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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.
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SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHER PREPARATION IN MINUTES...


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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.

**POINTERs 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.
My name is Melissa Breetzke and I am currently studying at Andrews University. I originally came here to study architecture. By the end of the first day, I realized architecture wasn’t my calling and proceeded to try several different majors throughout the following years. But through these varied pursuits, my interest in language never dimmed. I am now a Spanish for Translation major with a French minor. Studying languages has opened many doors for me, and I hope it will continue to do so. Once I graduate, my life could go in any direction. I may try to get a job writing, perhaps pursue a master’s degree in International Development, or spend a year as a student missionary. I’ll just wait to hear the Lord’s call. In the meantime, I’ll be in the wintery wilderness that is Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A. After spending a year in sunny Argentina, I’ve had to readjust to long winters. But one of the biggest blessings I have gained from being abroad was to learn to fully soak in every second of every day. I lived each day in Argentina knowing that I only had a year and that every opportunity could be my last chance to jump off the waterfall, paint with my roommates, or smell the cereal factory. Upon returning to my home campus I was tempted to sulk over all I had left behind. But it’s been a much bigger blessing praying for God to teach me to retain that “carpe diem” mentality. The chubby chipmunks scurrying about campus are a riot. I’ve come to marvel at the intricate beauties of snowflakes, and only a student who has spent four months buried beneath two feet of snow can truly appreciate the splendor of green grass and daffodils. God has etched Himself into every little detail of our world, but we must learn how to seek Him. Awaken your senses, remember that tomorrow is not promised, and seek Him in all you do, feel, and see. He is there, waiting, smiling.
Cover: We’ve been given a free opportunity to see God. All we need to do is take the time to look.

Lesson 1: My roommates Rheba and Tamara stand puzzled before the geometrically impossible triangle that infinitely wraps around itself, representing how simple yet utterly unfathomable the Trinity really is.

Lesson 2: My classmate Jason’s self-assured casualness is just one piece of God’s portrait. Each of us demonstrates a quality about Him that no one else can. We were created as individuals because God is too big to have His entire image fit into just one person.

Lesson 3: I sit before a statue that is being restored and contemplate the attentive and thorough process of restoring a work of art to its intended glory, just as God restores His image in us.

Lesson 4: An elderly janitor humbly cleans someone’s spilled soda while a portrait of the cross echoes sentiments of Christ’s own janitorial humility in coming to earth to clean up the messes we make.

Lesson 5: My roommate Linzi merrily whistles as she relishes the grandeur of mountains and God’s handiwork in nature.

Lesson 6: God’s laws, as with most rules, were established to help us prosper and stay safe.

Lesson 7: I believe the Sabbath is a day to relish the wonders of Creation. Children seem to understand this innately.

Lesson 8: A little girl, through a simple act of responsibility, calls us to take better care of the earth the Lord gave to us.

Lesson 9: My tall and brilliant engineer friend Jonathan finds himself dwarfed and perplexed as he engages with an exhibit demonstrating the Almighty.

Lesson 10: The statues show many different ways we may call out to God, but prayer really came to life for me when I witnessed the fervent and humble supplications of my neighbor Jyl.

Lesson 11: My sister Ashley has an artist’s soul and a playfulness about her that makes her just audacious enough to accept God’s invitation to participate in His creation.

Lesson 12: My friend Natalie finds herself drawn into a heroic tale of our desperate need for a Savior and His love.

Lesson 13: Lest we be tempted to sit and pine away until Jesus comes, we are brusquely shown the door and commanded to be people of action. My friend Torre’s cheerful readiness is just what we need.
“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 20, 21, NKJV).
Matthew 3

It Takes All Three

A few years ago on a Saturday night, I was out with a few friends. Unfortunately, one of them decided we should go to a nightclub. Two of us were against it, but since we weren’t driving, we found ourselves somewhat trapped. As we stood in line, one of my other friends and I felt the Holy Spirit whispering in our ear, “Don’t enter this place.” Even while we were inside, the Spirit kept whispering to us, making us feel quite uncomfortable.

All in all, the entire Godhead was involved that night.

By the time we finally left, we felt like horrible sinners not worthy of forgiveness, but we still called upon our Savior, the Son, to intercede for us and to ask the Father to cleanse us. It was He who protected us inside that club (a place we weren’t supposed to be) and who granted us forgiveness and cleansing from that unrighteousness. All in all, the entire Godhead was involved that night and continues to be active in my life today.

This incident makes me think of another example that distinctly explains the difference between the Members of the Godhead. “As soon as Jesus [the Son] was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the [Holy] Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my [God’s] Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’ ” (Matt. 3:16, 17, NIV).

John Wesley wrote the following to help us understand the Trinity: “Here are three candles, yet there is but one light. Explain this and I will explain the Three-One God.”

God is not divided into three equal parts. The personal distinctions of the Trinity are not merely added onto God’s real being. The Persons of the Trinity are not three different ways of looking at the One true God. Rather, They are Three distinct Persons. As you study this week’s lesson, be mindful of how each Person of the Trinity plays a role in your life.


Anissa Perez-Perla, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.
The Mystery of God Declared (Gen. 1:1, 26, 27; Deut. 6:4)

In the very beginning, the Bible hints that a Godhead exists (Gen. 1:1, 2, 26, 27). But then in Deuteronomy 6:4, God reminds Israel that He is their God and that He is unique because He is one God. These verses appear to contradict each other. However, the Hebrew root word for God in this verse, Elohim, is plural. A triune God is in many ways a mathematical absurdity.1 When you think about it, the belief in a Supreme Being who is responsible for creating the world, but yet Himself remains uncreated, is a mystery on its own. The belief that God is Three in One compounds that mystery. Yet it is through the revelation of the Trinity that God grants humankind greater insight into His character.


The concept of the Trinity is clearly revealed in the New Testament (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:2; Jude 20, 21). Probably the most striking revelation is evidenced at Jesus’ baptism. As He prepares for His earthly ministry, He pauses to be baptized. But immediately after He arises from the water, the other Members of the Trinity join Him. The Spirit of God in the form of a dove rests upon Him. This is followed by the announcement from God the Father that He is pleased by what has just taken place. What better time for the Triune God to be revealed than at the inauguration of the earthly ministry of Jesus, the Word of God made flesh (John 1:1). Could it be that through this act of confirmation, God is allowing us to see the role that each Member of the Godhead plays in our salvation?

The Mystery of God’s Love Revealed by the Father (John 3:16; 15:13)

In John 3:16, God reveals the love He has for fallen humanity. When our first parents sinned, the human race was destined for eternal destruction (Gen. 2:16, 17). Yet in Genesis 3:15, there springs forth God’s promise to send His Son to put an end to the power of the enemy through the power of the Cross. Although the heel of Eve’s Seed (Jesus) will be bruised, Satan will receive a mortal blow to his head. This prophecy is also a demonstration of God’s love—the love a Father has for His children, which if need be, would cause Him to die in their place. And that’s exactly what God did. In Christ,
God literally became flesh and blood so that He might take the punishment that was ours in order for us to receive the reward of life that was His (Isa. 53:3–5).

**The Mystery of God’s Humility Revealed Through the Son (Gen. 22:1, 2; Luke 22:42; John 4:34; Phil. 2:5, 6)**

The Old Testament demonstrates God’s ultimate act of love through the story of Abraham’s call to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise. As heart wrenching as this must have been for Abraham, let’s not forget the role Isaac played in the success or failure of this call. The plan could not have come to fruition without Isaac submitting to his father’s instructions.

That is exactly what Jesus the Son of God did. Although the plan for humankind’s salvation was put into place long before the world was created, it was still dependent on Jesus to willingly submit to His Father’s wishes (1 Pet. 1:17–20; Eph. 1:4, 5). And because God chose to humble Himself by taking on the form of flesh through Jesus, it was a struggle involving the power of the will. This struggle is evidenced in Gethsemane, where we witness Jesus’ struggle to submit His will to that of the Father.

**The Mystery of God’s Power Revealed Through the Spirit (John 14–16; Eph. 3:16–19)**

In the Third Member of the Godhead, we see God’s desire to be present in our daily lives. Although Jesus’ coming revealed God’s desire to be with us, the Holy Spirit reveals God’s desire to live within us, thereby granting us the power to become more like Him. “With the advent of the Holy Spirit, he came even closer as the indwelling presence of God within the community of believers and within the intimacy of their individual lives.”

The result of such intimacy is a life imbued with fruitfulness (Gal. 5:22, 23). Paul reminds us that a life of unimaginable richness is promised to all who are willing to allow the Spirit to direct their lives (Eph. 3:20). He wrote, “It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Phil. 2:13, NIV). Here Paul makes it clear that it is God’s Holy Spirit who places within our hearts the desire to please God and grants us the power to do so.

In many ways, the Trinity will remain a mystery on this earth. However, John reminds us that when Christ returns, the mystery will be no more, for then we shall finally see God as He is (1 John 3:2, 3)—no longer “through a glass, darkly; but then face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12).

**REACT**

How does the doctrine of the Trinity give you clearer insight into the depths of God’s love for fallen humanity?

---

Early Adventists came from a variety of denominations, some of which actually opposed the doctrine of the Trinity. Hence, this belief came rather late in our doctrinal development. The tide began to turn in 1898 when Ellen White published *The Desire of Ages*. In chapter 1 she wrote, “From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was ‘the image of God,’ the image of His greatness and majesty, ‘the outshining of His glory.’ ”

But it was her claim to the divinity of Jesus that rocked the church. Writing on the resurrection of Lazarus, she says, “Still seeking to give a true direction to her [Martha’s] faith, Jesus declared, ‘I am the resurrection, and the life.’ In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. ‘He that hath the Son hath life.’ 1 John 5:12. The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life.”

Equally adamant were her statements on the Holy Spirit: “The Holy Spirit was the highest of all gifts that He [Jesus] could solicit from His Father for the exaltation of His people. The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail. . . . Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power.”

“The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, is the Spirit in all the fullness of the Godhead, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour. There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—*the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.”

2. Ibid., p. 530.
3. Ibid., p. 671.

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Sherry Manison, Smithsburg, Maryland, U.S.A.
The Web site www.hebrew4christians.com helps us understand the Trinity by looking at two of God’s names—Elohim and Adonai. These names are plural in form, yet they are used with singular forms of verbs. John J. Parsons comments that “the form indeed allows for the plurality within the Godhead.” In English, we might accurately—though ungrammatically—translate the names as “They Is,” or “We Am.”

The Trinity doctrine might cause some to ask if we worship one God or three.

Creation also exemplifies the plurality of God—air, water, and dry land make one world. It teaches us that “God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:27). “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Jesus’ baptism also offers a glimpse of the Trinity as the Holy Spirit alights on the Son and the Father declares His approval. Yet another example is God’s church described as one body, composed of many members (Rom. 12:4; 1 Cor. 12:12–14; Eph. 4:1–16).

The Trinity doctrine might cause some to ask if we worship one God or three. One of the definitions the tenth edition of Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary gives for the word one is “constituting a unified entity of two or more components . . . being in agreement or union.” The Members of the Trinity are definitely “a unified entity of two or more components.” Plus They are One in action, in strength, and perfection, and All are worthy of our worship. The many gods of polytheistic cultures appear to have no such unity.

However, the above evidence pales in comparison to John 14–17. Jesus knows His death is imminent. So He focuses on these concepts: (1) To see Jesus is to see the Father. (2) The Father loves us as much as Jesus does. (3) The Spirit will be sent to teach us what we don’t understand, and to help us to remember what we have learned. In John 17, Jesus commits His disciples to the care of His Father. He asks that they be one just as He and the Father are One (verse 11). Then He prays for us! Jesus asks “for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” (verses 20, 21).

As you study the Trinity, may “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen” (2 Cor. 13:14).
Jesus took upon Himself the guise of humanity, and provided us with a blueprint on how to live a Trinity-inspired life that requires a God-first, God-second, God-third, and self-last mentality. God created us to glorify Him. He made us in His image. Sin, however, has corrupted the clarity of God’s reflection in us. Yet following Christ’s example can help to ensure that other people glimpse God through us. Following are some ideas about how this works:

**Don’t just talk about it; be about it.** Early in His earthly life, Christ made it clear that He was about His “Father’s business” (Luke 2:49). He preached. He healed. He loved. He died. And He did it all for the glory of God. Christ didn’t require fanfare. People saw and they believed, because hearts that are open to the influences of the Holy Spirit will recognize Trinity-inspired actions when they occur. Neither do we have to make a big deal about the fact that we are living a Trinity-inspired life. When we publicly pray before eating our meals, when we read religious publications, when we reject those parts of popular culture that are spiritually debilitating, and when we are mindful of others, people will take notice.

**Love as God loves.** Christ declared that loving each other as God loves us is the best indicator that we are His (John 13:34, 35). Some of Christ’s most memorable miracles and enlightening conversations involved the outcasts of His era. He made it clear that God’s mercy extends to everyone regardless of their place in earth’s social hierarchy. All of His children are equal. We can show our love for each other by respecting and uplifting one another. Be kind to strangers and friends alike. Share a hello. Volunteer your time. Listen to what others have to say. Or simply let someone know you are praying for them. Such Trinity-reflecting actions can make all the difference for someone else.

**REACT**

We spend several minutes every day adjusting our hair and our clothes to best create the image we want for ourselves. When you look into your spiritual mirror (the Bible), what simple but significant adjustments do you feel you can make to better reflect the image of God?
For generations, humanity has created individuals who perform heroic feats. We’ve allowed Hercules to be half-deity. We gave Arthur the British crown, cloaked a bandit in Sherwood Forest, and permitted an alien from a fictitious planet to rescue us from evildoers. But in reality, all we have to do is believe in the roles of the Holy Trinity. They are the real Superheroes.

In this world, we each are brought face to face with challenges and powerfully wicked spirits that shake the foundation of our lives.

Most people don’t like to think of the Trinity as their greatest Rescuer. They want God to be a deity who creates, exists, and observes without meddling in their earthly affairs. Well, that is true in part, but there is so much more to Him. In this world, we each are brought face to face with challenges and powerfully wicked spirits that shake the foundation of our lives. Are we not to be defended?

In Revelation 19, John witnesses Jesus astride a white horse. In the eleventh verse, John refers to Jesus as “Faithful and True.” John also says that He judges justly and makes war against evil. Why do we insist on limiting God’s power when Scripture is obvious about His superhero status? This is why I think that the concept of God as a being who just sits on a throne without defending the weak is so horrific. Scripture is alive with descriptions of Him as an action figure. So let us not cry to earthly heroes created for us and by us. Rather let us call upon the Holy Trinity—the only real Superheroes.

**REACT**

From what daily struggles and demons do you need to be delivered? How can you allow the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to do so?
CONCLUDE
Perhaps one of the most difficult biblical concepts to wrap our minds around is the triune nature of God. He is One, and He is Three. They are Three, but They are One. We worship the One true God, who is plural. Even though this is one of the things about God we can’t explain, we accept it because this is the way our Creator has introduced Himself. Maybe if we could fully comprehend God, He wouldn’t be God. So maybe the most important thing isn’t explaining the truth, but experiencing the truth.

CONSIDER
• Reading through the Gospels and writing down whatever descriptions you find of the character and role or mission of each Member of the Godhead.
• Looking through the hymnal and singing the songs written about the Trinity or that mention the Trinity.
• Talking to each Member of the Godhead in your devotional prayer time about the role He is playing in your life.
• Drawing, painting, or sketching a picture of Jesus’ baptism, showing the presence of each Member of the Godhead.
• Making a sketch of the sanctuary where the Israelites worshiped God in the wilderness and then meditating on what the different pieces of furniture illustrate about each Member of the Trinity.
• Leading a discussion in your Sabbath School class or small group, asking people to consider ways the family unit (father, mother, child) reflects the image of our Triune Creator.

CONNECT
Isaiah 48:16; Matthew 3:16, 17; Jude 20, 21.
Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, The Trinity; Max Hatton, Understanding the Trinity.
In the Beginning

“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Col. 1:16, NKJV).
It is hard for me to imagine a world without the Creator. I cannot believe that I came into being by chance, that I have no purpose. One thing that holds me together is the thought that a loving God created human-kind, and therefore created me. When He created Adam and Eve, He gave them a purpose for living. They were to tend the earth and create a family. And even when they sinned against Him, He provided for their salvation (Gen. 3:14, 15; John 3:16). Now He is waiting for His Son to return so He can take us to an even better world than He first created on earth. Many times when we look at the world we continue to destroy, we ourselves feel broken. We wonder if God is truly present with us. But we should not be afraid, for Jesus teaches us that we “are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke 12:7, NKJV).

Often we catch a case of spiritual amnesia. We forget who we are and who has designed us and this world. We lose sight of God’s love and purpose for us, and we create our own reason for existence. The end result is that we have no reason to exist. Our knowledge only goes so far, but God’s wisdom is eternal. When He formed humans, He did so in His image, “both in outward resemblance and in character.”* Just as a child resembles his or her parents, so we resemble God, our heavenly Parent. Often we claim that we are His children, but we do not make godly decisions. We forget where we came from and we forget whose we are. Why do we forget that God is our Creator, when we know that He cares for us so much He can even count the number of hairs on our head (Luke 12:7)? How is it that we can forget about God when His Word and nature sing praises of His love for us? As you study this week’s lesson, may you realize how God’s plan of creation fits perfectly into your life.

* Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 45.
Job was God’s devoted servant. Yet in his darkest hour, God speaks to him of the precision of His creative power. Consider the evidence. Earth is the only planet equipped with an atmosphere with just the right amount of nitrogen and oxygen to sustain not only human life, but also plant and animal life. If the earth were any smaller or larger this right amount of gases would change and life could not exist.1 If the earth were any larger, its atmosphere would contain free hydrogen, once again making life impossible.2

Now consider the earth’s position from the sun. The earth’s temperature ranges from approximately -30 degrees to +120 degrees Fahrenheit. Therefore, if the earth was any closer or farther from the sun, life would cease to exist on earth.3 In addition, the earth rotates at approximately 67,000 miles per hour on its axis, keeping the entire surface of the earth properly warmed and cooled each day.4 How can there be any other explanation for such precision other than that it was designed?

As Christians, we realize that no theories of chance or evolutionary claims are acceptable. In the beginning, God did not leave anything to chance, and today He continues to sustain this perfection.

We may not fully comprehend the approach God takes with Job’s suffering (Job 38:1–7). But Job had a relationship with God that allowed him to understand that God’s words provided the evidence he needed to fill his heart with joy. It is through this evidence that Job found hope in his Designer and Sustainer—the God who was, is, and always will be in control.

**REACT**

1. In what ways has God shown you His incredible sustaining power?
2. Reflect on other elements of nature that highlight the precise work of our Father’s hands.

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4. Ibid.
**Embracing God (Deut. 32:10)**

Children are unquestionably dependent upon their parents for survival. From a child’s perspective, Mom and Dad loom large over life and seem to be able to handle anything. While we know that this perspective is flawed, it does point to the desire to have a parent who embodies such powerful characteristics. The good news is that such a Parent exists, and He longs for us to experience a relationship with Him.

At the end of his career, Moses entered into his final dialogue with the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 32). After 40 years of wilderness wandering, he desired to remind them of their covenant relationship with God. In verse 10, he reminded them (and us) that despite fallen human nature, God has great plans for His people. More than anything, Moses wanted them to understand the significance of the role they were poised to assume. Little could they have known that their story—a story about dirty, tired desert nomads—was to be one of the foundations of Holy Scripture.

**[God’s] law exists to keep us out of harm’s way.**

Throughout our lives, we often sell ourselves short or doubt our abilities. And we tend to forget that we are wilderness wanderers just like the Israelites. While God may not be writing your life into another biblical testament, He desperately wants you to understand that your life is just as important to Him as the lives of the Israelites. Is this not the Father figure we long to embrace?

**The Master Builder (Job 38:4–7)**

Have you ever seen a father throwing his small child up in the air? The child squeals with delight as his or her entire well-being depends on Dad’s coordination and strength. It’s amazing how powerful a parent can seem to a child. It was this characteristic that God pointed out to Job when he challenged God to explain why he had fallen upon such hard times.

Consumed by tragic deaths, ailments, and financial ruin, Job becomes blind to God’s innate goodness. As he desperately cries out to God for an explanation, the Lord reminds Job of His omnipotence. God asks Job to explain to Him the creation process (Job 38:4). Thus, God established Himself as the all-powerful Creator of the cosmos; a Master Builder whose tools are His words, an Architect who has no need of a calculator. In doing so, Job’s complaints were reduced to mere faithlessness.

In a world that is increasing in knowledge, it is critical that we allow ourselves to be awed by the size, scope, and grandeur of God. Compared to
Him, we are but helpless, dependent children looking to our magnificent Creator in wonder and amazement.

**Creation and the Law (Psalm 19)**

Following rules can be challenging for children. Even when rules are established for their protection, they will disobey. Psalm 19 provides insight into God’s law. Here David connects two areas of theology that we sometimes view as separate: creation and law. After Adam and Eve fell, God articulated His law to humans, not as a series of directives from an angry Deity, but as a set of principles that, when followed, keep us safe from sin. David draws a parallel between the beauty and perfection of Creation and the beauty and perfection of God’s law. He ends this psalm “with a prayer that at once asks acceptance of the words and thoughts that [he] has uttered, and constitutes his general petition for purity of word and thought in the experiences of every day.”

**God’s Humanity (John 1:1–13)**

God’s law provides the same safeguards as parents who instruct their children not to touch a hot stove. His law exists to keep us out of harm’s way.

Have you ever seen children who have lost track of their parents? It’s common for them in this situation to scream for help. The Gospel of John communicates the inseparable qualities of God and His creation. As elements of God’s creation, we are intrinsically linked to our Creator. John 1:1–13 profiles God’s interaction with human history. The Creator who predated all created things became flesh, creating an entirely new dimension to the God-human relationship. John paints a picture of God leading and directing humanity by literally becoming one of us, to live as one of us. In opening his Gospel by pointing to God’s humanity, John writes about the role God plays in our direct role in our humanity.

