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Understanding our Emotions

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There are times when life is more than the update on Facebook, the tweets, the IMs, and texts. Sometimes, the important times, it’s about looking beyond the abridged, the instants, the clichés. It’s about discovering what God is really trying to say to you.
SABBATH SCHOOL
TEACHER PREPARATION
IN MINUTES...

http://www.cqbiblestudy.org/article.php?=3

JUST CLICK AND SERVE!
In this First Quarter 2011 Sabbath School quarterly companion book, Dr. Julián Melgosa uses biblical examples and personal illustrations to demonstrate how essential this partnership is in dealing with the all-too-human experiences of fear, stress, guilt, depression, jealousy, and addictions.

A growing body of scientific evidence indicates that faith, prayer, hope, forgiveness, and trust are beneficial to our physical and emotional health, reinforcing the author’s belief that “abiding in Jesus Christ, being in intimate connection with Him is the way to foster spiritual growth, well-being, and happiness.”

JULIÁN MELGOSA is dean of the School of Education & Psychology at Walla Walla University. A native of Madrid, Spain, Dr. Melgosa trained as a teacher and psychologist at the University of Madrid and obtained his PhD degree in educational psychology at Andrews University.
This Quarter’s *Illustrators*

Glen Divinagracia and Lanie Kinze worked together on this CQ project. Both artists live in Hagerstown, Maryland, and practice their photography and videography at The Crystal Lenz Photo Studio. “We had a great time working on these images and hope to do more in the future.”
GETTING THE MOST OUT OF CQ

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. CQ's purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the Adult Bible Study Guide find that because CQ deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

About four hundred Adventist young adults contribute to CQ each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflect the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of CQ is about 72,500.

POINTER FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.
3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.
4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:
   "Introduction" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
   "Logos" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.
   "Testimony" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.
   "Evidence" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
   "How-To" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
   "Opinion" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.
   "Exploration" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

CQ AND THE CHURCH

CQ is the General Conference-approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.
Emotions

“‘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).


Introduction

Emotions—
Let Them Be

One definition of the word *emotion* is as follows: “a mental state that arises spontaneously rather than through conscious effort and is often accompanied by physiological changes; a feeling.”

Even though the word *emotion* is a noun, our emotions often cause us to engage in certain acts. If we feel anger, we might lash out at the person with whom we are angry. If we are sad, we might cry about the situation that is making us feel that way. Often, we find ourselves in circumstances in which it is best not to let our emotions control our behavior. And so there must be criteria for determining which emotions warrant actions and which emotions do not. In Proverbs 3:5, 6, we learn what, or who, determines the standard. In these verses, we are encouraged to trust in the Lord, to acknowledge Him in all that we do so that He can direct our paths.

Why should we trust God so completely? One reason is that our understanding is often limited. We do not know all the facts of a situation that might be causing us to experience strong emotions. Another reason is that emotions can often tarnish our understanding of a situation. It is often difficult to understand the truth of a given event if we are angry or sad about it. Even so, the Father has given us a wonderful example in His Son, Jesus Christ. Christ consistently relied on the Father for guidance and direction. Christ says in John 5:19, “ ’I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does’ ” (NIV).

As Christians who are deliberately striving to follow Christ, we must learn over the course of time to do nothing on our own. When our emotions are causing us to do something that we *feel* is right, we should remember to ask Christ to guide us. In all our ways we need to learn to acknowledge Him. If left unchecked, our emotions—which by definition are spontaneous—will not provide us with any consistency. As you study this week’s lesson on emotions, may you decide to make Christ, rather than your feelings, the One who determines your actions.

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Alexandra E. Arnold, Fort Washington, Maryland, U.S.A.
The Danger of Emotions (2 Samuel 13)

We live in a world where we are encouraged to follow our hearts and to do what feels right. Unfortunately, however, human emotions are often unstable and inconsistent. They are especially dangerous when they are not submitted to God and when the heart is unwilling to be led by the Spirit. Jeremiah 17:9 states that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”

In the story of Amnon and Tamar, Amnon falls in love with Tamar, his sister. He forces himself on her, then leaves her disgraced and unwanted. Amnon’s impulsive and emotionally driven behavior led him to break God’s moral law. It brought shame and pain to himself and his family. Allowing our emotions to lead us often ends in irrevocable negative consequences.

The Power of God Through the Spirit (Gal. 5:22)

Amnon was rebellious and lacked self-control. But even the selfishness behind his brutal act was not beyond the remedy of the Holy Spirit. God was able to create in him a clean heart and to renew in him a right spirit (Ps. 51:10), but such renewal depended on his willingness to surrender. God does not forsake us simply because we don’t feel like doing right. First John 3:20 teaches us that we need not fear when our hearts condemn us for “God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything” (NIV).

We must first trust that He is able to fix us. Then we must allow Him to do so. Through the Spirit and faith in Christ, we have the ability to live a life that is not dictated by our emotional impulses. Instead, we have the power to live righteously. Read Galatians 5:22, 23.

A life in Christ gives us the ability to master our emotions by asking Him to master us. “Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Gal. 5:16, NIV).

Reacting in Love Through Understanding (Col. 3:12–14)

At times, we may find it impossible to forgive others for the hurt they cause us. Tamar, Absalom, and David were furious with Amnon for the evil he had done. This resulted in Absalom taking vengeance into his own hands by slaying his brother. God has called us to forgive as He has forgiven us (Col. 3:13). Fortunately, this is not something that He desires us to do through our own power. It is understanding the mercy and compassion that Christ has shown...
us that empowers us to forgive others when they do us wrong. As we grow in a relationship with Christ, we become more like Him. We learn to appreciate the beauty of compassion and kindness, the strength of humility and gentleness, and the wisdom of patience. Over time, we learn to forgive as God has forgiven us. Growing in the knowledge of God helps us learn how to stop reacting impulsively and teaches us how to rightly take action.

**The Truth About Emotions (John 16:17–24)**

Emotions are not all bad. In fact, many of them are a gift from God. They give us the ability to relate to one another. Without emotions, we would not be able to fully experience life. Emotions, both positive and negative, are tools God uses to teach us important lessons and to build our characters. Being a Christian doesn’t mean that you will always be happy. There will always be times when you feel angry, sad, or fearful—and that’s OK. David, a man after God’s own heart, experienced many emotional roller-coaster rides. Jesus Himself said, “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).

**God Understands (Luke 19:28–44; Heb. 4:15, 16)**

In Luke 19:42, we see Jesus weeping for Jerusalem, knowing the hardships and destruction that it would face. In anguish and compassion He says, “If you [Jerusalem], even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes” (NIV). Also read Matthew 23:37.

God is concerned about His children. He is a God who desires to bring us understanding and to shield us from our suffering, even though there are times we might reject Him. Tamar probably wondered why God had allowed Amnon to rape her. She felt rejected, ashamed, deeply humiliated, forsaken, and worthless. Even then, however, God yearned to heal her pain.

As God’s children, “The joy of the Lord is [our] strength” (Neh. 8:10). This does not mean that we will not have difficulties with our feelings. Rather, it means that we will be able to find comfort and strength in God. Though our feelings and circumstances may be out of our control, we know that God still has control over our lives and that He can bring order to our feelings. We know that He is able to give us peace that passes our understanding (Phil. 4:7), that He promises to be our refuge and strength, “a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1). He is familiar with our struggles and understands exactly how we feel. Read Hebrews 4:15, 16. God understands and wants you to have power over your emotions.

**REACT**

1. What should Amnon have done to rectify his actions?
2. How does God require us to respond to someone who is indifferent about his or her hurtful actions?
3. Explain when forgiving someone might not necessarily include reconciliation with that person.

---

Ailiana K. Denis, Bolingbrook, Illinois, U.S.A.
Emotions are very much a part of our lives. When God created humans, His thoughts were holy, and His goals for us were noble. Adam and Eve had well-balanced minds, but through sin, we have become debased and unholy. The apostle Paul says, “To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6, NKJV). Our emotions play a major role in our lives. They help us to make everyday decisions, and if not guided by the Spirit of God, our emotions can cause us great harm—perhaps even death. “It is not wise to look to ourselves, and study our emotions. If we do this, the enemy will present difficulties and temptations that weaken faith and destroy courage. Closely to study our emotions and give way to our feelings is to entertain doubt, and entangle ourselves in perplexity. We are to look away from self to Jesus.”

“When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life.”

“When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced; love, humility, and peace take the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness, and the countenance reflects the joy of heaven. No one sees the hand that lifts the burden or beholds the light descend from the courts above. The blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God. Then that power which no human eye can see, creates a new being in the image of God.”

To gain the victory over self and negative emotions is vital to the Christian experience. We must die daily to self and drink continually from the fountain of life from which Christ invites us all to take freely. We must also become partakers of the life that has been given to us by His infinite sacrifice. Read Isaiah 55.

**REACT**

1. Think of ways we die daily and drink from God’s fountain of life.
2. What Bible stories show the effect of both negative and positive emotions?

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Oshaine Altorick Wynter, Huntsville, Alabama, U.S.A.
The Gospel of John is divided into two books: the Book of Signs (1–12) and the Book of Glory (13–21). It is John’s record of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. His purpose in writing this record was to prove that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, and that we have eternal life by believing in Him (20:30, 31).

What is known as Jesus’ Farewell Discourse (13:31–16:33) is contained in the Book of Glory. Here, Jesus comforts His disciples concerning His approaching suffering and resurrection (13:31–38). He expresses that He is the only way to the Father (14:6). Jesus informs His disciples that the Father’s gift of the Holy Spirit will be sent to them (14:15–31) and that “He will guide [them] into all truth” (16:13, NIV). He also says that just as a branch cannot grow unless it is connected to the vine, so His disciples cannot grow unless they are connected to Him, “the true vine” (15:1–17). He forewarns them of the hatred they will incur on account of His name (15:18–16:4).

Then Jesus intimately shares the reality of an approaching, dynamic contrast. This contrast is between their emotional response and that of the world to His death: “I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices” (16:20, NIV). Jesus makes it clear that the world—those who hate Him and stand in opposition to His ministry—will rejoice when He dies. However, His disciples will weep and mourn at the same event. But Jesus doesn't leave His disciples in a seemingly hopeless condition. He says, “But your grief will turn to joy” (verse 20, NIV). There can be joy because His absence would only be temporary! Speaking of His resurrection in verse 22, Christ says that His disciples’ joy will come in the midst of their mourning when they see Him again.

We all experience tough emotional times that cause us to mourn.

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We all experience tough emotional times that cause us to mourn. But the same words of Christ encourage us today. As the resurrection of Christ was to His disciples then, so the soon return of Christ is to us now. All of life's sorrows will ultimately be turned to joy when we see Christ at His second coming. Stay encouraged!

**REACT**

1. Meditate on a time when Christ gave you joy in the midst of tough trials.
2. How can the reality of Christ’s second coming impact tough emotional times?
Emotions affect every aspect of daily life—from decisions we make at school to our walk with God. One day we might wake up in complete bliss, feeling as if we can conquer the world, while the next day we awaken feeling defeated. How we feel can be influenced by countless variables: friends, family, the weather, traffic, a difficult class, and so forth. Because we are prone to react to our feelings, it’s crucial that we learn how to keep our emotions from getting the best of us.

The Bible is filled with examples of how godly people dealt with the challenging emotions of everyday life. Read in Joshua 1:9 how God encouraged Joshua as he faced the terrifying task of leading an entire nation. Because Jesus understands our deepest pain and our greatest excitement, we can always find hope in Him. From the Word, we gain insight on how to cope with the ups and downs of life, from heartbreak to complete joy.

It’s easy to believe that no one understands us. Many people walk through life feeling very alone because they feel no one truly understands their journey. While this may be true at times, we have a heavenly Father who knows us better than we know ourselves and who can sympathize with us on every level. So the next time you’re tempted to feel abandoned and overcome by the struggles of life, remember these things:

**You always have a Father who is looking after you.**

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**You are never alone.** Friends and even family members might refuse to support you or journey with you, but you always have a friend in Jesus, who promises never to leave you or forsake you and to help you along the path of life (Heb. 13:5, 6).

**You are a child of God.** Life on this earth can be discouraging. During such times, think about the fact that you are a child of the King, a King who is like a parent. In Him, you always have a Father who is looking after you (John 1:12).

**Stay focused on Jesus.** It’s easy to lose sight of our eternal goal with the distractions of the world. However, when we stay focused on Jesus, we can have the peace we need to get through (Isa. 26:3).

**REACT**

1. In what areas of your life do you allow your emotions to take over?
2. How can you commit to relying more on what you know about Jesus than just on what you feel?
Gusts of wind wrap their fingers tightly around Jesus and the now eleven disciples as they walk toward Gethsemane. The words of Christ, “I will strike the shepherd, / and the sheep of the flock will be scattered” (Matt. 26:31, NIV), seemingly echo throughout the night sky. Upon reaching Gethsemane, thoughts of triumph through affliction assail the Savior’s mind, causing physical weakness. He signals that only Peter, James, and John are to travel farther.

These three, anxious to relieve their Master’s suffering, inquire of Him concerning the cause of His grief. His reply? “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me” (Matt. 26:38, NIV). After walking several paces farther, the Master falls upon a rock, casting His burdens upon His Father, the only One who can relieve His agony. All of heaven watches this scene, knowing that failure on Jesus’ part will have dreadful consequences.

He knew that God’s will must be made manifest in His life.

Jesus prays, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me” (Matt. 26:39, NIV). These words indicate the many emotions flooding His mind. At this moment, all of Satan’s forces surround Him, whispering lies to get Him to turn from His mission: “The people who claim to be above all others in temporal and spiritual advantages have rejected You. They are seeking to destroy You, the foundation, the center and seal of the promises made to them as a peculiar people. . . . One of Your most zealous followers will deny You. All will forsake You. . . . That those whom He had undertaken to save, those whom He loved so much, should unite in the plots of Satan, this pierced His soul.”* Even so, at Christ’s weakest point, He knew that God’s will must be made manifest in His life. Therefore, He prayed, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (verse 39, NKJV).

This account is but one of the many victories that show Christ’s unfailing love for us. We must carefully consider His example of self-denial as our standard. Our adversary, the devil, uses emotions to deceive and tempt us. Therefore, our actions must not be guided by emotional responses alone. Instead, every thought and action must be compared to the principle of godly love. We must wholly submit our lives to Christ, for only then can we truly follow the spirit of the law.

*The Desire of Ages, p. 687.
CONCLUDE

Above all else, Jesus knew what the human experience was about. He suffered temptation and sorrow alike. Our modern-day lives are affected by a variety of factors that influence our feelings. It is easy to become discouraged and downtrodden to the point of hopelessness. However, Jesus promised through His words and His deeds that our "grief will turn to joy" (John 16:20, NIV). Joy is the ultimate feeling in the human experience that manifests to the world that God is with us and that, through His Son, our feelings are validated and our wounds are healed. In order to inherit this hope, we must participate in the process of redemption through self-control, forgiveness, and a disciplined lifestyle.

CONSIDER

- Listening to and compiling a list of Christmas songs that mention the word joy.
- Writing a letter to a friend or relative who is discouraged and needs hope. Be sure to mention this week's theme of redemption through submission to God.
- Creating a bookmark that embodies a key theme from this week's lesson. Some themes to consider are self-control, overcoming temptations, hope, forgiveness, or joy.
- Making a homemade present for someone, such as a basket with healthy snacks in it.
- Resolving to give up a bad habit or setting a personal goal for the new year.
- Keeping a "feelings journal" in which you record your feelings throughout the week. When did you notice good feelings versus negative feelings? What kind of behaviors lead to positive feelings in your daily life?

CONNECT

Proverbs 3:5, 6; Galatians 5:22, 23.

Divine Provision for Anxiety

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you”
(1 Pet. 5:7, NIV.)
Worry (synonymous with fretting and anxiety) is one of the great plagues of life. It crosses all socioeconomic, racial, and gender boundaries. It is human to fret. Christian author William R. Inge defined worry as “interest paid on trouble before it becomes due.” Nevertheless, Jesus gives us one solid reason after another to live without fretting, even when we’re facing uncertainties that are out of our control.

When Abraham became anxious about who would be his heir, God said to him in a vision, “‘Do not be afraid’” (Gen. 15:1, NIV). There was only one logical thing for Abraham to do when the Lord promised to be his shield, strength, and reward, and that was to relax! Just like Abraham, in our moments of fear, we can either try to solve our own problems by fretting, or we can trust God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

When we think about our life, relationships, job, and finances, we should not get overly anxious about them. Instead, let us make God the King of our lives and hand the situation over to Him to do His righteous will. We should have confidence that He will work for us and meet all our needs according to His will.

Have you ever considered the birds? They dig their worms and snatch their bugs and line their nests with strings and leaves. But it is our heavenly Father who feeds them (Matt. 25:26). What we see when we look at birds are creatures that go about their work each day with confidence. How much more then, should we, who are made in God’s image, trust the mercy of our Creator? Relax! We are not birds or blades of grass, but children of our heavenly Father. We have the capacity to understand, to reason, to have confidence in God through our faith in Him. God values the exercise of our faith and offers us peace.

As we study this week’s lesson, let’s forsake all other allegiances, vow our loyalty to the King of kings, and in all things seek Jesus and make Him King of our lives. This, and this alone, is the way to be free from anxiety.

---

*J. Steven Lang, The Book of God’s Promises, p. 74.

Lorna Joel Yoyo, Berkshire, United Kingdom
Sam was exceptionally bright. He dropped out of university during the first year because he felt that the formal educational process was too slow. He had excellent interviewing skills, so it wasn’t long before he landed a well-paid job. He also had good social skills, and his chic, rented apartment was a hub of activity for his wide circle of non-Adventist friends.

“I prayed—and when I woke up, you were on my mind.”

One month, however, the accounts department made an error, so Sam did not get paid that month. He articulated every argument to get his wage, but they thought he could dip into his savings until the next pay day. But Sam had no savings. He was living hand-to-mouth. He needed to pay his rent, and his social engagements had to continue in order to sustain his image. He became worried, and this soon developed into anxiety. He became less conscientious at work. The credit crunch was impacting all businesses—and he found himself in the first batch of redundant staff.

Stressed, he wrote to an acquaintance, “I know I have not written to you in a long time, and for that I am sorry. . . . Well, right now things are not going too good for me. I lost my job about two months ago, and I’ve been looking for a new one ever since. Things are so bad that I feel like I am going crazy. . . . I really need to borrow some money from you until I get back on my feet. I’m not sure if you have it to lend, but I prayed—and when I woke up, you were on my mind.”

To reduce anxiety among His people, God instructed Joseph to save during the seven years of plenty for when the crunch would bite (Genesis 41). It is a general lesson we all should learn to avoid anxiety. When we have done what God wants us to do, we can take comfort in His promises. The birds don’t plant or harvest, yet God feeds them. The wild flowers don’t work, yet they are kept beautiful (Matt. 6:25–34). Paul adds, “I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything” (Phil. 4:12, NLT). God helps those who help themselves. And His grace provides help to those who are messed up. Sam has learned his lesson. He’s now buying his home, saves sensibly, and is happy in his job and the church.

**REACT**

1. What is the balance between having a good time and saving for the future?
2. When is the best time to start saving?
Anxiety can strike anyone at anytime. All human beings worry from time to time, whether they are rich or poor, learned or unlearned. A 2007–2008 report compiled by National Health Services in the United Kingdom indicates that one person in every fifty is affected by Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), and it generally begins to occur in a person’s twenties. It is medically established that prolonged anxiety can cause many health problems, including headaches, nausea, fatigue, digestive disorders, suppression of the immune system, and short-term memory loss. God did not create us to be anxious; fortunately, He has a way to help to us with this problem.

Anxiety and God’s Creation (Gen. 1:9, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; 3:6–10)
As He created the world, God often declared that it was good. Thus, there was nothing harmful about it. It was perfect, and therefore, there was no cause for anxiety. God clearly did not create humans to live in fear but rather in a peaceful relationship with Him and with all other humans.

When Adam and Eve sinned, much of this goodness was replaced or overshadowed by shame, fear, and danger. Because the world before sin was “very good,” the fear we suffer today is the result of sin and is, therefore, self-inflicted. Yet still, God desires to give us peace (John 14:27). The divine provision for anxiety is meant to eliminate this fear as much as possible and to enhance the relationship between God and humans.

After the Fall (Matt. 6:25–34; Rom. 8:35, 38, 39)
Although Christ came to give us peace and hope, it is becoming increasingly difficult to live without experiencing anxiety. No doubt He was aware of this, for in His sermon on the mount, He talked at length about worrying. Five different times in this sermon, He specifically urged His audience not to worry (Matt. 6:25, 27, 28, 31, and 34). This repetition is for emphasis, because since the Fall, anxiety has become deeply rooted in human nature. This repetition also suggests that in this sinful world, we will be subject to fear and that worry was not part of God’s perfect plan but part of the aftermath of sin.

The phrase “do not worry” can also be interpreted as “do not be anxious,” “do not have sleepless nights with worry,” “do not struggle,” “do not strive selfishly for anything,” “do not sorrow for the future.” The Weymouth
version says, “I charge you not to be over-anxious about your lives” (Matt. 6:25). The New Living Translation says, “ ‘Don’t worry about everyday life’ ” (Matt. 6:25); and Darby’s translation reads, “Do not be careful about your life” (Matt. 6:25).

**The Worried Disciples (John 14:1–3; 1 John 4:18)**

Despite what Jesus taught His disciples about not worrying, they were often afraid. Even after He lived with them for over three years, they still did not comprehend the fact that He would be leaving them. Instead, they became anxious. Jesus, therefore, commanded them, “Let not your heart be troubled,” for as they trusted in God, they should also trust in Him and the fact He was going to prepare a better place for them (John 14:1–3).

“Let not your heart be troubled” may also be rendered as “stop letting your heart be troubled.” It indicates that He was appealing to them to have peace of mind. God’s provision for anxiety includes trusting Him so that we can have confidence in Him while we are living on earth.

**Beating Anxiety (Psalm 91; Jer. 29:11; Matt. 7:7; Rom. 8:31; Phil. 4:11–13)**

Life is full of challenges and difficulties, and our happy moments are quickly overshadowed by unpleasant events. However, God assures those who know Him not to despair or be anxious but rather to have confidence in His ability to provide. For those in need, He says, “ ‘Ask, and it will be given to you’ ” (Matt. 7:7, NKJV). For those who are not sure what the future holds, He says, “ ‘For I know the plans I have for you, . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’ ” (Jer. 29:11, NIV). For those who are terrified by incurable diseases and plagues, God assures them repeatedly in Psalm 91 that He is their refuge.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (8:31, NIV). He advises us to be content in whatever situation we find ourselves (Phil. 4:11–13). William Barclay, in his comment about anxiety, said, “The future of reality is seldom as bad as the future of our fear.” If we were to carry our worries of today only and not fear for tomorrow, we would enjoy much more peace than we do now. Although we are living in a world of sin, God wants us to enjoy life and to have confidence and peace in the knowledge of His ability to provide and care for us.

**REACT**

1. Does Jesus’ command not to worry suggest that we should not plan for our future? Explain your answer.
2. Why did Christ not promise us a problem-free existence?
3. Does worrying indicate that we are not faithful Christians? Explain your answer.

