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As humans, we are the most rational of all the world’s created beings. Marvelous as they are, frogs, dogs, caterpillars, and donkeys don’t have our capacity to reason. Yet, even with all our powers of logic and rationality, we’re also emotional beings. One could argue, justifiably, that emotions rule our lives to a much greater extent than reason does or ever could.

Emotions are good; without them we’d barely be human. (What kind of person doesn’t know love, compassion, sympathy, fear, or sorrow?) Robots might be able to function emotionlessly; we never could.

Of course, existing in a world of sin, our emotions often bring us great pain. Sickness, disease, war, poverty, natural disasters, economic uncertainty, family problems—how can these not cause the kinds of fear, sorrow, dread, and sadness with which we all are so familiar?

Look, too, at the emotional reaction our world evoked in Jesus! “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). “And when he [Jesus] had looked round about on them with anger” (Mark 3:5), Jesus said, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death” (Mark 14:34). “When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled” (John 11:33). “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3).

Well did Hebrews express this incredible truth about our Lord: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but
was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). That’s the feelings of our infirmities, and, as we all know, the feelings of our infirmities can be pretty bad. Sadness, pain, sorrow . . . these feelings are not wrong, these are not sinful. We don’t show a lack of faith, a lack of trust, when we respond to life’s turmoil with such emotions. After all, Jesus responded with emotions.

We are, today, thousands of years from the “tree of life” (Gen. 2:9). The DNA is wearing thin. We’re damaged goods, and, contrary to the myths of evolution, we’re getting only worse. It’s no wonder, then, that sin has taken its toll on our emotional health, as well. So often, instead of being in control of our emotions, they control us, even to the point of pushing us into radically wrong choices that cause us even more grief and sorrow. Fortunately, that doesn’t always need to be the case. The Lord has something better for us.

This quarter’s lessons look at human emotions and give us biblical principles on how we can understand our emotions and seek the power of the Lord to bring them under His loving sovereignty. We’ll look at Bible characters, focusing on their emotional reactions to whatever befell them, good and bad, and ask ourselves the important question: What can we learn from their experiences that can help us with ours?

Of course, some people—especially those whose emotional problems are caused by a physical problem, such as a chemical imbalance—need professional help when available, though in no situation should we limit the power of God to bring healing to any life.

It’s our prayer that this quarter’s lessons will, in the context of understanding our emotions, help us reach out to the Lord, who has bestowed on us the greatest emotion of all: love. Finally, no matter our emotional ups and downs, may each of us learn to bask in that love, especially during the downs, and then, through God’s grace, reflect that love to others. Because, in the end, no matter our sorrows, “love never fails” (1 Cor. 13:8, NIV).

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How to Use
This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sabbath Afternoon


Memory Text: “‘I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy’ ” (John 16:20, NIV).

Emotions are a vital part of the human personality. They can be powerful motivators, both for good and for evil. And, depending on the emotions, they make us happy, sad, fearful, or joyous.

Positive emotions can bring a feeling of satisfaction and well-being; negative ones tend to cause pain and anguish. Though the first ones can promote mental health, a prolonged exposure to negative emotions may bring about behavioral and relational problems. Thus, emotions can play an important part in our overall well-being.

God wants us to enjoy the effects of positive emotions. However, because of sin, we often face the adverse effects of negative emotional experiences. Bible characters were not immune to emotional ups and downs either. Some succeeded in gaining control over them; others, losing control, allowed negative emotions to lead them into wrong actions.

The relationship between emotions and behavior is not clear and direct. At times painful emotions may drive us to our knees to seek God as the ultimate Source of help and support. At other times struggles may cause people to give up faith entirely.

How crucial, then, that we learn more about our emotions and how they impact our lives.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 1.
Negative Emotions

Read 2 Samuel 13, a story packed with adverse emotional experiences. In the midst of this turmoil, people ended up inflicting much physical and emotional pain on one another. The consequences of their behavior touched the entire royal family, impacting even future generations.

**What** emotional states can be identified in the following participants?

Amnon

Tamar

David

Absalom

Amnon’s “love” for Tamar could not have been true love but rather a strong sexual drive, because as soon as he achieved his goal he “hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her” (vs. 15, *NIV*). Amnon’s experience illustrates emotional extremes: uncontrolled passion (in the context of an incestuous relationship) and hatred. Behaviors performed under such emotional states almost always will be unbalanced and cause serious consequences. Amnon’s “love” turned almost instantly into hatred. He disdained his sister’s final plea and drove her out of his quarters by force.

Tamar was truly the victim. She did not permit any of Amnon’s advances, which frustrated him. She served her brother in obedience to the king. And when Amnon’s intentions became clear, she did her best to dissuade him and to outline the devastating consequences of such a wicked act. Being determined to do what he wanted, Amnon was not ready to seek sound advice. So, he proceeded with his plan.

As any woman who has suffered rape or abuse, Tamar must have felt angry, humiliated, and used; she surely suffered from significantly lowered self-esteem. Her brother Absalom did not offer much relief but instead advised her to keep silent. However, Absalom devised a plan to kill Amnon in order to avenge her rape. (Besides, getting rid of Amnon increased his chances to sit on the throne of Israel.) David, father of all involved, experienced anger and grief over these events.

When have you experienced hatred, sadness, fear, rage, or jealousy? How did you deal with these emotions? What do you wish you had done differently?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: John 16:20

The Student Will:
Know: Examine the variety of human emotions and their effects on our behavior and on our health.
Feel: Sense the humanity of Christ’s emotions.
Do: Trust God’s plan to turn our sorrows into joy.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Emotional Responses to Life
   A To respond emotionally to life’s situations is an important aspect of our human nature. Why might God have created us with emotions?
   B How do emotions enrich our lives? How can they cause devastation? What makes the difference?
   C How do positive and negative emotions affect our bodies and our health?

II. Feel: Tempted as We Are
   A How did Christ respond emotionally to the various challenging events He faced? What distressed Him? What brought Him joy? How can we empathize with His emotional responses?
   B How do His reactions to life’s challenges help us understand and relate to Him better? How can they help us understand and accept our emotional selves better?

III. Do: Sorrow Into Joy
   A Emotions are powerful, whether they are negative or positive. What is God’s plan to help us deal with not only the various circumstances of life but the strong emotions that they elicit?

Summary: Positive and negative emotions have a great impact on our health. While Christ experienced both types of emotions, He also modeled God’s plan on how to handle the emotions that He created to be such an important part of human nature.
Positive Emotions

Negative emotional states, such as hatred, worry, fear, rage, and jealousy, produce immediate physiological responses: a pounding heart, tense muscles, dryness of the mouth, cold sweat, “butterflies” in the stomach, and other physical manifestations. Longtime exposure to these symptoms has been associated with cardiac and digestive complications.

In contrast, positive emotional states, such as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, are associated with a sense of well-being, a positive outlook, and an optimal relationship with others and with God. Positive psychology, a newly developed and widely accepted branch of psychology, aims at the promotion of positive emotions in order to obtain happiness and to prevent mental illness. In fact, there is evidence that harboring certain negative emotions will adversely affect health and longevity; in contrast, the promotion of a positive outlook can promote health and longevity. In other words, the more positive your outlook and emotions, the better overall health you can enjoy.

Read Galatians 5:22. How should the fruit of the Spirit make a difference in the way people experience life?

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Read Colossians 3:12–14. What is the most outstanding positive emotion according to Paul? What is the meaning of “clothe yourselves” (NIV) as expressed in this passage? What consequences follow when someone puts into practice Paul’s words in this passage?

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Though love is more than an emotion, it is still the supreme emotion. God is love, and it is His plan for His children to experience love for others and from others; He wants us to know what it means to love God and to be loved by Him. Love brings about an array of other positive feelings and emotions that can be translated into highly desirable behaviors.

What has been your own experience with how your emotional state impacts your actions? Why is it wise not to make important decisions amid a flurry of emotions, be they positive or negative?
Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God created us with the capacity to feel a wide range of emotions. Our emotions have strong links to behavior and health. Because God created us with this capacity, we can look to Him for healthful ways to handle our emotions.

**Just for Teachers:** Use the following exercise as a fun way to help your class connect with the wide range of emotions we all have in common as humans.

**Opening Activity:** Ask each of your class members to think of an emotion that starts with the first letter of their names. Instead of saying what the emotion is, ask each person to demonstrate the emotion by a facial expression and/or by acting it out. Ask the rest of the class to identify the emotion and write it on a chalkboard.

Discuss the wide range of the emotions demonstrated by your class. How many of the emotions were positive? How many were negative? Was it relatively easy to identify the emotions by the person’s actions?

**Consider This:** Make a list of emotions Christ displayed and compare the emotions the class demonstrated with the list of Christ’s emotions. (See Matthew 26:37, 38; Mark 3:5; 9:36; 10:21, 22; 8:1–3; Luke 19:41–44; John 11:32–38.) What emotions do we experience that Christ experienced, as well? What negative emotions might we have that Christ did not display? Was He tempted to have these negative emotions? Why, or why not?

►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Help your class see Jesus as our Brother with emotions like ours yet with the power to help us reach beyond ourselves to connect with His divine, perfect nature.

**Bible Commentary**

1. **Feelings and Behavior** *(Review Mark 10:13–31 and related passages from The Desire of Ages, pp. 511–523.)*

As you read the stories of Jesus and the children and of Jesus and the rich...
Jesus’ Emotional Manifestations: Part 1

In Mark 8:1–3, “compassion” was the motivator that led Jesus to devise a plan for feeding the multitude. Nobody else had thought of the practical needs of these people who had eaten little or nothing in three days. Jesus observed that some had traveled far; thus, He knew that they could collapse if sent home without anything to eat.

Apart from nourishing the crowds, what other acts of Jesus were performed out of compassion? *Mark 1:40, 41; 6:34.*

Lepers often were treated with disdain. There was no other illness or condition that produced more terror and pity than leprosy. Individuals with this visible malady were banned from any social interaction and often were forced to live in a designated camp. Whenever others came near, they were obligated to shout “Unclean! Unclean!” in order to warn people to move away and avoid infection. Because Jesus felt compassion for this man, He cured him instantly and then sent him away with instructions not to tell anyone. But the cured man could not keep this wonderful act of love to himself, and he started to share it with everyone.

Jesus felt compassion, not only when people lacked the basic physical necessities but also when they were without leadership, direction, or aims. Thus, before providing food for them, He felt their deep spiritual needs and proceeded to teach them about the kingdom of God.

Christ’s compassion can be seen, too, in Mark 9:36, where Jesus emphasized physical touch. He held children and showed love and affection for them. He also reached out and touched diseased people in order to communicate divine healing power.

In the encounter with the rich young ruler (*Mark 10:21, 22*), Jesus loved him even though the young man did not follow the Master’s directions. In an instant, both men experienced strong emotions—love (Jesus) and sadness (the rich young ruler).

What are ways that you express compassion? That is, it’s one thing to feel compassion (most people do), but it’s another to express it by way of concrete deeds. How might you through words and deeds better reveal the compassion you feel for those who are hurting?
young ruler, list the emotions the people are feeling, as well as the ones Jesus is feeling. The mothers bringing the children were tearful and timid. The disciples, trying to protect Jesus, must have been rather stern and forbidding, impatient with the anxious mothers who longed for Jesus to touch and bless their children. Rather than being displeased with the mothers, however, Jesus was displeased with His disciples. He showed such sympathy and gentleness with the children that the mothers were comforted and encouraged to go home and work for their families with hope and cheerfulness.

Consider This: What feelings did Jesus have in this story? How did He show both His displeasure and His care? What feelings were awakened in the mothers’ hearts as Jesus blessed their children? How did this affect their later work with their children? What are we drawn to conclude about Jesus and His feelings toward us?

At first the rich young ruler was just observing the scene of the disciples, mothers, and children. But the tenderness Jesus showed with the children and mothers touched his heart. “He saw the love that Christ manifested toward the children brought to Him; he saw how tenderly He received them, and took them up in His arms, and his heart kindled with love for the Saviour. He felt a desire to be His disciple. He was so deeply moved that as Christ was going on His way, he ran after Him.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 518.

Note the young ruler’s response when His emotions were touched; he ran, and, the important man that he was, he knelt, asking what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus, too, was moved. The Bible says that Jesus “loved him.” He longed to fill the young man’s heart with love and joy and peace as He had when He blessed the children and their mothers. But the young ruler’s story did not turn out so well. Despite being moved so deeply by Christ’s love, he was not willing to give up self in order to follow Christ. What started out as a great “love” story ends in tragedy as the young ruler turns back to his riches and away from the feelings of divine love that had newly awakened in him.

Consider This: Feelings are important. Feelings caused by witnessing Jesus’ love moved the young man to run after Jesus; Jesus loved him too. He wanted the young man to follow Him as a beloved fellow worker and disciple. Why did this story turn out to be so tragic? What can we conclude about the relationship between Jesus’ feelings for us and our feelings and behavior toward Him?

While feelings can draw us toward a compassionate Savior, we also must
Jesus’ Emotional Manifestations: Part 2

Read Luke 19:41–44. What led Jesus to shed tears over Jerusalem? No doubt it was over the sorrow He felt as He looked into the future and viewed Jerusalem’s fate. But even more so, He felt sorrow for the many city dwellers who had rejected Him. “The tears of Jesus upon the mount, when he overlooked the city of his love and care, while in the midst of the rejoicing and hosannas of thousands, were the last pleadings of rejected love and compassion.”—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 20.

The Gospel writers record two occasions on which Jesus wept. People usually cry for themselves, but on these occasions Jesus’ sorrow came from a deep feeling for others.

**What** were some of the painful emotions Jesus experienced in the following contexts? *Matt. 26:37, 38; Mark 3:5; 8:12; John 11:32–38; Mark 11:15, 16.* **What caused the emotions He experienced?**

The first few verses of Isaiah 53 confirm that Jesus was a man of sorrows. Even though He experienced many moments of joy, He also felt severe emotional pain. Much of Jesus’ suffering had to do with feelings of frustration when His followers did not grasp His message. In spite of the abounding love of Jesus and His supernatural signs, many did not understand that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus also suffered greatly as He observed the results of sin upon humankind.

The events around Lazarus’ death caused Him great sorrow too. John tells us that Jesus groaned in the spirit (*John 11:33*). This is a translation of the Greek word that indicates a very strong display of emotional turmoil, accompanied by an audible sound from the throat and nose. Greek playwright Aeschylus (525–456 B.C.) uses the same word to describe the snorting of horses. The word is used five times in the New Testament, four of them to describe Jesus’ emotion.

Contemplating the emotional experiences of Jesus can help us understand how much He can relate to our own emotional turmoil. Look at this text: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses” (*Heb. 4:15, NIV*). How can the message of this text bring us into a closer bond with Jesus, especially in times of suffering?
make the choice to surrender our will to Him and do what He asks us to do.

II. A Sorrowing Savior (Review Isaiah 53 and John 11:33 with the class.)

While Jesus showed much compassion and tenderness while on earth, He also was weighed down by distress and sorrow. With your class, list the feelings attributed to Jesus in Isaiah 53. Compare these feelings with the terrible grief Jesus suffered in John 11:33. Jesus was not sad about Lazarus; He knew He would be raising Him up soon. His deep sorrow and indignation were expressed as *embrimaomai*, a Greek term that could be interpreted as a snort of anger, a pant, a groan caused by a great disturbance of mind.

Jesus was indignant that the hypocritical mourners around Lazarus’ grave were even then planning His death. In poignant language Isaiah foretold how Jesus would be despised and rejected. Because they rejected Him, many of these unbelieving people would soon close the door to any hope of salvation. In the judgment that was to soon fall on Jerusalem, they would lose their lives with no hope of even lamentation for their deaths, except for the tears Jesus shed over them.

Jesus wept, but not for Himself. He felt the pain of the entire human race. “Looking down the years to come, He saw the suffering and sorrow, tears and death, that were to be the lot of men. His heart was pierced with the pain of the human family of all ages and in all lands. . . . He longed to relieve all their distress.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 534.

Even today, many of the human race despise and reject Him. Many still rebuff His offer to take on Himself our sorrows and to accept His life, given on our behalf. How much He longs to save us. How He must yearn for us to acknowledge His great work on our behalf and to offer our gratitude for His sacrifice.

**Consider This:** In picturing Christ’s grief and deep distress at the human plight, what emotions are awakened in our hearts? How does this description of Christ endear Him to our hearts and help us understand Him better? How does it illuminate our hard-heartedness and our need for the Holy Spirit to teach us of Christ’s goodness?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Help your class recognize the need we all have to turn to Jesus for help in dealing with our emotions.
God’s Plan for Painful Emotions

Read John 16:20–24. What is Jesus’ promise in regard to pain and grief?

The passage offers great hope to anyone going through physical or psychological pain. Here are a few things that can be learned from this text:

• *The world seems to be full of joy.* Often the believer looks around and is reminded of the unfairness of life. Wicked people seem to enjoy themselves, while many committed to God are in pain. But Jesus assures us that this will not go on forever. Besides, appearances often are deceiving. We naturally tend to view others as being happier and more successful than we are.

• *Grief, sorrow, and anguish will turn to joy.* This is the core of Jesus’ promise. Believers must treasure the idea that sorrow will not only pass away but give way to joy.

• *Past pain will be forgotten.* Memories of the unpleasant past often cause much distress. Many psychotherapists work painstakingly to remove the effects of the past from their clients’ present life. Jesus assures us that, just as a woman gives birth and forgets the pains at the sight of the newborn, His followers will one day move beyond the pain of the past.

• *No one will take away our joy.* The type of joy Jesus offered is not the same as we now understand it. Jesus is offering us total happiness, an eternal condition that no enemy can take away from the saved.

• *There will be no needs.* Jesus affirms that the righteous will no longer ask anything. They will not need to make requests and supplications to Jesus, because all their needs will have been met.

How can you hold fast to the promise that your sorrow will turn to joy? How can this assurance help you pass through the adversities of life? How could you use Jesus’ promises to encourage someone in grief?
**Learning Cycle CONTINUED**

**Application:**

Even babies display their emotions on their faces. (If possible, show some pictures of babies with various emotions on their faces.) One of the important tasks in early childhood is for young children to learn to identify what they are feeling and learn how to handle their strong emotions appropriately before they spin out of control. For example, a parent can help a child identify when his frustration level is rising and help him choose to go to a special “time out” place to regain control of his emotions. Learning to turn his thoughts to Jesus at such a time is important; a picture of Jesus or a picture book about Him can help. This use of “time out” is not a punishment but a means of positive behavior management.

Many of us who are grown up still have lessons to learn about how to handle our emotions. What steps can we take before we lose control to strong emotions of anxiety, anger, or depression? What can we do to turn our hearts and minds over to God at these times?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Suggest these ideas as possibilities for service and as ways to creatively explore and reinforce positive emotions.

Jesus’ gentleness and care did much to comfort and encourage those around Him and renew their hope and cheerfulness. What can we say and do in the week ahead to bless the hearts of those around us?

Examine the list of positive emotions in Galatians 5:22. Choose an emotion to focus on this week. Research Bible texts regarding this emotion to study each day and create a felt or cloth banner depicting this emotion to hang in your home. If others in your class elect to do this activity, you might exchange banners and texts, studying a different emotion each week for the next nine weeks. This might be a good women’s ministry project for a quilting or an embroidery club. Men might choose to create wooden or metal plaques and share their texts and experiences at a weekly breakfast or lunch hour.

**Alternate Option:** Choose an emotion to focus on this week, researching Bible texts that describe it. Share what you learn from the texts about the emotion in class.
Further Study: “As the piercing look of Jesus swept the desecrated court of the temple, all eyes were instinctively turned toward him. The voices of the people and the noise of the cattle were hushed. Priest, ruler, Pharisee and Gentile all looked with mute astonishment and indefinable awe upon the Son of God, who stood before them with the majesty of Heaven’s King, divinity flashing through humanity and investing him with a dignity and glory he had never before displayed. A strange fear fell upon the people. Those nearest Jesus instinctively drew as far from him as the crowd would permit. With the exception of a few of his disciples the Saviour stood alone. All sound was hushed; the deep silence seemed unbearable, and when the firm, compressed lips of Jesus parted, and his voice rang out in clarion tones, there was an involuntary groan or sigh of relief from all present.

“He spoke in clear accents and with a power that caused the people to sway as if moved by a mighty tempest: ‘It is written, My house is the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.’ He descended the steps, and, with greater authority than he had there manifested three years before, with indignation that quenched all opposition, in tones that rang like a trumpet through the whole temple, commanded, ‘Take these things hence.’”—Ellen G. White, The Spirit of Prophecy, vol. 3, pp. 23, 24.

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe the emotions of Jesus as expressed in the above passage? What lessons can we learn from this about how many emotions, if properly channeled, can be a source of good?

2. How can negative emotions be compensated with positive ones? Consider the experience of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, who went to look at Jesus’ tomb and were “afraid yet filled with joy” (Matt. 28:8, NIV).

3. Jewish communities celebrate Purim to remember the time that “their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration” (Esther 9:22, NIV). Discuss with your class ways to make sure we do not forget the many times our sorrow has turned into joy. Share with the class times you have experienced this emotional change.

4. How can we learn to cling to God’s promises when, for now, they seem so distant and unattainable?
Divine Provision for Anxiety

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 3:6–10; 15:1–3; John 14:1, 2; Matt. 6:25–34; 18:3; Phil. 4:11, 12.

Memory Text: “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7, NIV).

Scripture is filled with verses containing words such as afraid, anxiety, anxious, fret, frightened, and terrified. Many references have to do with what people are anxious and fearful about; others with the promises of divine reassurance to those who are fearful or anxious. The message “Do not be afraid” runs across Scripture with strength and persistence.

And why not? After all, fear and anxiety have been part of human existence since sin entered this earth. Anxiety, or fear about what may happen, is one of the most dangerous emotions for mental and physical health. A medieval legend tells of the traveler who one night met Fear and Plague on their way to London, where they expected to kill 10,000 people. The traveler asked Plague if he would do all the killing. “Oh no,” Plague answered. “I shall kill only a few hundred. My friend Fear will kill the rest.”

This week’s lesson is about how, through divine power, we can have some relief from fear and anxiety. Trust in God and contentment are key factors in looking at the future with confidence.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 8.
The First Fearful Experience

Read Genesis 3:6–10. It is difficult to relate to Adam and Eve’s first encounter with fear, because none of us can remember the first time we experienced this emotion. Developmental psychologists have confirmed that infants from early life face definite fears, mostly of going hungry and of sharp noises. Growing children and adolescents go through a variety of fears, as well: fear of animals, of darkness, of being alone; fear of school-related situations, separation from parents, fear of not growing up, or of being rejected by peers. Adults also are subject to common apprehensions associated with their particular life circumstances: fear of not finding a suitable life partner, of not finding the right job, of terrorist attacks, of contracting a chronic or fatal disease, of being assaulted, of dying, etc.

Ellen G. White says that after Adam ate the forbidden fruit, “the thought of his sin filled him with terror” and that the mild temperature of Eden chilled the guilty couple. They were left with “a sense of sin, a dread of the future, a nakedness of soul.”—Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 57.

Consider the following sample of promises against fear and anxiety. Identify the distinctive component of each of them.

Ps. 23:4 __________________________________________________________________________

Prov. 1:33 __________________________________________________________________________

Hag. 2:5 ____________________________________________________________________________

1 Pet. 3:14 __________________________________________________________________________

1 John 4:18, 19 _________________________________________________________________________

Fear and anxiety are very common. They also are frequent, destructive, and painful. Common anxiety symptoms include apprehension, worry, insomnia, jitters, tension, headaches, fatigue, dizziness, palpitations, breathlessness, sweating, difficulty in concentrating, and hypervigilance. Anxiety also may come with panic attacks. God is interested in freeing us from such undesirable experiences and invites us to trust in Him.

What things make you especially afraid, and why? How rational is your fear? What practical steps can you take either to remove the thing that makes you afraid or to alleviate the fear itself?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Peter 5:7

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Outline God’s provisions for whatever causes anxiety in our lives.

**Feel:** Sense the futility of worrying about what God is taking care of.

**Do:** Learn to trust God to handle those concerns that are out of our control and to help us handle those concerns that are within our control.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: God’s Provisions for Our Care

- A What kinds of things cause anxiety in our lives?
- B What has God provided in order to care for our physical, mental, and social needs?
- C What has God provided for dealing with our sins? For our future?

II. Feel: Senselessness of Anxiety

- A Why do we tend to worry about so many things in our lives that are out of our control? Why does this give Satan cause to triumph?
- B How can we learn to be content with whatever happens?

III. Do: Learning to Trust

- A Why is trust more difficult for adults than for children? What kinds of experiences do we need to have in order to learn to trust again?
- B What are the Bible promises that encourage dependence on God for our care and happiness? What should we do to cherish these promises more, thereby increasing our peace and happiness?

**Summary:** Many things out of our control can cause anxiety, but God has made provisions for our every need, and He asks us to trust Him and choose not to be afraid.
Do Not Be Afraid

Read Genesis 15:1–3. What was Abram’s source of fear? What valid reasons did he have to fear?

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God called Abram and promised to make him into a great nation. Seeing that years passed by and he had no heir, Abram dwelt on this issue, and it became his favorite worry. Verses 2 and 3 (NIV) reveal the core of Abram’s fear: “‘Who will inherit my estate? . . . A servant in my household will be my heir!’” The attitude seems a generalized reaction inherent to human nature, which is to perpetuate something of ourselves, something to carry on our influence even after we die.

God’s response to Abram’s concerns was, “‘Do not be afraid. . . I am your shield, your very great reward’” (Gen. 15:1, NIV). The future of our lives, and our future, even after our death, is in the hands of our heavenly Father. He knows that freedom from anxiety is one of our greatest needs, and He wants us to be content today and confident about tomorrow.

Look up the following texts. What were the circumstances into which the Lord’s reassuring message “‘Do not be afraid’” (NIV) is introduced?

Deut. 31:8__________________________________________

2 Chron. 20:17_______________________________________

Luke 21:9____________________________________________

John 14:27____________________________________________

Anxiety is manifested through distress about uncertainties. Such uncertainties may be near or far in the future, and they may not even happen; for the time being, they exist only in the mind. Yet, the symptoms of anxiety are quite real, both emotionally and physically, and can be painful. No wonder the Lord wishes to free us from them.

How can you best use God’s assurance—“Do not fear”—in whatever situation you are in? How can you remember that no matter what you are facing, God is stronger and bigger than that challenge and that He loves you with a love greater than your fears?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Causing God’s children to falter with fear and anxiety is one of Satan’s greatest, and most often used, weapons against us. Satan would have us driven away from God—running away, alone and scared—but God beckons His children to nestle ever closer in His arms.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson is focused on fear, anxiety, and how we are given the instructions, and thus the ability, to avoid many of fear’s crippling and degenerating offspring: anxiety, insomnia, tension, fatigue, and many more. God’s Word is full of promises that He will care for us if we will trust in Him. This lesson will be exploring God’s promises and the power of trust and faith in Him.

Opening Activity: Ask, by show of hands, how many of your class members are parents. Ask them to recall when their children were small—perhaps three or four years old. Do they recall any specific instances when their child was scared and sought them for comfort and reassurance? Ask a few to share their memories.

Consider This: Christ admonished us in Matthew 18:3 to be as trusting as a little child. Having shared some stories of your children seeking comfort in the arms of a parent, what do you think Jesus meant by “trust”? In what ways can you strive to be more childlike in your trust?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Allowing fear and anxiety to come between God and us can have a steep price. (Read Numbers 13:1, 2, 26–29; 14:1–4, 11, 26–29.)

We join the children of Israel after they had experienced quite a series of miracles—unless you asked them, in which case they had just barely survived a litany of grievous ordeals.

God promised them a land flowing with milk and honey. He promised
Trust Against Anxiety

Reflect on the comforting words of Jesus to His disciples in John 14:1, 2. What happened immediately before? Where does He direct their thoughts?

These loving words encourage trust. Trust in the Father, trust in Jesus, because this is a trust that can free the troubled heart from gazing at the future in distress. Jesus immediately takes the disciples’ attention to the kingdom that He is preparing for them. In other words, no matter what happens to you here, no matter how bad things are, this is what you have waiting for you. Thus, trust in Me and My promises. This is what Jesus said to them then and is saying to us now.

In some counseling sessions, clients act out roles relevant to real-life situations that lead to increased self-confidence and enhanced self-esteem. In addition, they learn how to manage their thoughts when anxiety is near, so that the mind may be focused on safe themes. They also are taught relaxation and breathing techniques to be used in critical situations.

Although those strategies enjoy a relatively high level of success, they focus on gaining trust in oneself in order to reduce the chances of feeling anxious. This is acceptable but incomplete, because trust in ourselves is but a small step. We need, in the end, to learn to trust in God.

How does the psalmist compare trust in God with trust in humanity?

Ps. 118:8, 9.

What is Jesus saying to us in Matthew 18:3?

The first task of infants is to develop trust in their mother or caregiver. Once this has been accomplished, little ones will feel content and confident about the world and the future that awaits them. This is the beginning of trust. Jesus asked us to relate to Him as a child relates to his or her mother, allowing ourselves to be soothed and comforted by His tender care. We, though, have to make a conscious choice to do just that.

Spend a few moments remembering the times when God has answered your prayers or provided the best for you. How can previous experiences such as these help you to enhance your trust in your heavenly Father today for whatever difficult situation you are facing and for whatever is making you feel anxious and worried?
them that it would be their land, because He would deliver it into their hands. As the Israelites approached the edge of Canaan, God laid out His plan for them. God told Moses to send an exploration party into Canaan, one man from each tribe. Moses picked the crème de la crème—the best man from each of the twelve tribes.

Off the spies went into the Promised Land. They went, they saw, they returned with fruits bigger than any the Israelites had ever seen before. The report started out positively but quickly turned into a tale of grave woe. Apparently, the giant fruit was grown by giant people—big, scary, strong, giant people. The children of Israel were scared and worried and forgot all about trust. All of them but two, that is. Caleb and Joshua raised their voices against the storm of wails and fears and pronouncements of impending doom.

The Israelites would have none of it. In fact, they were so afraid that they became delusional. “Let’s go back to Egypt. We had food there. Life really wasn’t so bad in Egypt. We would rather have stayed in Egypt than come all the way here only to be trampled by giants. Why did God do this to us?”

How many times do we hear of this reaction? Something bad has befallen me, why did God do this to me? It is Satan’s prime objective to put a wedge between God and His children, and fear is one of the easiest ways to do this. It is one of his most used weapons. Why? Because it works.

The Israelites were so overset by anxiety that they were blaming God for things that hadn’t even happened. Not a single one of them had even seen a giant Canaanite; yet, they were blaming God for causing their deaths (which hadn’t happened yet) at the hands of these giants.