Obviously our heavenly Father wants us to enter into a close, dependent relationship with Him. Obviously He desperately wants us to understand that we belong to Him because He created us.

**REACT**

1. What can we do on a daily basis to strengthen our kinship with our Creator God?
2. What aspects of God or of His creation strike a sense of awe in you? Why?
3. Which of God’s laws do you find difficult to follow, and why?
4. How is David’s prayer in Psalm 19:14 a model prayer for us?

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Craig Mattson, Tulsa, Oklahoma, U.S.A.
“In the garden of Eden the existence of God was demonstrated in the objects of nature that surrounded them. Every tree of the garden spoke to them. The invisible things of God were clearly seen, being understood by the things which were made, even his eternal power and Godhead. . . .

“Nature is filled with spiritual lessons for mankind.”

“The things of nature upon which we look today give us but a faint conception of Eden’s beauty and glory; yet the natural world, with unmistakable voice, proclaims the glory of God. In the things of nature, marred as they are by the blight of sin, much that is beautiful remains. One omnipotent in power, great in goodness, in mercy, and love, has created the earth, and even in its blighted state it inculcates truths in regard to the skilful Master Artist. In this book of nature opened to us—in the beautiful, scented flowers, with their varied and delicate coloring—God gives to us an unmistakable expression of his love. After the transgression of Adam, God might have destroyed every opening bud and blooming flower, or he might have taken away their fragrance, so grateful to the senses. In the earth, seared and marred by the curse, in the briers, the thistles, the thorns, the tares, we may read the law of condemnation; but in the delicate color and perfume of the flowers, we may learn that God still loves us, that his mercy is not wholly withdrawn from the earth.

“Nature is filled with spiritual lessons for mankind. The flowers die only to spring forth into new life; and in this we are taught the lesson of the resurrection. All who love God will bloom again in the Eden above. . . .

“God is the superintendent, as well as the Creator, of all things. The divine Being is engaged in upholding the things that he has created. The same hand that holds the mountains and balances them in position, guides the worlds in their mysterious march around the sun.”

**REACT**

1. How is God’s love revealed to us in nature?
2. What are some ways in which you can personally seek God through nature?

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**Alexandra Yeboah, Brampton, Ontario, Canada**
Imagine living in a house with no foundation. You’re probably thinking that such a house would be rather unstable. Now consider that the doctrine of Creation is the foundation of Christianity. If we do not understand who created us and why, we have nothing upon which to build our faith.

**Creation shows that we are more than an accidental sprout of nature.**

The Bible teaches that God was present in the beginning and that everything was created through and for Him (John 1:1–4). While evolution discusses random mutation and natural selection occurring throughout time without any end goal, the Bible shows that from the very beginning, God had a purpose for what He created. This is evident in how He created. He took six days to carefully shape the world and all that is in it, rather than dashing it off in a minute. The theory of evolution takes a random approach to how we came into existence. But creation shows that we are more than an accidental sprout of nature. God created us in His own image (Gen. 1:26, 27), and “the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Ps.19:1, NIV).

To help us acknowledge the truth of creation and all other truths that stem from it, we should seek to acknowledge God’s creative power every day:

*Always remember that you were created in God’s own image. You are His masterpiece (Gen. 1:27).*

*Respect creation, and take care of it.* Because He has made us rulers over His creation (Ps. 8:5, 6), we must learn to take care of it wisely.

*Enjoy God’s creation.* Directly explore nature when and where it is safe to do so, or learn about it through reputable books and television shows.

*Ask God for wisdom.* Ask Him to help you share with others the story of God as our Creator.

*Be thankful.* Each day, thank God for the blessings of nature—its food, its beauty, and the health it gives us when we interact with it.

**REACT**

1. What does it mean to be created in God’s image?
2. How would you share your belief regarding creation with friends and family members who embrace evolution?
3. How does the belief that God is the Creator play a vital role in the plan of salvation?
I cannot fathom how God spoke the Ursa Major constellation into existence. His omnipotence is often forgotten by many in a world where we are constantly reminded of the destruction that sin has caused. But even when there is disaster, we should never forget that everything under heaven is God’s (Job 41:11).  

We are a manifestation of His love.

As sinful humans, we tend to become engulfed in our own lives. I am guilty of sometimes equating God’s goodness and love with the amount of blessings I receive. But doing so limits the power and glory of God as well as what He can do for and through us. Mistakenly, we claim a right to the privileges He freely gives us. We forget that despite what He gives or takes away, He is always worthy of our praise just because He is the Most High. We forget that He sustains us even when we are undeserving of the very air we breathe (Rom. 3:23).

When we humble ourselves before Him, God will give us glimpses of things greater than ourselves. In Job 38:4, 31, 32, He asks, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades, or loose the belt of Orion? Can you bring out Mazzaroth [the constellations] in its season? Or can you guide the Great Bear with its cubs?” (NKJV).

When we believe that God is Maker and Ruler of the universe, we also must believe that we are sinful and must rely on His strength. We are able to heed His will and completely surrender our lives to Him when we have faith in Him as our Creator. If He can guide the constellations, the sun, and the moon, He is more than able to guide our lives. Thus, our belief in Creation forms the very basis of our faith.

To deny Creation is to deny a self-worth that is pivotal in determining what we do with our lives. We may not be anything like the Ursa Major, but in God’s eyes, I know I am a treasure just as great as the constellations. We are a manifestation of His love, a priceless gift from the Father above, a carefully thought out, perfectly executed, one-of-a-kind design, ordained by the Divine Maker and King. To Him, we are a beauty much greater than the stars.

**REACT**

How can we accurately reflect God’s love for us in our daily lives?

Michelle Smith, Brampton, Ontario, Canada
CONCLUDE

God created humanity because He wanted to. He had a special purpose for our lives. He created us to care for the rest of what He had created. He wanted us to be fruitful and multiply. And He wanted us to fellowship with Him. Today, we are still blessed by the example of perennials, which die back each autumn, only to rise again in the spring—a perfect example of Christ’s resurrection and promise to always be a part of our lives. And after Adam and Eve sinned, He promised to be our dwelling place when we feel lost.

CONSIDER

• Visiting a planetarium to explore the heavens. Consider how God planned the stars to guide travelers on earth.
• Planting a garden and observing the miracle of growth from seed, to small plant, to larger plant that spreads its seeds to populate the earth and begin the creation cycle again.
• Writing a letter to someone who has been your mentor to share with this person how his or her influence has shaped who you are, just as God’s never-ending love can shape and mold you into the best person you can imagine.
• Sharing with a friend how a difficult experience from your past actually turned into a blessing once you had time to think about God’s influence in your life.
• Listening to “Indescribable” by Chris Tomlin (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-zJHgaoVa4&feature=related) and/or “God’s Plan” by Bluetree (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9H7rZm1R2iQ).
• Painting a postcard or greeting card for a friend that tells how belief in Creation has influenced the way you understand God’s plan for you.

CONNECT

Max Lucado, The Great House of God, pp. 69–79.

Stephanie Yamniuk, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
God as Redeemer

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev. 5:12, NKJV).
I am an extremely curious person, which often got me into trouble as a child. One day I decided to find out what the temperature of food was while it was cooking. So I took the thermometer my mother used to check my temperature with and put it inside the food that was cooking on the stove. In a few seconds, the thermometer blew up, spilling mercury and pieces of glass into the pan. Suddenly aware of some of my parents’ rules, I wished more than ever that they would come home as late as possible.

God seemed to be facing a stalemate.

For sure, Adam and Eve did not eagerly wait for God the day they sinned. Actually, they hid themselves (Gen. 3:8). On the other hand, Satan was waiting for that moment with immense interest. Perhaps he said, “And now, oh Creator, what are You going to do? If You forgive the man and woman, You are going to be unjust and unfaithful to Your own law. If You destroy them, You will be a tyrant! And in the end I will have been proven right.”

Indeed, God seemed to be facing a stalemate. How could He save the humans He had so meticulously created? How could He, who is love, destroy those whom He loved so much?

But then He looked into the future and contemplated all the totally defenseless humans who eventually will be born. He saw you, exactly where you are now—perhaps well, but perhaps not. Perhaps He saw that you are in despair, suffering from a broken relationship, hopeless, carrying bitter consequences of sin, or passing entire nights in tears. God decided, then, to pay the price His own law requires. His Son would die for these first two humans and all who would follow. He would come to earth so we could go to heaven. He would take on a mortal body, so we could be immortal again; and He would walk with sinners, so we could once again walk with angels. He would be hurt, so we could be healed (Isa. 53:5); and He would receive God’s wrath against sin so we could know God’s love. Christ would die so we could live.

At the Cross—between righteousness and love—God, through Christ, chose both so we could be redeemed. The problem of sin now has a solution. We don’t need to hide anymore, or be afraid for our parents to return home.
In 2010, I participated in evangelistic meetings with the Saterés Maués Indians along the Maral River, in Amazonas, Brazil. At first I thought I would bring God to those native villagers. But God was already there.

**The Unknown God (Gen. 3:15; Acts 17:22, 23)**

The Saterés Maués believe in a god named Tupana, who created all things. They also believe in a being called Ahiang, who brought evil. However, their belief system has no redeemer.

Several cultures have only a fragment of a Creator God in their beliefs, and the apostle Paul shows us how to use such fragments to teach the people of such cultures about a God they know incompletely.

It’s amazing to discover that there are people who are so geographically and culturally estranged from each other yet still share the religious roots of a Creator God. This is evidence that the same God has created us all.

**The Known God (Rom. 1:18, 19)**

The Abrahamic promise was that God would bless not only Abraham’s seed, but through him, all people. However, this last part of the promise was forgotten by the Hebrews. Jesus’ command is to “‘make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you’” (Matt. 28:19, 20, NIV). How well have you personally and your local church as an organization fulfilled this command?

Paul says that all people are sinners—Gentiles for breaking the law inherent in their consciousness, and the Jews for breaking the written law on which they relied for salvation.

**Not All Roads Lead to God (Eph. 2:8; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19)**

Many religions and Christian denominations still preach that we are saved by the works we do. The Jews believed this so firmly that they developed a commentary on how to keep the laws meticulously. This commentary is called the Talmud. But the law can’t save anybody. Instead, its function is to point out our sins and then point us to the Cross.

James 2:14–26 helps us to understand this sequence. Saving faith is evident by the good deeds we do for others. A person who is truly saved helps...
others. Our faith and actions work together. Our actions show others that our faith is complete and real. Everyone who has such faith is compelled to talk about Jesus and to help others as best they can.

Another misconception about salvation is that by surrendering to God once, we will never sin again—“once saved, always saved.” It’s as if God chains us to Himself to prevent us from leaving. In reality, when God justifies us, it’s like an earthly judge who declares a defendant innocent even when he or she is guilty, and then not having that person pay for the crimes he or she committed. Jesus was punished for our sins when He died on the cross. Our part is to grasp His sacrifice by faith.

**Showing the Way (Mark 10:32–45)**

Jesus is the ultimate revelation humans receive from God. He not only came to save us, but He came as one of us so that we could understand Him. In discussing that God became one of us through Jesus, Philip Yancey refers to a time when he kept a salt-water aquarium. He writes about how terrified the fish were every time he needed to clean the aquarium or even feed them. “To my fish, I was deity. I was too large for them, my actions too incomprehensible. My acts of mercy they saw as cruelty; my attempts at healing they viewed as destruction. To change their perceptions, I began to see, would require a form of incarnation. I would have to become a fish and ‘speak’ to them in a language they could understand.”¹ That’s exactly what God did. Through His Son, He became one of us, risking the very Godhead itself. What love!

Jesus’ sacrifice is for all people, even the worst of sinners. When we do not preach and live the message of the Cross, we basically invalidate all that Jesus did and is doing for us as our High Priest in heaven. We must not be afraid to tell anyone and everyone about Jesus and to help all who need help, just as He did. After all, Jesus associated with the rich, the poor, harlots and hypocrites, and Gentiles and Samaritans. He was known as the Friend of sinners because He went where sinners were. He was totally involved. When the great scientist Louis Pasteur was asked how he managed to discover and invent many things, he replied, “In the field of observation, chance favors only the prepared mind.”² How are you preparing your heart and mind to bring people to Jesus, the Redeemer who longs to save us all?

**REACT**

1. Have you recognized how sinful you are?
2. Do you understand what it takes to be saved?
3. What can you do to share the gospel and to be of service to others?

"It was to redeem us that Jesus lived and suffered and died. He became 'a Man of Sorrows,' that we might be made partakers of everlasting joy. God permitted His beloved Son, full of grace and truth, to come from a world of indescribable glory, to a world marred and blighted with sin, darkened with the shadow of death and the curse. He permitted Him to leave the bosom of His love, the adoration of the angels, to suffer shame, insult, humiliation, hatred, and death. 'The chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.' Isaiah 53:5. Behold Him in the wilderness, in Gethsemane, upon the cross! The spotless Son of God took upon Himself the burden of sin. He who had been one with God, felt in His soul the awful separation that sin makes between God and man. . . .

“What a value this places upon man!”

“But this great sacrifice was not made in order to create in the Father's heart a love for man, not to make Him willing to save. No, no! ‘God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son.’ John 3:16. The Father loves us, not because of the great propitiation, but He provided the propitiation because He loves us. Christ was the medium through which He could pour out His infinite love upon a fallen world. ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.’ 2 Corinthians 5:19. God suffered with His Son. In the agony of Gethsemane, the death of Calvary, the heart of Infinite Love paid the price of our redemption. . . .

“The price paid for our redemption, the infinite sacrifice of our heavenly Father in giving His Son to die for us, should give us exalted conceptions of what we may become through Christ. . . . ‘Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.’ 1 John 3:1. What a value this places upon man! Through transgression the sons of man become subjects of Satan. Through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ the sons of Adam may become the sons of God. By assuming human nature, Christ elevates humanity. Fallen men are placed where, through connection with Christ, they may indeed become worthy of the name 'sons of God.' “*

**REACT**

How does knowing that Christ died to redeem us motivate you to become more like Him?

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Elyssa Nascimento, São Paulo, Brazil
Jesus clothed His divinity with humanity. He was all the time as God, but did not appear as God. He put aside His glory and majesty. For our sake became poor, that through His poverty we could become rich.¹ He died so that we might live. He suffered for us so we can one day live without pain.

Only the spotless Son of God could be our Substitute.

“The death of the cross was something so cruel that for the ancient Latin people the word crucio became synonymous with suffering. According to historical data, there were four types of crosses: the comissa (T-shaped), decussata (X-shaped), the Greek (+-shaped) and timissa (†-shaped). The last one refers to that which we know traditionally by the various paintings of Christ’s death. Only timissa and the Greek cross allowed the placement of any sign above the head of the condemned, and the Bible says that happened with Jesus (Matt. 27:37). Timissa, being extremely high (4.80 meters), fits well with the characteristics presented in the Gospels. From what we read in John 19:29, 34, the cross could not be low, otherwise the soldiers wouldn’t need a stick to reach the mouth of the condemned (Jesus) nor a spear to pierce the ribcage. On the timissa, the convict’s arms were nailed in a V shape, and the victim had to put weight on his nailed feet to breathe better. This caused terrible suffering. The crucified could struggle with death for days. That’s why in Mark 15:44 Pilate marveled that Jesus was already dead.”²

While dying on the cross, Jesus’ heart was oppressed by anguish and wounded by sadness. The cause of His suffering was not the fear of death, but the overwhelming weight of the sin of a cruel world that separated Him from the love of His Father. All of this caused Him to experience an earlier than normal death. Only the spotless Son of God could be our Substitute. That’s what our Savior did. He took upon Himself the sin of the world and became our Redeemer.

**REACT**

1. What does the death of the Son of God mean to you?
2. How would you deliver this message of redemption to others?

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1. Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 680; adapted.
Humans everywhere and of all ages search for heroes because they make us feel safe and secure. In addition, either real or fantasy, our heroes generally express our own desire to make the world a safer, happier place in which to live. Unfortunately, our heroes, whether real or imaginary, have weaknesses, and when their enemies figure out these weaknesses, they use them to destroy our heroes. But there is one Hero who can never be destroyed, even though He did actually die (Mark 15:33–37). However, unlike other heroes who die, this One came back to life (Matt. 28; Eph. 2:4–6). His name is Jesus.

Jesus is more than just a hero, because through His marvelous love He paid the price of sin for us.

Our Hero Jesus does much more than protect us from Satan. He sets us free from sin and empowers us through His Holy Spirit to live transformed lives (Gal. 5:22–26). Jesus didn’t die because He was defeated in battle. He died because that was the only way to save us. Jesus is more than just a hero, because through His marvelous love He paid the price of sin for us. On the cross, He experienced the death that was meant for us. Jesus becomes our personal Hero “through faith in [Him] to all who believe” (Rom. 3:22, NIV). How do we come to Him in faith?

First of all, believe God’s promise that Christ atones for your past sins and that only He can make you holy. Then confess your sins and commit your life to serving God.¹

“Just as surely as you do this, God will fulfill His word to you. If you believe the promise—believe that you are forgiven and cleansed—God supplies the fact; you are made whole, just as Christ gave the paralytic power to walk when the man believed that he was healed. It is so if you believe it.”²

REACT

What else do the following texts teach us about how to come to God in faith? Isaiah 55:1; Ezekiel 36:25–27; Matthew 9:1–7.

¹. See Steps to Christ, pp. 49–51.
². Ibid., p. 51.
Along the forest rivers in the Amazon are thousands of villages whose citizens hunt and fish to survive. When the hunters return with a large and once-dangerous animal, everyone gathers around to see it, and the hunter shares the meat with all of the families. For at least that day, he is a hero.

Some heroes in today’s media are heroes because of whom or what they have killed. So it seems strange that Christ became a hero, not because He killed anyone, but because He Himself was slain. In fact, His death for our sin makes Him the ultimate universal Hero.

Revelation 5 reminds us of an ancient Hebrew law found in Leviticus 25:25. When somebody became poor and had to sell some of his property, his closest relative was to redeem that which was sold. In Revelation 5:2, an angel asks, “Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?” In other words, “Do any one of Adam’s descendants have the means to redeem this planet and its inhabitants?”

By being at the same time God and man, Christ became our Redeemer.

Before the heavenly throne, while John was crying, one of the elders tells him, “Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof” (verse 5). Next, Christ appears as a Lamb, and as He takes the book, heavenly beings kneel before Him and sing, “Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood” (verse 9).

By being at the same time God and man, Christ became our Redeemer, our closest Relative, so to speak, shedding His pure blood to redeem our life from Satan’s grip. Thus, He who was slain became the Hero, rather than the hunter. Thus, He redeems us as His own.

**REACT**

1. Imagine that you are beside John while he is having the vision depicted in Revelation 5. How do you feel about He who was once hunted becoming the Hero? What do you say to Him who died on your behalf?

2. In what ways can Jesus be your Hero on a daily basis?
CONCLUDE

The overwhelming weight of sin separating Jesus from the Father ended Jesus’ life that day on the cross. There, the fear the human race has felt ever since God came looking for Adam and Eve in Eden was dealt with. Jesus’ death made it possible for everyone to know God as the loving Father that He is. And it is our privilege to tell them about Him.

CONSIDER

• Creating an illustration in Sabbath’s lesson about the thermometer. Depict the author as a boy looking out the kitchen window toward the road or driveway of the house. Make a matching illustration that portrays a related story from your childhood.
• Reading the book *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* by Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey. Notice how the bodily parts and processes described deal with wounds and illnesses. Compare the authors’ use of the body of Christ metaphor with God’s redemptive work in our bodies and His church.
• Researching creation stories and/or food stories from other cultures. List the elements they have in common with each other. Expand your exploration to include the biblical narrative. What do the other stories share with the accounts in the Bible? What do your discoveries imply about God’s involvement with all of humanity?
• Playing and singing along with the hymn “Man of Sorrows! What a Name” (“Hallelujah! What a Savior!”) by Philip P. Bliss. Concentrate closely on the words. Key in the title on the Web to find a version that suits your taste in music.
• Producing a play about Adam, Eve, and the devil (Gen. 2:18–3:7). End the play before God calls for Adam and Eve in the Garden. Emphasize each character’s body language that reveals what may have been going through their minds at each point in the Scripture selection.
• Building models of the four different types of crosses described in Tuesday’s lesson.
• Thinking back to an experience when one or both of your parents had gone away and for some reason you deeply feared their (or his or her) return. Ask yourself if you ever feel the same way about Jesus’ return. Allow enough time to ponder your answer.
• Creating a list of references for further reading from Scripture, the Spirit of Prophecy, and other Christian writers regarding Christ as our Redeemer.

*Perfect Love Casts Out Fear* 1 John 4:17–19

Gill Bahnsen, Auburn, Washington, U.S.A.
“God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccles. 12:14).
In El Salvador during the 1940s, the president used rather unorthodox methods to fight crime. If the police captured a first-time delinquent, they marked his forehead with a special symbol indicating he was a thief. If the offender stole a second time, he would have one of his hands amputated. If the delinquent committed a third crime, his other hand would be amputated. If he committed a fourth offense, he would be executed.

One day, a criminal was brought to the president after being caught committing a fourth crime. To the president’s surprise, the offender was his own son. The president responded by saying, “I am not the one who orders you to be killed. It is the law that condemns you.”

As Christians, it is God’s law that condemns us. Yet unlike the president of El Salvador during the 1940s, our God is far more gracious when it comes to forgiveness. Just how does He solve the problem?

We are saved by God’s grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). “Yet being under grace does not give believers the license to ‘continue in sin that grace may abound’ (Rom. 6:1). Rather, grace supplies the power that makes obedience and victory over sin possible.”

