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There are times when life is more than the update on Facebook, the tweets, the IMs, and the 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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teacher’s guide

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Kwabena Donkor, Ph.D.
You’ll learn more this quarter about the Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs, especially the most recent addition, “Growing in Christ.” As you delve deeper into the Sabbath School lesson material, your faith will be strengthened as you discover how the beliefs are beautifully and logically connected. 978-0-8280-2639-0. US$13.99

Kwabena Donkor, Ph.D.
Associate Director
Biblical Research Institute
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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 is 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.
The Great Controversy—The Foundation

“There will be enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel’” (Gen. 3:15, NKJV).
The word controversy means “a prolonged public dispute, debate, or contention,” a “disputation concerning a matter of opinion.” Most of us are familiar with the great controversy between God and Satan, good and evil. But the hardest thing to identify in this controversy is what is being debated, and who is right.

To determine what is being debated, we must go to a time when there was no controversy. In heaven, there were glorious angels, one of whom was particularly so (Ezek. 28:13–17). His name was Lucifer. We don’t know when his heart led him to sin, but one thing is for sure—he began to question God’s authority, and in so doing, he began to covet God’s position ( Isa. 14:14). In Genesis 3:5, Lucifer spoke to Eve, getting her to question God’s authority and covet His position: “ ‘God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’ ” (NIV). (Remember that Lucifer was talking about being God, assuming the position of God, instead of being made in the likeness of God. God made humans in His likeness [Gen. 5:1]; but Lucifer sought to be God and deceived humans into thinking they could do the same.)

Since then, part of God’s work has been to defend His identity, to prove that He is the only One worthy to be called the Great I Am and to be worshiped. The ultimate revelation of God’s worthiness is seen in Jesus. God humbled Himself and became a human so that we could be “remade” in the likeness of God through salvation. In Jesus, we have a chance to learn that only God is God and that humans are made to be in His likeness but are not actually to be Him!

As for who is right? Consider the evidence and history. Can man be God? And what legacy does Satan leave in his wake? The Bible tells us that only God is right and that He will win the great controversy. But until a person chooses whose side he or she is on, all of this is just information. So whose side do you choose?

---

The conflict between God and His love and Satan and his selfishness forms the backstory for all that’s written in the Bible. Each individual story—from Enoch to Samson to Mary Magdalene to Martha to Paul—is another chapter of God’s multimillennial quest to save His children from sin.

Who Is Involved? (Rev. 12:7–9, 17)
Michael (Jesus) and His angels fight against the dragon (Satan) and his angels. The dragon is cast to the earth, where he wars against the woman and her offspring—“those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17, NIV). That means us! Not only is Satan at war with God, he is also seeking to destroy those people who follow God’s commands and who are willing to be guided by the gift of prophecy, which Revelation 19:10 defines as “the testimony of Jesus.”

The Beginning (Isa. 14:4–21; Ezek. 28:12–19)
Lucifer, the beautiful light-bearing head angel, allowed pride to take root and to grow in his heart. As a result, he became jealous of God. He opposed God’s authority, thus earning the name “Satan,” or “adversary.” How this happened in a perfect being is impossible to explain, but it does show how great a value God places on freedom of choice. Even in a perfect world, Lucifer had the ability to question God’s law and authority. Eventually, however, God cast Lucifer out of heaven along with all the angels he convinced to come over to his side.

Satan’s Fight (Gen. 3:1–5; Deut. 32:17, 18; Matt. 2:1–18; Rom. 1:20–28)
Satan, disguised as the serpent, tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. While Satan could offer the temptation to sin, it was Eve’s free choice to
accept it. When she offered the fruit to Adam, he also chose to disobey God. Together, their actions brought death, confusion, pain, and depravity to their offspring and to earth itself.

Since then, Satan has made every effort to mar the goodness of God’s creation. Our world bears the scars of thousands of years of sin. Worse, however, is the effect sin has on our minds and hearts. Satan desires that we worship anything other than the one true God. As a result, humanity is highly degraded from the beauty God originally intended. Even this process of decay is not arbitrary: “God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts” (Rom. 1:24, NIV). God allows us to choose whom we will worship, and the heart is shaped accordingly. But as bleak as this picture looks, God does not leave us without hope! He promises to restore our hearts by filling us with His Holy Spirit (Ps. 51:7–12).