They forgot to trust, again. In Numbers 14:11, God asks Moses what it will take for the Israelites to trust Him. He has performed miracle after miracle, and yet they do not believe He will take care of them.

As a result of the Israelites’ stubborn refusal to follow God’s instructions and enter the Promised Land as He had planned, they had to wander around for an extra 40 years.

We humans often mess up God’s plans for our lives by not trusting Him in times of trouble, or even supposed trouble. Letting fear rather than faith rule our lives can have disastrous consequences.
Of Sparrows and Lilies

Aside from Jesus’ kind advice to avoid worry, what lessons can we obtain from this segment of the Sermon on the Mount? Matt. 6:25–33.

Through this powerful text Jesus teaches a number of principles that, if seriously followed, can protect the believer from much distress.

Keep things in perspective (vs. 25). A hectic schedule may make us lose sight of the truly important things. Daily routines may distract us from what we believe to be fundamental. God gave us life. God created our bodies. If He has the power and the willingness to do that, will He not provide food to maintain His creation? Will He not arrange for the necessary garments to dress our bodies?

Become inspired by simple things from nature (vss. 26, 28–30). Sparrows and lilies are among the most common things in nature. Jesus chose them as a contrast to the immense complexity of human beings. It is obvious that sparrows do not worry about tomorrow and that lilies do not toil to obtain the latest fashion; yet, they are well taken care of. “ ‘Will he not much more clothe you?’ ” (vs. 30, NIV).

Worry is useless and pointless (vs. 27). Examining problems in order to find possible solutions may be productive, but worrying for the sake of worrying not only does nothing to solve the issue but magnifies the negative side of things.

Straighten out your priorities (vs. 33). Christians sometimes may be caught in the whirl of materialism or other things that can distract them from what really matters in life. Thus, Jesus reminds them: “ ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you’ ” (NKJV).

Winston Churchill said: “I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened.”—http://www.saidwhat.co.uk/quotes/political/winston_churchill.

Take a look at the things that worry you, and then kneel down and pray, asking God to take charge of all your worries. What are the concerns that you can have a part in fixing? What things are absolutely beyond your control? Do what you can to fix what you can, and then ask the Lord to help you learn to trust in Him for the rest.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: Reflect back on your life at a time when you faced seemingly insurmountable obstacles and threw in the towel like the children of Israel did. In hindsight, how much did it cost you? How might things have been different had you exercised more faith and trust in God?

II. Faith and trusting in God in the face of fear has rewards. (Read Numbers 14:5–9, 30, 36–38.)

Caleb and Joshua trusted God. They went directly against the crowd and stood firm. God had promised them the land. They believed in God. They didn’t understand how He would deliver the land into their hands, but they knew that He had promised He would. They knew God had kept every single one of His promises to them thus far. Why not trust Him now?

They probably weren’t very popular with their peers for voicing their opinions. Can you imagine the pressure they must have felt, being the only two nonconformists in a sea of grumbling, griping, wailing fatalism?

God saw their faithfulness in times of uncertainty, adversity, and fear. The other ten spies who spun the alarmist tale of behemoth bad guys met an untimely end. They were all killed by a plague. Caleb and Joshua were spared because they remained steadfast.

God handed down the consequences for Israel’s panic. No adult who had doubted Him would live to see the Promised Land—none of them, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua.

Both Joshua and Caleb inherited the land they were promised because of their faith. Joshua became the leader of the children of Israel. God worked through him to conquer the land and cities, and drive the enemies out. God blessed Joshua in ways Joshua probably never imagined were possible. He still does this for us today when we put our trust in Him.

Consider This: Again, reflect back on your life, this time at a period when you held fast to your faith and put your trust in God. How did God bless you in ways you did not expect? How was His plan made clear to you?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: From infancy through old age, we all experience fear, anxiety, worry, and the various negative ramifications thereof.
One Day at a Time

**Read** Matthew 6:34. What is Jesus telling us here? How can we learn to do what He says? Why is it so important?

Putting into practice the message of Matthew 6:34 would bring so much peace to people today. Jesus is not asking us to ignore planning or to be careless. He simply is telling us not to worry about what may happen, not to use the typical “What if” thoughts: “What if I get sick?” “What if I lose my job?” “What if I have an accident?” “What if my child dies?” “What if someone attacks me?”

The following list shows the various things that make up an average person’s anxiety. Anxious individuals focus on:
1. Fifty percent of events that will never happen
2. Twenty-five percent of occurrences in the past that cannot be changed
3. Ten percent about unconfirmed criticism by others
4. Ten percent about health (much of it apprehensive)
5. Five percent about real problems that will be faced

**How** can you gain inspiration from Paul’s experience of contentment? Phil. 4:11, 12.

One of the keys for living one day at a time is contentment, an effective antidote for worry. Contentment is not an inheritable attitude but an acquired characteristic. Paul said that “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation” (vs. 12, NIV). In this day and age, in which we face so many problems, there is a need to develop a sense of contentment for what we presently have and not to worry about what might come tomorrow.

Jesus said: “‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid’” (John 14:27, NIV). In practical terms, how do you benefit from Jesus’ assurance of peace of mind? Share your answer in class on Sabbath. What can you learn from each other?
Trust is not a natural behavior. It has to be learned. Like a baby learns to trust its parents, we must train ourselves to trust God. We must make a conscious effort on a daily basis to trust God in not just the little things (Please, God, help me drive safely to work) but also the big things (Dear God, I’ve lost my job, the house is in foreclosure, the kids need new clothes, and there is only one celery stick in the fridge).

Thought/Application/Inductive Questions:

1. What seems easier: to trust God with little things or big things? Why?

2. What are some areas of my life where I have trouble fully trusting God?

3. What can I do to let go of my desire to control outcomes and allow God to guide me, especially in moments of anxiety?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Acting and living by faith is much easier said than done. Remember the saying “hindsight is always 20/20”? Wouldn’t it be nice to have a personal record of all the times God comes through for us when we are afraid, unsure, or anxious? What better testament to God’s love, dependability, and unwavering care for His children than a personal record of God’s guidance, protection, and providing? This activity is meant to be a long-term, faith-building exercise.

Activity: Challenge your class members to keep a Faith Versus Fear journal. The idea is that every time they feel overcome or overwhelmed by anxiety or fear, they write it down. Immediately following the documentation of the fear, encourage prayerful meditation and then the writing out and claiming of a promise or verse that directly abates the worry. They will need to leave space to come back and write down how God acted in their life to get them through that specific problem. As the entries are made, it will become a reference. Each person will be able to, in time, look back on their worries and see in black and white how their faith in God is substantiated and rewarded.

Alternately, ask class members to share moments when they exercised faith in the face of fear. How did the experience build their trust in God? How did it strengthen their faith in ways that equipped them to meet future challenges and trials?
Further Study: “It is not work that kills; it is worry. The only way to avoid worry is to take every trouble to Christ. Let us not look on the dark side. Let us cultivate cheerfulness of spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, p. 466.

“If we educated our souls to have more faith, more love, greater patience, a more perfect trust in our heavenly Father, we would have more peace and happiness as we pass through the conflicts of this life. The Lord is not pleased to have us fret and worry ourselves out of the arms of Jesus. He is the only source of every grace, the fulfillment of every promise, the realization of every blessing... Our pilgrimage would indeed be lonely were it not for Jesus. ‘I will not leave you comfortless’ (John 14:18), He says to us. Let us cherish His words, believe His promises, repeat them by day and meditate upon them in the night season, and be happy.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, p. 468.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, go over your answer to Thursday’s final question.

2. Some, without any real immediate reason for concern, are afraid to suffer and die; others actually are experiencing a debilitating or terminal disease that will likely kill them. Others perhaps truly are facing another life-threatening situation. How can people in those circumstances be comforted?

3. Jacob showed “great fear and distress” (*Gen. 32:7, NIV*) in preparing to meet Esau. Joseph’s brothers were “terrified” (*Gen. 45:3, NIV*) when Joseph revealed his true identity. Discuss acceptable ways to deal with fears that come from our own wrongdoing. Is there a difference in dealing with fears that we have brought upon ourselves through our own wrong actions? If so, what is the difference?

4. Job affirmed: “What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me” (*Job 3:25, NIV*). Can our fears become real by way of the “self-fulfilling prophecy” effect? In other words, can a constant worry about something happening actually help bring about the thing feared? Discuss.

5. Think about all the things you have worried about that never came to pass. What lessons can you learn from these experiences that should, ideally, help you worry less about the future now?
Stress

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 1 Kings 17:2–4, 15, 16; 19:1, 2; Mark 6:31–34; Gal. 6:2; John 15:13.

Memory Text: “‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’” (Matthew 11:28, NIV).

S tress touches everyone. Demands at work, family crises, guilt, uncertainty about the future, dissatisfaction with the past—all are hard enough. All this, along with the general events of life, can put enough pressure on people that it affects their physical and mental health. Researchers Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe developed the social readjustment rating scale, which lists life events with corresponding stress values for each: the death of spouse—100; personal injury or illness—53; change in residence—20; etc. A person accumulating 200 or more points at any given time runs a 50 percent chance of becoming ill; someone accruing 300 or more will reach a point of crisis. Moderate amounts of stress are necessary to increase performance, but beyond a point, stress becomes a health hazard.

Jesus shows by precept and example that seeking God at a quiet time and place is the best remedy for life’s stresses (Mark 6:31). If we will allow Him, the Lord will help us deal with the pressures that are such an inevitable part of life here.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 15.
Exciting Life Events

How did God provide for Elijah’s survival during the long drought in Israel? 1 Kings 17:2–6, 15, 16.

In the midst of a long famine, Elijah must have felt very close to the Lord, who took such personal care of him. First, he had the opportunity to witness ravens come twice a day to feed him. Talk about a miracle! Then he saw endless rations of bread coming from a little oil and meal—enough food to feed three persons for two years. How much more evidence of God’s providential care would anyone need?

Ellen G. White applied the lessons of this story to God’s faithful people in the last days: “I saw that our bread and water will be sure at that time, and that we shall not lack or suffer hunger; for God is able to spread a table for us in the wilderness. If necessary He would send ravens to feed us, as He did to feed Elijah.”—Early Writings, p. 56.

What were some of the other things that happened to Elijah, and what lessons can we draw from them for ourselves? 1 Kings 17:17–22; 18:23–39, 45.

God used Elijah to resurrect the widow’s son. What a test of faith, and what a vindication of God’s power over life and death! Next, the test at Mount Carmel was an irrefutable and spectacular demonstration of God’s power. Finally, heavy rain after a three-year drought was another manifestation of God’s involvement in human affairs. Elijah’s life was full of direct and divine intervention. It’s hard to imagine how anyone, after all that, could not fully trust in the Lord; yet, not long after all that, Elijah was swept up in the symptoms of stress and discouragement (see tomorrow’s lesson).

Thus, there’s an important lesson here. Regardless of the miracles in our lives, we always will face obstacles. No one, not even a prophet like Elijah, is immune to the troubles that life brings.

Are success and achievement bringing you stress? A long series of exhilarating events (even positive ones) may add much weight to your load. At the same time, why must we be careful not to be too self-satisfied during good times?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Matthew 11:28

The Student Will:

Know: Outline both good and bad stressors and describe methods of handling these stressors as part of a balanced lifestyle.

Feel: Foster God-centered approaches to dealing with stressful circumstances.

Do: Practice a healthy lifestyle that includes service-centered activities that can help relieve stress.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Ups and Downs of Stress

A Stress can come from exciting, as well as troubling, circumstances and has both positive and negative effects on us. What kinds of situations result in stress that actually can be helpful? What kinds of situations result in damaging stress?

B What can we learn from how Jesus managed stress in His life?

II. Feel: God-Centered Stress Management

A What negative emotions add stress to our lives?

B Secular behavior management specialists offer many useful ideas for handling stress. What is different about a Christian attitude and approach toward stress management?

C How does a relationship with God reduce stress levels that we might otherwise experience?

III. Do: Balance and Service

A What daily lifestyle activities can help us live a balanced life and strengthen our resilience to damaging stress?

B How can an orientation toward the needs of others help us not to stress?

C How can we implement Christ’s methods of stress management in our daily lives this week?

Summary: Christ was service-oriented, but He also recognized that rest and time apart in communion with His Father were important for a balanced lifestyle and healthy stress management.
Bitter Life Events

Read 1 Kings 18:40. Whether or not Elijah took part himself in the killing of hundreds of people, he was clearly in charge of the operation, and that must have been an emotionally devastating experience. This act was permitted by God as the only way to eradicate the idolatry, which included the sacrifice of children (Jer. 19:5). Nevertheless, it surely must have taken an emotional toll on the prophet.

On top of the stress of that ordeal, what else did Elijah face? 1 Kings 19:1, 2.

From the beginning of Ahab’s reign, the wicked queen had been adamant that her husband should “serve Baal and worship him” (1 Kings 16:31, NIV). As a result, all of Israel had fallen into idolatrous practices. Jezebel was instrumental in restoring the worship of Ashtoreth, one of the vilest and most degrading forms of Canaanite idolatry. Now, with the death of all the priests, Jezebel felt impatient and enraged.

How did Elijah react to the message brought from Jezebel? 1 Kings 19:3, 4.

How could this man of God, after having witnessed a series of wonderful miracles, be in such a state of despair? How did he reach the point of asking God to take his life? After all, look at the miracles he had seen and even had been involved in!

“Satan has taken advantage of the weakness of humanity. And he will still work in the same way. Whenever one is encompassed with clouds, perplexed by circumstances, or afflicted by poverty or distress, Satan is at hand to tempt and annoy. He attacks our weak points of character. He seeks to shake our confidence in God, who suffers such a condition of things to exist.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 120.

How often have you done the same thing: forgotten the incredible way the Lord has worked for you in the past? Why is it so important, especially during times of despair and stress, to cling to the memories of how God has worked in your life in the past? Why do we so easily forget what the Lord has done for us? How can praise and worship help you through difficult times?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: A healthy, balanced lifestyle, one that is prayer and service oriented, can make us more resilient to the wear and tear of stress.

Just for Teachers: The following activity not only introduces and explores de-stressors, but its potential for humor can help draw the class together.

Opening Activity: Ask each class member to pantomime what they like to do to wind down after a stressful day. Take a little time to enjoy the responses, and discuss the joy of playing and laughing together as a de-stressor. List these suggestions on a chalkboard and note differences between personality types and gender: some people like to be alone, some appreciate company and talk in order to de-stress. Some like to exercise, and some like to sleep or work on a hobby.

Consider This: Some ways of dealing with stress may be damaging; for example, it has been jokingly pointed out that STRESSED spelled backwards is DESSERTS. However, if we eat as a way of dealing with stress, we may become overweight, which is associated with numerous other health concerns. What are other problem methods of dealing with stress?

We all face stress. Some stress may stem from exciting and fun events, and some may be the result of high demands, too much change, or trauma. Too much stress, from any source, is wearing on our vital forces. However, God has provided many ways of helping us cope with the wear and tear of life.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. The Stress of an Exciting Life (Review 1 Kings 17, 18 with your class.)

The events of Elijah’s life are a study in contrasts. The prophet appears abruptly from a secluded life in the mountains of Gilead and stands before Ahab as a valiant warrior for God, declaring God’s judgment on idolatrous Israel. He disappears just as quickly from the court of the wicked CONTINUED
God’s Therapy

**Read** 1 Kings 19:5–9. What were the simple remedies provided for Elijah during this stressful time in his life? What can we take from this for ourselves? How are our physical actions impacting, either for good or for bad, our mental attitude?

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Sleep. Eat. Sleep again. Eat again. And then engage in intense physical exercise—forty days and forty nights; from Mount Carmel to Mount Horeb. How interesting that proper sleep, exercise, and a healthy diet often are prescribed to combat psychological stress.

A common treatment for mood disorders is called activity scheduling. It consists of developing a rigid timetable that contains pleasant and purposeful activities that will force a depressed person to organize, anticipate, and carry out events. Such a regimen helps the person fill time positively and avoid self-pity. Physical exercise often is included in the activities, because it helps produce endorphins, morphine-like natural chemicals that enhance mood and temporarily relieve depression.

With heavenly guidance Elijah was led into the steps that would restore his normal mental health. As with Elijah, we need to be open to divine leading. As soon as Elijah sat down under the broom tree, he prayed. Yes, it was the wrong kind of prayer (asking God to take his life), but at least it was a prayer, a desire for God to take charge.

Over time Elijah overcame his terrible discouragement, and God still was able to use him (see 1 Kings 19:15, 16; 2 Kings 2:7–11). Before being taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah was given the great privilege of anointing his successor and of witnessing the separation of the waters of the Jordan River, thus permitting him and Elisha to cross the river on dry ground.

Finally, Elijah was taken to heaven, without ever having to die himself. Kind of an ironic “end” for a man who, not too much earlier, was asking God to take his life!

What are we missing out on if we pray only in times of discouragement and despair? Contrast the benefits of a life of constant prayer as opposed to prayer only in emergency situations. How can you learn to live more consistently in an attitude of constant prayer?
king to take up residence beside a quiet stream in the wilderness, where 
God feeds him twice a day by sending ravens. When the stream dries up, 
Elijah visits a widow in a foreign land and stays with her and her son. All 
three of them eat from a miraculous daily provision of oil and flour until 
God calls Elijah to face Ahab again.

Consider This: There is much to be said about the benefits of living a quiet 
life in the country. Which other great workers of God rose to public 
service from simple, rural backgrounds? (See 1 Samuel 16, Genesis 37, 
Luke 1:80.) What are the benefits of living close to nature as opposed 
to living with the frenetic pace of city life?

God’s prophets were known by the coarse camel’s hair garments they 
wore (Zech. 13:4). John the Baptist wore such a robe and also came from 
the desert, calling for repentance as Elijah had (2 Kings 1:8, Mark 1:6). 
There is something about the simple austerity of a life spent in commu-
nion with God, in natural surroundings, that can help to make the things 
of God crystal clear and gives power and clarity to the communication that 
God imparts to the heart. Elijah and John the Baptist and other prophets of 
God were fearless in delivering these messages to God’s people.

Though the king was in active pursuit to kill him, Elijah survived during 
the three years of famine on the daily providence of God. What effect did 
these special circumstances have on Elijah’s and the widow’s faith? Why 
did God honor this foreign woman in such a way? (Luke 4:2–26).

II. The Stresses of Life’s Trials (Review 1 Kings 19 with your class.)

From a quiet, private life, Elijah becomes a major public figure. For 
the past three years, he has been in seclusion, hiding from Ahab. Now 
he calls all Israel to the top of Mount Carmel and stages a dramatic 
showdown between God and Baal. God responds by sending fire from 
heaven and then a dramatic storm. The day closes with Elijah tucking 
up his robe and running down the mountain before Ahab’s chariot in a 
torrential downpour, in the dark. This is pretty heady stuff for a country 
prophet from Gilead.

Unfortunately, Elijah was not done running. In less than 24 hours, 
Elijah went from the peak of the Mount Carmel experience to running 
for his life from an enraged queen who was bent on vengeance. He fell 
into a depression so deep that he prayed for death. Instead of scolding 
him for his lack of faith, however, God fed Elijah through special
Jesus’ Method to Manage Stress

With the blossoming of cell phones in the mid-1990s, a veteran Adventist minister said, “I will never have one! As I visit churches and listen to people’s problems, I get weary and distressed. But when I return to my car, I find refuge. If I had a cell phone, I wouldn’t find rest even in my car.” Every follower of Christ needs a quiet hiding place to find calm, to pray, and to listen to God through His Written Word.

Read Mark 6:31. What lesson can we take from this for ourselves? How often do you do this for yourself, or do you always have an excuse?

Speaking of Jesus, Ellen G. White wrote: “His hours of happiness were found when alone with nature and with God. Whenever it was His privilege, He turned aside from the scene of His labor, to go into the fields, to meditate in the green valleys, to hold communion with God on the mountainside or amid the trees of the forest. The early morning often found Him in some secluded place, meditating, searching the Scriptures, or in prayer. From these quiet hours He would return to His home to take up His duties again, and to give an example of patient toil.”—The Desire of Ages, p. 90.

What other sanctuary did Jesus have? Matt. 21:17, Mark 11:11.

People may be a source either of distress or of peace. Jesus found peace with friends who brought comfort and affection to His life. This He found at the house of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. “His heart was knit by a strong bond of affection to the family at Bethany. . . . Often, when weary, thirsting for human fellowship, He had been glad to escape to this peaceful household. . . . Our Saviour appreciated a quiet home and interested listeners. He longed for human tenderness, courtesy, and affection.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 524.

How can you apply Jesus’ stress management method to your life? What advice would you give to a city dweller who needs to travel for hours to find nature? Or to someone who lives in an extended family with a large number of people under the same roof? To whom would you go, among your family/friends, if you found yourself disoriented and in need of emotional support?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

circumstances yet again. He gave Elijah rest and then sustained him as he traveled deep into the Sinai desert.

Consider This: What is evident from Elijah’s story about God’s care for our physical needs during times of stress? How can this reminder reduce stress in our lives? (See Matthew 6:25–34.)

Though God hadn’t sent him there, He graciously met Elijah on the mountain where Moses met with God many years before. There, God renewed his faith with a reminder that God’s work most often is done through the quiet work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. As God revealed Himself to his prophet in a still, small voice, “The high-strung, impetuous prophet became meek and submissive, ready to listen to the voice of the Lord. ‘In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength’ (Isa. 30:15).”—The SDA Bible Commentary, p. 825.

Fire from heaven and dramatic showdowns on the tops of mountains could do little to change sin-hardened hearts. That was done by the quiet work of the Spirit of God. It took the quiet surroundings of the wilderness and a time apart, communing with God with no other distractions, for Elijah to hear the Spirit’s quiet voice reminding him of this important lesson.

In times of stress, it is important to keep our priorities straight and spend time seeking and communing with God. That’s when He can remind us that it’s His work that is important, a work that is usually done in a quiet, unhurried way, in our hearts. Our main work is to cooperate with Him so we can then find “rest for [our] souls” (Matt. 11:28–30, NIV).

Consider This: How can success create stress? What other public figures have succumbed to temptations related to the power of leadership and achievement? (See 1 Samuel 18 and 2 Samuel 11.)

III. Jesus and Stress (Review Mark 6:31 with your class.)

On the surface, one might question why, out of 33 years of Jesus’ life on earth, would He spend only three-and-a-half years doing public ministry? One would think that during such a short time of service, Jesus would be pressed to get as much done as He could. However, even during the time He was pushed to meet public demands for His time, He spent many hours in private communion with His Father (Luke 5:16, 6:12, 11:1; Mark 1:35).
Bringing Relief to Others

**What** are the specific features about Jesus’ behavior that Peter used to describe his Master? *Acts 10:38.*

Jesus’ style was fundamentally selfless. He utilized all His energy to serve others, to bring them relief through His kind words and healing power. Jesus never used His divine powers to benefit Himself. This must have made such an impression on Peter that his description of the Savior was of someone who “‘went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil’” *(vs. 38, NIV).*

In the majority of cases, the pressure brought about by work, relationships, money, and so forth, is self-centered. Focusing on others (rather than on oneself) is a good way to remove personal pressure. People who engage in voluntary work, community projects, etc., report greater feelings of well-being and satisfaction than people who do not.

**Read** Galatians 6:2, Philippians 2:4, and John 15:13. What message is in there for us?

John D. Rockefeller (1839–1937) provided an example of how to survive stress by moving the focus from oneself to others. By 1879 his company, Standard Oil, handled about 90 percent of the refining in the United States. By the age of 50, he was the richest man alive. But in 1891, he had a nervous breakdown and was near death. However, he recovered from his illness in just a few months.

How?

Apart from a simple diet, rest, and exercise, he decided to give away his fortune and spent the remaining 40 years of his life as a philanthropist. Early in the twentieth century, his personal fortune peaked at nearly $900 million. At the time of his death, his estate was valued at $26 million. His donations did a lot of good in the world. And as for himself, he extended his life by nearly another fifty years, living in contentment to the age of 97.

What has been your own experience with the blessings that come from serving others? Why not make a concentrated and prayerful effort to do more?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

**Consider This:** If Christ, with His perfect understanding of His Father and His ministry, considered private time in prayer, study, and meditation as essential, how much more should we take time to rest, regroup, and reconnect with our heavenly Father?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Take time to remind your class of the infinite value of keeping the Sabbath.

**Life Application:** Keeping the Sabbath is an important de-stressor. Dan Buettner, who has partnered with scientists to study longevity in four countries, studied Loma Linda, California, Seventh-day Adventists and concluded in an interview reported in *Adventure* magazine:

“Look at what they do on Saturday—they stop everything; they focus on their god; they cut the stress out of what they need to do; they all go to luncheons with really good friends, and then they’re off on the nature walk. And the payoff is six extra years of life for an Adventist female and nearly ten extra years for an Adventist male.”—Josh Dean, “Dan Buettner’s Search for the Fountain of Youth,” *The Longevity Expedition, Adventure* (June/July 2009):11.

**Thought Questions:**

What other kinds of activities do we do on Sabbath that have the added benefit of helping us cope with life stresses? How might we deepen our appreciation of the delights that Sabbath offers?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Suggest the following activities to your class as ways to put into practice what it has learned about stress.

**Activities:**

1. A regular exercise program can be a great stress reliever, but it is best if you like what you are doing. Exercise in fresh air and sunshine in a natural environment are even greater pluses. What might you do this week to start an exercise program or improve a program you already have going?

2. Adequate sleep, a regular balanced diet, and plenty of water can help make us more resilient in stressful situations. What more can you do to build up your defenses against the normal stresses of life?

3. How might you combine a favorite hobby with a service to others and gain the added benefit of relaxation in the bargain?
Further Study: “Utterly wearied, he [Elijah] sat down to rest under a juniper tree. And sitting there, he requested for himself that he might die. . . . A fugitive, far from the dwelling places of men, his spirits crushed by bitter disappointment, he desired never again to look upon the face of man. . . . Into the experience of all there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement—days when sorrow is the portion, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind benefactor of His earthborn children; days when troubles harass the soul, till death seems preferable to life. It is then that many lose their hold on God and are brought into the slavery of doubt, the bondage of unbelief. Could we at such times discern with spiritual insight the meaning of God’s providences we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, striving to plant our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills, and new faith, new life, would spring into being.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 162.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever had times during which you clearly saw the hand of God working in your life, and your faith was strong, only to sink low right after and find yourself filled with doubts about God and His leading in your life? What have you learned from that kind of experience that could help others who might be facing the same thing?

2. What is it about helping others that makes us feel better? Why is that so often the case? At the same time, why is it so hard to give of ourselves to others? How can we learn to be more willing to die to self in order to serve the needs of those around us better?

3. Take a good look at your own health habits. What are you eating and drinking? What kind of exercise program are you on? How much leisure time do you have? What changes can you make that could help you feel better emotionally, as well as physically? Though in some cases, people have very serious psychological needs that must be professionally addressed, many times a change in lifestyle habits can make a big difference in how we feel.

4. How much “spare” time do you have? What do you do with that time? How could you better utilize that time to enhance your relationship with God?
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 1 Samuel 25; Eph. 4:1–3; 1 Pet. 3:9–12; Luke 17:3, 4; 23:34; James 5:16.

Memory Text: “‘So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets’” (Matthew 7:12, NIV).

An experienced urban evangelist used to organize stress management seminars as an introduction to evangelistic meetings in cities. He had devised a simple survey in which he asked the audience to list four or five things that caused them the most stress. Workers grouped the answers in general categories (health, money, work, relationships, etc.). Before the count was completed, one worker saw that the speaker already had a prepared set of transparencies to discuss “relationships” as the number one source. When questioned, the pastor explained that the results had always been the same: bad relationships always came up as the primary cause of stress.

Whether problems with spouse, children, boss, work associate, neighbor, friend, or enemy, people tend to be the principal stressor. In contrast, when relationships are positive, they are a powerful source of satisfaction. This seems consistent across geography and culture. People make us happy, or people make us miserable.

That’s why this week we’ll spend some time focusing on the important topic of relationships and what the Bible teaches us about them.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 22.
Completely Humble and Gentle

Read Ephesians 4:1–3. Why do you think Paul connects humility, gentleness, and patience with good relationships and unity? Recall examples of your own experience in which the above attitudes have made a positive impact on relationships.

Read 1 Samuel 25. What can we learn from the actions of Abigail and David regarding proper behavior in difficult and tense situations?

The story of David, Nabal, and Abigail provides an excellent example of successful social interaction. Results vary significantly depending on how individuals present themselves—as superiors, as equals, or as humble friends or associates.

David sent his soldiers to Nabal with a fair request. “We have protected your men and your property; give us whatever you can find” (1 Sam. 25:7, 8, author’s paraphrase). But Nabal didn’t know about kindness or diplomacy. We are told that he was a harsh and evil man. Other translations use terms such as surly, mean, brutish, rough, dishonest, churlish, and rude. And he surely displayed these traits before David’s warriors.

In contrast, notice David’s initial attitude. Even though he held the military power, his message was full of care and humility, wishing Nabal and his household long life and good health, introducing himself as “your son David” (vs. 8, NIV).

As for Abigail, the Bible tells us that she was intelligent and beautiful. Notice her behavior: she provided an abundant amount of choice food; she ran to appease David, bowed down before him, addressed herself as “your servant” and David as “my master,” and asked for forgiveness. She also reminded David that as a man of God, he needed to avoid needless bloodshed.

The result of Abigail’s tactful and humble action brought about a complete turn in David’s intentions. He praised the Lord for sending her and praised her for her good judgment. This effective mediation, full of godly spirit, saved the lives of many innocent men. As for Nabal, David did not need to shed blood, because the man died—probably of heart failure—a victim of his own fear.

It’s easy (usually) to be kind to those we like. But what about those we don’t? Think of those you find very disagreeable. How would they react if you displayed a humble and gentle attitude toward them? Through God’s grace, give it a try (remembering, too, that you might not always be the most likable and lovable soul either).
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Matthew 7:12

The Student Will:
Know: Describe the foundations of Christian relationships.
Feel: Cherish the attitudes that strengthen bonds in the family, church, and community.
Do: Apply the principles of relationships necessary to heal and promote positive relationships in our lives.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Building Christian Relationships
   A What biblical principles guide the way we treat one another when we are hurt, angry, or afraid?
   B What biblical principles teach us how to build intimacy?
   C Why are confession and forgiveness so important?
   D How should we approach barriers to relationships that have arisen from past experiences with another?