“Christ’s death magnified the law, upholding its universal authority. If the Decalogue could have been changed, He would not have had to die. But because this law is absolute and immutable, a death was required to pay the penalty it imposed. This requirement Christ fully satisfied by His death on the cross, making eternal life available to all who accept His magnificent sacrifice.”*

We know that our Father will never leave us alone in our difficulties. He sends us the Holy Spirit to keep us from sinning and to transform our character. Nothing on earth compares to our Father’s love and justice. As you study this week about His judgment and grace, may you experience anew a desire to follow only Him.

* Seventh-day Adventists Believe, 2nd ed. (Silver Spring, Md.: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), p. 275.
The word light is found throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and in many of these places it is used in conjunction with the word darkness. But the words light and darkness are used in a special way in John. Here light is a symbol of “divine love manifested in the incarnate Word [Jesus Christ]”\(^1\) while darkness is a symbol of “the mental darkness of ignorance concerning the love and mercy of God and the hopeless prospect of death. . . . It was to dispel this pall of darkness that the Light of life [Jesus] came into the world.”\(^2\) Such light and darkness cannot coexist. One expels the other automatically. There is no way we can “practice evil” (John 3:20, NIV) and expect to have the Light of life living in our hearts. Satan enjoys it when our hearts are full of “the moral darkness of sin.”\(^3\) It is his one goal in life to make sure that such darkness stays in our hearts.

“By the winsomeness of a Christlike personality and the compassion of Christlike deeds Christians are to reveal God to the world as Jesus did.”

However, God’s goal for us is to be saved by the Light of life—His Son, who died on the cross in our place and then rose again three days later. Thus we are able to become “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that [we] may proclaim the praises of Him who called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9, NKJV). In this verse, the word praises refers to “God’s glorious character, abounding love, and gracious provision for the salvation of sinners. . . . God acquired the church as His own special possession in order that its members might reflect His precious traits of character in their own lives and proclaim His goodness and mercy to all men. By the winsomeness of a Christlike personality and the compassion of Christlike deeds Christians are to reveal God to the world as Jesus did.”\(^4\)

**REACT**

1. How can we tell if we have the Light in our hearts?
2. Are you revealing “God to the world as Jesus did” in your life today?

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\(^1\) *The SDA Bible Commentary*, 1st ed., vol. 5, p. 898.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 899.
\(^3\) Ibid.

Kevin Parada, Alajuela, Costa Rica
In the Bible, grace and judgment are linked to one another. Today’s lesson explores that link.

**In the Beginning (Genesis 3; 6)**

We find examples of grace and judgment immediately after God created the world. Adam and Eve disobeyed God when they ate from the tree He told them to stay away from. Cain offered an incorrect sacrifice to God, became jealous of his brother who offered the proper sacrifice, and then killed him. By the time of Noah, the earth was so full of sin that God told Noah He would destroy it. He instructed Noah to build an ark in order to save his family and a sampling of the animals He had created. Even after that, sin returned with such a vengeance that God saw the need to destroy two cities—Sodom and Gomorrah. In all of these instances we see a pattern:

1. Someone commits a sin.
2. God pronounces judgment upon the sinner.
3. God offers grace to the sinner.³

Let’s look at this pattern in light of Adam and Eve’s situation:

1. They decided to sin when they ate from the tree which God had instructed them to leave alone (Gen. 3:6).
2 and 3. Then God pronounced a judgment upon them both (Gen. 3:16–19), a judgment that revealed God’s grace because it “was both remedial and restraining in purpose.”² God even demonstrated grace when He asked them, “Where are you?” right after they had sinned. “This call is not to be perceived as condemnation but as an invitation to turn back to God and away from Satan and the bondage to sin he has brought into the world. [Here] the Creator presents Himself as Saviour with a call that offers grace.”³

**Jesus Forgive Us (John 3:16–21)**

God sent His Son to die the eternal death we should die because of our sins. When we accept Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf, we are declared not guilty before the Father. "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the
Light, for their deeds were evil’” (John 3:18, 19, NASB).

It is important to remember that receiving His grace does not give us permission to continue sinning. If we truly accept His grace, the Holy Spirit will live in our hearts and transform our lives (Gal. 5:16–23).

**Fearing the Judgment Day? (Eccles. 12:14; 1 Cor. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 John 4:17)**

How many times have you seen unfair judgments in the news? Do you ever hear about someone who is put in prison unfairly? Even in the Bible, we have the example of Joseph being unfairly judged by humans (Gen. 39:1–21). It is important not to compare human judgment with God’s judgment.

If you have accepted Christ as your Savior and have the Holy Spirit in your heart, you do not need to fear the judgment. You should have no fear of being punished. First John 4:17 assures us that “we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world” (NASB).

**The First Angel’s Message (Rev. 14:6, 7)**

How can we be afraid of a God who is going to judge us when He is the same God who from the very beginning of time had a plan to save people before they even became sinners? How awesome it is to believe in a God who provides for our needs even before the need occurs. In Revelation 14:6, 7, we read the message of the first angel. It is the message of the eternal gospel. Here we learn once again that God’s message is for everyone (John 3:16). And once again, it is a message full of grace, for it “is accompanied by an appeal and a warning that reveal that the day of salvation has not passed. Men may still turn to God and escape the wrath to come.”

There are millions of people who don’t know about the gospel. Many are not ready for the final judgment. We are sharing His grace when we tell others about His salvation just as we received His grace when we first believed.

**REACT**

1. Review the pattern of sin, judgment, and grace discussed in the beginning of today’s lesson. How do you see this pattern in Cain’s life, in the Flood story, in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, and in your own life?
2. Why is it impossible to separate God’s grace from His judgment?
3. Why do God’s mercy and grace not give us a license to continue sinning?

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

*Heber David Morán Zeledón, San Salvador, El Salvador*
“That Lamb whose wrath will be so terrible to the scorners of His grace will be grace and righteousness and love and blessing to all who have received Him. . . . The light and glory of God to His commandment-keeping people are darkness to the unbelieving. They see that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. The arm, long stretched, strong to save all who come unto Him, is strong to execute His judgment upon all who would not come unto Him that they might have life. God grant that while mercy still lingers, while the voice of invitation is still heard, there will be a turning unto the Lord. The sure provision has been made to shelter every soul and shield those who have kept His commandments until the indignation be overpast.”

“I have graven them on the palms of My hands.”

“Then those who pierced Him will call on the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of His wrath has come, and who shall be able to stand? ‘The wrath of the Lamb’—One who ever showed Himself full of infinite tenderness, patience, and long-suffering, who having given Himself up as the sacrificial victim, was led as a lamb to the slaughter to save sinners from the doom now falling upon them because they would not allow Him to take away their guilt.”

“While Jesus is pleading for the subjects of His grace, Satan accuses them before God as transgressors. The great deceiver has sought to lead them into skepticism, to cause them to lose confidence in God, to separate themselves from His love, and to break His law. Now he points to the record of their lives, to the defects of character, the unlikeness to Christ, which has dishonored their Redeemer, to all the sins that he has tempted them to commit, and because of these he claims them as his subjects.

“Jesus does not excuse their sins, but shows their penitence and faith, and, claiming for them forgiveness, He lifts His wounded hands before the Father and the holy angels, saying: I know them by name. I have graven them on the palms of My hands.”

1. That I May Know Him, p. 356.
3. The Great Controversy, p. 484.
As we read Genesis 3, we experience sadness and happiness. The heading in my Bible labels this chapter “The Tragic Disobedience.” Perhaps a better chapter heading might be “God Shows Sinners How to Gain Victory,” for along with judgment, He also extended His grace to the first sinners. How can we better understand and appropriate God’s grace to our lives, especially during times of judgment after we have sinned?

Recognize that God is both a God of judgment and of grace. In fact, His grace exists because of His judgment. Salvation “and judgment reflect the twin characteristics of mercy and justice in the nature of God.”*  

Believe in His love. God’s love for us even after we sin is exhibited in His response to the fall of Adam and Eve. Even after they did what God had commanded them not to do, He went to find them during “the cool of the day” as was His custom (Gen. 3:8, 9). He came not only to judge them (verses 16–19), but to give them the hope of a Savior, symbolized by the garments of skin He made for them (verse 21) and by the sacrifice of a lamb (Gen. 4:4).

Trust His Word. When I was young my parents told me to not handle sharp objects because they could injure me. Like most children, however, there were times when I didn’t trust their commands to not play with such items. My disobedience usually resulted in my being injured. Likewise, we must learn to trust God’s commands. When through divine grace we do so, we will not hide from Him as Adam and Eve did. Instead, we will welcome His presence in our lives.

Become a youth according to God’s heart. David, the great king of Israel, was a man according to God’s heart (Acts 13:22). If you ask Him (Ps. 86:11), He will also help you walk by His side.

REACT

Why are God’s justice and grace so important to Christians?

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Silvana Peña, Cojutepeque, San Salvador, El Salvador
Judgment is a word that scares almost everyone. Usually judgment is applied to any case where there is a guilty person. According to the law, morality, ethics, lawyers, and judges, judgment is passed on a person who is guilty of wrongdoing.

Jesus paid the price at the cross so we can freely receive His grace. And what a price it was!

Parents must sometimes pass judgment on their children when their children have been disobedient. But it’s not easy for children to understand how their parents can discipline them and love them at the same time. In fact, some adults even think that loving their children does not equate with disciplining them. On the other hand, how is it that loving a child requires that adults be permissive toward them?

Love involves more than making another person happy. It also has to do with advising, guiding, and correcting when necessary. Love also involves letting someone “suffer” the consequences of his or her actions and decisions.

God allows us to behave the way we want. He never forces us to obey Him. But He has given us the Bible to teach us how to live a holy life if we so choose. By His grace, and with our permission, He leads us in the right way according to His everlasting love. He lights our path, and as we receive of His blessings, we learn that He wants what is best for us. But when we do stray, He will pass judgment. Never forget, however, that with His judgment comes His grace, if we will accept it. Jesus paid the price at the cross so we can freely receive His grace. And what a price it was! His life and the fear that He would be forever separated from His Father. Why would anyone ever turn away from such love?

REACT

Spend some time thinking about Christ dying just for you. Picture Him suffering on the cross. Think about your sins that put Him there. Then consider how God’s judgment and grace can change your life for the better.

Roxana Lisset Cruz Jovel, Santa Tecla, El Salvador
When people think of God’s judgment, they usually think in terms of punishment. Yet this week’s lesson has shown us how God’s judgments are also healing in nature. That is because His judgments are followed with offers of grace.

When we accept God’s grace by faith, His Holy Spirit abides in our hearts, and we live a new life by His power. Through the years, as the Spirit transforms our character, our worldly passions and desires will evaporate like mist before the rising sun.

CONSIDER

• Drawing a T-chart. Label the left side “Judgment” and the right side “Grace.” Then on the left side, list at least three times in your life when God pronounced a judgment upon your life. On the right side of the chart, after each time of judgment, write how God’s grace proved to be healing and restraining. (Reviewing the first part of Monday’s lesson will help you with this project.)

• Thinking about what life would be like if God were only a God of judgment. Then consider what your life is like because He couples His judgment with grace.

• Designing a Web site that explains the link between God’s judgment and grace. Choose one of the stories mentioned in the first part of Monday’s lesson as the focus of your site. What pictures and symbols will you use to depict the story, God’s judgment, and His grace?

• Role-playing with friends a story from Scripture that depicts the connection between God’s judgment and grace. Afterward, have each participant discuss how it felt to be their particular character in the story.

• Singing the song “Cover With His Life” from The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, no. 412. Then think about how the song deals with the relationship between God’s judgment and grace.

• Watching a beautiful sunrise while contemplating how accepting God’s grace makes each new day of your life more wonderful than the day before.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chaps. 3, 5, 7.
“Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the Lord our God is holy” (Ps. 99:9).
During our childhood and throughout our adolescent years, our parents always reminded us to respect the holiness of God’s name. In fact, they taught us that everything related to God is holy. Take, for example, a church building, which is a house of God. “God’s house should be free of corruption, worldliness, politics, pride, ostentation, respect of persons, hate and hypocrisy.”¹ As children, we always were reminded that church is not a playhouse, so there was to be no running and no eating inside of it. We were to walk softly in church and handle the Bible carefully because it is God’s holy book and God Himself is holy. We also were taught that the Sabbath (from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset) is holy because God blessed it. So we should not buy anything or work on the Sabbath because God blessed it.

God’s holiness should prevail in our minds and in our hearts.

But as I grew up and experienced life with some people from different cultures, I began to wonder about the way they celebrated God’s holy day. For some, it was a day for recreation. After church, they went swimming or played ball. If we all are worshiping one holy God, why do people honor and worship Him in different ways?

God’s holiness should prevail in our minds and in our hearts. Psalm 99:5 says, “Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy.” How can we sing “Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!”² if in God’s house we do not view Him as holy? To some people, church is just a place to meet with friends and find out what they did during the week. But how can we recognize God’s holiness if our thoughts are on ourselves rather than on Him?

This week’s lesson will help us understand the importance of God’s holiness and how His holiness can touch our hearts and move us closer to Him each day.

¹. Leroy Brownlow, Living With the Psalms (Fort Worth, Tex.: Brownlow Publishing Company, Inc., 1976), devotional for August 30.
². The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, no. 73.
The Bible describes God in many different ways. He is loving and merciful. He is a Father and a Friend to sinners. He is also holy, and this holiness is at the core of His personality.

**A Day Appointed as Holy (Gen. 2:3)**

God created the world in six days, with each day being special in its own way. But the day after creation was completed became the most special day of all. God set this day aside as a holy day, a day of rest for Him and for the people He had just created. He blessed and sanctified the Sabbath as a special day for people to be with Him in special ways. He meant for the Sabbath to be holy throughout all of time and eternity. The holiness of the Sabbath points to the holiness of its Creator.

**A Holy Call to Repentance and to Action (Job 42:5, 6; Isa. 6:1–3; Rev. 4:8, 9)**

From Job’s experience, we can learn much about God’s mercy and forgiveness. One thing we can admire about Job was his submission to God even after multiple disasters struck him down. After his time of great suffering, he concluded that he needed God to cleanse him from the many sins he had committed unintentionally. So with a sincere and contrite heart, he repented and allowed God to take control of his life.

Isaiah was called by God, and when the call came, Isaiah realized how sinful he really was and how unworthy he was to do God’s bidding. He saw how the hosts of heaven revere God, and he realized how unworthy he was to stand before Him.

God wants us to understand two things: (1) We have no righteousness of our own, and therefore should never boast about our good works; and (2) only God’s righteousness can lead us to see Him clearly. When God calls us to do something for Him, He will help us do what He has asked of us.

**The Messenger’s Holy Task (Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2)**

The coming of the Messiah was eagerly awaited, and His coming was clearly revealed in the Scriptures. John the Baptist was the one who would prepare the way for His coming. Preparing for something special is special.
in and of itself. It involves total commitment, and in the case of John, it involved total surrender to a holy God and the holy mission God had for him to perform.


In Luke 4:31–36, we read that the people were amazed at Jesus’ teaching as they gathered on the Sabbath to listen to Him. But it was actually a demon who recognized the holiness of His nature. “This demon inside the man knew two facts—that Jesus had indeed come to destroy them (and their power) and that Jesus was the Holy One sent from God. All demons, and Satan himself, knew that Jesus was the Messiah. While the people in the synagogue were astounded at Jesus’ teaching and wondered who this man could be, the demon knew.”

In Luke 5:1–11, we read how it took a miracle for Peter to recognize just how holy Jesus really was. Indeed, this miracle convinced those involved to leave all that they had in order to follow Him. After having worked all night without catching anything, Peter probably thought that going out again was a waste of time. But he did as Jesus commanded him to do. Imagine his amazement when they caught so many fish, they had to ask fishermen in another boat to help them! In fact, Peter was so amazed that he immediately recognized the holiness of the Man whom he had just called Master. Peter’s sense of unworthiness is indicative of “the first reaction in the human heart when God, through His Spirit, begins His work of transforming the life and character. Thus it was with Isaiah when, in vision, he was ushered into the divine presence (Isa. 6:5). . . . Upon Peter there now dawned, perhaps for the first time, a profound sense of his own spiritual need.” And we could well add, a profound sense of the holiness of Jesus.

**REACT**

1. Why did God make the seventh day holy and not the other six?
2. Why was it necessary for God to send a messenger to prepare the way for the Lord?
3. After an encounter with Jesus, a devil and a disciple recognized His holiness. In what ways has He made known His holiness to you? How did what happened make you feel, and how did you respond?
4. Do you think that Christians today have a proper sense of God’s holiness? Why or why not?

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Job G. Minasalvas, Oringao, Kabankalan City, Philippines
Moses experienced the holiness of God when he met Him at the burning bush (Exod. 3:1–5). He “saw a bush in flames, branches, foliage, and trunk, all burning, yet seeming not to be consumed. He drew near to view the wonderful sight, when a voice from out of the flame called him by name. With trembling lips he answered, ‘Here am I.’ He was warned not to approach irreverently: ‘Put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. . . . I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ It was He who, as the Angel of the covenant, had revealed Himself to the fathers in ages past. ‘And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.’

“God is greatly to be reverenced; all who truly realize His presence will bow in humility before Him.”

“Humility and reverence should characterize the deportment of all who come into the presence of God. In the name of Jesus we may come before Him with confidence, but we must not approach Him with the boldness of presumption, as though He were on a level with ourselves. There are those who address the great and all-powerful and holy God, who dwelleth in light unapproachable, as they would address an equal, or even an inferior. There are those who conduct themselves in His house as they would not presume to do in the audience chamber of an earthly ruler. These should remember that they are in His sight whom seraphim adore, before whom angels veil their faces. God is greatly to be reverenced; all who truly realize His presence will bow in humility before Him, and, like Jacob beholding the vision of God, they will cry out, ‘How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’ ”*

**REACT**

1. How have you personally experienced the holiness of God? What was your reaction, and how did it change your life?
2. Do you think people today come before God with sufficient humility and reverence? What examples can you give to support your answer?
3. If you think more humility and reverence are needed when approaching God, what would you suggest people do to change?

* Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 251, 252.

Connie DeVries, Washington, District of Columbia, U.S.A.
Justice Love C. Francisco-Diaz, Ebeye, Republic of the Marshall Islands

The Holy Spirit was with John the Baptist, which made John’s work of preparing people for Christ’s ministry a success. But who was John the Baptist? He was a relative of Jesus’—the son of Mary’s cousin, Elizabeth; and he was a little older than Jesus. From birth, John was taught the fundamentals of living a holy life. Why? God had a special role for him to play in Christ’s life, so it was important for people to know that he was a godly man upon whom they could depend.

Our main objective is to show people the path to Jesus Christ and His holiness.

John did not allow the world to influence him. He wore simple clothes, walked barefoot, and ate only wild food (locust pods and honey). He had no desire for wealth, self-exaltation, or power. Because he was clearly a holy man, many Jewish people in Israel paid attention to what he had to say. He was a bold, outspoken opponent of sin and hypocrisy, and he was quick to preach about moral uprightness.

John’s work was a fulfillment of prophecy. As such, he was sent by God specifically to pave the way for Jesus’ ministry and His kingdom. John showed the people the path that leads to the Savior.

As God’s holy people, we also should live a life of simplicity. Our main objective is to show people the path to Jesus Christ and His holiness. We are to help people focus on the Savior, rather than on ourselves. As John said, “He [Jesus Christ] must increase, but I [John] must decrease” (John 3:30).

The commission given to John is a challenge bequeathed to us as Seventh-day Adventists. With God’s help, we are to live lives of holiness, lives that reflect God’s loving, holy character, and that will show the way to Christ’s second coming.

REACT

1. How does it make you feel, knowing that even before God created the world, He had a place and a plan for you?

2. Consider your own life. Ask God to help you live more simply so that you can concentrate on His plan for your life.
In Isaiah 6:1–3, the prophet vividly depicts God’s holiness. “The term 
holiness means ‘separate,’ from an ancient word ‘to cut’ or ‘to separate’ or to 
be accurate, ‘a cut above something.’ ”1 Think about this definition in light 
of God’s holiness in Exodus 15:11 which declares, “ ‘Who is like You, O 
Lord, among the gods? / Who is like You, glorious in holiness, / Fearful in 
praises, / doing wonders?’ ” (NKJV).

Because the God we worship is holy, we also should be holy. In Le-
viticus 11:44, God says to the Israelites, “ ‘I am the Lord your God; con-
secrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy’ ” (NIV). Peter echoes 
these words in 1 Peter 1:15, 16: “Just as he who called you is holy, so be 
holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’ ” (NIV). But

Because the God we worship is holy, we also should be holy.

how can we, who are born with sinful natures, become holy? Below are 
three steps to help us live a holy life:

Be distinct from the world (1 Peter 2:9). In 1 Peter 2:9, the word peculiar 
(KJV) means “‘a people that belongs to God.’ ”2 Because we belong to Him, 
we are to live according to His standards, rather than the standards of the 
world. We can accomplish this only through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Be morally pure (Ps. 24:3, 4). Habakkuk 1:13 describes God as having 
eyes too pure to look upon evil and as being unable to tolerate that which is 
wrong. Psalm 24:3, 4 explains it well: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the 
Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a 
pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.”

Spend quality time with God every day. Holiness comes as the result 
of our continued day-to-day relationship with God and having faith in His 
Son Jesus Christ.

REACT

1. How can we show others that we are distinct from the world without 
making them feel that we are isolating ourselves from them?

2. Aside from family worship and praying, how else can we improve our 
personal relationship with God?

p. 54.


Michael John J. Diaz, Ebeye, Republic of the Marshall Islands
The first semester of the school year is almost finished, and your young adult Sabbath School is going to hold evangelistic meetings in a nearby town. Yet there is no budget for the meetings, and final exams are approaching. Each of you must raise funds for the meetings, but many difficulties are standing in your way, including the fact that some of your final exams are scheduled for the Sabbath. You’re not sure you have enough faith to continue. You’re exhausted and discouraged. Feeling hopeless, you sincerely seek God in prayer. You surrender all to Him and say, “Your will be done, Lord.”