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The people who listened to the words of Christ were still anxiously watching for some announcement of the earthly kingdom. While Jesus was opening to them the treasures of heaven, the question uppermost in many minds was, How will a connection with Him advance our prospects in the world? Jesus shows that in making the things of the world their supreme anxiety they were like the heathen nations about them, living as if there were no God, whose tender care is over His creatures.\(^1\)

"You may be perplexed in business; your prospects may grow darker and darker, and you may be threatened with loss; but do not become discouraged; cast your care upon God, and remain calm and cheerful. Pray for wisdom to manage your affairs with discretion, and thus prevent loss and disaster. Do all you can on your part to bring about favorable results. Jesus has promised His aid, but not apart from our effort. . . .

"It is not the will of God that His people should be weighed down with care. But our Lord does not deceive us. He does not say to us, 'Do not fear; there are no dangers in your path.' He knows there are trials and dangers, and He deals with us plainly. He does not propose to take His people out of a world of sin and evil, but He points them to a never-failing refuge. His prayer for His disciples was, 'I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil.' 'In the world,' He says, 'ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world' (John 17:15; 16:33).\(^2\)

"Our Saviour's words, 'Come unto Me, . . . and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28), are a prescription for the healing of physical, mental, and spiritual ills. . . . He will do great things for those who trust in Him."\(^3\)

REACT

A child can close her eyes and jump into her father's arms. Do you have the equivalent trust to believe what Jesus says, "Come and I'll give you rest"?

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1. Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, pp. 98, 99.
2. Steps to Christ, pp. 122, 123.
3. The Ministry of Healing, p. 115.

Mark Owens, Hampshire, United Kingdom
At some point, we will all face situations that are likely to make us anxious. When we do, what practical and spiritual steps can we take to react in the way Jesus would want us to?

When our body is put under extra stress, it needs extra support.

_Talk to God-fearing friends and family about what’s troubling you._ Whilst a problem shared isn’t always literally a problem halved, there’s a new perspective to be gained from those around us. However, God doesn’t just want us to focus on sharing our problems and gleaning advice from other people. As the Sculptor of our psyche, He is intimately aware of our anxieties and knows our thoughts before we do. He wants to hear from us in our troubles (Phil. 4:6, 7). He is best placed to support us and to see us through the toughest of situations (Ps. 46:1). If you find it hard to voice your worries aloud to God, try writing them down. Then pray over them and ask for His peace and direction.

_Take care of yourself._ Even “mild anxiety,” as medical professionals put it, can cause some of the side effects mentioned in the first paragraph of this week’s Logos article. When our body is put under extra stress, it needs extra support. Make sure you give yourself time to unwind before you go to bed so you will sleep well. Eat regular and nutritious meals, and exercise in the fresh air.

_Realign your perspective._ Sometimes we let ourselves become anxious because we forget about the true nature of our situation. We are treasured children of the most powerful, caring God imaginable. The Bible says that He knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10) and that He will never leave us (Matt. 28:20). To truly not be anxious, we need to get to the stage where we can trust God with every aspect of our lives. When you pray, try always acknowledging that God is who He says He is. Thank Him that He is in control, and praise Him for knowing what’s best for you in every situation.

**REACT**

1. Why do you think Jesus wants His followers not to worry?
2. Is it possible to live without worrying at all? Was Jesus ever anxious? Explain your answers.
3. What things in life distort our perspective? What can we do to stop this from happening?
Today there are many things to worry about. Sleep fails us because we're thinking about how we're going to afford certain things or finish an assignment. We worry about whether we're going to fit in or what tomorrow will bring. “Such a weight of anxiety is expressed, that one might almost suppose that we had no pitying, loving Saviour, ready to hear all our requests, and to be to us a present help in every time of need.”¹

Today’s text shows that anxiety entered the world when sin did (Gen. 3:6–10). It seems at times that sin and anxiety go hand in hand. When we feel anxious, we are sometimes coerced to act against our beliefs. Sinning takes us further from God and closer to anxiety. For example, if we are worried about money, we might decide to work on the Sabbath.

If we truly believe that God is looking out for us, why do we worry about anything? Does worrying mean that we don’t have enough faith? Jesus said, “‘You of little faith’” (Matt. 8:26, NIV). He understood that in order to trust God, we need faith, and that faith, in turn, increases our trust in Him. Since the Fall, God has been trying to reassure us that He is looking out for our every need (Matt. 6:28–32). This should not only calm us, it should also increase our faith.

All through our lives, one of the biggest worries concerns what the future will bring. It’s frightening to be heading toward the unknown. However, God has a plan for everyone of us (Jer. 29:11). Often it’s hard to remember this, but once we put all our trust in God, He will bless us beyond anything we can imagine. Recently, it seemed as if my understanding of a certain issue would stop me from getting my education. For days, grief and anxiety broke my spirit. But once I remembered that God only wants the best for me, my worry dissipated, issues were resolved, and I felt stronger about demonstrating my faith to my class. “God cares for everything and sustains everything that He has created. . . . No tears are shed that He does not notice. There is no smile that He does not mark. If we would but fully believe this, all undue anxieties would be dismissed.”²

The way to prevent anxiety, therefore, is to maintain a good relationship with God. The Bible shows that He cares, that praying about our troubles develops trust in Him. He does respond. He has responded to me.

¹. This Day With God, p. 42.
CONCLUDE

It is only human to be anxious about many things. However, God has said that if our hearts treasure God’s kingdom and His righteousness, then “all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33, NIV). If we have a good relationship with God, we can live a more worry-free life. However, it takes time to learn to give our worries to God, to actually let go and let Him handle things. If you worry about something you can fix—then fix it and stop worrying! If you worry about something that is out of your hands, then put it into God’s capable hands and stop worrying!

CONSIDER

- Doing a worry-meditation by writing the things you worry about on separate pieces of paper. Then sit somewhere quiet, holding each paper one at a time. Give each worry written on each piece to God, taking quiet time to hear His answer.
- Doing some research into African-American spirituals written by those who had been slaves. Learn to sing some that help you relieve your worries.
- Making a chart of the things that cause you to worry. Use different colors for each type of anxiety. Cross out a worry that God has helped relieve with gold or silver color.
- Getting a medical checkup if you are anxious about your health. Or go to a gym and have an instructor give you an introductory program to keep your body fit. (You might want to consult a physician before doing this to make sure you don’t have any unknown medical conditions.)
- Listing the things that worry you on the left-hand side of a piece of paper. Then write possible solutions or ways of letting the worry go on the right-hand side.
- Writing a description of what your life would be like without having to worry about anything. Is such a life realistic? Research what other people have written about getting rid of anxiety. Compare or contrast what they saw with what the Bible says about freeing oneself of anxiety.

CONNECT


Richard J. Foster, Celebration of Discipline, chapters 2 and 3, “Meditation” and “Prayer.”

Karin Wieczorek, Melbourne, Australia
Stress

“‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’” (Matt. 11:28, NIV).
It was 3:00 A.M., and I was lying in the middle of the woods on a rock, breathing heavily. The angry, frustrated sobbing had subsided, and now I was quiet, feeling the coolness of the stone seeping through my clothes. The emotion of the last few weeks had boiled over, and it was to this place of solitude that I had come to let God see my frustrations.

What had brought me there? It was the culmination of how I had chosen to spend my summer before classes started in the fall. Working 40 hours a week providing technical support to clueless college students and professors was one factor. Breaking up with her had contributed. And the additional 60 hours a week I was putting into editing the huge film project that no one believed in had certainly taken its toll. Then there were the sleepless nights and the fast food runs at two o’clock in the morning. I was at my wit’s end.

I was stretched so thin, nothing was getting done. The film languished while I either stared at footage or surfed the Internet—anything to avoid facing the problems it had. At work, people needing technical support got it slowly and the bare minimum that was humanly possible. I didn’t have anything more to give anyway. I was discouraged and angry—with myself, with everyone around me, and with God.

So I had shut down the editing software, walked across the railroad tracks, and headed toward my apartment. And somehow along the road back home, I wandered into the woods.

It was dark and quiet, and a light rain misted through the summer leaves, cooling everything. The rock I found was the right height to sit on or kneel by or stand on and shout at the sky. And I did all of those things in the quiet of the woods, where God and I communed.

Things didn’t change immediately; but it was a turning point, bringing God back into my hectic life. I took action against the stress. I stepped down from editing the film. I took a long weekend away from work and slept. Gradually, I got my life under control. I felt human again.

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Stress can hit us in many ways and for many different reasons. Amidst the turmoil, however, God is there. His voice is in the quiet, if we will only take some time to hand our burdens to Him. That’s the focus of our study this week.

Loren Small, Nashville, Tennessee, U.S.A.
Fugitive (1 Kings 17:19:1–18)

The Bible tells us nothing about Elijah’s upbringing, just that he’s a Tishbite—most likely meaning that he came from the town of Tishbe, in Gilead. From what we know, he had no family, only the occasional assistant. What Elijah did have was an incredible ability to speak truth to power—in his case, an unflinching king who set new standards for depravity in Israel.

For most of the chapters devoted to his story, Elijah defines cool, calm, and collected. Imagine him striding up to Ahab to announce, “‘As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word’” (1 Kings 17:1, NIV). I picture Ahab sputtering to come up with a response as Elijah confidently strides away. I see Elijah camping in the Kerith Ravine, whittling some wood, perhaps working on his memoirs, and counting every day on his raven butlers for a good meal.

Time passes, the famine gets worse, the brook dries up, and God sends him to someone else who was stressed—the unnamed widow of Zarephath. When Elijah boldly asks her for some bread and water, she tells him she only has enough oil and flour to make a few wafers—a last meal for herself and her son. She looks at her son, all spindly legs and poking ribs, then back at Elijah, lean yet fit, and underlines her pain: “‘That we may eat it—and die’” (1 Kings 17:12, NIV).

Elijah answers with perhaps the most common phrase in Scripture: “‘Don’t be afraid’” (1 Kings 17:13, NIV). If that didn’t widen the widow’s eyes enough, he asked her to bake him a little something while she was at it—because, he said, she would not run out of oil or flour until the famine lifted.

All went well, and the woman’s heart surely lifted a little, then a lot, with each faithful day—until the day her son felt queasy, then dizzy . . . and then died. The NIV tells me she “said” the following words, but I suspect there was a little more involved when she begged to Elijah, “‘What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?’” (1 Kings 17:18).

Elijah carried the boy to a room, then interceded to God on his—and his mother’s—behalf. When Elijah returned the son, all rosy cheeks and open arms, the mother must have nearly squeezed the life out of him again.
With experiences like that, you’d think Elijah would keep his eyes on the prize every step of the way thereafter—especially when he’s riding high from his triumph on Mount Carmel. But one threat from Ahab’s wife, Jezebel, and he’s mired in self-pity, exiling himself to the wilderness. The man who’d tucked his cloak into his belt and raced a chariot down a mountain in a rainstorm now fled for his life.

**A Solitary Place (Mark 6:30–34)**

I doubt the disciples ever knew what to expect from a new day with Jesus. They’d just returned from a two-by-two mission, traveling from town to town healing, casting out demons, and spreading the word about Jesus. They couldn’t wait to tell Him everything, but a mob of people kept them so busy they didn’t even have time to eat. So Jesus told them, “‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest’” (Mark 6:31, NIV).

So off they sailed to a “solitary place,” needing to unwind and reflect on everything this amazing new life was bringing them. As they came to shore, though, they saw that they’d been followed, for here came kids and teens and middle-aged men, mothers with babies, and old men who hadn’t had this much fun since the grain harvest of 12 B.C. When Jesus looked out at the crowd—eager and expectant—“he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mark 6:34, NIV). Those words get me every time. They sum up the nature and heart of humans and God, and remind us that though God knows our hearts, He still loves us to pieces.

**The Heart of the Matter (Gal. 6:2)**

Ask a dozen Christians how they can “fulfill the law of Christ.” Unless you’ve just run into the Brentwood Bible Bowl team, I’m guessing you’ll hear a lot more about dos and don’ts than the simple answer in Galatians 6:2—“Carry each other’s burdens” (NIV). There’s beauty and simplicity in those words, and just a hint of sorrow. Yet they sum up God’s ideal for His children, and they’re a perfect description of the body of Christ.

**Ultimate Love (John 15:13)**

There’s no greater expression of love than to sacrifice your life for a friend. Jesus spoke those stunning words in the midst of His last talk to His disciples, a message of reassurance that no matter what happened, Jesus would be there for them, and He asks them to always be there for each other.

**REACT**

1. How do the stories of Jesus’ compassion, and His calling us to take care of each other, make you feel about yourself? about others? about God?

2. Have you ever felt like Elijah on the run, going from celebrating to sulking? How can we keep a level head and rest in God’s love?
“God does not condemn prudence and foresight in the use of the things of this life; but the feverish care, the undue anxiety, with respect to worldly things is not in accordance with His will.”

“The Lord is not pleased to have us fret and worry ourselves out of the arms of Jesus.”

“It is not the will of God that His people should be weighed down with care.”

“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.”

“The love which Christ diffuses through the whole being is a vitalizing power. Every vital part—the brain, the heart, the nerves—it touches with healing. By it the highest energies of the being are roused to activity. It frees the soul from the guilt and sorrow, the anxiety and care, that crush the life forces. With it come serenity and composure. It implants in the soul joy that nothing earthly can destroy,—joy in the Holy Spirit,—health-giving, life-giving joy.”

**REACT**

How did people in the Bible deal with stress? How can your answer to this question help you to respond to stress in a healthy manner?

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The Old Testament is filled with stories of people under great stress. We’ll explore three of these stories in today’s lesson.

David. Nathan revealed to David that God knew all about his secret affair with Bathsheba and the strategic murder of Uriah, her husband. David normally confessed his sins and turned away from them, but not this time. God waited an entire year before He confronted David with the consequences (2 Sam. 12:11–14). Talk about stress! His actions caused the death of his son, along with a long list of collateral damage. If you had been David, what would you have done? For him, the answer was simple. Read 2 Samuel 12:16. David well knew both God's mercy and justice. That's why, when it really counted, this great king lay on the ground before God.

Daniel. One afternoon, Daniel answered the door of his house to find the captain of the king's guard standing there. They had been sent to kill him! The king had forgotten his dream and desired a truthful interpretation of it as well. So when the pressure was on, what did Daniel do? Read Daniel 2:17, 18. Daniel knew only one Source that can reveal the secrets of the future.

Joseph. Born into a dysfunctional family, favored above his grown brothers, Joseph was raised to be the CEO of the “corporation.” One day, his jealous brothers sought revenge by plotting his death. Reuben, however, put a stop to the plan. Later, Judah suggested that they sell him as a slave! Genesis does not say what Joseph did. We can presume that he prayed and begged his brothers for his freedom. We do know, though, that as his life unfolded in Egypt, Joseph trusted God.

We may not understand our current stressful circumstances; and as the stress builds, it’s easy to get confused. All these people trusted God with their lives and left us with great lessons. When our lives are a mess and the stress is too much to bear, God still loves us and has a plan for our future with Him. What a wonderful mystery!

**REACT**
What situations in your life are causing you stress? Choose one of them, and think of ways you can put that situation in perspective. Then try to put the others in perspective, as well, using the ways you thought of. Stick with it. It will take time. But God will be guiding you.
While some stress can cajole even the most laid-back person to action, too much can disassemble the most together person. As a medical resident, there have been times when I have had more to do than seemed humanly possible, and instead of getting work done I was paralyzed by fear. More dangerous are the times when we are so stressed we pick an action—any action—and that can be worse than no action at all.

We see this illustrated in the Garden of Gesthemane. Jesus is preparing to die a horrible death. Around Him His disciples sleep. He is alone. In a brief turnaround, the One who was welcomed into Jerusalem as a king is suddenly seized as a criminal. Many run, doing nothing. Mark runs away, naked, not even stopping to pick up his clothes as they are ripped from him. Peter, realizing that action is needed, cuts off the ear of the high priest’s servant. Jesus quickly instructs him to put away his sword, that those who use the sword will themselves be destroyed by the sword. He goes on to explain that He doesn’t need such protection, that if He wanted to He could call to God for fighting angels (Matt. 26:52–54).

So what are we to do to avoid stress? Here are some guidelines.

Stop! Take a deep breath. You don’t want your new nickname to be “Van Gogh.”

Ask God for help. The Bible is full of people crying to Him for help. Perhaps the most famous of these is David. He has written pages of psalms asking God to help him. Read Psalm 102:1, 2, for just one example.

Listen for God’s response. All along, Jesus had been teaching His disciples about what His kingdom was going to be and who was going to be in it. But they weren’t listening. If we’re too busy being stressed, we can’t hear God’s response to our cry. Jesus states that His sheep will know and listen to His voice (John 10:27).

Accept that you alone cannot fix everything. Only Jesus can save the world. Adopting a “messiah complex” will only leave you feeling like a failure.

Lisa D. Hermann, Nashville, Tennessee, U.S.A.
If God doesn’t make junk, why do we treat ourselves like that’s what we are? Take me, for example. I’m all smiles and waves. I open doors for the elderly and even make small talk with the cashier at the grocery store. My external life is the better half of a pharmaceutical commercial, the part where you end up on a beach flying a kite. I hoist the golden rule above my head like a mighty trophy for all to see.

I was a shell of the person I could have been.

For someone who dislikes himself, I seem quite nice externally. But my low self-esteem is dry rot to the soul; and that bile that I feed myself is starting to creep out. At night as I lie in bed, I’ll recount the day’s activities and berate myself for how poorly I carried out each one.

I’m sure every other student, teacher, or small woodland creature has it all together. I’m the screw-up. And as the dark above my bed bears down on me, I can feel the dull pull of my stomach. I realize that if I were a picture on the Internet, I would have “EPIC FAIL” scrawled across the front.

Most of high school and some of college life had me in that pathetic slump. I’d overanalyze and hesitate over anything I did or would do next. And it was all based on the false assumption that I was inferior by some scale that God applied to me and no one else. In the end, I was a shell of the person I could have been.

And yet “love your neighbor as yourself” means just that. You cannot love outwardly until you love inwardly. But somehow, most of us overlook the “love yourself” part. Accepting Christ and Christianity means loving yourself and accepting the lien Christ has on your life now. In fact, we are obliged to treat ourselves exactly as Christ treated us: as someone worth dying for. Low self-esteem is nothing more than a vote of no confidence in our Savior, and that just doesn’t work.

**REACT**

1. Low self-esteem is not the same as humility, but how do they sometimes get rolled together?
2. Is it easier to be critical of others or yourself? Explain your answer.
CONCLUDE

Our techno-driven world allows us a global community with virtual friends. We can tweet our every thought in an instant. Smart-phones attach to ears or sit on speakers in cars, keeping us constantly connected to our network. Laptops allow us to work all the time—at home or on vacation. In the midst of the constant hum, we risk losing the art of being still and being poised to hear the healing voice of God's Spirit speaking peace, joy, and inner strength into our lives. So, are we stressed out? You bet. What's the antidote for the anxiety pulsating below the surface of our hooked-up lives? Jesus’ first-century words gain momentum for our wrung-out souls today, and lest we missed His invitation in Matthew 11:28, Peter reiterates, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7, NIV).

CONSIDER

• Turning off the radio, television, computer, and smartphone and turning your focus to Jesus. You don't have to wait for Sabbath to do it. Do it now. Ask God to teach you the art of meditation, and let Him refresh your overloaded or too empty soul. It may not feel comfortable or natural at first, but don't give up. Follow the scriptural pattern of meditation by redirecting your mind from yourself and from the cares of the day.
• Reading a psalm each day as you awake in the morning and before you fall asleep in the evening. Experience the worship, meditation, gratitude, and dependence the psalmist reveals through his poems.
• Keeping a praise journal or speaking praise to colleagues and friends in place of news or gossip. Paul tells us to be joyful always (1 Thess. 5:16). If we look to God for our satisfaction and joy, then even when circumstances around us would seem to shake us to the core of our being, we will not be overcome with stress and anxiety. His joy will sustain us.
• Exercising regularly. The body is the temple of God, and exercising is a natural stress-releaser. Endorphines are the feel-good natural drug that our brain releases throughout our body when we exercise, giving us a sense of well-being. If you invite a friend or family member to join you, you add the benefit of developing positive, strengthened relationships with others—another good antidote against the anxiety virus!

CONNECT

Karl Haffner, The Cure for Soul Fatigue.

Chandler Riley, Laurel, Maryland, U.S.A.
Relationships

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

(Matt. 7:12, NIV).
“Diplomacy is nothing but a lot of hot air,” said a companion to French statesman Georges Clemenceau as they rode to a peace conference. “All etiquette is hot air,” said Clemenceau. “But that is what is in our automobile tyres; notice how it eases the bumps.”¹

“I hate you.” Is there anyone who hasn’t uttered these three small but powerful words? If you haven’t, I’ll bet they at least passed through your mind. The first time I screamed them was to my mother, when as a child, I wanted my way on a matter. However, I remember this incident only because of her reaction. She said, “I don’t want your love. I want your respect. Respect me first. Then you can learn to love me.” The realization that love is a gift and not a right was an epiphany for the mini-me. Also new to me was the fact that love and respect are not mutually exclusive. They go hand in hand.

Obviously, this did not herald an end to my “reign of terror.” My mother and I continued to have a tumultuous relationship. Over time, however, it became less rocky because of an understanding we formed. I had decided not to talk back, because I thought this would help me to avoid being punished when I did something I knew was wrong. However, I quickly realized that even when I didn’t talk back, I would still be punished. So I concluded that I might as well say what was on my mind, because I was going to be punished anyway. In a strange way, this opened the lines of communication between my mother and me so that over the years, I have learned to trust her unconditionally. Now I can honestly tell her anything and everything. Trust is the cornerstone of any relationship. Frank Crane said it best: “You’ll be deceived if you trust too much, but you will live in torment if you don’t trust enough.”²

My experience has taught me that love, respect, and trust are crucial to establishing positive and edifying relationships with those around us. Are there any more lessons to be learned? Yes. Plenty. So this week we will consider a biblical discussion on relationships and how as Christians we can sustain healthy relationships in this life and the one to come.


Kimberley Cadogan, St. Philip, Barbados
Trust is an important ingredient in healthy relationships. Without it, we live under clouds of suspicion and fear. People trusted Jesus because as a human, He was so much like them, and He identified with them:
1. He loved others, and others loved Him (John 3:16; 12:12, 13).
2. He was sad, and He cried when a beloved friend died (John 11:35, 36).
3. He enjoyed festive occasions (John 2:1, 2).
4. Jesus took pity on those in need and helped them (John 6:1–12).
The life of Joseph also indicates that trust is an important ingredient in relationships. In Genesis 50, we read that when his father died, Joseph wanted to bury him in Canaan. Pharaoh granted him permission to do so because “Joseph had proven himself trustworthy as Pharaoh’s advisor. Because of his good record, Pharaoh had little doubt that he would return to Egypt as promised after burying his father in Canaan.”