II. Feel: Attitudes That Bind
   A What attitudes should we cultivate in our relationships to our leaders? Our children and other family members? Our neighbors? Those with whom we disagree?
   B How did Christ model relationships with leaders, with His quarreling disciples, and with difficult crowds? What close relationships did He have, and how did He maintain these?

III. Do: The Golden Rule
   A How does the Golden Rule of conduct inform our everyday relationships?
   B What needs to be done, with Christ’s help, to promote healing in any of our present or past relationships?
   C What kinds of things can we do to strengthen our relationships with our neighbors and family and church members?

Summary: As we seek to be a blessing to one another, we will confess our faults and forgive one another, be considerate and encouraging, and always seek to build one another up.
Repaying Evil With Blessings

What is the true intent of 1 Peter 3:8–12? What are some of the immediate ways you can apply these principles to your own life?

Jesus upgraded the “eye for an eye” approach to turning the other cheek (Matt. 5:38, 39). This was a revolutionary concept then and still is today for many cultures and traditions. Unfortunately, even Christians rarely return good for evil. But Jesus keeps saying: “‘Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart’” (Matt. 11:29, NIV).

A couple with small children was experiencing serious problems with their neighbors. On several occasions, and in nasty tones, these neighbors told the young parents how disagreeable it was to see play equipment installed in the yard and to hear the children playing on it. They complained about certain sections of the young family’s yard and how they were bothered by this and that. The young couple did not appreciate being talked to in such a harsh and unkind tone. After all, they were not doing anything against the neighborhood rules. One day, when the family was harvesting apples from the backyard apple trees, the mother decided to give the neighbors two freshly baked apple pies. The neighbors accepted the pies gladly. That simple act made a difference in their relationship, probably because they never would have expected anything like that from people whom they had been constantly harassing.

How did David pay back Saul’s constant attacks on his life? 1 Sam. 24:4–6. What does this tell us about David’s character? How might we need to apply the same attitude in our own experience, especially when we might be having problems with someone who, in his or her own way, also could be “anointed of the Lord”?

First Samuel records four times when David expressed the immorality of lifting his hand against “the Lord’s anointed.” Even though he had opportunities to take revenge, he repeatedly tried to approach and forgive the king. David chose a humble and godly manner in his dealings with someone who wasn’t kind to him.

Shouldn’t we all, in whatever situation we are facing, seek to do the same?
Learning Cycle

► STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Recognize the importance of allowing God to be Lord of our relationships with other people.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize the importance, indeed, the centrality, of relationships with others in the Christian life. Relationships may have positive or negative effects upon us. God wants them to be positive.

“I love humanity; it’s people I can’t stand!” So said Linus, a character in Charles Schultz’ “Peanuts” comic strip. Linus was a fictional counterpart to the frustrated idealist in all of us. We have high standards for ourselves and others, especially others. We open our eyes in the morning with every intention of spreading mercy, patience, peace, and love. It becomes a little more difficult as we find our way to the kitchen, only to discover that someone drank our supply of all-natural, volcanic spring water we use to make our caffeine-free, organically grown herbal tea. But we can deal with that.

After a few more encounters with imperfect people, as opposed to this platonic ideal of “humanity” that exists (primarily) in our heads, we leave the house, only to find that someone dented our bumper during the night and neglected to leave a note containing a phone number and insurance information. You know, the bumper that used to have the molded plastic Christian fish symbol that now lies in pieces on the pavement. The smile is a little tighter now, and the eyes a tiny bit narrower. And we aren’t even in traffic yet.

People. As the song says, you meet them every day. Or you encounter the results of their actions, some positive, many not so much. Every encounter results in a relationship. Relationships are the cause of—and the solution to—all the world’s problems, but one relationship can empower you to really spread mercy, patience, peace, and love: the relationship with Jesus Christ.

**Discuss With the Class:** Is your relationship with God strong enough to keep you on the right path in your relationships with other people?

► STEP 2—Explore

**Bible Commentary**

I. Remembering Who You Are *(Review Ephesians 4:1–5 with your class.)*

When the human race was created, we were in unity, or at least in
Forgiveness

It is possible to appear to live a rich and meaningful religious life, yet have serious relational problems. It’s a fact of life that as human beings we often cross each other and cause each other pain, even—and sometimes especially—in the church. Hence, how important we learn the art of forgiveness.

Read Ephesians 4:32. How well have you been applying this biblical truth in your life? Whom do you need to forgive, and why is it important for your own good to forgive them?

Only in recent years has the counseling profession started to look more positively at the importance of spiritual principles for mental health. For decades religion and spirituality were seen by many psychologists and counselors as an underlying source of guilt and fear. Not so much anymore. Today many utilize the protective effects of a committed Christian viewpoint. “Therapies” such as prayer, spiritual journaling, memorization of key biblical texts, and forgiveness protocols are now recognized as helping many people overcome a variety of emotional disturbances. Forgiveness counts among the most soothing strategies, even if the ability to truly forgive and be forgiven comes only from God through a God-transformed heart (Ezek. 36:26).

Read Matthew 5:23–25; Luke 17:3, 4; 23:34. What do they teach us about forgiveness, as well?

Sometimes one may think that forgiveness virtually is impossible to grant. But no human being will ever reach the extent of what Jesus bore in the way of pain and humiliation: the King and Creator of the universe was unjustly degraded and crucified by His creatures. Yet, Jesus, in complete humility, cared for them enough to implore the Father for their forgiveness.

At times people wrong others without a full understanding of the pain they are causing. Other times people offend because they are insecure or have personal problems, and so they try to obtain relief by hurting others. How can the awareness of others’ problems help you offer forgiveness? How can you learn to forgive those who are purposely trying to hurt you?
fellowship, with God. The first sin broke that unity. We no longer knew God. We didn’t understand His motives. In fact, we were suspicious of Him, because we attributed our own selfishness to Him.

At that point, it wasn’t too difficult to assume that other people were out to get us, as well; and they often were, because they really were just like us. Yes, we could try to be good, fair, and kind, and even succeed some of the time. We even devised codes of ethics and law to remind ourselves not to yield to our worst impulses most of the time. But failure was assumed, and, in order to work, these codes of law and ethics required the threat of punishment for violation.

Eventually, God revealed His law to Moses to remind us of where we had come from and how far we had strayed. It could be compared to a finger directing us toward the character of God, which was supposed to be the model for our relationships with one another and Him. But people became intensely fascinated with the loops and whorls and fine lines on the finger. Anything to avoid noticing what was really important.

Through Christ, God restored the unity with Him—and one another—that we were meant to enjoy. We no longer had to be what we had been. God was in us, and we were in Him, one in the Spirit and at peace.

Consider This: God has brought us in unity with Him and one another in His body, the church. Why, then, do we have such a difficult time recognizing it and acting as if it were true? How can we be sure to remember who God meant us to be?

II. Do Unto Others . . . *(Review Matthew 7:12 with your class.)*

Our perception of what is “good” for other people often is clouded by our own selfish desires and preferences. Sometimes we’re just plain wrong. But still, we’re called to be active in meeting peoples’ needs. To do this, we must ask God to show us what those needs are and to be open to His guidance.

Consider This: Have you ever tried to help someone, only to find out what you thought he or she needed wasn’t really what was needed at all? Or have you found yourself completely oblivious to the needs around you? How can we be more open to the needs of others and be prepared to meet them?
Confess Your Sins to Each Other

How do you interpret James's recommendation to confess sins to one another? James 5:16. Dwell on this verse and ask yourself how you need to apply its teaching to your own situation.

Sins against my neighbor require my confession to him or her in order to secure forgiveness and to restore the relationship. It also shows that I am willing to take the responsibility for what I have done and that I trust and hope for acceptance and forgiveness. By God's grace, a noble soul will grant forgiveness, regardless of the size of the offense.

There is an additional interpretation of James's text, which offers great healing possibilities. Confessing sins, errors, and transgressions to someone you trust brings about emotional healing. Opening up one's own imperfection to a godly Christian friend will help alleviate the burden of sin. In addition, mutual confession deepens interpersonal relationships. Trusting and being trusted provide the bonding that will make a friendship genuine and lasting.

In fact, the entire counseling profession is founded upon the principle that talking is good for the soul. Although there are mental disorders that necessitate professional treatment, many feelings of distress can be relieved at the church and community levels. And this is especially true for problems created by the deterioration of interpersonal relationships—misunderstandings, slander, jealousy, etc. Following James's advice not only will alleviate psychological burden but also bring renewed strength to change destructive behaviors.

A word of caution though. Although disclosure of committed sins to a close friend may bring much relief, it makes the confessor vulnerable. There is always the risk that our friend will reveal the confidence to others, and this is destructive to those involved.

Most important, we always can confess our trespasses to the Lord in full confidence and with the assured certainty of forgiveness. Read 1 Peter 5:7. Defective relationships may bring uncertainty and even fear and anxiety. Others may be able to help, but the surest aid comes from God, who is willing to take all our cares at any time, leaving us with a genuine sense of relief for having left our burdens in His hands.
III. Prayer Together  *(Review James 5:14–16 with your class.)*

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, most of us are familiar with the service of anointing and prayer for the sick. The text for review from James is the passage upon which it is based. Fewer are aware of its close connection with the idea of confessing one’s faults to other people.

Confession to anyone other than God is problematic to most Protestants. Nearly every commentary on these verses will advise the reader not to take this too literally and to exercise extreme care in regard to how much and to whom he or she confesses. In an ideal world, we could share anything with fellow Christians and not worry about being judged or gossiped about. This is not that ideal world.

But we should, at least, stand ready to examine our consciences and admit when we are wrong. When we harm others, we should take responsibility and tell the wronged person and make it right. Nor is it excessively idealistic to seek out fellow Christians with whom we can share our deepest struggles and do likewise for them. In this way, we might be able to neutralize the forces that corrode our spiritual lives and the life of the church.

**Consider This:** In what situations might it be appropriate to confess one’s shortcomings to others, as well as to God? Why might it, in such cases, be a healing experience, as the passage in James suggests?

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**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. The quality of your relationship with God is revealed in the quality of your relationships with other people. True, false, or complicated? Discuss.

2. What exactly is forgiveness, and why is it so difficult? Why is it also so essential?
Building Others Up

Read the following texts, and ask yourself how you can apply the teaching to your own life. Why is this so important, not only for yourself but for others? Eph. 4:29, 1 Thess. 5:11, Rom. 14:19.

Paul admonishes the early church communities to avoid the deterioration of personal relationships in the “body of Christ.” Many interpersonal difficulties come from tearing each other down and, in the process, hurting the entire community. People who engage in gossip and backbiting tend to have problems themselves—feelings of inferiority, the need to be noticed, a desire for control or power, and other insecurities. These people need help to abandon this hurtful way of dealing with their inner conflicts.

Indeed, feeling well about oneself helps to prevent being involved in gossip and slander. Members of the body of Christ need to consider themselves privileged for having received the gift of salvation (Ps. 17:8, 1 Pet. 2:9). With this understanding, the emphasis becomes building others up and working toward mutual edification. Words of encouragement and approval, emphasis on the positive side of things, humility, and a joyful attitude are ways of supporting those with personal problems.

Another way to help is to serve as relational mediators. Jesus calls peacemakers “‘blessed’” and “‘children of God’” (Matt. 5:9), and James says that peacemakers will reap “a harvest of righteousness” (James 3:18, NIV).

Read Matthew 7:12. Why is this so key to all relationships?

This principle can be considered a priceless jewel for social relationships. It is positive, it is based on love, it is universal, and it stretches above and beyond human law. The “golden rule” also brings about practical benefits to everyone involved.

A Chinese farmer was tending his rice paddy up in the mountain terraces overlooking the valley and the sea. One day he saw the beginning of a tidal wave—the sea retreated, leaving a wide portion of the bay exposed—and he knew that the water would return with force, destroying everything in the valley. He thought of his friends working in the valley and decided to set his rice field on fire. His friends immediately ran up the mountain to put the fire out and thus missed being killed in the tidal wave. As a result of this spirit of helping one another, their lives were saved.

The lesson is clear.
Application Questions:

1. Can you remember an occasion when you returned good for evil? Was it difficult? Was it rewarding? What was the result?

2. Do you fully accept that God has forgiven you for your sins and imperfections? How has this made an impact on your relationships with others?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The following activity is meant to illustrate the core of Jesus’ teaching about relationships, as seen in Matthew 7:12, and how we can apply it in specific situations in our daily lives.

Prominently display Matthew 7:12, “‘In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you’” (NIV). What form would being true to this teaching take in one or more of the following situations? (Feel free to come up with your own hypothetical scenarios):

1. You are supervising a new employee at your workplace. This person is pleasant, thoughtful, and genuinely eager to do his or her job well, but it is becoming clear that he or she isn’t really cut out for the job. There may be interpersonal issues, as well.

2. Your neighbor has developed an enthusiasm for what he calls “meadow gardening.” It appears to you and others as merely an excuse not to mow his lawn. Others in the neighborhood are getting catty about it, and some have left anonymous nasty notes for the neighbor. You commiserate, but as property values are dropping in the current economy anyway, you can’t help but be concerned yourself.

3. It’s Christmas or some other holiday that brings families together over great distances. Your brother-in-law has very strident politics that differ markedly from yours, and he never hesitates to bring them up. You’ve never gotten along with him, but he’s basically a decent person, and he loves your sister, and she loves him. In spite of that, you’re not proud of how you’ve reacted on some past occasions.
**Further Study:** Read Ephesians 4:25–32 and underline the words that touch your heart most directly. Reflect on all the things you can do, with God’s help, to improve your relationship with other people.

These are portions of a letter that Ellen White wrote in 1908 to an evangelist: “I have this message for you from the Lord: Be kind in speech, gentle in action. Guard yourself carefully, for you are inclined to be severe and dictatorial, and to say rash things. . . . Harsh expressions grieve the Lord; unwise words do harm. I am charged to say to you, Be gentle in your speech; watch well your words; let no harshness come into your utterances or into your gestures. . . .

“When the daily experience is one of looking unto Jesus and learning of Him, you will reveal a wholesome, harmonious character. Soften your representations, and let not condemnatory words be spoken. Learn of the great Teacher. Words of kindness and sympathy will do good as a medicine, and will heal souls that are in despair. The knowledge of the Word of God brought into the practical life will have a healing, soothing power. Harshness of speech will never bring blessing to yourself or to any other soul.”—*Gospel Workers*, pp. 163, 164.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How much do you like to gossip? Even if you don’t do it yourself, how eager and open are you to hear gossip from others? Why, in a sense, is that just as bad as spreading gossip yourself? How can you stop being part of what can cause other people a great deal of pain?

2. Forgiveness can be so difficult, especially when we have been very badly hurt. How do you learn to forgive those who don’t ask for forgiveness, who don’t care about your forgiveness, and who might even scorn it? What is your responsibility in such cases?

3. Verbal and physical abuse within families is a reality that brings much pain to individuals and groups. What should be the Christian attitude to help prevent this problem? What should be recommended when forgiveness does not cause any change in abusive behavior?

4. Think over your life right now. What steps can you take to bring about an improvement in your relationships? Why are humility, trust in God, and a desire to do right so important in such a process?
A sense of guilt is one of the most painful and incapacitating emotional experiences. It may cause shame, fear, sorrow, anger, distress, and even physical illness. Although often unpleasant, these feelings can be used by God to lead sinners to repentance and to the foot of the Cross, where they can find the forgiveness for which they’ve been longing. Sometimes, however, the guilt mechanism makes people feel guilty about something for which they are not responsible, as in the case of some accident survivors or children of divorce.

But when the sense of guilt is justified, it serves as a good conscience. Guilt produces enough discomfort to make the person do something about it. Depending on personal choices, guilt may be highly destructive, as in the case of Judas, or highly positive, as in the case of Peter.

This week we will study four biblical accounts of guilt in order to understand this process better and to see what we can learn about it. We can see how, if properly channeled, guilt can be used by the Lord to our advantage. So much depends, really, on our attitude toward the guilt we feel and what we choose to do with it.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 29.*
Shame

Read Genesis 3:8–13. How did Adam and Eve manifest the guilt they experienced? What especially was bad about Adam’s reaction?

Guilt was the first adverse emotion felt by the human race. Soon after Adam and Eve sinned, their behavior changed. They “hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (vs. 8, NIV). This unprecedented reaction indicated fear of their Father and Friend and, at the same time, their shame to face Him. Up until their fall, they had found joy in God’s presence, but now they hid before His approaching. A beautiful bond was broken. In addition to fear and shame, they felt sorrow, especially as they were made aware of the terrible consequences of having disobeyed God.

Notice Adam’s and Eve’s words: “ ‘The woman you put here with me . . .’ ” and “ ‘The serpent deceived me . . .’ ” (NIV). Guilt brings about a seemingly automatic reaction to place the blame on somebody else or to justify one’s own behavior with argumentation. Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, called this reaction “projection” and argued that people project their guilt on others or on circumstances in order to lighten the burden of guilt. This “projection” is considered a defense mechanism. But blaming others does not work well for interpersonal relationships and poses a barrier to God’s forgiveness. The true solution consists of accepting full responsibility for one’s own actions and seeking the only One who can provide freedom from guilt: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1, NIV).

Sometimes people suffer from guilt for the wrong reasons. Close relatives to those who commit suicide, survivors of a massive accident or calamity, and children of a recently divorced couple are typical examples of what is, in most instances, unfounded guilt. People in these situations need to be assured that they cannot be held responsible for the behavior of others or for unforeseeable events. And if, in certain cases, they do have some blame, they must take responsibility for their actions, seek forgiveness from those whom they have hurt, and then hold fast to such Bible promises as: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12, NIV).

How do you find yourself reacting to guilt? Are you quick, as Adam was, to blame others for your wrong actions? How can you learn to face up to the things you have done wrong and then, through the grace of God, move on?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Psalm 130:3, 4

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Contrast an unhealthy response to guilt and a healthy, Christ-centered response to guilt.

**Feel:** Acknowledge a sense of humble confession and acceptance of God’s provisions for dealing with our sin.

**Do:** Confess our sins, accept Christ’s forgiveness, and live joyfully in the freedom of His love.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Good for the Soul

A. A healthy conscience alerts us to wrongs we have done. How can we cultivate a healthy conscience?

B. What is the best way of relating to guilt over sin? What does God do for us when we confess our sins?

C. What problems can occur when we don’t confess our sins?

D. Why is it important to forgive others who sin against us?

II. Feel: Humility and Trust

A. What feelings can get in the way of acknowledging our errors?

B. What feelings should accompany confession?

C. How do we feel when we accept God’s forgiveness?

III. Do: Abundant Life

A. What sins do we need to confess?

B. Once we have confessed our sins, what has God done for us that we need to contemplate, appreciate, and accept?

C. What would it take for us to live a free, joyful life in Christ this week? How can we share news of this freedom with others?

**Summary:** Feelings of guilt arise from unconfessed sin, but sin acknowledged and forgiven brings freedom, peace, joy, and an abundant life that starts now and stretches into eternity.
Joseph’s Brothers’ Distress

What particular remorse-eliciting memory lingered in the minds of Joseph’s brothers? Gen. 42:21. What does that tell us about them?

Guilt is associated with a particular occurrence of the past, sometimes an image or a brief event that tends to be replayed mentally. Other times it takes the form of a flashback image that invades one’s mind or appears in dreams or nightmares. The image of the adolescent Joseph pleading with his older brothers for his life must have come to Jacob’s sons again and again.

How else did guilt affect Joseph’s brothers? Gen. 45:3.

People affected by guilt think on it repeatedly, lamenting the fact that they did what they did, showing fear for the consequence, and entering into self-blame. Such rumination produces much distress, frustration, and anger at oneself for not having done differently. Unfortunately, no matter how much time is devoted to recalling those thoughts, the past will remain unchanged. Repentance and forgiveness are required. Joseph’s noble character emerges, and he offers forgiveness and encourages them to stop being angry at themselves. He assures them that the occurrence of events had to do with God’s design to save many lives. The fact that God was able to use their evil action for good doesn’t, however, change the fact that they were guilty of a horrible crime.

How would obeying what’s in these verses help us deal with guilt? James 5:16, 1 John 1:9.

All sins bring pain to the sinner and to God. Many sins also involve other people. Each corner of the triangle (God—Others—Me) needs to be worked out in order to bring a resolution to past wrongdoings. John tells us that God is prepared to forgive and to purify us from unrighteousness. In addition, James tells us to confess sins to each other; we should do this, especially to those whom we’ve wronged.

Humble confession is the only way to free oneself from guilt. “Your sins may be as mountains before you; but if you humble your heart and confess your sins, trusting in the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour, He will forgive and will cleanse you from all unrighteousness. . . . [The work of His righteousness] is peace, and its effect quietness and assurance forever.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 566. What do you need to confess in order to experience the promises here?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Guilt is an inevitable part of the human condition, but it need not be the end of the story. And that’s because God has provided a remedy.

**Just for Teachers:** Guilt can be overwhelming; it can be emotionally, even physically, debilitating. As you teach this material, aim to place guilt in the context of Christ’s call to repentance and His eagerness to extend forgiveness, a force dramatically more powerful than guilt.

Dr. Kent Kiehl, an associate professor of psychology at the University of New Mexico, immerses himself in the intense, often horrifying, world of criminal psychopaths. He explores their minds—literally—by scanning their brains, searching for similarities in structure that could offer a physical clue as to why some people have an almost complete inability to experience guilt. His interest in psychopaths was sparked as an eight-year-old, living in Tacoma, Washington. His father, who worked on the local newspaper, came home one day talking about Ted Bundy, a seemingly charming, intelligent, clean-cut young man, who had assaulted and murdered at least thirty women. “This was a guy who had grown up just down the street,” says Kiehl. “I said I want to understand why people do bad things—how someone could get to be like Ted Bundy—and I want to study the brain.”—John Seabrook, “Suffering Souls: The Search for the Roots of Psychopathy,” *New Yorker* magazine (November 10, 2008).

**Consider This:** “Psychopathy” is characterized by a state of moral emptiness—an inability to experience empathy or remorse. People usually view “guilt” in essentially negative terms; it implies failure, doing something wrong. And yet, the idea of a world where people do wrong things without the emotion of guilt is horrifying. Ask your class to discuss the positive role of guilt—for individuals and society.

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

I. “I have guilt, therefore I am…” *(Review with your class Genesis 3:8–13 and Romans 5:18, 19.)*

CONTINUED
Sapped Strength

**Read** Psalm 32. What does this teach us about guilt and confession? What does David mean by “keeping silent”? What happens when one remains silent? What was David’s solution to his guilt?

Honest confession is good for the soul, and seemingly also for the body. David’s language clearly suggests that his mental state of guilt was causing physical pain, as well: bones wasted away (vs. 3, NIV) and strength sapped (vs. 4, NIV). Health professionals today recognize the close link between psychological stress and physical maladies. The expression “psychosomatic disease” has been part of the health professionals’ language for decades, and it refers to physical symptoms caused largely by psychological processes. More recently the field of psychoneuroimmunology has identified the key role that mental states play in protecting our bodies from, or exposing them to, diseases.

Guilt, as does any other strong adverse emotion, causes immediate deterioration in behavior and can, in the long run, destroy physical health. But for those who know the Lord, there is no need of putting themselves at risk.

David’s testimony reveals the antidote for guilt: “Then I acknowledged my sin to you. . . . And you forgave the guilt of my sin” (vs. 5, NIV).

Thus, shame, remorse, sadness, and hopelessness caused by guilt can vanish through the Lord’s wonderful forgiveness, and joy and happiness can come instead (vs. II).

**Read** 1 Timothy 4:1, 2. What does he mean by seared consciences?

Paul forewarned Timothy of individuals who would teach strange doctrines to believers. They would do this because their consciences had been “seared as with a hot iron” (vs. 2, NIV). As fire may burn nerve endings and make certain parts of the body insensible, a conscience also may become seared by: (a) repeated violation of correct principles until no sense of wrongness remains and (b) strong environmental influences that cause one to view something wrong with indifference or even as good.

What things that once bothered you now don’t? If so, might that be a seared conscience at work? Try to step back and take a good look at things you do that don’t bother your conscience but perhaps should.
Consider This: Literature and art throughout the ages testify to the pervasive nature of guilt as an inevitable part of human experience. Why is this emotion such a core part of the normal human psyche?

Original “Corruption.” Guilt cannot exist by itself; it is a by-product of something else—sin. Theologians have long debated the concept of “original sin.” They’ve asked, What exactly were the consequences for humanity of Adam and Eve’s disobedience to God’s will? Read Psalm 51:5. The word sin obviously describes specific acts, but does it also describe a general state or condition that humans inherit at birth? Ellen G. White clearly links the human sin problem with Adam’s fall. She writes, “There is in his nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, he cannot resist.”—*Education*, p. 29.

Seventh-day Adventist theologian Gerhard Pfandl suggests that the phrase “original corruption” best describes our church’s teaching. We don’t inherit the actual guilt of Adam’s sin (original sin), but we inherit the human tendency to sin. He writes: “The study of original sin and corruption should lead us to a greater awareness of our need of righteousness. That we need a Saviour the day we are born, not only after we have transgressed God’s law. . . . The everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ meets our need.”—Gerhard Pfandl, *Some Thoughts on Original Sin*, p. 22.

Thought Questions:

Consider alternate theories for why guilt exists. (For example, society’s expectations, parental expectations, an innate desire not to harm others, psychological neurosis.) Why aren’t these explanations adequate? Can the emotion of guilt exist without an objective standard of right and wrong?

II. Mea culpa—“I am guilty” (*Review* Psalm 32:5 and John 16:7, 8 with your class.)

Before modern advances in ventilation and machinery, coal mining was an extremely dangerous activity. One technique used to check the safety of the air quality in the mines was to keep canaries—birds especially sensitive to methane and carbon monoxide—in the mine shafts. As long as the birds stayed healthy, miners knew the air was safe. A dead canary was the signal to evacuate immediately.

Consider This: In what ways does our conscience act as a “canary in
Bitter Weeping

One of the greatest manifestations of guilt appears in Matthew 26:75. What made Peter’s sense of guilt so great? Have you ever had a similar experience? If so, what did you learn from it that could help you from making a similar mistake?

On two occasions Peter stated his intention to be firm and never to deny the Master. His second affirmation came even after the Lord had predicted that Peter would deny Him three times that very night. Hours later two women identified Peter as one of Jesus’ disciples, and he denied the Lord each time. Then a group of servants of the high priest’s household identified him, and he exclaimed: “I am not” (John 18:25, NIV). Notice that the accusers (minors, females, servants) were considered of low social rank in the context. This must have added to Peter’s shame and guilt later on.

The crucial point, however, is that Peter’s weeping led to repentance, to a change of heart and to a true conversion, no matter how painful the process itself. Sometimes that’s what it takes: we need to see ourselves as we really are, to see what’s really in our hearts and what treachery we are capable of—and then we will fall, broken like Peter, before the Lord.

“With blinding tears he [Peter] makes his way to the solitudes of the Garden of Gethsemane and there prostrates himself where he saw his Saviour’s prostrate form when the bloody sweat was forced from His pores by His great agony. Peter remembers with remorse that he was asleep when Jesus prayed during those fearful hours. His proud heart breaks, and penitential tears moisten the sods so recently stained with the bloody sweat drops of God’s dear Son. He left that garden a converted man. He was ready then to pity the tempted. He was humbled and could sympathize with the weak and erring.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 416.

The first half of the book of Acts provides an unquestionable testimony of Peter’s transformation. His preaching and leadership and miracle workings were extraordinary and led to the salvation of many. His work also led to the foundation of the church as the body of Christ. His death, anticipated by Jesus in John 21:18, was received as an honor, for he died in the same manner as his Master.

In what ways have your falls and failures made you more sensitive to the falls and failures of others? How can you learn to minister, out of your pain, to others in theirs?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

What happens after we are convicted of our guilt before God? Scripture lays before us two possible paths—one leads to spiritual paralysis, the other to transformation.

Paralysis. Read Ezra 9:6 and Psalm 38:4. Martin Luther, whose teachings about God’s grace split the political and religious world of his day, wrote about an earlier period of his life, as a young monk, when he frantically attempted to expiate his sense of guilt through fasting and self-punishments. He wrote, “I lost hold of Christ the Savior and comforter and made of him the stock-master and hangman over my poor soul.”—James Kittelson, Luther the Reformer (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishing House, 1986), pp. 78, 79.

Discuss: Consider the experience of Luther and describe how carrying a burden of unresolved guilt can shape us: our thinking, choices, and relationships with others.


What is transformed? Our self-perception (we recognize not only our guilt but our unfathomable value to God, who has provided a remedy for our guilt); our relationship with God (we repent and seek to make our actions conform to His will); our relationship with others (we try to make good, as far as we can, the consequences of our sin).

Consider This: One of the most beautiful themes in Scripture is that of Christ “reconciling” us to God. Ask three people in your class to read the following passages: Romans 5:10, 11; 2 Corinthians 5:17–20; Colossians 1:21, 22. What emotions do you feel as you hear of God’s efforts to draw
Total Forgiveness

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1, NKJV). What does this text promise us? How can we make this promise our own?

God’s forgiveness is so great, so deep, and so wide that it is impossible to understand fully. Even the best quality of human forgiveness cannot compare with that of God. He is so perfect, and we are so flawed; and yet, through the provision God Himself provided in Jesus, we all can have full and complete pardon the moment we claim the promises for ourselves in full faith and surrender to the Lord.

Read the three texts below. How do they shed light to help you understand God’s forgiveness?

Ps. 103:12

Isa. 1:18

Mic. 7:19

The Bible uses allegories from the concrete and familiar realms in order to help us understand the meaning of difficult concepts. As far as we can perceive, snow and wool are good examples of whiteness; the depths of the sea are among the deepest places we can imagine; and nothing can be geographically farther apart than east from west. Yet, these are limited allegories of God’s forgiveness.

In the Abbey of Elstow, a stained-glass window portrays an image inspired in Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress. Christian, the central character, can be seen kneeling at the foot of the Cross. His heavy burden of guilt is rolling away from his shoulders, bringing ineffable relief to his soul. Christian says: “I saw it no more.” The burden was gone. Its pain, sting, anxiety, and shame disappeared forever. Because of our imperfection, selfishness, and defective relationships, it is very hard for us to understand the perfect and total forgiveness of God. We simply can accept it by faith and pray: “Lord, I humbly confess my sins to You and accept Your pardon and cleansing. Amen.”

How can we be sure our sins are forgiven if we don’t feel that they are forgiven? What reasons do we have to believe we’re forgiven, despite our feelings?
us close to Him? How effective are these passages in placing the emotion of guilt within the context of God’s plan for our salvation?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The more clearly we see sin, the more intensely we feel guilt’s power. Help your class explore how we can destroy the negative power of guilt in our lives, while still taking seriously the devastating power of sin.