The fourth commandment says, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.” The Sabbath is essential to our spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional health. God blessed the Sabbath, and sanctified it because after He created our world, He Himself rested on the Sabbath (Gen. 2:3).

Being holy is to completely surrender to God’s will. It is walking by faith rather than by sight. It is relying on God with confidence and resting in His love. Living with Him helps us to be holy. “Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14, NKJV).

To change our unholy evil behavior we need Christ to live in our lives. He changes us from sinfulness to holiness. Holiness is not a birthright. Rather, it is a gift from God through Christ. Those who receive Christ as their Savior become God’s children. There are two aspects to holiness: (1) accepting Christ as our personal Savior, and (2) following His example of self-denial. We are His spiritual children, born again and renewed in righteousness and true holiness.

**REACT**

1. Describe in your own words what it means to be holy.
2. How can the holiness of God change your life for the better?
3. How can God’s making us holy affect the world around us? See, for example, Isaiah 58.
CONCLUDE
In our modern age there is little that commands our respect. Government and other leaders, some of the most powerful people in our world, are often shown to be foolish or corrupt. The media makes everything accessible to us, but with accessibility comes commonality. We must be careful not to allow this attitude to affect how we view God and interact with Him who is almighty, powerful, and holy. While we can talk with Him like a brother, we must never lose sight of the fact that He is our Creator and we are His creatures.

CONSIDER
- Videotaping a montage of images to the worship song “Indescribable” from the album Arriving by Chris Tomlin, which describes the awesomeness of God.
- Meditating on the holiness of God. Enter His presence with a sense of awe and reverence. Carry this feeling with you whenever you enter His presence.
- Role-playing an audience with an earthly king, taking turns being both the subject and the ruler. Concentrate on the unique insights you obtain from both vantage points and implement them when you enter God’s presence.
- Interviewing a broad range of people, asking them what their definition or idea of holiness is, and whether they have any suggestions for keeping God’s holiness in proper perspective. Share your findings with your Sabbath School class.
- Researching the Hebrew and Greek words for holy in the Bible and making a list of their definitions and shades of meaning.
- Creating an ATC (Artist Trading Card) with holiness as the theme. Either use it as a bookmark in your Bible, a devotional, or consider trading with other artists.

CONNECT
Leviticus 19:2; Isaiah 6:3; 1 Peter 1:15, 16; Revelation 15:4.
Our High Calling, p. 214; That I May Know Him, p. 131; This Day With God, p. 146.
Graham Maxwell, Can God Be Trusted? chap. 10; Brother Lawrence and Frank Laubach, Practicing His Presence, chap. 7; C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, pp. 141–145; Mark Buchanan, Your God Is Too Safe, chap. 2.

Céleste Perrino-Walker, Rutland, Vermont, U.S.A.
God the Lawgiver

“The Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King; He will save us” (Isa. 33:22, NKJV).
Did you grow up in a home with adults, or at least one adult, who established certain regulations that, if you followed them, kept you safe? If so, consider yourself lucky. A few years ago, I took a trip with my sister to Maryland. While there, we strolled through Baltimore’s vibrant Inner Harbor late one night. While we were walking back to our car, we saw a young girl about twelve years of age meandering through the harbor alone. Our instinctive response was to wonder why she was there by herself. Didn’t her parents care where she was? Hadn’t they told her she shouldn’t be out alone at night? We wondered what kind of parents they were.

Similarly, what kind of God would we have if, after creating us and claiming to love us, gave us no guidelines on how to live our lives? What kind of God would just sit back and let His favored creation wander around, doing whatever they pleased without attempting to guide them in the right path? Would such a god be a loving god? Would there be any love in a home where both husband and wife were serial adulterers? Would there be any joy in a world where a small annoyance could lead to death, and your neighbor could come to your house and take whatever he wished? Wouldn’t we question the god who would create such a world? (Unfortunately, since sin entered the world, we now know how horrible such a world would be!)

Thus God, being the loving God that He is, provided a law by which we are to live. We do not know the form this law took in the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve sinned. But we do know the form it takes now. It is a law given to us because of His great love for us; and because of that, we regard our keeping of it as being based on our love for Him and for humanity (Luke 18:18–22). This week, as you study God’s law, may you recognize it for what it is, and may you commit yourself once again to following it with the help of God’s Holy Spirit.
God’s presence was enshrouded in the thick cloud that engulfed the peak of Mount Sinai. Prior to descending to meet with His people, God instructed Moses to have them sanctify themselves for two days, and on the third day He would visit them. God is a Holy God, and His presence is a consuming fire. God's law was to be presented to His people in a holy atmosphere. So He instructed Moses to lead the people in creating an atmosphere that could befit the majesty of the Lawmaker and His law.

In Exodus 19:9, God tells Moses, “Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever.” God wanted the children of Israel to be ready and to be able to employ all of their senses as they observed God revealing Himself through His law. The lightning, thunder, and trumpet spoke to their ears while the smoke, fire, and quaking of the mountain appealed to their sense of sight, touch, and smell. Such a display served as tangible evidence of God’s greatness and presence.

Events preceding God's giving of the Decalogue can be likened to what occurred on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–7), which foreshadowed Christ’s second coming when He will descend from heaven on a glorious cloud. Then, too, the trumpet will sound while mountains will shake. The graves of His people will open, and they shall see their Savior return. Like the Sinai experience, Christ’s coming will be glorious, literal, visible, audible, and dramatic.

Why did God give us His law? “God’s law is given for two basic reasons—for our joy and protection. The Ten Commandments were not written to restrict our happiness; they free us to enjoy life to the fullest. Obedience is the doorway to happiness.”* The psalmist also discovered that “great peace have those who love Your law, / and nothing causes them to stumble” (Ps. 119:165, NKJV).

**REACT**

1. Why did God choose to manifest Himself in such a dramatic way to the Israelites?
2. The Israelites responded to this event by saying, “ ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do’ ” (Exod.19:8, NKJV). How well did the Israelites do in fulfilling this covenant pledge, and why?

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T. Makini Mogere, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.
God Our Provider (Exod. 16:4–30)

God is love, and God’s law, which is a transcript of His character, is an expression of His love. Therefore, His law and love cannot be separated. This is shown in how God provided for the Israelites.

Approximately forty-five days after their departure from Egypt, the children of Israel began to complain about food (Exod. 16:1–3). After they grumbled to Moses and Aaron, God responded by giving them manna on a daily basis, except on Sabbath. The manna was tied to the Sabbath so the Israelites could associate God’s law with His provision for them and so that they could therefore learn to trust and appreciate the love and care He had for them.

This instruction regarding the Sabbath was given to the Israelites before the rest of the commandments were presented to them. Seeing that the Sabbath commandment was to be observed every week, and seeing that the manna came each day but the Sabbath, the Israelites were daily reminded that God was their Provider. In this way, the Sabbath as well as the manna, became an emblem of His promise to provide.

God Our Parent (Rom. 13:8–10)

Parents are to teach their children how to live with others in harmony and love. Likewise, God, as a responsible Father, reminds us how to love one another in practical ways. One way He does this is by giving us His law.

Jesus says, “‘If you love Me, keep my commandments’ ” (John 14:15, NKJV); and Paul says, “The one who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8, NRSV). If loving God is keeping His commandments and loving others is fulfilling the law, it then means that for us to show God that we love Him, we must love others as well.

Therefore, in the act of giving the law, God expects that we show love to Him by loving people (1 John 4:7, 8). It is impossible to truly love others without first experiencing the love of our own hearts (1 John 4:11).

God the Performer (Heb. 8:10; 10:16)

When the Israelites broke the first covenant God had made with them, He gave them another chance. Through the prophets, God illustrated how
He would do so. In Jeremiah 31:33, God said, “‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts’” (NIV). The key words here are put and write. In the original languages, both words paint a picture of God acting in us. In Hebrew, the word for put is nathan, whereas in Greek it is didomi. Yet they both mean to “perform,” “bring forth,” or even “to have power.”! Hence, when God says He will put His law in our hearts, He is saying that He will give us the power to exercise that law in our lives. Paul reinforces this idea by saying, “It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Phil. 2:13, NIV).

As a giver and performer, God portrays Himself as strong and balanced. At His core He is a God of action. For every expectation He has of us, He empowers us. He is not a distant boss who sits and expects us to do, but rather He comes close, especially to our weak points, and says, “‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’” (2 Cor. 12:9, NIV).

**God Our Purifier (Rom. 7:8–13)**

Our eyes are incapable of seeing the minuscule germs present on our hands. Agar plates can reveal these germs to us. One puts his or her finger on the plate to transfer the germs to it and reveal them to the eye. Thus we can see just how dirty our hands can be.2

God’s law is like an agar plate. His law reveals our sinful condition and how we desperately need His help to cleanse us. Even more important, God’s law paints a clear picture of who He is and how much we need Christ as our Savior. “The law was put in charge [functioned as a custodian] to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24, NIV).

The agar plates cannot clean our hands. They can only show how filthy they are. Likewise, God’s law cannot purify us. Rather, it shows us our need and points us to our Savior. Only His blood has the power to cleanse us from sin. “The blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, [will] cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God” (Heb. 9:14, NIV).

The act of God’s giving the law to us highlights His loving character in unique ways. It helps us to know Him personally as a God who provides, performs, and purifies.

**REACT**

1. Which of the four attributes of God highlighted above do you feel you need to experience the most at this point in your life?
2. To whom do you need to show a glimpse of the attributes discussed above? Seek God’s help in doing so.

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Our memory text this week reminds us that the Lord is the Lawgiver. When asked about which part of the law was the greatest (Matt. 22:36–40), Jesus directed the questioner to the fundamental principles of the law—loving God and loving others. These are eternal principles that transcend time, place, and our fallen nature.

“[God’s law] embodies the principles of His kingdom.”

“The principles of the Ten Commandments existed before the fall, and were of a character suited to the condition of a holy order of beings. After the fall, the principles of those precepts were not changed, but additional precepts were given to meet man in his fallen state.”

“The Pharisees had exalted the first four commandments, which point out the duty of man to his Maker, as of far greater consequence than the other six, which define man’s duty to his fellow man. As the result, they greatly failed of practical godliness. Jesus had shown the people their great deficiency, and had taught the necessity of good works, declaring that the tree is known by its fruits. For this reason He had been charged with exalting the last six commandments above the first four.”

“God’s law is the transcript of His character. It embodies the principles of His kingdom. He who refuses to accept these principles is placing himself outside the channel where God’s blessings flow.”

Obedience to the law is heeding the call to love God supremely and to love fellow human beings as ourselves. Love and obedience are aspects of our Christian life that are inseparable. Love leads the way. If we love God, we will obey Him (1 John 5:3). If we do not love Him, obedience becomes a burden. Obeying God means loving Him with all our heart, soul, and mind, and loving our neighbors as ourselves. No wonder Paul says, “Love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13:10, NKJV). So let us therefore keep God’s law.

**REACT**

1. Will keeping the commandments help us to love God, or will God’s love help us to keep His commandments?
2. How do we learn to love God? Is it possible that love for God is a gift from Him and not of our own making?

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2. The Desire of Ages, pp. 606, 607.

Elvis Mogere Mogo, Wilmington, Delaware, U.S.A.
After their escape from slavery, the Israelites complained to Moses and Aaron about their food. God heard their cries and decided to test their obedience. “‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not’” (Exod. 16:4, NKJV). Since leaving Egypt, the children of Israel had seen many evidences of God’s power and faithfulness. Surely they would follow the Lord’s command to gather the manna each morning and a double portion on the sixth day so they could properly observe the Sabbath. Yet some did not (Exod. 16:27, 28). How can we learn to trust God and His law? Following are three ways:

- **Revive your faith by remembering how He has guided you in the past.**
  
  *Remember how God has led you in the past.* Through the plagues, the Israelites remained unscathed. Then God parted the Red Sea so they could escape Pharaoh and his army. Yet the Israelites doubted His care in the wilderness. When you find yourself doubting His care, revive your faith by remembering how He has guided you in the past.

  *Study and meditate upon other instances in the Bible where God has cared for His people.* For example, consider Daniel and his friends, Esther, and the widow of Zarephath. What other examples can you think of?

  *Memorize Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:19–32.* When you begin to doubt His care for you, repeat this passage to yourself. Or write it out and keep it where you can refer to it often.

  When we choose to give our lives to Christ, we become His responsibility. He promises to take care of all our needs (Phil. 4:19). By giving us a law by which to abide, God has provided an opportunity to reveal His character and His faithfulness to us. Often we are overcome, like the Israelites, and we, too, forget to remember how our Lord has taken care of us in the past. So remember to remember!

**REACT**

1. How often do you disregard God’s commands because you are too busy worrying about the future?

2. What other aspects of God’s character are revealed in today’s key passage? How have you experienced these aspects in your own life?

3. What are you especially worried about right now? Give it to God in prayer before you close your Bible and this Bible study guide.
Imagine living in a house full of siblings, parents, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and pets. Each of you must learn to share the house, live peacefully, and enjoy life. Adherence to basic household rules makes this house a home where each member feels loved and appreciated. Household rules maintain boundaries that respect the rights of each member. Family members show love to one another by keeping to these simple rules.

In the same way, God gave us His law to show us how to live happily together with one another and with Him. Many of society’s woes would be nonexistent if we all respected the law of God. Imagine a world without theft, adultery, murder, jealousy, lying, or hate. That was God’s initial plan, and it still is His ideal for us.

Through His Ten Commandments, we catch a glimpse of a loving, wise, and orderly God.

The natural laws that govern our environment also speak to the wisdom of our Lawgiver God. It is amazing how He created the world for us, fully equipped to sustain life. Take, for example, the act of procreation. In the Garden of Eden, God commanded each living thing to multiply after its own kind, and this has remained so. Even after more than six thousand years of life on this sinful planet Earth, a dog will reproduce a dog, a cat another cat, and of course, a human being, a baby boy or girl. It is amazing how modern science, with all its cutting-edge advances, still faces the ominous challenge of sterility when dealing with hybrid plants and animals.*

So whether it is in our homes, our society, or in God’s vast universe, He has instituted laws that govern all these systems to keep us in harmony with His perfect will. Through His Ten Commandments, we catch a glimpse of a loving, wise, and orderly God who seeks to impart His character of love to us when we abide by the principle of love upon which the commandments are based.

**REACT**

1. Imagine a world where everyone kept the Ten Commandments. How would you describe it with words or paint it as a picture?
2. If people today allowed themselves to be governed by the principles of love as exhibited in God’s law, how would newspaper headlines read?


Ellen Mochache, Middletown, Delaware, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE
Birds do it. Bears too. Instinctively they know where to go and what to do and when they should do it. But too often people don’t have a clue how to live their lives. Jeremiah 8:7 reflects, “Even the stork in the sky / knows her appointed seasons, / and the dove, the swift and the thrush / observe the time of their migration. / But my people do not know / the requirements of the Lord” (NIV).

God gave humans the precious gift of freedom, but in choosing to disconnect ourselves from our Creator, we’ve lost our way. God’s law of love restores meaning and direction to our lives.

CONSIDER
- Researching the migratory patterns of birds and reflecting on God’s incredible design for His creation.
- Memorizing all or your favorite parts of Psalm 119, the psalmist’s ode to the law.
- Tracing God’s law of love, summed up in “love God” and “love your neighbor as yourself,” throughout Scripture.
- Paraphrasing the Ten Commandments as “Dos” rather than “Do nots.”
- Composing your own song about God’s law of love.
- Creating a photo essay about each of the Ten Commandments from a love-centered perspective.

CONNECT
Romans 8:1–12; Galatians 5:13–26.
The Desire of Ages, chap. 54; Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, chap. 3.
C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity.
Lord of the Sabbath

“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath’ ”

(Mark 2:27, 28, NKJV).
A few months ago after a lengthy struggle, I decided to speak to a non-Adventist friend about my faith and my belief in the seventh-day Sabbath. I broached the subject with her the best way I knew how—by asking a question.

“Why do you believe as you do? Why do you keep the Sunday Sabbath?”

What followed were several back and forth e-mails as we tried to explain and understand what we each believed and where the foundation for our beliefs lay. She had never given the question much thought and was curious about and interested in my questions and explanations. But in her very first reply she asked me a question that proved to be the launching point of our talks together: “What makes the Seventh-day Adventists different from Catholics and other Protestants?”

Why do we set ourselves apart in school and at work by following this one particular day that so many others ignore?

As Seventh-day Adventists, we live out a faith that makes us unique. This is particularly evident in our belief in the seventh-day Sabbath. Each Saturday morning Adventists from all walks of life stop to commune with God, while all around them it seems as if everyone is moving full speed ahead in a completely different direction.

Regarding the day of worship, the “what” of Adventism seems plain. Seventh-day Adventists, by their very identity, believe in the sanctity of God’s seventh-day Sabbath. But beyond the question of what we believe stand other critical questions: Why do we believe as we do? Why do we set ourselves apart in school and at work by following this one particular day that so many others ignore? Are we just trying to be different for the sake of being different? Is it really all that important to observe the Sabbath? Does it really matter?

This week, we go beyond the “what” of our belief in God’s seventh-day Sabbath to deal with the “why.” We will learn that this day, which is more than just another day of the week, holds God’s own holy imprint, and that it is a sign and a reminder of not only His creative and sanctifying power, but also of His Lordship and His goodness to humanity. As we spend some time exploring the meaning and purpose of God’s Sabbath, we will begin to understand why this special time, forgotten by so many people, is a day God calls us to remember Him.

Afia Birago Donkor, Ontario, Canada
Context (Mark 2:23–26)

Our memory verse for this week is part of Jesus’ defense on behalf of His disciples’ “unlawful” Sabbath activities. What was their crime? They were picking heads of grain to eat because they were hungry. On any other day, this wouldn’t have been an issue. The Torah actually allows for picking heads of grain from a field belonging to someone else (Deut. 23:25). The issue here is not that the disciples were picking heads of grain, but that they were doing so on the Sabbath. However, nothing in the Torah (or anywhere else in the Bible for that matter) prohibits picking heads of grain on the Sabbath. So why did the Pharisees describe the disciples’ behavior as “unlawful”?

The Jews who returned to Jerusalem from the 70-year exile in Babylon were well aware that their exile was a punishment for neglecting God’s laws. So to avoid another exile, they formulated detailed legislation that would safeguard them from ever breaking the Sabbath (or other divine laws) again. Such Sabbath legislation evolved over time, but by the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry, it had become a list of 39 prohibitions developed by the Pharisees and later recorded in the Mishnah (m. Shab. 7:2). One of those prohibitions was picking heads of grain.

Jesus defended His disciples’ actions first by recounting the Old Testament story of when David ate the shewbread from the temple and gave some of it to his companions (Mark 2:26; 1 Sam. 21:1–6). Because the shewbread was to be eaten only by the priests (Lev. 24:5–9), David and his companions broke an actual biblical law.

Why was it permissible for David and his companions to eat the shewbread, when by God’s command only the priests were to eat it? Presumably, it was permissible because they were hungry, and eating the shewbread was their only option to satisfy that hunger. In such a case, human need was more important than religious form (the sacredness of the shewbread). In the same way, Jesus’ disciples were not at fault because they, too, were in need of food, and picking heads of grain from a field was lawful. The fact that they were doing it on the Sabbath didn’t make any difference.

While this may make perfect sense to you and me, it would have been infuriating to the Pharisees. To them, 39 Sabbath prohibitions held the same authority as the Torah. So what right did Jesus have to override...
their authority? That's where this week’s memory verse comes in.

**The Sabbath a Blessing, Not a Burden (Mark 2:27)**

With their 39 prohibitions, the Pharisees turned the Sabbath into a burden. Under the Pharisaic law, Jews were prohibited from something as strange as spitting on the ground on Sabbath, because in doing so one might irrigate a blade of grass. They were also prohibited from something as ambiguous as taking something from one place to another. With such laws, Jews must have constantly worried if even the simplest activities on the Sabbath were violations of the commandment. With such a mind-set, there must have been very little opportunity for enjoying the Sabbath.

This is not what God intended the Sabbath to be like. “The Sabbath was made for [literally, for the sake of] man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27, NIV). God created humans to need rest, to need spiritual rejuvenation, and He created the Sabbath to meet that need. It’s not as if God needed His Sabbath to be kept, and so created humans to meet that need.

I think we’ve all been tempted to consider Sabbath keeping to be of greater value than the humans it was intended to benefit. Ellen White encouraged the church to read and to put into practice Isaiah 58, which reminds us that God is displeased when we put the forms of religion before people in need.* What can we do to guard ourselves from giving in to such a temptation?

**The Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28)**

Jesus concludes His defense by declaring that He is Lord even of the Sabbath. How do we know He was referring to Himself here? The title “Son of Man” is a Messianic title connected to Daniel 7:13, and is used in Mark’s Gospel exclusively as a title for Jesus.

With this simple statement, Jesus says a lot about Himself. With this simple statement, He declares that He is the One who created the Sabbath for us. With this simple statement, He asserts that He alone determines what is lawful to do on the Sabbath. This was a serious rebuke to the Pharisees, who were trying to enforce their own laws regarding the Sabbath.

Yes, Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. This is great news. He alone determines what the purpose of the Sabbath is, and He has determined that it should be a blessing and a delight to humans (Isa. 58:13).

**REACT**

Are you blessed by the Sabbath each week, or has it become a burden to you? If it is a blessing, how can you share that blessing with others? If it has become a burden, why do you think that is? What might you do to start enjoying the blessing of the Sabbath again, or for the first time?

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* Welfare Ministry, pp. 29–34.

Luke Self, Overland Park, Kansas, U.S.A.
“There was joy at the institution of the Sabbath. God looked with satisfaction upon the work of His hands. All things that He had made He pronounced ‘very good.’ "1 "Because He had rested upon the Sabbath, ‘God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it,’—set it apart to a holy use. He gave it to Adam as a day of rest.”2

“Because the Sabbath was made for man, it is the Lord’s day. It belongs to Christ.”