As the Israelites experienced hardship and stress on their way to the Promised Land, their trust in both their human leaders and in their divine Leader wavered. Even when they stood at the border of the land God had promised them, their trust faltered to such a degree that God denied them access. Only those who were at that time under the age of 20 were allowed to enter after the 40 years of wandering.

Once they were in the Promised Land, God gave the people instructions regarding every area of life, including the importance of trust. In Numbers 30:1, 2, He instructed them to keep the vows that they made to one another. This is because "a wholesome society can be maintained only by the integrity of the rank and file of its men and women.”

**REACT**

George MacDonald, the eighteenth century Scottish clergyman, said that “to be trusted is a greater compliment than to be loved.” Why do you think this is true?

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Lisa Thorne, St. Philip, Barbados
The Great Cost (Heb. 4:15)

Jesus Christ identified Himself with humanity (Heb. 4:15), not only before the Fall, but after it as well, because it was essential for Him to understand the pain and helpless depths and debt that disobedience brought with it.

“Sorrow filled heaven, as it was realized that man was lost and that world which God had created was to be filled with mortals doomed to misery, sickness, and death, and there was no way of escape for the offender. The whole family of Adam must die. I saw the lovely Jesus and beheld an expression of sympathy and sorrow upon His countenance.”

Poor relationships are less likely to affect the Christian who is a peacemaker.

The heavenly host groaned in pain and sadness, not for a lack of solution, but for the separation from the crowning act of creation. Adam and Eve soon recognized the great cost of one piece of fruit—the cost that only the Son of God could pay with His life.

One Bad “Apple” Spoils the Whole Barrel (Rom. 5:1, 12, 13)

The moment Adam and Eve sinned, the law of love was broken (Rom. 5:12, 13). So God became a human in order to reestablish the God-human relationship (John 1:1–3, 14; 3:16, 17). It is only through this act of love that we can find eternal life. “The angels prostrated themselves before Him. They offered their lives. Jesus said to them that He would by His death save many,” that the life of an angel could not pay the debt. His life alone could be accepted of His Father as a ransom for humans. However, humans must accept by faith the extended hand of love and grace in order to be delivered from the wrath of sin (Eph. 2:1–9). This redemptive relationship does two things: It gives peace of mind to both God and us (Matt. 6:25–34; Rom. 5:1), and it assists in the process of remaking us in the image of God (Eph. 4:22–27; Phil. 4:11–13).

Having reestablished a relationship with us through the blood of Christ, God ensures His image in humanity. This rebirth is demonstrated daily in the lives of Christians. Christians have no tolerance for anything that will corrupt the soul or prevent them from bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23; James 3:16–18). A fruitful life is characterized by forgiveness, compassion, and love without partiality or social boundaries. Poor relationships are less likely to affect the Christian who is a peacemaker (Matt. 5:9).
One Tree Versus the Other (Josh. 24:14, 15)

Adam and Eve chose to disobey God’s law. Since then, the human race has been depraved and deprived of the maximum love and companionship of God (Gen. 3:1–24). “Adam was made to comprehend what sin is—the transgression of the law. He was shown that moral, mental, and physical degeneracy would result to the race, from transgression, until the world would be filled with human misery of every type. . . . Yet, notwithstanding the weakness, and enfeebled mental, moral, and physical powers of the human race, Christ, true to the purpose for which He left heaven, continues His interest in the feeble, depreciated, degenerate specimens of humanity, and invites them to hide their weakness and great deficiencies in Him.”

As we reap the results of Adam and Eve’s sin, our best choice is to forsake the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and to choose the tree of life. Satan’s primary motive is to secure our allegiance through worshiping him. That motive has not changed. As we approach the end of time, we must be decisive like Joshua as to whom we will serve (Josh. 24:14, 15). Like the Hebrew young men, we must decide to whom we will bow down (Dan. 3:15–18). Satan never ceases his acts of deception. He continues to portray God as unjust. The oceans of bitter tears caused by sin remain a barrier between God and His people. Yet Christ bids us to come to Him through faith (see Matthew 14:28–31).

The journey of faith can at times be trying and tedious, but tears of joy await the faithful (Ps. 31:24; Revelation 21), even those who are faithful unto death. “All come forth from their graves the same in stature as when they entered the tomb. Adam, who stands among the risen throng, is of lofty height and majestic form, in stature but little below the Son of God. He presents a marked contrast to the people of later generations; in this one respect is shown the great degeneracy of the race. But all arise with the freshness and vigor of eternal youth. . . . Restored to the tree of life in the long-lost Eden, the redeemed will ‘grow up’ (Malachi 4:2) to the full stature of the race in its primeval glory.”

Before too long, the redeemed will exchange their weight of affliction for a crown of glory, and all relationships will be redeemed.

REACT

1. How has Adam and Eve’s sin affected your relationships?
2. How can Christ’s desire to remake you into His image affect your relationships?
3. Read each one of the texts listed at the top of page 40. What would our relationships look like if Christians lived up to these verses? Do you think others might be more attracted to Christianity if more Christians lived according to these verses? Explain your answer.

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1. The Story of Redemption, p. 42.
2. Ibid., p. 43.
3. Ibid., pp. 49, 50.

A. George McCallum, St. Michael, Barbados
To an evangelist, Ellen White wrote the following regarding his relationship to people: “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. . . .

“Words of kindness and sympathy will do good as a medicine, and will heal souls that are in despair.”

“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.”

To married couples, White had this to say: “There should be . . . much more tenderness and love, cheerfulness and Christian courtesy, among the members of the household. Many need to learn how to make home attractive, a place of enjoyment. Thankful hearts and kind looks are more valuable than wealth and luxury, and contentment with simple things will make home happy if love be there. . . .

“It is the little attentions, the numerous small incidents and simple courtesies of life, that make up the sum of life’s happiness; and it is the neglect of kindly, encouraging, affectionate words, and the little courtesies of life, which helps compose the sum of life’s wretchedness. It will be found at last that the denial of self for the good and happiness of those around us constitutes a large share of the life record in heaven.”

REACT

Honestly evaluate yourself in light of the above two quotes. Where do you think you are on the scale between “harsh expressions” and the “simple courtesies of life”?


Jan Van Valkenburg, Ann Arbor, Michigan, U.S.A.
Jesus lived and died for us so that we could have a relationship with Him like Adam and Eve had with Him before the Fall—a relationship not based on rules and regulations but a relationship based on the type of love upon which His commandments are based—love for God and love toward fellow humans (Matt. 22:37–40). We need to allow this seed of love to grow in our hearts. How can we cultivate this seed?

**God isn’t finished with any of us yet!**

*Pray.* Pray especially for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. When He lives in our hearts, we can be transformed so that our lives reflect the life of Christ.

*Study.* Read His Word for guidance in everyday life. Also read Ellen White’s books and other books by Christian authors who have good reputations.

*Witness.* Tell others about the wonderful love of Jesus you experience as His disciple.

*Serve.* Help others in your community. Serve in a soup kitchen or at a homeless shelter or teach an adult how to read. Service possibilities are numerous. Chances are there’s one that fits your talents and abilities.

As we grow in our relationship with Christ, we will be able to grow healthy relationships with our friends and family. Here are some ways to help those relationships grow:

*Be realistic.* You cannot be all things to all people. Neither can any one person be all things to you. Accept people as they are. God isn’t finished with any of us yet!

*Look for the best in others.* Undoubtedly, some of your friends and family members will hurt your feelings. Undoubtedly, you will hurt theirs. Forget about it and move on. Look for the best in others.

*Be yourself.* Don’t pretend to be something you’re not. Good relationships are made with real people, not fakes or forgeries.

Checking into the dorm my freshman year, I was surprised to find a letter waiting in my mailbox. Written by a friend a few years ahead of me, the letter was filled with wisdom regarding college life.

As I’ve thought about what advice to give my son Daniel, a college freshman, I’ve come to the conclusion that some of the most important wisdom I can share revolves around relationships. So, here are four relationship strategies I’d like him to know as he begins collegiate life:

The world is filled with wonderful people, and part of the adventure in life is finding them.

1. Choose your relationships carefully, because they will have a huge impact on your life. The first question to ask is “Will this relationship draw me closer to God, or will it lead me away?” Are you in spiritual harmony with this person? Notice how this person relates to others in a variety of situations—because the way a person treats others is the way he or she will treat you. Remember that “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm” (Prov. 13:20, NASB).

2. Invest time in your relationships. Some cultures place a high value on time and material assets. Others put a higher value on relationships. Try to find a good balance between the two. While time and goals are important (especially in college), don’t underestimate the joy and purpose that can come into your life through meaningful relationships. Some of my most meaningful memories come from time spent with friends—hard times as well as good. Remember that your character and relationships with others will outlast material possessions.

3. Continue to develop an interest in new relationships. The world is filled with wonderful people, and part of the adventure in life is finding them. Be open to widening your circle of healthy relationships—strengthening each other in faith and learning from one another.

4. Keep your relationship with God strong. This is the most important point. If you’ve got this as your number one priority, everything else eventually will fall into place. But, as with all healthy relationships, it takes time. Take time to read your Bible each day. Other religious books are good, but there’s no substitute for the way God’s Word can speak directly to your heart. Take time to pray. And take time to listen—God actually does speak. As you listen, you will learn to recognize His voice.

Gina Wahlen, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE
Love, respect, and trust are crucial to establishing positive relationships with those around us. These foundational elements can occur only if we have a strong, trusting relationship with God. Then, as we grow in our relationship with Him, we will be able to grow healthy relationships with our friends and family. Praying for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and for God’s Word to be made practical in our lives is an effective tool in this process. Regular acts of selfless service, accepting others (and ourselves) as they are, and humble honesty in our relationships demonstrate our good relational health.

CONSIDER
• Creating a logo to illustrate Ecclesiastes 4:12. Incorporate color into your design. Start with detailed sketches for three different approaches to the same concept. Refine the best one into your final design.
• Playing on a keyboard a sequence of two-note chords, starting with the octave and then decreasing the interval by half steps. Change notes slowly, savoring the sound of each combination before moving to the next. See what changes in the feeling of the music as you change the distance between the notes. What can you infer about distance in people’s relationships from this musical exploration?
• Taking three strands of yarn and do what you can to break each one separately. Then take three more strands, each the same length, braid them together, and try to break the braid. What does this teach us about the power of healthy relationships?
• Hosting a dinner party, but have the guests share in bringing the food and in cleaning up afterward. Turn “many hands make light work” into “many hands make a party.”
• Setting aside a significant block of time when you can be free from distractions. Begin this time with prayer. Invite God to give you a clear view into your heart and to guide you in this time according to His agenda.
• Listing the two or three closest relationships you have. Include your relationship with yourself. Ask God to show you how you have caused harm in each relationship. Listen to His voice, and write down what you hear. He will not speak in an accusatory way. Ask Him what He would have you do to make things right in these relationships, including the one with yourself. Then ask Him for the strength and guidance to carry out these actions in His way.

CONNECT
Emerson Eggerichs, Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires, the Respect He Desperately Needs; Brennan Manning, The Rabbi’s Heartbeat.
Guilt

“If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins,
O Lord, who could stand?

But with you there is forgiveness;
therefore you are feared” (Ps. 130:3, 4, NIV).
Introduction

A Dream and a Wake-Up Call

Last night I had a dream.
I dreamed that it was the last days before Jesus’ return, and I was running—running from the government, running from the law, running because of my belief in Jesus.

And as I ran, suddenly, I caught a glimpse of heaven. It was all light and complete happiness. I stopped running and felt weightlessness and peace wash over me. It was like nothing I had ever felt before. As I stood there, before my eyes, I saw Jesus on His throne, holding out His hand to me.

But then, as I stood before Him, I started to think of my past: my sins, my lack of conscience, things for which I had not repented. In my dream, I was consumed with guilt; tears poured down my cheeks, and I began to recite my sins to Jesus, begging for forgiveness for each wrongdoing. As I pled for forgiveness, as each confession escaped my lips, it lifted from my soul and floated to Jesus. When I finally became quiet, I looked into the face of my Lord, and He smiled at me.

Then I awoke.
I laid in bed for quite some time, pondering this dream. There were many sins and burdens still on my soul for which I had not asked forgiveness. My so-called secret sins. Things that I wanted no one to know. They had eaten at my heart at one time, but I had pushed them away time and time again, until I almost forgot they were there.

In the quiet of my room, I slipped from under my covers and knelt. I began to cry out to the Lord, begging for forgiveness. As I cried and prayed, I felt a peace come over me. Suddenly, I knew. Nothing—NOTHING!—would come between me and my Jesus! Nothing—NOTHING!—was worth hiding from Him, for He knows everything anyway. As had happened in my dream, a peace washed over my soul, and I became quiet. I climbed back into bed—at peace with my conscience for the first time in many years—and fell sweetly to sleep.

Each one of us experiences guilt at some point in our lives. Our study this week will discuss the role of guilt in our spiritual lives and how guilt can be used to bring us closer to Jesus instead of separating us from His never-ending love.

Alison Zollman, Centerville, Ohio, U.S.A.
The First Negative Emotions (Gen. 3:7–13)

It is interesting, if one pays attention, to notice the feelings and emotions that unfold after Adam and Eve sinned. In Genesis 3:7, they make the striking discovery that they are naked. We recognize this emotion as shame. This bothers Adam and Eve, so they figure out a creative way to conceal themselves (a billion dollar industry today!). Then they hear God walking in the Garden and feel the need to “duck and run.” We call this emotion fear. When confronted and asked why they were naked and afraid, Adam, who ate the fruit out of his deep love for Eve, starts us down the path we still travel on today—blaming someone else for our actions. Eve quickly takes this to another level and casts the blame indirectly on God.

The words no condemnation are awesome!

Our wrong decisions should, even today, evoke uncomfortable feelings within us that should, ideally, cause us to make immediate corrections. Guilt lets us know we have crossed a line. We can make excuses. We can rationalize. We can justify. But in the end, we know the truth, regardless of what we can persuade others to think. It is up to us to do the right thing or pay the price. And lugging around a guilty conscience is a high price to pay (as most of us already know).

A Psalm of Relief (Psalm 32)

Although it may be easier to get forgiveness than permission, Psalm 32 echoes the human experience with sin and guilt. Our sinful acts weigh us down, as well they should; but this psalm begins with thanksgiving and then journeys back through David’s experience. He hides his sin and finds it hard to bear until he decides to confess, at which point he experiences the freedom of forgiveness and the natural gratitude that accompanies it. David’s experience is the human experience, one that all of us can relate to, whether or not we take it all the way to confession, repentance, and the obtaining of forgiveness. Too often we stop short and fail to experience the freedom God is so willing to give us.

Cock-a-Doodle-Don’t (Matt. 26:75)

Weeping bitterly. Peter was a grown man, but he wept bitterly. The realization of what he had done had sunk in deep and evoked a dramatic response. Sin is serious stuff and should not be treated lightly. (Peter probably never heard a rooster crow the same way again.) But we tend to grow
comfortable, to some degree, with sin—and the enormity of it ceases to affect us like it should. Sin breaks relationships. It damages what we claim to value. We should weep bitterly more often than we do!

**Condemnation-Less (Rom. 8:1)**

When Paul uses the word *therefore* in Romans 8:1, it means he’s bringing to a conclusion a point he has taken perhaps chapters to make. It’s usually a good idea to back up and retrace his steps, but in this case he’s unmistakably clear. “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because. . .” (Rom. 8:1, 2ff, NIV). That’s a declaration! The words *no condemnation* are awesome! But the word *now* is even better! The key, of course, is being “in Christ Jesus.”

We are told that “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23, NIV). Wages are both earned and expected. In this passage, death is not a gift. It is the pay-out for sinning. Contrast that with what God offers—a gift, neither earned, nor expected, nor deserved! A gift is free to the one receiving it, but a gift does cost the giver, and in this case, the Giver! Because of what “God in Christ” did on a cross, Paul can say that “there is now no condemnation!” Romans 8:2 goes on to say, “Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death” (NIV). That’s great news for guilt-ridden humans who need what only God can give. Weeping bitterly sets us up for appreciating the gift of “no condemnation” that God offers. Without an understanding of the enormity of our sin, there can be no true gratitude for God’s forgiveness!

**Kindness Melts Stone (Rom. 2:4; Ezek. 11:19)**

Paul says in Romans 2:4 that “God’s kindness leads you toward repentance” (NIV). That’s an unusual approach to effecting change. Kindness. Seems kind of weak on the surface, but much like a seed in the crack of a sidewalk, the seed begins to sprout, grow, and, in time, destroys the concrete! God’s kindness begins to melt that heart of stone we are so prone to have, and if we’ll let Him, He replaces that heart with a fleshier one! Not a bad trade! Which takes us back to David’s declaration of praise, “Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!” (Ps. 32:11, NIV). (That would be the new and improved heart!)

**REACT**

1. Does your sin negatively affect you to the point of “weeping bitterly”? When was the last time you shed a tear due to your sin? Why is it often easier to shed tears over someone else’s sin?
2. Is God’s forgiveness too easy to get? Explain your answer.
3. What happens when we choose not to let guilt lead us to a better solution?
4. Has someone’s unexpected kindness ever caught you off guard? What can make kindness so powerful?

Jan Yakush, Smithsburg, Maryland, U.S.A.
“The feeling of guiltiness must be laid at the foot of the cross of Calvary. The sense of sinfulness has poisoned the springs of life and true happiness. Now Jesus says, Lay it all on Me; I will take your sin, I will give you peace. Destroy no longer your self-respect, for I have bought you with the price of My own blood. You are Mine; your weakened will I will strengthen; your remorse for sin I will remove.”

“If we had to bear our own guilt, it would crush us.”

“God in Christ gave Himself for our sins. He suffered the cruel death of the cross, bore for us the burden of guilt, ‘the just for the unjust,’ that He might reveal to us His love and draw us to Himself. And He says, ‘Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you.’ Ephesians 4:32. R.V. Let Christ, the divine Life, dwell in you and through you reveal the heaven-born love that will inspire hope in the hopeless and bring heaven’s peace to the sin-stricken heart. As we come to God, this is the condition which meets us at the threshold, that, receiving mercy from Him, we yield ourselves to reveal His grace to others.”

“Satan seeks to draw our minds away from the mighty Helper, to lead us to ponder over our degeneration of soul. But though Jesus sees the guilt of the past, He speaks pardon; and we should not dishonor Him by doubting His love.”

“We should not try to lessen our guilt by excusing sin. We must accept God’s estimate of sin, and that is heavy indeed. Calvary alone can reveal the terrible enormity of sin. If we had to bear our own guilt, it would crush us. But the sinless One has taken our place; though undeserving, He has borne our iniquity. ‘If we confess our sins,’ God ‘is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ 1 John 1:9.”

REACT
1. How can we as Christians help others deal with guilt, especially if they do not have a relationship with Christ?
2. Are you holding on to guilt instead of leaving your sins at the foot of the cross? If so, how can you get yourself to accept Jesus’ forgiveness?

2. Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, pp. 114, 115.
4. Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 116.

Kandace Zollman, Smithsburg, Maryland, U.S.A.
Evidence
Guilt and Forgiveness

Guilt has two sides, legal and emotional. Legal means the outcome of a legal or moral transgression. Emotional is that which God has instilled in us that leads us to repentance.

We are all prone to fall when we don’t keep our eyes on our Savior.

When we ask God for forgiveness, He will forgive us. He wants us to come to Him so He can cleanse us from our sin and guilt. “I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, / And like a cloud, your sins. / Return to Me, for I have redeemed you” (Isa. 44:22, NKJV). “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).

We must not forget that as humans, we are all prone to fall when we don’t keep our eyes on our Savior. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23, 24, NKJV).

The best part, however, is that we can always return to His throne of grace to receive mercy. “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:6, 7, NIV).

Don’t forget, though, that Satan will continue to try to draw our minds away from the Mighty Helper, to lead us to ponder the degeneration of our souls. When you find this happening, remember that “grief, anxiety, discontent, remorse, guilt, distrust, all tend to break down the life forces, and to invite decay and death.” Satan’s goal is to separate us from the love and redemption of God. He uses guilt to keep our eyes focused on our sin rather than on the glorious gift of forgiveness offered to each one of us through the death of Jesus on the cross.

“But though Jesus sees the guilt of the past, He speaks pardon; and we should not dishonor Him by doubting His love.”

REACT
What are some other Bible passages that help us to remember that we can go to God with our guilt?

2. Lift Him Up, p. 256.
Sin and guilt are connected like a tree and its shadow. Imagine a bright, sunny day. The maple tree in the front yard is in full leaf. As the sun shines on the tree, it casts a shadow behind it. One day, the tree is cut down and hauled away. The next day—when the sun rises—the tree is no longer there. Is the shadow there? No. When the tree is gone, so is its shadow—a simple lesson from the natural sciences.

In the spiritual realm, we can apply the illustration like this: The Son (of God) shines His light on sin in our lives (the tree), casting a shadow. We call that shadow guilt. Guilt is what you feel when your conscience bothers you after you’ve done something wrong. But God has a purpose for guilt. He casts that shadow in our life for a reason—so we will seek His forgiveness.

In 2 Corinthians 7:8–11, Paul tells the Corinthians that by reproving them in his first letter, he knows that he has grieved them, that he has made them feel guilty when he pointed out their sins. But he also says, “I rejoice . . . because you were grieved into repenting” (verse 9, ESV). Their godly grief produced a repentance that led to salvation (verse 10). That’s what God wants for us. That’s why He sends guilt—to lead us to repent, to seek forgiveness, and to claim salvation.

How does one get over feeling guilty?

[God] sends guilt—to lead us to repent, to seek forgiveness, and to claim salvation.

In 2 Corinthians 7:8–11, Paul tells the Corinthians that by reproving them in his first letter, he knows that he has grieved them, that he has made them feel guilty when he pointed out their sins. But he also says, “I rejoice . . . because you were grieved into repenting” (verse 9, ESV). Their godly grief produced a repentance that led to salvation (verse 10). That’s what God wants for us. That’s why He sends guilt—to lead us to repent, to seek forgiveness, and to claim salvation.

How does one get over feeling guilty?

Confess and seek God’s forgiveness of the sin that is causing you to feel guilt. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9, ESV; italics supplied).

Believe that God has actually forgiven that sin. When He forgives our sins, He takes them away. When He cuts down the tree, the shadow of guilt disappears too. To continue to carry guilt after you have received God’s promised forgiveness makes Him a liar. In essence, we are saying, “You didn’t really forgive my sin!”

Allow joy to lift up your heart as far as guilt had weighed it down. In Psalm 32, David said, “You forgave the guilt of my sin. . . . Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous” (verses 5, 11, NIV).

**REACT**

What load of guilt are you carrying from which you need to claim freedom?

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Franke Zollman, Smithsburg, Maryland, U.S.A.

52
Bring on the guilt! Generally, it is a good thing. I’ve seen entirely too many people who perpetrated atrocities without sufficient guilt. Society could use more guilt—guilt over selfishness, theft, fraud, murder, gossip, and so forth.

The greatest thing about guilt is that it brings us to Jesus.