Life Application: In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel *The Scarlet Letter*, a puritan pastor hides his affair with a young woman while presiding over her punishment for the sin of adultery. He conceals his guilt until it bursts out in a dramatic moment of confession. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, in *The First Circle*, describes a prisoner who compulsively records every bad thought or fault by marking a sheet of paper.

How do you typically handle feelings of guilt? Do you tend to brood on them? Are you driven to try to “make things right”? Do you find yourself drawn to confession—to God or to other people?

Activity: Political theorist John S. Mill saw guilt as a good thing, providing a moral restraint on society and preventing people from harming others. Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche saw guilt as a sign of human repression and weakness. Sigmund Freud, founder of modern psychiatry, considered guilt a psychological sickness, the product of impossible demands placed on people by an overdeveloped conscience.

How would you describe guilt and its function? As a class, develop your own definition of guilt based on your study of Scripture.

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Guilt rarely comes unaccompanied into our lives. It also can bring despair, hopelessness, depression, low self-esteem, anger, and frustration. Close the lesson by pointing class members to the One who longs to gather us into His arms of forgiveness and healing.

When it comes to understanding the power of guilt, Jesus, the guiltless One, chose to walk the path before us.

Challenge class members to make time each day to meditate on Christ’s radical identification with humanity, the fact that He bore our guilt so that we can experience a life free from a paralyzing sense of guilt. Close the class by reading Matthew 11:28–30.
Further Study: “When sin struggles for the mastery in the human heart, when guilt seems to oppress the soul and burden the conscience, when unbelief clouds the mind, who lets in the beams of light? Whose grace is sufficient to subdue sin, and who gives the precious forgiveness and pardons all our sins, expelling the darkness, and making us hopeful and joyful in God?—Jesus, the sin-pardoning Saviour. He is still our Advocate in the courts of heaven; and those whose lives are hid with Christ in God must arise and shine, because the glory of the Lord has risen upon them.”—Ellen G. White, Bible Training School, May 1915. “If you have given offense to your friend or neighbor, you are to acknowledge your wrong, and it is his duty freely to forgive you. Then you are to seek the forgiveness of God, because the brother you have wounded is the property of God, and in injuring him you have sinned against his Creator.”—Ellen G. White, The Faith I Live By, p. 128.

Discussion Questions:

1. Madame Mao, the wife of the former leader of Communist China, Mao Tse-Tung, lived in constant fear and guilt, all because of many of the bad things she had done. She was so paranoid, in fact, so full of guilt, that any sudden noises, any unexpected sounds, would send her into cold sweats or into a fury. It got so bad that she demanded that her staff keep birds away from her compound so she didn’t have to hear them singing. Though an extreme case, what does this tell us about the power of guilt to ruin our lives?

2. What advice would you give to someone who is struggling with guilt over past sins, who claims to have accepted Christ and yet still can’t get rid of the feelings of guilt? How can you help them?

3. In Thursday’s lesson the Bible gave us a number of images to describe God’s forgiveness. Have class members come up with some of their own metaphors to describe the depth of the forgiveness that is found in Jesus for those who will accept it.

4. In a world in which no God existed, could guilt exist? Discuss your answer.

5. As we saw this week, God can use guilt to bring us to faith and repentance. Are there any other “benefits” to guilt? If so, what might they be?
Good Thinking

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Philippians 4:8, NIV).

As one of the most utilized forms of mental health intervention today, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is based on the assumption that most psychological problems are improved by identifying and changing inaccurate and dysfunctional perceptions, thoughts, and behaviors. People with depression tend to interpret facts negatively; people with anxiety tend to look at the future with apprehension; and those with low self-esteem maximize others’ success and minimize their own. CBT, therefore, trains people to identify and change their unhealthy thinking habits into better alternatives that promote desirable behavior and eliminate unwanted ones.

The Bible teaches us about the connection between thoughts and actions (Luke 6:45). Good thought patterns not only are healthy but also provide a way toward integrity: “Do not those who plot evil go astray? But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness” (Prov. 14:22, NIV).

This week we’ll look at some biblical truths that can help us gain control over our mental activity by allowing Christ to take charge of our mind.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 5.
Thoughts: The Root of Behavior

Read Mark 7:21–23 and Luke 6:45. What do these texts tell us about the importance of controlling not just our actions, not just our deeds, not just our words but our thoughts, as well?

People who suffer from impulse-control disorders fail to resist the impulse to steal, to gamble, or to attack someone. Mental health clinicians know that these impulses often are preceded by a certain thought (or chain of thoughts), which leads to the undesirable behavior. Consequently, patients are trained to identify those thought triggers, dispel them immediately, and occupy their minds with something else. In this way, they gain control of their thoughts and avoid the actions to which these wrong thoughts so often lead.

Indeed, sinful acts often are preceded by definite thoughts. (Isn’t this what temptation is all about?) It is the duty of every Christian to learn to identify, with God’s help, the first steps in this process, because dwelling on wrong thoughts leads almost inevitably to sin.

What alternative is proposed by Paul to deal with immoral behavior? Rom. 8:5–8.

Mind and behavior are shown by Paul to be intimately linked. The Spirit-filled mind will seek good deeds, and the sin-dominated mind will bring about sinful deeds. It is not enough to change the behavior for the sake of convenience or to present a righteous face to the world. The heart (mind) needs to be transformed or else the eventual fruits will show the true nature of that heart.

“We need a constant sense of the ennobling power of pure thoughts and the damaging influence of evil thoughts. Let us place our thoughts upon holy things. Let them be pure and true; for the only security for any soul is right-thinking.”—Ellen G. White, The Signs of the Times®, August 23, 1905.

Suppose you had to express, verbally, to others the thoughts you have had during the past 24 hours. What would you say? How embarrassed would you be? What does your answer say to you about the changes you need to make?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Philippians 4:8

The Student Will:

Know: Examine the impact of our thoughts on our words and behavior and the effect of God’s words on redirecting our thinking.

Feel: Sense the power available through the Holy Spirit as we dwell on God’s Word.

Do: Choose to allow the Spirit to shape our thinking as we ponder God’s creative power, His faithful love, and His law.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Wellspring of Action

A What relationship do our thoughts have to what we say and do?

B What difference does it make in our thoughts and feelings when we dwell on God’s words in the Scriptures? How does prayer work to change the directions of our thoughts?

II. Feel: The Power of God’s Words

A Our feelings are closely related to what we tell ourselves. Why is it important to make conscious choices about the words upon which we dwell?

B How can the Spirit, by changing our thoughts, change our feelings?

III. Do: Choose the Spirit

A By purposefully placing ourselves where the Spirit can fill our minds with His way of thinking, we allow Him to control our minds and hearts.

B What can we do to allow the Spirit full access to our thoughts?

C What changes need to take place in our choices of associations and entertainment?

Summary: Our thoughts are the wellspring of our words and actions, and, as such, they need to be surrendered to the control of the Holy Spirit, moment by moment.
Thoughts as a Source of Distress

**What** are the things that really frighten you? What are ways that you can learn to trust the Lord, despite that fear? After all, isn’t the Lord’s power greater than whatever threats you face?

Much suffering can occur through thinking. Psychologist Philip Zimbardo, in his book *Psychology and Life*, reports the case of a young woman taken to a hospital because she was terrified of dying. Apparently there was nothing wrong with her, but she was admitted overnight for observation. Hours later she died. Further investigation showed that years before, a psychic had predicted her death on her twenty-third birthday. This woman died, a victim of her own panic, the day before she would have become 23. No question, people can suffer seriously from their negative thoughts; hence the need of wholesome thinking (tomorrow’s lesson).

Also, just as important to remember: we also adversely can affect others’ thinking by expressing our negativity to others. Words are very powerful tools, either for good or for evil. Our words either build up or tear down. There is life and death in the words we speak. How careful we need to be with the thoughts and sentiments that come out of our mouths.

**Read** Acts 14:2, 15:24, and Galatians 3:1. What do they tell us about the power to impact people negatively?

“If you do not feel lighthearted and joyous, do not talk of your feelings. Cast no shadow upon the lives of others. A cold, sunless religion never draws souls to Christ. It drives them away from Him into the nets that Satan has spread for the feet of the straying.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 488.

Think about times someone’s “mere” words tore you down in a big way. How can you be sure you never do that to anyone else?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Moment by moment, day by day, our thoughts are a potent force that either draw us closer to Christ or take us farther away from His will for our lives.

**Just for Teachers:** Trying to control our thoughts can be like trying to herd fish—you corner one, while five more slip out of your reach. Help your class to understand the powerful role our habitual thought processes—conscious and unconscious—play in shaping our daily Christian walk and explore spiritual tools to help safeguard our minds.

**Opening Activity:** On November 18, 1978, 909 men, women, and children died in a mass suicide-murder pact in a remote Guyanan settlement. The few survivors of the “Jonestown massacre” gave an account of a tumultuous scene, where many parents willingly injected their children with a cyanide solution before drinking the same poison themselves. But an audiotape recording, recovered later, showed that not everyone participated willingly. One woman, Christine Miller, loudly challenged Jim Jones, the charismatic religious leader of the group who presided over the death of his followers. Jones responded as he had countless times through the years to damp down dissent. He urged others in the crowd to “shout down” Christine, and her lone voice of protest was drowned out in an avalanche of mob disapproval.

Jones’s methods of crowd control were not new. Gustav LeBon in his 1895 book, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, explored how an individual’s thoughts may be perverted, controlled, and channeled into action by the power of “mob mentality.” Decades later, Adolf Hitler notoriously employed similar techniques in his use of the mass media.

**Consider This:** We easily forget the sheer power of what happens inside our minds, the incredible ability of thought patterns to impact not only our own lives but the lives of those around us—for good or ill. Do we seriously consider the frightening vulnerability of our thoughts to outside influences—to what we watch, read, or allow ourselves to dwell on?

Explore the simple power of suggestion. Ask your class NOT to think about a pink elephant balancing on a tightrope. How many were able to keep this image from their minds? Ask them to list daily influences that can unconsciously shape their thinking.
Wholesome Thinking

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil. 4:8, NIV).

What is the essence of Paul’s words to us here? What is the key to doing what he says? See also 2 Pet. 3:1, 2.

Remembering, repeating, thinking about, and meditating on the words in the Bible is one of the greatest spiritual blessings available to us, and it is a sure way to cultivate what Peter called “wholesome thinking” (2 Pet. 3:1, NIV). Many people have obtained invaluable blessings by committing to memory treasured Bible texts. When confronted with moments of worry, doubt, fear, frustration, or temptation, they have repeated such thoughts in their minds and have obtained relief and peace through the power of the Holy Spirit.

With so many alluring competitors (TV, computer, etc.), this generation of believers is being tempted to put the Bible aside. It is necessary therefore to make a committed decision to read and reflect upon the Word every day. The Word of God is the only true fortification we have against the mental onslaught of unspiritual distractions that come from the world.

Look again at the text above. Make a list of what things you encounter that are true, pure, lovely, and so forth. What does that list consist of? What do these things have in common? Bring your list to class and share it with others on Sabbath.

Prayer is another way to keep the mind out of trouble. While we talk to God, there is little chance for lustful or other forms of selfish thoughts. Acquiring prayerful habits is a sure protection from sinful thoughts and, consequently, from sinful actions. The Bible is clear: God cares about our thoughts, because our thoughts impact our words, our actions, and our overall well-being. God wants us to have good thoughts because good thoughts (wholesome thinking) are good for us, both physically and mentally. The good news is that through meditating on the Bible, through prayer, and through Spirit-inspired choices on our part, we can keep our minds and hearts on things that will uplift ourselves and others, as well.
I. Making the Connection (Review Luke 6:43–45 and Mark 7:21–23 with your class.)

Thoughts may seem ephemeral. Physiologically, they’re merely the sparking of synapses in our brain. Yet, the message of Jesus’ words is unmistakable: thoughts matter. Eventually we express our innermost convictions and emotions in our choices, speech, and actions. If love is the controlling force of our mind, then, as Ellen G. White points out, “Love can no more exist without revealing itself in outward acts than fire can be kept alive without fuel.”—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 695.

Consider This: Scripture often refers to our actions as “fruit” (karpos). Contrast the “fruit” of those who fail to control their thoughts with the “fruit” of those who surrender their thinking to God (Gal. 5:19–23). Dig deeper into this metaphor. What practical lessons about Christian living can we draw from the natural growth phases of a living plant? Just as the production of fruit first requires a healthy seed, planted well and tended regularly, what must come before this harvest of spiritual “fruit”?

II. Setting Our Perspective (Review Colossians 3:1–17 with your class.)

What is the most crucial step in building a healthy thought life? Read again Colossians 3:1–4. Note the phrases “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ”; “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God”; and “you also will appear with him in glory” (NIV). Now compare this with the similar language of Hebrews 3:1: “who share in the heavenly calling” (NIV).

Paul is reminding his readers that they have had a life-transforming, perspective-altering encounter with their Lord. We see things differently. We are invited to share in Christ’s triumph over death. Our perspective now transcends the finite world. We see, instead, through the lens of eternity.

Thought Question:
What practical changes can this “eternal perspective” bring to the way we think about our career, our family, our finances?
The Thoughts of Our Hearts

Read 1 Kings 8:39, Psalm 19:14, 1 Chronicles 28:9, and 1 Samuel 16:7. What crucial point are these texts making? More important, how should this truth impact us and how we think? Does this truth make you nervous and fearful, or does it give you hope? Or both? Analyze the reason for your answer.

“For you alone know the hearts of all men” (1 Kings 8:39, NIV). The word heart often is used in the Bible as the seat of thoughts and emotions (see Matt. 9:4). Only God has access to the intimacy of our mental activity, to our true intentions, and to our secret yearnings. Nothing, even in the form of a fleeting thought, can be hidden from the Creator.

God’s knowledge of our soul is to our advantage. When people are too discouraged to utter a sensible word of prayer, God knows their need. Humans only can look at the outer appearance and behaviors, and then try to imagine what someone else is thinking; God knows the thoughts in ways others never can.

Likewise, Satan and his angels only can observe, listen, and estimate what goes on inside. “Satan cannot read our thoughts, but he can see our actions, hear our words; and from his long knowledge of the human family, he can shape his temptations to take advantage of our weak points of character.”—Ellen G. White, The Review and Herald, May 19, 1891.

As you make everyday decisions (personal or work-related) or think of other people, pause for a moment and send a quiet prayer to God. Enjoy the understanding of an intimate dialogue that is between you and God alone. Nobody else in the universe is privy to this communication. Allowing Christ into your thinking process will safeguard you from temptation and bring spiritual blessings. This process will, beyond doubt, help you build a closer walk with the Lord.

How does the day’s lesson help you better understand the biblical admonition not to judge others? How many times have your motives been misjudged by those who don’t know your heart? Why, then, is it important not to judge others in return?
III. Input/Output *(Review with your class Philippians 4:8.)*

If a perspective-altering encounter with God provides the foundation for a healthy thought life, how do we then build on this foundation? How important in this process is the simple equation, “garbage in = garbage out”?

**Thought Questions:**

1. Read again Colossians 3:16. What role does the community of believers play in helping us to develop healthy thinking? How important is it to have a safe place to express our fears, our failings, our hopes, and our struggles? What happens when we attempt to be “poker-faced Christians”—keeping everything inside?

2. How far is the spiritual battle to “guard the avenues of our minds” influenced by seemingly mundane considerations, such as getting adequate rest, eating well, maintaining a balanced lifestyle, and rejecting substances that could impair our ability to think clearly?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** The biblical principles we have studied are critically important in today’s world of pervasive mass media. Help your class to take these age-old teachings about guarding the mind and apply them within a modern context.

**Consider This:** How conscious are you of the messages that shape your thoughts each time you turn on the television, log on to the Internet, or open a magazine? What does it mean to cultivate a mindset of “critical evaluation”?

Learn to *talk back* to the media you engage with. If you’re watching a program or reading an article, ask it these questions: “What are you trying to get me to believe? What assumptions, values, and worldview underlie the messages you’re giving me? Are these acceptable to my worldview? Do they line up with my values and the “eternal perspective” given to me by Christ?”

**Activities:**

1. Give each person in the class a page from a magazine or newspaper. Ask him or her to spend a few minutes looking at the articles and advertisements; then ask each person to share with the class two or three values or assumptions that, although unstated, are still being communicated. Ask
The Peace of Christ in Our Hearts

Read Colossians 3:1–17. What are the specific actions that we are called upon to do in order to live the kind of life in Christ we are promised?

This passage takes us to the root of moral and immoral behaviors, the heart and mind. It also points at the only One who can work goodness in us by governing our thoughts, Jesus Christ: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (Col. 3:15, NIV). Note expressions such as “set your hearts,” “set your minds,” “put on love,” “let the peace of Christ,” “let the word of Christ.” They indicate that avoiding sin and acquiring virtue are matters of choice and preparation, not improvisation. Sin can be overcome only by setting hearts and minds on things from above. Christ is the source of virtue and goodness. Christ, when allowed by us, is the only One capable of bringing true peace to our minds.

Our minds, then, being the core of our existence, need to be put under the care of Jesus. It is central to the development of character, and it cannot be left to the mercy of circumstances. Sinful tendencies and corrupt environments both work against purity in thought. Yet, the Lord does not leave us abandoned; He extends His help and protection to all who want it. “Our thoughts, if stayed upon God, will be guided by divine love and power.” Thus, we must “live on the words that proceed from the lips of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, Mind, Character, and Personality, vol. 2, p. 669.

In the middle of spiritual warfare, a person may be tempted and find it very difficult to dispel certain adverse thoughts. In those moments, it may be easier to distract oneself by changing place or activity or seeking good company. This may permit a change that facilitates prayer and assurance.

Thought is a very mysterious human process. We really don’t know for sure even what it is or exactly how it works. In most cases, though, in the inner recesses of our consciousness, we alone make the choice regarding what we are going to think about. A thought can be changed in an instant. We simply have to make the choice to change it. (In some cases, though, mental illness can affect a person’s ability to change their thoughts easily, and so professional treatment [if available] can be extremely beneficial.) What about your thoughts? Next time the wrong ones come, what are you going to do?
the class to discuss in what way, if any, these assumptions challenge our Christian values.

Violent video games are front and center in the ongoing debate about the link between violence in the media and increased aggression. In the game series Grand Theft Auto, players engage in simulated theft, violence, street-gang activity, sexual activity, and profanity. Ask your class to develop a list of simple principles that could help Christian parents guide their teenagers through the difficult world of gaming and media. Just as important, discuss how these principles could be communicated effectively and positively to teenagers.

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Blocking negative influences is only one side of the battle to guard our minds. Encourage members of your class to search for practical ways to cultivate “God’s peace” in their thought life.

Thought Questions:

Do you have peace of mind? We often focus solely on the admonition contained in Philippians 4:8, but what theme do you see repeated in the verses that “bookend” this text (vss. 7 and 9)? What does this emphasis on “God’s peace” say to you about an important end result of learning to guard our thoughts?

Activity: Create two lists on a chalkboard or large sheet of paper. Ask your class to list the most powerful “disturbers of the peace” when it comes to our thoughts (such as worries about work or finances, anger, temptations, and so on.).

Next to each item ask the class to list specific promises or passages from God’s Word that could help someone combat this specific negative thought pattern and find God’s peace. Challenge class members to continue this during the coming week: whenever assailed by negativity, deliberately seek out a suitable “antidote” in Scripture, a piece of music, a devotional book, or in nature.

Reflection: End the class with a period of silent reflection and prayer. Ask class members to consider the health of their own thoughts and to bring their struggles before God. Ask them to reflect on these questions: Do I have a strong foundation for a healthy thought life? Have I had a life-transforming, perspective-altering encounter with God? Am I trying to wage the battle in my own strength, or do I instead ask God daily to reign in my heart and mind? What specific changes could I make this week to help focus my thoughts on that which brings me closer to God?
Further Study: “More precious than the golden wedge of Ophir is the power of right thought. We need to place a high value upon the right control of our thoughts. . . . Every impure thought defiles the soul, impairs the moral sense, and tends to obliterate the impressions of the Holy Spirit. It dims the spiritual vision, so that men cannot behold God. The Lord may and does forgive the repenting sinner; but though forgiven, the soul is marred. All impurity of speech and thought must be shunned by him who would have clear discernment of spiritual truth. . . . We are to use every means that God has placed within our reach for the government and cultivation of our thoughts. We are to bring our minds into harmony with Christ’s mind. His truth will sanctify us, body, soul, and spirit, and we shall be enabled to rise above temptation.”—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, August 23, 1905.

Discussion Questions:

1. In class, go over the list you made on Tuesday and compare yours with those of others in your class. What can you learn from one another’s picks?

2. What is the meaning of “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”? 2 Cor. 10:5. How can we learn to do that?

3. How do the Internet, TV programs, recreational reading, advertisements, et cetera, work in your mind? How much of your thinking and doing may be affected by these sources? Why do we fool ourselves if we believe that what we read or watch doesn’t impact our thinking?

4. What are ways in which our actions, even subconsciously, reveal the thoughts in our minds? How does body language show what’s going on inside?

5. What advice would you give to someone who is struggling with impulsive behavior? What promises can you present to them from the Bible? Why is it also important to keep before them all the promises of forgiveness and acceptance through Jesus? How can you keep them from giving up in complete despair, believing that, because they have not achieved the victory that they want, their relationship with God is somehow deficient? How can you help them learn never to give up on the promises of forgiveness, no matter how unworthy they feel?

6. How careful are you with your words, which simply reflect your thoughts? How can you be sure your words always are working for good and not for evil?
Hope Against Depression

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Psalm 42, 31:10, 39:2–7, 32:1–5, 1 John 1:9, Mic. 7:1–7, Rev. 21:2–4.

Memory Text: “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18, NIV).

Depression, or extreme discouragement to the point of becoming disabled, has been experienced since the inception of sin. A number of Bible characters displayed symptoms that probably would meet today’s diagnostic criteria for depression.

Hopelessness is a symptom of depression, and the biblical message of hope can offer us so much in contrast to a world that offers so little. All people, at times, face moments of extreme discouragement for any variety of reasons. No wonder, then, that the Word of God is filled with promises that can give all of us, no matter our situation, reasons to hope for a better future, if not in this world, then certainly in the next.

Of course, when depression is severe, it’s important to get professional help when possible. The Lord can work through these people to help those who are in need of special care. After all, regardless of your relationship with God, were you physically ill you would seek the help of a doctor or health professional. It’s the same with those who are suffering from severe clinical depression, which often is caused by a genetic predisposition and chemical imbalance in the brain. Thus, even Christians, at times might need the help of professionals.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 12.
The Downcast Soul

Read Psalm 42. How can you relate to what’s being expressed there? What hope is offered?

David experienced serious mood alterations on many occasions because of unfair persecution (for instance, Saul and Israel’s adversaries). In addition, his violation of God’s commandments brought about a deep sense of guilt (Ps. 51:4), and guilt often is associated with depression.

When one sees oneself negatively (“I am dumb”), looks at the world pessimistically (“life is always unfair”), and contemplates the future hopelessly (“it will never improve”), chances of depression become high. This attitude is called “catastrophic thinking.”

Christians may opt for alternative ways to interpret things, a way that incorporates God’s plan and messages into the equation.

Consider the following alternatives:

• How to look at yourself. You were created in God’s image, to rule over creation (Gen. 1:26, 27). God’s traits, albeit marred, are still in you. Jesus Christ, through His sacrifice, rescued you from eternal death and granted you privileges—chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9, NIV). Before God’s eyes you have infinite worth.

• The world. It is true that the world is rotten and full of evil. At the same time, there also are many right, noble, and admirable things upon which (Phil. 4:8) to ponder. Furthermore, Christians can understand the existence of evil without despair, as they know its origin and ultimate fate.

• The future. What a wonderful future is reserved for God’s children! The Bible is full of promises with the assurance of salvation (Ps. 37:39).

Sadness is not a sin. After all, look at how often Jesus felt sad. We mustn’t feel guilty because of sadness or depression. In some cases we have good reasons to be hurting. How can you use the biblical truths stated above to help you cope with whatever struggles you are facing now?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Psalm 34:18

The Student Will:

Know: Describe the mental and physical symptoms of discouragement and depression experienced by biblical characters, as well as by Christians today.
Feel: Experience the power of hope that comes from talking and listening to God and dwelling on what He has done.
Do: Focus on the forgiveness, saving mercy, goodness, and provisions of God for our future as an antidote for sadness, discouragement, and depression.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Tears for Food
   A What deep sorrow, discouragement, or depression did such people as Elijah, David, and Jesus go through?
   B What are the mental and physical symptoms that accompany depression?
   C How does forgiveness and acceptance from God relieve depression?

II. Feel: Hope
   A How can prayer and dwelling on what God does or has done transform feelings of helplessness and negativity?
   B What is the best source of hope?
   C How does sharing our pain with others contribute to our healing?

III. Do: Outward and Upward
   A Sharing our pain and sorrow can be helpful, but we also need to look outward and concern ourselves with the needs of others.
   B What kinds of positive assurances of God’s care regarding our self-worth and hope for the future should we dwell on?

Summary: Deep feelings of sorrow, disappointment, and guilt can lead to depression. Sharing these feelings with others and in prayer, and accepting God’s provisions of forgiveness and a bright future, free from evil, can aid in healing depression.
The Consequences of Discouragement

“‘I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am troubled; O Lord, come to my aid!’” (Isa. 38:14, NIV).

The biblical description above leaves no doubt about the strong pain manifested by Hezekiah’s crying out loud. There are cultural differences in manifesting emotional distress. People in certain contexts suffer in silence, avoiding any obvious or visible complaint. Others (like Hezekiah) use moaning and wailing when going through sorrow. There also are personal differences; some people are able to approach death with more tranquillity than can others.

Depressive symptoms commonly are found in individuals with a prolonged or terminal disease. Hezekiah was suffering from illness, and its gravity announced death. Thus, he experienced a spell of depression as described in Isaiah 38. Depressive symptoms are so painful that many will attempt suicide to end this horrible experience. In fact, more than 10 percent of clinically depressed patients kill themselves. Clearly, clinical depression is a serious matter and must be treated as such.

What symptoms are expressed in the following texts?

Ps. 31:10 _________________________________

Ps. 77:4 _________________________________

Ps. 102:4, 5 ______________________________

1 Kings 19:4 ______________________________

Depression causes a variety of painful manifestations: (a) a deep sense of sadness (sorrow), (b) a lack of motivation to do anything, even enjoyable activities, (c) a change in appetite and either weight loss or gain, (d) sleep disturbances, sleeping either not enough or too much, (e) feelings of low self-esteem, (f) poor reasoning and memory, and (g) thoughts of death and suicide. Some people experience just one or two symptoms, while others manifest several and suffer for months until the episode ends. In any case, the burden of depression is enormous and must be relieved by medical and spiritual intervention.

We all suffer sadness and discouragement in one form or another for one reason or another at one time or another. What things bring you down, and why? Recall incidents of God’s past guidance in your life. What hope and encouragement can you draw from remembering the Lord’s leading? Why is it important to keep those memories alive?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The vicissitudes of life are such that no human being can long endure them without experiencing a touch of hopelessness, or worse, depression. God has given us a way to stay connected to Him that we might live victoriously, fearlessly, hopefully. That way is found in the disciplines of the spiritual life.

Just for Teachers: This week’s study examines the loss of hope that results from depression. Whether one’s depression is the result of some innate chemical imbalance or the toll exacted by some hidden sin or stressor, God cannot fully help us until we understand our utter inability to handle life on our own. Your goal in Step 1 is to get the class thinking about those moments in life when we come to the end of our capacity to improve our situation.

Opening Activity: Share and discuss the following story with your class. On October 7, 2008, news outlets reported a grizzly murder-suicide that happened in a posh gated community on the outskirts of Los Angeles, California, U.S.A. Facing a deepening financial crisis, 45-year-old Karthik Rajaram shot six family members as they slept in their beds then turned the gun on himself. Rajaram wrote in his suicide note that, given his situation, he had only two options. He could kill himself, in which case his family would go on suffering because he would not be there to help provide for them. Or he could kill everyone and permanently solve what really was a temporary problem. He chose the latter, believing it to be a more honorable choice.

Discuss: Ask your students to share moments in their lives when they felt hopeless. Did they ever have thoughts of harming themselves or others? How did they ultimately pull out of their depressive state? What did they learn about themselves and their capacity to “handle” life during these times?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: The goal of this Explore section is to examine the human condition and God’s plan to help us deal with it. As the lesson points out, God is extremely concerned about us, His special creation.
Relief From Depression

Read Psalm 39:2–7. What happened when David remained silent? And what was the result of his speaking up?

Like most emotional disorders, depression necessitates that the sufferer speak about his or her struggles. This act alone can begin to initiate healing. Approaching the Lord in fervent and sincere prayer is a safe way to release tension and psychological pain. Often more is needed, but this can be a good start.

A basic coping strategy for depression consists of talking to a friend (or a therapist) who knows how to listen and, even better, who knows how to help access more intensive resources, if needed. There is a healing effect in verbalizing thoughts and feelings. The church community can provide an excellent context to help the discouraged, but often this is insufficient, especially when professional care is required. Nevertheless, it is important for anyone going through hard times and who feels discouraged or even depressed to have someone trustworthy to whom they can talk. Sometimes merely talking to someone can go a long way toward helping a person feel better.

Read Psalm 55:17. What promise is there? Why should this promise mean so much to us?

The counselor’s appointment, if possible at all, may not be available until next week. But like David—who learned how to get help any hour of the day or any day of the week—we, too, can turn to the Lord at any time. David knew that the Lord heard his voice, and that greatly encouraged him.

Even secular psychologists are recommending that clients who believe in prayer pray. All of us, even when not suffering with something such as clinical depression, can experience the impact of how praying to the Lord does help to make us feel better. No matter who we are or how deep our discouragement, having a relationship with God can go a long way in bringing us hope and encouragement and healing.

Ellen G. White once described prayer as “the opening of the heart to God as to a friend.”—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 533. Though prayer doesn’t always solve all our problems, how does it help us deal with them?
When we hurt, He hurts. When we need help, He arrives on time, and before on time, because He anticipates our need.

I. Without and Within (Read Luke 21:26 and Romans 7:18–20 with your class.)

The apostle, in his famous diagnosis of the problem of sin, wrote, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me” (Rom. 7:18–20, NKJV). The enemy is within, seeking to undermine our ability to do what pleases God. Thought of another way, one might say that our sin problem renders us powerless to live hopeful lives in a hopeless age.

In short, we need help. To live our lives by Protagoras’s credo that “Man is the measure of all things” is to be foolhardy. Fear, sadness, and depression are the results of sin, and until we accept that we have a sin problem, finding the antidote (Jesus) to these ills will prove elusive.