“All through the week we are to have the Sabbath in mind and be making preparation to keep it according to the commandment. . . . On Friday let the preparation for the Sabbath be completed. . . . Before the Sabbath begins, the mind as well as the body should be withdrawn from worldly business. . . . Let not the precious hours of the Sabbath be wasted in bed. On Sabbath morning the family should be astir early. If they rise late, there is confusion and bustle in preparing for breakfast and Sabbath school. There is hurrying, jostling, and impatience. Thus unholy feelings come into the home. The Sabbath, thus desecrated becomes a weariness, and its coming is dreaded rather than loved. . . . At family worship let the children take a part. Let all bring their Bibles and each read a verse or two. Then let some familiar hymn be sung, followed by prayer.”3

“Because the Sabbath was made for man, it is the Lord’s day. It belongs to Christ. For ‘all things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made.’ John 1:3. Since He made all things, He made the Sabbath. By Him it was set apart as a memorial of the work of creation. It points to Him as both the Creator and the Sanctifier. . . . To all who receive the Sabbath as a sign of Christ’s creative and redeeming power, it will be a delight. Seeing Christ in it, they delight themselves in Him. . . . And every object in nature repeats His invitation, ‘Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.’ ”4

REACT
What are some things you and your family can do to make every Sabbath a positive experience?

1. Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 349.
2. The Desire of Ages, p. 281.
The Sabbath signals a prelude to the eternal rest God has promised His faithful children in the world made new.

During the French Revolution, Napoleon and his supporters wanted to abolish all vestiges of Christianity, which included the seven-day weekly cycle. So they created a new calendar named the French Revolutionary Calendar or the French Republican Calendar, which was used for about 12 years from late 1793. Eventually this “calendar was abolished because having a ten-day work week gave workers less rest (one day off every ten instead of one day off every seven).”*

The most certain and universal of all scientific principles is the law of cause and effect. Nature testifies to an infinite, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, living, personal God, who cares so much for His human creation that He set aside an entire day so they could rest. Our need to rest is paramount to our survival, especially now because of the effects of sin. Without the rest God affords us on the Sabbath, we’d fall apart physically, psychologically, and spiritually. This is the work of the Master Designer who knew what we would need before He created us. Thus in the Sabbath we get a glimpse of a loving God who gave us a special time not only to rest, but to commune with Him in special ways and to commemorate His creation.

During the Sabbath, God invites us to touch Him. The Sabbath signals a prelude to the eternal rest God has promised His faithful children in the world made new. The French thought they could defy God’s institution of a seven-day week, but they had to abandon it, because of the toll it had on the people. We, too, have to abandon our pet ideas about the Sabbath and observe it God’s way.

REACT

1. Have you considered what it would be like for you to be on the go all the time?
2. What is the significance of the Sabbath rest for humans? Why might the Sabbath be more than simply a time to unwind?

Imagine that a famous artist made a painting just for you. How would you treat that painting? Would you leave it on the floor for your dog to chew on? Or would you touch it after you’d just been eating fries? Most likely you would be very careful about how you treated it. The Sabbath has been created for us as a gift from the Master Artist. How can we handle it with care?

Make sure you know the Artist. A geologist once pointed out to me a very rare rock formation. He looked at it with awe while I stood there thinking how much the formation looked like just so many layers of dirt. I couldn’t see what he saw because I didn’t know what he knew. If you don’t know the Maker of the Sabbath, it’s hard to treasure the gift of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was made for humanity because God knew how much we would need time with Him.

Be purposeful in how you keep the Sabbath. Spending a full Sabbath afternoon on Facebook might not be considered breaking the Sabbath, but it might not be keeping it either. Choose activities that will reap rich spiritual dividends, such as in-depth Bible study, special prayer time, nature walks, or being of service to someone.

Plan for the Sabbath throughout the week. You might consider doing one thing each day to prepare for it. For example, you might try to iron your church clothes on Sunday. By doing small things every day to prepare for Sabbath, not only will you be ready for it, but you’ll discover that your week has become centered on the Sabbath. Also, don’t forget to prepare your heart and mind for the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was made for humanity because God knew how much we would need time with Him. Handling the Sabbath with care may take thought and effort, but the rewards of a deepened relationship with God that the Sabbath gives us are endless.

**REACT**

1. What has been one of your most meaningful Sabbaths? Why?
2. Think of ways in which you can be more purposeful in how you keep the Sabbath.
The Sabbath is a special day given to us as both a privilege and a command. It’s a day in which we can find rest both mentally and physically, which helps us to be ready for the six days of work that will follow. Faithfully keeping the Sabbath helps us to appreciate being able to rest from all our toil and cares. But we must be careful not to turn the Sabbath into a day of dos and don’ts. I believe that when we begin to nitpick at any command that God has given us, we run into trouble. When we begin to focus more on the law as opposed to the One who gave us the law, we will soon depart from the heart of His Sabbath commandment. All of God’s commandments are given and based on His love. Whenever we as humans begin to focus on the actual Sabbath day more than on the Lord of the Sabbath, we are departing from the heart of His command.

Matthew 12:1–13 tells how the Pharisees condemned Jesus’ disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath. The Pharisees didn’t care at all that the disciples were hungry. They were more concerned about a law being broken rather than the comfort and well-being of people. Jesus, therefore, pointed out to them how David and his companions ate the bread that was only to be eaten by priests because they, too, were hungry.

The lesson that Jesus wanted to teach them back then and that He wants us to learn today is that there is far more at stake here than religion. Yet there lies the question as to what could be more at stake than religion? Even today we’ve become more focused on Sabbath dos and don’ts than on the Lord of the Sabbath. The Son of Man is in charge of the Sabbath; thus He focuses more on the hearts of His people rather than on rituals. Sabbath keeping is important, but we should be careful to keep our Sabbath observance focused on the One who created it.

**REACT**
1. Why is it better to focus on the Lord of the Sabbath rather than on the rituals of Sabbath keeping?
2. How can your Sabbath experience be more like what God desires it to be?
CONCLUDE

“It [the Sabbath] was designed to keep the living God ever before the minds of men as the source of being and the object of reverence and worship.” More than 300 years ago, a lowly, uneducated teenager dedicated his life to God. Brother Lawrence made it his single goal to live as though God were always by his side. In one of the last letters he wrote, he said, “Let all our employment be to know God; the more one knows Him, the more one desires to know Him. And as knowledge is commonly the measure of love, the deeper and more extensive our knowledge shall be, the greater will be our love.” When the Sabbath is all God planned it to be, we’ll begin to sense His presence more fully and experience a relationship with Him that will continue throughout eternity.

CONSIDER

- Creating a collage that illustrates ways of enjoying the Sabbath to the fullest.
- Attending a Sabbath worship service at a local synagogue. Compare/contrast the Jewish worship with that of your home church.
- “Illustrating” Exodus 20:8–11 with actions and gestures as you read through the Sabbath commandment. Or look online for an American Sign Language dictionary for signs that “illustrate” specific elements of these verses.
- Interviewing a number of church members, asking them what makes the Sabbath a special day for them.
- Journaling to find out what you do or do not like about the Sabbath. Writing about our likes can help us to enjoy them even more, while writing about a problem often brings insight that can help us change uncomfortable attitudes.
- Getting to know God better by learning more about His creation during the Sabbath hours. Begin working on a Pathfinder nature honor, go bird watching, or prepare a nature lesson you can share at church or Sabbath School.

CONNECT

Chris Blake, Searching for a God to Love, chap. 8, “I Got No Time for God.”
Brother Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God.

* The Great Controversy, p. 54.

Renee Coffee, Gobles, Michigan, U.S.A.
Creation 

Care

“The Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15).
Imagine waking up tomorrow to a world that has forfeited access to God’s creation due to thousands of years of abuse. Without access to any plants, gone are your comfy cotton pajamas and soft sheets. Unfortunately, it gets worse when you look for your morning decaf or tea and realize that those plants are gone too. Don’t even bother reaching for the cereal. In fact, without access to plant or animal products, there is virtually nothing to eat. That’s enough to give you a headache, but with such a high percentage of medications derived or synthesized from nature, there’s not much left for you to take for your malaise. You’ll now dress in your wholly synthetic clothing and head out hungry to face a day with limited energy sources and transportation to get to your synthetic desk at your synthetic workplace or school. How depressing!

Obviously, a scenario like this will never be a possibility because, without plants and the oxygen they provide, human life would have already expired. However, it certainly makes us think about how truly dependent we are on God’s provisions. It also reminds us that, while we are here, God has given us the solemn responsibility of caring for that which He has entrusted to us. He has given us a planet full of an amazing array of plants and animals. In fact, scientists don’t really know just how many species do exist. Estimates range anywhere from 5 million to 100 million, of which only 1.7 to 2 million have even been identified.* Unfortunately, scientists estimate that we also have an extinction rate of between 4 and 24 of those species per day, mostly due to loss of the rainforest.

As Christians, we must prayerfully consider how God would have us address this problem. He put us on this planet and instructed us to dress it and keep it. Does that mean we should become political activists? How do we show the world we are concerned about the environment but still demonstrate respect for the Creator above that which He has created? In this week’s lesson we will consider information that might help us answer these questions and achieve a solid balance in our own understanding as well as in our example to others.


Jodi Knotts, Boonsboro, Maryland, U.S.A.
Genesis 1:28 charged Adam and Eve with helping to create a population of a size that God had designed the earth to support. The remainder of the verse granting humans dominion over the earth demonstrates that the growing population was to care for the vast ecosystem of living creatures God had created for the benefit and enjoyment of humans.

Adam and Eve’s family . . . found that if they cared for the earth, fruitful harvests would result.

However, with the fall of Adam and Eve, everything changed. Biological systems that previously worked together in perfect harmony now war against each other in competition for survival. Yet out of this catastrophe, God clearly expects fallen humans to manage the earth’s resources to ensure their survival and to thrive, in so far as sin allows. Adam and Eve’s family, and all the following generations, found that if they cared for the earth, fruitful harvests would result. The same applied for the well-being of beneficial domestic animals. Maximizing conditions that sustain healthy life also means minimizing the release of toxins into the environment beyond what our world’s biosphere can absorb and render harmless. Clearly, the answer to the question, “Is the Christian responsible for the care and management of the environment?” is scripturally and scientifically answered with an emphatic yes!

However, the benefits of managing the environment can become a curse when defending the environment and how it is to be managed is used as a weapon to arbitrarily determine and enforce who the economic and political winners and losers will be. Most important, it is the greatest of curses if it leads a person away from the Creator.

**REACT**

1. What specific responsibilities might Christians today be charged with for caring for the environment?
2. How should the church be involved in the political debate over the care and management of the environment?
3. How might there be a risk of Christians worshiping nature rather than its Creator as they become involved in caring for the earth?

Given the Keys (Gen. 1:26–28; 2:15)

Remember when your first set of car keys were handed to you? The car was then yours, and its maintenance became your responsibility.

God “handed the keys” to the earth over to Adam and Eve, and ever since we’ve been in charge of it. As the Bible says, “Fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28, NIV). Tending the garden was the first task (Gen. 2:15). After sin entered, humans began to spread, and as time passed, the human population increased. That increase, along with the increase in technology, has given us much more influence over the environment. A few nomadic tribes camping near the Jordan River didn’t have the same impact that several thousand factories do today. So how should Seventh-day Adventist Christians handle environmental concerns considering that one of our beliefs is that the earth “will be destroyed by fire” (2 Pet. 3:10, NIV)?

Our care for the environment . . . should spring from our desire to be like the Savior we love.

Caring for the Engine (Neh. 13:16–19)

Owning a car is about more than the joy of freedom. You have to pay for gas and maintain its engine. The engine of creation is the Sabbath. It is the final stamp of God’s approval, His signature of completion. It is a day for us to contemplate creation and re-creation, and it is a symbol of the rest we have in the grace of Jesus Christ.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, you enjoy a unique perspective regarding the God of creation. The Sabbath is a constant reminder of who created this earth and who continues to re-create us for the new earth. Nehemiah recognized this fact when he undertook the task of trying to rebuild Jerusalem. He called all of the men together to address the fact that they were conducting open market days on the Sabbath. “What is this wicked thing you are doing—desecrating the Sabbath day?” he asked them (Neh. 13:17, NIV). He understood that the Sabbath was an integral part of a godly environment.

Driving Dad’s Car (Psalm 100)

When you drove your parents’ car, you had the responsibility of caring for someone else’s vehicle along with the privilege of driving a much nicer auto than you could afford. Aren’t all of the blessings of this earth much like that car? Just think of the gifts God has given us: fresh air,
clean water, good food, and beautiful scenery. “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth” (Ps.100:1, NIV). As imperfect as this earth is, it is still our dwelling place until God comes to take us home. So why shouldn’t we cooperate with Him as keepers of His creation? He is a restorer, and because we love Him for restoring us through the blood of Jesus Christ, we want to emulate Him. Remember, “The Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations” (Ps.100:5, NIV).

**Avoiding a Lemon (Rom. 1:25)**

I still remember the guy’s big gleaming teeth that seemed too bright for his face. He slapped the car like it was the progeny of the race horse Secretariat. “Yea, I’ll let ya steal this beauty from me for $1,500.” And with that my dad drove away with the used car. It didn’t even make it home before it was belching black smoke as it crawled along the side of the road.

Satan always tries to sell us lemons with lots of glitzy promises. Sadly many people buy them. “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen” (Rom.1:25, NIV). There is an environmentalism based on humanism and that is about politics rather than about honoring God. This type of environmentalism worships and serves created things rather than the Creator. Our care for the environment, however, should spring from our desire to be like the Savior we love. It should not be aimed at creation itself. Any concern for the environment that makes a certain class of people a target for our scorn or contempt is a lemon the devil is trying to sell us.

**Complete Coverage and the Car Crusher (Heb. 1:1–3; 2 Pet. 3:10–14)**

Every car eventually meets the fate of the car crusher. So it is with this earth which will “wax old like a garment” (Isa. 51:6). Just like our old cars, the “heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare” (2 Pet. 3:10, NIV).

Old cars are crushed in order to be renewed. It is like an insurance policy that covers everything. We are covered with such an insurance policy, and so is nature. As the apostle Paul wrote, “The creation waits in eager longing for the revealing of the children” (Rom. 8:19, NRSV). Salvation is to be enjoyed by all of creation, and the earth will be made new again.

Fortunately for us, our insurance policy is issued by Jesus Christ. “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven” (Heb. 1:3, NIV).
God hasn’t revealed to us just how He accomplished the work of creation. Great intellects have sought to define these secrets of the Most High. But God’s creative power is just as incomprehensible as His existence.1 “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, . . . and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (Gen. 8:22). “In His teaching from nature, Christ was speaking of things which His own hands had made, and which had qualities and powers that He Himself had imparted. In their original perfection all created things were an expression of the thought of God. To Adam and Eve in their Eden home nature was full of the knowledge of God, teeming with divine instruction. Wisdom spoke to the eye and was received into the heart; for they communed with God in His created works. As soon as the holy pair transgressed the law of the Most High, the brightness of the face of God departed from the face of nature. The earth is now marred and defiled by sin. Yet even in its blighted state much that is beautiful remains. God’s object lessons are not obliterated; rightly understood, nature speaks of her Creator.”2

“God gave to our first parents the means of true education when He instructed them to till the soil and care for their garden home. After sin came in, through disobedience to the Lord’s requirements, the work to be done in cultivating the ground was greatly multiplied, for the earth, because of the curse, brought forth weeds and thistles. But the employment itself was not given because of sin. The great Master Himself blessed the work of tilling the soil.”3

“In the days of Christ these lessons had been lost sight of. Men had well-nigh ceased to discern God in His works. The sinfulness of humanity had cast a pall over the fair face of creation; and instead of manifesting God, His works became a barrier that concealed Him. Men ‘worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.’ Thus the heathen ‘became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.’ Rom. 1:25, 21.”4

**REACT**

Why would God have secrets that He hasn’t revealed to us?

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1. Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 113.

Paul Tooley Sr., Rohrersville, Maryland, U.S.A.
I was 21 years old and had a car full of teenage girls. We were returning to camp from a trip into town, when one of the girls threw her trash out the window. I immediately stopped the car. “What are you doing?” the girl asked. “I’m stopping because we’re not going to leave your trash here,” I answered. All the girls dutifully filed out of the car. “I don’t see what the big deal is,” complained the trash thrower. “This little bit of trash isn’t going to hurt anything.”

“Great! A plastic bag. Now we have something to put other trash in,” I yelled triumphantly, waving the bag in the air. After filling every bag we could find, we stuffed them into the car’s trunk. Later I wondered about my response to the culprit’s question. What was the principle of the thing? Why do you put your trash in its proper place? Why do you avoid putting oil and solvents into the water system? Why do you recycle? Why are you concerned about emissions and global warming? Think about these questions before you read what I believe the principles are.

I care for the earth because of my respect for the Creator. I believe He created the earth for me as a gift. Through this gift I have the opportunity to know Him better. Nature is God’s first book, and I treat it with respect just as I treat His other Book, the Bible, with respect.

I care for the earth because I have respect for other people. They are also God’s created beings purchased with Jesus’ blood. As such, they have an innate affinity for the natural world. This is called the Biophilia Theory and is supported by much research that reveals how positively people respond to open, grassy landscapes, stands of trees, meadows, water, winding trails, and elevated views.* Out of respect for others, I should do my part to keep these areas clean.

I care for the earth because of my own self-respect. I enjoy being in a well-groomed garden. God uses the metaphor of tending our own gardens to remind us of His care for us. By spending time in God’s first book, I sense the joy that comes from communing with my Creator.

In 2006, environmentalists told the world that the next ecological crisis would be global warming, as opposed to the major ecological crisis of the 1970s—global cooling. Then there's always pollution, overpopulation, deforestation, increased carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, and saving the whales and all other endangered species.

Modern environmentalism is a blend of social movement, scientific study, and philosophical discussion about our origins and position in the natural equation. One growing philosophy is Deep Ecology or Deep Environmentalism which suggests that all parts of nature (human and nonhuman alike) are equal. The principles supporting Deep Ecology have been with us for a long time and align well with atheism and animism. Atheism is based on the idea of rational thought given to us by Karl Marx, and influences the filters of science which essentially state that to be considered by science, something must be observable. Because God is not observable and no one saw Creation, neither can be considered in science. Bestselling author Michael Crichton recognized modern environmentalism as “the religion of choice for urban atheists . . . a perfect 21st century re-mapping of traditional Judeo-Christian beliefs and myths.” Animism views all life as being intelligent. For example, the “Gaia” theory gives a name to our earth—Gaia—and suggests that all living things on it are a single living organism with the ability to change and adapt as needed in order to remain alive.

While environmentalism offers much in terms of improving the quality of life on earth, people approach it from two opposing cosmologies pointing to one pivotal question: Did God create the earth as the Bible says? This question informs our concept of who we are, our relationship to our environment, and how we understand our future. If we choose not to believe the Bible, then we have a wide variety of theories and ideologies we can use to build our belief system, all of which provide no concrete hope for our future. However, if we choose to believe the biblical account, then we are privileged to be stewards of that which God gave us. Plus, we have a concrete hope for our future and a clear understanding of the earth’s future.

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Richard Tooley, Fairplay, Maryland, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE

“All the gods of the people are idols, but the Lord made the heavens” (Ps. 96:5, NASB). Over and over in Scripture the Lord points out two things that establish Him as the one true God: He created the world, and He can foresee the future. The name “Seventh-day Adventist” carries these two attributes that set the Lord apart as the true God. Recent generations of Christians have hesitated to get involved in “earth-care” because of the heavy politicism and animism woven so tightly into many environmentalist movements. So perhaps it’s time for Christians, including Seventh-day Adventist Christians, to take back the concept of dominion—caring for this earth from a biblical perspective—out of respect for the Lord, our Creator. After all, it is a command He gave us (Gen. 2:15).

CONSIDER

• Leading a discussion in your Sabbath School class or small group, asking these two questions: (1) How do we show the world we are concerned about the environment while demonstrating respect for the Creator above the creation? (2) How should Christians handle environmental concerns considering that one of our beliefs is that the current form of this earth will pass away (1 Cor. 7:31)?
• Taking a hike or, better yet, a camping trip to commune with God in His created works.
• Making a “man on the street” video asking people what they do to “live green.”
• Deciding on two new habits you’re going to develop to save energy or reduce waste.
• Writing out all the verses you can find about God being the Creator. Then meditate on what it means to be a caretaker of His creation.
• Reading Job 38; 39 and considering how much God loves and enjoys every detail of His creation.

CONNECT

The Bible and History

“‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty’” (Rev. 1:8, NKJV).
“There are those times in life we see
With faith that is not flawed,
A chance to touch eternity
And catch a glimpse of God.”

How can we “catch a glimpse God”? Bible writers in both the Old and New Testaments insist that God directs history and reveals Himself through it. Through the history of lives such as Abraham, Noah, Moses, Esther, Saul, Nebuchadnezzar, Balaam,

Daniel, Paul, David, Jesus’ mother Mary, doubting Thomas, Mary and Martha, Judas, and a host of others, we see glimpses of God in so far as these people allowed or did not allow Him to direct their lives.

And therein lies the crux of the matter. Not all history reveals God’s will, because humans are free to make bad choices. And bad choices as well as good choices influence history. The point is that just because God works through history doesn’t mean He is the cause of all that happens. What it does mean is that despite the scheming and evil of human beings, God is there, working out His ultimate will in order to bring human history to a grand and glorious close.

This week, as you study how God has worked in and through world history, think about how you would like Him to work in and through you. Do you want Him to remember you as He did Noah, favor you as He did Hannah, fight for you as He did for the Israelites, intervene for you as He did for Esther, protect you as He protected Daniel, keep you safe as He did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, or strengthen you as He did Samson? In other words, how do you want others to glimpse God in your history?

