also prepared Daniel to stand firm regarding worship, knowing that his decision would lead him to the lions’ den. Rizpah’s example is not headline material but represents the hundreds of daily decisions we all make that corporately frame our character.

Activity: As a class, create a photo montage of simple acts of faithfulness that are repeated every day. This can be done utilizing stock photos that appear in newspapers and news magazines or by taking your own pictures as a group activity.

What do each of these ideas collectively illustrate to us about being faithful? What does faithfulness in the small things teach us about faithfulness in the big? Why is it difficult—or even impossible—to have one without the other?

Alternate Option: To do this activity without photos, ask class members to picture in their minds the simple acts of faithfulness that they are thankful for every day. Ask for a few class members to share, or describe, their picture of faithfulness. Then ask the questions provided above.
Further Study: “The gospel is a message of peace. Christianity is a system which, received and obeyed, would spread peace, harmony, and happiness throughout the earth. The religion of Christ will unite in close brotherhood all who accept its teachings. It was the mission of Jesus to reconcile men to God, and thus to one another.”—Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, p. 47.

“It is one thing to read and teach the Bible, and another thing to have, by practise, its life-giving, sanctifying principles engrafted on the soul. God is in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. If those who claim to be his followers draw apart, showing no affectionate or compassionate interest in one another, they are not sanctified to God. They have not his love in their hearts.”—Ellen G. White, The Review and Herald, March 17, 1910.

Discussion Questions:

1. In your Sabbath School class, think of ways to demonstrate God’s faithfulness to the people of your community who do not know God personally.

2. What is faithfulness? Have different class members define faithfulness, using biblical characters as examples.

3. Many times we seem to be helpless and without any choices in our circumstances. What can we learn from a woman such as Rizpah, who, despite her circumstances, acted so faithfully before the Lord?

4. Men of God with concubines? Descendants suffering for the sins of their fathers? This story leaves the modern reader with a lot of unanswered questions. Of course, as with everything in life, there are always unanswered questions. Part of what it means to live by faith is to live with unanswered questions (after all, if all things were answered, where would the need for faith come in?). How have you learned to live with the unanswered questions in your own existence? What have you learned from not having answers that could help someone else who struggles with questions that beg for answers that, for now, aren’t coming?

5. Dwell more on the power of example. Who are the powerful examples in your culture and society? Are they good or bad examples? What about your own example? What kind of influence do you think you have on those who watch your behavior? How different is your example at home from your example in public or in church? Would those who might admire your example in public be shocked if they saw your example at home?
Lesson 10  *November 27–December 3

The Man of God: Obedience Is Not Optional

Sabbath Afternoon


Memory Text: “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20, 21, NIV).

This week we will look at one of the strangest stories in the Old Testament. On first glance we discover a renegade king, a prophet who makes specific food prohibitions, an altar that splits open like a cracked egg, and then, more disturbing, a lying old prophet, and a selectively dangerous lion.

The story takes place in the first years of the divided monarchy, a time of political and religious tension. Under the leadership of Jeroboam (and with the express blessing of the Lord [1 Kings 11:29–39]), the ten tribes of Israel have separated themselves from Rehoboam, the son of Solomon and heir to the Davidic kingdom. War hangs in the air, and it is during this time of instability and change that God sends His prophet with a specific message to King Jeroboam about the idolatrous worship in the northern kingdom, which would prove ultimately to be its ruin.

Below the surface of this story about a nameless prophet lies the important issue of obedience and how seriously God takes our obedience. Whatever the unanswered questions, this story shows that any expression of the gospel without resulting obedience is, of necessity, a false gospel.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 4.
The Politics of Religion

After the death of Solomon, the poor judgment of Rehoboam, his son, led to the division of the nation, with King Jeroboam ruling in Israel, the northern kingdom, and Rehoboam in Judah, the southern kingdom (see 1 Kings 12).

Not long after the break, Jeroboam set the northern kingdom on a very dangerous path. He did not deliberately set out to lead Israel from a worship of God to idolatry; instead, he was acting from political expediency. He created two centers of worship, one at Bethel and one at Dan. He claimed to be trying to make things easier for the Israelites, so that they would not have to travel all the way to Jerusalem in order to worship. The golden calves were simply to be a visual reminder of God (not a representation) and were to make worship more credible for the common Israelite. What started as a political move, however, led to the breaking of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:4, 5).

What similarities can be noted between the golden calf episode in Exodus 32 and Jeroboam’s golden calves? See 1 Kings 12:25–33.

It is necessary to be innovative in worship and adapt worship to our specific cultural contexts, but we must be so careful. Even a small deviation from a clear command of God has far-reaching effects. In the case of Israel, the golden calves led the nation on a path toward blatant sin. But things did not stop there. Jeroboam was obliged to make other changes as well. He wanted to persuade some of the Levites, living within his borders, to serve as priests at his newly established shrines. However, they saw the dangers and were not prepared to contradict God’s commands; thus, Jeroboam was compelled to make priests of common people (1 Kings 12:31, 32), which in turn degraded the sacred office.

The story of Jeroboam’s religious-political changes should have served as a warning to the early Christian church; however, the same thing happened. Divine commandments were changed due to political or social influences. Sunday instead of Sabbath was now the new “holy” day, in order to distinguish the church from the Jews. The veneration of saints was introduced in order to make the worship of God more visual for heathen believers. The pressures that led to these changes are by no means limited to the time of Jeroboam or early Christianity. Today, as a church, we face many similar challenges.

What kinds of cultural pressure is your own church facing? How susceptible are you to cultural pressures around you? How willingly do you compromise on “little” things?

What

November 28

Sunday

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The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Kings 13:26

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Compare and contrast actions of a man of God who prophesied so dramatically and resisted a corrupt king’s inducements but yet fell into deception so easily on the way home.

**Feel:** Sense how easy it is to slip from focused faith to lax disobedience.

**Do:** Resolve to daily seek God’s face and His protection from temptation.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: So Strong Yet So Weak**

   A How could the man of God from Judah have acted so courageously and faithfully before the king and a large crowd yet slip into temptation so quickly afterward?

   B What were the immediate consequences for the man as a result of his disobedience to God?

   C Why did God punish him so decisively and quickly?

II. **Feel: Darts of Temptation**

   A What kinds of inducements to temptation did the man of God face in the guise of conflicting instructions from another man of God in Israel?

   B What temptations beset us to let our obedience to the Word of God slip?

III. **Do: Shield of Faith**

   A Because it is so easy to fall into temptation to disobey God, what is our only hope?

   B How can we find protection from deception and the strength to meet Satan’s wiles?

   C An older prophet gave the man of God instructions that conflicted with God’s original message. What can we learn from this situation about yielding our conscience to another’s when it goes against clear instruction from God?

**Summary:** The man of God from Judah prophesied faithfully and turned toward home, only to fall into the temptation to doubt God’s Word.
God’s Move

In the middle of Jeroboam’s political moves, God steps in and makes Himself heard. He speaks through a prophet from Judah. This unnamed prophet makes his appearance just as Jeroboam is standing before his altar at the dedication ceremony for the shrine. Anyone who was anybody in the kingdom of Israel would have been there. God selected the most opportune moment to act. The result is dramatic.

Read 1 Kings 13:1–6. What happens here? What immediate lessons come to mind from this narrative?

The prophet, though not named, is referred to as the man of God. This was a common title used for a person recognized as a messenger of God. It was used for Moses (Deut. 33:1) and Elijah (1 Kings 17:18). This title connects our nameless prophet with some of the great prophets of the Old Testament; thus, the reader’s expectations for him are high. The man of God cries out against Jeroboam’s altar and gives a prophecy. In the prophecy, a specific name, Josiah, is mentioned (1 Kings 13:2). This is amazing, because Josiah is born almost three centuries afterward. It reminds us of Cyrus, the Persian, whose name is mentioned by the prophet Isaiah about two hundred years before his birth (see Isa. 44:28, 45:1).

What are the main points of the message the man of God brings? First, the altar is illegal, and the man of God predicts that a descendant of David named Josiah will defile it. This is exactly what Jeroboam most fears. He is establishing these worship centers especially to avoid losing his kingdom to someone who sits on David’s throne. The second part of the message provides an immediate demonstration of God’s power, thus guaranteeing the prophecy’s future fulfillment. Before the eyes of everyone, the altar splits apart. Perhaps this is meant to remind the onlookers of the tablets of the Ten Commandments that Moses broke at the worship of the first golden calf.

It seems as if Jeroboam has learned nothing from history. He has two golden calves instead of one. And now instead of being repentant, Jeroboam points at the man of God. Pointing the hand, stick, or scepter has always been a sign of judgment in biblical times. Jeroboam wants to have him arrested. So much for surrendering to the will of God.

How, in this story, do we see the mercy of God presented, even to someone as stubborn as Jeroboam? How often do you find yourself expressing a similar attitude toward the clear leading of God? What have been the personal consequences of that attitude?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** We must follow our conscience rather than depending on someone else to interpret God’s Word for us.

In popular parlance, obedience and conscientiousness are frequently confused with legalism. Those who desire intimate fellowship with God, expressing their devotion through heartfelt obedience, are sometimes parodied as rigid, legalistic, and somber souls, unacquainted with laughter and delight. Satan surely rejoices when such distortions prevail. True obedience is, in fact, the simplest expression of trust, which forms the foundation of every relationship. Failure in obedience, therefore, equals failure to believe (trust). Within marital relationships, respect and trust deteriorate long before courthouse papers are filed for divorce. Spiritually speaking, disrespect and distrust, leading to disobedience, form long before the dissolution of saving relationships. Those who diligently pursue intimacy with God understand obedience, not as shackles and fetters but as the liberating natural outgrowth of loving a Father we can trust.

**Opening Activity:** Governmental guidelines, regulations, advisories, and natural law form boundaries that enable us to live productively. Without these fences protecting our daily lives, chaos would engulf our existence. Discuss the following systems, analyzing how obedience enhances rather than restricts life: (1) traffic safety regulations (speed limits, traffic lights, lane designations, and so forth); (2) administration of prescription medications; (3) environmental protection (hazardous waste disposal, and so forth); and (4) criminal law (injunctions against murder, robbery, character defamation, computer fraud, and so forth).

**Consider This:** Considering the systems under discussion, how would life improve were these prohibitions and advisories removed? Alternatively, how would things deteriorate, even self-destruct, in their absence? When guidelines are followed (obedience)? How does that exhibit trust?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** From a general discussion of the significance of
**The Giver of Gifts**

It is a spectacular miracle. Jeroboam’s hand, which had “dried up, so that he could not pull it in again” (*1 Kings 13:4*), is immediately restored. After such convincing evidence, we would expect at least a public confession from Jeroboam, the king. But miracles cannot change our will. Even after a dramatic intervention by God, it is surprisingly easy to find a “natural” explanation or just simply go back to our old habits.

**What** did Jesus say about the connection between miracles and belief? *Luke 16:31, John 10:25–28, 15:24.* **Why do you think this is so true of us?**

Instead of abandoning his worship activities and wholeheartedly beginning a reformation, Jeroboam simply changes tactics (*see 1 Kings 13:7–10*). He invites the man of God home with him and offers him a reward. This was a political move aimed at neutralizing the effect of the message on the people who witnessed the miracle. King Jeroboam is offering to take the man of God into his employ. Only the one who is in charge or who is soliciting a service is in a position to offer a reward, but God’s man is never to be on sale. He owes his allegiance to God and cannot let his messages from God be modified by whoever might be sponsoring him.

**Read** 2 Kings 5:14–16 and Daniel 5:13–17. **How did the prophets respond to the offers of gifts?**

Giving a gift places the giver in a position of power, and the receiver “owes” the giver. The man of God refuses the king’s gift and goes on to state that he will not eat or drink in the territory of Israel. By not accepting Jeroboam’s hospitality, the man of God says “No” to mixing true worship with idolatry. God’s people should not be for sale. They should walk a different route. The man of God did not have too far to walk, because the inauguration of the shrine at Bethel took place about 2 kilometers (1.4 miles) from the border with Judah. The next town in Judah’s territory was Mizpah, a 10-kilometer (7-mile) walk from Bethel. The man of God was to show how revolting the idolatrous system was to God through a dramatic object lesson of not eating and drinking and even by taking a different route home.