Consider This: Adam and Eve were created perfect and placed in a perfect world. Given their perfect environment, why did they still have a need for God? What does their need for God in their sinless state say to us about our own need of Him in our fallen one?

II. The Call to Worship (Read Psalm 42:1–5 and 1 Peter 5:7 with your class.)

The psalmist David understood the ups and downs of life. In the rocks and caves that were his bedroom during the years he spent on the run from Saul, David held out hope that he would once again see God’s countenance. The word countenance refers to one’s appearance, especially the expression on the face. In his night of struggle, the psalmist still had fixed in his mind the picture of a God whose face is turned toward him and whose expression is one of love and care.

How did he manage to retain such a picture in challenging times? For one, David worshiped. He had grown accustomed to God’s presence in His life because he was intentional about seeking that presence. Psalm 42 was written to God and sung in worship to Him. It was a part of David’s worship regimen, his personal connection with His God.

David used his worship time to praise God, but he also saw it as a way
The Need for Forgiveness

How did David find relief for his agony? Ps. 32:1–5; see also 1 John 1:9. How can we find this same thing for ourselves?

The guilt produced by unconfessed sins may become extremely painful. The expressions used by David are a clear indication of intense inward pain. Psalm 32 and other passages in Psalms show the severity of David’s emotional distress.

When we meet sufferers of depression, we must be extremely careful not to blame them for not having confessed their sins! Nor should we simply conclude that they are wicked people, and that’s why they are in distress. It is unfortunate that many people seem to be able to offer concern and understanding to those suffering from an organic malady, true clinical depression, but tend to be quite judgmental in dealing with mental or emotional turmoil brought about by their own wrong actions.

Edgar Allen Poe in his “Tell-Tale Heart” refers to the story of a man who committed murder and hid the victim’s body under the floorboards of the room in which the murder had been committed. He hoped to leave his guilt hidden with the body, but a strong sense of remorse grew within him. One day he heard the victim’s heartbeat; and the beat grew louder and louder. Later it became clear that the pounding was coming not from the grave below but, rather, from his own heart.

At the same time, too, there are people who, having confessed their sins, still suffer greatly from a sense of guilt. They often feel unworthy of forgiveness and lament the horrible suffering that they have brought through their sins, even though they have confessed and are, by faith, forgiven by God. This, too, can be a great source of emotional distress. In such cases, it’s important to focus on God’s promises of healing and of acceptance, even for the worst of sins. We can’t undo the past; what we can do, by God’s grace, is seek to learn from our past mistakes and, to whatever degree possible, make restitution for whatever wrong we have done. After all, all we can do is surrender to God and seek His mercy, grace, and healing.

Many, having confessed their sins, still struggle with guilt over them. Why is it so important that we acknowledge our sins, take responsibility for them, and learn to move on and get past whatever wrongs we have done?
to unload on God, to cast all his cares upon Him (1 Pet. 5:7). Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—God in human flesh—prioritized His devotional life so much that not even exhaustion would prevent Him from rising early and seeking the presence of His Father (Mark 1:35).

Consider This: Prominent in the first angel’s message of Revelation is the call to worship “‘Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’” (Rev. 14:7, NKJV). If worship is commanded by God, why do His followers often forego this daily spiritual exercise? How might a lack of personal and corporate worship experiences influence one’s mental well-being and overall outlook on life?

III. The Call to Unceasing Prayer (Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17 and Psalm 39:2–7 with your class.)

In *Celebration of Discipline*, author Richard Foster writes, “In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God’s thoughts after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things he loves, to will the things he wills. Progressively, we are taught to see things from his point of view.”—(San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), pp. 33, 34. Prayer is the most intimate means by which God shares Himself with humanity.

Tuesday’s lesson highlights the need for the emotionally challenged to speak about their troubles to someone. In Psalm 39 we are told that David suffered deep anguish of soul and inner discomfort when he kept silent, when he tried to deal with his inner turmoil alone.

Perhaps this is why the apostle Paul encourages the Thessalonian believers to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Our English language does not really capture the true essence of this verse. The literal meaning of this verse is “incessantly pray.” The admonition of the Scripture is never to allow the connection with heaven to be broken by anything or anyone. Through this connection, God speaks peace to our worries, hope to our fears, and joy to our sorrows.

Consider This: In Luke 18:1, Jesus spoke a parable to His disciples and said, “Men always ought to pray and not lose heart” (NKJV). Did you know that during the time of Christ, it was taught that three times a day was the optimal amount of time to seek God? Anything more than this was thought to weary God. Do we sometimes fall prey to
Hope Against Distress

What was the prophet’s way out of the surrounding social and interpersonal problems? Mic. 7:1–7.

In just the first six verses, Micah describes a complete smorgasbord of immoral, unethical, and aggressive acts present in his time. Oppression and abuse of various kinds, lack of respect and consideration, corruption, and deceit all have been present since the inception of sin. We all face it even today. Just take today’s newspaper, and you can find a direct correlation with Israel’s misery at that time. This sociological chaos becomes especially hurtful when touching close to home—neighbor, friend, spouse, child, parent (Mic. 7:5, 6).

Highly defective interpersonal relationships cause much stress and are associated with depression. Clearly stated by Micah (vs. 7), the conclusive ingredient to survival in the middle of a crisis is hope.

Hope is essential to living our lives with a reasonable amount of mental health. Hope must be alive even for the unbeliever—youth in search of employment must hope that they’ll find a job, a lost traveler will hope to find his way, and investors who have lost their money must believe that there will be better times. Living with zero hope leads to meaninglessness and death.

When Italian philosopher and poet Dante Alighieri (A.D. 1265–1321) attempted to describe hell in his Divine Comedy, he envisioned a big sign at the entrance saying: “Abandon all hope, ye who enter here!” The worst possible punishment is to deprive someone of hope.

The kind of hope presented in the Bible goes beyond positive anticipation. It encompasses an eventual perfect solution and salvation based on redemption through Jesus Christ. The historic “blessed hope” of Seventh-day Adventists must become the focal point of our lives. Hoping for Jesus’ return helps us to gain perspective over the many unpleasant things that surround us and allows us to look in confidence toward eternity.

Look at these promises. What hope is offered there for us? Isa. 65:17, 2 Pet. 3:13, Rev. 21:2–4. Why, in one sense, is this the only hope for any of us?

A vision of faith in the new creation can reassure the suffering soul. In the same way that a woman in childbirth contemplates the final result of her child being born and soon “forgets the anguish” (John 16:21, NIV), the troubled soul can, by God’s grace, gain hope with the vision of a caring God who promises us a new world without any of the things that bring us so much sadness in this world.
such thinking, such as when taking the same problems to God again and again?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: This week’s apply section examines how staying connected to God helps to keep us emotionally balanced and ready to help lift the burdens of those around us.

Thought Questions:

1. In John 15:1–8, Jesus gives the disciples the secret to living a fruitful, healthy life: abiding in Christ. What does this mean in practice? How are we to “abide in Christ”?

2. What role does the Holy Spirit play in helping us to remain hopeful in the face of life’s trials? What does Romans 15:13 tell us about the connection between the Holy Spirit and our ability to hope in God?


Application Questions:

1. Read Isaiah 53:6. In what ways do you typically turn away from God, the Source of your strength? At what times in your life are you most prone to wander?

2. Isaiah 53:4 says, “He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (NKJV). If Jesus is willing to carry our griefs and sorrows, why do we insist on carrying them ourselves?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Share the following activity with your students. Begin by distributing to each class member a 3×5 card and a writing utensil if needed. Ask the class members to complete the following statements. If time permits, allow those who wish to share their responses.

Activity:
1. I feel stressed when . . .
2. I get depressed when . . .
3. I find hope when . . .
4. I choose to give my stresses to God by . . .
**Further Study:** Read and reflect on Matthew 26:36–43. Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow “‘to the point of death’” (vs. 38, NIV). Visualize the agony of Jesus, with lack of social support and betrayal from His disciples, seeming separation from God, and the load of guilt from humanity. His suffering exceeds any depressive episode experienced by mortals.

“As He neared Gethsemane, He became strangely silent. He had often visited this spot for meditation and prayer; but never with a heart so full of sorrow as upon this night of His last agony. Throughout His life on earth He had walked in the light of God’s presence. When in conflict with men who were inspired by the very spirit of Satan, He could say, ‘He that sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him.’ John 8:29. But now He seemed to be shut out from the light of God’s sustaining presence. Now He was numbered with the transgressors. The guilt of fallen humanity He must bear. Upon Him who knew no sin must be laid the iniquity of us all. So dreadful does sin appear to Him, so great is the weight of guilt which He must bear, that He is tempted to fear it will shut Him out forever from His Father’s love. Feeling how terrible is the wrath of God against transgression, He exclaims, ‘My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 685.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **What great role can your local church community play in helping those who are suffering depression or emotional distress for any reason at all?** Whatever your resources are, no matter how limited, what more can be done to help those in need?

2. **How can you help someone who prays, who counsels, who loves the Lord and who trusts in Him, and yet still feels overwhelmed with sadness, even if he or she doesn’t understand why?** How can you help him or her not give up his or her faith but cling to the hope and promises given in the Word?

3. **One of the greatest mistakes people can make is to believe that because they feel so down, so depressed, so hopeless, it means that God has abandoned them. Why is that, first of all, not true?** What Bible characters (such as Elijah, Jeremiah in jail, John the Baptist in jail, Jesus in Gethsemane) can you point them to in order to show them that sadness and discouragement do not mean God has forsaken them? How can you help them learn that feelings are not a good barometer of faith?
Resilience

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Job 19:25; James 5:10, 11; Ruth 1; Esther 2; 2 Cor. 11:23–28; Phil. 4:11–13.

Memory Text: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging” (Psalm 46:1–3, NIV).

Resilience is the process of facing adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or extreme stress and “bouncing back” successfully without becoming too negatively affected by the experience. The concept has received growing attention because of the usefulness of possessing a reasonable amount of resilience in the face of life’s difficulties. After all, who among us doesn’t face major stressors, in one form or another? The question is, How can we have the resilience to deal with what happens and not be destroyed emotionally in the process?

In the 1960s, Victor and Mildred Goertzel wrote Cradles of Eminence, which presented biographical analyses of more than seven hundred subjects who went through great childhood adversity (broken homes, financial struggles, physical and/or psychological handicaps, etc.) and yet achieved great success. The book was updated in 2004.

The Bible also tells us of individuals who had to face adversity but who, through God’s grace, bounced back and overcame their problems. Despite difficult circumstances and even flaws in their characters, they were able to be used by God because they had the resilience to press on, even amid adverse circumstances.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 19.
The Patience of Job

Read James 5:10, 11. What is it about Job that makes him an example to be emulated? See also Job 1–3.

A woman who underwent counseling to recover from a serious crisis told her friends that one idea transmitted by the counselor was key to her successful recovery. “What helped me most,” she said, “was the counselor insisting that my painful circumstances would come to an end. ‘It looks dark and unending now,’ the counselor used to say, ‘but it will not last too much longer.’ This thought helped me gain resilience.” In other words, the counselor kept the woman’s hope alive.

How can we grow in patience? George Goodman of England once received a young man who needed to be prayed for. He expressed his need directly: “Mr. Goodman, I wish you would pray for me that I might have patience.”

The elderly man responded, “Yes, I will pray for you that you may have tribulation.”

“Oh no, sir,” the young man replied, “it is patience that I want.”

“I understand,” said Goodman, “and I will pray for you that you may have tribulation.” The Bible teacher opened his Bible and read Romans 5:3 to the amazed young man: “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience.”

The story of Job offers a supreme example of resilience. Earlier in his life, Job had understood that God is merciful and righteous. He did not understand the reasons for his suffering; he did not find support from his wife; his property and children were destroyed, and then he contracted a horrible disease. And yet, somehow amid it all, he never lost his faith in God and endured until the tragedy ended.

Read Job 19:25. What hope did Job cling to here? How can we better learn to cling to this hope in our own adversity, as well?

Think about times you were going through something terrible. What hope sustained you? What words spoken to you were helpful? Which ones were not so helpful, or even harmful? What did you learn that would enable you to better help someone who is going through great adversity now?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Philippians 4:11–13

The Student Will:

Know: Describe the positive outcomes that come from suffering that is endured with patience and trust in God.

Feel: Nurture the development of rest and hope in God, regardless of how terrible circumstances may seem.

Do: Persevere in clinging to God and trusting in His care, whatever happens.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Perfect Work of Suffering

A. What kinds of benefits can come from suffering patiently endured?

B. How does Joseph’s story illustrate resilience and perseverance under trial?

C. How did Ruth support Naomi in her suffering? What can we learn from Ruth’s example about supporting those who are suffering?

D. Job’s questions to God about his trials were never really answered. What can we learn from God’s responses to Job?

II. Feel: Learning to Be Content

A. How can we learn to be content in whatever circumstances God gives us?

B. Peace comes from having complete confidence in God’s ability to care for us. What Bible verses help us review the history of God’s care of those who are suffering?

III. Do: Unfaltering Trust

A. How can trials teach us to submit more completely to God’s far-reaching oversight?

B. When the going is good, it’s much easier to trust in God. What is it about trusting in God when times are difficult that strengthens faith?

Summary: Resilience under trial comes from learning to be patient and have faith in God’s foresight, strength, and unfailing goodness to us, regardless of what happens.
Joseph in Captivity

Read Genesis 37:19–28 and Genesis 39:12–20 and try to put yourself in Joseph’s sandals. Think how discouraged he must have been. Think of the potential for anger and bitterness that could have, even justifiably, been his. Though the Bible doesn’t tell us in detail what his emotions were, it’s not hard to imagine the pain he suffered from such betrayal and treachery.

Nevertheless, Joseph turned to the Lord at these junctures, and in the end, good things came out of the events. After having been sold by his brothers, Joseph actually experienced his conversion and a much closer relationship with God. “He had been told of the Lord’s promises to Jacob, and how they had been fulfilled—how, in the hour of need, the angels of God had come to instruct, comfort, and protect him. And he had learned of the love of God in providing for men a Redeemer. Now all these precious lessons came vividly before him. Joseph believed that the God of his fathers would be his God. He then and there gave himself fully to the Lord.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 213, 214.

When he was thrown in prison unjustly, the experience opened the path to the court of Pharaoh to accomplish the mission to save many souls and his own people.

What do the following texts tell us about how bad situations can be turned to good?

*Rom. 5:3–5*

*2 Cor. 1:3, 4*

*2 Cor. 1:8, 9*

*2 Tim. 1:11, 12*

God does not want us to suffer needlessly. In fact, the environment Jesus has prepared for us in heaven is tearless and painless (*Rev. 21:4*). But as we wait for that promise to be fulfilled, it seems certain that pain is the path to learning certain lessons. Character development, empathy, humility, discipleship, understanding of good and evil—these are some of the lessons we can learn. Although it is difficult to think of the benefits of suffering, especially in the midst of trial, we can ask God for the necessary strength to pass through difficulties.

Have you ever had a terrible experience that in the end brought some good, some benefit? How can this help you learn to trust the Lord in any adversity, even when nothing good seems likely to result?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Even the most difficult moments of despair—those that bring us through the “valley of the shadow of death” and that threaten to break us—are opportunities to grow in God’s grace by cultivating emotional, mental, and spiritual resilience.

The sky fills with raptors, their bodies dark spots on cloudless blue. They circle far above the water, seemingly lazy and without intention. Finally one breaks off, tucking its wings to enter a freefall, a tearing and headlong dive. For a moment, one of the largest, most majestic lords of the sky becomes a creature of water, completely consumed. An eternal second later, the water’s surface breaks again, this time as powerful wings pump through waves and then finally air, lifting the heavy, wet bird to the sky, a fish gripped in its claws.

This act unfolds on every continent (except Antarctica) near the bodies of water where osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) make their home. Ospreys overwinter on continents throughout the southern hemisphere and make annual grueling and treacherous journeys back to their ancestral homes north of the equator. Traveling between one hundred and two hundred miles a day, they chart a course back to the places of their birth in order to mate, incubate, hatch, and fledge their offspring. One visceral account of a single female osprey en route to the Pacific Northwest was captured on film in March 2009 by a birder from Phoenix, Arizona, who traveled to the desert to photograph the blooms and birds of spring. He focused his camera on a large raptor flying in his direction and snapped a picture of what later turned out, to his amazement, to be an osprey flying over the desert.

**Consider This:** A bird that depends upon fish to live is spotted flying over the desert! If that’s not remarkable enough, this same bird, already many hundreds, if not thousands, of miles into her journey, has still farther to go and more difficult territory to traverse. Throughout our lives, many of us will pass through similar, figurative deserts, harrowing experiences that seem impossible to endure, hard journeys that test our faith in God’s love. But just as God ordained the osprey’s difficult annual migration, so He has allowed each of us to face our share of trials and tribulations. How does the osprey’s journey mirror the faith and resilience we are called upon to exercise in our own faith journeys?
Naomi

What are some of the misfortunes experienced by Naomi? Ruth 1.

Leaving one’s country to settle somewhere else is always scary, especially when the departure is motivated by the need to survive. The famine in Judah forced Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons to emigrate to the country of Moab, an agricultural area where they could obtain food. The Moabites were an idolatrous people (Judg. 10:6) whose practices clashed with Jewish beliefs. This, in itself, must have produced significant turmoil to the newcomers. Sometime after having settled, Naomi’s husband died. Mother and sons found themselves in a foreign land, degraded to the condition of widow and orphans, without protection and subject to additional disgrace. Then Naomi’s sons, Mahlon and Kilion, married local women. This fact may have brought conflict to the family, at least in the beginning, because of significant religious differences. Although the law did not specifically prohibit marriages between Jews and Moabites, it was stipulated that Moabites, or their descendants, could not enter the assembly of the Lord until after ten generations (Deut. 23:3).

Later on, Mahlon and Kilion, whose names meant “sickness” and “wasting,” respectively, also died. It is hard to imagine a more tragic situation in the life of Naomi—no one alive from her close family and the remaining kin far away in Bethlehem.

What was the turning point in Naomi’s life? How did God repair the severe adversities suffered by Naomi? Ruth 1:16–18, 4:13–17.

At the deepest moment of trouble, Naomi’s daughter-in-law Ruth served as God-sent emotional support. Naomi must have been a remarkable woman to have inspired the devotion of her two daughters-in-law, especially Ruth, who accepted the God of Israel and made the firm decision to care for her mother-in-law for life in a land whose inhabitants were, historically, her enemies.

Chapters 2 through 4 convey a beautiful succession of events that ended up in a happy family arrangement. Naomi left behind untold suffering and lived to witness the marriage of Ruth to Boaz and the birth of her grandson Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David.

However much we ultimately need to trust the Lord and surrender everything to Him, at times we also need human help. When was the last time you really needed someone’s help? What did you gain from that experience?
Learning Cycle  CONTINUED

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Job: The Source of Suffering  *(Review Job 1:8–10 and Job 2:5 with your class.)*

The story of Job is one of the few in the Bible that gives a glimpse into the divine rationale that allows for suffering to take place. Job 1:6–12 and Job 2:1–6 reveal that the calamities Job faced were linked to the larger conflict between God and Satan. Satan sought to prove that Job, the most blameless and upright man on earth *(Job 1:8)*, was faithful to God only because of his soft, cushy life—specifically because he had material riches *(Job 1:10)* and was blessed with physical health and well-being *(Job 2:5)*. Further, we learn that Satan called Job’s faithfulness into question before the heavenly host of God.

**Consider This:** What lesson is there in knowing that the origins of Job’s suffering are linked directly to the universal conflict between good and evil? The story of Job lingers as a reminder that although we, like Job, may not understand the reason for our suffering, we can be assured the root cause is the same. How can this knowledge enable our faith and spirits to endure our darkest trials with resilience?

II. Trials of Faith  *(Review Job 12–14 with your class.)*

In chapters 3, 7, 9, 10, 12–14, 16, 17, 19, 21, 23, 24, 26–31, we confront the personal account of Job’s perseverance to hold on to his faith amid a struggle to reconcile his circumstances with his concept of God as just and loving. Here we see Job stretched to the limits of his capacity—physically, mentally, and spiritually. He laments his own birth, asserting the futility of life. He wishes he were dead. He says that God shattered him and vacillates between despairing of God’s dealings with him altogether and asserting God’s power as a Redeemer in his life, a Savior he longs for.

**Consider This:** Job’s crisis of faith is familiar to anyone who has experienced senseless tragedy and profound personal loss. We know that
Esther’s Days of Stress

What were some of the adversities, struggles, and pressures faced by Esther?

Esther 2:6, 7

Esther 2:10

Esther 2:21, 22

Esther 4:4–17

Esther 7:3, 4; 8:3

Since early life Esther had been an orphan. Although she was adopted by her older cousin Mordecai, the stigma of parentless childhood was most surely difficult. In spite of this, Esther grew up as a balanced, determined, and capable young woman.

After she became queen, Esther did not reveal her nationality or family background. This was a particularly heavy challenge. Surrounded by food, luxuries, and practices of life in the court, Esther had to somehow try to maintain her Jewish faith and identity. In addition, the risk of being identified as a member of the Jewish people was real, and the consequences of hiding her identity were uncertain.

Esther also had to take to the king the bad news that officers were conspiring to kill him. This was not an easy task because, if the plot could not be substantiated, Esther and her cousin could be blamed for starting rumors, and who knew the results?

But the greatest responsibility placed on Esther was being left as the sole channel to save her nation. Mordecai asked her to mediate on behalf of the Jews, which she could not do without risking her life. When she hesitated, her cousin put still more pressure on her: “If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish” (Esther 4:14, NIV). Talk about stress!

Finally she appeared before the king, knowing that such an act carried with it a high chance of death. In the end, though, things worked out, however dangerous the situation was at times for this young woman.

All of us, like Esther, are born into situations not of our own making. What is your background? What things were handed you, good and bad, that you didn’t ask for? How can you learn to appreciate more deeply the good that you have been given and to overcome the bad?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Job was a man whose faith was so great that he was singled out by God as “a blameless and upright man” without a peer on the earth (*Job 1:8, NKJV*). Yet, even a man like Job can be brought to the brink of despairing in God in his pain and grief. Consider that resilience doesn’t mean that there aren’t moments of profound doubt. How does Job’s story show that being resilient is not measured by the individual moments of strength or weakness along the way but rather the place we end up?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** We often want to know why we are asked to endure suffering; yet, this question is rarely answered. At the same time, God reveals Himself to strengthen the weak (for instance, Job) or works through others to provide support (for instance, Naomi and Ruth), giving resources to help individuals endure their circumstances. Focus on biblical examples provided in this week’s lesson which show that individuals caught up in trying circumstances may be part of a larger plan (for instance, Job, Joseph, Esther) and discuss the possible applications for our lives today.

**Thought Questions:**

1. Rather than asking the reasons for our suffering, what are other questions we can ask ourselves that can help us grow in grace and strength to carry us through the dark moments?

2. In circumstances we cannot change, all we can do is decide what our response to them will be. How can we cultivate a resilient attitude and a thankful spirit? (*Read Romans 8:28 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18.*)

**Application Questions:**

1. Think about the most challenging circumstance in your life. As you look back on that experience, what unexpected blessings grew out of it that you perhaps couldn’t see during the trial?

2. Discuss how God can make something beautiful out of tragedy, how He can transform our biggest failings into sources of personal growth and strength.
The Secret of Being Content

Paul was born and grew up in Tarsus, into a Hebrew family from the tribe of Benjamin. He obtained his Roman nationality through his father, a citizen of the Roman Empire. He became a Pharisee, a devout group who adhered to the law (Torah) plus the oral tradition (Mishnah). With this background, he must have enjoyed the privileges of his social and religious status.

However, when Paul responded to the call of Jesus, everything changed. Instead of persecutor, he became the target of radical persecution from some of his own nation and eventually from Romans. He suffered tribulations for three decades and was executed after having been imprisoned at Rome.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:23–28, which lists some of the adversities Paul had to face. Then read Philippians 4:11–13. After so much suffering, what is the assessment Paul makes of his own life? What lessons are here for us amid whatever struggles we’re going through?

Contentment is a crucial component of happiness and psychological well-being. Being content comes to those who see the positive outlook of things, those who look at the past with acceptance and at the future with hope. Interestingly enough, having “everything” doesn’t guarantee contentment and happiness. For some folk, no matter what they have, it’s never enough. Others, having so little, are nevertheless satisfied. What do you think makes the difference?

One of the many current definitions of “intelligence” is the ability to adapt to new situations. This may have to do with living in new places, relating to new people, or experiencing new socioeconomic conditions. Paul’s ability is not a hereditary trait, because he specifically says, “I have learned to be content” (Phil. 4:12, NIV). This is not a capacity that some possess and others do not. Adaptation and contentment amid a wide range of circumstances are learned processes that come as a result of time and practice.

Verse 13 gives the ultimate key to Paul’s resilience. Not only could he feel contentment with little or much material resources. He could do anything and everything in Jesus Christ.

How content are you? How much are you tossed around and victimized by your circumstances? What are ways in which you can learn better to be “content in any and every situation” (vs. 12, NIV)?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

To the young and untested, giving thanks in suffering seems impossible. What is the way in which the testimony of those with experience can strengthen the resolve and resilience of individuals undergoing trials of faith for the first time? (Read Hebrews 12:1–3, Romans 5:3–5, and Ephesians 6:18.)

STEP 4—Create

Inspiration: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Heb. 12:1–3, NIV).

1. During most of our lives we face everyday challenges. Pipes break, work circumstances are challenging, our friends or family disappoint. Think of the top three problems you face in your life. How often do we miss out on using these challenges as opportunities to grow in grace and faith? Moving forward, how can you take a new look at your life, specifically the problems you face, and cultivate a new attitude and spirit of thankfulness? How can you use the circumstances in which you find yourself to build resilience (and all the fruit of the Spirit) for yourself, your spouse, your family, and your wider community? (Read Galatians 5:19–23.)

2. How does faithfulness in facing small challenges lead to a capacity to face the big challenges in life?

3. What example of Christian community do we find to help us understand what creates resilience? How do we foster resilience in our families, churches, and wider community? How do we raise children to cope with adversity and to build internal resources to endure suffering? How do we create spiritual support networks to lend support and minister to one another?
Further Study: “The powers of darkness gather about the soul and shut Jesus from our sight, and at times we can only wait in sorrow and amazement until the cloud passes over. These seasons are sometimes terrible. Hope seems to fail, and despair seizes upon us. In these dreadful hours we must learn to trust, to depend solely upon the merits of the atonement, and in all our helpless unworthiness cast ourselves upon the merits of the crucified and risen Saviour. We shall never perish while we do this—never! When light shines on our pathway, it is no great thing to be strong in the strength of grace. But to wait patiently in hope when clouds envelop us and all is dark requires faith and submission which causes our will to be swallowed up in the will of God. We are too quickly discouraged, and earnestly cry for the trial to be removed from us, when we should plead for patience to endure and grace to overcome.”—Ellen G. White, God’s Amazing Grace, p. 114.

Discussion Questions:

1. Some people overcome hardships under which others are crushed. What do you think makes the difference?

2. Dwell more on the question of trials and tragedy that don’t seem to have any kind of happy ending. What are we to make of them? How do we reconcile them with our faith and the promises of God?

3. In the third sentence of the quote in Friday’s study (“In these dreadful hours we must . . .”), what is Ellen G. White telling us? Where is she pointing our hope? Why, in the end, is the gospel, as presented in these words, our only hope, regardless of the tragedy that happens to us now?

4. How can you practically apply Peter’s counsel in 1 Peter 4:12, 13? It’s one thing to remain resilient and faithful amid trial, but to do what Peter says? How is that possible?

5. Suppose you were dealing with someone in a very dire situation, one from which there seemed no way out, humanly speaking. Suppose, too, that you had only five minutes with that person. In those few minutes, what would you say to give the person hope?
Self-Esteem

**SABBATH AFTERNOON**


**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).

Diminished self-esteem is a modern plague. It often is brought to the counseling or pastoral offices either by itself or in association with such full-blown problems as substance-related abuse, depression, or eating disorders.

In everyday existence, low self-esteem never may reach clinical proportions, but it almost invariably hurts relationships and impairs performance in most areas of life.

Perhaps the main reason people suffer more than ever from this problem is the media, which often portrays its celebrities as larger than life, leaving others to feel their own inadequacy in contrast to the icons paraded before them.

The idea of self-esteem as presented in the Bible has a different perspective. Conventional psychology sees self-esteem as the evaluation someone makes of their own attributes and characteristics based on their observation of themselves and on the input of others. The Bible offers at least two additional components: What humans are by origin (Gen. 1:26, 27) and what God thinks of and grants to each person (John 3:16). When we add these components, so much regarding self-esteem can change.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 26.*
Origins

Two prevailing views of human origins exist, each mutually exclusive of the other. One portrays humans as products of pure chance, the result of a cosmic accident in which our existence wasn’t planned. We just happened to come into existence. Though this view always has existed among some people, in recent centuries—particularly after the false theories of Charles Darwin became popular—the idea of humanity existing purely by accident has deceived millions. Thus, many have come to believe that life is inherently without purpose or that any purpose it might have individuals must try to make for themselves. For millennia most people thought that they had originated from God or from gods; today, many think that they came from the apes.

In contrast, there’s the view taught in the Bible.

Read Genesis 1:26, 27; Psalm 8:5; 100:3; and Acts 17:24–28. How radically different is what’s presented in these texts from the view of our origins as expressed previously? How should each view impact our own sense of self-worth and self-esteem?

Not only did God purposely create us, He created us in His image. He also created other wonderful, life-bearing plants and animals, but in their beauty and perfection they do not bear resemblance to their Maker as do humans. Furthermore, humanity is placed above all of them with dominion and authority.

In contrast to the atheist belief in no transcendent purpose for our human biology and psychology, the Bible teaches us that God chose to share “His image” with the human family. Obviously, much of that image has been marred and lost by generations of sin, yet the imprint continues in each person, and that lost image can be restored progressively by the transforming power of the Spirit working in those who are surrendered to Christ.

Not only did God create us, He redeemed us, as well. In fact, Ellen White said that Christ would have died for even one person. What does that tell us about our inherent worth, regardless of what the world might think of us? Why is it so important to keep before us our worth in the eyes of God?
The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** Romans 12:3

► **The Student Will:**
   - **Know:** Describe a healthy self-esteem, using a Christian perspective of God’s value for us.
   - **Feel:** Acknowledge the importance of valuing ourselves and others as God values us.
   - **Do:** Come to a realistic evaluation of who we are and the importance of our place in the body of Christ.