Guilt is, after all, only the voice of conscience whispering that our latest selfish deed may not have been all right after all. Guilt also may be the Holy Spirit adding His voice to that little whisper. So hurrah for good conscience! Hurrah for the eternal God speaking to us! There will come a day when the Holy Spirit no longer will be able to speak to anyone but God’s people (see Ephesians 4:30). That will be the close of probation, soon followed by the close of history. But until then, let the Holy Spirit speak so that anyone who is willing might be saved.

There is guilt that is all wrong, sure enough. One kind of guilt assumes a hopeless cloud of destructive gloom. This guilt is more like a glittery coat draped over the filthy rags of determined disobedience to give an aura of respectability. Then there is the guilt that wallows in the pain of consequences without any intention of changing behavior. This type of guilt is worn like a black coat to cover the stain of dark deeds. This coat also is worn to cover deliberate inaction.

Real guilt, however, demands change. Real guilt lines you up and says, “Shape up!” So you line up to shape up and find out you can’t do it. You try and you try. And your good guilt keeps saying, “It isn’t enough. You need to be cleaner.”

So the Holy Spirit slips in the word that we really need Jesus. And if we are feeling guilty enough, we will turn to the only real solution to our selfish, fraudulent, gossiping selves. Jesus cleans us, and suddenly guilt sits quiet, then tiptoes out to be replaced by peace.

The greatest thing about guilt is that it brings us to Jesus, who destroys guilt. So bring on the guilt! Let it drive you to Jesus, who will cleanse you and give you His peace.

**REACT**

1. Why is the Holy Spirit not able to speak to people at the end of time?
2. What happens if a person fails to meet guilt’s demand for change?
3. Is it possible to be making mistakes, yet still be living in peace? Explain your answer.
CONCLUDE
God hates sin because it hurts and destroys the lives of His children. Sin hurts people at the core of their existence, their inner life, their heart, and their soul. Sin has a wage—death. God, however, already has paid that price on the cross. Forgiveness is God’s way of restoring His image in His people. Forgiveness is His way of giving people a new start. It is His way of reaching into people’s inner world and filling it with peace and acceptance. Forgiveness is God’s way of bringing emotional, physical, and spiritual healing to human beings.

CONSIDER
- Reading Luke 18:9–14 in several versions of the Bible. How are you different from or similar to the characters in the story?
- Praying “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner” several times a day and reflecting on how God responds to you.
- Visiting someone who is incarcerated. Journal your visit from the moment you enter the facilities. What did you see? What did you hear? How did you feel? What did it make you think about forgiveness and guilt?
- Googling the word forgiveness to find out how it affects people’s physical and emotional health.
- Doing a study of the word sin in the Bible and writing an essay on your findings.
- Developing an attitude of forgiveness to people who have sinned against you. How does forgiveness give you a sense of well-being?
- Sharing your story with someone at work or at school of how God has forgiven you.

CONNECT
Steps to Christ, pp. 49–55.

Sergio Torres, Miami, Florida, U.S.A.
“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable,
whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever
is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything
worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil. 4:8, NRSV).
At the beginning of his book Seven Secrets for Feeling Fantastic, Dr. Darren Morton tells about a friend who lost control of his car while driving early one morning. The car hit an oily patch on the wet road and fishtailed along while he tried to regain control before rolling repeatedly. “Eventually the car came to rest right side up,” Morton narrates, “and as he sat clutching the steering wheel in a hot sweat—shaken but unhurt—the radio started playing, ‘Ooooo, ooooo, ooooo, don’t worry, be happy.’”

The somewhat ironic timing of Bobby McFerrin’s hit song from a number of years ago underlines the philosophical hollowness of this approach to life. Perhaps we should worry less about some things. However, true happiness does not require us to ignore our circumstances in some brainless sort of way. Instead—as is the point of Morton’s book—what we choose to focus our lives on in all aspects of what we do, say, and practice has a profound influence on our happiness and emotional well-being.

A similar principle also applies to our faith. What we become, how we are transformed, is molded by God working in our lives; but we invite and allow Him to act by our intentional focus on righteousness (see Matthew 5:6). A variety of spiritual practices and disciplines are important to our spiritual formation and transformation. But perhaps most important is the steady habit of training our minds toward right thinking; and the best kind of thinking is that which is directed toward God. As Jesus explained it, “‘Blessed [happy] are all who hear the word of God and put it into practice’” (Luke 11:28, NLT).

This is a different and deeper kind of happiness from that described in McFerrin’s song—even if the timing of the song might have helped Morton’s friend smile as he coped with the shock of what he had just experienced. Good thinking is focused and intentional; it learns to react positively whatever our circumstances—which is often something more than just shrugging our shoulders and saying, “Don’t worry, be happy.”

Perhaps the best place to begin is to pray with David: “May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart / be pleasing to you, / O Lord, my rock and my redeemer” (Ps. 19:14, NLT). I believe this is a prayer God is always happy to answer.


Nathan Brown, Melbourne, Australia
French philosopher Rene Descartes wrote in 1644, “I think, therefore I am.” In other words, the very act of thinking meant that he must exist. If thinking proves that I exist, would the subject of my thoughts then prove the kind of existence I have? The statement could be expanded to include the things I actually think about and the kind of person I am. “I think [about what I want], therefore I am [all about personal pleasure].” And if this is my thought pattern, how would it affect my behavior?

Descartes’ ponderings appear to have excluded the existence of a God who made humans in His image. In light of Genesis 2:4-25, which describes God’s creation of humankind in intimate detail, the statement would perhaps be more accurately rendered “I am, therefore I think.” Through God’s amazing creation of people as complete beings—body, heart, and mind—this statement concludes that simply because someone exists, they must necessarily think.

And what would the extension of this statement look like? “I am [a child of the Most High God], therefore I think [He must love and care for me deeply].” If this were my thought pattern, how would it affect my behavior?

Long before Descartes existed and had thoughts about whether he existed, Jesus existed as a Man on earth, sharing thoughts and ideas about how to live life His way. Long before you or I could contemplate how our thoughts may or may not affect the kind of people we are, Jesus told us that they would. In Luke 6:45, He said, “ ‘The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks’ ” (NRSV). These “treasures” are not just things that make us feel good. They are the things we spend all our time thinking about and all our energy striving for. And because of that great investment in them, they inform our values, attitudes, and behaviors. Jesus is saying that our thoughts will determine who we become.

What are your heart treasures? What are you thinking about today? What do you want to be like?

**REACT**

How do our thoughts actually affect our behavior? Is it possible for thoughts not to affect behavior? If so, how?
Our senses sometimes play tricks on us. Our sight is fooled by optical illusions, which cause the brain to perceive effects like shimmering patterns and dim shapes that are not actually there. Our hearing can be fooled by music, as the brain is selective in what it takes in. In particular, it becomes accustomed to various patterns in the sound and may think it hears an expected note that, in reality, is missing.

The biblical worldview integrates a spiritual dimension.

It seems strange that the tuning of our senses can be a little fuzzy, but what if this were true of our thought processes as well? What if the “world” inside our head—our “mental map” by which we interpret life—did not fully line up with outside reality? Psychology claims that to some degree, this is true for all of us. Some experiences in the Bible illustrate warped thinking about Jesus, His messengers, and His theology.

Twisted Minds (Acts 14:2; 15:24; Gal. 3:1)

In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas spoke convincingly of God’s grace. “But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers” (Acts 14:2, NRSV). This text not only implies that unpleasant distortion is possible, it also shares how the apostles handled the problem. They did not divert from their message to turn against the troublemakers. Neither did they resort to underhanded tactics, such as gossip and backstabbing or retreat into silence and submission. Rather, they continued to share the gospel “boldly for the Lord,” who confirmed the message with signs and wonders (verse 3, NRSV). Doing so nearly cost Paul his life (verses 19, 20).

Believers also may be fooled. Some visitors to Antioch sparked a heated debate by arguing that circumcision was necessary for salvation (Acts 15:1). The leaders in Jerusalem rejected this assertion, saying that the visitors “have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds” (verse 24, NRSV). Their correction was well-received (verses 30–35), and the conflict was resolved amicably.

Later, Paul rebuked an entire region: “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified” (Gal. 3:1, NIV). They also forgot that the Holy Spirit is received by faith, not by relying on law-keeping and human effort (verses 2–14). Here we see unbelievers “poisoned” against the gospel, believers with “troubled” and “unsettled” theology, and other believers “bewitched”
concerning Christ’s death and the Holy Spirit.

Cognitive therapy attempts to challenge unhelpful thinking, although its domain is broader than our examples and its practitioners are not inspired like the Bible. Its goal is to intercept and refute thoughts leading to undesirable moods. Similarly, Scripture affirms the “wholeness” of a person, including a close interplay between thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

Core Worship (Mark 7:21–23; Luke 6:45)

Some religious leaders confronted Jesus because the disciples ate food with “unwashed hands” (Mark 7:2, NKJV). Jesus rebuked the leaders as “hypocrites” (verse 6), a term originally describing actors in a stage play and implying acting a part in life. These leaders acted holy, but their hearts and minds were impure.

Jesus clarified the true source of defilement: “‘For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person’” (verses 21–23, NRSV). In the original language, the word for \textit{heart} means “the core or center of a person.” The concept can refer to the mind and, to a lesser extent, the emotions.*

Likewise, good things also come from within. We know people by their fruits (Luke 6:43–45). Jesus states that both good and evil behaviors stem from the inner person.

Look Up (Ps. 19:14; Col. 3:1–17)

David understood that he needed to look up to God: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart / Be acceptable in Your sight, / O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer” (Ps.19:14, NKJV). God revealed to him that his speech and thoughts mattered. Earlier in the psalm, David marvels at God’s creation (verse 1). He also praises God’s instructions as pure, right, and true, and able to make one wise, revived, and righteous (verses 7–9). Similarly, “behavioral therapy” suggests better ways of relating to aid a person’s transformation.

We should seek wisdom (Eccles. 1:13) and teach and correct one another (Col. 3:16). The biblical worldview integrates a spiritual dimension. As the new self “is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (verse 10, NIV), Paul encourages us to “set [our] minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Col. 3:2, NIV). He also encourages us to put to death earthly behavior such as “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (verse 5, NIV; see also verses 8 and 9). To “wear” qualities like “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (verses 12–14) is to “wear” the character of Christ.

“The mind is a trust from God. The powers of the mind are to be cultivated. They are to be so wisely used that they will increase in strength. Each one is to use his entrusted talents in a way that the greatest good will be done. The mind is to be educated that the best energies of the soul will be brought out and every faculty be developed.”

“You commit sin and deny your Saviour by dwelling on gloomy things, by gathering trials to yourself, and by borrowing troubles. You bring the troubles of tomorrow into today, and embitter your own heart, and bring burdens and a cloud upon those around you, by manufacturing trials. The precious probationary time that God has given you in which to do good and become rich in good works you are very unwise to employ in thinking unhappy thoughts and in airy castle-building.”

“Live the life of faith day by day. Do not become anxious and distressed about the time of trouble, and thus have a time of trouble beforehand. Do not keep thinking, ‘I am afraid I shall not stand in the great testing day.’ You are to live for the present, for this day only. Tomorrow is not yours. Today you are to maintain the victory over self. Today you are to live a life of prayer. Today you are to fight the good fight of faith. Today you are to believe that God blesses you. And as you gain the victory over darkness and unbelief, you will meet the requirements of the Master, and will become a blessing to those around you.”

**REACT**

1. If our task is to cultivate the mind and to “become a blessing to those around you,” how should we relate to such issues as world unrest, financial instability, and physical or mental disability, especially when they touch us personally?

2. What specific attitudes does Jesus promote in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5:7)?

3. How are you using your talents for the greatest good?

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Christine Miles, Dannemora, Manukau, New Zealand
The mind is a powerful part of our body. If your mind challenged your arm to an arm wrestle, your mind would beat the arm every time—if it chose to. Simply put, your thoughts can simply put your arm in reverse and thump—the score is Mind 1, Arm 0.

**Happiness is not something you can buy from a shop and switch on when you get home.**

To a great extent, our thoughts run our body. What we do, when we do it, where we do it, how we do it, and ultimately why we do it, is often determined by the mind. Because our thoughts play a crucial role in controlling our actions and emotions, one could argue that it is just as important to look after the health of one’s mind as it is to look after any other part of your body. So here are some ways you can best set up your mind to have a happy and healthy life:

**Immerse yourself in that which is good.** Read, watch, listen, and take part in activities that increase your knowledge of all that is good and eternal. Occasionally stop to consider whether the TV programs you watch and the music you listen to are worth the space they fill in your mind. What about the films you see, and the books and magazines you read? Also consider the Web sites you visit, the purchases you make, the sports and hobbies you engage in, and the friends you choose.

**Don’t vandalize your mind.** It’s difficult to function well if you mistreat your mind with poor food or sleeping habits. Alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, caffeine, and a lack of exercise can also sabotage your mind.

**Nurture a positive attitude.** Happiness is not something you can buy from a shop and switch on when you get home. It’s up to you to look on the positive side of life’s situations. Doing so will help you to be happy.

**Avoid gossip.** Speaking negatively about people and situations can cause us to dislike others and to be unhappy with life. Dwelling on the positive is far more beneficial to our minds and attitudes than dwelling on rumored scandals and situations about which we can do very little or nothing.

**REACT**

1. How many quotes from films compared to Bible texts can you accurately recite?
2. Explore how you can choose to be either positive or negative about a bad situation you are currently experiencing.

*Scott Wegener, Melbourne, Australia*
God wants us to have a heart that seeks and meditates on truth, nobility, righteousness, and purity (see Philippians 4:8). Personally, I struggle to do this. I relate to Paul, who writes, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (Rom. 7:18, 19, NIV).

I want to think right thoughts and reflect God’s character. But I fail—time and again. In this sinful body of mine, in this mixed-up, self-driven world, it is difficult to find goodness. The possibility of changing my mind to “good thinking” and the resultant behavior feels out of reach. I am trapped in this place, and I am damaged goods. I have been fooled. Satan smiles. But he has not won.

When I immerse myself in God’s presence, His love flows in, and my heart is moved. The potential for change comes from knowing what I do about who God is and what He has done for me. Without Him, there is no possibility for good. Paul agrees, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:24, 25, NIV). But I must believe it. Only then can change occur. I must choose to love Him, serve Him. In that divine connection, I can pray for the strength provided by God to follow through.

This has certainly been true for me in recent years as I worked through an anxiety condition I suffered with. Fearing that I would suffocate from the mess inside my head, I finally sought help from a professional. It was a big step for me. I had listened to Satan’s lies for so long. I had to choose the change. I had to believe in God’s powerful love for me—the love that never fails. And what followed was a breakthrough, a change in my thinking that I never thought was possible.

God’s love can change your heart and lift your mind. Do you believe it?

**REACT**
1. Have you been so weighed down by an emotion or condition that you felt you would never be able to change? What helped you reach a breakthrough?
2. When do you experience a closeness to God that helps you believe in the possibility of change in yourself, in your thinking and behavior?

Georgina Hobson, Sunshine Coast, Australia
CONCLUDE
In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he sets the tone for Christian behavior within the context of love. Undoubtedly, there is a connection between what we say, what we do, and how we feel. If we have a negative outlook, there is no way we can reflect hope in God. The connection between the body and mind is crucial to our well-being. That is why we need to be careful about what we “feed” our minds. In today’s postmodern, media-infused world, we must be vigilant about keeping Satan at bay. We must be mindful to glorify God with our behavior and our treatment of others. Most negative behavior can be avoided. It all begins with how we nurture and cultivate our minds.

CONSIDER
- Painting a self-portrait and analyzing your self-perception based on the finished product.
- Gathering a short list of negative news items from a newspaper or the Internet and finding solutions that would turn these negatives into positives. How would the headlines change?
- Fasting from television or Facebook for a week. What difference did you notice in your thoughts and attitudes?
- Making a list of short- and long-term goals in terms of your thought patterns and tracking your progress toward those goals.
- Turning exercise into a lifestyle and seeing the mental benefits of a daily brisk walk or 20 minutes a day of jogging or running.
- Researching on the Internet to investigate areas of the brain that produce pleasure, make decisions, and store memory. How are these parts of the brain directly connected with our mood, feelings, and perceptions?
- Visiting a botanical garden or park and reflecting on God’s image in the beauty all around us. How does doing so create better living through better thinking?

CONNECT

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Fabian Carballo, Colton, California, U.S.A.
Hope Against Depression

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Ps. 34:18, NIV).
"I believe my client is not a hopeless case." This was the usual line I and the rest of my classmates in psychology used whenever we did case studies for our major classes in college. We always believed in the power of counseling and therapy—that certain methods would once again invigorate a person to live life as an average person should. However, as Christians, we are also taught that these methods are at times not as effective as the comfort, encouragement, and healing we get from our Lord, the greatest Comforter of all.

We have all been "down in the dumps" at some point in our lives. The good thing is, no matter how bad the situation we are in, we can always know that we never have to go through it alone. The Lord Himself will be with us. He will provide all the comfort and encouragement we need to get back on the right track. We just have to remember who our God is and what He can do for us. Our feelings of loneliness and discouragement will not last forever, but God will. Everything else in this world may go wrong. People may turn against us; friends may disappoint us; and loved ones may abandon us. God, however, always remains faithful. He is the only One who never changes, the only One who remains constant.

Therapy does provide the methods that psychologists use to help other people, but the best help that people can get comes from the Lord Himself. God is the only One who can completely and totally provide us with the comfort and healing we need. He can even do it before we ask Him. Just as we are comforted, we need to help provide the same comfort to others who feel hopeless, for the Lord is our light, and He calls us to be instruments in His work. We can be His beacons in a dark world that desperately needs light. People need to put their hope in Him. The problems we face are only temporary and may even be necessary for our spiritual growth. Only the Lord knows our future. He knows what is best for us. All we need to do is trust Him. The Lord is our best hope in these times of trouble.

This is the message of our lesson this week.
Is There Really Hope Against Depression?

The Joy of Forgiveness (Pss. 31:10; 32:1–5)
Right from the start, sin brings grief, sorrow, weakness, guilt, and depression. This truth is clearly manifested in Psalms 31:10 and 32:1–5. It is thought that David wrote Psalm 31 as a result of his experience in the Wilderness of Maon (1 Sam. 23:19–26). He wrote Psalm 32 after his affair with Bathsheba and after he had her husband killed in battle. He said, “My life is spent with grief, . . . / My strength fails because of my iniquity,” and “when I kept silent, my bones grew old / through my groaning all day long” (Pss. 31:10; 32:3, NKJV).

Healing, however, came when he acknowledged his dependence upon God and confessed his sin to God. When God delivered him and forgave him, he experienced the joy of a restored relationship with his Redeemer.

Have you ever been in trouble with no apparent way out? Have you sinned against God and your fellow humans? In Psalm 31:2–5, David recognizes that God is his refuge from trouble; and 1 John 1:9 assures us that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just not only to forgive us but to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Living With Hope (Pss. 39:1–7; 42:11)
Life on earth is short compared to eternity. The psalmist compared our lives to “vapor” (Ps. 39:5). In Psalm 39:1–7, he used additional metaphors to show that life is fleeting. He prayed, “‘You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand. / An entire lifetime is just a moment to you; / human existence is but a breath’” (verse 5, NLT). As the psalmist did, let us ask God to measure our days, to know how frail we are and to realize that our brief years on earth are in vain when we spend them acquiring the riches of earth rather than the riches of heaven. Because our life is brief, dwelling on the trials, sorrows, pain, and grief is a waste of time. The psalmist asks, “Why are you cast down, O my soul?” He advises himself, “Hope in God” (Ps. 42:11, NKJV). So live with hope. Our short life becomes meaningful when we spend it with God. Pray with the psalmist, “‘My hope is in You’” (Ps. 39:7, NKJV).
Misery Turns to Hope (Mic. 7:1–7)

In Micah 7:1–7, the prophet explains how miserable he was. He found nothing to eat or to satisfy his hunger. When he turned to his people, they proved unfaithful. They had laid traps to murder even their own brothers. When he turned his face to the government, he saw the corruption and injustices of the officials and judges. Perhaps he would find hope in his friends and family. Nevertheless, even there he failed to find it. “Don’t trust anyone—not your best friend or even your wife! For the son despises his father. The daughter defies her mother. The daughter-in-law defies her mother-in-law. Your enemies will be right in your own household” (Mic. 7:5, 6, NLT).

Where then could Micah turn? He concluded that only God could give Him hope (verse 7).

Living With the God of Hope (Rev. 21:1–4)

Praise God, for the time will come very soon when Jesus will establish His kingdom. John saw the Holy City coming down out of heaven from God. God will live with His people and be their God. If we have enjoyed His guidance, protection, blessing, comfort, love, encouragement, and compassion while we lived on earth despite the trials we’ve had, how much more joy we will experience when God finally lives with us in the new heaven and the new earth. Then He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. He will banish death, sorrow, and pain, forever.

“No matter what you are going through, it's not the last word—God has written the final chapter, and it is about true fulfillment and eternal joy for those who love him. We do not know as much as we would like, but it is enough to know that eternity with God will be more wonderful than we could ever imagine.”

REACT

1. Is there something in your life for which you need forgiveness? What is holding you back from experiencing the joy that comes with forgiveness?
2. Is there a situation in your life that seems hopeless? Turn it over to God, so He can work it out for you.
3. What do you look forward to the most about living with God for eternity? How does this give you strength for living on earth now?
4. Take a few minutes to consider a trial that you are currently facing. Then stop to think about how it is not “the last word,” that “God has written the final chapter.” How do those two facts make you feel?


Petronio Genebago, Malabon City, Philippines
My first assignment as a ministerial intern was in Lubao, Pampanga, a province on the Philippines’ biggest island of Luzon. I was partnered with my friend, Bryan, and it was July. Typhoon season in the Philippines had started, which meant we were welcomed by heavy rains and floods. We stayed with the only Adventist family in town. Even though they were kind and accommodating, we didn’t know what to do next, because we had no other church members to visit except them.

“Look constantly to Jesus. Take all your troubles to him.”

Because of the rainy season, we had to wait almost three months to start our field work. So we had basically nothing to do until then. Bryan and I would walk around with a handful of tracts to give away, but there was no interest and we became depressed. Frustration began to take its toll—a third of the year into our assignment and we had accomplished nothing! I felt as though I were a total failure. My heart was broken. It was horrible; and I was angry. I began to entertain thoughts of taking another course of study or another job. I struggled in prayer. Those moments of prayer in a garden of someone I called Apong Eliong were precious to me. They were quiet times of communion with my God. I decided to put matters in His hands. And again, He did what He always does best—He performed a miracle! The following months were the most rewarding. Our evangelistic efforts bore fruit. A sister from Natividad donated money for a piece of land and a church building. God turned our mourning into joy!

Ellen White encourages us to “look constantly to Jesus. Take all your troubles to him.” He will never misunderstand you. He is the refuge of his people. Under the shadow of his protection, they can pass unharmed. Believe in him and trust in him. He will not give you up to the spoiler. Flee to the stronghold, and learn that the power of Christ to strengthen and to help passes all comprehension. Open the door of the heart, and let Jesus enter, to fill your life with his peace, his grace, his joy.”

**REACT**

1. Why is it that oftentimes we need to experience “storms” before finally seeing light?
2. Is it possible to grow in the Christian life without suffering some trials? Why, or why not?