**How is the giving of gifts or favors viewed in your culture? Are you indebted to anyone by gifts that you receive? Pray for God’s wisdom in helping you disentangle yourself from any compromising situations that you might find yourself in because of gifts given you.**
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

obedience and trust, we now intensify our focus on the importance of individual conscience. How does a person know what to obey? How is God’s will discerned when there are conflicting voices that claim divine authority?

Bible Commentary

I. God’s Move (Review 1 Kings 13:1–6 with your class.)

Responding to the idolatry initiated by Jeroboam, God dispatches to the scene an unnamed prophet with messages of rebuke and correction. Risking his life, the prophet, known only as the man of God, faithfully delivers God’s message. Dedicated boldness obviously characterizes this unsung spokesperson. When Jeroboam aggressively threatens this messenger, his hand mysteriously shrivels, the altar cracks, signifying divine judgment, and God’s righteousness is vindicated. Centuries later, Judah’s final good king, Josiah, fulfilled the prophecy delivered by this unknown man of God, destroying Jeroboam’s abomination (2 Kings 23:15, 16).

Consider This: Should the story have ended here, what grade might you have assigned the prophet, and why? Which noble characteristics might we discern about him?

II. The Giver of Gifts (Review 1 Kings 13:7–10 with your class.)

Apparently overwhelmed by the divine display of judgment, Jeroboam retrenches. Rather than repenting, the renegade king attempts to achieve by guile something he could not otherwise attain. Balaam, generations before, had succumbed to the allure of financial enticements. Might this prophet likewise be seduced by avarice? The prophet, however, rebuffs Jeroboam’s attempts to compromise his integrity. This faithful messenger’s conscience cannot be auctioned off.

Consider This: Should the story have ended here, what grade might you have assigned the prophet, and why? Which characteristics, thus far revealed, should be emulated by believers in every generation?

III. Tempting Lies (Review 1 Kings 13:10–19 with your class.)

Triumph! Triumph! Triumph! Initially the unnamed prophet secures our
Tempting Lies

God’s dramatic intervention at the inauguration ceremony gives the ordinary people plenty to talk about. Some young men go home and tell their father all about the man of God. The father’s name is not given, but we learn that he is old and that he is actually a prophet himself. This old prophet decides to go after the man of God and finds him sitting under a tree.

Read 1 Kings 13:11–19. Compare this passage with the first temptation and lie in Genesis 3:1–5. What similarities are there, and what can we learn from these episodes?

The man of God must have understood something of the urgency of his mission. He was told to give his message to the king and then not to take any time for eating or drinking but to return straight back. However, here he is, sitting under a tree in Israel, taking it easy. He could have walked the 2 kilometers (1.4 miles) and then could have sat under a tree in Judah. By losing his sense of urgency, the man of God was opening himself to temptation.

The old prophet deceives the man of God. We do not know what motivates the old prophet to deceive him. Whatever his motivation, the Bible tells us that “he lied” (1 Kings 13:18, NKJV). In this moment the old prophet becomes an agent of Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44). Perhaps an even more disturbing part of the story is that the man of God seems so easily taken in. After so obviously being led of God, after so obviously doing the Lord’s will, he just falls for the trick and goes directly against what God has told him to do.

It’s really hard to understand, isn’t it? We would like to excuse him for disobeying God, since he was led astray. But God never excuses belief in a lie when the lie is directly opposed to a clear command that He has given.

Temptation revolves around the choice to disobey God’s revealed will. Temptations don’t change as much as the forms of the temptations do. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus was tempted as we are. The same basic temptations we face (albeit in modern disguise) were faced and conquered by Jesus. Jesus promises us insight and a “way of escape” so that we would not be taken in by Satan’s lies (1 Cor. 10:13).

How easily do you allow temptations to lead you into direct conflict with God’s revealed will? What can you do, what choices can you make, to protect yourself from the temptations that so easily trap you?
admiration, facing down as he does the idolatrous king, who was surrounded by his adoring followers. The prophet sacrifices personal security for the uncertainties of faithful witness, eschewing personal financial aggrandizement in favor of unqualified, uncompromised commitment to God. Quite possibly he merits mention with Elijah and Samuel!

However, the narrative travels down new pathways from this point forward. Accosted by an elderly prophet, whose motives remain unexplained, the unnamed prophet retreats from his return journey for no apparent reason. Only two kilometers from Judah’s border and the safety of a completed mission (15–20 minutes of leisurely walking), he stops. The elderly prophet deceitfully claims he’s received divine messages that directly contradict those received by the unnamed prophet. Shockingly, after risking life itself based on the trustworthiness of the divine message and the Divine Message Giver, and after repulsing efforts to detain him based on the explicit directives of that message, the unnamed prophet yields his judgment based on “progressive revelations” supposedly given to another prophet with whom he is unacquainted.

Consider This: How do you grade the unnamed prophet now, and why? Will “progressive revelations” ever contradict earlier divine revelation? What perils await those who surrender their judgment to others in the interpretation of the divine revelation within Scripture? What is the standard by which all supposed new revelations must be judged?

IV. Twin Temptations (Review 1 Kings 13:20–33 with your class.)

The Bereans, of New Testament fame, refused simply to take Paul at his word, choosing rather to search the Scriptures for themselves in order to verify what Paul proclaimed (Acts 17:11). If only the unnamed prophet would have been so careful, how differently this story might have ended! Searching the Scriptures for ourselves, never surrendering our individual judgment to another on the basis of academic status or popular opinion—these are two safeguards against the perilous mistake in judgment that caused the death of one who once stood fearlessly for God.

Consider This: What habits must I adopt so that I am not tempted to surrender a correct understanding of the Scriptures to the judgment of others?
Twin Temptations

The man of God faced two temptations. The first, which he powerfully resisted, came from the king; the second, which he succumbed to, came from the old prophet. What important lesson can we take from this for ourselves? See 2 Tim. 4:3, 2 Pet. 2:1, Jude 4–16.

The greatest threat to our faith is not persecution from the outside by political powers but rather false prophets and teachers who come from within us or who claim to speak in God’s name.

It is important to have a clear word from the Lord. In other words, we need to study God’s Word, the Bible, for ourselves. A true prophet or teacher will not contradict other inspired revelation. Because God never contradicts Himself, any new prophecy or teaching from God will add to established truth and not subtract from it. It also will encourage obedience and never disobedience. Finally, we can judge prophets and teachers by the results of their teaching for their audience and in their own lives.

Read 1 Kings 13:20–34. What happens next, and what lessons are there for us?

What is hard to understand in all this is why the old prophet lies to the man of God to begin with. He starts out in the role of Satan, the deceiver, and then, before the chapter is over, he is the one delivering the “Thus saith the Lord” (vs. 21) to him. Although much is hard to understand, one thing in this story shouldn’t be: the man of God should not have so directly and blatantly disregarded the clear command of the Lord.

The death of the man of God is not without effect. Unlike the king, who witnessed a miracle and continued in his sin (see 1 Kings 13:33, 34), the old prophet believes that God’s Word will be fulfilled. He tells his sons that when he dies they are to lay his bones beside the bones of the man of God. The prophecy made by the man of God from Judah is literally fulfilled by Josiah three centuries later (2 Kings 23:15, 16). As prophesied, Josiah burns bones on the altar; however, he spares the bones of the man of God and also, consequentially, the bones of the old prophet who was buried with him (2 Kings 23:17, 18).

Look at this verse: “It is the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the Lord” (1 Kings 13:26). What ironic but important message can we take from this for ourselves?
**Learning Cycle CONTINUED**

**STEP 3—Apply**

*Application Questions:*

1. How do I maintain the integrity of my conscience regarding my understanding of Scripture and still live in active community with others who disagree with me? Must I compromise? How can those who disagree still bond spiritually?

2. Sarah and Myra room together at a prestigious Seventh-day Adventist university. Recently, Sarah has lost interest in her studies but finds ways to spend every spare moment with a mysterious group that claims to have discovered “new light.” She has become critical of the church, especially certain doctrines that she characterizes as “antiques.” Sarah is becoming more insistent that Myra should join her at these meetings. How should Myra handle the situation?

3. How should we approach claims of new revelations from God? By which standard are these to be evaluated? How can we be obedient to God’s truth and still maintain relationships with those who are not?

**STEP 4—Create**

*Just for Teachers:* Obedience to God’s call defines the depth of our trust in Him. That obedience cannot be based on another person’s trust in God or understanding of truth. We are held individually accountable; for our decisions cannot rely on another person’s faith. We cannot sustain life by merely watching another person eat, nor can spirituality be maintained by observing another person’s experience. The unnamed prophet had many admirable qualities, but his undoing came when he relied on the purported spiritual experience of another instead of obeying a clear and certain “Thus saith the Lord.”

*Activity:* Christ is our example. With the Christmas season upon us, there is even more reason to focus on Him. If the Christmas tree is a custom in your country, bring a small one to your classroom and decorate it with small ornaments to which scriptural passages will be attached. Passages should reflect the following emphases: (1) passages related to Jesus’ obedience, (2) passages regarding His unwillingness to compromise, (3) passages in which Jesus quotes or alludes to Scripture, and (4) passages that highlight Jesus’ trust in His Father.

*Alternate option:* Ask members to share and meditate on passages from Scripture that reflect the four areas of emphasis above. How do these passages help us to understand obedience and trust?
Further Study: “The Saviour overcame to show man how he may overcome. All the temptations of Satan, Christ met with the word of God. By trusting in God’s promises, He received power to obey God’s commandments, and the tempter could gain no advantage. To every temptation His answer was, ‘It is written.’ So God has given us His word wherewith to resist evil. Exceeding great and precious promises are ours, that by these we ‘might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.’ 2 Peter 1:4.

“Bid the tempted one look not to circumstances, to the weakness of self, or to the power of temptation, but to the power of God’s word. All its strength is ours. ‘Thy word,’ says the psalmist, ‘have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee.’ ‘By the word of Thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.’ Psalms 119:11; 17:4.”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 181.

Discussion Questions:

1. Truth is progressive. As we better understand God’s truth, we may have to make changes in our lives, beliefs, organization, outreach, and so on. Keeping the status quo is not an option. Discuss in your class how we can know whether our proposed actions arise from God’s leading or society’s influence.

2. Discuss Jesus’ model of socializing with sinners as opposed to the duty of the man of God not to socialize and thus condone sin. How do we meet people where they are? Give practical examples in your Sabbath School class to show how you have come close to people and shown acceptance without encouraging sinful practices.

3. In many societies, the paying of bribes or giving of special gifts is part and parcel of almost all business, legal, and political deals. How can we, as Seventh-day Adventists, individually and as a church, survive in such societies? Based on this week’s lesson, as a class write some guidelines for dealing with this problem.

4. Imagine that someone in your church stands up and claims to have a message from the Lord or that your head elder claims to have new biblical light on last-day events. What would you do? How would you evaluate the claims?
Lesson 11  *December 4–10

The Widow of Zarephath: The Leap of Faith

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: 1 Kings 17; Job 38; 42:5, 6; Luke 4:24–28; Heb. 11:1; Rev. 1:17.

Memory Text: “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6, NKJV).

She was no stranger to death. She had seen her husband die. And now she watched, helplessly, as everything around her died. The grass dried up, the trees dropped their leaves, the cows were gaunt skeletons, and the goats bleated pitifully. Every day she scanned the cloudless sky, hoping against hope for a cloud and rain. She had been rationing the flour and the oil in an attempt to make it stretch until the end of the drought. The little round, flat daily loaf was unevenly divided. Her son needed all the nourishment she could give him. It pained her to see the lad so thin and without energy. But her sacrifice seemed pointless, for she feared that both would soon starve to death. There was enough for one final meal. Holding her son’s hand, the widow leaves the dusty town of Zarephath to scrounge for firewood in order to cook their final meal. And here the unnamed woman steps into the biblical narrative and into sacred history, where her story teaches us lessons that we can, thousands of years later, apply to ourselves. This week we see the great controversy between God and Satan played out in miniature in the life of an unnamed widow who chooses God and is led step by step into a journey of faith.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 11.
To Zarephath

Although our story begins with God’s command to the great prophet Elijah to go to Zarephath, we must remember what led to this command. The kingdom of Israel had fallen into idolatry. Baal worship had become the official state religion. God dramatically had “challenged” the storm god by declaring through His prophet Elijah that there would be no more dew or rain (1 Kings 17:1).