God’s Answer (Gen. 3:15; John 3:16, 17)
Because of His love for us, God offers us the plan of salvation. Jesus came to earth as fully God and fully human. Here He lived and died in our place. This opened the door of salvation to all who choose Jesus. Jesus’ sacrificial death and Satan’s willingness (acting through the priests) to kill the innocent Son of God demonstrated to the world, the angels, and the rest of the universe the true character of Satan and his followers. Satan can no longer claim that God is unloving, unjust, or unmerciful because the entire universe has seen how great His love is in His willingness to give up His own Son to pay the price for our sin. Nor can Satan claim that his way is better than God’s, for all have seen that his way leads to death and suffering, while God’s way brings life, joy, and peace.

Our Choice (Josh. 24:15)
Jesus’ death offers us the gift of salvation. It is up to us to choose whom we will serve. God will never force anyone to serve Him. He will, however, take every step possible to show us who He is and how His way brings life and light. In doing so, God’s dealings with each individual serve as a small picture of the great controversy as a whole. Just as each person must decide whom to serve, God contrasts the true horrors of sin with Christ’s incredible self-sacrificing love. This way, the entire universe can decide to whom to give its allegiance.

REACT
1. Does the perspective of a universal conflict between good and evil change how you view your personal trials and struggles against temptation? If so, in what ways?
2. How does the concept of the great controversy help us to understand why suffering and death persist in our world, even though we have a loving and all-powerful God?

“Satan’s policy in this final conflict with God’s people is the same that he employed in the opening of the great controversy in heaven. He professed to be seeking to promote the stability of the divine government, while secretly bending every effort to secure its overthrow. And the very work which he was thus endeavoring to accomplish he charged upon the loyal angels. . . . So it will be now. While Satan seeks to destroy those who honor God’s law, he will cause them to be accused as lawbreakers, as men who are dishonoring God and bringing judgments upon the world.”¹

Our battle is constant, but there is hope offered to those who are loyal and faithful to God.

“To every soul will come the searching test.”

“Those who endeavor to obey all the commandments of God will be opposed and derided. They can stand only in God. In order to endure the trial before them, they must understand the will of God as revealed in His word; they can honor Him only as they have a right conception of His character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them. None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict. To every soul will come the searching test: Shall I obey God rather than men? The decisive hour is even now at hand. Are our feet planted on the rock of God’s immutable word? Are we prepared to stand firm in defense of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus?”²

God offers us hope through endurance and patience. We must not fight against one another, but rather love one another and work together to defeat evil, as Christ works with God to put an end to the great controversy.

“Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near. Don’t grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!” (James 5:7–9, NIV).

REACT

Examine your own life to consider how Satan might be tempting you now. Consider this temptation in light of the great controversy. Then ask God to help you plant your feet on His immutable Word.

¹. The Great Controversy, p. 591.
². Ibid., pp. 593, 594.
Eden was truly a paradise. Adam and Eve could explore without worrying about running into a dangerous animal or becoming exhausted. And they were able to commune with their Creator face-to-face. What a joy that must have been! What they discussed has been lost in the mists of time, but we can at least imagine their conversations. Perhaps they pointed out some of the more unusual creatures, inquiring of the Creator why the platypus looks the way it does or marveling at the many vibrant colors of the various birds. Their talks may have turned to more somber subjects as they asked about the one tree from which they were not to eat. Did they ask Jesus for an explanation of who Satan was?

**When God did show up, it was with a heavy heart.**

However, one fateful day Eve wandered away from Adam and over to the forbidden tree. As she came close to it, the serpent hiding in it was able to speak with her. But this wasn’t just any serpent. It was Satan himself. He quizzed Eve with a trick question, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?” (Gen. 3:1, NIV). Perhaps caught off-guard, Eve’s response exaggerated the danger posed by the tree (verses 2, 3). After further discussion with the serpent, Eve took a piece of the fruit and ate it. Shortly afterward, she gave a piece to Adam, who also ate the forbidden fruit.

Adam and Eve’s next meeting with their Creator was not one they were looking forward to. They had failed the test and were afraid of the consequences. When God did show up, it was with a heavy heart that He informed them of the consequences of their actions. They were to be barred from the paradise they had grown to love. They also were banned from eating from the tree of life. Their animal companions would turn on each other and against humans, and everything that had life would eventually die. However, God did have good news. Genesis 3:15 is the first recorded promise in the Bible. In it, the plan of salvation is presented. The plan was fulfilled thousands of years later when Jesus was crucified after living a sinless life. Perhaps at that time, some beings in the universe recalled the words spoken in the Garden promising victory for all those who would follow Christ no matter what.

**REACT**

As you read this quarter’s lessons, look for evidence of the ultimate promise, as well as other promises God has given to us.