*Carmella Reeves, Hopewell, Hanover, Jamaica
To what extent does God determine the affairs of the human race? Some take the view that every time we find a vacant parking space, lose a set of keys, or draw breath, the event has been directly caused by God's will. On the other end of the spectrum lies the idea that God's universe is governed by the laws of cause and effect and that He is generally quite absent. Both views have their problems. If God directly causes every event, then obviously He's been dropping the ball! Or if God's absent, then what's the point of praying? What does the Bible tell us about God's involvement in human history?

A kidnapped university student by the name of Daniel decodes the message for the king.

“And . . . Action” (Genesis 1; 2; John 1:1–4, 14–16; Heb. 2:1–9)

From its very first words, the Bible teaches that God created our world. Genesis 2 tells us that initially the earth was shapeless and empty, and that God methodically and creatively formed and filled it.

John 1 tells us more: It was through the Logos—the Word—that all things were created. The original Greek has the sense of an overarch-ing meaning. Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, used the word around 600 B.C. when he wrote that “all things come to pass in accordance with this Logos.” Although John was specifically referring to Christ, his readers would have been familiar with the concept expressed by Heraclitus.

When God spoke our world into existence, He had an overarching plan in mind—a purpose—a history ready to roll out. Like a movie director, He called “Action” to begin the drama of human history. However, a fallen angel and the first two people had another plot in mind (Genesis 3). This drama is summarized in Hebrews 2:10 as salvation for the human race. Its plot involves humans being reborn as God's children, maturing into His likeness (in which He created them), then being brought to glory. The twist is that the Author Himself steps into His own story. It is His suffering and death that are the keys to the plot.

“The Spoiler” (Daniel 2)

Daniel 2 relays the story of Nebuchadnezzar, possibly the most powerful man in the world at the time. He is a young king, still in his twenties. When he has a dream about the destruction of an enormous statue, he knows it's a message of “extra-terrestrial origin.” He's sure the message is important, but he does not know what it means.

A kidnapped university student by the name of Daniel decodes the
message for the king. Daniel says it’s about “things to come”—about the rise and fall of human nations and the eventual invasion of a kingdom from heaven.

Why did God choose to share a “spoiler” of His great drama with Nebuchadnezzar? The story doesn’t say. However, in Isaiah 52:6, God shares another “spoiler”: “ ‘Therefore in that day they will know / that it is I who foretold it. / Yes, it is I’ ” (NIV).

It’s not enough for God to merely surprise us with the plan of salvation. He also immensely enjoys broadcasting the “spoiler” through prophecy and then astounding us with its brilliance and seeming impossibility.

**Other Histories (Isaiah 60)**

Why isn’t Chinese history in the Bible? Or Polynesian history? The Thai civilization is ancient, yet it doesn’t get a single verse! One of the criticisms leveled at Bible-believing Christians is that our view of history is narrow, one-sided, and arrogant.

What about God’s people portrayed in Scripture? Did God involve Himself in their history? Or did He leave them to their own devices? What was so unique about their history?

The answer is that God’s drama came to a crisis point on planet Earth in the very real place and time of Golgotha, A.D. 31. The Old Testament traces the history that led to this point—and this history is specifically concerned with the “incubator people” God chose—the Hebrews. Why them? We don’t know, apart from the fact that they were told, “The Lord set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations” (Deut. 10:15, NIV).

The history related in the New Testament ends only a few years after Jesus arose from the grave. It is then that we see in this history a change of focus from a “local outlook” centered on Israel, to a global outlook. Still, the histories of other nations are not irrelevant. The Bible teaches that God also steered the destinies of other nations. See Isaiah 60, for example.

**Punchline (Rev. 22:1–5, 20)**

Victor Frankl, survivor of Nazi concentration camps and author of *Man’s Search for Meaning* discovered that the people who were most likely to survive the horrors of the Nazi regime were those who were able to find meaning in their suffering. Remember, then, that when life is hard, when catastrophe strikes, God truly is the Director of history. And His drama has a glorious end.

**REACT**

1. How does God steer the history of your life?
2. Does God know the future because it’s already set, or because He has the power to bring it about?


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Jotham Kingston, Lismore, Australia
Nebuchadnezzar thought he had built his empire by himself and for his own glory (Dan. 4:30), but he had not yet encountered the God who sets up kings and deposes them (Dan. 2:21).

“Soon after Daniel and his companions entered the service of the king of Babylon, events occurred that revealed to an idolatrous nation the power and faithfulness of the God of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar had a remarkable dream, by which ‘his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him.’ But although the king’s mind was deeply impressed, he found it impossible, when he awoke, to recall the particulars.”

“‘The dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.’”

Read in Daniel 2:27–45 how the king learned about the meaning of his dream.

“A most interesting and important history is given in Daniel 2.”

“The dream of the great image, opening before Nebuchadnezzar events reaching to the close of time, . . . that he might understand the part he was to act in the world’s history, and the relation that his kingdom should sustain to the kingdom of heaven. In the interpretation of the dream, he had been plainly instructed regarding the establishment of God’s everlasting kingdom. ‘In the days of these kings,’ Daniel had declared, ‘shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. . . . The dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.’ Daniel 2:44, 45.”

**REACT**

1. Given “the wonderful exactness with which the prophecy [in Daniel 2] had been fulfilled” when compared with the historical record of this event in textbooks, why do many people today question God’s control over world events?

2. In what ways do we live like Nebuchadnezzar did, and how can we avoid the pitfalls of his experience?

3. What evidence can you share with colleagues and friends that God is indeed involved in making history?

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_Darrin Parker, Burpengary, Queensland, Australia_
Daniel’s words recount his personal interaction—and Israel’s collective interaction—with the Babylonian empire. Reading Daniel in the original language reveals a book of three parts: Daniel 1:1–2:4 is written in Hebrew; 2:5–7:28 in Aramaic; with the remainder returning to Hebrew. It’s not surprising that Daniel was writing for a secular society rooted in Aramaic and a Jewish nation tied to ancient Hebrew. It is in the Aramaic portion that Daniel’s prophecy concerning King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream occurs. Here we witness God in control of our history and our future.

“‘There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.’”

Nebuchadnezzar threatened to have his wise men and magicians executed because they were unable to recount and interpret his dream. They, to their downfall, had admitted that no one could do so (Dan. 2:10). So Daniel was called on to interpret the king’s dream. In the midst of the royal court, Daniel stated that “‘No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about,’ before adding, “‘but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries’” (Dan. 2:27, 28, NIV).

When considering the image God presents to us concerning the history and future of this earth, it is easy to feel like Nebuchadnezzar’s failed advisors—that the mysteries are beyond comprehension, that we always will have more questions than answers.

Following Daniel’s response, Nebuchadnezzar recognized the authority and power of Israel’s God. His questions were answered, and he proclaimed, “‘Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries’” (Dan. 2:47, NIV).

Despite the complexities of history and prophecy, historical and biblical accounts present an image of a God who exerts ongoing, compassionate control. Through the book of Daniel we witness that He remained in control despite Babylon’s reign. The most powerful earthly leaders could not dethrone the King of heaven because “he set the earth on its foundations; / it can never be moved” (Ps. 104:5, NIV). Like Nebuchadnezzar, we will never find complete answers in the words of man (2 Peter 1:21). The answers lie with God, who is in control. The question is: will we listen?

**REACT**

1. What current evidence testifies that God is in control over the world?
2. How can we be blessed by taking to heart the words of prophecy?

Reflect on Revelation 1:3.
Have you ever heard the expression about not “being able to see the forest for the trees”? It means that we can be so close to what’s going on that we can’t see how the parts comprise the whole. Instead, we see only fragments rather than the entirety. History can be a bit like that. There is a dimension of it that we are not seeing. As humans, our perspective is limited and there are some things we can never understand—things that will make sense only in heaven. God, however, has shared with us the blueprint for redemption, giving us assurance and hope. He is the one constant in a changing world. Throughout the Bible, God continues to reveal His unchanging nature and purpose. We don’t know what the future holds, but we do know that God is and always will be right beside us. What does this mean for each of us?

Focus on enjoying the opportunities God sends your way.

We can learn from the past. Every Bible story contains lessons to learn that relate to our lives. The Bible is there to instruct us and to give us a model to follow (2 Tim. 3:15–17). When we examine the past, we can see God’s leading and that throughout time He is faithful and constant.

We can make the most of the present. God has a plan for each of us (Jer. 29:11). He loves us and wants to provide for us (Luke 12:25, 26). Instead of worrying about a past you can’t change or a future you can’t predict, focus on enjoying the opportunities God sends your way.

We can have hope for the future. The Bible is God’s Word. The word gospel means “good news,” and it truly is, for it tells us the history of our redemption (Eph. 1:13, 14). Always remember that God is in control. It might not seem like it sometimes, but then that’s what faith is for. When in doubt, ask Jesus, the Author of our faith (Heb. 12:2). We can connect with Him anytime, anywhere, through prayer.

REACT

1. How does our free will align with God’s role in human history?
2. Why should knowing God’s plan for this world affect the way we live our lives?
God speaks through His prophets, and these prophecies come true. Prophecy was given because God loves us enough to warn us of the consequence if we continue in sin; to show us He is true to His word; to help us increase our faith and faithfulness in Him; to give us hope for a future with Him; and to remind us of the value He places on us.

We do not need to convince God to answer our prayers.

God knows the end from the beginning. Sometimes He uses warnings or convictions to prevent negative things from happening. Sometimes He plans a great ending despite the mess we have made. Sometimes it seems as though He does nothing, and we question His love for us.

In His sovereignty and wisdom, God grants us freedom of choice. He did not program us like robots to follow Him. He did not use force or fear to move us. Because He loves us, He wants us to freely choose to love Him.

When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, sin and all its ugly consequences entered the world. God has turned this around by providing eternal life for all who choose it. God does all the good He can in all the circumstances He can, but often His hands are tied by our unwise choices.

We learn from Daniel 10:13 that God sent an angel when Daniel prayed for help, but the angel had to battle the prince of Persia for 21 days before reaching Daniel. We do not need to convince God to answer our prayers. He loves us and always wants our highest good. We cannot blame Him when evil gets in the way because we know that until the Second Coming, sin’s consequences must play out.

When we do not understand God’s battle or the choices of humankind that tie His hands, let’s trust Him anyway. Why? Because He is the epitome of love. No matter what happens, let us remember that He already has written the final paragraph. It’s a heroic “happily ever after” that outshines all other endings.

REACT

1. Have you ever prayed and wondered where your backup was? How did you react toward God, and what could your response be next time you are in a similar situation?

2. When God’s love is at the center of our study, we see things more clearly. How can you make Him the center of your study?
Life can be confusing, painful, and scary. What do we do when we need answers to life’s mysteries? We can be comforted that through the chaos lives a God who loves us and who knows the end from the beginning. He who “set the earth on its foundations” (Ps. 104:5, NIV) will never let us get lost in the events of our lives. We can communicate with our Father in heaven through prayer, just as Daniel, Moses, and Mary, Jesus’ mother, did. God wants to communicate with us. Will you let Him communicate with you today?

**CONSIDER**
- Telling a friend the answer to this question: Where did I see God today? Look in nature, or in a life experience where God is trying to reveal His mystery to you. Let Him tell it through you.
- Writing out a prayer to God, asking Him to help you understand something that has happened in your life that has left you frustrated or upset. Be prepared to give God the time He needs to reveal His wonderful mystery to you.
- Reading a newspaper article with a Bible study group and looking for ways in which God can reveal Himself through current events. Write down several Bible texts that support God’s revelation to you.
- Visiting a seniors’ home and telling stories of how God has revealed Himself to you and to others in the Bible. Ask the residents how God has revealed Himself to them throughout their lives.
- Searching the Bible for stories where God has revealed something to one of His faithful followers. Look for people in the Bible who did not wait for God to answer their questions and tried to find solutions on their own.
- Making a list of the times when you asked God to show Himself to you. Make another list of how He did reveal Himself to you. Spend some time talking with God about your desire to connect with Him and to see His mysteries revealed to you.

**CONNECT**
- Jeremiah 29:11–13; Daniel 2; Revelation 1:8.
- Max Lucado, *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*, pp. 51–54.
The Promise of Prayer

“Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice” (Ps. 55:17, NKJV).
The Bible is the source of all our doctrines. However, true faith is not sustained merely by intellectually believing these doctrines. Too many questions still easily arise. If the Bible is truly God’s Word, how do I know it is true? How do I know this belief system is not just some self-delusion to make me feel better? The promise of prayer is the antidote to such worry and doubt.

“Prayer is breathing for eternity.”

Prayer is how we establish a real friendship with God. Without prayer, people who claim to be Christians are dead bodies. The undertaking makes them look good on the outside, but they are dead to real life. So why is prayer necessary in the Christian life? “Prayer is spiritual breathing.”1 It is essential for maintaining a vital Christian walk. This becomes obvious when we study the life of Jesus. He made prayer an integral part of His time on earth. He prayed when things were going well (Mark 6:30–46) and when things were going badly (Matt. 26:36–46). In order to have a real connection with God that brings our faith to life and calms our doubts, we also need to make prayer a habit.

We need to make our prayers real. Instead of the sterile “now I lay me down to sleep,” we need to be engaged in what we pray about. The Psalms are full of unvarnished, “real” prayers. One example is Psalm 120. Verses 1 and 2 say, “In my distress I cry to the Lord, / that he may answer me: / ‘Deliver me, O Lord, / from lying lips, / from a deceitful tongue’ ” (NRSV).

Let us remember that “prayer is breathing for eternity. Prayer is prop- ping open our heart to a friend. We search for God, and when we find Him, we are the ones who have won the sweepstakes. God is personal.”2 This week we will look in more detail at the wonderful promise and necessity of prayer.

**REACT**

1. If we pray and don’t feel we have received an answer, what gives us assurance that God still hears us?

2. How can we make prayer more like a conversation? What are some ways in which God speaks to us?

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2. Ibid., p. 83.

*Troy Harden, Los Alamos, New Mexico*
Prayer isn’t always answered today like it was in Jesus’ time. The chance that someone we know will be healed like the man at the pool of Bethesda is much smaller than it used to be. The numerous stories we often hear from highly developed countries about miraculous healings can be greeted with some skepticism due to scam faith healers, etc. This skepticism can grow each time we know of someone who was diagnosed with a severe disease, prayed desperately to be healed, was even anointed, but then died anyway. It can be difficult to understand why God sometimes doesn’t respond to such prayers the way we want Him to. After all, He still has the power to heal miraculously.

Should the evidence for the effectiveness of prayer exist solely in the results we get from prayer? No. The evidence for prayer’s effectiveness exists because of the faith we have to pray in the first place. Prayer’s effectiveness exists because we believe that God hears our prayers and that He can help us somehow, some way when we pray to Him in faith.

God doesn’t live in a purely empirical setting, and He didn’t make prayer an empirically verifiable method of communication between Himself and us. John 3:16, 17 teaches us that if we believe in Christ, we will be saved. Yet nothing on this earth that we can measure empirically proves that we’re saved. The proof is in the faith we have that Jesus hears our prayers, that He rewards our faith in many different ways, and that instead of intermittently caring for us, He loves us without ceasing. We learn through faith that God hears us, loves us, and wants to help us. Prayer can’t be effective without a certain amount of faith. Evidence that prayer works is seen in the faith prayer produces in us. In turn, faith feeds our desire to often be in prayer with the Father—the Light upon our path, the Giver of our talents, the Answer to our many questions.

**REACT**

1. What types of miracles are we likely to see in modern societies?
2. During Jesus’ time, many people ignored His miracles, even the high priests. How do people ignore the miracles He performs today?
Prayer Seeks Strength Through Surrender (Matt. 26:34–44)

Prayer is taking hold of God’s divine strength by means of surrender. When Jesus prayed to His Father “not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:39, NASB), He was plugging into the strength of His Father. When we pray this same prayer, we also may plug into the strength and power of God. But in today’s world, this isn’t always easy. Too many things and activities vie for our attention, all of them promising us happiness and success. Furthermore, surrendering to God often involves fear and trembling, along with letting go of our selfish demands. That’s why we hear Jesus saying to His disciples just before His great surrender in Gethsemane, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death” (NASB). To give Himself completely to His Father, He had to surrender in prayer and die to His own anguish.

So it must be with us. We, too, can receive the strength Christ had to go forward with the plan of salvation when we, like Him, completely yield to the Father.

Prayer Is Devotion That Makes a Difference (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17)

Being devoted to prayer is not intended to be mere ritual. And being devoted to prayer is not for receiving spiritual warm fuzzies. No, we are to be devoted to prayer so that doors might be opened for the spreading of God’s Word. Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against “spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12, NASB). And the way we gain victories for the kingdom of God and the power to spread His Word are not through weapons of our carnal nature. Instead, such weapons are “divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses” (2 Cor. 10:4, NASB, emphasis added).

Nine of Jesus’ disciples learned this lesson the hard way while He was on the mount of transfiguration with Peter, James, and John (Mark 9:14–29). A man with a demon-possessed son came to them, but they were unable to drive out the demon. How embarrassing! And when they asked why they couldn’t cast the demon out, Christ said, “This
kind cannot come out by anything but prayer’ (Mark 9:29, NASB). Prayer connects us to our all-powerful God who gives us strength to cast out any type of demon.

Could it be that the reason our faith is lacking is that we are lacking in prayer? Could it be that our faith doesn’t grow because we never see the power of God, and the reason we never see the power of God is that we are not devoted to seeking a relationship with Him through prayer? The stronger our relationship grows with God as a result of prayer, the better able we will be to share Christ with our friends, family, and peers.

Prayer Is an Asking Faith (Heb. 11:6; James 4:2)

Just as “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26), so is discussing prayer without actually engaging in prayer. Too often we talk about prayer or read about different ways to pray, without ever really praying. Is that what you’re going to do with this lesson? Read about prayer, study it, talk about it, and then never really pray?

Why not stop and pray right now? Why not stop with your friends as you’re working through this lesson in your Sabbath School class and pray? Otherwise, this week’s lesson will be about as useless as a screen door on a submarine.

It’s not enough to intellectually believe that the Bible says, “Ask, and it shall be given you” (Matt. 7:7). We must actually do the asking! What are you waiting for?

REACT

1. In what areas of your life do you need to pray a prayer of surrender?
2. How or why does surrendering in prayer feel like work to you?
3. What is holding you back from surrendering your will to Christ?
4. How could your devotion to prayer make a difference in your home, school, or work place?
5. Who needs you to persevere for them in prayer, and why?
6. Who or what do you want to pray for right now? Go for it! Pray!
“When we do not receive the very things we asked for, at the time we ask, we are still to believe that the Lord hears and that He will answer our prayers. We are so erring and shortsighted that we sometimes ask for things that would not be a blessing to us, and our heavenly Father in love answers our prayers by giving us that which will be for our highest good—that which we ourselves would desire if with vision divinely enlightened we could see all things as they really are. When our prayers seem not to be answered, we are to cling to the promise; for the time of answering will surely come, and we shall receive the blessing we need most. But to claim that prayer will always be answered in the very way and for the particular thing that we desire, is presumption. God is too wise to err, and too good to withhold any good thing from them that walk uprightly. Then do not fear to trust Him, even though you do not see the immediate answer to your prayers.”

Many times in our lives we are faced with impossible situations. We cry to God, hoping He will answer our plea. We usually know exactly what we want to have happen, but often things don’t go according to our plan. How do we cope when this happens? We need to remember that God loves us with an everlasting love and that He combines this love with complete knowledge of our needs (Matt. 6:25–34). When we open our hearts to Him, we are humbled before Him. He knows us so much better than we know ourselves. Without Him we would be nothing. Prayer is our acknowledgment of our need of Him. It is our recognition of His ability to save us. Brokenness is apparent in Jesus’ prayer to His Father just before His death: “ ‘Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will’ ” (Matt. 26:39, NKJV). Empty of self and full of His Father’s love and power, He saved us from our sins. There is an abundance of grace, mercy, love, and power available to us when we ask God to direct our lives.

**REACT**

How can we learn to pray for God’s help all the time, not just when we’re going through hard times?

* Steps to Christ, p. 96

Andrea Cherne, Alamosa, Colorado, U.S.A.
If two people publicly vow to “love, honor, and cherish one another in sickness and in health,” but then proceed to live separate lives, the marriage will be over before it began. The two parties who made the public proclamation will proceed to the court of law, even if only one individual is guilty of not fulfilling the vows.

Prayer is the glue that bonds you to [God].

God is longing for a meaningful and committed relationship with His significant other—you! He desires you to acknowledge Him in your public and private life, just as Daniel did. Daniel did not just pray, visibly, at his window, three times a day (though this established a habit that would not be broken even when it violated the king’s law). Instead, Daniel lived in a constant state of prayer, talking to God at any time of the day and in any place.

In order to live in a state of prayer you must do the following:

Make a dwelling place in your heart for God’s Holy Spirit. Bible study alone cannot fulfill your deepest needs. Neither will an unlimited amount of mission trips or community service satisfy your soul. Contemporary Christian music or the latest religious bestseller can only partially point the way to a godly life. Time together with God in prayer is paramount.

Pray wherever you are and for whatever you need. God is available to anyone, anytime, anywhere. You don’t need any other person to intercede on your behalf. You don’t need any special words. You can even share a laugh or two with Him. There’s no rule that you can’t yell at Him if you’re angry. He’s touched deeply when you cry. In fact, God knows the secrets tucked in the darkest reaches of your heart even if you can’t express them with words. And when it’s all said and done, forgiveness is His favorite medicine.

Study God’s Word. Doing so helps you to understand your Maker. But remember that prayer is the glue that bonds you to Him. Know Him intimately. Ask for His Spirit. Pray.

REACT

1. Why are we so afraid to be authentic when we pray?
2. How does prayer render Satan powerless?
During a Week of Prayer, Campus Ministries encouraged students to post quotes about prayer on bulletin boards around campus. This was to remind everyone to pray throughout the day. The sign I posted on the first floor of the ad building (where it was sure to be seen) said, in bold letters, “Why pray when you can worry?” There’s something about this question that really hits home with me, probably because it’s so absurd. I don’t enjoy worrying, yet I choose it over prayer every day. Why?