What irony is found in the idea that God tells a kingdom that was worshiping the storm god that there would be no rain? What does this tell us about God’s power in our world in contrast to every other power? See also Ps. 86:8, Jer. 10:6, Heb. 1:1–3, and Job 38.

Elijah had been hiding at the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:3) while the country of Israel withered under a devastating drought. The brook finally ran dry, and God commanded the prophet to leave and go to Zarephath (1 Kings 17:1–9).

God commands Elijah to leave Israel and go to a foreign land. Zarephath is located on the Mediterranean coast between Tyre and Sidon. It is within the territory of Phoenicia, which is where the terrible queen Jezebel comes from. One of the important Phoenician national deities is Baal, and Jezebel, as King Ahab’s queen, actively imported Baal worship to Israel from Phoenicia. In the ancient world, gods were normally thought of as belonging to a specific city or region. Zarephath, situated outside of Israel in a foreign country, is supposedly far removed from the Lord’s area of influence. The people of this heathen nation also should be far out of God’s reach. But no one ever is out of His reach. Right in the very center of Baal worship, God is going to make His presence and power known.

It’s important to note that God uses the prophet’s need to reach out to a woman in far-off Zarephath. As believers in Jesus, we do not have to project a perfect front to all those around us. We do not have to cover up our problems or pretend that we have no needs, because, as we all know, that’s just not true. As Christians, we still suffer, we still hurt, we still need at times the solace and help of others who, in fact, might not be of our faith or of any faith at all.

What’s wrong with the attitude that says we show a lack of faith when we seek help from others? What are ways that we might, through our needs, reveal to others the goodness and character of God?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Kings 17:13, 14

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Describe the circumstances that brought Elijah to ask for help from a pagan, widowed mother in a foreign land.

**Feel:** Empathize with the conflicting feelings that a starving mother must have had when a stranger from another religion asked for her last bit of food.

**Do:** Step out in faith when God calls you to act, even though you may not know all the details.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: At the Bottom

A. The widow was at the end of her resources, and so was Elijah when God brought them together. How did they serve each other, and how did this affect the growth of their faith?

II. Feel: Enough Faith to Be Generous

A. Though faced with death, the widow still was generous enough to share with a stranger what she believed was the last meal she was able to provide for her son and herself. What assurance did Elijah give along with his request for her food?

B. How does God assure us when He asks us to act on His requests?

III. Do: Acting in Faith

A. What has God asked you to do that requires stepping into unknown and potentially life-threatening territory?

B. What assurances of God’s care do you rest on?

**Summary:** The widow of Zarephath cared for Elijah’s needs, through faith, even though she was at the end of her resources; and God richly blessed her, her son, and Elijah.
An Unusual Instrument  *(1 Kings 17:7–12)*

The widow, out gathering firewood to make a last meal for herself and her son, immediately recognizes Elijah as a believer in God. The text doesn’t say what it was, but something let her know that Elijah was a worshiper of the Lord.

**Read** carefully verse 12. The woman acknowledges that God exists, but what does that, at this point, mean to her? Dwell on her phrase “that we may eat it, and die.” What does it imply?

**What** similarities can you detect between 1 Kings 17:3, 4 and 17:8, 9?

God directs and guides His prophet Elijah in order to save his life. First He tells him to hide by the brook Cherith. Ravens are commanded to feed him. Following this, God commands again and sends Elijah to Zarephath, where he has “commanded a widow” *(vs. 9)* to feed him.

She seems an unusual instrument for God. She is a non-Israelite. She is a widow with no social standing and no influence or power. She herself is on the brink of starvation.

What an incredible lesson can be learned from observing this divine strategy. More often than not God chooses us—not for a particular strength that we may have—but rather in spite of our weaknesses *(2 Cor. 12:9)*.

Yesterday we saw that God is not limited geographically. Today we see that God is not limited by human limitations. God is the One who orders in this story. Throughout this narrative it is clear that God is in control, a point that also is very important in the larger context of Elijah’s ministry in the great battle between the Lord and Baal. Nothing and no one can stand in the way of God’s ultimate will. Later in the story we will see that even death cannot interfere with God’s purposes. Even though things and events that are hurtful or detrimental to our lives will be thrown at us, God’s purposes for us always are good *(Jer. 29:11)*, although we may not see this immediately. We need to learn to trust Him in all situations, both the good and the bad, for we will inevitably find ourselves at some point in both.

**How has the Lord been able to use you despite your weaknesses? How much more could you do were you, through His power, able to overcome those weaknesses?**
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God today is as intent to design for us a leap in faith in our journey heavenward as He was for the widow of Zarephath.

**Just for Teachers:** Use the story below to remind class members that while God designs for us to take a leap in faith in our heavenward journey, we must be careful not to mistake faith for presumption.

An author wrote a biography. The subject of the biography planned a book tour in order to promote the book’s release. However, she lacked the necessary means of travel to take her from place to place.

The woman gave her dilemma some thought and finally settled on a unique approach for seeking divine guidance in the matter. After obtaining what she believed was an answer, she approached the author and revealed her method for arriving at a solution. “When I closed my eyes and opened my Bible, my finger landed on the phrase ‘go down to Egypt.’ So, since the message indicates travel, I need you to take me around to camp meeting speaking appointments and book signings this summer,” she concluded.

The author, however, resisted this fortune-cookie approach to seeking guidance from the Bible. Such an approach might have caught the author off guard had she not been able, biblically, to detect presumption in the request.

**Consider This:** Let us consider for a moment that the widow of Zarephath may have been caught off guard by the seemingly audacious request for food in a time of famine. Elijah’s request was likewise presented as coming “from above,” as was the request made to the author. What was the key difference between the two requests? How was the widow able to differentiate a request made in faith from one made in presumption? What guidance does this story offer us in discerning between presumption and what is truly God’s leading?

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STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** How do we know that the widow’s response to
Total Surrender  *(1 Kings 17:13–16)*

**Read** 1 Kings 17:13–16. What’s the first thing Elijah says to the widow, and why? What great leap of faith is Elijah taking in asking her to do this?

Widows were marginal characters in the biblical world at the best of times. Especially if they had no grown children to take care of them, they easily were victimized and had limited legal recourse. A widow in the time of a great drought was even worse off. Each family was fighting for survival, and there would be no handouts to poor widows. This woman is now asked to feed the prophet. She is really the most unlikely candidate, when we consider her social and economic reality. Only a handful of flour and a little oil stands between this poor woman and starvation.

**Whom** does he tell her to feed first? What kind of thoughts must have gone through her mind when she heard that? What kind of faith was required on her part?

In many of our cultures it is more appropriate to offer to others before taking for ourselves. However, to add insult to injury, the prophet not only wants to take from a person who cannot afford to give, but he wants to be served first.

Remember that throughout this story the prophet really is standing in as a representative of God. By asking the woman for her last bread, the prophet is inviting her to take a leap of faith, to surrender all she has.

**What** other examples can you find in the Bible in which the Lord asks for complete surrender? *See, for instance, Genesis 22.*

When we give God everything we have, we always gain in the end. The woman originally had enough for only one meal. In giving that meal to the prophet first, this pagan woman reached out in raw faith, trusting in what she could not see or understand. In a sense, isn’t that what faith is all about *(see Heb. 11:1)*—trusting in a God we can’t see and in promises we don’t fully understand? What’s amazing, too, is that this isn’t even an Israelite woman but a woman from a pagan land who practiced a degrading form of worship. And yet God somehow communicated with her *(see vs. 9)*, and she responded in faith, doing what she had been commanded to despite how foolish, from a worldly perspective, her actions might have seemed.

**When was the last time you had to reach out in raw, naked faith, trusting in what you could not see or did not understand? What lessons did you learn about what it means for us, as fallen beings, to live by faith?**
I. God Leads His Children Into Faith (Read 1 Kings 17:9, 12, 14 with your class.)

True, the widow lived at ground zero of Baal worship (Phoenicia). But even before the arrival of Elijah, “she was a believer in the true God and had walked in all the light that was shining on her pathway.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 129. To paraphrase, the widow was in heathenism, but not of heathenism (see Ellen G. White, The Upward Look, p. 195).

Guide your class in a discussion of how God gently, step by step, built up the widow’s faith to prepare her for Elijah’s arrival and request. Evident talking points:

Verse 9: God, as well as Elijah later on, gave the widow a command. For her to get a directive straight from Israel’s God likely would have told her that God was real and was working in her life.

Verse 12: Just as Elijah, by divine guidance, recognized the widow, she recognized Elijah in her greeting: “As the Lord thy God liveth.”

Verse 14: Before handing over her last morsel of food, she received Elijah’s promise from God that if she complied, the supplies would not fail.

It was enough. After she had received a command from God Himself, followed by divine insight to recognize her guest, the way was paved for her not to reject, without at least testing, the third step—the promise.

Consider This: “God will never remove every occasion for doubt. He gives sufficient evidence on which to base faith.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 432. Discuss whether the widow acted on presumption or budding faith.

II. Keeping Faith Warm (Compare 1 Kings 17:12 and 24.)

What happened, in just 12 verses, that the widow now has to conclude...
Remembering My Sins (1 Kings 17:17, 18)

The widow gave her last loaf of bread, and God performed a miracle. She and her son miraculously escaped starvation and had a constant source of food. It’s hard to imagine the astonishment she must have felt to see this incredible miracle happen, not just once but day by day.

**What is the natural human response to contact with God?** See Job 42:5, 6; Isa. 6:5; Dan. 10:8; Luke 5:8; Rev. 1:17. Why do you think that reaction is so common?

Through the prophet Elijah, the widow came into contact with God. As we come into contact with a holy God, our sins become more apparent. And then, when something terrible happens, we may feel that the Lord is punishing us. In 1 Kings 17:18, the widow blames God’s prophet for being there and consequently bringing her to God’s notice.

**Look at her reasoning (vs. 18). Why might she have thought the way she did?**

Perhaps she saw the kind of faithful and holy life that Elijah lived, and she felt convicted in his presence when she contrasted herself to him. Or, living day by day with such a miracle, perhaps she felt the presence of God and His holiness as never before and thus felt her sinfulness more than ever before. Thus, in that context, she saw her sins as the cause of this tragedy.

In many ways this is such a common reaction. We often blame ourselves and our sins for the tragedies that hurt us or our loved ones. What did I do that caused my child to get sick? What sin has caused this calamity in my life? Though it is true that many times pain and suffering result directly from the sinful choices we make, it’s also true that tragedies come for which we see no apparent reason and certainly through no fault of our own. Remember the story of Job. Even God admitted he was a righteous man, and look what happened to him. We need to be very careful in how we seek to explain the cause of tragedy in our lives. What’s more important is how we respond to those tragedies, and fixating on the supposed cause most likely won’t help.

**We all face unexpected and inexplicable tragedy, don’t we? It’s part of what it means to be fallen beings in a fallen world. How can you learn to trust and love God, even amid painful times?**
all over again, “Now I know who you are”? Because we know the narrative from beginning to end, it is easy for us to ask, After the miracle of the ever-flowing oil, how could any doubt possibly have set in?

Possibly she’d begun taking the nonstop oil for granted and required something to jolt her faith again. Or perhaps discouragement had set in from lack of self-worth. If this was the case, two possible reasons for that lack could be her social position or guilt and self-reproach.

First, widows had next-to-zero status in society. Her name is not mentioned in 1 Kings. Yet, she appears in Luke 4:26 as Jesus’ first recorded sermon illustration! (What other widow—often called the greatest fund-raiser throughout the ages that the church has ever had—went unnamed? Read Mark 12:42–44.)

Second, the widow blamed herself for her son’s death. Blame is an easy and dangerous trap to fall into. Though we all are guilty in one way or another, we always must remember that Jesus bore our guilt at the cross.

**Consider This:** “The nearer we come to Jesus, the more clearly we behold the purity and greatness of His character, the less we shall feel like exalting self. The contrast between our characters and His will lead to humiliation of soul and deep heart searching.”—Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 46. Can even forgiven sins be later realized in a clearer light? Was this David’s “post-forgiven” experience in Psalm 51?

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**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Evaluating our faith is introspective. Am I recognizing life experiences (heart-wrenching tests, comforting assurances, answers to prayer) as steps of spiritual growth?