*The Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald, January 5, 1911.*

Isagani Valencia, Metro Manila, Philippines
Some of the symptoms of depression can include feelings of helplessness and guilt, loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, decreased energy, difficulty concentrating, and persistent headaches and digestive disorders. It is thought that depression can result from a combination of “biological (including genetics), social, and psychological factors.” Christians must also consider that sin can cause depression. “Treatment for depression, like for most mental disorders, usually relies on psychotherapy and medication for the quickest, strongest effects.” In addition, research also suggests that “hope therapy” is a potent way to fight depression.

Hope is exactly what the Bible offers. Our sins can be weighty and may put us in an early grave, but our merciful God is ready to forgive our sins when we confess them and ask for His forgiveness. That’s what David did. He recognized that his depression and grief were a result of his sin. He also knew that the first step toward recovery was to acknowledge that he had failed God. From there, he had faith that God would forgive him.

In Psalm 32, David was likely bemoaning his sins against Bathsheba and her husband. In verses 3 and 4, we see the weakening influence of sin—the loss of physical strength and mental health. However, in Psalm 51 (also written in relationship to David’s sin against Bathsheba and her husband), we find a hopeful biblical cure for depression that is caused by one’s sins. This psalm teaches us that hope therapy for the Christian means that “God does not merely cleanse the heart; He creates in His forgiven child a new heart (see Ezek. 36:26). . . . The prayer for forgiveness should always be accompanied by the prayer for heart renewal and sanctification.”

**REACT**

Does turning to psychotherapy and medication when we are depressed always mean that we fail to admit our sin and lack faith in God’s healing and forgiveness? Why, or why not?

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There are times when our emotions run deep, even to the point of depression. Issues in life can render us tired and defeated. When disasters happen and things get out of hand, we feel both helpless and hopeless. Depression is never easy to battle. It’s like being stuck in a pit with no ladder. There should be no shame in seeking help for it, because there is good news. There is a way out. There is a way up!

Through [God], we will do more than survive. We will thrive.

Read. God promises to help us in times of our difficulties. The Bible is filled with promises that soothe the ailing heart. Didn’t He say to cast our burdens upon Him? (See 1 Peter 5:7.) Try reading His words. Feel His presence telling you to cry to Him because He’s there, waiting and wanting to ease your pain and to give you the blessed assurance that erases depression.

Believe. As you read God’s words, believe in them. Let Him do what He has promised to do. Stop doubting, and start trusting. He keeps His word.

Share. It’s good to have friends and to allow the sunshine of hope to shine from them to you and vice versa. Being with your friends allows for good conversation, enjoyment, and inspiration. Don’t wallow in self-pity. Keep yourself busy, and think happy thoughts.

Our life is full of challenges, which makes it easy to succumb to loneliness when we don’t get what we expect out of our efforts. But when all good deeds are done, when we know that we have acted according to God’s will, then we can let God be God. Through Him, we will do more than survive. We will thrive.

Serve. Helping out in your community in a volunteer capacity takes your mind off your own problems and generally increases your sense of well-being. Learn how to teach someone how to read. Volunteer in a soup kitchen. Help to build a home through Habitat for Humanity. Knit or crochet scarves and mittens for people in homeless shelters. Tutor children who need extra help with reading or math. The list of ways to be of service is practically endless!

**REACT**

1. What plans do you have to read the Bible on a daily basis?
2. Why is it important to search God’s Word for advice regarding a particular issue you are facing?
3. In what ways do you think you can best share yourself with others?

Loralyn Dela Roca Sandoval, Lipa City, Batangas, Philippines
Have you heard the saying that life is like a box of chocolates? A box of chocolates contains a variety of candies. Some are covered with sweet, lighter chocolate, while others consist of darker, more bitter varieties. So it is with life. Life is filled with a variety of experiences. Some events are sweet and happy, while other events are darker and leave a bitter taste in our mouths.

From each abysmal fall, Joseph rose exponentially.

The life of Joseph is a good example of this. His early life is sweetened by the affection of his father. But the jealous behavior of his brothers turns his life dark and bitter. From being daddy’s little boy and on the best dressed list to being sold as a slave in a foreign land could have easily crushed his spirit forever. Once settled in Egypt, his life again turns sweet when Potiphar recognizes his talents. However, it again turns bitter when he is falsely imprisoned because of a lie told by Potiphar’s wife. Yet a third time this cycle is repeated. His life returns to sweetness when he is released from prison to administer the country’s food supply during a lengthy famine. Ironically, this famine forces his brothers to seek food in Egypt and therefore puts them into direct contact with Joseph. Imagine the bitter memories that must have flooded his mind, threatening a happy outcome to this reunion. Yet still, he rose to the occasion.

From each abysmal fall, Joseph rose exponentially. Yet it is only logical to assume that he struggled against being consumed by pain, rage, shame, and terror. He could have allowed the varying physical conditions and emotions to consume him. But each time, he eventually chose to realize that with God’s help, he could be productive in the very place of his affliction. In this way, he developed a mind-set that stretched beyond his present circumstances and into the loving arms of God’s grace.

The secret against depression is generally found in coming to Christ. As our empty hands grasp His wounded hands, our depression is washed away by the blood of His grace. Depression is real. But the bitter can be made sweet when we allow His love to enfold us.

**REACT**

1. Have you ever battled against depression? What helped you to move on?
2. In what way can depression actually be a blessing in disguise?

Armon Perez Tolentino, Dagatan, Taysan, Batangas, Philippines
CONCLUDE

The Mayo Clinic reports that depression “is one of the most common health conditions in the world.”1 It affects the mind as well as the body. Symptoms of depression include unexplained aches and pains, sleeplessness, weight gain or loss, crying spells, loss of interest in daily activities, and feelings of hopelessness.2 Ever since sin entered the world, most people have or will experience depression. Many people we read about in the Bible displayed symptoms that would most likely indicate that they were depressed. But thanks to God for His promises and words of encouragement that give us all hope.

CONSIDER

• Reviewing your life over the past month. During that time, when did you feel depressed? What caused the depression? What did you do to overcome it? How might you prevent depression in the future?
• Collecting religious music that lifts your spirits when you’re feeling depressed and putting it on your MP3 player to listen to whenever you feel the need for them.
• Searching the Internet for Bible studies dealing with depression and/or hope. Choose a series that looks good and study it alone or with a small group.
• Sculpting, drawing, or sketching something that depicts any part of the quote by Ellen White appearing in this week’s Testimony article. Share it with your Sabbath School. Explain to them why you chose the portion of the quote that you did and how your art interprets it.
• Walking through a park or looking at a pictorial nature book. Do you feel better when you finish than when you started? What does this tell you about nature and/or exercise and its relationship to hope and depression?

CONNECT


Leslie Jane Simmons, Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A.
Resilience

“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” (Ps. 46:1–3, NIV).
The Bible shows that humans aren't like the rest of animals in creation. We show a complete range of emotions: sorrow at the passing of a loved one, guilt as we contemplate something we should have done or did do but shouldn't have, joy at a birth, tears as we weep over a loss, anxiety and trepidation, jealousy when we think we aren't getting what we want, and anger as we are faced with challenges and problems. These emotions are all around us every day in various situations.

Does God care what happens to us? Does He know how we feel?

Jesus showed a wide range of emotions: He was surprised that His parents didn’t understand that He would be speaking with the elders in the temple when He was 12 years old. He pitied Judas who betrayed Him. He showed anger with the moneychangers in the temple, and He sympathized with the woman at the well. He relieved embarrassment at the wedding in Cana by showing kindness when He turned water into wine. He showed happiness in healing Peter’s mother-in-law and in raising the widow’s son. He showed concern when He stilled the storm, and He exhibited a sense of humor by instructing the disciples to let down their nets in the middle of the day when fish stayed away from the sunlight. He also was compassionate when the disciples wanted to send the children away, empathetic about feeding five thousand-plus people rather than sending them away as the disciples had wished, and sad at Lazarus’s grave.

These emotions also are seen around us every day. To my mind, the greatest emotion to be recorded in the Bible is that of Jesus weeping. It seems that it wasn’t just a silent teardrop that no one saw as it slipped down His face, getting lost in His beard. I believe it was open, unabashed sobbing—His friend had died, and He was sorrowful (John 11:1–6). Jesus wept (verse 35), and the Jews, noticing, said, “‘See how he loved him!’” (verse 36, NIV).

So how do we handle our emotions? Is it OK to feel sad or happy? Is there anything wrong with laughing or crying? What does the Bible have to say about human emotions? Does God care what happens to us? Does He know how we feel when we go through our sorrow, grief, pain, and anguish like the woman who lost her husband? Does He laugh when we laugh? May He help us to understand and deal with our emotions as we go throughout our lives.

Introduction
It’s OK to Cry

John 11:1–46

Beverly Henry, Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies
Christ's miracles are constant reminders as I recall that fateful day in March 2006, when after complaining that she wasn't feeling well, my daughter went into a coma as my husband and I rushed her to the hospital. I knew God understood how I felt, but that did not stop me from pouring out my heart to Him.

If we practice trust in little things, it will become a habit for the big events in life.

Jesus wanted to turn grief to joy, and "He could not forbear this expression of tender sympathy." The widow of Nain with her only son, dead on the bier; Mary and Martha with their brother Lazarus, dead and rotting; the centurion with his servant ill at home—they all acknowledged that His presence makes a difference. They all had gut-wrenching emotions that I, too, felt when the doctors said, "You need to prepare yourself...we don't expect her to make it." Sometimes our moans and whispers are all we can offer when it's time to pray. God, however, not only hears them, He understands them as well, for He, too, agonized, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death" (Mark 14:34). So when we say to our loved ones, "Please—oh, please, wake up," He hears, understands, and comforts.

God still answers prayers. Just as He did for Esther, Job, and Ruth and her mother-in-law, He will do the same for us. Peace comes over us as we remember that He promises not to give us more than we can bear. Trusting Him sometimes is hard when times are rough, but if we practice trust in little things, it will become a habit for the big events in life. He is with us through the Holy Spirit. My personal experience taught me again that God's promises are true, and if we have faith like a mustard seed, we will see the refuge that is our Lord, a God who is always there just when we need Him most (Ps. 46:1–3).

**REACT**

1. How has your faith been tested recently? How did you respond?
2. When have you received an answer to prayer that was not what you had in mind? Did you still trust the direction in which you were sent? Why or why not?

*The Desire of Ages, p. 318.

Avery Thompson, Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies
Resilience is the ability to find vigor and the determination to overcome adversity, trauma, tragedy, unfortunate situations, and the pain of being broken. A resilient person often will emerge out of a bad situation stronger than he or she was before facing that situation. With God we can face difficult times and remain whole in spite of the emotions we feel. “God is our refuge and strength, / an ever-present help in trouble” is the resilient Christian’s mantra (Ps. 46:1, NIV).

Stressors, Pain, and Disappointment (Job 19:25; 2 Cor. 11:23–28)

It would be inaccurate to give the impression that resilient people are immune to stress, pain, disappointments, and tribulations. Job was cited as having all that a man could wish for—a good family; enough wealth to take care of his needs and wants; servants; houses and land. In addition, he served the Lord.

Who would have thought that Job could have reached such an emotional low as when he lost everything and when his friends and his wife chided him for believing in God despite his loss? Yet he realized that his Redeemer lived and would deliver him. Despite his initial reaction, Job’s response during those difficult times gave authenticity to his spiritual strength and total dependence on God.

The apostle Paul, too, suffered persecution, beatings, and trials; yet he remained steadfast to the God he learned to serve, even to the point of becoming a martyr for Him.

Women Who Showed Resilience (Ruth 1; Esther 2; Mark 5:25–29)

Ruth’s determination was evident when she decided to return home with her mother-in-law and then to perform menial labor—gleaning in the fields—in order to keep them both alive. Esther saved her entire nation because she was resolute about going to the king to plead her cause, deciding, “If I perish, I perish.” It must have taken courage for the woman with the issue of blood to approach Jesus for healing after spending her life savings on physicians who did not help her. The same spiritual strength is available today for those who are facing hardship, and who are sick and despondent.
Jesus’ Emotions (John 11:35)

Our greatest example of resilience is demonstrated in the life of Christ. His feelings and emotions are recorded under various circumstances. When He healed the man with the withered hand, the righteous of His day wanted to accuse Him of sin, but He looked at them with anger and asked, “‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’” (Mark 3:4, NKJV). When His friend Lazarus died, Jesus wept, or as was eloquently stated by the nervous little boy repeating John 11:35 for the Thirteenth Sabbath program, “God cried.”

During His betrayal, denial, and unfair trial, Jesus felt the sting of loneliness, rejection, and physical pain, yet He kept His composure because He knew He could face any situation as long as He remained connected to His Father. His constant control of His emotions resulted from knowing that God is in charge and that nothing happens without His knowledge. Isaiah 53:3 says that He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

We, too, will face challenges. Some of these situations will evoke a variety of emotions within us. What we can learn from Jesus, however, is that even in the midst of unpleasant circumstances, we also can remain self-possessed.

Resilience—Available to All (Exod. 2:11–13; 2 Samuel 11; Psalm 51; Matt. 26:69–75; Daniel 3)

Many Bible characters overcame emotions that have destroyed the lives of other people. Moses overcame anger and disgust because his people were being mistreated. His anger led him to commit murder. Yet he became a great leader in Israel. David committed adultery and had her husband killed in battle when he learned the woman had become pregnant by him. Yet he chose to come to God for forgiveness and penned the now famous Psalm 51. Peter denied Jesus; and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were punished for their obedience to God. The demon-possessed man, living as an outcast, realized that Jesus was the answer (Mark 5:1–9).

“In this world you have tribulation” (John 16:33), but we can overcome. We can be resilient because of our trust in, and dependence on, God.

REACT

1. If you were in the position of Moses, having murdered another human being and covered it up, would you have been willing to allow God to use you? If yes, explain why.

2. Imagine Jesus’ emotions when He was on trial for the sins of the world. Think about His emotions, and put yourself in His place. How would you have reacted?

3. What can you learn about resilience from this week’s lesson that can help you at work or school, or with life in general?

4. How can we have the resolve to deal with what happens, and not be destroyed emotionally in the process? Be willing to share with your class an experience that demonstrates your resilience.

T. Basil Sturrup, Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies
Evidence of God’s feelings for us has been provided in the Bible, and Ellen White amplifies a number of instances that demonstrate His affiliation with the human race. Thus, we may understand how to be resilient and how to avoid the devil’s pitfalls.

“There is not a sorrow, not a grievance, not a human weakness, for which He has not provided a remedy.”

Sometimes we falter because we do not ask for God’s help; and many times we allow our emotions to make our decisions for us rather than relying on what we know to be right. Ellen White wrote that “not once should feeling be allowed to get the mastery over judgment.” Sometimes when we feel challenged and pressured to make decisions, we start riding an emotional roller-coaster. But we are reminded, “Do not wait to feel special emotions before you think the Lord answers. . . . Trust His word, and leave the whole matter in the hands of the Lord.” Remember, Christ became human and is therefore sympathetic to our needs and challenges. He, too, sorrowed and therefore is acquainted with our grief.

We also are reminded that “there is not a sorrow, not a grievance, not a human weakness, for which He has not provided a remedy.” As we go about our daily tasks and decision-making, it is best to keep our will on the Lord’s side, to keep our courage steadfast (Ps. 31:24), and to remember to have our “every emotion . . . brought into captivity to the will of Jesus.”

Satan will use our friends, our enemies, our employers, and even our families to dissuade us from being obedient to God’s commandments. Daniel and his three friends were able to demonstrate to their captors that their God could take care of them whether it was through their eating and drinking, their praying, or their worship of their Creator.

REACT
1. How can we know when our emotions conform to the will of God?
2. Show how three Bible characters other than Daniel were able to subdue their emotions and fulfill the will of God.

3. The Ministry of Healing, p. 249.
Ruth was a young woman who lost her husband. She could either return to her own land as her mother-in-law encouraged her to do or go with her back to Judah. What emotions must have swirled around her as she wondered whether she was making the right decision. Yet she chose the right path and became a progenitor of Christ. How can we make the right decisions that lead to resilience?

Love was the overriding principle upon which they stood firm.

Rely on God's leading. If you have doubts as to the outcome of a challenge, be like Ruth and rely on God's leading. You may be surprised at the outcome.

Commit yourself to prayer and fasting. After Esther became queen, the decree to exterminate the Jews led Mordecai to suggest that maybe she had “come to the kingdom for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). So Esther called her people to prayer and fasting as she prepared to go to King Ahasuerus. Doubts and questions are a natural part of life, but take time for communion with God, and like Esther, let Him be the source of your strength.*

Show love to others and fidelity to God. Paul persecuted Christians, but he became a devout Christian and was himself persecuted. He showed moral strength even when he had to stand alone. He remained true to God and encouraged other Christians to do likewise.

These Bible characters showed joy in union with Christ, shared love with others, and exhibited a positive outlook despite their problems. In spite of challenging situations and the turbulent emotions they must have felt, they remained true to their Savior. Love was the overriding principle upon which they stood firm (see 1 Corinthians 13). Faith, hope, and love are necessary elements of the Christian character—but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13), and love is the first fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22).

REACT

1. Carefully reexamine the biblical accounts of the characters in today’s lesson. When we are faced with similar challenges, how would the approach they took be useful today?
2. Why is it easier to love those we know rather than the stranger on the street?
3. How can we use Jesus’ example to help us be resilient?

*Prophets and Kings, p. 601.
The book of Job is about the human experience, which includes the inevitable emotions that accompany life. How fortunate we are to have a God who loves and cares for us and who guides and directs us when we let Him.

Job was well known and respected for being an astute businessman and a loving and caring family man and citizen of his community. The challenges he faced involved his family and his wealth. Within rapid succession, he lost his cattle, his beasts of burden, his servants, and his ten children. Then he was afflicted with boils from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. What a great challenge that could have left him discouraged, despondent, acrimonious, and resentful of God.

Why, in this modern age, [do] children die of starvation or lack of clean water?

The culture of his day dictated that to have befallen such an ill state of affairs, he must have committed a grievous wrong. These curses must have been an act of God to show His displeasure. That is why his wife encouraged him to “curse God and die” (Job 2:9). Yet despite it all, he worshiped God and blessed His name (Job 1:20–22), and his community was able to see that his end was better than his beginning (Job 42:12, 13).

In their present situations, some people wonder what they did wrong and why they are similarly afflicted. They wonder why their home mortgage was foreclosed or why they lost their job or their health. They wonder why, in this modern age, children die of starvation or lack of clean water. They wonder where God’s love is manifested in all of these things.

Sometimes when challenges occur and we don’t understand God’s purpose, we ask, “Why is God silent?” This doesn’t mean we shouldn’t cry out to God as David did (Ps. 27:8, 9). We can learn from the Bible, history, and the experiences of others that Christ is touched with the feelings of our infirmities (Heb. 4:15). Our Savior Himself was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:3).

**REACT**

1. List times when God spoke but you didn’t pay attention. What could you have done differently? What difference would it have made in the outcome?
2. What are our feelings when faced with similar challenges as non-Christians? Where is God’s love in all of our trials and suffering?

Andre Henry, Raleigh, North Carolina, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE

Don’t we all wish that life was continually filled with contentment and peace? Life, however, has its share of difficulties, failures, and challenges. In fact, life is not a bed of roses. It’s human to express frustrations, fears, and sadness when one is going through difficult times. A useful saying to remember at such times is, “And this, too, shall pass away.” Those who trust in God to see them through are able to say with the psalmist, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1). With such an assurance, we can, indeed, finish strong!

CONSIDER

- Creating a card that expresses appreciation for somebody who encouraged or supported you during a time of crisis. Present the card to that person as a surprise.
- Dividing a paper into two columns. In the first column, write a list of major failures or disappointments you have experienced. In the second column, write what you have learned from each experience.
- E-mailing a friend who is going through a difficult time (for example, financial difficulty, bereavement, sickness, or relationship problems), sharing comforting and encouraging words.
- Watching the video Are You Going to Finish Strong? This is an incredible story of Nick Vujicic, who was born without limbs yet is powerfully testifying for God. (Information about other videos of him are available at http://www.lifewithoutlimbs.org.)
- Writing lyrics that represent your emotions when you go through troubles and the victories you have experienced through God’s help. Use a familiar tune for your lyrics.
- Counting the number of “bouncing back” experiences you have gone through this past week/month. Thank God for the lessons you’ve learned from each one.

CONNECT

Psalm 51; Matthew 14:23–33.
The Desire of Ages, chap. 9; Gospel Workers, p. 269.
Max Lucado, In the Eye of the Storm, chap. 22; Philip Yancey, Where Is God When It Hurts? chaps. 9 and 10.

Prema Gaikwad, Silang, Philippines
Self-Esteem

“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 Pet. 2:9, NIV).
Signora Bella, the great Italian equilibrist (tightrope walker) calls audiences to her performance by promising that they will see one bella signora walk one very slack rope. Not only does she walk a slack rope, but she does so while dressed in period clothing, juggling sharp Turkish swords and flaming torches. Oh, yes. She also keeps up a stream of amusing chatter.

Self-esteem, like walking a tightrope, is a tricky thing. If you fall off one side, you land in arrogance, alienating people and heedlessly crushing those around you. Fall off the other side, and you find yourself in the low-lands of self-worth, unable to move confidently through life and letting others take advantage of you.

Walking the tightrope of self-esteem successfully doesn’t take practice, as it does for Signora Bella. For the Christian, it takes surrender and acceptance. Surrender, because everything we have and everything we are comes from God and belongs to God. “Give yourselves to God. . . . Surrender your whole being to him to be used for righteous purposes” (Rom. 6:13, TEV). Add acceptance, because God loves us, created us, redeemed us, and walks with us every moment of every day. He is our strength and our comfort. Our job is to accept that fact, because as Christians, that’s where our self-esteem, our self-worth, comes from.

In and of ourselves, we have nothing and are nothing. We’re strangers, sojourners on this planet. Everything, from the next breath we take to the next meal we eat, comes from God’s hand. He even allows trials to help fashion our character and ready us for heaven. Our self-worth comes from the fact that God cares about every tiny thing that we think, feel, or fear. Jesus gave up His place in heaven, took on our form, and died in order for us to be with God in heaven for eternity. Can there be any greater demonstration of the esteem God feels for each child He has created?

God has done everything possible and imaginable to show us the value He places on each of us. And that is the full measure of our self-esteem and value. When we fully internalize that truth and begin to draw from God’s well of worth, the slack rope of self-esteem will become a highway of hope.

As you study this week, may your self-esteem grow strong in the God who created you.
Valued by the King (2 Sam. 9:1–5; Luke 15:1–10)

Because of his love for Jonathan, David desired to treat kindly anyone left of Saul’s house. Even after Saul became David’s enemy, David’s loyalty toward Saul and his household never faltered (1 Samuel 24 and 26). So he initiates a search for any of the “‘house of Saul’” remaining to whom he could show “‘the kindness of God’” (2 Sam. 9:3, NKJV).