► **Learning Outline:**

   I. Know: In God’s Image
   - **A** What did God do to demonstrate His value for us?
   - **B** What is the difference between building up someone’s ego and showing proper esteem and value for them?
   - **C** Why is it important to continually seek to be remade in Christ’s image, rather than remain satisfied with our status quo?

   II. Feel: Bought by His Blood
   - **A** How does God view us?
   - **B** How should we value ourselves as we see ourselves through God’s eyes?
   - **C** How should the way God values us inform and shape the way we treat others?

   III. Do: Cherish Christ’s Body
   - **A** How can we realistically evaluate and place a proper worth on the gifts God has given us?
   - **B** How can we fulfill the role He wants us to play in the church?
   - **C** What can we do to respect and cherish each member’s contributions to Christ’s body?

► **Summary:** A Christian sense of self-esteem develops out of the recognition that we are each formed in the image of God and, with our consent, are continually being transformed into the likeness of Christ as important members of His body.
Self-perceptions

What I see in myself is one important component of self-esteem. However, it is an incomplete and often faulty picture. Subjectivity can lead to misinterpretation when assessing people, including ourselves. One of the gravest biblical warnings is against passing judgment on someone else: “For at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself” (Rom. 2:1, NIV; see also Luke 6:41, 42). Distortion seems universal, and people are subject to commit mistakes when judging others. The same happens with self. There is a great deal of error when one judges oneself in terms of ability, looks, character, power, etc. There always are going to be people smarter, better looking, and more gifted than you; at the same time, there always will be people who will look at you and feel themselves to be inferior.

Read prayerfully and carefully Matthew 22:39. What is implied in this text regarding how we should view ourselves?

This text implies that a reasonable amount of love should go to oneself (though this is not the main focus of the text). There should be a healthy pride in things well done, in well-accomplished tasks, and in the good traits and characteristics one may possess. There is an expected attitude of self-protection and caring for oneself. The problem comes when someone does not give credit to God, the Creator of all good things in us.

How are we to understand Romans 12:3 in light of what we’ve looked at so far?

There is a desirable middle area between extremely low self-esteem and arrogance. And Paul warns against the latter. At the same time, Romans 12:4–8 explains that the body of Christ needs the input of each member, according to the individual gifts given by grace. There is nothing wrong in acknowledging each gift, using them to strengthen Christ’s church, and thanking God for them.

Make a mental list of the good personal attributes, characteristics, and abilities that God has given you. How can you use them and at the same time remain humble? How can looking daily at the Cross help keep us in our place?
Learning Cycle

➤**STEP 1**—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The only means by which human beings can come to a true estimate of their worth is by looking at themselves through the eyes of God. God has placed a high price on us: the blood of His Son.

**Just for Teachers:** Our self-worth is deeply impacted by those closest to us. The following story and subsequent sharing time is designed to consider the impact that those closest to us can have on our self-image.

For elite athletes, there is no pressure cooker quite like the Olympic games. Athletes change their diets, sleep patterns, training regimen, and anything else necessary to win gold on a world stage. The pressure to perform well is already immense, but add to that the fact that participants carry with them the hopes and dreams of the nations they represent, and the result is a recipe for major stress.

One very decorated Olympic diver came up with a novel way to handle the stress of the moment. Unlike a team sport, diving is a very solitary endeavor, so he devised a strategy for calming his nerves. As he stood atop the diving platform, right before he launched into the air, he repeated the following: “Even if I blow this dive, my mother will still love me.”

Did he want to win? Sure. Did he sometimes lose? Absolutely. Win or lose, he had one thing on which he could count: the unconditional love of his mother. His mother’s love had fortified him against the inevitable challenges of competing on the world’s biggest stage. That diver, by the way, is considered to be one of the greatest ever to stand on a diving platform.

**Consider This:** If our sense of self is impacted for good or ill by those closest to us, what does that tell us about the place that God should occupy in our lives?

➤**STEP 2**—Explore

**Bible Commentary**

I. Crowned With Honor *(Read Genesis 1:26, 27 and Psalm 8:5 with your class.)*
What Others See

In so many societies, a person’s worth is determined by his or her talents, gifts, appearance, and so forth. We do look at outward appearance (1 Sam. 16:7); after all, that’s all we can see. Thus, our concept of self often is shaped by the reaction others display, based on their outward observation of us. If everyone tells you that you are pretty, you will be more likely to view yourself as pretty.

But there always is much more to each of us than meets the eye. Individuals experiencing poor self-esteem need to think in terms of personal traits or attributes that are of true value and not necessarily what the world values, because so often what the world values is of no value to God.

What are the things that your society and culture place so much value on? How important do you think those things are to God?

There may be exceptions, but most societies tend to place excessive value on outward, observable features. However, other traits, such as honesty, kindness, temperance, or firm commitment to principles and ideals tend to have less value.

How does gender/class/nationality prejudice affect people’s self-esteem? What should be the Christian’s aim in terms of prejudice and discrimination? Gal. 3:28.

The effects of prejudice are devastating on self-esteem and performance. As Christians, we should be making a concentrated effort to uplift and encourage others, regardless of their background.

In 2 Samuel 9, there is the story of Mephibosheth, who could have been the target of retaliation by David. No wonder he showed fear, fell on his face to the ground, and called himself “a dead dog.” He also was crippled. The restoration of the family property, the reassignment of servants, and the honors granted no doubt brought to Mephibosheth an extra measure of self-worth.

The influence that people have on the self-esteem of others is extremely powerful. More than we realize, we have the ability to shape the self-concept of others through words, actions, and even how we look at them.

How careful, or careless, are you with the way you impact the self-esteem of others? Think about your closest relationships. How can you help build up these people as opposed to tearing them down?
This week’s lesson begins with the most self-affirming work done on behalf of humanity. God CHOSE to share His image with His creation. We belong to Him. Psalm 8:5 establishes our place in the pecking order of creation. We are made “a little lower than the angels,” and we are crowned “with glory and honor” (NKJV).

The honor granted us by God is no ordinary recognition. The word honor rendered in Psalm 8:5 is the word hadar, which means to honor, to glorify, and to make splendid. God crowned humanity with splendor at their creation. The word hadar is the same word used in the “beauty of holiness” phrase found in Psalm 96:9 and Psalm 110:3. Is there a beauty more exalted than that found in holiness? Hadar is used to describe this beauty and the beauty of humanity’s creation, a holy act, performed by a Holy God.

**Consider This:** How should the honor and holiness in which we were originally created inspire us to allow God to re-create His image in us?

**II. Image Is Everything** *(Read Psalm 16:8 with your class.)*

The great tennis star Andre Agassi made the slogan “Image is Everything” famous. Of course, Agassi was advertising Canon cameras at the time, but there is a truth in that phrase that goes much deeper than the ad intended. As we know, what we behold changes us.

Ellen G. White wrote the following about how Jesus grew in wisdom and knowledge during His formative years and how we, too, might be formed in God’s image:

“Every child may gain knowledge as Jesus did. As we try to become acquainted with our heavenly Father through His word, angels will draw near, our minds will be strengthened, our characters will be elevated and refined. We shall become more like our Saviour. And as we behold the beautiful and grand in nature, our affections go out after God. While the spirit is awed, the soul is invigorated by coming in contact with the Infinite through His works. Communion with God through prayer develops the mental and moral faculties, and the spiritual powers strengthen as we cultivate thoughts upon spiritual things.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 70, 71.

**Consider This:** In his formative years, Jesus beheld God in the Old Testament scrolls read to Him by His mother, and He beheld Him in nature and in prayer. *(Read Psalm 16:8.)* How would our view of ourselves change if we were to set the Lord always before us?
What God Sees

**Read** Luke 15. What should that one chapter alone tell us about our worth to God? How should this impact our own sense of self-esteem? What do these parables tell us about what God thinks of us? Why is this so important to know and to keep before us?

If someone feels tempted to dwell upon being inferior, lost, or outcast, they should remember that something else goes with that condition—a special and intense care from God and His angels. The shepherd cared more for the lost sheep than for the remaining ninety-nine. The woman forgot her other coins and searched carefully until she found the lost one. The father appears to have given more attention to the unreasonable demands of the prodigal son than to his first-born. Shepherd, woman, and father all show a special consideration to the lost individual or thing in the story.

Then, when the lost are found, there is great joy on earth and in heaven. Look at how powerfully these stories reveal to us the love of God for each one of us, regardless of our faults.

This principle can play out in the helping of those in need. So often, in talking with others, if you can give them a nonthreatening, confidential, and accepting environment, that alone can do them so much good. People, especially hurting people, need to know that someone cares for them, especially in their pain.

A Christian has a clear advantage over someone who does not accept or believe in the Lord. God is on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to listen to the depressed, stressed, lonely, and anxious soul. This relationship with God should be sufficient reason to feel special and to gain some relief from low self-esteem.

Of course, the greatest example of our worth in the eyes of God is the Cross. That, more than anything, should show us just how valuable we are to God, regardless of whatever weaknesses and faults we have. The Cross tells us that no matter what others think of us, or what our society thinks of us, we are of infinite value to the Creator of the universe. And, considering how fleeting and transitory and contingent society and its values are, in the end how much should the view of others and of society as a whole really matter to us anyway?

**How can we help others take the message in Luke 15 and apply it to themselves? How can we help others realize that Jesus here is talking about them personally?**
III. Healthy Self-Esteem (Read Romans 12:3 and Philippians 2:6, 7 with your class.)

This week’s lesson touched briefly on the idea of correctly estimating one’s worth. In Romans 12:3 Paul argues for a balanced view of one’s self, based on the transformation brought about in life by the sacrifice of one’s life to God. People who are being transformed by God exhibit a correct estimate of their worth. The worldly pattern of building one’s self-esteem is to get as many toys as you can because a person’s life consists in the abundance of the things that he possesses, but Jesus begs to differ with this assessment (Luke 12:15).

The danger in estimating our worth above that which God places on us is one of self-conceit. Instead of focusing inordinately on what we possess, or even on our God-given gifts and talents, Paul asks us to think soberly about ourselves, seeing not only the great things about ourselves but also the areas of our lives that need godly molding.

Consider This: If estimating our own worth can be fraught with pitfalls, are we really up to evaluating others? Is there ever a time when we are called upon to point out the faults of others, say, when they wrong us? If so, what guidance does the Bible give us? (See Matthew 18:15–20.)

STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

1 In John 15:16, Jesus told His disciples that they had not chosen Him; He had chosen them that they should “bear fruit,” and that their fruit should “remain.” In a very real sense, we are a product of their fruit—their faithfulness in sharing the gospel that we continue to spread today. How do you think this “chosen” message impacted the disciples? How do you think they viewed Jesus’ words after His ascension?

2 Like the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost boy, we, too, often get lost, but Jesus comes in search of us. How does Jesus woo you back to Himself? (Jer. 31:3).
A New Self

**Read** Ephesians 4:23, 24. What does Paul mean by “putting on” the new self? What is the nature of this new self?

People like to try new looks: changing hairstyle, buying new types of clothes, even getting a face-lift or hair transplant. But these changes will bring only minor variations inside. The basic self will remain unchanged.

Paul talks about a new self, related not to appearance but to attitude and mental nature. He says that we are “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (vs. 24, NIV).

**Outline** the attitudes and behaviors coming out of the new self. Eph. 4:25–32.

The new self referred to by Paul exhibits successful fruits (truthfulness, unity, honesty, diligence, wholesome talk, kindness, forgiveness). Notice, too, that all of the new self’s attributes have to do with good character and interpersonal relationships, and these can be tied directly to questions of self-esteem. The adverse behaviors mentioned in Ephesians 4, such as lying, anger, and bitterness, leave the person with a diminished sense of value. In contrast, sharing with those in need and being kind and compassionate are actions that can enhance self-esteem, as they change a person’s focus from self and thus leave the person with a sense of accomplishment.

The Christian community needs people who are interested in building others up rather than destroying them. The concept of self easily can be ruined in no time with rude words of criticism. “Upon every family, upon every individual Christian, is laid the duty of barring the way against corrupt speech. When in the company of those who indulge in foolish talk, it is our duty to change the subject of conversation if possible. By the help of the grace of God we should quietly drop words or introduce a subject that will turn the conversation into a profitable channel.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 337.

**Why is it that helping somebody enhances your own self-esteem?** Make a list of small things that you can do for your neighbor, partner, or family member. Do them; you may be surprised at how well you feel about yourself.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Application Questions:

1. Think of someone who always builds you up. Spending time with this person always makes you feel better. What specifically does he or she do that uplifts your spirits and strengthens your sense of who you are?

2. Isaiah 40:11 paints an awesome picture of God’s care for His “sheep.” What parts of Isaiah’s description of God’s care speak most warmly to you? What does this tell you about your intrinsic worth to God?

STEP 4—Create

This week’s lesson addresses the issue of self-esteem, and it does so at a time when technology is greatly impacting the image we hold of ourselves. The rise of Internet use and social networking Web sites, in particular, are creating what some researchers have dubbed the most narcissistic generation ever. Technology has shrunk our planet, but more and more of us are obsessed with how we appear to people on the other side of the world whom we will never meet in life. Here are some ways that you might apply the truths of this week’s lesson to your life and the lives of those around you:

1. Encourage a hyper-connected online friend to go on a one-week media fast with you. Each day, identify one characteristic of God’s love from His Word and discuss its benefits with your friend.

2. Of all the animals in the world, God likens humans to sheep. Sheep have no claws, are not known to be aggressive or particularly smart. They can be easily distracted, and they are prone to getting lost. But that’s not all there is to sheep. Do a quick Internet search on the uses of sheep and sheep parts, and you might be surprised at what you find. Sheep are not the wisest animals in the barn, but that doesn’t mean that they are not valuable. The same might be said of us humans. What insights do the sheep give you into your dependence upon, and your relationship with, God?

3. Identify a Bible character whose self-esteem got him or her into trouble. Have a class member role-play this person’s story and give the class an opportunity to guess who he or she is.

4. If the death of Jesus for fallen humanity establishes just how precious we are, what might we say to Jesus on the day when we see Him? Ask several from your class to share what they plan to say to Jesus when they meet Him in glory.
Further Study: “If God cares for a sparrow . . . how will he care for the purchase of the blood of Christ? One soul is worth more than all the world. For one soul Jesus would have passed through the agony of Calvary that that one might be saved in his kingdom. ‘Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.’”—Ellen G. White, The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, May 3, 1892.

“We lose many and rich blessings because we neglect to seek the Lord with humble hearts. When we come to Him in sincerity of heart, asking Him to reveal our defects, He will show us a true picture of ourselves, reflected in the mirror of His Word. Then, having seen ourselves as God sees us, let us not go away forgetting what manner of men we are. Let us study critically the features of our character that are defective, and seek for grace to make them like the pattern presented in the Word of God.”—Ellen G. White, The Lake Union Herald, November 3, 1909.

The two paragraphs above give us additional insight to maintain the balance between inferiority and vanity. Read Romans 12:2, 3 in the light of these texts to gain understanding into attaining a balanced self-concept.

Discussion Questions:

1. The twentieth century was one of the most violent ever, with mass murder seen on a scale as never before. How could the Darwinian view of human existence, which postulates that all life is a product of random mutation and natural selection, be partially responsible for this total disregard for the sanctity of human life? In other words, if human beings are just advanced apes, products of chance alone, what is the inherent value of an individual life?

2. Tuesday’s lesson looked at how the perceptions of others can impact a person’s self-worth. Though we want to affirm people and help them have a healthy sense of self-worth, we also need to be careful about feeding someone’s ego and pumping them up in ways that could be detrimental to them. How can we strike the right balance here—affirming people without, in the process, damaging them in a different way?

3. Dwell more on the question of what the cross of Christ teaches us about our individual worth. Think about what happened at the cross, who was on it, and what His death meant. How should the Cross help us have a better sense of what our individual worth really is?
Jealousy

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Isa. 14:12–14; James 3:16, 17; Exod. 20:17; Genesis 37; 1 Samuel 18; Matt. 12:14.

Memory Text: “Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?” (Proverbs 27:4, NIV).

One of the most devastating emotions is jealousy. It is the oldest type of sin (Isa. 14:14) and can hurt not only interpersonal relationships (2 Cor. 12:20) but our physical health, as well (Prov. 14:30).

Jealousy tends to be personal; it targets an individual who is perceived as a rival and a threat. As a result, jealousy often causes violence, either psychological (verbal abuse, backbiting, criticism) or physical. Who hasn’t, at some point, felt the misery brought by this emotion?

This lesson provides instances of individuals who allowed jealousy to impact their behavior: Satan, Joseph’s brothers, King Saul, and the chief priests of New Testament times. The result always was disastrous. How fascinating, too, that all of these jealous individuals enjoyed high status and privileges to begin with. Yet, all fell into the trap of hating someone else for what they were or what they had.

The Lord warns us away from such an erroneous path and urges His children to love their neighbors to the point of rejoicing with them in their gifts, achievements, and possessions as if they were our own.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 5.*
At the Root of Evil

**What** was the cause of Satan’s expulsion from heaven? *Isa. 14:12–14.*
What does it say about freedom that even in a perfect environment, heaven, this terrible trait was able to arise?

Lucifer, the most magnificent creature from the hands of God, was given the highest place in heaven outside of the Godhead. His honor, beauty, and intelligence were supreme; yet, sin nevertheless grew within him (*Ezek. 28:12–15*). The perfect peace and happiness of all creatures was greatly disturbed by this act of self-exaltation and jealousy toward Christ.

“‘I will make myself like the Most High’” (*Isa. 14:14, NIV*) was the thought that triggered dissension, rebellion, violence, and much pain to all inhabitants of heaven and then to the entire human family. “Satan was jealous of Jesus. He wished to be consulted concerning the formation of man, and because he was not, he was filled with envy, jealousy, and hatred. He desired to receive the highest honors in heaven next to God.”—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 145.

By contrast, we look at Jesus. The inception of sin through jealousy and selfishness is rebuffed by the willingness of Jesus to be humbled to the lowest level of humankind and to be killed, like a criminal, in order that each person may be saved from the ultimate devastation caused by sin (*2 Thess. 1:9*).

**Read** James 3:16, 17. What contrasts are presented here? What should this tell us about how damaging and demonic jealousy is?

Our sinful nature is such that the first bad deed makes the next one easier. When the wrong path is initiated with jealousy and selfish ambition, the result seems to be a smorgasbord of sin: “disorder and every evil practice” (*vs. 16, NIV*), as James describes it. The wonderful news is that there is room for another option, one that is “pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere” (*vs. 17, NIV*). This option is love.

Lucifer did not look at what he had; instead, he chose to contemplate what Christ had. How often do we tend to do something similar? How much jealousy and envy do you harbor for those who have “more” than you? How can you overcome this dangerous emotion?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Proverbs 27:4

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize the far-reaching destruction that follows in the wake of jealousy.
Feel: Abhor even the beginnings of the feelings of envy.
Do: Fill the mind and heart with the selfless humility of Christ as the antidote to jealousy.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Slippery Slope of Jealousy
   - What examples of jealousy in the Old Testament demonstrate the evil developments associated with on-going jealousy?
   - How do the stories of Joseph, Saul and David, and Jesus illustrate how jealousy can destroy families and communities?
   - How should we respond to those who are jealous of us?
   - How long is it taking for God to resolve Lucifer’s problem with Christ? What should this teach us in regard to patience as God works out His plans?

II. Feel: The Origin of Sin
   - Often, jealousy can awaken in the heart that has plenty and has no reason to envy anyone else, such as in the case of Lucifer. Why is it so important to surrender to God the first feelings of envy and jealousy?

III. Do: Antidote to Jealousy
   - How does focusing our minds on Christ help to protect our hearts against the evils of envy?

Summary: Jealousy indulged results in the most horrible of evils, as illustrated in the lives of Lucifer and Saul. But Jesus’ humility and submission to the Father, as He waits for God’s plan to work out through the universe, illustrates a positive response to jealousy.
Joseph’s Brothers

So often, jealousy and envy arise among those with whom we are very close, which makes the potential for serious consequences even more devastating. Indeed, a large portion of aggression (physical or psychological) today is found within the family circle, and jealousy and rivalry between family members is so often at the root.

Read Genesis 37. What is the background to the story? What led up to this criminal act? What role did jealousy play?

It’s hard to believe that these brothers could have been so cruel. Did they not think, too, about what their actions would do to their father? Their jealousy became so powerful that it overruled not only common sense but common decency and morality, as well. What a powerful lesson this should be to all of us about the potential danger of this emotion. No wonder there’s an entire commandment dedicated to warning us against it (see Exod. 20:17).

Besides all the pain that their actions brought upon themselves and their father, they also feared for what Joseph would do to them after the death of their father, Jacob (Gen. 50:15).

But Joseph’s attitude could not be more noble, for he said: “‘Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God?’” (Gen. 50:19, NIV). Joseph had understood that his duty was to forgive the offenders and to trust in God’s mercy and justice.

The life of Joseph has been compared to the life of Jesus Christ. Jealousy moved his brothers to sell him as a slave; some priests and elders were jealous of Jesus, and that jealousy fueled their actions against Him. Joseph was sold to the heathen; Jesus was sold to His enemies. Joseph was falsely accused and sent to prison because of his virtue; Jesus was falsely accused and rejected because of His righteousness. Joseph displayed noble benevolence toward his brothers; Jesus, too, forgave His enemies. The evil actions against Joseph ultimately led to good; the same thing happened with Jesus, in that the evil done against Him was turned to good, as well.

What kind of pain and suffering has jealousy and envy—whether your own or someone else’s—brought to your life? What lessons have you learned from these experiences? How often, too, have you felt jealousy over things that today seem so trivial and meaningless? What lesson should you learn from that, as well?


Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Jealousy is an emotion that cannot coexist in any measure with the peace and joy that distinguish the true Christian life.

If you have ever traveled in the American Deep South, you will see, in many places, vague shapes covered by a thick coat of leaves and vines. Some of them appear to have once been trees. Others may have even been buildings.

All this is the work of a little plant known as kudzu. Kudzu was brought to the United States from Japan in 1876 and introduced at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. Proponents touted it as the solution for a number of problems, not realizing that it would itself become a problem. Where it was planted, it thrived at the expense of everything else. If you had kudzu, kudzu was all you had.

One could say that jealousy and envy are the kudzu of human emotions, except that kudzu really does have beneficial properties. Not so with jealousy. Where there is jealousy, there is no peace, joy, love, or patience. You can’t have a little jealousy. Eventually it will cover over everything else and strangle it. For the Christian, rooting out jealousy is literally a matter of life and death.

**Discuss With the Class:** Most of us wish we were richer, smarter, more attractive, or more athletic than we are. At best, this can motivate us to work to improve ourselves. How can we keep these thoughts from taking root to the point where we hate and envy other people who seem to have these desired qualities?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

1. **In Search of the Original Sin** *(Review Isaiah 14:12–14 with your class.)*

   Although it is hard to see, envy has a tiny bit of the good in it, however twisted and perverted. Oscar Wilde wrote that hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue. In the same way, envy can be said to be the tribute paid to the good and
Saul’s Jealousy of David: Part 1

A classic case of how jealousy works can be seen in the story of Saul and David. Saul was king, ruler over the nation. He had everything going for him, and yet jealousy entered, and it seemed to change everything about him.

Or did the jealousy merely bring out what was already there inside Saul?

**What** was Saul’s initial attitude toward David? *1 Sam. 18:1–5.*

Saul’s actions show that he had a very positive attitude toward David, to whom he gave a high place in the army. Also, considering his own son’s attitude toward David, it was clear that David had royal favor.

**What** changed Saul’s attitude? *1 Sam. 18:6–9.* **Why is Saul’s attitude** such a common human response?

The rest of 1 Samuel 18 shows just how damaging Saul’s jealousy of David became. It led him to all sorts of deviousness and trickery, and yet, none of it worked. The very things that he feared in David became more and more pronounced!

Jealousy generates a series of negative emotions: low self-esteem, hatred, suspicion, fear, guilt, and anger. Saul was afraid of David, as mentioned several times in the chapter. He might have been afraid of losing his kingly position or afraid of David becoming the absolute hero of Israel. But his main source of fear was “because the Lord was with David but had left Saul” (1 Sam. 18:12, NIV).

Being left by God is reason enough to be afraid. But Saul’s fear was aggravated by the fact that “the Lord was with David” (vs. 12, *NIV*). Saul was unable to apply to the situation the simple logic of Gamaliel: “If [this] is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop [it]” (*Acts* 5:38, 39, *NIV*). When the Lord blesses people, there is no point in developing jealousy or seeking their doom. God will continue to bless them.

**However wrong Saul’s attitude, why is it relatively easy to understand? What’s your immediate attitude to someone you deem could be a threat to your position? Do you surrender everything to the Lord, or do you start plotting a counter strategy?**
the beautiful by evil and ugliness. The person who is envious of someone else recognizes the presence of good qualities in another person, but rather than enjoying them and being thankful for their presence or working to emulate those qualities, he or she selfishly desires to take them for himself or herself, at the expense of the other.

This brings us to Lucifer. Lucifer is said to have been the covering cherub. Some even speculate that he may have been chief of the angelic choirs. In other words, in contemporary church terms, he was (assuming this is true) the worship leader or even the minister of music. It was his position to draw attention to the praiseworthy attributes of God, worship them, and encourage his colleagues to worship. Apparently he excelled at this, until that day he stopped enjoying and appreciating the divine attributes and started wondering why he couldn’t have those attributes in the same way and (most of all) be worshiped for them. In short, the original sin was envy of God.

**Consider This:** Even in a spiritual or religious context, envy and jealousy may appear. Most of us probably have taken note of people who seem to be more spiritually advanced than we are, and maybe, for one brief moment, we wished we were as good as they are, or even entertained the thought that they are fakers or hypocrites. Why, then, is it safe to follow others only as they follow Christ? *(1 Cor. 11:1).*

**II. Jealousy, the Soul Virus . . .** *(Review Genesis 3:5 with your class.)*

We see from the previous passage that Lucifer went from the admiration and appreciation of God’s attributes to the belief that the glory due to God could and should be due to him. Next came the belief that God was actively withholding these honors from him to his detriment. The next step was to convince others of this. He succeeded; a full third of the angels rebelled against God with him. The result was their confinement to a backwater planet, third from a rather ordinary star somewhere in the Milky Way galaxy. But there were others there, and perhaps he could convince them to see things his way. . . .

Adam and Eve had an entire planet that was created for their enjoyment and enrichment. Beautiful things to see, delicious things to eat, majestic animals, natural wonders, and perpetual communion with God, all theirs except for one tree in a remote corner of their habitat of which they were not to eat. A trifle, really.
Saul’s Jealousy of David: Part 2

Read 1 Samuel 19. On what path can you see Saul? What lessons are here for us?

Saul, at first, worked with some stealth and subtlety in seeking to remove the perceived threat of David. When that didn’t work, he came right out into the open with his murderous plans. Most likely he, at first, never dreamed he’d go that far. However, once the floodgates are opened to sin, none of us realize how far down the wrong path sin can lead us. Killing David became an obsession. Saul’s negative feelings, first harbored when women sang and danced to honor David, soon reached the point of murderous attempts on his life. In chapters 18 and 19 alone, we find eight specific attempts, either mandated or perpetrated by Saul himself, to murder David.

The rest of the story is a sad one as things grew worse for Saul. As his hatred and jealousy increased, he became irrationally suspicious of David, obsessive about killing him, and frightened of the surrounding Philistines. On the excuse that they had sided with David, he killed 85 priests of the Lord and many men, women, children, infants, and farm animals in the priestly town of Nob (1 Sam. 22:17–19). Look at where he was being led!

Full of terror because of the Philistine incursion, he asked the Lord what to do. But Saul had gone too far away from God, turning down divine advice too many times, so he did not obtain an answer. He chose, therefore, to consult an evil spirit through a witch, a practice that he himself had abolished. He even bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground before the evil spirit, which was impersonating the deceased Samuel (1 Sam. 28:14). This was the beginning of his end, for the following day he and his sons lost their lives to the Philistines (1 Samuel 31), as forewarned by the evil spirit, obviously a demonic manifestation.

Saul, by letting jealousy take root, followed a path to complete apostasy and ruin. Worse, his sin brought suffering not only on himself but on his own family. Sin is bad enough when it hurts us as individuals. Rarely, though, is the damage and pain so localized. In most cases, our wrong deeds impact others negatively, as well.

Look at all the cases we’ve seen so far. In each example the jealousy and the results of that jealousy had far-reaching consequences, most likely not anticipated by the one who first harbored the emotion. How crucial, then, that we, by God’s grace, seek to die to self the moment this ugly emotion arises in our hearts.
Perhaps they wondered about it. They were probably curious. Maybe they occasionally took a scenic route through the garden so they would have an excuse to stare at it. But they would never have doubted God’s wisdom and intentions without that push which Lucifer, in the form of the serpent, was prepared to give.

One day when Eve found herself in that corner of the garden, someone else was there, too, asking seemingly innocent questions: Were they really not supposed to eat from the tree? Why not?

It turned out that the serpent not only had questions, he had answers too: *God prohibited Adam and Eve from this tree because He knew good things would happen to the first humans if they ate from it, and He wanted to keep it all for Himself!* All the good things that they had were really just mere crumbs thrown to them to keep them fat, happy, and stupid! They could be like God, the serpent argued, and they should be like God.

**Consider This:** What does the experience of the first humans tell us about jealousy? Why is it so dangerous even to entertain envious thoughts toward others? How could Adam and Eve come to doubt and suspect God’s intentions?

### III. Jealousy Is Murder

(Review Genesis 4:1–15, Genesis 37:13–24, and 1 Samuel 18:6–9 with the class.)

Jealousy, however common it is and however much some people seem to luxuriate in it, is not a pleasant emotion. Perhaps that is why jealousy seems to lead to attempts to erase the source of it.

The first murderer, Cain, felt that God did not esteem him sufficiently. He felt slighted next to his brother Abel, who was (in his mind) clearly less deserving. When this became clear, God warned Cain that sin was crouching at his door, but he ignored it. He irrationally decided that the source of his trouble was Abel, and if Abel were gone, the trouble would be too. In fact, it was only the beginning of a pattern that would continue throughout history.

**Consider This:** All three of the passages above show examples of how jealousy leads to violence. We know that in day-to-day life we don’t literally murder people we envy, but in what way can it be said that we do so in a moral sense? *(See Matthew 5:21, 22.)*
Jealousy Toward Jesus

“For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy” (Matt. 27:18, NKJV).

**Skim** over quickly the first 11 chapters of Matthew, focusing specifically on what things Jesus did. Then read Matthew 12:14. What was it about Him and what He did that would have caused the leaders to respond this way? What did their actions reveal about their hearts? As you think about your answer, dwell on the question of how you might have responded were you in their situation.