**Thought Question:**

We often face two kinds of “tests” regarding faith. The first kind is the kind in which we really have no choice. Perhaps you go to the doctor and are given bad news. This isn’t a challenge you have chosen. It was thrust upon you.
Testing Faith

How was the faith of both the widow and Elijah tested here? 1 Kings 17:17–24.

Notice the struggle that Elijah himself had with the death of the boy. It doesn’t seem as if he knows for sure that the Lord will raise him. His prayer seems to reflect some of the attitude of the woman herself, blaming God for the death. What this shows is that even prophets can struggle with understanding things that happen (Matt. 11:1–3).

No question, for quite a while both the widow and Elijah were living in the presence of a miracle—the continual supply of flour and oil—which should have been more than enough to keep their faith strong. And yet, even with something as dramatic as that, their faith was put to the test.

How often, too, we might have had some incredible experience with God, something that really touched us in a powerful way, only to question Him later when events unfold that we don’t like. That’s why, though miracles can have a role in the building of faith, they shouldn’t be the center of it.

How does Elijah refer to the Lord? What does that tell us about his relationship with God?

Elijah has a very intimate relationship with God; he calls God “my God.” Having a close relationship with God does not mean that one has all the answers. Elijah cannot understand why God has permitted the child to die. But it is when we have an intimate relationship with God that we best can experience the power of God in our lives. The miracle does not occur by a special magic formula or even the attempt of the prophet to keep the boy warm. The writer of the account makes it clear that it is God who resurrects the boy.

Elijah himself is thrilled at the results. “Look, your son is alive!” he probably shouted to the widow. No doubt, whatever this incident did for the faith of the woman, it surely helped Elijah, as well.

The widow’s response ends in a faith statement. She now knows that the God of Israel is able to sustain life and also give life.

Read Luke 4:24–26, where this widow is mentioned again. How do Christ’s words here help us better understand this story as a whole? What lessons might we draw from it for ourselves, we who are part of a privileged group?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

In contrast, perhaps you are offered a dream job, the job you always wanted. Everything is all set until you hear the words, “You will have to work on some Saturdays.”

What are the differences in these scenarios, and what role does faith play in them both?

STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Impress upon members that faith is not just an abstract, “out-there-somewhere” word. The faith visibly rewarded and proven in this report from Phoenicia can happen in (name of home city), as well.

Example: Moments before the opening night of an evangelistic series, the electricity was cut, leaving the church in total darkness. The head deacon watched a tiny residue of fuel oil in the nearly empty, hastily borrowed generator to keep the lights, laptop, and projector going. He was praying harder than ever when the meeting ran a half hour over. At the last amen, the lights went out.

The oil (food or fuel) still flows! Without the widow’s story, why might we tend to view such reports as mere hype?

**Activity:** Reread the memory text. In response to the following prompters, invite members to share voluntarily a one-word emotional descriptor (spanning from spiritual birth until present time) of how they felt/feel their Christian experience has begun.

My first awareness that “Jesus loves me”: ___________

The day of my baptism: ___________

Most memorable forgiveness experience: ___________

**Teacher’s concluding prayer:** “Jesus, thank You for our memory text in Sabbath’s lesson. We know, absolutely, that You didn’t bring us this far to let us go now!”

Last, invite class members to repeat aloud the prayer together, each inserting their own name:

“Jesus, I know, absolutely, that You didn’t bring [_____] this far to let [_____] go now. Selah.”
Further Study: ‘And He said, verily I say unto you, No prophet is acceptable in his own country. But of a truth I say unto you, There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land; and unto none of them was Elijah sent, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman, the Syrian.’ Luke 4:23–27, R.V.

“By this relation of events in the lives of the prophets, Jesus met the questionings of His hearers. The servants whom God had chosen for a special work were not allowed to labor for a hardhearted and unbelieving people. But those who had hearts to feel and faith to believe were especially favored with evidences of His power through the prophets. In the days of Elijah, Israel had departed from God. They clung to their sins, and rejected the warnings of the Spirit through the Lord’s messengers. Thus they cut themselves off from the channel by which God’s blessing could come to them. The Lord passed by the homes of Israel, and found a refuge for His servant in a heathen land, with a woman who did not belong to the chosen people. But this woman was favored because she had followed the light she had received, and her heart was open to the greater light that God sent her through His prophet.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 238.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the connection between sin and suffering? The widow of Zarephath thought that her sin caused her son’s death. In the New Testament the disciples thought that being blind was the result of the individual’s or his or her parents’ sins (John 9:2, 3). Should we relate differently to people who are suffering as the result of their own sins as opposed to those who seem to be suffering through no cause of their own? Or should we not even make that judgment call? Defend your answer.

2. A child is born with a rare genetic disorder, and the mother feels that God is punishing her for her rebellious youth. What advice and comfort can you as a class offer her?

3. Ask if anyone in class ever witnessed a miracle, something that could have come only from God. What was the person’s reaction? How has the impact of the miracle in the person’s life changed over time? Did he or she ever struggle with doubt again, despite having witnessed something so amazing? What lessons can we learn from these experiences about what it means to live by faith?
Lesson 12  *December 11–17

Gehazi: Missing the Mark

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 39:4–6; 2 Kings 4; 5; 8:1–6; Jer. 9:23, 24; John 13:1–17; 1 Tim. 6:10.

Memory Text: “It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him” (Deuteronomy 13:4, NIV).

Gehazi was a servant. Not just any servant but the servant of one of the greatest prophets in Israel’s history: Elisha. Elisha had been called by the Lord to minister to the prophet Elijah, in preparation for Elisha’s own prophetic ministry (1 Kings 19:16). For many years Elisha served Elijah and listened, observed, and thus understood what it meant to be a prophet. When Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind of fire (2 Kings 2:11), Elisha’s time had come. His ministry was not as fiery and glamorous as Elijah’s, but he exerted a far-reaching influence.

Thus, Gehazi had a wonderful opportunity to be closely associated with someone as blessed of God as Elisha. It’s hard to imagine all that he could have learned and seen in the years that he worked with the prophet.

Yet, as we will see this week, despite so much potential and so many great opportunities, Gehazi became a miserable failure. His story serves as an example of someone who gets sidetracked and becomes unable to distinguish the important from the peripheral. How crucial it is for us to learn from his mistakes!

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 18.

Being a servant means primarily that one puts aside one’s own wants, wishes, and comfort and involves oneself totally in someone else’s life. A servant is there to assist the master in carrying out the master’s plans, wishes, and activities. Sometimes being a servant involves carrying messages, accompanying someone, acting for the person, and doing menial jobs that need to be done. At other times it involves managing finances and households, but always the servant acts not to further his own ends but to further his master’s.

Gehazi was the servant of prophet Elisha. Being a servant to a prophet was a unique privilege. It involved more than menial labor. It was a type of apprenticeship. Elisha himself had served as Elijah’s servant (1 Kings 19:19–21). Although the job of prophet depended on a divine call, it would seem that this special time of serving together helped the would-be prophet develop his faith and trust in God. By serving his master Elijah, Elisha would be learning to put himself aside and serve others. This would prove to be the best qualification for any future ministry. We have no record of Gehazi’s calling, but we will see the opportunities that he was given.

This servant idea is by no means restricted to Old Testament times. Jesus said that the willingness to be a servant was a prerequisite for any leadership position in the church (Mark 9:35).

Read John 13:1–17. How does this passage show the link between leadership and servanthood?

The disciples have been with Jesus for three years. They have learned from His teachings, they have even shared in His healing ministry, and yet they are not ready to go out as God’s ambassadors. They were ready to learn in theory and enjoyed the association with Jesus, but they still were not prepared to put themselves aside and humbly serve one another.

How do we get the humility and the death to self needed in order to serve others? How do we learn to serve others with an attitude of seeking nothing back for ourselves?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 2 Kings 5:26, 27

The Student Will:

Know: Identify Gehazi’s great opportunities to learn ministry and his failures to do so.

Feel: Sense the disappointment and loss to the cause of God when a potential leader, such as Gehazi, turns to self-seeking.

Do: Resolve to accept and improve upon every opportunity to learn ministry and serve God’s people.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Chance of Many Lifetimes

A Imagine the opportunity to serve as an apprentice to the prophet Elisha. What extraordinary experiences and lessons of faith did Gehazi have in his service to Elisha? How did he fail to benefit from these opportunities?

B What was the price Gehazi paid for his selfishness? Why was this sentence fair?

II. Feel: Lost Opportunities

A Despite Elisha’s examples of selfless service, Gehazi never learned to give up his own interests in order to serve God’s purposes. How did Gehazi’s greed detract from the lessons about God that Elisha was attempting to impress on Naaman?

III. Do: Resolution to Serve

A We have more opportunities and models to learn servant leadership now than at any other time in earth’s history. How can we improve upon the opportunities we’ve been given, especially considering our apprenticeship to Christ Himself, the greatest of teachers and role models?

B How can faith help us meet the temptation to be self-serving?

Summary: Gehazi had many opportunities to witness selfless service and learn to minister; yet, he chose to serve his own interests.
Learning Firsthand

A good teacher teaches by example and gives plenty of opportunities for the student to apply what he or she is learning. Elisha was this type of teacher.

Read 2 Kings 4:8–17. What is Gehazi’s role in the narration? What opportunities is Elisha giving Gehazi?

The story of the woman of Shunem follows another miracle involving a woman. In 2 Kings 4:1–7, Elisha helps a widow clear her debts and keep her two sons from being sold into slavery. And now Elisha is on his way to Shunem. Given the general status of women in biblical times, it is strange that the narrator gives a married woman such status. Her husband’s name is not given. All we know is that he is consulted about the building of the guest room and that he is old, even though he still seems to be fit enough to supervise the harvesting of his fields. In the first part of the story Elisha actively involves Gehazi. He sends him to call the woman and includes Gehazi in his expression of thanks. He asks Gehazi’s opinion and acts on Gehazi’s suggestion. Gehazi rises to the occasion by being observant and showing sensitivity to the woman’s real needs. Elisha gives Gehazi the opportunity to initiate a miracle. Within a year the miracle child is born.

Read 2 Kings 4:18–31. What change in attitude do we see here in Gehazi as compared to what we saw in the previous story?

The miracle child is now a young boy. Gehazi is still Elisha’s servant, but something of the sensitivity he once had seems to be gone. When the woman arrives and brushes past him to grab hold of the feet of Elisha, Gehazi tries to push her away. He sees only the “rudeness” of the Shunammite woman, who oversteps any type of social convention in her action (vss. 25–27). He does not seem to be able to see her deep distress as does Elisha.

It sometimes is easy to be so self-centered and self-absorbed that we become insensitive to the feelings and needs of others. Who hasn’t been on both ends of that equation? How can you learn to be more sensitive to the feelings and needs of others? Also, how can you learn to bear gracefully the insensitivity of others toward you?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God calls us to be servants guided not by earthly enticements but by spiritual commitment to God and others.

Rabbinic tradition suggests that the lepers at the gate of Samaria who discovered the mysterious rout of Ben-hadad (see 2 Kings 7:3–8) were Gehazi and his sons. Even if inaccurate, the tradition illustrates the spiritual descent of Gehazi. Leprosy was understood as judgment from God, spiritual or physical punishment for moral failure. While Gehazi’s story begins favorably, with his being portrayed as Elisha’s faithful associate and somewhat overzealous protector (2 Kings 4:27), avarice overtakes him, rendering him a symbol of greed for succeeding generations. One simple character flaw destroyed what appeared to be unlimited future promise. What might have been? Elisha faithfully served Elijah, eventually succeeding him with decades of his own prophetic ministry. Might Gehazi, if faithful, have become Elisha’s successor? Might the prophetic mantle have fallen on his shoulders? History records not mere speculations but what actually happened. Instead, Gehazi is remembered only for deceit, moneygrubbing, and receiving the curse of Naaman’s leprosy. Opportunities for Christian servanthood are still being compromised today. If anything, materialism has strengthened, not weakened. What opportunities might we forfeit for the attraction of earthly enticements? Which embellishments are we embracing while sacrificing spiritual values?