John declares, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10, NIV). With the stories of the lost sheep and coin, Jesus confirms the good intentions of God’s heart that cause Him to search for us. The sheep is helplessly lost in the wilderness of self-will (Isa. 53:6), unable to find its way home. The good Shepherd searches until He finds it (Luke 15:4–7). The coin doesn’t even know it’s lost, but the woman still values it and seeks for it until it’s found (Luke 15:8–10).

Our lineage goes all the way back to “Adam, the son of God.”

Value in the Eyes of the Seeker (2 Sam. 9:6–8; Luke 15:18, 19; Acts 17:24–28)

Mephibosheth is fully aware of why David should despise him. He is from a rival monarchy. His lame feet severely limit his usefulness. Plus they are a constant reminder of the terrifying night he learned of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, the collapse of Saul’s dynasty (2 Sam. 4:4). Now David, the man his grandfather Saul and uncle Ishboseth had persecuted, claims he wants to show him “the kindness of God.” Mephibosheth exclaims, “What is your servant, that you should look upon such a dead dog as I?” (2 Sam. 9:8, NKJV).

When we look at ourselves honestly, we see no reason for God to love or cherish us (compare Luke 15:18, 19). Yet He desires that we find ourselves in Him (Acts 17:28). Though God does not need our help in any way (Acts 17:24, 25), He has created us to desire Him (Acts 17:27). Far from being forced to put up with us, He sustains us. “In Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28, NKJV). Our lineage goes all the way back to “Adam, the son of God” (Luke 3:38).

The Lost Value Restored (2 Sam. 9:9, 10; Luke 15:11, 32)

Mephibosheth could rightly have expected David to seize for himself all the lands of the defeated dynasty. Instead, he received all that had been
lost and confiscated and was restored to a position of honor, wealth, and influence in the kingdom. All that had been Saul’s, the archenemy of David, was restored to his grandson Mephibosheth because David wished to show him “the kindness of God.”

Similarly, the prodigal son, having wasted everything that could by any stretch of the imagination be construed as his rightful share of the family possessions (Luke 15:11–19) is received into the household as a son with all the rights this implies—the love of his father, the honor of the family vestments (robe), access to the family checkbook (signet ring), and food fit for a celebration (Luke 15:20–24). “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3, NKJV).

Gratitude and Humility to the Restorer of Value (Rom. 12:3; Ps. 100:3)

The devotion of Mephibosheth toward David is evident in his distress during David’s flight from Absalom. Read 2 Samuel 19:24. “The kindness of God” that David had shown him won his undying devotion. Recognizing something of the measure of God’s mercy and grace in restoring us to honor and dignity gives us a healthy understanding of our value. On one hand, we understand that only by God’s grace exercised in His creative power are we anything at all. “Know that the Lord, He is God; / It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves” (Ps. 100:3, NKJV). On the other hand, what He has made us gives us value, honor, dignity, and His protection. “We are His people and the sheep of His pasture” (Ps. 100:3, NKJV). When we grasp this, our minds are clear (sober) to understand who we are (Rom. 12:3). We are humbled, for we see our dependence on God. Gratitude and love overflow, for we experience His unmerited love toward us.

Valued as Royalty (2 Sam. 9:10–13; Matt. 22:36–39; Eph. 4:23–32)

David declared that Mephibosheth “shall eat at my table like one of the king’s sons” (2 Sam. 9:11, NKJV). Thus, the disinherited king’s son is restored to honor and privilege. That is “the kindness of God” toward each repentant son of Adam and daughter of Eve who receives the Son of David by faith (John 1:12, 13; 1 Pet. 2:9, 10). You may not feel worthy, but if God says you are royalty, who are you to disagree with Him? If God honors, values, and loves you, then you certainly have His permission to honor, value, and love yourself. The deep healing of learning to love ourselves as God loves us brings us to the place where we can show “the kindness of God” to the people around us (Matt. 22:39; Eph. 4:23–32).

REACT

1. What evidences has God given you of the value He places on you?
2. What would loving your “neighbor” the way God’s love has taught you to love yourself look like?

Arnet Mathers, Bennington, Vermont, U.S.A.
“On Friday I had written about forty pages, and on Sabbath morning I was weary, but this did not discourage me. I know upon whose arm I am leaning for support, and the Lord did not disappoint me. As I meditate upon the goodness, and mercy, and love of God, I cannot but praise His holy name. ‘For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’

“We are to have a true sense of our value as God has estimated us.”

“If these words will not thrill through every soul as he shall contemplate them, what will? This is the price of our salvation—the most humiliating, agonizing death a human being could suffer. And the Son of God endured this shame as the penalty of guilt, in order that the sinner may stand guiltless and innocent before the throne of God. See what may arise from the height of exaltation from which our Saviour came, and the depth of humiliation to which He reached in order to grasp the sinner and lift him up to become a partaker of His divine nature, and link his life, his soul, with the Infinite God. When we obtain a sight of that cross; when that suffering, agonized cry, ‘It is finished,’ pierces our ears, the sacrifice is complete. His love has imprinted the name of every saint upon the palms of His hands.

“Oh, unbounded grace! What love expressed! Shall we not expel pride from the soul? Can we cherish self-esteem; shall we harbor stubbornness of soul when we see and understand what our redemption has cost? Shall not a view of the cross cause us to humble ourselves in the sight of God, that He may lift us up?

“But while we are to humble ourselves, we are to have a true sense of our value as God has estimated us, in the price paid for our redemption. We are to value every capability, every talent entrusted to us, as the Lord’s most precious endowment, that we may use them to His name’s glory.

“When we look upon ourselves as purchased at an infinite cost in order that we might have every advantage in the strife for immortality, eternal life, we will make every gift a treasure of influence whereby we may reach perfection, completeness in Jesus Christ. Then let the prayer of Daniel be our prayer, that the Holy Spirit may work in our behalf.”


Stuart Griffin, Mount Holly, Vermont, U.S.A.
Simply put, self-esteem is how you really feel about yourself. With the Center for Disease Control reporting that the most prescribed drugs in the United States are antidepressants, it seems ironic that we live in a society obsessed with personal success and happiness. Many self-help gurus have pontificated about ways to increase self-esteem, thereby ensuring happiness and success. So is the answer to low self-esteem and discontent to be found in some special self-affirmation mantra repeated daily in front of a mirror to convince you of your own power and worth?

The best way to feel good about yourself is to actually do something good!

More than a decade ago, I read one of those articles about the woes of the U.S. educational system. After citing the dismal placements of students in math and science, the article said that U.S. students did outscore all other countries on one measurement—self-esteem. Teachers joked that perhaps our students weren’t the best and the brightest, but at least we all felt good about our failures. Ironic, yes, but does what you do relate to how you really feel about yourself?

Self-esteem is self-respect. As a reading specialist, I work with at-risk students in a public high school. While I do encourage my students to think positively about themselves, the best self-esteem boost will come from their own actions. The best way to feel good about yourself is to actually do something good!

So, that original self-help guru of the early church, Paul, gave us the blueprint for healthy self-esteem in Ephesians 4:22–32. It seems that being kind, helpful, considerate, honest, and hard working are actually the building blocks for self-respect. And nobody has ever done this better than Jesus. His life of building relationships and serving others is our model not only for lifestyle and character development but for self-esteem too.

As Christians, we have grown up hearing that we are God’s chosen. First Peter 2:9 promises us that God has picked us for His team of lightbearers. This affirmation of our worth flies in the face of society’s litany of ways to attain success and happiness. We have been chosen for God’s team, and we chose to follow His biblical blueprint.

**REACT**

How can you truly feel good about yourself when you are never as good as “so and so”?

*Debra Gardner-Baasch, Wallingford, Vermont, U.S.A.*
How do I obtain godly self-esteem? First, understand and believe in the value God places on us. In Romans 5:8, we read that even while we were sinners Christ died for us. When we choose to believe in our worth based upon God's view of us rather than the distorted messages that fellow sinners here on earth can project on our self-image, we begin to obtain true godly self-esteem—believing that we are who God says we are!

Jesus urges us to love our neighbor as ourselves.

How can I keep godly self-esteem? Once we catch a glimpse of ourselves through the eyes of Christ, we must resist the urge to criticize that which God values so highly. What right do we have to belittle those whom God has called His children? By despising ourselves or others, we are really criticizing the One who created us. Paul talks about a renewing of our minds as a way of dealing with this unhealthy way of thinking. “You must become a partner with God in this reprogramming and renewal process. Such work is a continuous process, not a sudden crisis. I don’t know of a single Christian experience that will change your self-image overnight. You are to be ‘transformed by the renewing of your mind’ (Rom. 12:2). The verbs in this verse represent continuous action, and the word mind describes the way you think, the way you look at life as a daily process.”

How can I help others have godly self-esteem? If we have succeeded in the first two steps, we will be able to help others develop a healthy self-image. Jesus urges us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and we can only do that when we come to a place where we are not looking to others for reassurance of who we are. When we see ourselves and others as sons and daughters of our loving heavenly Father, we will treat each other differently. Being in a loving relationship with our heavenly Father can give us the ability to bless all of His children with the overflow of His love and grace that we receive. We will actively seek out fellow sons and daughters for the express purpose of blessing them because we love our Father.

REACT

Do you view yourself as one who is priceless in the eyes of God? If not, why not?


Amy and David Campbell, North Clarendon, Vermont, U.S.A.
Often, at our house, Rachel is in the kitchen preparing dinner. The dishwasher has completed its cycle and needs to be emptied. Rachel begins, and as she is about to finish up, Gary comes into the kitchen and says, “I was going to empty the dishwasher,” to which Rachel replies, “I know you were, but I did it because I have to earn my keep!” Gary gets a tender smile on his face and says, “Oh, no, honey, you don’t have to earn your keep, you belong!”

“You don’t have to earn your keep, you belong!”

The swell in my heart that comes when I hear the words you belong is indescribable. I feel so wanted, so loved! There is no more powerful way to build people’s sense of self-worth than to communicate to them that they are part of the group, that they have a contribution to make, that they are needed and wanted!

Jesus shared these same sentiments when He talked about the value of sparrows and the adornment of the lilies. He said that people were more valuable than those things. He gave us worth! When He invited the children to come to Him after they had been turned away, He indicated that they were valuable. He spoke about lost coins, lost sheep, and a lost son, ending each story with the description of the joy and celebration that came when each was found. Those stories tell of the value of belonging. Jesus was communicating to us that we are wanted, loved, and needed!

It doesn’t get any better than to hear God’s own words assuring us of His love and His care. Listen to His tender voice as you read these words as transcribed by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 43:1–3, ESV. Insert your name each time you come to the word you:

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel:
“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

Father-God, thank You for assuring me that I belong!  

Rachel Busby Kinne, Rutland, Vermont, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE

Self-esteem is not easy to build if you are feeling inferior. But God made us. He loves us as we are and sees what we can be. Far from being forced to put up with us, He sustains us. God actually restores us sinful humans so that we become part of His royal priesthood. We are infinitely worthy in God’s eyes, not just because Jesus’ death for us makes us all right in His eyes and His salvation covers our sins, but because He created us to fit in with His plan, to glorify Him with all the gifts He has given us. Serving God makes us feel good about ourselves, because we are following Him, and thereby are living up to our potential.

CONSIDER

- Writing a description of yourself as you currently perceive your own personality. Then add a list of the encounters you have had with God, and compare that with your self-image. Figure out what fits with how God has treated you and what you think of yourself.
- Writing a song about being redeemed and serving God. Then practice it with friends and sing it in church. Or practice a song about God loving you, and share it with your church or Sabbath School class.
- Drawing a self-portrait with a variety of symbols around it that show who you are. Have friends analyze it, saying whether they see you the same way you see yourself.
- Asking friends to list three of your worst qualities and three of your best qualities. Do you feel they are right or wrong? Why?
- Portraying the story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1–11) through dance or mime and performing it in church.
- Asking on Twitter or Facebook what your friends think will increase their self-esteem. See if you get any answers that refer to God. Or write some comments about that yourself!

CONNECT


Karin Wieczorek, Melbourne, Australia
Jealousy

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

Jealousy: Are Christians Exempt?

“I used to think that he did these things because he loved me. But now I don’t think so at all. I feel smothered. I feel as if he doesn’t trust me. It’s really affecting our relationship, and I think it’s even affecting our children.” Alicia was recounting a few instances that confirmed that her husband was indeed jealous of her. He called her several times during the day to check up on her. He would get angry if she came home late, and he always listened in on her telephone conversations. “I can’t take it anymore,” Alicia confided to her friend. “I want a divorce.”

Kaden resented Christen for “taking her place” and soon began disliking other church members as well.

Then there’s Kaden, who grew up in a Christian home and gave her life to the Lord at a young age. She was talented, outgoing, and the “apple of everyone’s eye.” She was on most of her church’s committees, and she was always called upon to participate in church programs. Then one day, Christen started attending church, became baptized, and was called upon to do many of the things people had asked Kaden to do. Kaden resented Christen for “taking her place” and soon began disliking other church members as well. She stopped attending that church and started going elsewhere.

Jealousy is an overpowering emotion that can lead to even more devastating results than the above two stories. Jealousy can provoke a host of other emotions and behaviors, including anger, covetousness, resentment, suspicion, distrust, and slander (Col. 3:5, 8)—habits that should not be displayed by anyone who is intent on building a Christlike character.

The Bible states that “God is a jealous God” (Exod. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; Josh. 24:19), which might cause us to justify our jealousy. However, God’s jealousy means that He “refuses to share His glory with idols” and that “He declines the worship and service of a divided heart.” He knows that we cannot truly say we love Him while giving place to the devil who is the instigator of jealousy (Isa. 14:12–14).

Jealousy has many negative effects on us and on others, not the least of which are poor health and damaged relationships. As Christians, we are not immune to these feelings. So this week, we will look at jealousy, its effects, and how we can overcome this damaging emotion.


Julia Campbell, Weschester, Portmore, St. Catherine, Jamaica
Jealousy normally breeds conflict. Who among us has not fallen victim to its snare? Jealousy can cause us to be vindictive, callous, and surly. Just think of Lucifer (Isa. 14:12–14). His story is a good example for us today. Like Lucifer, many of us have everything we need. Yet there is always something else we want or someone of whom we are jealous because this person has something we would like to have. Lucifer was next to Christ in power, and therefore had great responsibilities. Yet he desired more: “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, / I will be like the Most High” (Isa. 14:14, NKJV).

Many families have been destroyed by jealousy, many wars fought, and many lives taken. Covetousness is a sin (Exod. 20:17) and for good reason. So why has God repeatedly said that He is jealous? The ancient Greek for “jealous,” transliterated as Zelos, means to have zeal as well as to be jealous. Zeal means “energetic and unflagging enthusiasm, especially for a cause or idea.” One meaning of jealous is “demanding exclusive loyalty or adherence.” Don’t these two meanings capture God perfectly? His jealousy is not ugly or destructive. We see His zeal for us through the life His Son lived and, more so, by the death He died in our stead. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8, NKJV). Here, we are not dealing with a Greek goddess or with Lucifer, the “god” of this world, but with a truly compassionate and loving God whose jealousy enfolds us in His arms.

The Modern Effects of Jealousy (James 3:16, 17)

Oral and Roxanne had been married for five years. Oral was charismatic and confident, but Roxanne was very insecure because she was carrying baggage from a previous relationship. On several occasions, she poured out her heart to Oral, asking him to be more sensitive to her situation while she tried to work through it. However, every time Roxanne interrogated him about any female who was paying attention to him, he felt that she was questioning his loyalty to the marriage.

Resentment and anger grew, and the marriage spiraled downward into a divorce. Roxanne resigned herself to living a single life because she wasn’t sure if she would ever be able to trust a man. Even though Oral always had been faithful to Roxanne, she had a lot of contempt for him.

Jealousy Compared to a Grave (Prov. 6:34; Song of Sol. 8:6)

Jealousy is to the mind what cancer is to the body. It is degenerative and painful. It slowly saps one’s life, one’s vigor, and one’s zeal. It imprisons a person and causes that person to feel as if he or she is losing control. Being jealous for a protracted period of time results in deep emotional pain, leaving one to believe that there is no way out.

The wise man Solomon in Song of Solomon 8:6 likens jealousy to the grave. While the word in this verse is better translated as “zealous love” or “passion,” comparing jealousy to the grave brings to mind some interesting comparisons. A grave represents the stark reality of separation from our loved ones. And what exacerbates this starkness is that sometimes this separation is sudden. Just when you thought everything was going your way, a loved one dies, and you feel as if your world has fallen apart. Jealousy can create the same sense of despair.

Another comparison between jealousy and the grave is that the person who has passed on will never know the pain you have to deal with as a result of his or her death. Likewise, when we are struggling with jealousy, it can seem as if those around us are unaware of our feelings and needs.

Maybe the greatest comparison of all between jealousy and the grave is that the grave represents death, and jealousy has the power to drain life from the one who is jealous. If not properly dealt with, jealousy can cause us to lose ourselves, to evolve into someone we never wanted to be, sym-
bolically killing the person we were originally. Proverbs 6:34 tells us that jealousy can cause great anger. Jealousy can so consume the mind that it dictates behavior and impairs judgment in a person who ordinarily would intend no harm. And before long the person whose mind has been consumed by jealousy is no longer a kindhearted person. That person has died.

**Keeping Score (Genesis 37)**

Joseph’s brothers were jealous of him—a jealousy that was fueled by their father’s favoritism toward Joseph. (Still, that was no excuse for their feelings or their behavior.) Jacob favored Joseph “because he had been born to him in his old age” (Gen. 37:3, NIV). This favoritism led him to give Joseph a coat that was likely similar to the style of coat worn by royalty. This caused his brothers to be even more jealous. But when Joseph had dreams that indicated he would become a ruler and rule over his brothers, it was enough to make his brothers want to kill him.

“Could jealousy ever make you feel like killing someone? Before saying, ‘Of course not,’ look at what happened in this story. Ten men were willing to kill their younger brother over a robe and a few reported dreams. Their deep jealousy had grown into ugly rage, completely blinding them to what was right. Jealousy can be difficult to recognize because our reasons for it seem to make sense. But left unchecked, jealousy grows quickly and leads to serious sins. The longer you cultivate jealous feelings, the harder it is to uproot them. The time to deal with jealousy is when you notice yourself keeping score of what others have.”

**Kingly Jealousy (1 Samuel 18)**

Once again we read in the Bible how jealousy can have serious consequences. Saul was so jealous of David’s success and popularity that he flew into a rage, picked up a spear, and threw it at him, hoping to pin him to the wall (1 Sam. 18:8–11). Throughout the rest of his life, Saul continued to threaten David’s life. Yet despite this, David twice spared Saul’s life when he could have killed him. This presents another side of jealousy. If you know of someone who is jealous of you, can you dare to be like David? Could you befriend that person rather than fight back?

**REACT**

1. Have you ever struggled with jealousy? If yes, how did you try to deal with it and why?
2. Has jealousy ever determined how you related to some people? Or have you always tried to relate to them in a godly manner?
3. In what other ways can jealousy be compared to the grave?
4. After studying today’s lesson, why do you think one of the Ten Commandments instructs us not to covet? Based on today’s lesson, what other commandment goes along with this one? What does this connection teach us about the nature of the Decalogue?

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Ricardo Kerr, St. Catherine, Jamaica, West Indies
Does it seem that jealousy is eating you alive? Are you miserable because you are jealous of what other people have? Then look to Jesus as the antidote. He longs to cure you. Read what Ellen White has to say about how He can help you overcome covetousness.

“Ever learning of the divine Teacher . . . we cooperate with God in overcoming Satan’s temptations.”

“What beauty of character shone forth in the daily life of Christ! He is to be our pattern. There is a great work to be done in fashioning the character after the divine similitude. The grace of Christ must mold the entire being, and its triumph will not be complete until the heavenly universe shall witness habitual tenderness of feeling, Christlike love, and holy deeds in the deportment of the children of God.

“Each person must obtain an experience for himself. No one can depend for salvation on the experience or practice of any other man. We must each become acquainted with Christ in order properly to represent Him to the world. ‘His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue’ (2 Peter 1:3). None of us need excuse our hasty temper, our misshapen characters, our selfishness, envy, jealousy, or any impurity of soul, body, or spirit.

“We must learn of Christ. We must know what He is to those He has ransomed. We must realize that through belief in Him it is our privilege to be partakers of the divine nature, and so escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. Then we are cleansed from all sin, all defects of character. We need not retain one sinful propensity . . .

“As we partake of the divine nature, hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong are cut away from the character, and we are made a living power for good. Ever learning of the divine Teacher, daily partaking of His nature, we cooperate with God in overcoming Satan’s temptations. God works, and man works, that man may be one with Christ as Christ is one with God. Then we sit together with Christ in heavenly places. The mind rests with peace and assurance in Jesus. . . . In Him there is inexhaustible fullness . . .

“God has given us every facility, every grace. He has provided the riches of heaven’s treasure, and it is our privilege to draw continually from this capital.”

“God’s Amazing Grace, p. 235.

Jean Boeve, Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A.
The home team rebounds and gets the ball from the opposing team. The point guard throws the ball to Mark, the fast-breaking forward. With five seconds to go, and down by a point, Mark dribbles past an opposing player, makes the layup, and scores the winning basket! Fans erupt in a frenzy of joy while Mark’s teammates jubilantly carry him on their shoulders. Anthony, however, is left standing alone and defeated in the center of the court. “That should have been me,” he sadly sighs to himself.

Sweat dripping off his face and running down his back, Joel pants heavily as he walks briskly to avoid being late to class. Vvvrrrooommm! He stops and turns around as the loud music and the turbo blow off from the new sports car that the football captain drives. Joel hastens into the schoolyard and sees the captain and his girlfriend leaving the car, walking arm-in-arm to class. “If only I could be him,” Joel sighs. “Then I could get the prettiest girl in school and a football scholarship.”

How many times have we found ourselves jealous of someone else, wondering how it’s possible to deal with the emotion dubbed the “green-eyed monster”? Here are a few suggestions that will help:

- **Read spiritually inspired books.** A good one to start with would be chapter 59 of *Patriarchs and Prophets*. This chapter is about Israel’s desire to have their own king based on their jealousy of the kingdoms surrounding them.

- **Help others who are less fortunate.** Helping others in need gives us a sense of well-being and accomplishment. Additionally, helping others takes our minds off what we don’t have and enables us to appreciate what we do have.

- **Pray earnestly.** Ask God to be the center of your life. “At all times and in all places, in all sorrow and in all afflictions, when the outlook seems dark and the future perplexing, and we feel helpless and alone, the Comforter will be sent in answer to the prayer of faith. . . . Wherever we are, wherever we may go, He is always at our right hand to support, sustain, uphold, and cheer.”

**REACT**

Review *Exodus 20:17*. Then think of some things that you are coveting. Reread *Exodus 20:17*, only this time replace the words *wife, house, male servant, female servant, ox, and donkey* with those items.

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*The Desire of Ages, pp. 669, 670.

Linval Lewis, St. Catherine, Jamaica, West Indies
Often I wonder what the world would be like without jealousy. Perhaps some relationships would still be intact, or perhaps you would not have spent your savings on a new car because you envied your neighbor’s new BMW. But most of all, the world would be without sin.