Do you ever wish God had a Facebook page?

James 4:2 says, “You do not have, because you do not ask God” (NIV). I worry about things because I don’t ask God for peace of mind. This must make God sad. It’s like the hymn I often sing in church without really paying attention to the words: “O what peace we often forfeit, / O what needless pain we bear, / All because we do not carry / Everything to God in prayer.”* These words, written more than 150 years ago, are so profound and still so relevant. The angels must shake their heads in wonder at how much needless pain we go through, simply because we won’t take time to pray.

Do you ever wish God had a Facebook page? I’m friends with several people on Facebook whom I don’t ever actually talk to. Yet I feel connected to them just by checking their page to see what they’ve been doing. If God was on Facebook, I could check in, see what’s going on, and feel connected to Him without really taking the time to talk with Him. But what kind of friendship is that? God wants to have a close, meaningful relationship with us. He longs for us to know Him as well as He knows us. Prayer is an essential element of such a relationship.

So the next time I worry about something—oh, who am I kidding? I’m worrying about something right now! So the lesson I’ve been reminded of today (and hopefully you were too), is to give what you’re worrying about to God. Right now. In prayer. I’m not going to leave Him a note on Facebook. I’m calling Him up.

REACT

1. Should prayer be more of a focus than it currently is in Sabbath School and church?
2. What are you worrying about right now instead of talking about it with God? What’s keeping you from praying about it?

* The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, no. 499.
CONCLUDE

God's voice is heard primarily through the Scriptures when the Spirit is present. But even a deep intellectual-only understanding of the Bible will not develop a personal relationship with God. Likewise, discussing and studying the topic of prayer is not the same thing as actually listening and speaking to God in prayer. God our Father dearly loves us and is with us always. He wants us to take advantage of His Presence.

CONSIDER

- Asking God to guide you in creating a work of art that illustrates effective prayer.
- Writing several prayers for various aspects of life—praise, supplication, thanksgiving, lament, and one in which you “crawl into God's lap and let Him love you.” Before you begin, wait quietly, asking God to show you your heart and what He would have you pray. Once you've finished, say each prayer out loud to Jesus, who is “with you always” (Matt. 28:20, NIV).
- Inviting some friends to your home or dorm room to share with, and pray for, each other. When all who wish to share have done so, begin praying for one another, as each feels led.
- Answering these seven questions.* How many of these different experiences have you had? (1) Invitation: Has God ever invited you into His family? Or have you ever responded to a call from God? (2) Scripture: Have you ever heard God speak to you through Scripture? (3) Teachers: Has God ever spoken to your heart through a pastor or teacher? (4) Worship: Has God spoken to you through worship? (5) Conviction of right and wrong: Does God ever address issues you need to make right with Him or others? Does He ever affirm areas where you truly please Him? (6) A burden for others: Have you ever felt a strong urge to pray for someone? (7) Prompting: Has God ever prompted you to encourage someone?

CONNECT


Gill Bahnsen, Auburn, Washington, U.S.A.
God as Artist

“One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple”

(Ps. 27:4, NKJV).
Introduction

God, the Artist

Most of us probably haven’t thought too much about God being an artist. How disappointed that must make Him, because when we go to the very beginning of the Bible, there He is creating all sorts of marvelous things for our eyes, ears, nose, and touch to enjoy.

Let’s start from the beginning. If we look at what Genesis 1 says about His creation, we learn that all of it was good. Implied in the meaning of the word good is the fullness of what God had created, not only the perfection or the splendor of it all but the completeness of His creation. There was not anything lacking that should have been there, and what He had created coordinated “completely with His plan.”

As an artist, His creativity is beyond what our finite minds can comprehend.

When God created the world, He spoke splendor into existence. His very word had the power to transform the bleak nothingness into something marvelous. As an artist, His creativity is beyond what our finite minds can comprehend. He possesses the power to bring into existence that which we cannot grasp. We need only consider our amazing bodies and the intricate systems they possess (Job 5:8, 9; Ps. 139:14). If we stop to consider such intricacies, how much more will our faith in Him grow!

But there is more to God’s creative powers than nature. His desire is to create a Christlike character in each one of us that will, in turn, draw others to the Savior so that many people will proclaim God’s creative power (Pss. 65:9–13; 90:2).

God as an artist not only wanted to create a great and beautiful existence for us, but He desires to create beauty in our hearts. “ ‘I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh’ ” (Ezek.11:19, NIV). Are you willing to allow Him to create such a work of art in you so “that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet. 2:9, NIV)? As you study about the Master Artist this week, may your desire to do so increase.


Samba Chiseya, Cape Town, Republic of South Africa
**God’s Greatness in Space and in Us (Gen. 1:26, 27; Ps. 19:1)**

We worship a God who spoke this world and the heavens into existence. The splendor of the “Sombrero Galaxy” can be seen through the Hubble Space Telescope. This galaxy is filled with beauty, and its vastness helps us to realize how small we really are among all the millions of other galaxies.

However, even though we might feel small and insignificant in the face of such magnificence, we are still God’s most precious creation, for He created us in His image (Gen. 1:26, 27). “As human beings, we are to act like God because we were made to be like God. Though we are human, and not divine, we are to reflect our Maker within our dominion in every way possible.”

How are we to reflect our Maker? Galatians 5:13–26 describes God’s exquisitely beautiful character. It is this character that He seeks to duplicate in us through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit.

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**The Master Artist is the most skilful of all crafters. This is probably the most evident when we consider the human body.**

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**The Death of Lazarus (John 11:1–44)**

Only the Master Artist could make something beautiful out of death. Lazarus, a close friend of Jesus, lived with his two sisters, Mary and Martha, in Bethany. The sisters sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was sick, but Jesus promised that his sickness would not end in death. While Jesus was traveling to Judea, Lazarus died. Jesus and His disciples then began their journey to Bethany. By the time He arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Jesus asked to be taken to Lazarus’s grave, where upon arrival, He commanded Lazarus to come out. And so Lazarus arose from the dead.

The Master Artist, who created the world and the first humans, is more powerful than sin and the physical and eternal death it causes. Someday, all who have died in Christ will arise by virtue of this same power. And when they do, their bodies will be re-created for eternity, never to experience the eternal death of unrepentant sinners. “Every believer who has died will yet live, and everyone who is still living and believing will die, but not eternally. Christ did not promise the prevention of physical death; he guaranteed in himself to give abundant life, including resurrection and eternity with him. Christ did not prevent Lazarus’s physical death (after
being raised, Lazarus would eventually die again), but Lazarus had the guarantee of eternal life.”

**Fearfully and Wonderfully Made (Ps. 139:14)**

The Master Artist is the most skillful of all crafters. This is probably the most evident when we consider the human body. The brain is the most powerful organ in the body. It weighs only three pounds, and consists of three main parts. The cerebrum helps us to remember and solve problems. It also controls movement. The cerebellum controls coordination and balance, while the brain stem connects the brain to the spinal column and controls automatic tasks such as breathing and heart rate. The wrinkled surface of the brain performs a host of functions, including interpreting information we receive from our senses, solving problems, and storing memories. The brain truly outcomputers any computer system ever created by a person.

Then there is the human skeleton. The average human skeleton has 206 bones joined together by ligaments and tendons. An average of 2.6 million red blood cells are produced each second.

Surely we can praise God because we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14, NIV).

**REACT**

1. Contrast the fruit of the Spirit with the acts of the sinful nature (Gal. 5:19–23). Where do you see yourself in each list? Then consider yourself, and ask which artist you see creating your life—Satan or God?

2. Read 1 Corinthians 15:51–55 in light of the Master Artist being able to make something beautiful even out of death. To you personally, what is the most beautiful part of the mystery described in these verses?

3. Why do you think God designed the human body with such precision and exactness?

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The creation of man was God’s crowning act of Creation. “As man came forth from the hand of his Creator, he was lofty of stature and of perfect symmetry. His countenance bore the ruddy tint of health and glowed with the light of life and joy.”

“The Lord blessed Adam and Eve with intelligence such as He had not given to the animal creation. He made Adam the rightful sovereign over all the works of his hands. Man made in the divine image could contemplate and appreciate the glorious works of God in nature.”

Although the beauty of God’s creation still remains for us to enjoy, thorns and thistles are a constant reminder of the sin that changed human history. That is why we are to remember that “the hand that hung the worlds in space is the hand that wrought with delicate skill the lilies of the field. And as God is perfect in His sphere, so we are to be perfect in ours. The symmetrical structure of a strong, beautiful character is built up by individual acts of duty. And faithfulness should characterize our life in the least as well as in the greatest of its details.” We may be the only “letter” that other people may read that bears a reflection of God, the Master Artist. We are to be living witnesses for the sake of the kingdom. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that Paul asks, “Know ye not . . . that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.’ Man is God’s workmanship, his masterpiece, created for a high and holy purpose; and on every part of the human tabernacle God desires to write his law. Every nerve and muscle, every mental and physical endowment, is to be kept pure.”

**REACT**

How does knowing that you are God’s masterpiece make you feel? What does this knowledge make you want to change in your life?

1. Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 45.
There are many types of artists, but one that I find most fascinating is the potter. Making pottery is one of the oldest forms of technology and it is still popular among artists today. The potter’s work is mentioned in Jeremiah 18:1–7. As Jeremiah watches the potter, he sees that the vessel is flawed. Then the potter remakes the clay into another vessel. In the hands of the potter, the clay has no say. It totally depends on the potter to make of it whatever seems good to him. It is the potter who sees the vessel’s defects and repairs them in order that it can be useful to serve the purpose for which it was intended. The potter also knows which type of vessel to make from which type of clay and the correct temperature at which to fire the clay in order for it to become a strong, usable vessel.

God longs to be the Potter in our lives. Just as in Jeremiah 18:4 the clay vessel was marred, so we have been marred by sin, and we can no more fix our sins than the vessel in the potter’s hands could fix its own defect. The Lord desires to mold us into vessels that are good in His sight. He yearns to mend us through His grace. He knows that we are but dust (Ps. 103:14), and He knows just the right kind of shaping we need, and the correct temperature of the fiery trials we must go through, in order to be purified. Just as He said to Israel of old, He says to us today: “‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?’ says the Lord. ‘Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand’” (Jer. 18:6, NKJV).

REACT
1. Read all of Jeremiah 18. What is the Lord trying to teach Israel, and how can we apply it to our lives?
2. God is the One who shapes our characters and molds us. What is our role in this transformation process? What biblical evidence supports your answer?
3. Relate our helpless condition to Jeremiah 13:23. What, then, is our hope?
When we wrap a gift, we hope the person receiving it will appreciate it as well as the thought and time that went in to choosing it. God, in His loving kindness, gave us the gift of grace. In His unfathomable artistic genius, He wrapped it in the plan of salvation that was delivered through the sinless life and redemptive death of His Son. As we draw closer to God, we can marvel at the beauty of this grace He so selflessly lavishes upon us.

How can we keep our spiritual perception sharp?

We should never be oblivious to the beauty of God’s grace, for it speaks of redemption and transformation (Rom. 12:2). When we behold the Cross, we understand that it is only Christ “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7). Nothing else can surpass the beauty of this gift and the joy of a justified and transformed sinner who has received this grace. Sometimes our spiritual perception is dulled to the point where we marvel at the works of technology yet fail to appreciate the price the Master Artist paid to give us such a present. How can we keep our spiritual perception sharp so we can fully appreciate the gift of God’s grace and the beautiful new life it creates in us?

**Purify ourselves.** In 2 Corinthians 6:17–7:1 God promises that if the Corinthian Christians purified themselves from the evils of the world, He would be like a father to them and they would be His children. Today He offers that promise to us. With the Holy Spirit in our hearts, through God’s power and grace, we are able to wear the armor of God which helps us to remain pure against Satan’s advances (Eph. 6:10–18).

**Have faith.** Hebrews 11 is a biography of people in the Old Testament whose faith in God enabled them to do wondrous things. Take time to read this chapter and to be inspired by the beauty of the lives mentioned there—beauty made possible because of the Master Artist’s grace.

**Live in peace.** The writer of Hebrews urges us to do so in Hebrews 12:14. “Believers are to have as peaceful relations as possible with their unbelieving neighbors and associates, as well as harmonious relationships within the church. Certainly they should not be the cause of dissension. Christian fellowship should be characterized by peace and building up one another.”

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*Life Application New Testament Commentary, WORDsearch9 CD-ROM.*
What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word *art*? A beautiful painting? A striking photograph. Even a cartoon? For me, the word *art* conjures up an image of a Renaissance painting in a dark wooden frame. But the next time you want to check out some artwork, try looking in the mirror.

**Do our lives reveal the character of the One who made us?**

Of course, not one of us is perfect. Most of us think that we’re too fat or too skinny, too tall or too short. And some of us really hate our hair. Despite all our perceived flaws, we need to remember that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps.139:14) and that the One who made us loves us just as we are, warts and all. And if God can love us unconditionally, there is no reason why we shouldn’t love each other unconditionally.

The first verse in the Bible offers a glimpse into the magnificence of God’s creativity. “The art of creating the world and the heavens, was an act of absolute creative intelligent design: pre-planned, loving, and timed to perfection. Every color shape and form was thought through and pre-established, with the finesse of an artist and sculptor of ultimate Renaissance.” *

God’s creativity did not end with the Garden of Eden. His creativity continues every day. With you. With me. He has designed every inch of our bodies with care, precision, and love. “You created my inmost being; / you knit me together in my mother’s womb” (Ps. 139:13, NIV). But that’s only half of the equation.

Art enthusiasts often make a game out of identifying artists by their paintings. Everything from the subject matter to the brushstroke, even the type of paint used, is a clue to the master behind it. While our physical bodies reveal God’s incredible artistry, do our lives reveal the character of the One who made us? We need to ask ourselves one question: Would God look at our lives and say that they are good as He did when He first created the world?

**REACT**

Think about how your life reflects God’s character.

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CONCLUDE
David longed to behold the beauty of the Lord, the Master Artist (Ps. 27:4). And so should we. He is, after all, our Creator, and we are then part of that beautiful creation. Even after sin marred the world’s natural beauty and the perfection with which God originally endowed humans, there is still much about His handiwork to enjoy. As His grace re-creates us anew, let us enjoy our lives in Him and the beauty of the nature that surrounds us and teaches us about His love and grace.

CONSIDER
- Reading Genesis 1 and 2 from two or three different versions of the Bible. As you read, think about what you see, hear, smell, and feel emotionally as you “watch” the Master Artist create the world.
- Researching on the Internet one or two items of God’s creation that you particularly enjoy, for example, a particular flower, the stars, or the Sombrero Galaxy.
- Taking a series of nature photographs. Compile them into a book or a calendar and give it to someone you know who is in a nursing home or is housebound. There are many Web sites that can help you create such a project.
- Listening to the “music” nature makes: bird songs, rippling water, even the aurora borealis (northern lights). Many of these sounds are recorded on the Internet, on nature videos, or on CDs. Imagine the delight of sounds that existed in the Garden of Eden.
- Growing a vegetable garden with some of your church members and one or two other churches in your town. Give the produce to your town’s homeless shelter or soup kitchen.
- Studying a particular feature of God’s character. (His love, His creative power, His grace, His ability to forgive, etc.) Consider how He longs to re-create that same feature in you personally. How will your life become more beautiful as this creation occurs?
- Researching a feature of the human body (the ear, the eye, the heart, etc.) and then re-creating it in a pencil sketch.

CONNECT
Psalm 104; Matthew 5:25–34.
Jo Ann Davidson, Toward a Theology of Beauty: A Biblical Perspective.

Clara Reynolds, Fairfax, Virginia, U.S.A.
Love Stories

“The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you’ ” (Jer. 31:3, NKJV).
A handsome war hero. A beautiful princess. A love story told from generation to generation.

The war hero and the princess are in love; but her father, the king, will not let them marry for he feels his daughter deserves someone better. So he sends the hero away to defeat 100 enemy soldiers. If he is successful, he will be allowed to marry the king’s daughter. Despite all odds, the war hero returns home victorious. So the king gives his daughter to him. The king is furious, however, and sends his men to kill the hero in his sleep. The daughter knows about the plot, warns her beloved, and helps him to escape.

[God] will always be there for us, for His love is inexhaustible.

The war hero is now a hunted man, and his princess is given in marriage to someone else. After several years, however, the war hero manages to become king, and his princess returns to live with him. Does this story sound familiar? It should, because it’s the biblical narrative of David and Michal.

God is love. We hear that all the time in our churches, and we know it is true. He will always be there for us, for His love is inexhaustible. It says so in the Bible, which is, among other things, a book of history starting from the day our world was created and ending with the return of Jesus and the re-creation of our world. Because the Bible covers such a vast amount of time, we don’t find a detailed description of everything that happens during that time period. Yet even so, God inspired the Bible’s authors to include love stories. God wouldn’t have included these stories if they weren’t important to Him and to us. This week, we will study some of these love stories to see what they teach us about God and what we can learn from them for our world today.

**REACT**

1. Why do you think people don’t usually see God as a romantic?
2. What does God’s inclusion of these love stories in the Bible say about His character and His view on romance?
There is an interesting modern love phenomenon, which just may be reaching toward an anticipation of real love—even as it seldom reaches it, and often allows the grossest false love to sneak in behind a mask. I’m talking about online friendships. I thought it vaguely odd years ago when I met the first couple that had connected, corresponded, and fallen in love, before meeting in person. They seemed to be in love. Even enough to get married! Years later they are still married. There are untold thousands since who have begun a relationship online that ended in the real thing.

Some of us snickered at the professor’s habit of getting the married couples in class to read Song of Solomon aloud.

Is online love really so dissimilar from those of us who love God—never having met Him? We’ve read about Him; reached out to Him emotionally; have at times received online feedback, enough even for some of us to have totally changed our lives and to have formed a deeply emotional attachment strong enough to last a lifetime and beyond.

The Song of Solomon obviously has a surface narrative of human love. But it is no stretch to read it, as the rabbis did, as a love affair between an emotionally involved God and His people. Thus read, it portrays the passion of the Creator for His creation—all be it a passion marred by sun (sin!) seared skin, and night terrors.

Once I took a class that taught the Bible as literature. Some of us snickered at the professor’s habit of getting the married couples in class to read Song of Solomon aloud. But his method worked, and we saw the sublime parallel. Those who think this poem a lecher’s ditty haven’t taken the time to read it as the drama of the soul. Maybe it’s time they got online with “Jesus, lover of my soul.” After all, we have long told ourselves that marriage was designed to teach us more fully about God’s love. And God persists in likening His relationship to His people and His church as a marriage relationship. There must be something in the Song, after all!

**REACT**

1. What parallels exist between the Song of Solomon and the book of 1 John?
2. What is the essential characteristic of true love?
3. The New Jerusalem “as a bride adorned” (Rev. 21:2). How is this an expression of true love?
God’s Love Revealed (Gen. 2:21–25)

As stated in this week’s introduction, this week’s lesson is about love stories in the Bible—what they teach us about God and what we can learn from them for our world today. It is interesting to note that the first love story in the Bible appears in the very beginning of it with God’s creation of Adam and Eve.

This first couple was equal in every way. Any functional differences between them in no way implies inequality. This equality is seen in the Bible’s first love poem. In this poem, Adam declares that Eve is “‘bone of my bones / and flesh of my flesh’” (verse 23, NIV).

Because God created Eve out of Adam’s body, man is to leave his father and mother in order to be one with his wife—an unbroken unit on earth so long as they both shall live.

The love of God demonstrated in various situations throughout Scripture comes to its ultimate fruition in an unlikely way.

Considering the marriage analogies in Scripture, such as Matthew 22:1–14 and Revelation 19:7, 8, we can be assured that Jesus has taken it upon Himself to restore the broken relationship between God and humanity. We have comfort that Jesus will do whatever it takes for the relationship between Him and humanity to be re-created in the way it was originally meant to be.

God’s Love Explained (Exod. 20:5; Isa. 62:5)

The phrase “I the Lord thy God am a jealous God” can be troublesome to some people because of the baggage the word jealousy carries in many cultures. Through an analysis of all the times this word is used in connection with God’s relationship to His people (for example, Deut. 5:9; Josh. 24:19), it is clear that jealousy in these instances refers to God’s great desire that His broken relationship with humanity be restored. His jealousy is an expression of His desire for us to have no other gods before Him and to have a strong relationship with Him as our God. Such jealousy means that when we return to Him, His mercy is able to outweigh His justice regarding our sin.

Isaiah 62:5 revisits the marriage theme of Genesis 2:21–25. God is jealous of us the way a bridegroom is jealous of his bride. His desire is for no other, and He rejoices in His relationship with us.
God's Love Experienced (Isa. 43:4)

Isaiah 43:4 occurs in the midst of a description of what God has done for Israel. He created them, redeemed them, and calls them by name. Furthermore, He is with them in their trials (verses 1 and 2). In verse 4, God states that Israel is precious in His sight. He also relates the lengths He will go to for those whom He loves. Trading people for Israel's lives refers to such times as when God delivered Israel from Pharaoh during the time of Moses and Sennacherib during the time of Isaiah.¹

God's Love Demonstrated (Rom. 5:8)

The love of God demonstrated in various situations throughout Scripture comes to its ultimate fruition in an unlikely way. We see in Christ's crucifixion the ultimate proof that God is willing to do whatever it takes to restore His relationship with us. That if necessary (and it was), He Himself in the form of Christ would come to earth not only to show us how to live but to also suffer death at the hands of His own creation. Such love teaches us that with God's help, husbands and wives can and should go to great lengths to help one another in many different and sometimes difficult ways as they travel the road to heaven together.

God's Love Victorious (Rom. 8:37–39)

Not only will God do whatever it takes to win us back, but once we accept His love, nothing can separate Him from us. Thus His love will ultimately be victorious in reconciling us with God.