Opening Activity: Many states have banned the use of cellular phones by motorists while driving because of safety considerations. What philosophy undergirds these restrictions? Discuss how driving distractions compromise safety, endangering pedestrians and other motorists. Make a spiritual application of your discussion. Analyze aspects of contemporary culture. Which ones interfere with our spiritual vision? Which serve as distractions to our divine assignments? Which distort our spiritual focus on service? How can Christians keep earthly enticements from sidetracking their spiritual development and servant focus? What consequences result from failing to serve?
A Question of Faith

Read 2 Kings 5:1–19 and answer the following questions:

• Why did the king of Israel react as he did? Was his reaction reasonable or unreasonable? What did he really fear was going on?

• Why did Naaman react as he did to Elisha’s command to him? What good reasons did he have for his reaction? In what ways did his reaction reflect the king of Israel’s toward the letter?

• Read verse 12. What kind of logic is the captain using there? What mistake is he making?

• How does Naaman refer to himself before Elisha after the miracle happened? What does that say about him?

• Why do you think Elisha refused to take any money from the captain? Why would it be important that he not take any?

• Read carefully verses 17–19. What is going on here? How do we understand Naaman’s request and Elisha’s response to it?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Learning Firsthand (Review 2 Kings 4:8–31 with your class.)

Gehazi was uniquely privileged as Elisha’s prophetic associate. Very few individuals, according to the scriptural record, experienced resurrections firsthand. Gehazi, as Elisha’s trusted assistant, was one who personally witnessed divine resurrection power. Strange that he could experience divine authority in such close proximity but later commit the crimes he did. Common sense should have told Gehazi that the all-powerful God who conquered the grave was likewise all-knowing regarding his deceitfulness. Nevertheless, we must recognize Gehazi’s admirable qualities. He seems sensitive about the woman’s needs, and Elisha treats him as a trusted consultant.

However, later in the narrative, his attitude undergoes a subtle shift. His insensitivity toward the same woman, now distressed by her child’s death, is perhaps the initial sign of Gehazi’s self-centered nature.

Consider This: Which admirable qualities does Gehazi exhibit? How does self-centeredness usher in insensitivity?

II. Gehazi’s Fall (Review 2 Kings 5:20–27 with your class.)

Gehazi’s thoughts may be paraphrased, This wealthy heathen felt obligated, and Elisha foolishly refused payment. A bright fellow like me shouldn’t allow golden opportunities to escape. There’s still time to catch Naaman, concoct a story that explains “Elisha’s change of heart,” and cash in. Following his wicked instincts, Gehazi pursues Naaman’s party. Naaman’s heart still overflows with gratitude, and his generosity doubles Gehazi’s greedy request! The gift is large enough to require two servants to transport it. Fearing discovery, Gehazi immediately hides his ill-gotten gain. Hiding from the Lord proves futile. Elisha exposes the fraud, and Gehazi’s punishment is immediate.

Consider This: How does greed and financial gain influence the church and its membership today? What dangers are inherent in the belief that divine blessings and powers can be purchased with money? (Note also the story of Simon in Acts 8:12–24.) How may trusting our financial investments dilute
Gehazi’s Fall

It’s hard, at least from our perspective today, to understand why characters in the Bible did what they did at times, especially in the face of so many miraculous events. The incredible healing of Naaman happened right before Gehazi. He saw not only the power of God but the actions of his master, who refused to take any money from the captain. One would think that would have been more than enough to humble him before God and man, but apparently it didn’t.

Read 2 Kings 5:20–27. How did Gehazi, at least at first, rationalize his actions? What little bit of nationalism, or ethnic prejudice, is hinted at in Gehazi’s thoughts?

The Bible is full of warnings against the love of money and the dangers of earthly possessions. These warnings are directed not only toward the wealthy. It is not the amount of material possessions that we have that is the problem but rather our attitude toward what we have. The battle against greed requires constant attention. We continually have to adjust our thoughts toward our possessions and surrender them to God. We can keep our perspective by consistently giving not only material possessions but also time. The love of material things blinds us to our true mission and purpose in life and in the end can cause our eternal ruin if we are not careful.

It is strange that Gehazi swears to himself by the living God and then goes off to deceive. Does he think that the living God does not see him? What a powerful testimony to the power of our own corrupt hearts to deceive us!

Naaman, meanwhile, is very generous about giving Gehazi the gifts, but he probably goes away with some questions, especially when his two servants return and report Gehazi’s strange behavior. Gehazi has let his greed interfere with the witness that Elisha wants to give to this new convert.

Of course, in the end the same God who performed miracles revealed the truth to Elisha about what Gehazi did, and, just like that, his ministry and life were ruined.

It’s very easy to underestimate the incredible hold that the love of money (1 Tim. 6:10) can have on us. What examples, from either biblical or nonbiblical history, can you think of in which money led to someone’s ruin? How can we learn to protect ourselves from what can be a very dangerous temptation?
our need to trust God? Why do some Christians today believe that they can keep their actions hidden from God?

III. Living on Leftovers (Review 2 Kings 8:1–6 with your class.)

Years have passed since Gehazi served the prophet Elisha. Remarkably, we find him conversing with the king. Apparently, Gehazi was not badly disfigured, or this audience with the royal court likely would not have occurred. His storytelling reaches back to the resurrection narrative involving the Shunammite woman’s deceased son. This final encounter with Gehazi leaves a bittersweet taste. Happily, he remembers those life-transforming experiences that shaped the religious foundation of Israel. Sadly, he must also have remembered the grand opportunity he forfeited, all for the dubious increase of earthly riches.

Consider This: How valuable will earthly wealth seem during our twilight years if opportunities for faithful service have slipped through our fingers? What should we do daily to fortify ourselves against the temptation to exchange eternal principles for temporal advantages, or birthrights for porridge?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Within every heart, battles are waged between self-centeredness and spiritual commitment. Whenever commitment vanquishes that selfishness, the natural result is selfless service. Neither religious piety nor charismatic fervor makes an adequate substitute for Christian servanthood.

Activity: Read the following Jewish tale and discuss the connection between spirituality and service.

“In a small Jewish town in Russia, there is a rabbi who disappears each Friday morning for several hours. His devoted disciples boast that during those hours their rabbi goes up to heaven and talks to God.

“A stranger moves into town, and he’s skeptical about all this, so he decides to check things out. He hides and watches. The rabbi gets up in the morning, says his prayers, and then dresses in peasant clothes. He grabs an axe, goes off into the woods, and cuts some firewood, which he then hauls to a shack on the outskirts of the village. There an old
Living on Leftovers

We last hear of Gehazi in 2 Kings 8:1–6. What do we find the ex-servant of Elisha doing?

Many years have passed since the great miracle of the raising of the Shunammite’s son. Gehazi’s skin disease must not be too disfiguring, for we now find him in the royal court. Gehazi, Elisha’s “ex-servant,” is talking about what has been. He is bragging about Elisha and his miracles, and in doing so he is most likely reflecting on his own importance by his connection to Elisha.

We never may have heard of this storytelling session had it not been for the timing of this event. The biblical author tells us that at the precise time that Gehazi was telling about the miracle of the Shunammite’s son being brought back to life, the Shunammite appears before the king. God in His providence uses Gehazi’s bragging to help the woman of Shunem. The woman of Shunem is by now most probably a widow, as no mention is made of her husband, and it is unusual that a woman would appear before the king on such business instead of her husband. She is most likely in charge of her family until her son becomes of age. She has been out of the country for seven years during a severe drought. Having the right relationships and knowing the right people may be important and seen as advantageous from a human point of view, but God views things differently.


And so Gehazi fades from history. The sad part of the story is the fact that Gehazi could have been doing God’s work. He could have learned from Elisha. He could have been the next major prophet or perhaps a leader and teacher in the schools of the prophets. Now all he can do is speak about the good old days when he worked with the prophet. Gehazi could have been making history; now all he can do is live in the past.

We need to recount and remember God’s dealing with us in the past. But at the same time, we need to be careful about dwelling on what happened in the past, at the expense of living correctly in the present. How do we strike a right balance here? How can dwelling too much on the past negatively influence our walk with the Lord today?
woman and her sick son live. He leaves them the wood, enough for a week, and then sneaks back home.

“Having observed the rabbi’s actions, the newcomer stays on in the village and becomes his disciple. And whenever he hears one of the villagers say, ‘On Friday morning our rabbi ascends all the way to heaven,’ the newcomer quietly adds, ‘If not higher.’ ”—Perfect Illustrations for Every Topic and Occasion (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002), p. 249.

Questions: Why does the newcomer not expose the fallacy of the “heavenly journey”? What attracted him to discipleship? What can we learn from the secrecy of the rabbi’s service? What were the rabbi’s followers trying to communicate through the boast that their rabbi spoke directly with God? How does serving others place us in intimate fellowship with our Redeemer? How does the figure of peasant’s clothing illustrate the servanthood of Christ? (Hint: Compare Phil. 2:1–8.) What does Matthew 25:31–46 say to those who desire the intimate fellowship with God illustrated in the parable of the rabbi?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Whether or not Gehazi would have been called into prophetic office is subject to speculation. Nevertheless, there was clearly a call to servanthood. This calling itself, apart from the specific prophetic calling, offered multiple opportunities for intimacy with God. Those opportunities remain open for Christians today who, likewise, have been called into spiritual service. Perhaps we have not witnessed bodily resurrections or experienced miracles that match Elisha’s; nevertheless, there exists abundant evidence for divine power in the daily sunrise, children’s laughter, the expansive universe, and discoveries through microscope and telescope. Gehazi witnessed firsthand miraculous wonders, including a bodily resurrection, but exchanged intimate fellowship with God for silver and clothing. How ridiculous these enticements appear when we remember that God Himself creates wealth and clothes the fields!

Activity 1: Read Matthew 6:24–34 together. Invite class members to provide illustrations from nature that reinforce the concept of a loving Eternal Provider. Discuss how fellowship with God resolves human worries regarding daily necessities.

Activity 2: Using the divine provision of manna as another talking point, connect God’s daily watchcare for Israel with the object lessons from nature, suggested by the class. Considering these things together, ask the class how we can learn to trust in God to provide for us, no matter how difficult our circumstances might be.
Further Study: “Solemn are the lessons taught by this experience of one to whom had been given high and holy privileges. The course of Gehazi was such as to place a stumbling block in the pathway of Naaman, upon whose mind had broken a wonderful light, and who was favorably disposed toward the service of the living God. For the deception practiced by Gehazi there could be pleaded no excuse. To the day of his death he remained a leper, cursed of God and shunned by his fellow men.

“A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.’ Proverbs 19:5. Men may think to hide their evil deeds from human eyes, but they cannot deceive God. ‘All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.’ Heb. 4:13. Gehazi thought to deceive Elisha, but God revealed to His prophet the words that Gehazi had spoken to Naaman, and every detail of the scene between the two men.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 252.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the warning signs that money or the pursuit of it is taking the place of God in our lives? How can we learn to use money and not let it use us? What role do tithing and giving offerings play in connection with the whole question of the influence and power of money over our lives?

2. As a class, go over your response to the last question in Thursday’s study. What are the things that really matter in life, and why is it so easy to lose track of what really matters?

3. What reasons might have led Gehazi to think that he could get away with his deception? He knew God existed; he had seen miracles take place, some quite incredible, in fact. Yet, despite all this, he tried to deceive his master. Perhaps he had done similar things before and gotten away with it. Perhaps in his own mind he truly rationalized his actions. We don’t know. What we do know, however, is that it’s not that hard to deceive ourselves. What are ways we can learn to protect ourselves from falling into the same self-deception?

4. Go back to 2 Kings 5:17–19. What lessons should or should we not draw from Naaman’s request to Elisha about bowing down in the house of Rimmon?

5. What are some practical ways you can serve others?
Gehazi: Missing the Mark

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 39:4–6; 2 Kings 4; 5; 8:1–6; Jer. 9:23, 24; John 13:1–17; 1 Tim. 6:10.

Memory Text: “It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him” (Deuteronomy 13:4, NIV).

Gehazi was a servant. Not just any servant but the servant of one of the greatest prophets in Israel’s history: Elisha. Elisha had been called by the Lord to minister to the prophet Elijah, in preparation for Elisha’s own prophetic ministry (1 Kings 19:16). For many years Elisha served Elijah and listened, observed, and thus understood what it meant to be a prophet. When Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind of fire (2 Kings 2:11), Elisha’s time had come. His ministry was not as fiery and glamorous as Elijah’s, but he exerted a far-reaching influence.

Thus, Gehazi had a wonderful opportunity to be closely associated with someone as blessed of God as Elisha. It’s hard to imagine all that he could have learned and seen in the years that he worked with the prophet.