*Bryan Yates, Hollister, California, U.S.A.*
Now that we’re on the rinse cycle of God’s grace, we know the war is over. God has won—with love. The winning act of love was Jesus’ saving death. Jesus isn’t just God’s Son. He is God, and He would rather die to give us life than live without us. God loves us more than He loves Himself.

We don’t need a reason to love; love is its own reason.

The seemingly natural reaction to this overwhelming passion is to love with crazy abandonment. But love—true agapé, selfless, God-centered love—is rare. Even if such love were as simple as it seems, our world probably still wouldn’t be all sunshine and roses. Sometimes the simplest instructions are the hardest to follow, and if God’s instructions are anything, they’re simple: (1) love God; (2) love yourself; and (3) love your neighbor.

Love God. Loving God is as fundamental as breathing. We cannot really live without it. So you would think we’d naturally love the One who gave us life. God tells us many times in the Bible to love Him—five times in Deuteronomy alone (Deut. 6:5; 11:1, 22; 19:9; 30:6). Yet we so often ignore Him. Such love is essential. But the only way we can manage to love God, even a little, is if He helps us.

Love yourself. This is a hard one because we are blind to our worth. God loves every bit of us (Matt. 10:30). He is a new Father, counting His daughter’s toes, touching her perfect cheek. Why would God love something worthless? We are infinitely precious to Him, and hating ourselves after He died for us is like spitting in His face.

Love others. When I have trouble loving someone, I remember that God loves that person just as much as He loves me. It’s a daunting thought. But we shouldn’t love people just because God loves them (although that’s a good reason). We should love them because they’re people. We don’t need a reason to love; love is its own reason.

Remember that no matter what we do, nothing matters without love (1 Corinthians 13). The greatest love is loving others more than yourself (John 15:13). Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8).

**REACT**

1. Which of these three loves is the hardest for you? Why?
2. What are your reasons for loving others?

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Serena Stevens, Centerville, Ohio, U.S.A.
While we may groan in disbelief every time we read about Israel’s or Judah’s idolatry, we sometimes forget that their experience is not unique. Idolatry is just as real today and even more dangerous because the gods of our world are no longer conveniently labeled “Baal” or “Ashtaroth.” Rather, they are cleverly concealed within the framework of our everyday lives so that we must be more attentive to identify them. We could probably come up with a list of basic necessities that, if we are not careful, could easily become snares to us: money, food, clothing, and housing. Beyond these, there also are other “idols” Satan uses to distract us. Often these distractions come in the form of amusement and entertainment. For some of us, it is our favorite team or athlete whom we faithfully cheer to victory. For others, it is an actor or a television program with which we establish an emotional or intellectual bond. For others still, it is a continual craving to be connected to social media.

Every moment lived . . . is an opportunity to serve God and to draw nearer to Him.

This is not to say that these activities are inherently wrong. But as Christians and active participants in the great controversy, we must continually be on guard against Satan’s attempts to separate us from the Father. As is the case in all aspects of our lives, we should honestly consider whether our choices in recreation draw us closer to God or whether they distract us from that ultimate purpose.

John Wesley believed that there was no middle ground between serving God and serving Satan. He was convinced that every part of his life “must either be a sacrifice to God, or myself, that is, in effect, to the devil.”* For the Christian, there is no distinction between the religious and the secular. Every moment lived—whether classified as worship, work, or play—is an opportunity to serve God and to draw nearer to Him.

**REACT**

1. What in your life is distracting you from a deeper relationship with God?
2. How does your understanding of the great controversy influence your recreational activities?

---

While reading a book review, I came across this warning: If you don’t want to know how the book ends, stop here. The reviewer realized that he could ruin the book for anyone who wanted the pleasure of watching the story unfold page by page. But when it comes to the great controversy and actually participating in it, it’s reassuring to know ahead of time how everything will turn out. God has shown us through His Word that He has already won the war. Now all He is waiting for is to see if He will win our hearts.

CONSIDER

- Creating a poster that highlights the importance of loving others. Consider using the following saying: “We love Jesus only as much as the person we love the least.”
- Writing a short explanation of the plan of salvation that you could present to a peer and another explanation that would be more appropriate for an eight-year-old.
- Choosing three or four Bible verses on a topic such as “the plan of salvation” or “the soon return of Jesus.” Copy the verses on cards and review them during the next week until you have them committed to memory. Then look for opportunities to share the verses with others.
- Listening to the song “Make My Life a Living Sacrifice” at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGNC-ihd4cl, and then asking God what things you need to put on the altar of sacrifice in order to be fully dedicated to Him.
- Passing out literature, such as GLOW tracts, to people at a park, mall, or doctor’s office.
- Journaling for a week, asking God each day to reveal to you any idols that are keeping you from making a total commitment to Him.
- Spending time in nature looking for evidence of how sin has affected our environment.