“Instead of troubles separating us from the love of Christ . . . , on the contrary, ‘through him that loved us’ we are victorious over them. There is no affliction so heavy, no temptation so strong, that it cannot be overcome through Christ. For the One who loved us enough to give Himself for us is even now living in us to continue the work of our salvation” (Gal. 2:20). Therefore, we can do all things through Him who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13). Paul experienced and acknowledged this saving power, and it led him to exclaim, ‘Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 15:57).”²

REACT

Think of ways in which God’s love—revealed, explained, experienced, demonstrated, and victorious—can help to keep marriages strong and vibrant.

². Ibid., 2nd ed., vol. 6, p. 579.
At least four different types of love exist—love for one’s friends, siblings, children, and spouse. When most people think about God’s love they often focus on the first three types of love. Rarely do people think of God having a passionate love toward us. Yet Ellen White compares Christ’s love for us as a groom to his bride. “Christ honored the marriage relation by making it also a symbol of the union between Him and His redeemed ones. He Himself is the Bridegroom; the bride is the church, of which, as His chosen one, He says, ‘Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee.’ [Song of Solomon] 4:7.”

“God has bound our hearts to Him by unnumbered tokens in heaven and in earth. Through the things of nature, and the deepest and tenderest earthly ties that human hearts can know, He has sought to reveal Himself to us. Yet these but imperfectly represent His love.”

These sights and wonders represent a fraction of how much He loves us. The ultimate sign of His love for us was giving us His Son to save us from sin. When we ask God how much He loves us, He points to Jesus on the cross, and says, “This much!” “The gift of Christ reveals the Father’s heart. It testifies that, having undertaken our redemption, He will spare nothing, however dear, which is necessary to the completion of His work.” “Such love is without a parallel. Children of the heavenly King! Precious promise! Theme for the most profound meditation! The matchless love of God for a world that did not love Him!”

Yes, God spares no expense for His bride, yet like a gentleman, He will not force Himself on anyone. God’s love for the world is comparable to a man who longs for the day when He can marry His bride. Yet at the same time His love encompasses the other three types of love. No human relationship can match the way God feels about us. God the Father, Friend, Brother, and Romantic will one day return to take His beloved home.

**REACT**

How does God try to win your heart?

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Kaitlyn Gavin, Glen Burnie, Maryland, U.S.A.
We have all heard before that God is love (1 John 4:8), and that we need to have an intimate relationship with Him. But how would we translate that into day-to-day life? Because we are the bride of Christ, let’s think of our relationship with God as a “romantic” relationship. There are some basic principles that make a good marriage that also can apply to our relationship with God:

**Sing [God] a love song or two.**

*Exclusivity.* Not many husbands or wives would appreciate their spouse longing after someone else. Likewise, the Lord said He is “a jealous God” (Exod. 20:5). He desires us to worship only Him, just as one spouse in a marriage desires the exclusive love of the other spouse. If anything is coming between you and your Savior, rethink your priorities so God will always be your number one.

*Quality time.* A wife and husband who rarely spend time together risk the good health of their marriage. The same goes for our relationship with God. So set aside some time to go on a date with Him, whether it be going to church, taking a walk in nature, or just being still before Him (Ps. 46:10). Let Him be a part of your daily life. Invite Him along to class and to hang-out time with friends. Let your soul thirst for Him like a deer thirsts for water (Ps. 42:1). The more you are with Him, the more you’ll long to be in His presence.

*Communication.* When was the last time you told God you loved Him? What about the last time you sat down with Him and had a serious heart-to-heart talk? Communication has always been an essential part of love. So spend time each day communicating with your Savior. Talk to Him through prayer, and open your heart and mind to let Him respond. Always have that connection open between you and Him, so you can truly pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). Worship Him with the fullness of your heart; tell Him how you can’t live without Him; sing Him a love song or two, for He desires the praises of His people.

Let us learn to love the Lord with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength—with everything in us.

**REACT**

1. How is loving God like loving a spouse? How is it completely different?
2. In what areas do you need to strengthen your relationship with God?
When we observe today’s media, we can’t help but notice that love is a dominant theme. Even the media during our parents’ time and generations before, spoke of love. Discussions on love will never cease. Love is even the underlying message of the Bible.

Biblical scholars point out that the Bible describes two different types of love—phileo (brotherly love), and agape (unconditional love, likened to the love parents have toward their children). But does the Bible speak of a romantic love? Much of today’s romantic love is based on imagination. We imagine romance as it is portrayed in novels, poems, magazines, television programs, and music. Such portrayals are intended to activate a certain kind of love between a man and a woman, but when we see romance from God’s perspective, we’re in for a glorious experience. So let us explore how marriages took place during the time of Jesus.

The process of marriage occurred in two stages called Kiddushin and Nisuin. Kiddushin is more binding than the engagement period of Western cultures. During this period of time, the woman is legally the man’s wife. And during this time, the husband prepares a place for his wife. This period can be as long as a year. At the time of Nisuin, the husband brings his wife to the home he has prepared for them, and they begin their life together.* Although this was a Jewish custom from long ago, it still seems quite romantic. Christ is now in heaven, preparing a place for us. This is for us the time of Kiddushin. We are His bride, waiting for the time of Nisuin, when He returns for us and takes us back to heaven with Him. This is the greatest romantic story of all times—to know that the One who died and rose again is now taking the time to prepare a place for us. As we prepare for that great wedding, let us ask ourselves how our lives reflect our love for Him.

CONCLUDE

In modern times romantic love has been slickly packaged to sell flowers, candy, and other merchandise. We weep over the touching card, go weak in the knees at the gallant marriage proposal, and are swept away by the happy ending. We are told that if love is real, it will do something for us, something spectacular. If real romance is truly found in extravagant gestures, then God still provides us with the ultimate example in giving us Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins—a love that risked everything and gave everything. What could be more extravagant than that?

CONSIDER

- Sending God an e-mail at http://sendemailtogod.com telling Him why you love Him. Be specific.
- Composing a love poem or love letter to God. Don’t get caught up in word choices. Concentrate instead on expressing your gratitude for His love and His many gifts to you.
- Memorizing passages of Scripture that talk about love: Song of Solomon 2:4; John 13:34, 35; John 14:23; Romans 5:5; 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:22, 23; Ephesians 5:2; 1 Timothy 1:5; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 John 3:14; 1 John 4:12, 13, 17, 18.
- Staging a short skit (no script needed) about the Jewish traditions of Kiddushin and Nisuin (Thursday’s lesson). In your skit, convey the excitement of the groom (Jesus) and the anticipation felt by the bride (us).
- Researching love in the animal kingdom by studying the monogamous mating habits of some animals (for example: gibbons, swans, prairie voles, bald eagles, and turtle doves). Reflect on what this can teach us about love.
- Listening to and/or singing or performing the song “Hallelujah” from the album Heather Williams EP by Heather Williams, a song she wrote praising God and reaffirming her love for Him after the death of her son.

CONNECT

1 Corinthians 13; Song of Solomon; John 3:16.

Céleste Perrino-Walker, Rutland, Vermont, U.S.A.
The Promise of His Return

“‘Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work’”

(Rev. 22:12, NKJV).
Dom and Ron grew up in the rural suburbs of southwestern Kenya. Dom was from a Christian family who regularly attended Sabbath services. She grew up within the Adventist lifestyle. The fact that her father was a church minister and her mother a shepherdess helped her to live a Christian lifestyle.

Ron also grew up in a Christian family. He was an intelligent gentleman whose father was a teacher and his mom a nurse. He, too, lived a Christian lifestyle, having grown up in a God-fearing family. Dom and Ron grew up together. They shared jokes and activities as children, youth, and young adults. Eventually, they fell in love with one another and became engaged to marry.

Dom studied zoology and graduated with her Bachelor's degree. One year later, Ron graduated with his Bachelor's degree in actuarial sciences. Soon after, Dom and Ron had their wedding. After the birth of their first child, Ron received a letter offering him a postgraduate scholarship in Russia. Ron’s acceptance of this privilege would not be easy for this young family. They would have to live apart while Ron studied in a faraway land. Many people accompanied Ron to the airport. All the while, Ron kept saying, “I'll be back. I promise.” Naturally, Dom found it difficult to accept her husband’s departure. With tears rolling down her cheeks, he just kept promising, “Baby, I’ll be back. I promise.”

This week, we are studying about Christ’s second coming and how we should prepare for it. As we know, whole generations have been caught up in frenzied speculations regarding the exact time and place of this event, only to find their predictions worthless. Today, many Christians still struggle with the big questions regarding the return of Christ: Is He really coming back? What’s taking Him so long? How should the promise of Christ’s second coming affect us, and how can we prepare for it? These important questions provide a guideline for our study this week.
Vigilance (Luke 12:42–48)

Christ’s imminent second coming motivates Christians to live godly lives in order to be ready for His return. In Luke 12:42–48, Jesus shares a parable with His disciples concerning how one should prepare for His return. In this parable, the master represents Jesus, and those who claim to follow Him are represented by the servants. The master expects his servants to work, regardless of the responsibilities he has given them. Those servants who have been faithful to their work will be rewarded. However, those servants who lag behind in their responsibilities because it seems to them that their master has delayed his return will lose out in a big way. Jesus’ point is that no matter what He asks any one of us to do, we should do it faithfully, regardless of how long it seems to be taking Him to return. We need to be watchful at all times. If we are to claim our place in heaven, we must be as the faithful and vigilant servant, who was not caught off guard by his master’s return.

The Promise of His Return (John 14:2, 3; 2 Pet. 3:1–10)

There is an old adage that says, “Promise is a debt.” Jesus’ promise to return is proof that He will be pay that debt, for He expresses that promise in the Greek present tense. “This so-called futuristic present gives emphasis to the certainty of the event. The event is thought of as being so certain as to be already taking place.”

Peter reassures us of Christ’s promise to return by reminding us that God’s sense of time and timing is different from ours and that to remain faithful while we wait, we should continue to study God’s Word and live according to it as we await His return. He warns us of scoffers, the false teachers who taint the message of Christ’s return with counterfeits.

We are never asked to look forward to the tribulations that precede Christ’s return, nor are we asked to interpret God’s timetable. Rather, we are urged to look forward to Christ’s second coming. Such a focus will have a purifying effect on us as we seek to allow the indwelling Holy Spirit to prepare us for that great day.

Faith is the power that drives the life of a true Christian.
By Faith (Heb. 9:28; 11)

Faith is the power that drives the life of a true Christian. We need faith to believe the incredible! What is faith? It is a constant commitment to believe God against all odds. Without faith, Christ's return becomes an impossibility. Faith, however, allows a person's heart and mind to accommodate biblical truths that would otherwise make no sense.

If by faith, Daniel believed God could deliver him from lions when there was no way for him to escape, then why should it be difficult for us to believe that Christ is coming again, no matter how long time seems to drag on? By faith, we are to live in the light of Christ's second coming, so that when He finally does return, we shall hear Him to say us “ ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’ ” (Matt: 25:23, NIV).

Why the Delay? (Dan. 2:44; Rev. 6:9, 10)

From as early as the time of the apostles, many people have been caught up in the urge to set a date for the Second Coming, despite the fact that Christ has said in Matthew 24:42, “ ‘You do not know on what day your Lord will come’ ” (NIV). As it was for the apostles, the exact time of Christ's return remains hidden from us. However, from as long ago as when Adam and Eve sinned, humans have had God's assurance that there is a Redeemer and that Christ will return to set up an everlasting dynasty that will never be destroyed by any worldly authority (Dan. 2:44).

In the same way it was in the days of the apostles, so it is with us today. The Judge is still at the door. The day is still at hand. He can come at any moment. What we consider to be a delay is simply His long-suffering kindness. Because He doesn't want anyone to perish, He is giving more time for everyone to repent. As such, the command to be ready and watchful is as applicable to us as it was to the early church. In fact, the return of Christ should be an even more urgent issue for us, because it draws nearer with every passing day.

REACT

1. What should Christ’s return teach you personally about how to live?
2. How should the second coming of Christ affect us as a church?
3. What might you personally do to be vigilant at all times while you are waiting for Christ’s return?

The subject of Christ’s second coming remains one of the pillars upon which our faith is built.

“The coming of the Lord has been in all ages the hope of His true followers. The Saviour’s parting promise upon Olivet, that He would come again, lighted up the future for His disciples, filling their hearts with joy and hope that sorrow could not quench nor trials dim.”

“The angels had assured them that the very one whom they had seen go up into heaven, would come again even as He had ascended.”

“Christ had ascended to heaven in the form of humanity. The disciples had beheld the cloud receive Him. The same Jesus who had walked and talked and prayed with them; who had broken bread with them; who had been with them in their boats in the lake; and had that very day toiled with them up the ascent of Olivet—the same Jesus who had now gone to share His Father’s throne. And the angels had assured them that the very one whom they had seen go up into heaven, would come again even as He had ascended.”

In Noah’s time, scoffers laughed at the thought of a worldwide flood that would destroy the earth. After all, it had never rained before. “Christ declares that there will exist similar unbelief concerning His second coming. . . . When the professed people of God are uniting with the world, living as they live, and joining with them in forbidden pleasures; when the luxury of the world becomes the luxury of the church; when the marriage bells are chiming, and all are looking forward to many years of worldly prosperity—then, suddenly as the lightning flashes from the heavens, will come the end of their bright visions and delusive hopes.”

**REACT**

1. How can we balance our temporal life with our belief that Christ will someday return? Do you believe that Christ will come again?

2. In terms of your relationship with Christ, do you think He should come quickly or delay a bit?

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Hellen Atieno, Rongo Township, Kenya
In Romans 13:11, 12, Paul underscores the urgency and the imminence of Christ’s return with four strong phrases: “the hour has come,” “our salvation is nearer,” “the night is nearly over,” “the day is almost here” (NIV). Even more so today, this call should instill in us the awareness that time is short and opportunity fleeting. Paul, like any other Christian of his day, was confident that Christ would come in his lifetime. While addressing this issue with the early church, he used personal pronouns that show he clearly was convinced that he would be among those caught up alive to meet the Lord (1 Thess. 4:15, 17).

**What seems like ages to us is to Him just a mere blip in eternity.**

If Paul believed that he would be alive to see the Second Coming, how much more should we believe! We also should remember that none of us knows exactly when we will die. So we should always be ready for Christ’s return.

It is natural, however, for skeptics to think that Christ’s delay means He will not fulfill His promise (2 Pet. 3:3, 4). But the genuine believer’s focus should be to hold firm in the faith, because even though it seems that He tarries, Christ’s return is closer now than it’s ever been.

It has been so long since Paul wrote to the Romans about Christ’s soon return, that many Christians today exist in a state of lethargy. They have become like the foolish virgins who did not purchase enough oil to wait for the bridegroom (Matt. 25:1–13).

We cannot interpret God’s timetable using our own concept of time. God has a purpose for delaying Christ’s return; and what seems like ages to us is to Him just a mere blip in eternity. That is why we should be patient concerning the Second Coming. In the words of Christ Himself, we should “‘watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping’ ” (Mark 13:35, 36, NKJV).

**REACT**

Which one is important: the exact time of Christ’s second coming, or just His coming? Why?
Writing to the church in Rome, Paul talks about changing from a sleeping state of sinfulness (darkness) to putting “on the armor of light” (Rom. 13:12, NKJV). Then in Hebrews 12:1, we are encouraged to lay aside anything that keeps us from running the race before us. After accepting Christ as our Savior, we are to accept the Holy Spirit in our lives so we can be transformed into Christ’s likeness (Gal. 5:22, 23). In practical terms, we are to let the following principles guide our lives as we wait for Christ’s return.

**Steadfastness.** We are called to be patient and to establish our hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand (James 5:8). “Whatever the circumstances, James encourages us to be rock solid in our faith and to have a faith-inspired joy that permeates every part of life.”¹

“Christ admonished His disciples ever to be in readiness for His return, and devout Christians in all ages have treasured the hope that His advent might be near in their day.”²

**Kindness.** Rather than grumble and complain about others, we must exercise Christian unity and kindness because Christ, the Judge (James 5:9), is coming soon, and He is the only One qualified to be our Judge. (See also Matthew 7:1–5.)

**Prayer.** Our petitions in the name of Christ connect us directly to Him. Therefore, we should be serious and watchful in our prayers. Such seriousness and watchfulness requires that with the help of the Holy Spirit, we have clear minds and be self-controlled (1 Pet. 4:7).

**Holy conduct and godliness.** When we understand that the things of this world will be destroyed (2 Pet. 3:10, 11), we will want to seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance in helping us to live godly lives. Then when our Savior comes, we shall be as He is. In 2 Peter 3:11, “Peter reveals that his great concern is not with events but with men, that is, with the characters of his readers. He has gone into detail about last-day events in order to bring before them the imperative need for holiness.”³

**REACT**

Consider prayerfully these four principles. Which of them do you feel in need of the most? Take a moment to ask God to help develop that principle.

1. Life Application New Testament Commentary, WORDsearch9 CD-ROM.
3. Ibid., p. 616.

Goretty Atieno, Homa-bay, Kenya, East Africa
The subject of the second coming of Christ reminds me of my third-grade teacher. He was an Adventist and very knowledgeable when it came to the Bible. Even though at that time I was not an Adventist, I loved how he presented the topic of Christ’s return. I imagined that He would surely come back even before I did my final exams in primary school; and even though I was a child, I decided to change some of my bad habits so I would be ready for Him.

To my surprise, however, I completed primary school, went to high school, and proceeded to college. And now I am married and have children. However, Christ has not yet returned. However, as an Adventist Christian, I continue to look forward to the Second Coming with renewed faith.

While we wait for Him, we need to look to Christ as our Example. We must persevere, stand firm, and not lose heart, even if we should die before He comes. We should remain focused on the promise of His second coming, despite what is happening to us personally. Faith will help us to cultivate a watchful expectancy regarding His return. Such expectancy will prevent us from becoming obsessed with earthly events. Believing in Christ’s soon return will turn our hearts heavenward.

Like the souls of the martyrs, we should keep our faith alive at all times and leave the rest to God. Then it will not matter if Christ returns this year or one hundred years from now. To be ready should always be our goal.

**REACT**

1. How strong is your faith regarding the second coming of Christ? If you feel that your faith is weak, how might you be able to strengthen it?
2. What earthly events are you currently worried or obsessed about? How can focusing on Christ’s return take your mind off these events?
3. Consider some of the habits you have that might be keeping you from focusing on Christ’s return. Ask Him to help you to break those habits.
CONCLUDE

For the expectant Christian, the “now and not yet” of Jesus’ triumph over sin and His ongoing physical absence are continual spiritual struggles. It is heartening to know that this earthly life is not all there is, for Jesus will soon make “all things new” (Rev. 21:5). It is not just a fable, but a true promise that will be kept. Jesus promises to be with us every day of our lives, through all the challenges that waiting for His return will bring us.

Jesus prepared us for the anguish of this waiting time through such parables as the wise and foolish bridesmaids. Yes, we will feel that our Savior delays His return. But if we stay in tune with the Holy Spirit, keeping our eyes on Christ even when He seems the most distant, we will soon hear the Master declare, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:23), as He comes to take us home.

CONSIDER

- Brainstorming ways God may wish to use your talents for building His kingdom.
- Exploring the Bible with a concordance for all the references to Jesus’ return and how we should relate to it.
- Interviewing fellow church members of various ages as to how the Second Coming makes them feel. Excited? Scared? Ambivalent?
- Listening to the Delirious song “Come Like You Promise.”
- Pondering how near or far major life events seemed to you as a child. Relate your discoveries to how you might be feeling about the nearness of the Second Coming.
- Painting an image representing our light shining for God.

CONNECT

Acts 1:6–8; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11; 2 Peter 3.
Christ’s Object Lessons, chap. 29, “To Meet the Bridegroom.”
June Strong, Song of Eve.
If you have not yet received a copy of CQ for Second Quarter 2012, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

**Lesson 1: Defining Evangelism and Witnessing**

**Logos:** Acts 4:33; 13:1–49; 22:2–21; 1 Pet. 3:15; 1 John 1:3

**Memory Text:** “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19, 20, NKJV).

**Key Thought:** If we are to be involved in fulfilling the great gospel commission, we must understand what we mean by *evangelism* and *witnessing*.

An employee often is given a job description. It’s a detailed account of expected duties.

The Bible also speaks about a “job description,” and in this case, it’s one for God’s people. In 1 Corinthians 15:58, the apostle Paul admonishes the Corinthian believers to be “always abounding in the work of the Lord” (NKJV). While Paul does not specify what work he is referring to, a similar phrase is used in 1 Corinthians 16:10, referencing the work of the Lord done by Timothy and Paul in evangelism and witnessing about Jesus Christ and the plan of salvation. Thus, Paul’s admonition in chapter 15 certainly included the work of spreading the gospel.

This week we will explore what evangelism and witnessing actually are; in other words, we’ll seek to uncover our biblical “job description.”

**Lesson 2: Every Member Ministry**

**Logos:** John 4:35–41; Acts 14:27; 2 Cor. 5:15–20; Eph. 4:12; 1 Thess. 1:5–8.

**Memory Text:** “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9, NKJV).
Key Thought: Too often evangelism and witnessing are seen as the pastor's job alone; this attitude is wrong.

According to Peter, God’s people are chosen, called to be a “royal priesthood.” Because the priests were given a ministry, it follows that if we are called to the “priesthood,” then we have a ministry, as well. We must understand, however, that we are not called merely in order to perform a ministry. First and foremost, God is calling us into a relationship with Himself, and it is out of that relationship that we are compelled to share with others the great things that God has done, and is doing, for us. This is at the heart and soul of personal witness. Each of us, therefore, has a personal ministry to perform, and it involves proclaiming the praises of Him who has called us “out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

This week we will explore the concept of “every member ministry” and see how each individual experience contributes to the church’s corporate ministry. The point being that each of us has a role to play in the work of outreach and evangelism.