Yet, as we will see this week, despite so much potential and so many great opportunities, Gehazi became a miserable failure. His story serves as an example of someone who gets sidetracked and becomes unable to distinguish the important from the peripheral. How crucial it is for us to learn from his mistakes!

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 18.

Being a servant means primarily that one puts aside one’s own wants, wishes, and comfort and involves oneself totally in someone else’s life. A servant is there to assist the master in carrying out the master’s plans, wishes, and activities. Sometimes being a servant involves carrying messages, accompanying someone, acting for the person, and doing menial jobs that need to be done. At other times it involves managing finances and households, but always the servant acts not to further his own ends but to further his master’s.

Gehazi was the servant of prophet Elisha. Being a servant to a prophet was a unique privilege. It involved more than menial labor. It was a type of apprenticeship. Elisha himself had served as Elijah’s servant (1 Kings 19:19–21). Although the job of prophet depended on a divine call, it would seem that this special time of serving together helped the would-be prophet develop his faith and trust in God. By serving his master Elijah, Elisha would be learning to put himself aside and serve others. This would prove to be the best qualification for any future ministry. We have no record of Gehazi’s calling, but we will see the opportunities that he was given.

This servant idea is by no means restricted to Old Testament times. Jesus said that the willingness to be a servant was a prerequisite for any leadership position in the church (Mark 9:35).

Read John 13:1–17. How does this passage show the link between leadership and servanthood?

The disciples have been with Jesus for three years. They have learned from His teachings, they have even shared in His healing ministry, and yet they are not ready to go out as God’s ambassadors. They were ready to learn in theory and enjoyed the association with Jesus, but they still were not prepared to put themselves aside and humbly serve one another.

How do we get the humility and the death to self needed in order to serve others? How do we learn to serve others with an attitude of seeking nothing back for ourselves?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 2 Kings 5:26, 27

The Student Will:
Know: Identify Gehazi’s great opportunities to learn ministry and his failures to do so.
Feel: Sense the disappointment and loss to the cause of God when a potential leader, such as Gehazi, turns to self-seeking.
Do: Resolve to accept and improve upon every opportunity to learn ministry and serve God’s people.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Chance of Many Lifetimes
   A Imagine the opportunity to serve as an apprentice to the prophet Elisha. What extraordinary experiences and lessons of faith did Gehazi have in his service to Elisha? How did he fail to benefit from these opportunities?
   B What was the price Gehazi paid for his selfishness? Why was this sentence fair?

II. Feel: Lost Opportunities
   A Despite Elisha’s examples of selfless service, Gehazi never learned to give up his own interests in order to serve God’s purposes. How did Gehazi’s greed detract from the lessons about God that Elisha was attempting to impress on Naaman?

III. Do: Resolution to Serve
   A We have more opportunities and models to learn servant leadership now than at any other time in earth’s history. How can we improve upon the opportunities we’ve been given, especially considering our apprenticeship to Christ Himself, the greatest of teachers and role models?
   B How can faith help us meet the temptation to be self-serving?

Summary: Gehazi had many opportunities to witness selfless service and learn to minister; yet, he chose to serve his own interests.
Learning Firsthand

A good teacher teaches by example and gives plenty of opportunities for the student to apply what he or she is learning. Elisha was this type of teacher.

**Read** 2 Kings 4:8–17. What is Gehazi’s role in the narration? What opportunities is Elisha giving Gehazi?

The story of the woman of Shunem follows another miracle involving a woman. In 2 Kings 4:1–7, Elisha helps a widow clear her debts and keep her two sons from being sold into slavery. And now Elisha is on his way to Shunem. Given the general status of women in biblical times, it is strange that the narrator gives a married woman such status. Her husband’s name is not given. All we know is that he is consulted about the building of the guest room and that he is old, even though he still seems to be fit enough to supervise the harvesting of his fields. In the first part of the story Elisha actively involves Gehazi. He sends him to call the woman and includes Gehazi in his expression of thanks. He asks Gehazi’s opinion and acts on Gehazi’s suggestion. Gehazi rises to the occasion by being observant and showing sensitivity to the woman’s real needs. Elisha gives Gehazi the opportunity to initiate a miracle. Within a year the miracle child is born.

**Read** 2 Kings 4:18–31. What change in attitude do we see here in Gehazi as compared to what we saw in the previous story?

The miracle child is now a young boy. Gehazi is still Elisha’s servant, but something of the sensitivity he once had seems to be gone. When the woman arrives and brushes past him to grab hold of the feet of Elisha, Gehazi tries to push her away. He sees only the “rudeness” of the Shunammite woman, who oversteps any type of social convention in her action (vss. 25–27). He does not seem to be able to see her deep distress as does Elisha.

**It sometimes is easy to be so self-centered and self-absorbed that we become insensitive to the feelings and needs of others.** Who hasn’t been on both ends of that equation? How can you learn to be more sensitive to the feelings and needs of others? Also, how can you learn to bear gracefully the insensitivity of others toward you?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God calls us to be servants guided not by earthly enticements but by spiritual commitment to God and others.

Rabbinic tradition suggests that the lepers at the gate of Samaria who discovered the mysterious rout of Ben-hadad (see 2 Kings 7:3–8) were Gehazi and his sons. Even if inaccurate, the tradition illustrates the spiritual descent of Gehazi. Leprosy was understood as judgment from God, spiritual or physical punishment for moral failure. While Gehazi’s story begins favorably, with his being portrayed as Elisha’s faithful associate and somewhat overzealous protector (2 Kings 4:27), avarice overtakes him, rendering him a symbol of greed for succeeding generations. One simple character flaw destroyed what appeared to be unlimited future promise. What might have been? Elisha faithfully served Elijah, eventually succeeding him with decades of his own prophetic ministry. Might Gehazi, if faithful, have become Elisha’s successor? Might the prophetic mantle have fallen on his shoulders? History records not mere speculations but what actually happened. Instead, Gehazi is remembered only for deceit, moneygrubbing, and receiving the curse of Naaman’s leprosy. Opportunities for Christian servanthood are still being compromised today. If anything, materialism has strengthened, not weakened. What opportunities might we forfeit for the attraction of earthly enticements? Which embellishments are we embracing while sacrificing spiritual values?

Opening Activity: Many states have banned the use of cellular phones by motorists while driving because of safety considerations. What philosophy undergirds these restrictions? Discuss how driving distractions compromise safety, endangering pedestrians and other motorists. Make a spiritual application of your discussion. Analyze aspects of contemporary culture. Which ones interfere with our spiritual vision? Which serve as distractions to our divine assignments? Which distort our spiritual focus on service? How can Christians keep earthly enticements from sidetracking their spiritual development and servant focus? What consequences result from failing to serve?
A Question of Faith

Read 2 Kings 5:1–19 and answer the following questions:

• Why did the king of Israel react as he did? Was his reaction reasonable or unreasonable? What did he really fear was going on?

• Why did Naaman react as he did to Elisha’s command to him? What good reasons did he have for his reaction? In what ways did his reaction reflect the king of Israel’s toward the letter?

• Read verse 12. What kind of logic is the captain using there? What mistake is he making?

• How does Naaman refer to himself before Elisha after the miracle happened? What does that say about him?

• Why do you think Elisha refused to take any money from the captain? Why would it be important that he not take any?

• Read carefully verses 17–19. What is going on here? How do we understand Naaman’s request and Elisha’s response to it?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Learning Firsthand (Review 2 Kings 4:8–31 with your class.)

Gehazi was uniquely privileged as Elisha’s prophetic associate. Very few individuals, according to the scriptural record, experienced resurrections firsthand. Gehazi, as Elisha’s trusted assistant, was one who personally witnessed divine resurrection power. Strange that he could experience divine authority in such close proximity but later commit the crimes he did. Common sense should have told Gehazi that the all-powerful God who conquered the grave was likewise all-knowing regarding his deceitfulness. Nevertheless, we must recognize Gehazi’s admirable qualities. He seems sensitive about the woman’s needs, and Elisha treats him as a trusted consultant.

However, later in the narrative, his attitude undergoes a subtle shift. His insensitivity toward the same woman, now distressed by her child’s death, is perhaps the initial sign of Gehazi’s self-centered nature.

Consider This: Which admirable qualities does Gehazi exhibit? How does self-centeredness usher in insensitivity?

II. Gehazi’s Fall (Review 2 Kings 5:20–27 with your class.)

Gehazi’s thoughts may be paraphrased, This wealthy heathen felt obligated, and Elisha foolishly refused payment. A bright fellow like me shouldn’t allow golden opportunities to escape. There’s still time to catch Naaman, concoct a story that explains “Elisha’s change of heart,” and cash in. Following his wicked instincts, Gehazi pursues Naaman’s party. Naaman’s heart still overflows with gratitude, and his generosity doubles Gehazi’s greedy request! The gift is large enough to require two servants to transport it. Fearing discovery, Gehazi immediately hides his ill-gotten gain. Hiding from the Lord proves futile. Elisha exposes the fraud, and Gehazi’s punishment is immediate.

Consider This: How does greed and financial gain influence the church and its membership today? What dangers are inherent in the belief that divine blessings and powers can be purchased with money? (Note also the story of Simon in Acts 8:12–24.) How may trusting our financial investments dilute...
Gehazi’s Fall

It’s hard, at least from our perspective today, to understand why characters in the Bible did what they did at times, especially in the face of so many miraculous events. The incredible healing of Naaman happened right before Gehazi. He saw not only the power of God but the actions of his master, who refused to take any money from the captain. One would think that would have been more than enough to humble him before God and man, but apparently it didn’t.

**Read** 2 Kings 5:20–27. How did Gehazi, at least at first, rationalize his actions? What little bit of nationalism, or ethnic prejudice, is hinted at in Gehazi’s thoughts?

The Bible is full of warnings against the love of money and the dangers of earthly possessions. These warnings are directed not only toward the wealthy. It is not the amount of material possessions that we have that is the problem but rather our attitude toward what we have. The battle against greed requires constant attention. We continually have to adjust our thoughts toward our possessions and surrender them to God. We can keep our perspective by consistently giving not only material possessions but also time. The love of material things blinds us to our true mission and purpose in life and in the end can cause our eternal ruin if we are not careful.

It is strange that Gehazi swears to himself by the living God and then goes off to deceive. Does he think that the living God does not see him? What a powerful testimony to the power of our own corrupt hearts to deceive us!

Naaman, meanwhile, is very generous about giving Gehazi the gifts, but he probably goes away with some questions, especially when his two servants return and report Gehazi’s strange behavior. Gehazi has let his greed interfere with the witness that Elisha wants to give to this new convert.

Of course, in the end the same God who performed miracles revealed the truth to Elisha about what Gehazi did, and, just like that, his ministry and life were ruined.

It’s very easy to underestimate the incredible hold that the love of money *(1 Tim. 6:10)* can have on us. What examples, from either biblical or nonbiblical history, can you think of in which money led to someone’s ruin? How can we learn to protect ourselves from what can be a very dangerous temptation?
our need to trust God? Why do some Christians today believe that they can keep their actions hidden from God?

III. Living on Leftovers (Review 2 Kings 8:1–6 with your class.)

Years have passed since Gehazi served the prophet Elisha. Remarkably, we find him conversing with the king. Apparently, Gehazi was not badly disfigured, or this audience with the royal court likely would not have occurred. His storytelling reaches back to the resurrection narrative involving the Shunammite woman’s deceased son. This final encounter with Gehazi leaves a bittersweet taste. Happily, he remembers those life-transforming experiences that shaped the religious foundation of Israel. Sadly, he must also have remembered the grand opportunity he forfeited, all for the dubious increase of earthly riches.

Consider This: How valuable will earthly wealth seem during our twilight years if opportunities for faithful service have slipped through our fingers? What should we do daily to fortify ourselves against the temptation to exchange eternal principles for temporal advantages, or birthrights for porridge?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Within every heart, battles are waged between self-centeredness and spiritual commitment. Whenever commitment vanquishes that selfishness, the natural result is selfless service. Neither religious piety nor charismatic fervor makes an adequate substitute for Christian servanthood.

Activity: Read the following Jewish tale and discuss the connection between spirituality and service.

“In a small Jewish town in Russia, there is a rabbi who disappears each Friday morning for several hours. His devoted disciples boast that during those hours their rabbi goes up to heaven and talks to God.