The chief priests and elders were knowledgeable and exacting in the observance of the law. But their analysis of religious life was so microscopic that they had lost sight of the point of religion. Jesus brought a fresh view of piety, and the people of Israel (including religious leaders) heard the good news of salvation. Instead, though, of thanking Jesus for alerting them to their self-destructive path, they sought to destroy Him.

How often folk let their own jealousy blind them to what should be obvious. After all that Jesus was doing, the miracles, the healing, the casting out of demons, it’s hard to imagine anyone questioning Him as being anything other than from God. The evidence He gave should have been more than convincing (see Matt. 11:4, 5).

Perhaps because they were more aware of their own needs, the common people were more open to Jesus than were many of the religious leaders, who feared that Jesus would change the status quo and thus endanger their position. Jesus’ teaching was in many ways so different from theirs, and His message so much more appealing, that they had good reasons to fear His influence. Unfortunately for them, they were more concerned with preserving their own power and influence than they were in knowing and following the Truth.

The fact that jealousy was motivating them wasn’t a secret. According to Matthew 27:18, even the Roman leader Pilate knew what their motives were. That’s how obvious it had become. Sadly, these leaders were so blinded by their jealousy that they thought they were defending the faith against some impostor who was leading the people astray. Had they surrendered in humility and faith before the Lord instead of letting their jealousy overrule rational thinking, they would have avoided the tragic course that surely led them to eternal ruin. We would do well in our context, whatever it is, to learn from their mistakes.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:
1. How do we see jealousy at work in our society and among individuals today? While we are taught from an early age that jealousy is an ugly and unworthy emotion, what are the ways in which our society subtly promotes it? Examples could include the focus on the material goods of others; also, the joy which the media often encourages us to take in others’ misfortune.

2. Do you agree that jealousy is at the root of many sins and possibly sin itself? Why, or why not?

Application Questions:
1. As noted in the lesson, much of the opposition to Jesus among the religious leaders of the time was motivated primarily by jealousy. Have you ever seen jealousy at work in today’s church, to the extent that it hampers our ministry? How can we firmly but compassionately guard against its influence over ourselves or the climate of the church as a whole?

2. One of the worst aspects of jealousy is that it blinds us to what is right in front of our eyes—as it did to the religious leaders of Jesus’ time—and gives us distorted concepts of the motives and character of other people. If we find ourselves thinking this way, what can we do to bring ourselves back to reality?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The following activity is meant to supplant jealousy with its opposites: gratitude and self-esteem.

Hand out slips of paper with the phrase at the top, “I am grateful to God for . . .” and three columns labeled “things I have,” “things I am,” and “things I’ve done.” Have your students fill these out individually, or they can discuss their responses in small break-out groups. Come back together as a class and discuss the results. How can their responses help class members to foster an attitude of thankfulness instead of jealousy and envy?
**Further Study:** “Satan was once an honored angel in heaven, next to Christ. His countenance, like those of the other angels, was mild and expressive of happiness. His forehead was high and broad, showing great intelligence. His form was perfect; his bearing noble and majestic. But when God said to His Son, ‘Let us make man in our image,’ Satan was jealous of Jesus. He wished to be consulted concerning the formation of man, and because he was not, he was filled with envy, jealousy, and hatred. He desired to receive the highest honors in heaven next to God.”—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 145.

“One great defect in the character of Saul was his love of approbation. This trait had had a controlling influence over his actions and thoughts; everything was marked by his desire for praise and self-exaltation. . . . It was the ambition of Saul to be first in the estimation of men; and when this song of praise was sung, a settled conviction entered the mind of the king that David would obtain the hearts of the people and reign in his stead. Saul opened his heart to the spirit of jealousy by which his soul was poisoned.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 650.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How many things do you have to be thankful for? Why is it so important to dwell on those things, as opposed to your problems?

2. Can jealousy ever be good, ever be a motive for improving oneself? Defend your answer.

3. Think about some of the Bible characters in this week’s lesson who displayed jealousy: the most superior angel in heaven, the king of Israel, the religious leaders in Israel. They all were in exalted positions; they all had so much. And yet, they still allowed jealousy to come in and wreak havoc. What does that tell us about why jealousy is an internal problem, a problem of the heart, as opposed to something that arises only from outward conditions? Why could someone have so much of what this world offers and still be stung by the nasty bite of jealousy?

4. Ellen White wrote in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (see quote in Friday’s study) that the “one great defect” in the character of Saul was his love of being praised. Just one “little” defect, and look what happened. What should this tell us about the danger of not seeking to overcome all our character flaws before they overcome us? What Bible promises can you claim that should give you the hope and encouragement that victory over these defects can be yours?
Freedom From Addictions

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Prov. 23:29–35; 1 Cor. 7:2–5; Matt. 25:15–30; Mark 10:17–27; 1 Pet. 3:3, 4.

Memory Text: “‘So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed’” (John 8:36, NIV).

In recent years, many people have broken free from political tyranny and bondage. But there’s another kind of bondage, one that can be just as bad as or worse than its political counterpart—the bondage that comes from being an addict. Alcohol, tobacco, and other substances have enslaved millions. Furthermore, powerful nonchemical addictions are on the rise, too: sex, pornography, gambling (or risky investments), and the accumulation of money/goods.

All addictions create dependence (one feels very uncomfortable until the substance is taken or the act realized) and a certain degree of tolerance (one needs a bit more to reach the effect of previous times). Thus, it becomes extremely difficult for addicted people to break away from the cycle that has captured them. For this reason, those trapped need support from family, church, and friends. They also might need professional care and, above all, the power of God working in their lives to give them the freedom that they’re promised in Christ the Lord.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 12.
Alcoholic Beverages

Wine, beer, and other liquor have been associated in the Western world with memorable events, happy occasions, holidays, and important business transactions. There is a seemingly clean and beautiful face to alcoholic beverages. They not only have become socially acceptable but also a “necessity” in certain circumstances. Unfortunately, there’s another side to alcohol that those who make their living selling it don’t want their potential customers to see.

Read Proverbs 23:29–35. What do these verses say about the adverse effects of alcohol? From your own experiences, what have you seen of the devastating effects from the use of this poison?

The image of beautiful wine soon biting like a snake and poisoning like a viper is powerful. Alcohol’s chemical makeup is treated by the human body not as food but as a toxic substance. It is absorbed into the stomach and transported by the bloodstream to the brain, lungs, kidneys, and heart in just a few minutes. The liver especially is taxed in order to process a substance that takes hours of hard work to break down. When the presence of alcohol is chronic and significantly prolonged, the organs deteriorate, and the person suffers from one or more illnesses.

Unfortunately, the effects of alcohol transcend the drinker. Alcohol use comes with a terrible social cost. Half of all automobile and workplace accidents are alcohol-related. Many crimes are committed under the effect of alcohol. Public and private funds are depleted to provide health care to cure maladies caused directly by alcohol. And, closer to home, the spouse and children of the addict often are victims of verbal and physical abuse.

Alcohol, as well as any other psychoactive substance, will affect our ability to make the correct moral choices; under the influence, folk are likely to slip deeper and deeper into sin.

Those trapped in any kind of substance abuse need to realize their problem and their need of help from a power greater than themselves—and that includes God’s grace, the support of family or a caring church community, and the treatment prescribed by qualified professionals (if possible).

As Seventh-day Adventists, we take a very strong line on alcohol use. Without judging or condemning them, how can we help those among us who are struggling with this problem?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: John 8:36

The Student Will:

Know: Compare and contrast the effects of addiction and freedom in Christ to do the will of God.

Feel: Sense the slavery that comes with addictions and the need to depend instead on God’s grace in times of temptation.

Do: Stop focusing on the negative effects brought about by fulfilling destructive human desires and instead live for God and His will for our lives.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Evils of Addiction
   A What are some different kinds of addictions?
   B Some addictions are harmful in even small quantities, such as heroin. Others are not inherently bad, such as food, sex, or money. What makes the difference? What are the similarities? What effects do addictions have on how we live?
   C How can Christ give us the freedom to live for God, rather than for our destructive desires?

II. Feel: Dependence
   A How do we feel when we are enslaved? How are addictions like slavery?
   B How can dependence on the saving power of God free us?
   C Can dependence on God be addictive? Why, or why not?

III. Do: Living for God
   A If such things as work, money, power, and beauty can be addictive, what do we need to do in order to live for God instead of for these things, good as they may be in themselves?

Summary: When anything becomes an obsessive, uncontrollable, and destructive desire, it becomes an addiction. However, God has promised freedom from destructive desires.
What does the Bible say about sex as a source of enjoyment and strengthening marriage relationships? Prov. 5:18, 19; 1 Cor. 7:2–5.

Sex is one of the many enjoyable gifts that God has granted to men and women. God designed it not only for procreation but also to be a source of joy, closeness, and unity—but only in the context of marriage between one man and one woman (Gen. 1:27, 28; 1 Cor. 7:2). When taken away from this God-ordained framework and purpose, the gift becomes sin—sin often with devastating consequences (see 1 Cor. 6:18, 19). God alone knows the extent of havoc that sexual immorality has brought to the human family.

Sex is a very strong drive and thus readily open to abuse. It easily can become an absorbing obsession, one that’s very difficult to control. Worse, the more one indulges in it, the more and more sex one needs in order to reach the level of satisfaction attained earlier.

Prostitution and adultery are traditional paths into sexual immorality and addiction (see Prov. 5:3–14, 9:13–18). In addition, other forms of sex addiction are available today, such as pornography and cybersex. Internet pornography has created a staggering problem because, with a few mere clicks of a mouse, it can put the most vile and degrading acts into our homes and offices. These practices are highly capable of creating addiction, compulsion, and deterioration of marriage and family ties. It’s impossible to calculate the damage, for instance, that adultery has created in the world.

Sexual immorality is easy to start, and those who have not fallen into its trap will do well in keeping far from it. How crucial that when confronted with sexual temptations outside the sacred bonds of marriage, each person should act as Joseph did (see Gen. 39:7–12).

God is willing to grant full pardon and freedom to anyone trapped in sex addictions. Submission to Him is crucial (James 4:7). But the addiction mechanism is so intricate that professional help may be needed. Support groups that incorporate God as the ultimate Source of help and include specialized skills to treat the problem can be of great benefit, if available.

How can you help someone who, though guilty of sin in this area, is seeking to know God’s forgiveness and healing? Suppose you are struggling here. How can you know that all hope is not lost, just as long as you don’t lose hope yourself? Jesus forgives—and heals.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Only the power of God can release us from the grip of addictive behavior.

Kaye (a pseudonym) had served for years as kitchen coordinator for a Christian camp. She had witnessed many youths come to Christ there, including two of her own children. She was an integral part of the team, providing meals that were not only nourishing but also enjoyable. She had committed her life to Christ only a short time before she started working for the camp; but Kaye had a secret that she kept hidden from the pastor and most of the church membership.

She was addicted to alcohol. It happened innocently enough. While in high school, someone challenged her to drink. “Once” surely was acceptable. Her friends indulged, apparently without suffering long-term effects. “One-time” experimenters should not be compared with alcoholics, should they? How could she know that researchers estimate that as many as one-seventh of the population may have a predisposition toward alcoholism, meaning that even a solitary encounter with alcohol can translate into lifetime enslavement? That “innocuous dare” plunged her headlong toward alcoholism, a lifetime struggle that continued even after baptism. Although God delivered her from addiction months before her death, the consequences were nevertheless unavoidable. Left behind were those beautiful, intelligent, elementary-age children.

Lloyd (a pseudonym) struggled with sexual addictions. Unbeknown to church leadership, this Pathfinder Club director secretly molested his stepdaughters until his wife discovered his destructive activities. Although he disappeared from their lives shortly thereafter, his wife, overcome by shame, self-blame, and guilt, committed suicide. “Release for captives” is the divine promise that planet Earth desperately needs fulfilled today.

**Opening Activity:** Conceal small magnetic metallic objects beneath uncooked rice in an opaque container. Using a powerful electromagnet lift the unseen metallic objects from the rice.

**Consider This:** How did the electromagnet uncover objects invisible within the rice? How may temptations uncover character shortcomings and addictions invisible beneath the façade called “church/civic involvement”? Considering the metaphor of the electromagnet, how do Christians disable the power of temptation?
Gambling

Though the Bible doesn’t come right out and prohibit gambling per se, it’s hard to imagine Jesus or Paul working the tables in Las Vegas, isn’t it?

At the same time, Paul does warn against love of money, classing it as the root of all evil and the reason people have abandoned the faith (1 Tim. 6:10). For some, in their desire for wealth, gambling becomes the snare that Satan uses to seek to destroy them.

Read Matthew 25:15–30. How could one apply the teaching here to the problem of gambling, especially when the vast majority of people who gamble lose?

Gambling is for losers. The industry thrives because a lot more money is lost than won. What, for instance, are the chances of winning the lottery? The odds are staggeringly against you. You have more chance of getting hit by lightning than you do of winning.

Logic alone should warn us against putting any money and time into gambling (after all, the gambling industry can exist only when people lose more than they make). Yet, people gamble, and soon what they thought of as fun later becomes a compulsion.

Why? Self-esteem needs seem to be at the core. Many find a special satisfaction in fantasizing about winning. When they do not win, they become increasingly hopeful about hitting it next time. So, they gamble again and again. When all money is spent, they borrow, lie, and may steal in order to get another “dose” of this nonchemical “drug.”

We may think that gambling addiction does not happen in our church, but Ellen White wrote about it in her time, for it was a problem even then. There is no reason to believe that today (when gambling is ubiquitous) our church members are free from this problem, especially as online gambling can bring the casino right into our homes.

Recovery from gambling takes a multiple front: First is to admit that you have a serious problem. Then you must quit at once but find refuge in a group (if available) in order to avoid relapse. Be alert and stay away from any stimulus that may entice you to gamble. Enhancing self-esteem also is necessary to avoid relapse. Most important, constant communion with God and clinging to His promises of healing are crucial when struggling with any temptation.

What would you say and do if someone you know said to you, “I am hooked on gambling, and I just cannot quit”? What Bible promises could you point them to? See 1 Cor. 10:13 and 1 Pet. 4:1, 2.
**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Isaiah’s proclamation of freedom (Isa. 61:1, 2), fulfilled through Christ’s earthly appearance (Luke 4:18), is essentially the gospel. Freedom from oppression, liberty extended to captives, forms the heartbeat of the Christian message. Sin is addictive by nature. Praise our heavenly Father for this promise: “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36, NIV).

**Bible Commentary**

1. **The Love of Money** *(Review Proverbs 30:8, 9 with the class.)*

When considering addictive behaviors, Christians generally condemn chemical dependencies, pornography, and other taboos. Other addictions often escape such scathing rebukes, although they are no less sinful. Indeed, some appear endemic to Christian organizations. Loving money is certainly one of those “white-collar” addictions, generally escaping condemnation and often cloaked in acceptability.

Ironically, the apostle Paul identified money-worship as evil’s root. Of course, money merely represents what may be accomplished by its possession. People worship money for the power it affords them. In pursuing the love of power, there are many pathways—political, organizational, as well as financial. Eventually all are traced back to self-love, for instance, self-centeredness. By extension, evil is rooted in self-centeredness that has assumed the form of “money-loving.” Interestingly enough, the New Living Translation of 1 Timothy 6:10 uses the language of addiction—“craving money”—to describe “people who long to be rich,” and those who “fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction” (vs. 9).

**Consider This:** If money-worship is merely a pathway to the usurpation of power, how might the apostle Paul have evaluated other means of accruing power? Is loving money for the purpose of accruing power any more sinful than other means of cultivating power, for example, political infighting, organizational ladder-climbing, or backstabbing colleagues? Why might Christians enjoy condemning drunkards, cocaine addicts, and pornographers but avoid condemning power-grabbing, money-hungry fellow believers? Or how did power-thirsty church leaders compromise...
The Love of Money

“Put falsehood and lying far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; [provide me only with the food I need;] lest, being full, I deny you, saying, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or, being in want, I steal, and profane the name of my God” (Prov. 30:8, 9, NAB).

The Bible does not limit the amount of money one should aim to have but warns against the wrong attitude toward money and possessions—such as covetousness and greed. A wrong outlook might make people obsessive, compulsive, and addicted to moneymaking (albeit honestly earned) or to the accumulation of possessions. These themes may occupy so much time and effort that they become false gods.

Information technology has made things easier but, at the same time, more risky for those prone to addiction. For example, private investors on the stock exchange now can perform their operations instantly over the Internet. In this setting, some easily are caught for endless hours in front of the computer, all in order to make money; this is not the same thing, however, as someone being a good steward by wisely and carefully investing money.

Read Mark 10:17–27. See also 1 Tim. 6:10 and Luke 12:15. What warning must we take away from these texts?

Such expressions as “the man’s face fell” and “he went away sad” (Mark 10:22, NIV) tell us that his love for wealth was greater than his love for the Master. Accumulation of money or material possessions is not good or bad in itself. It all depends on where the heart is (see Matt. 6:21). It becomes dangerous when it stands in the way of what should be the first goal: seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness (vs. 33).

The ship Chanunga, on its way from Liverpool to America, had a massive collision with a small vessel from Hamburg. Crowded with more than two hundred passengers, the ship sank a half hour after the crash. The Chanunga’s lifesaving boats were lowered in order to reach the shipwrecked persons, but only thirty-four were saved. Why such a small proportion? Almost all had seized their belts of gold and silver and tied them round their waists. Refusing to lose their money, they lost their lives (and their money) instead.

Who doesn’t like money? The question you need to ask yourself is, “Do I control my desire for money, or does it control me?”
the gospel’s purity during the Middle Ages? What role did the pursuit of power play in the great controversy between Christ and Satan?

II. Personal Image (Review 1 Peter 3:3, 4 with the class.)

Among Christians, generally speaking, fashion also may be classified as “white-collar” addiction. Such an evaluation is not popular, but this only underscores the insidious nature of that addiction. Denial becomes an almost insurmountable hurdle to overriding any addiction. Practically speaking, a simple test is in order. This is that test: Do I spend more time on matters of appearance—shopping for clothing (in local stores, on the Internet, through catalogs), studying hairstyles and creating them, comparing cosmetic surgery techniques, applying make-up, reading “muscle-magazines,” and so on—than I spend reading God’s Word and praying? If we answer honestly and affirmatively, we should immediately, by God’s grace, reorder our priorities. This is less a matter of what one wears as it is a matter of how important appearance is compared with how important spiritual substance is.

Christ came to redeem who we are (substance), not what we look like. What matters to our Maker is who we are in relationship with Him. Every fashion, conservative or bizarre, when worshiped instead of the Creator, becomes idolatrous, a form of self-worship; but every heart, completely surrendered to God, becomes a channel of light in a darkened world, allowing Jesus to shine through.

Consider This: Why do Christians allow outward appearances to unduly influence their judgment? Why are believers tempted to give more attention to surface matters to the detriment of internal transformation? How does James 2:1–9 influence our approach to these matters?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Have class members or church youth present the following dialogue. Discuss the implications about how to gain release from our addictions and compulsive behaviors.

“The Light”

OWNER. I give up! I’m never going to find my way out of this trap.

FRIEND. Trap? This is your home. You built it. You invested years of your income to get this place. Now you want out?

OWNER. In a heartbeat. But it’s not going to happen, is it? I feel betrayed and lied to!
Personal Image

Read 1 Peter 3:3, 4. How is what’s said there different from what society teaches us?

Society has placed an excessive value on personal image. This is a weakness that has accompanied humans for their entire history. In our days, this emphasis on beauty and personal care has reached overwhelming proportions. The worldwide cosmetic industry alone is more than half of the global food retail market. In addition to cosmetics, many people spend endless resources on body building, facelifts, hair transplants, plastic surgery, special diets, and so on, all in order to improve their appearance.

This intensive desire to become more beautiful also has the risk of becoming addictive. Some develop exercise addiction; others the addiction to eat a little less each time, to the point of endangering their lives. Others may become obsessed with their hair or skin, submitting themselves to sophisticated, costly, and never-ending treatments.

How would you interpret Matthew 6:19–21 in the context we are looking at? How do the same principles apply?

There is nothing wrong with being fit, clean, and nice-looking. It is the constant focus on these things that can draw our hearts to them to the point of letting them become idols. Jesus talked about the need to develop treasures in heaven, not on earth, where things do not last and may distract us from God’s kingdom. Indeed, there’s one thing about looks that you can be sure of: sooner or later, time and gravity will take them away.

Like material resources, our bodies are a treasure entrusted to us, but we run a serious risk of making it an idol when our devotion to it becomes excessive. It’s not always easy to know when a line has been crossed; hence, the need for all of us to be careful in this regard.

What kind of messages are we creating for our young people in the church in regard to personal image? What are we emphasizing? In what subtle ways might we be sending wrong messages? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.
**Learning Cycle**

**FRIEND.** What?
**OWNER.** You heard me! I was told that this was the great adventure.
**FRIEND.** What is?

**OWNER.** The absence of light. At first it was a novelty. It was a real kick feeling your way around in the dark—kind of secretive like the hide-and-go-seek you play as kids. Then I did a face plant, tripping over something. May have broken my back falling down some stairs nobody told me about. Tried feeling around the walls for an outlet to plug in a light and got shocked. I hate darkness.

**FRIEND.** Then let the light in.

**OWNER.** Aren’t you listening? I’ve tried till I’m blue in the face . . . that is, if you could see my face. I was promised this forever light . . . fluorescent deal that never goes out . . . only I can’t see where to screw it in and I fell on it. Cut my hand to pieces. They said just start the generator for electricity, but the pull cord snapped. I’ve done everything I know to put some light in this dungeon. Nothing, I mean nothing, works. I’m doomed to darkness.

**FRIEND.** You’re the one who isn’t listening. I didn’t say, “Make light.” I didn’t say, “Generate electricity.” I merely said, “Let the light in.”

**OWNER.** Huh?

**FRIEND.** There’s already plenty of light on the other side of your curtains. You don’t have to make it. You just need to let it come in.

**Thought Questions:**

1. In overcoming the darkness of addictions, are we able to generate the power to overcome temptation? Is it humanly possible to generate light (understanding, wisdom, willpower)?

2. Does that light already exist beyond ourselves? If such power exists, how do we usher that light into our lives? What role can friends play in helping others to “own” their pain while still dismissing the darkness?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** The most dangerous addictions are the “white collar” addictions readily accepted by most Christians. While the closing activity applies to all addictions, do not allow the class to overlook how this applies to their socially acceptable ones.

**Activity:** (1) Identify what constitutes an addiction. (2) Discuss what “this week’s” addictions (alcohol, gambling, greed, fashion, and sex) have in common. (3) Create a Scripture-based escape plan for those so trapped.
Further Study: “Words and acts testify plainly what is in the heart. If vanity and pride, love of self and love of dress, fill the heart, the conversation will be upon the fashions, the dress, and the appearance, but not on Christ or the kingdom of heaven. If envious feelings dwell in the heart, they will be manifested in words and acts. Those who measure themselves by others, do as others do, and make no higher attainments, excusing themselves because of the faults and wrongs of others, are feeding on husks and will remain spiritual dwarfs as long as they gratify Satan by thus indulging their own unconsecrated feelings. Some dwell upon what they shall eat and drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed. These thoughts flow out from the abundance of the heart, as though temporal things were the grand aim in life, the highest attainment. These persons forget the words of Christ: “‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.’”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 500.

Discussion Questions:

1. In class, go over your answer to Thursday’s final question.

2. Why is it so important not to be judgmental toward those who are struggling with an addiction of any kind? It’s easy to be judgmental, of course, but why should we be very careful in that regard?

3. Some addictions are deemed more socially acceptable than others that could only add to their deception. After all, how many people enter treatment for addiction to wealth or power? How can we learn not to let societal values impact how we view these things?

4. However strong the grip of addiction could be in your life or in the life of someone you know, is there anything that the Lord can’t free us from? What is the key to allowing Christ to work in our lives so that we can have that victory? See Luke 9:23.

5. What kind of programs does your local church have that can help people who are struggling with addiction? What can your church do to help those who are in need? In what ways could programs such as these be powerful outreach tools, as well?

6. Read 1 Peter 4:1, 2. What is the Lord’s message to us here in regard to what is involved in overcoming sinful addictions?
SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Gen. 1:27–2:25; Genesis 3; Jer. 10:12, 13; Ps. 19:1–7; Matt. 6:25–34; Psalm 104.

**Memory Text:** “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge” (Psalm 19:1, 2, NIV).

God created Adam and Eve in His own image. What could be a more perfect inheritance? He then placed them in the Garden of Eden. What could be a more perfect setting? Both heredity and environment, then, were divinely balanced to produce and preserve perfect mental and physical health.

Sin, however, ruined everything—and, by the second generation, jealousy, hatred, and violence contaminated the world. The natural environment also underwent the initial results of sin, and when sin became intolerable, the Flood changed forever the portrait of the earth.

Yet, much goodness and beauty remain in the natural world. Nature still supplies sufficient resources to satisfy our basic needs. Nature also can provide joy, happiness, and well-being to compensate partially for the misery caused by sin.

Thus, despite its sometimes violent and deadly convulsions, nature can be a source of mental and physical health. It also can become a means for us to draw ever closer to the Creator, the fount of all goodness: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17).

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 19.*
A Perfect Environment

Today, living as we do in a world tainted and corrupted by sin, we can only imagine what it must have been like for our first parents in Eden. No sin, no suffering, no death—nothing to bring them the kind of sorrows and pain that we all know so well. In a sense, we’re so used to these realities, they’re so common, that we forget that they all are intruders, things that were not in the original creation, things that were never meant to be, things that we are promised will one day be forever gone.

Read Genesis 1:27–2:25. What picture is presented about what life and the environment were like in Eden? How different is it from what we know today?

The newly created couple was placed in a garden that God Himself had planted (Gen. 2:8). Although the biblical account is brief, imagine when we consider the wonderful bounties nature provides for us today, the luxurious mix of produce that must have come from this, the first garden. Their senses were exposed to sights, sounds, tastes, feelings, and aromas that certainly brought much satisfaction and well-being to our first parents. It truly was Paradise.

There is no doubt that the environment was the best to suit the newly created humans. Their physical, emotional, and mental needs were more than met. Mental states such as uncertainty, anxiety, and worry were completely unknown, because there was nothing there to cause them.

“The Creator chose for our first parents the surroundings best adapted for their health and happiness. He did not place them in a palace or surround them with the artificial adornments and luxuries that so many today are struggling to obtain. . . . In the garden that God prepared as a home for His children, graceful shrubs and delicate flowers greeted the eye at every turn. There were trees of every variety, many of them laden with fragrant and delicious fruit. On their branches the birds caroled their songs of praise. Under their shadow the creatures of the earth sported together without a fear.”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 261.

Try to envision what Eden must have been like. Think of the sights, the smells, the tastes, everything designed to appeal to our senses. What should that tell us about how, in principle, our physical bodies are good and were made to be enjoyed by us?
**The Lesson in Brief**

**Key Text:** Psalm 19:1, 2

**The Student Will:**

- **Know:** Outline the physical, mental, and spiritual benefits of close contact with the natural world God created.
- **Feel:** Cherish the beauty, order, power, and love of God as demonstrated in His works of creation.
- **Do:** Commune with God in natural surroundings and use the natural remedies He offers.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Nature’s Wealth**

- What are the health benefits that God has provided in nature which we can appropriate only by being outside in His natural world?
- What are the spiritual benefits of worshiping in the garden, field, or woods?
- What are the mental benefits of study and close contact with the works of God’s hands?

II. **Feel: Invisible Made Visible**

- How are the traits of God revealed in the works of His hands?
- Which of these demonstrations of His attributes are most valuable to you?
- How do you acknowledge your gratitude and appreciation to God for what He has made?

III. **Do: Living With Nature**

- How can we take better advantage of the benefits God has provided for our health in nature?
- How can we bring what we eat into closer conformity to God’s original plan for our diet?
- How can we make our home environment more in harmony with our first home in Eden?

**Summary:** In nature, our first home, God has provided healthful foods, a peaceful environment, natural remedies, and an ideal place for worship and communion with Him.
Sin and Nature

Whatever wonder and beauty we can find in nature, it is today a double-edged sword. Beauty and marvel are there, but so are famine, earthquakes, pestilence, and disease. Something has gone terribly wrong.

Read over Genesis 3, the Fall. What immediate changes came to both humans and nature as a result of sin?

Sin brought immediate physical and spiritual consequences to human life. Nature, too, suffered the effects of sin. Sin caused devastating effects upon Creation in at least three ways:

• The ground was cursed (Gen. 3:17). After departing from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve encountered immediate obstacles in working the soil. The ground began to produce undesirable thorns and thistles. Pests, most probably, got in the way of healthy growth too. Things got worse after the devastation of the Flood.

• Human beings experienced significant changes. Fatigue and pain became a reality. The relationship between the man and the woman changed. The chapter seems to imply that Eve would have originally not had pain in childbirth. The relationship of Adam to the earth had changed, as well, and work now was going to be much more difficult than it would have been before. We do not know how the awareness of their own impending deaths affected the first couple, but it must have changed their outlook on life completely.

• Sin affected human and animal behavior. Hatred, jealousy, selfishness, arrogance, etc., caused aggression against fellow humans and animals. Other unknown ways of damaging the environment (perhaps comparable to what we are witnessing today) may have taken place. Animals started to kill each other for food and for power. As described in Genesis 3–6, corruption and violence escalated to the point that God was grieved for having made all creatures (Gen. 6:5–7).

The true extent of all these transformations is not revealed to us, but we can assume that profound changes took place. Yet, God, in His infinite mercy, preserved a great deal of the magnificent original Creation for the benefit of human beings.

Look around at the wonders of nature wherever you are. What echoes of the original Creation seem to remain? What hope can you draw from those echoes that point you to the promises of a better world?
**Learning Cycle**

►**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God created the world of nature to be the optimal environment for His creatures and to express His character. Sin has altered it, but nature still can help us to know God better and to help us achieve better physical and mental health.

The only universe in which intelligent life could come into being and thrive is a universe much like the one we occupy now. In fact, it is the universe we occupy now. So says what physicists and cosmologists call the Anthropic Principle.

According to this reasoning, there are an infinite number of universes that could have come into being if it had been left up to what Christian apologist Scott Hahn refers to as the “anti-deity” of the atheists, Chance. An incomprehensibly huge number of these possible universes would have been completely hostile to the existence of anything we would recognize as life, with an infinitesimally tiny number of them capable of becoming home to *any* form of life. The number capable of giving rise to intelligent life would be even smaller. Yet, somehow, here we are.