Satan wanted to be like the Most High. He coveted “the glory with which the infinite Father had invested His Son.”* So he contrived a plot to overthrow the rulership of heaven, which eventually led to his and the angels who listened to him being thrown out of heaven. Thus began an ongoing warfare that is full of confusion and strife. It is warfare each of us experiences whenever we are jealous.

Were you really in a position to get that award? Did you honestly work as hard as your classmate to achieve high grades?

We may look at the most outstanding students in our class and think, Why is she so bright? or Why did he get that trophy? We might even reach the point where we hate such people and isolate ourselves from them. When we harbor envious feelings in our hearts, we end up hurting ourselves. We must be careful of how we view others’ achievements. James 3:16 says, “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there” (NKJV). So what if we were to turn the spotlight on ourselves? Were you really in a position to get that award? Did you honestly work as hard as your classmate to achieve high grades? Are you simply jealous of all the attention your classmates are receiving? What if your talents lie somewhere besides academics or sports? Perhaps you have another talent you can capitalize on, for example, painting or music? We should ask God, “Is this what You want me to do? Is this the path I should take?”

God wants us to have meaningful relationships. However, the devil frowns when God’s people are happy, so he is always trying to create mayhem.

When God reigns in our hearts, our first reaction to such situations is not one of anger. Rather, we rely on Him to see us through, to help us think clearly about our thoughts and emotions, and to respond in a way that reflects His love. This is peace.

Now weigh the difference to see which you would want to experience—strife or peace?

*Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 35.

Shareka McFarlene, Greater Portmore, St. Catherine, Jamaica, West Indies
CONCLUDE

One of the Bible’s great stories of coveting involves David and Bathsheba. David had dozens of wives. But Uriah had only Bathsheba. That didn’t matter to David, who saw Bathsheba, coveted her, and acted on his desires. But was it worth it? David’s act led to horrific sins, even murder. The Bible doesn’t say whether David was explicitly jealous of Uriah, but he wanted someone who belonged, through marriage, to someone else. Surely that’s the outworking of jealousy, isn’t it?

When we act out of jealousy, we don’t gain a lot, but we can lose everything, including our standing with God. Believers are called to be satisfied with what they have and to be thankful for God’s provision.

CONSIDER

• Clipping out magazine pictures of things you covet. They can be material items, photos of people in exciting jobs or living in nice homes. Paste the pictures on posterboard, and consider why you are envious of these items or positions. Ask yourself, Do I really trust Jesus to meet all my deepest needs?
• Writing a brief recollection of a time when you were jealous and acted on it. What happened? Were there hurt feelings? Did you have to repair the situation? How was your relationship with Christ affected? How about your inner peace or harmony with others?
• Thinking of some songs that make jealousy sound good. Discuss the lyrics with a friend. Are the songwriters being honest, or are they trying to convince themselves (and you) that wrong behavior can lead to right results?
• Using some modeling clay to create some figures representing people you know. Role-play a situation in which jealousy might arise and how you’d work things out in a Christlike manner.
• Interviewing someone about a situation he or she was in that involved jealousy. Ask how that person dealt with it and what he or she might do differently if the situation happened again.

CONNECT

Freedom From Addictions

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed”
(John 8:36, NIV).
Introduction

1 Cor. 6:12

Which Wolf Will You Feed?

The elderly Cherokee grandfather was troubled with the things he saw happening to his grandson. The world seemed to be drawing the boy away from all that he had been taught. Grandfather struggled with this thought. For days he mulled over what words to speak to his beloved grandson that would make a lifelong difference and draw him away from the evil that he was so close to following.

At last the words had come. As the grandfather sat by the fire, he looked long at his grandson. “There is a fight going on inside me,” said Grandfather. “It is a terrible fight, and it is between two wolves. One wolf represents fear, anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, competition, superiority, and ego.”

“What is the other wolf, Grandfather?” asked the grandson.

“The other wolf stands for joy, peace, love, hope, sharing, serenity, humility, kindness, friendship, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. This same fight is going on inside you and inside every other person too.”

The grandson thought about the story his grandfather had just told. He felt those same wolves fighting within him. The battle was long and arduous. There were days that the grandson wanted to give up. He was unsure of the outcome for his life. He wanted to know, and so he asked with fear in his voice, “Grandfather, which wolf will win?”

Then the grandfather knew he had made his point, so he simply answered, “The one you feed.”

Grandfather’s advice was true. The wolf that we feed in our lives is the one that will consume us. A friend once told me that we all have addictions, but some addictions are just more acceptable than others. There is a lot of truth in that statement. Why is it that the druggie who is just waiting for his next fix is considered a deadbeat, but a shopaholic who can’t wait until the mall opens at 10:00 A.M. so she can get her shopping fix doesn’t even generate a response from most people?

There are many kinds of addiction, but, as we will learn in this week’s lesson, we all have addictions because we are all infected with sin. We can choose to feed the wolf of addiction, or we can choose to feed the wolf of freedom from addiction. Which wolf will you feed in your life this week?

Deena Bartel-Wagner, Spencerport, New York, U.S.A.
Addiction Defined (Rom. 7:14–18)  
Addiction has become a politically correct way to describe sin. This does not mean that addiction isn’t real. But the term and the sentiment are, in this writer’s estimation, the “PC-ization” of wrong. Alcoholism, for example, has moved from being “unacceptable” to being “a sickness” to being an addiction, to being unavoidable due to one’s genes. Many behaviors now are said to be unfortunate but acceptable because of a person’s genetic predisposition to do them. Thus, we are becoming ever more adept at finding ways to justify behaviors that God discourages or forbids.

Simply put, we are all addicts, addicted to sin.

Even the term addiction has evolved. As recently as 2003, it was defined as “persistent, compulsive use of a substance known by the user to be harmful.” However, today addiction is no longer limited to the use of a substance. Many, for example, are addicted to pornography or sex. These are better described as behaviors rather than substances. Neither is addiction limited to that which a person assents to, knowing something is harmful. Nicotine is a substance now known to be harmful and extremely addictive. Yet for decades, certain industries denied that smoking was addictive, and millions smoked, oblivious to their danger. Their lack of knowledge did not make them any less addicted. We might, therefore, more accurately define addiction as “persistent, compulsive, harmful behavior.”

All Are Addicts (Rom. 7:19, 20)  
The texts appearing at the very beginning of this article give us examples of behaviors and emotions that can become addictive. They range from drinking alcohol to lust, the love of money and outward adornment, and slothfulness. Evolving definitions within a culture do not change the reality of the addiction, but in many cases simply institutionalize it as being a culturally acceptable addiction.

Addictions start small, from the seed of deep emotional wounding. Then, a young person takes a sip of beer from a can left by an older sibling, or a child stumbles across porn on the Internet or watches a TV program glorifying bling. At some point, even though these behaviors and emotions are condemned by God, practicing them turns into addiction.

Paul clearly describes the addictive nature of sin: “I decide to do good, but I don’t really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don’t result in actions. Something has gone
wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time” (Rom. 7:19, 20, The Message).

Simply put, we are all addicts, addicted to sin—the practice of exalting ourselves rather than God. Yes, everyone sins and falls short of God’s glory (Rom 3:23). Paul struggled with addiction. Some say he redefined it and accepted it. In 1 Corinthians 6:12, he said, “Everything is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible for me’—but I will not be mastered by anything” (NIV).

Some have chosen to focus on the “‘everything is permissible for me’” and say that as long as one has accepted Christ, no behavior is sinful. However, Paul flatly condemns sexual immorality (whether between opposite-sex or same-sex couples). Some argue that it is merely a natural function and therefore nonmoral. In the pop song of a former generation, the sentiment of “it can’t be wrong when it feels so right” shows that the same sentiment Paul condemned is present today.

Likewise, alcoholism is not specifically forbidden in the Ten Commandments but is without doubt discouraged in the knowledge that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19, 20) and we are to glorify God in them. Paul refused to be “ mastered by” any behavior that would take glory away from His Savior.

Peter explains why these behaviors are dangerous. Read 2 Peter 2:17–19. Anything that holds us in bondage or slavery controls us for its own benefit, rather than for our own. The power of addiction, then, is that we become controlled by whatever power manipulates the behavior.

There Is Hope (Rom. 7:24, 25; 1 John 1:9)

The good news is that any controlling power can be overcome. Paul attributes this victory to Jesus. It involves a recognition that the behavior is a sin and must be broken. This step can begin the journey down the road to victory. First John 1:9 gives us hope that our sins can be forgiven, and that our unrighteousness—that persistent, compulsive behavior within—can be cleansed.

Evangelists report that people who for years have tried to quit smoking, drinking, or “getting high” have gained the victory in five minutes by surrendering the behavior to God in prayer. That doesn’t mean it always happens that way, but it does mean that God has the power over addictions and is willing to give that power to those who truly seek it. God’s ultimate goal with each of us is to restore our relationships with others and with Himself. And He uses the most appropriate methods to accomplish that. For a large number of recovering addicts, one of those methods is a 12-step program.

“All are personally exposed to the temptations that Christ overcame, but strength is provided for them in the all-powerful name of the great Conqueror.”

“Let no one think he can overcome without the help of God. You must have the energy, the strength, the power, of an inner life developed within you. You will then bear fruit unto godliness, and will have an intense loathing of vice. You need to constantly strive to work away from earthliness, from cheap conversation, from everything sensual, and aim for nobility of soul and a pure and unspotted character.”

“The Spirit of God will answer the cry of every penitent heart.”

“The reason why so many are left to themselves in places of temptation is that they do not set the Lord always before them. When we permit our communion with God to be broken, our defense is departed from us. Not all your good purposes and good intentions will enable you to withstand evil. You must be men and women of prayer. Your petitions must not be faint, occasional, and fickle, but earnest, persevering, and constant. It is not always necessary to bow upon your knees in order to pray. Cultivate the habit of talking with the Saviour when you are alone, when you are walking, and when you are busy with your daily labor. Let the heart be continually uplifted in silent petition for help, for light, for strength, for knowledge. Let every breath be a prayer.”

“The Spirit of God will answer the cry of every penitent heart; for repentance is the gift of God, and an evidence that Christ is drawing the soul to Himself. We can no more repent of sin without Christ, than we can be pardoned without Christ, and yet it is a humiliation to man with his human passion and pride to go to Jesus straightway, believing and trusting Him for everything which he needs.”

“The only faith that will benefit us is that which embraces [Christ] as a personal Saviour; which appropriates His merits to ourselves. Many hold faith as an opinion. Saving faith is a transaction by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God. Genuine faith is life. A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which the soul becomes a conquering power.”

4. Selected Messages, book 1, p. 381.
5. The Desire of Ages, p. 347.

Jordan Wagner, Collegedale, Tennessee, U.S.A.
In many addictions, particularly those involving substance abuse, a physiological dependency overwhelms the will to resist. This is particularly true with illegal drugs, yet there are many other ways to create physiological dependencies. Social perspectives will vary with the substance. Caffeine addiction is a prime example, encouraged in some professions as an expected part of the working culture.

Shame is the chain of captivity.

For many people, addiction is the result of behavioral patterns rather than substance abuse. Gambling is one example, but there is a wide spectrum of habits that also lead to addiction. Internet use, video gaming, sex, pornography, shopping, and even work are recognized addictions. Between substance abuse and habit, there is ample opportunity for everyone to suffer from some form of addiction.

The stigma of addictive behavior separates the victim from wholesome social networks. Shame is the chain of captivity. So many victims long for strength to resist the temptation, for a cure to their weakness, or for acknowledgment that their struggle is real. Those who are slaves to a habit will find comfort and solidarity in the context of this week’s memory text. Jesus describes us as slaves of sin, addicts to a habit of rebellion against God. Our own struggles for righteousness deliver only limited success, and there is a constant danger of relapse. But “ if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36, NIV).

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) was created by two men who found hope through sharing their burden with fellow addicts and in placing their habit under the power of God. Their 12-step program features confession, submission, daily prayer, restitution, and outreach. Today, more than two million AA members in 180 countries seek help with their struggle, and the 12-step formula has been adopted by groups devoted to fighting other addictions.

Realizing that my own will is too weak to fix the habits that bind me, I must pray David’s prayer: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; / test me and know my anxious thoughts. / See if there is any offensive way in me, / and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23, 24, NIV). Not just for today, but tomorrow, and the next day. And for each succeeding day until the Son shall make me free indeed.

**REACT**

Which of your habits would God find offensive?
The steps used by many to overcome alcohol and drug addiction are surprisingly good medicine for any addictive habit that may be poisoning our spiritual life, personal progress, or relationships.*

*We can’t overcome addiction on our own.* This is the first thing we need to realize. Only God can give the strength to escape the cycle we’ve created. We need to give Him control of every aspect of our lives. We’ve all felt the pull between what we should do and what we want to do. If we allow God to choose our path, we will lead fuller lives.

Many times, we must ask to *want* to give up our old habits.

*It is important to admit our sins.* Pray for God to reveal your imperfections, then confess them and repent. This may require you to confess to other people as well as to God.

*We must be ready to let it go.* This is difficult, because addictions are what we reach for when things get tough, stressful, or boring. In Mark 10:21, Jesus tells the rich man to sell all his possessions to gain eternal life. Riches aren’t necessarily the only thing keeping us from fully surrendering to God. Any allegiance that causes us to choose our own desires over His is harmful to our relationship with Him. Many times, we must ask to want to give up our old habits.

*Move forward, trusting in Him.* You can do this if you are ready to be completely His. God knows the beginning from the end. No matter how much we rationalize our habits and desires, we don’t know. His way is always the best way. Many people know the story of the rich young ruler and the call for him to sacrifice for the Lord. But what may surprise you is that another famous text concludes this story. Talking about the struggle to give up our desires for God, Jesus promises, “ ‘For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible’ ” (Mark 10:27, NRSV).

*Surrender your will every day to God.* He does not expect us to purify ourselves. He is the only One who holds the power to break addictions.

**REACT**

1. Read Mark 10:21. Before Jesus told the man of his need to change, the Bible said that He “loved” him. What does that mean for you as you recognize faults in your own life and in others?
2. What things have become habits in your life?
3. Where are you in the process of giving up your addictions?

* Summarized from Alcoholics Anonymous’ “Big Book.”

Carrie Purkeypile, Citrus Heights, California, U.S.A.
Addictions capture the lives of millions of people all over the world. People can develop addictions to alcohol, drugs, pornography, sex, money, and work, to name a few. Here are some addictions that often leave us feeling good about ourselves:

Many of us pack our refrigerators as though we are facing the end of time.

Sports/exercise. You see it in magazine headlines, on television, in stores, and at the gym. People crave it after a long day of work or studying, or after failing a test. It's fun. It's good for you. So don’t stop. Without even recognizing it, exercise can be the one thing that dulls the pain or fills in the lonely places, while sports can make us feel good about ourselves and maybe even turn us into heroes.

The Internet. Many homes that I’ve visited have a computer in every room. Guests are encouraged to surf the Web for entertainment instead of talking with their hosts. When we get home, we head to our computers to buy a gift, download music, tag photos, or redo our profile on Facebook. Before we know it, the hours have flown by, and household chores remain undone.

Food. Overeating and poor food choices are threatening people’s health in many countries. Bookstores are loaded with cookbooks, commercials bombard our senses with delicious looking morsels, and many of us pack our refrigerators as though we are facing the end of time. It's hard not to want to eat all the time, because food is being pushed upon us in so many places.

Addictions can seep into our lives without us even being aware of them. Temporarily, they make us feel better about ourselves, especially if there is something in our life that’s missing. First Peter 4:1–11 focuses on living for God. He will help us to maintain balance in our lives so we can enjoy life more fully and glorify Him.

For those who struggle with addictions, there is an answer. Through the power of prayer, connecting with God in Scripture, and finding a trustworthy person to whom you can be accountable, you can be released from your addiction.

**REACT**

1. What other types of addictions do you and others in your circle of influence struggle to overcome?
2. How would you describe the process of overcoming an addiction?
CONCLUDE
Addictions result when strategies we use to make life work on our own terms take control of us. The root of all addictions takes hold when we forget about the first of God’s Ten Commandments—when we place ourselves in the top spot of our lives rather than a healthy, growing relationship with God. Then an emotional cancer grows in our hearts that overwhelms and kills any thing healthy that had been there. True addicts are powerless to stop acting out. Theirs is a life-or-death situation. Radical, painful “surgery” is required to fight this life-destroying disease, after which a long period of recovery begins.

CONSIDER
• Finding a copy of The Living Witness: Art in the Concentration Camps and Ghettos by Mary S. Costanza. The works reproduced in this book capture the horror and darkness that true addicts experience. Explore your own heart through charcoal drawings or black-and-white photographs.
• Listening closely to the album The Altar and the Door by Casting Crowns. The songs “Every Man,” “Slow Fade,” “The Altar and the Door,” and “Somewhere in the Middle” are pertinent to addicts. The songs “What This World Needs,” “East to West,” “The Word Is Alive,” and “All Because of Jesus” deal with the solution to addiction.
• Reenacting the musical skit by Lifehouse entitled “Everything” three times. First, put yourself in the part of the devil. The second time, imagine yourself as the woman. Finally, put yourself in the part of Jesus. As you do, focus on His feelings of love and desire for you. The skit can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyheJ480LYA.
• Finding a recovering addict who has recently completed Step 12 of the 12-step program and is now a “sponsor” or “mentor” for another addict who has begun working the 12 steps. Ask what his or her life was like a little while before he or she “hit bottom” and began the recovery program. Ask how the addict’s attitude changed as progress was made. Find out what the biggest blessing received was.

CONNECT

Gill Bahnsen, Auburn, Washington, U.S.A.
Nature as a Source of Health

“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” (Ps. 19:1, 2, NIV).
“Daddy’s not coming back. He died.” My world suddenly became cold and empty like a dark city—full of people but devoid of life. Who could know what it was like to lose my hero? So I ran from the cold gray buildings, from cars and horns that couldn’t silence my sobs. I ran from a world where there was no comfort for a broken heart.

Breaking free from the darkness of manmade things, I let the light of the sun warm my crushed and bleeding heart. Leaving the pavement, I stepped into a world of healing green. With my every stride, the blades of grass caressed my soul. The meadowlark’s song reached from its bright yellow breast to lift my heart a little higher. I stretched toward the sun with the wild flowers, their bright colors reminding me of joy. The laughing brook spoke of mirth that will come again as its cool ripples washed away a little more sorrow from the soles of my feet. The soft green leaves brushed away a tear. The wind in the trees whispered “peace.”

In this place of tranquility and solitude, of healing and love, I spent hours, days, and months over the next three years, crying, screaming, praying, questioning, reading, ultimately learning that God’s heart was as broken as mine; learning that His plans were for all creation to live in peace and harmony; learning that with every loss we grieve, He grieves right beside us. I found that in the midst of sorrow, His creation spoke to me of healing and love, of a God who never forsakes us.

Over the years since that awful morning when I learned of my father’s death, I have experienced God and His love in many ways. I’ve stood at the top of mountain peaks, gazing down upon the world, humbled by a sense of how small I really am. I’ve observed the majestic animals that roam the plains of South Africa. I’ve made friends with people who really do understand. I’ve been through many highs and lows in life, but I will always remember that when the very foundations of life seem shattered, God is there in nature, seeking to restore, heal, and make whole all who seek Him. I will always remember that He told me of His love in that place of healing, my place of solitude.

As you study this week’s lesson about nature as a source of health, may you also be truly blessed.

William Helbley, Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A.
Can nature have a healing effect on people who have emotional problems? An empirical study conducted in the latter part of the 1980s examined a hypothesis proposing just such a connection.* Researchers Jennifer Davis-Berman and Dene S. Berman studied the results when 23 at-risk adolescents participated in a series of four wilderness trips in conjunction with daily therapy. The study focused on changes in self-control, behavioral symptoms, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. The Bermans discovered that the teens all experienced a marked improvement in the factors studied.

Spending time in God’s natural world is beneficial . . . for troubled teens.

Not included in the study was the reason for the change. As Christians, we know that the God who created nature imprinted within it a picture of His character for us to find. Paul talks about the power of nature’s testimony concerning God: “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20, NRSV). Even those who have no knowledge of God can draw close to Him and find healing through an experience in His creation.

The narrow focus of the Bermans’ study shows that time in the wilderness can be therapeutically beneficial for emotionally disturbed teenagers. Spending time in God’s natural world is beneficial not only for troubled teens but for anyone who is experiencing the pressure of life. We all need to take time to reconnect with God through nature. Spending time in nature brings peace and healing that are often difficult to find amidst the daily grind of life. While medical interventions may be necessary, nature itself provides rest and a reminder of God’s care and provision for us.

Genesis recounts the experience Adam and Eve had in the Garden that God created for them. Not only did God create a perfect natural habitat for them, He also blessed them with His presence. Even after sin, nature still tells us of the Creator. We also can look forward to the time when nature will be restored to its sinless state. Then we will again be able to commune face-to-face with God.

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The Beginning (Gen. 1:27–2:25)

The Bible begins with the creation of a new world by an infinitely wise and powerful God. First, there is a whirlwind of action as He creates the sky and seas. Then trees and plants spring up out of the newly created soil. The sky lights up with the inception of the sun and the moon. Next, the water and sky explode with the activity of fish and birds. The air fills with the sounds of animals and insects. Finally, after all this, God creates a man and a woman. Perhaps the angels watching this flurry of creative activity might have thought that the creation of humans was anticlimactic, but they would have missed the point. Man and woman were created in God’s own image, and the world was created especially for them. They came together in intimate, shameless union, and finally God pronounced His creation as “very good.”

God provided a healthy environment with fruit that was good for food. He invited the man and the woman to tend the Garden, where they were surrounded and blessed by beauty. God also placed gold and precious stones in the lands where rivers watered the region. He blessed the man and woman with relationship. The final creative stroke of the Master Artist was the creation and preservation of an entire day each week for humans to rest and commune with Him in special ways. He had created a place for them that was an ideal physical, mental, spiritual, and relational environment.

Despite the cancerous progression of sin, we can still see in nature glimpses of paradise lost.

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The Sickness (Genesis 3)

Genesis 3 tells why this healthful nurturing environment didn’t last. The perfect creation was infected by sin, which caused changes in nature and in people’s relationship to nature. When shame entered the world, Adam and Eve tried to cover themselves with fig leaves (verse 7). Work that once brought joy became toil (verse 17). Nature began to change. Where once everything was good, thorns and thistles began to grow (verse 18). God’s creation was no longer perfectly healthy for humans. Now nature could wound, and people would die (verse 19). The loving relationship between Adam and Eve became a power struggle. In addition, they could no longer commune face-to-face with God. Despite these bleak effects, God prophesied a cure (verse 15). He Himself would become the healing balm.

The Cure (Matt. 4:23, 24)

Thousands of years later, an infant was born. His name was Immanuel,
which means “God with us” (Matt. 1:23). For the first time since the Fall, humans could again speak to God face-to-face. The name Jesus means “the Lord is salvation.” Jesus came to save His people from their sins.

The common Greek word for save as found in Matthew 1:21 is used not just for eternal salvation (John 3:17), but also for physical healing (Matt. 9:21, 22), mental and spiritual healing (Luke 8:36), and even healing from death (Luke 8:50). This broad ministry is seen in Matthew 4:23, 24, which tells of Jesus teaching in synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing people who have every kind of disease, including demon possession, epilepsy, and paralysis.