“A stranger moves into town, and he’s skeptical about all this, so he decides to check things out. He hides and watches. The rabbi gets up in the morning, says his prayers, and then dresses in peasant clothes. He grabs an axe, goes off into the woods, and cuts some firewood, which he then hauls to a shack on the outskirts of the village. There an old...
Living on Leftovers

We last hear of Gehazi in 2 Kings 8:1–6. What do we find the ex-servant of Elisha doing?

Many years have passed since the great miracle of the raising of the Shunammite’s son. Gehazi’s skin disease must not be too disfiguring, for we now find him in the royal court. Gehazi, Elisha’s “ex-servant,” is talking about what has been. He is bragging about Elisha and his miracles, and in doing so he is most likely reflecting on his own importance by his connection to Elisha.

We never may have heard of this storytelling session had it not been for the timing of this event. The biblical author tells us that at the precise time that Gehazi was telling about the miracle of the Shunammite’s son being brought back to life, the Shunammite appears before the king. God in His providence uses Gehazi’s bragging to help the woman of Shunem. The woman of Shunem is by now probably a widow, as no mention is made of her husband, and it is unusual that a woman would appear before the king on such business instead of her husband. She is most likely in charge of her family until her son becomes of age. She has been out of the country for seven years during a severe drought. Having the right relationships and knowing the right people may be important and seen as advantageous from a human point of view, but God views things differently.


And so Gehazi fades from history. The sad part of the story is the fact that Gehazi could have been doing God’s work. He could have learned from Elisha. He could have been the next major prophet or perhaps a leader and teacher in the schools of the prophets. Now all he can do is speak about the good old days when he worked with the prophet. Gehazi could have been making history; now all he can do is live in the past.

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Questions: Why does the newcomer not expose the fallacy of the “heavenly journey”? What attracted him to discipleship? What can we learn from the secrecy of the rabbi’s service? What were the rabbi’s followers trying to communicate through the boast that their rabbi spoke directly with God? How does serving others place us in intimate fellowship with our Redeemer? How does the figure of peasant’s clothing illustrate the servanthood of Christ? (Hint: Compare Phil. 2:1–8.) What does Matthew 25:31–46 say to those who desire the intimate fellowship with God illustrated in the parable of the rabbi?

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Just for Teachers: Whether or not Gehazi would have been called into prophetic office is subject to speculation. Nevertheless, there was clearly a call to servanthood. This calling itself, apart from the specific prophetic calling, offered multiple opportunities for intimacy with God. Those opportunities remain open for Christians today who, likewise, have been called into spiritual service. Perhaps we have not witnessed bodily resurrections or experienced miracles that match Elisha’s; nevertheless, there exists abundant evidence for divine power in the daily sunrise, children’s laughter, the expansive universe, and discoveries through microscope and telescope. Gehazi witnessed firsthand miraculous wonders, including a bodily resurrection, but exchanged intimate fellowship with God for silver and clothing. How ridiculous these enticements appear when we remember that God Himself creates wealth and clothes the fields!

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‘‘A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.’ Proverbs 19:5. Men may think to hide their evil deeds from human eyes, but they cannot deceive God. ‘All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.’ Heb. 4:13. Gehazi thought to deceive Elisha, but God revealed to His prophet the words that Gehazi had spoken to Naaman, and every detail of the scene between the two men.” — Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 252.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the warning signs that money or the pursuit of it is taking the place of God in our lives? How can we learn to use money and not let it use us? What role do tithing and giving offerings play in connection with the whole question of the influence and power of money over our lives?

2. As a class, go over your response to the last question in Thursday’s study. What are the things that really matter in life, and why is it so easy to lose track of what really matters?

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4. Go back to 2 Kings 5:17–19. What lessons should or should we not draw from Naaman’s request to Elisha about bowing down in the house of Rimmon?

5. What are some practical ways you can serve others?
Baruch: Building a Legacy in a Crumbling World

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Isa. 53:1–5, Jer. 7:1–11, 28, 45, Matt. 6:25–34.

Memory Text: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20).

The world, as Baruch knew it, was drawing to a close. Jerusalem and Judah were in their final moments. Assyria, which had dominated the ancient Near East for more than two hundred years, was internally divided, engaged in civil war, and losing its grip on its vassal states. Meanwhile, a new superpower was on the horizon: Babylon. For a little time Judah had some respite and, under good King Josiah (640–609 B.C.), the nation managed to expand its territory and renew its commitment to the worship of the true God. However, with rapid changes occurring at the end of the seventh century B.C., time was running out for Jerusalem. King Josiah died in battle against the Egyptians (2 Kings 23:29). His sons, reigning after him, did not have the same status as their father, and they rebelled repeatedly against Babylon, a fatal mistake. Finally, in 586 B.C., Jerusalem was taken, the temple destroyed, and many Judeans taken captive.

Baruch lived in this time of dramatic change and loss. However, though his world was crumbling, he left a legacy that no king or war could destroy.

What can we learn from Baruch, our final background character in the Bible?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 25.
Baruch’s World

Baruch’s world was constructed around certain political, economic, and religious realities that dominated his nation at that time. Politically speaking, the country of Judah was chafing under the yoke of Babylonian domination. Strong nationalistic undercurrents affected all areas of society. People wanted to be free of Babylon. Economically, things were going quite well, at least for a sector of the population growing wealthier by exploiting the poor. And, of course, there was the religious system of ancient Judah, which was to form the foundation for all the society.

Read Jeremiah 7:1–11. What are some of the crucial moral and spiritual problems the people were being warned about? What parallels might we be able to draw to our own time today? Give special attention to verse 4. What were the people being told there, and what lesson can we take from that for ourselves?

Baruch’s name means “one who is blessed,” and Baruch does seem blessed. He was a scribe, which meant that he was a highly educated man. He seems to have come from a family of scribes, and he had the correct family connections.

Exactly how Baruch is drawn into the service of the priest and prophet Jeremiah we are not told. Perhaps it is the solidness of Jeremiah’s connection to God that draws Baruch to him. Indeed, the social, political, and economic ideal that Jeremiah preaches is firmly rooted in God’s revelation. Jeremiah is not afraid of standing up for the Word of God, even when it is deemed politically incorrect to do so. Through his visions Jeremiah has unique insights into the fallibility of the structures that his society trusted in, and he was called upon by the Lord to warn the people about what their actions would lead to if they didn’t change their ways. Perhaps it was his desire to be a part of this that led Baruch into his special role.

Read again Jeremiah 7:1–11. How might these words apply to you in your own walk with the Lord? What things in your life need amending? What “lying words” might you also be trusting in? What other “gods” might you be walking with? How open and honest with yourself are you willing to be in confronting these questions?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Jeremiah 5:4, 5

The Student Will:
Know: Examine the challenges and persecution that Jeremiah and Baruch faced in delivering the Word of God to Israel’s leaders.
Feel: Identify with the expectations and disappointments that Baruch faced in his supporting role to Jeremiah’s ministry.
Do: Determine to seek God’s glory in everything, rather than seeking great things for ourselves.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Trouble on the Right Side
   A. Jeremiah’s whole life was one of great hardship; he was even kidnapped and carried off to Egypt, the very place he warned Israel’s leaders not to go—and apparently he died there. How did Baruch share in Jeremiah’s persecution?

II. Feel: No Great Things
   A. How did Baruch feel about all the trouble he faced? God promised to save his life, but why did He ask Baruch not to seek great things for himself?
   B. Jeremiah never got kudos for speaking God’s words to His people; yet, he faithfully gave God’s messages. What was the danger of twisting the words of God to the people in order to make popular statements, as Hananiah did?

III. Do: God’s Perspective
   A. As we work for God, what perspective do we need to keep in mind about our own personal outcomes?
   B. Why should we refrain from seeking great things for ourselves?

Summary: As Jeremiah’s scribe, Baruch wrote and publicly read many of Jeremiah’s messages. He also shared in the suffering of God’s servant, as we all are called to do.
Jeremiah’s Scribe

The book of Jeremiah provides us with some unique glimpses into the writing process of the Bible. Baruch, Jeremiah’s scribe, actually is participating in the transmission and preservation of God’s Word. In Jeremiah 36:4, Jeremiah calls Baruch and—as he dictates a message to the people—Baruch copies it all down on a parchment scroll. This is an excellent illustration of how inspiration works. First, God does not physically take control of the prophet Jeremiah and move his hand as he writes. Rather, God gives Jeremiah visions and messages. Normally the prophet then formulates the message and writes it down. In this particular case, Jeremiah himself did not do the writing but dictated to Baruch, who then wrote it down. Baruch also communicates the message in public. Because Jeremiah is out of favor in the court and has been denied access to the temple, Baruch reads the prophetic message in the temple on a holy day. Baruch never claims to be speaking for himself or even for Jeremiah; the message comes from God.

Read the story of Hananiah in Jeremiah 28. In what ways does this narrative reveal the principle revealed in Isaiah 8:20?

God’s message does not flatter or bend to public opinion. It is not always, or even very often, “politically correct.” Nor does God’s message contradict itself; human interpretations of the message might be contradictory but never the message itself.

In Jeremiah 28:7–9, the prophet refers to the unity of Scripture built on the firm foundation of fulfilled prophecy. The false prophet’s untimely death in this chapter vividly reinforces this important principle.

The point is that God has given us not only His Word but also very good reasons for trusting in that Word, even when we come to parts that we don’t understand or sections that offend our sensibilities. The Bible doesn’t save us, Jesus does; but He has revealed Himself to us more fully in the Scriptures than He has anywhere else.

There are many forces at work to weaken our trust in the Word of God. Identify some of those forces and ask yourself how you can protect yourself from them. After all, if we stop trusting in the messages of the Bible, what is left to trust in?
**Learning Cycle**

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God is trustworthy, especially during periods of upheaval and difficult circumstances.

Global newscasts daily remind viewers that the earth remains chaotic, unpredictable, and dangerous. Military invasions, collapsing financial institutions, widespread famine, nuclear proliferation, and other “headline grabbers” threaten life itself, leaving little room for complacency. Moral disintegration engulfs modern society while financial icebergs instill fear among international leaders. Is Jeremiah’s message, viewed through his associate’s eyes, ever more appropriate or timely?

Baruch served as Jeremiah’s scribe during the most chaotic period of Israel’s history. Everything was collapsing around them. Babylon crushed opposing nations like a steamroller crushes crackers. Judah likewise succumbed to Babylon’s military prowess. Apparently, Judah’s leaders were “doubting Thomases,” failing to believe that Jehovah was indeed trustworthy. Instead they invested their faith in political alliances with other nations, whose ability to defeat Babylon was roughly equal to the capability of ants to lift skyscrapers! During times of upheaval and difficult circumstances, personal or global, who receives our trust? Placing trust in ourselves, our interviewing skills, our political connections, our financial reserves probably demonstrate less intelligence than did Judah’s placement of trust in Egypt. However, beyond the troubled horizon, Jehovah remains secure, immovable, trustworthy, and intimately concerned about human trials and earthly conditions. Trusting Him is humanity’s most important decision today.

**Opening Activity:** Utilizing current newspapers, periodicals, and/or the Internet (supplemented by human memory), create a list of international troubles. Categories may include monetary, societal, ecological, familial, moral, and so on. Which deeper spiritual problems underlie these more visible surface problems?

**Consider This:** When physicians diagnose diseases, why is it more effective for them to treat the underlying causes for the symptoms rather than simply the symptoms? By the same token, why should government leaders, who focus on fixing problems, spend more time understanding the spiritual maladies that undergird our collapsing societies?
Thwarted Ambitions (Jeremiah 36)

The seriousness of the situation finally seemed to be dawning on the people of Judah. In Jeremiah 36:9, the people gathered in the temple for a day of fasting before the Lord. Through his professional connections with other scribes, Baruch manages to secure a good public place, in the window of Gemariah at the entrance to the temple. Here Baruch proceeds to read the scroll that he has written at Jeremiah’s dictation. After Baruch’s reading of the message, court officials ask him to give them a private reading. After inquiries as to where the message has come from, the officials decide to bring it to the king’s attention. For a brief moment it looks as if there might be change in Judah.

For Baruch this is a moment of hope. Should things turn around, then his support for Jeremiah will pay off. In the possible reformation he will be a man of importance, maybe elevated to a high position in the government.