CONNECT

The Great Controversy, chaps. 37, 42.
Marvin Moore, How to Think About the End Time (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press©, 2001).

Renee Coffee, Gobles, Michigan, U.S.A.
Revelation and the God Revealed in It

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (Heb. 1:1, 2, NKJV).
God gives Mary a task that seems impossible. Her reaction was not as joyous as Gabriel might have expected. She is at first fearful of his presence and confused about what will happen. But then Mary accepts, “‘Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word’” (Luke 1:38, NKJV). And with that, she accepts the most important task in human history: raising God’s Son—the Eternal King and her own Savior.

The truths of Scripture are of no value in and of themselves.

Mary knew in her heart who Jesus was. She held on in faith to the signs surrounding His birth—the promise of a Savior, angels singing, and wise men and shepherds worshiping. She watched and pondered as He developed into a wise, righteous, and humble young man and as He shattered her preconceptions of the Messiah’s role (Luke 2:19, 51). As with the disciples, who still struggled to understand Jesus’ mission even after the Resurrection (Luke 24:21), Mary had to both watch Jesus and discover how He fit into Old Testament prophecy. Her whole life she believed in God’s promises. Her cousin Elizabeth prophesied about her, “‘Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord’” (Luke 1:45, NKJV). Jesus echoed this idea of the power of faith multiple times (Mark 9:23, 24; John 3:12; 20:29).

The truths of Scripture are of no value in and of themselves. We have the Bible to tell us about God. We have the fulfillment of prophecy, Jesus Christ. But we must put these things in our hearts. We need to treasure what Jesus has done and is continuing to do in our lives. This is the biggest and best gift we have been given.

REACT

1. What aspect of your experience with God has most deeply affected your life, and why?
2. Can a person who has doubts about God still receive God’s healing? Be able to explain your answer.
3. Where do you see God inviting you to spread the truth?
Second Peter 1:19–21 declares that the words spoken from a prophet are not the prophet’s own. The term *prophet* stems from a Greek word (*profitis*) meaning “foreteller.” The task of the biblical prophet was to deliver a message given by the Holy Spirit. When it came down to it, a prophet was essentially a spokesperson for God. And as lofty and seemingly elevated as the position might seem, it could be a dangerous position in which to find oneself. See, for example, Jeremiah 11:18–23.

**Imagine the scribes who copied the Torah and codices. . . .**

**What a task!**

Even with the prophets’ faulty memories, poor language skills, and cowardice, the Spirit relayed through these humans distinct and implicit messages from God to His children. And like the prophets, the Bible itself claims that its contents are from God. Second Timothy 3:16, 17 affirms that all the writings of the Bible are, in fact, from God. We can marvel over the books and origins or even debate what is established as canon. However, through it all, there is a single consistent presence. God’s ever-present countenance is seen through a set of books that have been written, studied, and treasured over several millennia. But the Bible is so much more than just words, or a record of acts and miracles that astound. What the Bible teaches us, about the God who inspired it, is spelled out in James 1:17. What is that consistent message? God is our benevolent Provider and consistent Keeper.

Imagine the scribes who copied the Torah and codices, the authors and prophets who were given the task to reveal the Divine in script. What a task! And yet miraculously, this consistent and benevolent Creator is easily discovered through these volumes. Glowing through eons of biblical inspiration, the God revealed to us then is reaching out to us now. And just like the prophets did, we also must—to the best of our abilities—listen with our hearts and minds to the message that He has for us.

**REACT**

1. Why is it important for the Bible to declare its source of inspiration?
2. How is it that the Bible, written by many different people, consistently defines who God is?
It has been said that God must always, to some extent, hide Himself, or we would see nothing but Him. It’s no wonder that God is such a mystery in our world of petty distractions. And while we cannot enjoy face-to-face communion with Him like Adam and Eve or Jesus’ disciples did, we have Scripture and the Holy Spirit to guide and teach us.

From day one . . . , the Spirit has worked to connect heaven with earth.

An Ancient Source (Gen. 1:1)
The oldest portions of the Bible are more than 3,000 years old. The newest are just under 2,000. Despite the Bible’s age, archaeology has found that the Bible has remained unchanged throughout the centuries. Scholars were amazed to find that the Dead Sea Scrolls, manuscripts dating to the first century A.D. and earlier, revealed far fewer textual variances than the manuscripts of any other ancient literature—including many written much closer to the modern era. The Bible has been well preserved and protected.