Like nothing or no one else ever could, Jesus showed us the true nature of God (John 14:9). Ultimately, He would demonstrate God’s love by sacrificing Himself so that we might live (1 Pet. 2:24).

The Recovery (Rom. 1:20)

It has been nearly two thousand years since Jesus returned to heaven. Humans once again are unable to speak to God face-to-face. Yet, despite the cancerous progression of sin, we can still see in nature glimpses of paradise lost and the love of the One who designed that paradise for us. In His healing ministry on earth, Jesus reminded us that nature continues to reveal God’s character. He often taught lessons about God through nature. For example, He used birds and flowers to teach trust in the loving care of our heavenly Father (Matt. 6:25–34).

Psalm 19:1, 2 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; / And the firmament shows His handiwork. / Day unto day utters speech, / And night unto night reveals knowledge” (NKJV).

By observing nature, we can also learn of God’s righteousness and His faithfulness (Pss. 50:6; 89:1–5). Paul says, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made” (Rom. 1:20, NKJV).

What God designed for Adam and Eve at Creation—good food, physical exercise, clean water, sunlight, clean air, and rest—are still good for us today. In addition, a trusting relationship with God goes a long way in healing many of our physical, mental, spiritual, and relational problems.

The End (Revelation 21; 22)

At the end of time, the Bible describes a new start using the imagery of nature and healing. It promises a time of spiritual and emotional healing (Rev. 21:3, 4) and a city of unprecedented beauty constructed with gold and precious stones (Rev. 21:18–21). The same as in the beginning, the new earth will have a river and a tree. Only now it will be a river of the water of life and a tree of life with various fruits. With imagery that we will probably only fully comprehend then, John says the leaves of this tree will be “for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:1, 2). The curse caused by sin will be no more, and once again humans will be able to commune with God face-to-face (Rev. 22:4).
"Through the agencies of nature, God is working, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, to keep us alive, to build up and restore us. When any part of the body sustains injury, a healing process is at once begun; nature’s agencies are set at work to restore soundness. But the power working through these agencies is the power of God. All life-giving power is from Him.

“The words spoken to Israel are true today of those who recover health of body or health of soul. ‘I am the Lord that healeth thee.’ Exodus 15:26.

“The desire of God for every human being is expressed in the words, ‘Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.’ 3 John 2.”

“‘And He said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile.’ Christ is full of tenderness and compassion for all in His service. He would show His disciples that God does not require sacrifice, but mercy. They had been putting their whole souls into labor for the people, and this was exhausting their physical and mental strength. It was their duty to rest.

“As the disciples had seen the success of their labors, they were in danger of taking credit to themselves, in danger of cherishing spiritual pride, and thus falling under Satan’s temptations. A great work was before them, and first of all they must learn that their strength was not in self, but in God. Like Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, like David among the hills of Judea, or Elijah by the brook Cherith, the disciples needed to come apart from the scenes of their busy activity, to commune with Christ, with nature, and with their own hearts.”

**REACT**

1. In what ways has your soul been healed or inspired by nature?
2. What steps can you take to find healing and restoration in God’s creation?

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*Marla Keller, Boise, Idaho, U.S.A.*
Revitalizing Yourself Through Nature

God designed the Garden of Eden with His own hand, decorating it with foliage and populating it with wildlife. Our first parents had all they could ever dream of needing or desiring. However, the world we find ourselves in is scarred by sin and devastated by our own creations. Even so, “in ten thousand objects in nature, from the oak of the forest to the violet that blossoms at its root, is seen the love that restores. And nature still speaks to us of God’s goodness.”1 To gain the greatest benefit, we need to be intentional about incorporating nature into our lives:

Have an outdoor spiritual retreat. Find a secluded area such as a quiet park, a campground, or a retreat center. Notice everything you see. Reflect on all that you witness in your exploration. Read a short passage from Scripture, and ask yourself what God is saying to you through the verses. The psalms are especially good for this. Pray. Then sit quietly, listening for God’s voice. Finally, write or draw a response to God based on your experience.

If you live in the country or the suburbs, plant a garden. It is gratifying to watch what you have planted grow into something beautiful and vibrant. Imagine that the weeds you pull are your burdens and that you are ridding yourself of them. Look for the insects that make their home in your little plot and watch them work. Notice the symmetry and patterns in the plants that grow.

Bring nature indoors, especially if you live in the city or in a very cold climate. Create an indoor garden or keep houseplants that are beneficial for filtering the air within your home.2 Fill an aquarium with colorful fish and lose sight of your worries as you watch them. Adopt a furry pet and feel stress melt away and your mood improve as you train it and play with it.3

Keep a journal of how you experience God in nature. Look back at your entries when you are feeling down.

Our best examples of how God intended humans to deal with life on earth are Adam and Jesus. Adam was placed in a garden and was so stress free that even though he and Eve were naked, “they felt no shame” (Gen. 2:25, NIV). And when the stress of Jesus’ ministry weighed heavily on Him, or when He knew He was about to be tested, He headed for nature. If we stop here, we can conclude that we should head out for camping trips on a regular basis to deal with our stress. Yet this would be a woeful error. It is not frolicking naked in the forest that allowed Adam and Eve a peaceful, uncomplicated life. And it was not long walks without food that gave Jesus the strength.

This would be like saying that walking into a church gives you eternal life. This is simply not the point. Going through the motions of church attendance, prayer, and trips into nature do much more for us when we are doing them because we have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit. It wasn’t the clean water, fresh fruit, or the animals that allowed a shame-free existence for Adam and Eve. It was “walking with God” and being totally connected to Him. It was the same for Jesus. It was His prayer in the desert and in the Garden that gave Him the strength to follow God the Father’s seemingly impossible plan for Him.

My beautiful wife and I walk along the Boise River every week. It is a blessing only if we are open and honest with each other, or if we are what we call “checked in.” We have found that if we just share the story it is not enough. We must share our core emotions with each other while inviting the Holy Spirit to wash through and over us. It is this total connection that is healing, and as a result we are completely grateful for the river, fish, birds, trees, and even the other people who are around us.

**REACT**

1. When you are at church, in prayer, or in nature, are you fully engaged with those you are with and with Jesus Christ?
2. Can you easily identify your core emotions and express them freely with God and with those to whom you are close? Why, or why not?
3. What is it like to listen completely and feel the impact that the presence of God and others has on you?

*Jami Keller, Boise, Idaho, U.S.A.*
CONCLUDE
We hear much about going green today. It appears that everyone is talking about it. However, talking about it is not enough. Of all people, Christians should be the most excited about going and living green. We believe in a God who created a world full of beauty. Nature is also a way God reveals Himself to us. We should be known as advocates for a green world because caring for His creation honors the Creator. If we make this a prettier, healthier place in which to live, everyone will benefit. People will use its resources for building healthier and holistic lives. So let’s go green!

CONSIDER
• Committing to a daily walk in a park. Bring your camera with you. After a week or two, post your pictures on Facebook with appropriate biblical captions.
• Visiting a farmers’ market to buy locally grown fruits and vegetables. Notice the texture and the color of the food. Also notice how much better it tastes.
• Volunteering with a group of your friends to clean up a beach, park, or stretch of roadside on a monthly basis.
• Doing a personal assessment of how you are making the planet a healthier place.
• Reading a book on making the world green. Which of its principles and suggestions can you apply to your life?
• Encouraging your congregation to have church outdoors a few times during the year.

CONNECT
Steps to Christ, pp. 9, 10 and Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 44–48.
Partnership With Jesus for Perfect Mental Health

“‘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).
It would seem logical to assume that before Adam and Eve were affected by sin, they had perfect health, including good physical and mental health, human companionship, an unhindered relationship with God, security, food, and drink. Moreover, they were surrounded by beauty.

What does the list of things God has provided for us look like? He has provided us with the greatest gift of all—Himself, in the form of the Holy Spirit. God gave us His only Son, Jesus Christ, so that He can live in us through the Holy Spirit, to teach us, to guide us, and to empower us to overcome any obstacle that comes our way. Furthermore, God has given us the talents and gifts we need to succeed. Even at our weakest moments, when we think there’s no way out, God is working powerfully to help us. His grace is always there for us, especially at the point of our greatest need. He is our connection for our direction in life. We don’t need to stress about it, because God has a solution to our problems before we even go to Him for help!

We often have trouble understanding our partnership with God and applying that relationship to daily life. Some of us are take-charge, in-control types. We tend to run ahead of God and do a lot of things on our own. During such times, we are not in alignment with Him. Alternately, some of us believe we are helpless and powerless. We need to ask ourselves, “What role do I play in my partnership with God? What does He expect of me? What is His role?” The balancing act is interesting. It comes down to the answers to these questions: What is my responsibility? What is God’s responsibility?

At the core of every relationship is a dynamic tension that can lead to growth and maturity. Our relationship with God is like that too. There is a rhythm and flow to it, times of taking control and times of surrender. It is a process of discovering and following through on God’s call.

This week, we’ll begin to learn how to die to our self-centered desires and how to surrender to God’s will. We’ll also learn something about accepting His call on our lives, how to overcome the challenges before us, and how to fulfill our destiny. As you study, remember not to stress out over a problem, because God already has solved it!

Sharon Ennis, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Lessons From My Laptop (Luke 4:14–18)

My laptop, on which I rely heavily as a pastor, was running quite slowly, so I took it to a repair shop to get it “reprogrammed.” While there, I discovered that there are numerous ways to reprogram. You can use a restore CD, which apparently wipes off everything and restores your computer to the condition in which it came out of the box. You can also try cleaning the computer by deleting (a) cookies (small pieces of text stored on a computer while surfing the Web), (b) temporary files saved from the Internet, and (c) files that take up a lot of memory, such as images and video. A good antivirus sweep also can remove any shareware or malware (damaging software installed on a computer without its owner knowing it).

Divine Reprogramming (Mark 1:21–35; 2 Cor. 5:17)

That which occurs in the tech world also applies to our emotional lives. We, too, have been affected and infected by events that have left internal scars. We, too, need to release some of the memories that are taking up too much space. If we are ever to be restored to what we were originally intended to be, we need divine reprogramming through a love relationship with Jesus. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.


I will never be mistaken for a great chef, and I don’t boast a roster of amazing recipes. However, I know a thing or two about experimenting in the kitchen—and my family and I are still alive to tell of it! I’ve seen a single added ingredient transform an old, tired recipe. Some ingredients, added even in the smallest measure, can so completely change the flavor of a dish that it is considered completely new. Some cooks call it their “secret” ingredient. Fortunately for Christians, that ingredient is no secret. Paul is not telling the Christians in Corinth that the moment you come to Christ everything in your life is supposed to immediately look completely different. He was saying that when Jesus is added to that old recipe of your life, your life is new because there’s an ingredient in it that wasn’t there before.

Get Lost! (Ps. 31:24; Matt. 26:36–44; Luke 9:23, 24)

Just as a new ingredient impacts the entire recipe, partnering with Jesus impacts every area of your life—spiritual, social, physical, and mental.
The main challenge, however, lies in us and how much we are willing to allow Him to have complete control. “‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it’” (Luke 9:23, 24, NIV). Sometimes we get on each other’s nerves, and in frustration, we can say mean things, such as “get out of my face” or even worse, “get lost.” Jesus, with friendlier intent, tells us to “get lost” and move self out of the way so that we can really be what He has created us to be.

“Like a computer, our brains record the experiences we have in life. Newborn babies come into this world with a clean slate. The only world they know is what they can see, hear, feel, taste, and smell. Nothing has been programmed into their computer. They have no vocabulary and therefore no way to communicate with those who are charged to take care of them. They have neither the presence of God in their lives nor the knowledge of His ways. So during the early and formative years, they learn to live independent of God. In later years, when these individuals come to Christ, their minds are still programmed to live independent of God.”

Moving from Independence to Dependence (Ps. 31:24; Matt. 26:36–44; John 15:4, 5)

The hard part is going against what the talk shows and self-help books encourage—that you can have mental wholeness all on your own. This falsely reinforces our independence, hence, the need to reprogram our minds. Jesus may not install within us a hard-drive restore CD and “delete” and “clear” out our old thinking patterns, but He does give us His presence, and our dependence on Him enables us to experience optimum mental health. “‘Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing’” (John 15:4, 5, NKJV). “Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness,—all depend upon our union with Christ. . . . A life in Christ is a life of restfulness. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there should be an abiding, peaceful trust.” With Jesus, not only are we supplied with power to experience mental wholeness, but He sets the example by the way in which He lived while on earth.

REACT

1. What important issues in your life have you failed to ask God to control?
2. Try to identify the barriers that prevent you from relying completely on Jesus.

2. Steps to Christ, pp. 69, 70.
"[Matthew 11:28 quoted.] ‘Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.’ John 14:27. This peace is not something that He gives apart from Himself. It is in Christ, and we can receive it only by receiving Him."\(^1\)

"The grace of Christ works to the disciplining of the whole human fabric."

"It is for you to yield up your will to the will of Jesus Christ; and as you do this, God will immediately take possession, and work in you to will and to do of His good pleasure. Your whole nature will then be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; and even your thoughts will be subject to Him."\(^2\)

“When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced; love, humility and peace take the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness, and the countenance reflects the joy of heaven. No one sees the hand that lifts the burden or beholds the light descend from the courts above. The blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God. Then that power, which no human eye can see, creates a new being in the image of God.”\(^3\)

"In his own strength man cannot rule his spirit. But through Christ he may gain self-control. In his strength he may bring his thoughts and words into subjection to the will of God. The religion of Christ brings the emotions under the control of reason and disciplines the tongue. Under its influence the hasty temper is subdued, and the heart is filled with patience and gentleness.”\(^4\)

"Our Saviour is a Saviour for the perfection of the whole man. He is not the God of part of the being only. The grace of Christ works to the disciplining of the whole human fabric. He made all. He has redeemed all. He has made the mind, the strength, the body as well as the soul, partaker of the divine nature.”\(^5\)

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Richard and Florence Brake, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
The beginning of a relationship with Jesus is not unlike that of any other love-based relationship. It’s always about two people who are getting to really know each other. With Jesus, it can be even more challenging. That is perhaps why Isaiah 55:8 warns, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord” (NIV). The irony is that because God is so wise, the first step to knowing Him begins with having faith in all that He is and in all that He can do for us as we partner with Him.

At first, partnering with Jesus can be disruptive. The disciples left homes and loved ones for what seemed to many to be three years of hopeless wanderings. The founders of our church grappled with the apparent futility of the Jesus partnership when He did not come October 22, 1844. However, when the issues were resolved, and Jesus was understood the way He wanted to be understood, it became clear that living with Him is disruptive only temporarily and only because we don’t know Him as we should.

The start of all relationships can be tense until we begin to see things the way the other person does. Perhaps that is the reason why Paul encourages us to have the same attitude that was in Christ (Phil. 2:5–8). When Jesus was on earth, He was about knowing and loving His Father, whom He absolutely trusted. He then would instinctively do what His Father would do or say what His Father would say.

The same is true for us. It’s not about our figuring things out but about knowing Jesus as Someone we can trust, then allowing our behavior to be based on what He guides us to do. This partnership is perfect for mental health, because our behavior is not about getting something right every time. It’s about letting Jesus reveal Himself to us. It’s also about letting Him keep us in perfect peace because our minds are fixed on Him (Isa. 26:3).

**REACT**

1. At what point does the source of our peace become the source of our turmoil, and when does the source of our turmoil become the source of our peace?
2. Can you have faith in Jesus Christ without having peace? Explain your answer.
When Christ lived on earth, Satan tempted Him to question what He knew to be true about God. However, He did not succumb to the wiles of the devil. Matthew 4 tells the story about the temptation of Jesus in the desert. The devil came to Christ when He was at His weakest point, for He had not eaten in 40 days. Satan took advantage of Christ’s weakness, desiring to wage both psychological and spiritual war. Fortunately, Christ was well versed in the Scriptures, so He knew who He was and what His mission was to be. In addition, He had just been baptized and had heard the voice of His Father saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (Matt. 17:5, NKJV). Satan’s crafty words were designed to cause Christ to doubt His mission. Remember Eve in the Garden? “If you are the Son of God” (Matt. 4:3, NKJV; emphasis supplied; see Genesis 3:1–7).

Christ does not take mental anguish lightly, so neither should we.

Often, the devil comes to us when we are at our weakest. Then he causes us to doubt who we are and where we’re going. We rack our brains, stress ourselves out, and waste emotions even when God has spoken to us and given us our purpose. Christ does not take mental anguish lightly, so neither should we.

To help us achieve mental unity with Christ, He gives us a few pointers to follow (1 Pet. 2:21):

Pray (1 Thess 5:17). We get to know people by spending time with them. If we expect to get to know God and His plans for us, we must spend time with Him.

Guard your soul (Phil. 4:8). If we fill ourselves with garbage, our minds will not be able to recognize the voice of our Father.

Put what you learn about being a child of God into practice (Phil. 4:9). Doing so ensures peace. It also lets other people know whose side you are on! Learn to forgive others and to serve those in your community who are in need.

Study Scripture (Ps. 119:11). Christ was armed with the Word of His Father, so that whenever the devil came after Him, He was not shaken.

**REACT**

Jesus helped many people during His ministry on earth. Find a service project in your town in which you can participate.
From the moment we wake up until we lie down to sleep again we are constantly making choices. Freedom of choice is one of the greatest gifts God has given us. He will never force us to do anything against our will, no matter what the consequence may be. Partnering with Jesus is a choice each of us must make, regardless of the area in which we are trying to succeed.

Psalm 31:24 states that we must make a conscious choice first to “be of good courage” and then to “hope in the Lord.” As a result, He will be able to “strengthen your heart.” John 15:4 says, “‘Remain in me, and I will remain in you’” (NIV). God cannot dwell in us unless we choose to dwell in Him.

On earth, Jesus continually submitted Himself to His Father’s will, whether He was experiencing emotional distress or not. In prayer, He told His Father everything that was troubling Him. If Jesus could not make it through His trials without praying, it is imperative for us to do the same!

God tells us to ask for whatever we need, and it will be given us (Matt. 7:7). “The condition upon which you may come to God is not that you shall be holy, but that you desire Him to cleanse you from all sin and purify you from all iniquity. The argument that we may plead now and ever is our great need, our utterly helpless state, that makes Him and His redeeming power a necessity.”

Because we are constantly fighting against our sinful instincts, we must each day consecrate ourselves to God and ask the Holy Spirit to control our thoughts and actions. Before we even get out of bed in the morning, we should ask for the armor of God (Eph. 6:10–17). With that, “the Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still” (Exod. 14:14, NIV).

**REACT**

1. Why is it that sometimes when we ask God to save us from our situation, nothing seems to happen?
2. God always has a perfect plan (Jer. 29:11), even when we mess up. Is it possible that He is allowing us to experience trials so that one day we may be powerful witnesses to someone who is going through the same thing?

*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 131.*

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CONCLUDE
Partnership experiences can be both fun and challenging. It does make a difference as to who your partner is for judging the overall impact of the relationship. Each one of us is invited to partner with the greatest benefactor who ever existed—Jesus. This relationship is strictly personal. A growing relationship with Him is possible by taking time each day to think about what He enjoyed doing and what was important to Him. Most essential, if you are willing, He is ready to help you do those things too. This is the real partnership—Jesus and you.

CONSIDER
- Journaling your experiences of partnership with Jesus these past few days/weeks. Highlight instances of His carrying you through difficult situations.
- Studying carefully at least one partnership in nature (for example, lichens—algae and fungus; butterflies/bees and flowers) to appreciate the benefits of such relationships. Compare what you learned through your observations to your partnership with God.
- Reading Luke 9:23 and reflecting on what it means to “deny” oneself in order to follow Jesus.
- Listening to the song “My God and I.” Appreciate the meaning of the lyrics and visualize the walk described in the song. (The lyrics can be found at http://www.jesusourpeace.com/Music/Hymn%20Lyrics/mygodandi.html.)
- Paraphrasing Psalm 121:1, 2.
- Creating an oral presentation with media on your experiences of walking with Jesus. This may include your prayer life, Bible reading plan, how you share your faith, and more. Plan to use this presentation during a small-group sharing time.

CONNECT
Psalm 121; John 15:13; 1 John 4:10.
The Desire of Ages, p. 83; The Ministry of Healing, p. 182; Steps to Christ.

Prema Gaikwad, Silang, Philippines
next quarter's lessons
SECOND QUARTER 2011

Garments of Grace:
Clothing Imagery in the Bible

If you have not received a copy of CQ for Second Quarter 2011, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1 In the Loom of Heaven

Logos: Isaiah 64; Rom. 3:21–31; 4:1–7; 6:1–13; Phil. 3:3–16.

Memory Verse: “‘Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered’ ” (Rom. 4:7, NIV).

“Christ is the sinner's substitute and surety. He has obeyed the law in the sinner's place, in order that the sinner may believe in him, and grow up into him in all things to the full stature of a man in Christ Jesus, and thus be complete in him. Christ has made reconciliation for sin, and has borne all its ignominy, reproach, and punishment; and yet while bearing sin, he has brought in everlasting righteousness, so that the believer is spotless before God.

“The time comes when it is asked, ‘Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?’ and the answer is, ‘It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again.’ He who has the spotless robe of righteousness, woven in the loom of heaven, in which is not a thread that sinful humanity can claim, is at the right hand of God, to clothe his believing children in the perfect garment of his righteousness. Those who are saved in the kingdom of God will have nothing of which to boast in themselves; the praise and the glory will all flow back to God, the giver of salvation.”—Ellen G. White, The Youth’s Instructor, Dec. 6, 1894.

Notice the imagery: a robe of righteousness, a spotless robe of righteousness, “woven in the loom of heaven” and with not a thread of sinful humanity stitched in anywhere. What a wonderful image of the righteousness of Jesus, the righteousness that covers anyone and everyone who will be saved into His kingdom at last.

Lesson 2 From Exalted to Cast Down

Logos: Deut. 8:1–18; Isa. 14:12–14; Ezek. 28:12–19; John 1:1–3; 2 Cor. 11:14; Col. 1:16, 17.
Memory Verse: “Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee” (Ezek. 28:15).

Today’s memory text has to be one of the most profound in all revelation. Two crucial words stand out: perfect and iniquity, with the latter (iniquity) encapsulated by the former (perfect). What this means is that contained in the idea of being perfect, of having perfection—even in heaven!—is the potential for iniquity. How could iniquity be found in a being created “perfect” unless “perfection” allowed for it? Iniquity could not arise in a being created perfect unless being “perfect” included the possibility of it, which it obviously did.

What this text shows is that in God’s universe, the concept of “perfect” includes freedom, moral freedom, the ability to choose right and wrong. How could it not, and humans still be moral and free? A company might be able to program software that blocks employees from accessing Internet pornography or gambling or other immoral sites, yet no one would call the software itself “moral” or “free.”

What we have, then, is a being, Lucifer, so highly exalted that even his garments, his covering, are given special notice in Scripture, yet he abuses the freedom given him and falls away from the Lord.

What can we learn from his tragic mistake?

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