What did the king’s response mean to the future hopes of Baruch, at least on a professional level? See Jeremiah 36.

Scrolls were made of papyrus and were expensive. They had to be copied by hand. This made each scroll a scarce and precious resource. This particular scroll was God’s message to King Jehoiakim. The king and his servants showed a deliberate insult to God by systematically cutting and burning the scroll. The burning of the scroll meant the loss of many hours of hard work by Baruch.

Baruch, who may have hoped for an honored position in court, now realizes that he has backed the “wrong” player and effectively sabotaged his future as a scribe at the royal court of Jerusalem. He also has angered the most powerful man in the kingdom. Here’s a clear case where someone’s stand for the Lord has cost him something.

Together with Jeremiah, Baruch is now a marked man. Royal agents comb the city, seeking to get hold of these “defeatists.” Following God is no path for cowards or people who want to use God in order to make a nice career for themselves. Being God’s messenger does not represent a life driven by personal ambition but rather involves letting God’s will unfold in our lives, whatever the cost. At times that cost can be very great.

What has following the Lord cost you? When was the last time you had to lose or sacrifice something important to you because you stood for a biblical principle or for a commandment from God? Think through the implications of your answer.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Baruch’s World (Review Jeremiah 7:1–11 with your class.)

Remembering how God has led in history is critically important. However, trusting in symbols embedded in that history—without a corresponding contemporary and dynamic relationship with God—is foolishness. Judah made this mistake. Their attitude was, “Consider this beautiful temple. Such grandeur clearly demonstrates divine favor toward us, Jehovah’s chosen nation. As long as we cling to this symbol, nothing threatens our security. Despite our wickedness, our depraved indifference to divine directives, our arrogant treatment of fellow Israelites, our self-centered pursuit of godless pleasure, God will protect and preserve our culture and national identity.” Jeremiah was commissioned to rebuke such complacency, and Baruch was designated as Jeremiah’s spokesperson. Caught in the political crossfire, Baruch faced an ominous decision between faithfulness to God and compromise for political expediency. Sound familiar?

Consider This: Before judging Israel for blasphemous arrogance, we should examine ourselves. What symbols of God’s past leading might we depend on instead of a living relationship with God? How have such catchphrases as “remnant church,” “three angels’ messages,” and “Spirit of Prophecy” become mere jargon, providing false security to a wayward generation? In what ways has the church become an institution defined by past experiences and symbols rather than by a living connection with the Eternal Father?

II. Thwarted Ambitions (Review Jeremiah 36 with your class.)

“In the OT the scribe first appears as a muster officer (Judg. 5:14). In the monarchical period (eleventh to tenth centuries B.C.), the scribe was a high cabinet officer concerned with finance, policy, and administration (2 Kings 22; Jer. 36:10). Jeremiah’s associate, Baruch, who recorded his words, was also a scribe (Jer. 36:32).”—Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 980. In ancient civilizations, when literacy was limited, scribes formed a significant and highly respected professional class. Their educational status and expertise in matters of economics, jurisprudence,
Woe Is Me!

The Lord has a special message just for Baruch (Jeremiah 45). And no wonder, considering the circumstances.

First, the historical reference to the fourth year of Jehoiakim in Jeremiah 45:1 puts chapter 45 after chapter 36. Jeremiah is most probably in prison, and the prospect of a revival among the leaders of Judah no longer seems probable. Second, Baruch’s future, at least from an earthly perspective, seems bleak at best. Thus, as Jeremiah 45:3 states, Baruch is having what might be called “a bad day.”

Of course, feeling dejected, sad, or depressed is a natural part of our human existence on our fallen earth. There are many reasons for feeling this way, and one never should think that it’s wrong or sinful to have these feelings. Depending upon the circumstances, it almost would seem inhuman not to have them. Certainly plenty of biblical characters had their moments of despair (see 1 Kings 19:4; Job 6:2, 3; Ps. 55:4). We fool ourselves if we think that somehow we are going to escape them ourselves.

Read Isaiah 53:1–5. What kind of mood and feelings are depicted here, and who is the one who is suffering these feelings? What should that tell us?

What’s most important for us to remember during times of emotional distress and sadness is that this doesn’t mean that God has forsaken us. It means only that, as with all fallen humanity, we will suffer in this life. Whether the suffering is our own fault or not doesn’t, in one sense, matter. What matters is that we, amid our suffering, do not let the evil one use our grief to turn us away from the Lord or make us bitter and resentful against Him. What matters is that we claim God’s promises of forgiveness, of healing, of a better future and a new life in a new heaven and a new earth.

We all long for things to go well; we all long for a better existence here and now. But often, given the nature of our world, that doesn’t happen, or at least it doesn’t happen as we imagine we would like it to. Hence, how important that, amid whatever we are going through, we don’t forget the great hope that awaits us once the horrible experience of sin, suffering, and death is forever over.

What are some of your favorite Bible promises about the new heaven and new earth? Read through them, pray over them, and ask the Lord for the faith to hang on until the time when you, yourself, will be living in them.
Learning Cycle continued

government, and religion offered them a privileged place in society. Baruch’s prospects were thus much higher than what average Jewish citizens might expect. His brother, Seraiah, was a staff officer in King Zedekiah’s court (Jer. 51:59). This status suggests that Baruch’s association with the political renegade Jeremiah may have been a personal spiritual decision. Apparently he, like Moses many generations before, refused the natural advantages of a royal court appointment, choosing instead “to share the oppression of God’s people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin” (Heb. 11:25, NLT). Such sacrifice is admirable anywhere but seems doubly virtuous during the disastrous final years of Judah’s existence when security was scarce. His perceived betrayal of Judah in favor of Babylon served only to endanger his life.

Consider This: What level of spiritual resolve is necessary to swim upstream against popular opinion? How can Christians today prepare themselves for persecution and ridicule? How willing are we to sacrifice our earthly ambitions in favor of spiritual principles?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Turmoil is woven throughout modern society. Without divine guidance, human wisdom has proved incapable of resolving national conflicts, personal loneliness, and a multitude of other contemporary dilemmas. Modern governments, however, seem determined to trust international associations, military strength, and psychological knowledge to provide solutions. Like King Asa, who trusted his foot disease to the physicians (and not to the Lord), humankind would rather self-medicate than acknowledge the futility of living without a Savior.

Activity:
Think about the following situation:

How much have you thought about the outrageousness of what we have to believe? Our whole faith hinges on something so antirational, so antiscientific, and so antiempirical that we have to leap across the accumulated knowledge of millennia in order to believe it.

We’re talking about the resurrection of the world’s dead. Billions and billions of people, many whose bodies have long been eaten and digested again and again by generations of worms, bugs, beasts, and bacteria, will live again? People whose molecules have been recycled,
What Is in It for Me?

Read Jeremiah 45. What does this passage tell us about God? What does it tell us about Baruch?

Baruch is sad, in pain, restless, and worn out. Baruch sees all of his lifework being uprooted, all of his dreams vanishing like a mist.

God’s heart is pained too. He has tenderly planted and watched over Israel. Like a parent agonizing over a stubborn, rebellious child, the Lord has warned and pleaded with His people for more than a thousand years. Baruch’s pain and sadness are but a faint reflection of God’s. Perhaps this is why God’s heart always is touched by our sorrows. We never weep alone. The God who knows the “number of hairs” on our heads takes the time to address a despondent scribe and gives him hope and encouragement. In the judgment that was soon to fall on Israel, Baruch would be saved. God would preserve his life. The expression found in verse 5 (“thy life will I give thee for a prey”) also can be found reflected in other parts of the book of Jeremiah (Jer. 21:9, 38:2 and 39:18). It evokes the figure of a soldier escaping with his life after a defeat in battle.

Paradoxically, salvation comes only through “defeat.” It was in the humiliation and apparent defeat at the cross that Jesus won the victory. It is only as we are willing to stop fighting and surrender our lives, plans, and future to God that we can find security. It’s when we are willing to totally surrender all that we become secure in the Lord.

What similarity can you note between Jeremiah 45:1–5 and Matthew 6:25–34?

In Jeremiah 45, God reminds Baruch of what really is important. In Matthew 6, Jesus reminds us that our lives are more important than our earthly possessions. For all his dreams of greatness, in the hour of disaster all that really mattered was Baruch’s life. Ironically, even though Baruch missed out on a great future in the Jerusalem political scene because of his loyalty to Jeremiah, this connection really saved his life and gave him a far bigger legacy than anything he ever could have dreamed of.

It is this legacy that we have searched for in the shadow figures of the Old Testament that we have studied over the past 13 weeks. Most of the people we have gotten to know a little better were not the major power brokers of their particular time, but their names or titles have been recorded in Scripture so that we can learn from them, from both their successes and their failures.
reprocessed, and revamped into a thousand different incarnations—these people will be put back together into a living and conscious whole? Against all reason, against all experience, against all that we have ever seen or felt or could imagine, we have to believe this.

Why? Because without it our faith, our religion, everything we believe in and hope for, is, as Paul said, *mataios*, “useless” or “vain” (*1 Cor. 15:17*).

**Thought Questions:**

Whatever struggles you have, what are they in contrast to the resurrection of all the world’s dead? If your faith can reach far enough to believe that (and again, you have to believe in the resurrection of the dead or else you have nothing), then why can’t you trust God with your present trials? Whatever you’re facing, no matter how apparently insurmountable, what are they compared to the reconstruction to life (and for many to immortality) of dead billions of people? If you trust that God can do the latter, then why not trust Him with whatever’s raging in your life now?

 **STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Tomorrow the world celebrates the Messiah’s birth. Many will, ironically, observe it for the wrong reasons. Those who truly celebrate God’s unique entrance into earth are those who understand that Jesus is still the answer for today’s world. As the gospel chorus reminds us: “If we ever needed the Lord before, we sure do need Him now.” Baruch surely understood this need; otherwise he never would have sacrificed his position, embraced the lamenting prophet Jeremiah, and chosen righteous suffering above comfortable compliance.

In celebrating the Messiah’s matchless gift of life, may we exhibit trust without reservation, for the only gift that Jesus desires is the heart fully committed to Him.

**Activity:** Prepare small scrolls, wrapped in holiday ribbon or wrapping paper, with Bible promises written inside. Distribute them to class members and read them aloud. Invite members to share how particular promises have benefited their spiritual journey. The testimonies may reflect a personal fulfillment or a fulfillment for a friend or associate who in turn strengthened them. If possible close by singing “Jesus Is the Answer” (Andraé Crouch, composer) or a Christmas carol that focuses on the themes of surrendered lives and God’s providence.

**Alternative Activity:** This activity can be done without the visual aid of the scrolls. Simply invite members to share how particular promises have benefited their spiritual journey.
Further Study: “Taking another roll, Jeremiah gave it to Baruch, ‘who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words.’ Verses 28, 32. The wrath of man had sought to prevent the labors of the prophet of God; but the very means by which Jehoiakim had endeavored to limit the influence of the servant of Jehovah, gave further opportunity for making plain the divine requirements.

“The spirit of opposition to reproof, that led to the persecution and imprisonment of Jeremiah, exists today. Many refuse to heed repeated warnings, preferring rather to listen to false teachers who flatter their vanity and overlook their evil-doing. In the day of trouble such will have no sure refuge, no help from heaven. God’s chosen servants should meet with courage and patience the trials and sufferings that befall them through reproof, neglect, and misrepresentation. They should continue to discharge faithfully the work God has given them to do, ever remembering that the prophets of old and the Saviour of mankind and His apostles also endured abuse and persecution for the Word’s sake.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 437.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is our understanding of how inspiration works? How has the life and ministry of Ellen G. White helped us understand this important topic?

2. What biblical characters had their personal ambitions thwarted because they remained faithful to the Lord?

3. In class, talk about what things people have had to give up in order to stand for the Lord. What can you learn from one another’s stories? Ask whether anyone thought what it cost to serve the Lord wasn’t worth what the person has received in return.

4. How do you respond when reproved for wrong actions? Are you more likely to repent on your knees or, figuratively speaking, cast the reproof in a fire and seek to imprison the messenger? What does your answer tell you about yourself and what you need to change?

5. How can we better understand that just because we are suffering (even as a direct result of our sins), this doesn’t mean that the Lord has forsaken us? How can we learn to hold on to our faith while going through tremendous pain?