There are two possible ways of explaining this. Either our universe did come into being by chance and every universe that *can* exist *does* exist; we just happen to be in the one that allows us to exist. For many minds this explanation strains credulity.

The other alternative is that the universe was designed with us in mind, which just happens to be what the Bible has been telling us all along.

**Discuss With the Class:** How does it make you feel that God designed the universe with us in mind? Or do you believe that is true, that He actually did that?

►**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

I. The Speech and Knowledge of the Stars *(Review Psalm 19:1, 2 with the class.)*

Most people would agree that the stars are pretty to look at. But for many...
God’s Gifts Through Nature

The natural world presents a powerful testimony to not only the existence of God but also His power. Sadly, as Paul warned, humans (no doubt inspired by Satan) turned away from the living God and worshiped the creation instead of its Creator (see Rom. 1:19–25).

Read Jeremiah 10:12, 13. What picture is presented here of God’s creative power and His present involvement in natural phenomena? What can we learn about the character of God through His created works?

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Of course, as we all know, nature sometimes turns against us, spreading horror through earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, etc. Why these tragedies happen when and where they do are questions that we don’t have answers for now. What we do know, however, is that the first few chapters in the book of Job reveal the reality of the great controversy between God and Satan and that Satan can use the forces of nature for evil purposes. And despite these terrible calamities, the goodness of God still can be seen in the natural world.

Read Psalm 19:1–6, and then in your own words paraphrase its basic message.

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Nature traditionally has been seen by Seventh-day Adventists as God’s second book. Observation and study of the natural world, if done in humility and openness to the influence of the Holy Spirit, will deepen faith and trust in God. It also will provide additional understanding into God’s love for His creatures. This can be a great source of mental and spiritual comfort. Sometimes, when all else fails, the beauty of nature, and what it testifies to us about God, can be a source of great comfort and hope.

If while you are witnessing to someone about God’s goodness (especially as revealed in nature) the person brings up the question of tsunamis, earthquakes, famines, and the like, how would you respond? What does the reality of these natural disasters tell us about the limits of what nature can teach us about God?
peoples in ancient times, the stars were more than objects of beauty; they were gods. The civilizations of Mesopotamia—Chaldea, Babylon, and so on—developed an elaborate system that became what we now know as astrology to determine how these “gods” governed the destinies of individuals, nations, and peoples. This continues to this day. An iconic American president, it has been alleged, based some of his scheduling on the recommendations of an astrologer. Some people in India would no more release a new product or run for office without the benefit of an astrological chart than they would dispense with the advice of consultants or analysts.

In a way, it was, and is, not unnatural for people to think this way. We look up at the stars and see order: heavenly bodies moving in their courses with mathematical precision and certainty. Then we look around at the earth and see seeming chaos, but we know in our hearts that there must be order and meaning to it all. The heavens are as good a place as any to look.

But the psalmist urges us not to stop there but to look beyond at the source of that order. There is indeed knowledge to be found in the stars, but it is knowledge of the One who created the stars and set them in motion, the One who really holds the keys to the destinies of individuals, nations, and peoples.

Consider This: Some believe that God created the universe, set the laws by which it would be governed, and left it to its own devices. The God of the Bible, however, created the universe and natural laws but continues to involve Himself in the lives of His people. What does it mean to you that the God who set the stars in motion is intimately concerned with what concerns you? What does the order of the universe tell us about God’s will for our physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional well-being?

II. Nature—Then and Now (Review Genesis 1:27–30, 3:17 with your class.)

Many people have tried to draw detailed prescriptions for the ideal human diet from this passage. Much has been made, for example, of the fact that God prescribes fruit and herbs bearing seed for human consumption, while allowing all green plants to other animals. Did our first parents follow a form of kosher veganism? We’ll never know, and it isn’t that important.

What is important, and what most commentators agree upon, is that our first parents—and God’s other creatures—were what we would now call vegans. They were able to sustain themselves without snuffing out the lives of any of God’s other creatures, including the plants they ate, which even today are somewhat self-regenerating. Even if one
Communion With God in Nature

“‘Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin’” (Matt. 6:28).

A young man, an atheist his whole life, was converted in his early twenties. Right after his new birth, he lived for a number of months in a country setting, and he would often wander in the woods, marveling at the wonders of the God who had created such beauty. Of course, he had seen wonderful things in the natural world before, but only now was he able to see the character of the Lord who had created it all. It was, he said, “as if my eyes were opened for the first time in my whole life!” It was during that time that this new Christian came to truly know the Lord.

Read Matthew 6:25–34. What is Jesus telling us that we can learn from studying nature?

No question, we indeed can learn many valuable spiritual lessons from the study of the created world. But nature can work to our advantage spiritually in another way, as well. Luke 5:16 says that Jesus “withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed,” something that Ellen White said Jesus did often. Sometimes we, too, need to get away from everything and just be alone with the Lord in a natural environment. The beauty, the comfort, the peace, the serenity that one often finds in the natural world can speak to our hearts and minds in ways that nothing else does. There might not be any sudden revelation of new truth; there might be no new insights on a doctrine or a text. What there can be, instead, is an unspoken recognition of the love and power of the One who created all this. However we might individually experience the Lord this way, there’s no question that time alone in nature, in communion with God, can bring healing and peace to our bodies and souls.

“All who are under the training of God need the quiet hour for communion with their own hearts, with nature, and with God. In them is to be revealed a life that is not in harmony with the world, its customs, or its practices; and they need to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God. We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God.”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 58.

When was the last time you communed with the Lord in nature? If possible, make an effort to do just that. You might be surprised at what a positive spiritual effect it will have.
ate the leaves of a plant, the same plant would produce other leaves. In other words: no death, no exploitation, everything living in harmony with everything else, and no need for fighting or fleeing.

This also puts the concept of dominion—presented in verse 28—in an interesting light. Some commentators wonder why God didn’t allow the first humans a carnivorous diet, since He gave them dominion. Clearly, dominion as described here was not a relationship of exploiter and exploited. We really have little concept of what this entails, except that with the advent of sin it did “evolve” into an exploitative, sometimes predatory, relationship.

When sin was introduced into this harmony, it functioned in a way comparable to a computer virus or malware. At first, nature may have seemed to have gone on much the way it had. But the functions began to break down in certain ways. Dominion became naked exploitation of the weak by the strong. Death became part of the cycle of life and nourishment. The nature that God had created was recognizable but marred.

**Consider This:** In 1 Corinthians 15:47–50, Paul introduces the idea of Jesus Christ as the second Adam. What does this suggest about His role in restoring the harmony of creation destroyed by the first Adam? What, for example, does Christ’s sacrifice for us suggest about the true concept of dominion outlined in Genesis 1:28? *(See also Philippians 2:5–8.)*

### STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Help your students to find and identify God’s presence and character reflected in nature and to see the ways in which God can and does communicate with us through the natural world.

**Thought Questions:**

1. What distinguishes reverence for the natural world as God’s creation from the sentimentality that many people have about nature (for example, the assumption that anything “natural” is good), or worship of nature, both of which seem to become more common and attractive the farther we’re removed from nature itself?

2. Why do you think Jesus used so many examples from the natural world in His parables? What was He saying about nature, particularly in
Psalm 104

In the nineteenth century, a popular belief known as deism stated that God had created the world but then left it alone. In other words, according to this position, God exists but doesn’t want to get involved.

That view, however, is not what the Bible teaches. God didn’t just set the world like a wind-up watch and then let it go, come what may. According to the Bible, He’s intricately involved in all that happens here. After all, what is the Cross if not God intimately and directly involved in human affairs?

Read Psalm 104 prayerfully. What does it tell us about the role of God in creation and in the natural world?

Perhaps the most telling thing about Psalm 104 is the enthusiasm and excitement that exude from the words themselves. The psalmist rejoices in the creative and sustaining power of the Lord. You almost can hear him shouting out these words in praise and adoration. He sees the reality of God in the everyday function of the natural world.

The God presented in this psalm is not the god of the deists either. He’s a God who is involved in what happens here. No doubt, whatever the psalmist’s personal troubles, he finds comfort and hope in the power of the Lord. Sure, contemplating the birds in their nests or the lions seeking their food isn’t going to solve whatever daily struggles he’s facing, but he can see in nature things that speak to him of God’s goodness and power, and that gives him hope.

Nature also can be a source of healing to the body, mind, and spirit. In many cases fresh air, sunlight, water, and a healthy diet can do wonders for us both physically and mentally. Natural remedies remain a powerful means of health and healing.

Some doctors, too, often will tell people to get away from work and stress and find rest and relaxation in a natural setting somewhere. Some research shows just how good nature and a natural environment can be for us physically and mentally. After all, God put our first parents in a garden, not in a city square. Something in us resonates better with a field of lilies than it does with an asphalt parking lot.

Nature is one of God’s great gifts. We should do all that we can to take advantage of it. What are ways you can benefit better from what God has given us in nature?
contrast to the physical, mental, and spiritual environment humans had created for themselves? Look at Matthew 6:25–34, for example.

Application Questions:

1. There are two basic points of view on the question of humankind’s “dominion” over nature mentioned in Genesis 1:28. The first is that it justifies almost any use, or exploitation, of the natural world. Such views also tend to emphasize the impermanence of the present world, which is waiting for Jesus’ return. The second associates the concept with something that might better be called stewardship. Which do you agree with? In what way do you think the entrance of sin into the world changed the meaning of the word *dominion*?

2. How has nature helped you personally—or how do you think it can help you—to enjoy better physical or mental health?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: One of the effects of the modern way of life in many places is that it has caused us to become estranged from nature. Many of us know relatively little about the natural world in our own backyards. The following activity will help your students to learn a little about the natural phenomena in their immediate area, and possibly encourage them to take greater notice of the wonders right in front of them.

The week before this lesson is to be taught, encourage your students to find out facts about nature in their immediate area. What kinds of trees can be found in their yards or neighborhoods, for example? What are some of the nearby bodies of water? What plants and vegetables grow best in that particular climate and soil? Encourage class members to report what they have discovered.

Alternatively, a more hands-on approach might be to plant a garden (climate and seasons permitting) in pots or in a corner of the church property, as available. Grow from seed and watch the whole life cycle. This is, of course, a long-term class project.
Further Study: “The home of our first parents was to be a pattern for other homes as their children should go forth to occupy the earth. That home, beautified by the hand of God Himself, was not a gorgeous palace. Men, in their pride, delight in magnificent and costly edifices and glory in the works of their own hands; but God placed Adam in a garden. This was his dwelling. The blue heavens were its dome; the earth, with its delicate flowers and carpet of living green, was its floor; and the leafy branches of the goodly trees were its canopy. Its walls were hung with the most magnificent adornings—the handiwork of the great Master Artist. In the surroundings of the holy pair was a lesson for all time—that true happiness is found, not in the indulgence of pride and luxury, but in communion with God through His created works. If men would give less attention to the artificial, and would cultivate greater simplicity, they would come far nearer to answering the purpose of God in their creation.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 49, 50.

“The constant contact with the mystery of life and the loveliness of nature, as well as the tenderness called forth in ministering to these beautiful objects of God’s creation, tends to quicken the mind and refine and elevate the character.”—Ellen G. White, The Adventist Home, p. 143.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can we make sure that we don’t cross the line from being a lover of nature to a worshiper of it? How might that not always be an easy distinction to draw? However wonderful nature is, we always must remember that, in the end, it can’t save us. Only the God who created nature can. Why is it important to always keep that crucial truth in mind?

2. What should we as Seventh-day Adventists have to say in regard to the whole question of the environment? What, if anything in our teaching, could be a helpful and needed component in this important question? At the same time, how should we respond to the following idea: “Well, we know the Lord is coming soon, and this whole world will be destroyed and then made over, so is the environment really that important?”

3. In what ways today should all the incredible advancements in scientific and natural knowledge help increase our love of and appreciation for the power of God? Think of all the things we know about the natural world today of which the ancients had no inkling. Thus, in what ways do we have so many more advantages than they ever did in regard to being able to marvel at the creative power of the Lord?
Partnership With Jesus

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “‘Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me’” (John 15:4, NIV).

In recent years, research has pointed to the positive effects that religiosity, faith, spirituality, prayer, forgiveness, hope, and church attendance can have on health, including mental health. Numerous prominent scientific publications have reported a connection between religious faith and positive mental and emotional well-being. Surprise of surprises!

Yet, this is not magic; the faith factor applies only to those who are deeply committed to their religious principles. Psychiatrist Montagu Barker, an expert in the interface between religion and mental health, states that religion is a potent safeguard against mental illness, but only when believers possess a strong commitment to their beliefs. If not, religion may become a source of guilt and the cause of emotional, mental, and behavioral disturbances.

This week we will look at our best Example, Jesus, to learn how we can be strong in faith. By studying His life and maintaining a close relationship with Him, we can build solid mechanisms for spiritual growth, which itself can lead to better mental health.

Prayer and Bible study, worship, the practice of forgiveness, service to others, and hope and trust in God are sure pathways to spiritual development and mental health. With Jesus as our Example, we surely can’t go wrong.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 26.
The Praying Lord

Read Mark 1:21–35 and Luke 4:31–42. What lessons can you learn about His habits of prayer? What should this say to us about our need to pray?

Jesus is found going to the synagogue on that Sabbath in Capernaum, teaching the Scriptures to an amazed group of people who recognized His authority and that He healed a demon-possessed man. After the meeting, Jesus and His disciples went to the house of Peter and Andrew, and, there, He healed Peter’s mother-in-law. At sunset, many (“the whole town” [Mark 1:33, NIV]) congregated around Jesus and brought all sorts of ill and demon-possessed to be healed.

“Never before had Capernaum witnessed a day like this. The air was filled with the voice of triumph and shouts of deliverance. Not until the last sufferer had been relieved did Jesus cease His work. It was far into the night when the multitude departed and silence settled down upon the home of Simon.”—Ellen G. White, Lift Him Up, p. 86.

That must have been an exhausting day for Jesus. However, He did not sleep late the next morning. He needed to be in communion with His Father; so, He got up before dawn, went to a solitary place, and spent time in prayer. Jesus, the Son of God, He who had been with the Father before the world began (John 17:5), He who had created the entire universe (John 1:3), nevertheless felt the need for prayer. The concept is remarkable.

After stressful days, we tend to postpone prayer and communion with God. But it is precisely during those moments of psychological drain that we most need the soothing balm of prayer and time in the Word of God. Jesus knew this and practiced consistent closeness with His Father. If this was necessary for Jesus, how much more should it be for us?

Prayer is a positive factor in well-being and mental health. However much we don’t understand about prayer, about how it works or even about why it works, we are admonished to pray (Luke 18:1, 21:36, Rom. 12:12). Who hasn’t felt the positive impact this can have on our spirit and mind when spending time in communion with the Lord through prayer and reading the Word? We don’t have to understand all the mysteries of prayer in order to know how crucial it is to have a close relationship with God.

What kind of prayer life do you have? How much time do you spend in the Word of God? What are ways you can make your devotional time more meaningful and life-changing? However important that we spend time in prayer and reading the Word, time alone isn’t the only element. What other factors are needed?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Ephesians 4:15, 16

**The Student Will:**

- **Know:** Describe the health benefits of a spiritual relationship with Christ and His body, the church.
- **Feel:** Experience the hope and peace that comes from a daily walk with God, as well as the emotional support that comes from fellow believers.
- **Do:** Offer forgiveness and service to others as part of your practical religious experience.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know:** A Healthy Spiritual Life

- A What are the health benefits of an active prayer life and relationship with God?
- B What are the health benefits of church attendance and strong, caring relationships with fellow believers?
- C Why are forgiveness and service also important for health?

II. **Feel:** Spiritual Blessings

- A What blessings have you felt from meeting with fellow believers?
- B What positive emotions result from a relationship with God?
- C How do healthy Christians deal with guilt?

III. **Do:** Forgiveness and Service

- A Is there anyone in our present or past life that we need to forgive? What are the first steps we can take to committing to forgiveness?
- B How can we increase the outward focus of our lives? What needs in the church or neighborhood can we help to meet this week?
- C How has Christ modeled unyielding faith in God, even when He felt abandoned?

**Summary:** Strong relationships with our fellow believers and Christ, the Head of the church, help to create emotional stability. Trust in God brings not only peace and comfort now but confident hope in eternal life, as God has promised it, with no evil and no death.
Worship and Church Community

Jesus went regularly to the synagogue on Sabbath (Luke 4:16). His example should speak to us of the importance of community. The concept of “a lone Christian,” independent of the body, is not biblical. That there are some occasional examples of this in the Bible doesn’t prove that this is God’s plan. All through the Scriptures we see the model of God’s people as a community, a group working together for the mutual benefit of each other and for the church as a whole.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–31 and Ephesians 4:15, 16. What do these verses tell us about our role and place in a larger church community?

How interesting, too, that in recent years reputable studies are showing that those who attend and participate in church services (compared to those who don’t) on a regular basis are:

- less likely to suffer from substance abuse
- more likely to be sexually responsible
- less involved in risky behaviors
- more likely to practice business and work-related ethics
- more likely to enjoy a richer social network and group support
- more likely to display higher levels of self-esteem and personal efficacy
- more likely to cope better with losses (death of dear ones, calamities, health complications, and so on)
- more likely to harbor positive emotions (love, forgiveness, contentment, and so on)
- less likely to harbor negative emotions (guilt, fear, hostility, anger, and so on).

Belonging to a church can be a great source of blessing. Such an environment can be therapeutic for soul and body. True, at times problems arise in the community, leaving some angry and bitter; but more often than not, those who work through their problems can find in the church support and fellowship and encouragement that they might not get anywhere else. Think about what church could be like if every member took to heart these words from Paul: “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2, NIV).

What is your relationship to your local church body? Are you a giver or a taker? Why, at times, might you need to be a taker? At the same time, if we all went to church with the attitude of giving ourselves when and where we could, what kind of community would we have?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The keys to successful living are forged through divine partnership.

**Just for Teachers:** In 1979 the Chrysler Corporation was staring bankruptcy squarely in the face. Unable to rescue themselves, they sought a partner with vast reserves. Eventually, a partnership was forged with the federal government of the United States. One-point-five billion U.S. dollars were advanced to the moribund corporation. Without this partnership, Chrysler would have disintegrated into a historical footnote, and thousands of families would have fallen into unemployment. Partnership was crucial for viability.

Partnership is also crucial for spiritual viability. Scripture repeatedly states that humans are spiritually bankrupt when evaluated for themselves. Nevertheless, this does not imply worthlessness. Even while facing bankruptcy, Chrysler owned vast assets. Their condition, however, demonstrated that they owed infinitely more than they can ever repay. Likewise, our human race owes infinitely more than we could ever repay. Our spiritual bankruptcy demands a partnership with Someone possessing unlimited resources to cover our indebtedness. Enter the Heavenly Government of the Universe.

In Jesus Christ, heaven advanced us righteousness, salvation, justification, redemption, sanctification, and eternal hope. Lifeless apart from Christ, we become eternally viable with Jesus as our controlling partner. Our current study focuses our attention on how that divine partnership is forged.

**Opening Activity:** Discuss the mechanisms of business partnerships and the reasons acquisitions and mergers occur. Technical language is unnecessary, but basic concepts like the following undoubtedly will emerge from the discussion: (1) Often, companies accrue debt that they cannot handle alone or have aspirations that they cannot attain without additional capital; (2) another party, deeply interested in the distressed company, agrees to fund the indebtedness or the capital needed to achieve their goals; (3) the party funding the indebtedness becomes the controlling partner; and (4) in gratitude the party receiving the financial assistance provides worthwhile returns on the investments.
Forgiveness

“‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do’” (Luke 23:34).

Read Matthew 6:14, 15. What powerful message is Jesus giving to us here? What is He saying that is so full of eternal consequence for all of us?

Jesus taught His disciples to pray: “‘Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors’” (vs. 12, NIV). Then He insisted (vss. 14, 15) that if we do not wish to forgive, God will not forgive us.

The thought is terrifying. After all, we all are sinners; and thus, we all need divine forgiveness. Thus, we all must learn to forgive if we want to be forgiven ourselves!

Forgiveness is so important because it’s foundational in repairing and maintaining good relationships. The Lord knows how painful the burden of sin is and how its burden must be released through forgiveness—through the forgiveness that we get from God and through the forgiveness we give to others.

The experience of forgiveness is helpful, not only to those receiving it but also to those granting it. The feeling of grace and generosity experienced by those granting forgiveness brings them closer to God and contributes to character building.

A study conducted among recently divorced individuals showed the difference between those willing and those unwilling to forgive. Mark Rye of the University of Iowa recruited 199 divorced individuals from community singles’ organizations and church-based divorce recovery groups. Not surprisingly, researchers found that those who extended forgiveness to their former spouses enjoyed higher levels of mental health. When compared to those unwilling to forgive, forgiving persons experienced higher levels of well-being and religious satisfaction and lower levels of anger and depression.

This is not an isolated experience. Studies over the past decade are clear. Forgiveness reduces depression and anxiety and increases self-esteem and overall emotional well-being. In sum, forgiveness is good for many things; holding grudges, meanwhile, is dangerous for body and soul.

Is this so unexpected? Who among us hasn’t experienced the healing and relief that come from offering forgiveness to those who have hurt us?

How can you practice Paul’s counsel: “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Col. 3:13, NIV)? What choices must you make in order to forgive those who have hurt you?
Consider This: Think of the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. Was the landowner harsh in expecting a return on his investments? How does the attitude of the first two recipients contrast with that of the final recipient? What will the sincere believer’s attitude look like?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. The Praying Lord (Review Mark 1:21–35 and Luke 5:16 with the class.)

Prayer is divine communication. Could major corporations effectively exist without viable communication? Although perfect in every respect, Jesus constantly prayed. Christ valued communication with His heavenly Father, His Partner for the enterprise of redemption.

Ironically, feeble, frail human beings often appear less inclined toward prayer than did Christ, although we desperately need the direction of our Controlling Partner. Jesus opened and closed each day with such divine communication. Anyone who sincerely desires to reward the investment God has made in him or her, anyone who genuinely appreciates his or her release from spiritual indebtedness, anyone who understands the importance of our Controlling Partner’s wisdom, cannot help but communicate with God through prayer and Scripture reading.

Consider This: How does prayer fortify the believer in the battle against evil?

II. Worship and Church Community (Review Luke 4:16 with the class.)

Not only is passive partnership unfounded in Scripture, “independent partnership” is inimical to biblical Christianity. Indeed, “independent partnership” is an oxymoron. Jesus Himself regularly fellowshipped with believers every Sabbath. Although the embodiment of perfection, Christ did not consider interaction with His disciples or the uncultured masses beneath His dignity. He reserved time for communing with His Father, but He was constantly about the Father’s business of reaching lost souls with the gospel. Christians today need to gather strength from one another to successfully perform the work that God has given them to reach others with His love.

CONTINUED
Service

The Seventh-day Adventist outreach to the world historically has held two basic branches of ministry: teaching/preaching and healing/helping. They represent the two major tasks of Jesus’ ministry (see Matt. 9:35 and Acts 10:38). Furthermore, for many people throughout the world, Seventh-day Adventists are known by their health and humanitarian work.

At the same time, these powerful branches have become quite institutionalized in many places. As a result, the ordinary member may fail to engage directly in these ministries. Some provide financial support; others leave these ministries to the professionals; and some, unfortunately, even view them with indifference. In the end, many do not become directly involved in the task of going around “doing good” and thus miss a tremendous blessing. Why? Because there is a great personal blessing that comes from ministering to the needs of others. The simple practice of directly sharing with the needy, or of helping someone who is sick, or simply of attentively listening to others’ problems will result in great blessing to the one doing the ministering. There’s something wired in us, something not totally eradicated by six thousand years of sin, that makes us feel good, even whole, when we serve others.

Read Matthew 25:34–46. What is Jesus saying to us here? What does this mean in the light of Ephesians 2:8, 9?

Salvation cannot be achieved by works. If it were, nobody would be saved. God’s grace manifested by the sacrifice of Jesus in our behalf is the only means of salvation. At the same time, personal acceptance of God’s grace does produce good works, and these works reveal the reality of our walk with God. The good works we do should be a direct result of knowing that we already have salvation in Jesus, as a result of His works for us. Works are the natural outgrowth of being saved, not a means of getting saved. How crucial that we keep that important distinction always before us.

Meanwhile, there’s a tremendous emotional and spiritual blessing for those who, out of thankfulness to God for the salvation they have in Jesus, give of themselves to others. Many people struggling with emotional issues would feel so much better merely by directing their thoughts away from themselves and toward others.

Unhappy, unsatisfied? Most likely it’s because you’re too self-absorbed. Get involved in helping others and see what happens.
Consider This: What practical means may we employ for the purpose of supporting and strengthening one another?

III. Forgiveness (Review Colossians 3:13 with the class.)

Any human organization, including the church, is susceptible to misunderstandings, erroneous judgments, and flawed perceptions. Realistically speaking, the church also is susceptible to self-promoting ambition, selfishness, avarice, unethical conduct, harassment, dishonesty, and apathy, often cloaked in the apparel of righteousness. Sometimes, religious organizations suffer from naiveté regarding certain unethical behaviors not even countenanced by secular organizations because they take sinful conduct more seriously than does the church. Since our expectations of church life may become unrealistically high, doses of reality often wound sharply, and disillusionment may overwhelm even the veteran believer. Forgiveness is the only certain antidote for such disillusionment.

Forgiveness never excuses nor minimizes sinful behavior but, rather, recognizes the frailty and sinful propensity of all human beings. Forgivers recognize their own desperate need for forgiveness. Forgiveness ultimately releases those indebted to the forgiver from the just condemnation that should accompany their misdeeds. Ironically, releasing those who sin against us releases us, as well.

Consider This: How could the church, or any organization for that matter, function for any length of time without considerable doses of forgiveness? Why do forgiving people, generally speaking, experience better health (physically and mentally), fulfilling social networks, and lower incidence of depression? Whom should we forgive this coming week?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Successful partnerships develop ways of minimizing the ambiguities of role expectations. When both parties assume the role of chief executive officer (CEO), conflict is inevitable. Human organizations attempt to minimize unnecessary conflict by using job descriptions and titles. Scripture attributes certain titles and “job descriptions” to God; likewise, Scripture defines our role in redemption. Read the following texts to discuss God’s part and ours.
Hope and Trust in God

“Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord” (Ps. 31:24, NIV). What reasons do we have for putting our hope in the Lord?

Studies show that hope is a critical factor in mental health. An attitude of hope found in hostages makes a difference in survival. Hope is a great motivator and a source of mental and physical endurance. Most depression treatments work well in patients convinced that their mood can improve significantly and that they can be helped. Indeed, depression and anxiety often afflict those whose outlook on life is pessimistic, catastrophic, and hopeless. A hopeful attitude can make a big difference in our entire mental outlook.

But there is more than the general hope that whatever your present trial is, it will end well. Religious hope transcends the finite and focuses on the eternal. It points us to realities and truths and promises that the world, in and of itself, can never offer. It’s a hope found in the Creator God, who alone can give us what nothing else in the world can.

Read Matthew 26:36–44. What can we learn about trusting in God, even in terrible times, from Jesus’ example here?

The passage tells us of the Savior’s disheartened state. Carefully chosen words are used to describe Jesus’ painful emotions: troubled, exceedingly sorrowful, deeply distressed. Heartbroken and disregarded by His friends, He fell not only on His knees but on His face and asked His Father for relief. When relief did not come, He asked again. And again. And again. Note that every time He posed His request, He asked for God’s will to be done. In the end, Jesus put all His trust in the Father. Regardless of what would happen, He sought to be surrendered to His Father. That was His way, and it must be ours, as well.

It’s one thing to trust in the Lord in good times. But how can we learn to trust Him in bad times? How do we learn to trust when our prayers are not answered as we wish?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

**Controlling Partner:** Gen. 1:1; John 3:16; 5:27; 14:1–3; 15–18; 15:1–3; 16:7, 8; Deut. 5:6; Isa. 9:6, 7; 35:4, 10; 44:6–8; 53:1–12; 55:3; 65:17, 18; Amos 3:7; Ps. 139:1–6; 1 John 3:20.


**Thought Questions:**

1. What generally characterizes the role of the controlling partner?
2. While the junior partner is naturally subordinate, what valuable contributions might he or she make to the partnership?
3. What disastrous results might occur if junior partners try to assume roles assigned to the controlling partner (for example, the role of judge)?
4. What dangerous consequences happen when junior partners attempt to strip the controlling partner of his role of chief executive officer?

STEP 4—Create

**Closing Activity:** Develop a group definition of success. Guide the discussion so that no one individual dominates the exchange. Once an acceptable definition has been reached, discuss how the major emphases of the lesson (prayer, corporate worship and community involvement, forgiveness, service, and trusting God) influence our partnership with God. Can we unequivocally state that these elements contribute to our success in life? Why, or why not? Is there a “compounding effect,” meaning that these various elements reinforce one another rather than merely stand alone? What are the common threads linking this matrix together? Worthwhile scientific experiments consider the total body of evidence—that which appears to support the hypothesis and that which does not. Allow freedom of expression for those whose life experience does not apparently support the hypothesis. Disappointments with prayer or the church community or something else may have led them to other conclusions.
**Further Study:** “We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ Ps. 46:10. Here alone can true rest be found. And this is the effectual preparation for all who labor for God. Amid the hurrying throng, and the strain of life’s intense activities, the soul that is thus refreshed will be surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace. The life will breathe out fragrance, and will reveal a divine power that will reach men’s hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 363.

“Every ray of light shed upon others will be reflected upon our own hearts. Every kind and sympathizing word spoken to the sorrowful, every act to relieve the oppressed, and every gift to supply the necessities of our fellow beings, given or done with an eye to God’s glory, will result in blessings to the giver. Those who are thus working are obeying a law of heaven and will receive the approval of God. The pleasure of doing good to others imparts a glow to the feelings which flashes through the nerves, quickens the circulation of the blood, and induces mental and physical health.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 56.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What have prayer and Bible study done for you in your walk with the Lord? Where would you be spiritually were you to cease doing them? Write out a testimony as to what these practices mean to you and why they are so important in your walk with the Lord.

2. What has been your own experience with your local church community? How can you improve that experience? How can you work with your church to make it a place where all people would feel comfortable coming, where all people could be welcomed, where all people could learn about salvation and the present truth message we have for the world? In what areas is your church strong, and in what areas must it improve?

3. What has been your own experience in regard to giving and getting forgiveness? What have you learned that could help those who are in need of learning to forgive?

4. Suppose someone were to come to you and say, “Yes, I believe in God, in Jesus, in salvation, but I just don’t know how to walk in faith. I just don’t know how to trust God.” What practical advice would you give?