What Is Inspiration? (2 Tim. 3:16, 17)
Second Timothy 3:16, 17 are indeed inspiring verses. The nature of that inspiration, however—and how to interpret words written to varying audiences requiring different approaches—continues to inspire heated debate.

The Old Testament historical books frequently cite secular historical records (for example, 2 Kings 13:12). Matthew, Mark, and Luke copy each other (with Mark likely having been written first), yet make strikingly different points about Jesus. Ecclesiastes 12:9, 10 describes its author carefully selecting proverbs, seeking “just the right words” to make his point. The Bible does not reflect “verbal inspiration,” with God dictating every word as a person copies it down. Instead, the Holy Spirit inspired writers to express certain truths within certain historical contexts. Put together within the total context of Scripture, an incredible tapestry is revealed.

Second Peter 1:20, 21 says that “no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet’s own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God” (NLT). The Holy Spirit’s role in inspiration cannot be undervalued. From day one (Gen. 1:2), the Spirit has worked to connect heaven with earth.

The Nature of God (Matt. 28:19)
Perhaps the last major doctrine to be widely accepted in Adventism was
the Trinity. We’ve long since taken it for granted, but when Ellen White wrote of the Holy Spirit’s role and Jesus as His Father’s uncreated equal in such later works as Steps to Christ and The Desire of Ages, it was a striking declaration of a neglected doctrine. Judaism builds itself on the declaration in Deuteronomy 6:4 that “the Lord is one” (NIV). The role of Jesus was one of the biggest concepts for the early Christians to grasp. Texts such as Matthew 28:19 delineate the Trinity as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet their unique, complementary, and interlocking roles continue to challenge our thinking.

What Is God Like? (2 Chron. 6:18)

In 2 Chronicles 6:18, Solomon marvels, “Why, even the highest heavens cannot contain [God]. How much less this Temple I have built!” (NLT). Yet Jesus chose to live with us. He felt the weight of humanity, yet when He so chose, His divine power shone through. Jesus, ever-approachable, assured us that if we know what He is like, we know what His seemingly unapproachable Father is like.

God declares that His character does not change (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17), yet Scripture shows Him constantly adapting His approach of reaching out to His wayward children. As the Source of all that is good (James 1:17), God ever seeks to lift us up, pointing us to His ideal, and engaging us in creative conversation. One truth we can hold on to above all others: God is love. He created us in love. He died for us and saved us through His love. He guides us in love, and His love stirs Him to mourn with us when we suffer and grieve. God is eager for the day when all can know Him fully, unrestricted by the weight of sin.

The God of Action (Exod. 3:1–14)

Ancient peoples viewed their gods as geographically restricted, with different gods ruling over particular countries, cities, and even hills and homes. The true God, however, shattered all restrictions. Jonah bet that he could escape God by sailing in the opposite direction from what God had instructed him to take, but God found him anyway. He went to Nineveh, and the inhabitants there accepted the message God wanted Jonah to deliver to them. God declared judgment over Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24, 25); rescued His people from Egyptian slavery after summoning Moses from his hideout in the desert (Exod. 3:1–14); and even revealed Himself—and humankind’s future—to an aged disciple exiled on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9).

Today, God longs to connect with individuals as surely as He did the once-nobodies and self-important officials of ancient Mesopotamia. He’s not willing to give up on any of us. He is ready to act with power in each of our lives.

REACT

1. Why is God—the “Trinity”—a partnership? What does this partnership tell us about God’s nature and character?
2. Why didn’t God just dictate every word of Scripture as He did with the Ten Commandments?
3. How should we deal with parts of Scripture that seem to contradict each other?

Tompaul Wheeler, Nashville, Tennessee, U.S.A.
“Human minds without the special assistance of the Spirit of God will see many things in the Bible very difficult to be understood, because they lack a divine enlightenment. It is not that men should come to the Word of God by setting up their own way, or their own will or their own ideas, but it is to come with a meek and humble and holy spirit.

“We want to have implicit faith in the Bible as a whole."

“Never attempt to search the Scriptures unless you are ready to listen, unless you are ready to be a learner, unless you are ready to listen to the Word of God as though His voice were speaking directly to you from the living oracles. Never let mortal man sit in judgment upon the Word of God or pass sentence as to how much of this is inspired and how much is not inspired, and that this is more inspired than some other portions. God warns him off that ground. God has not given him any such work to do. . . .

“It takes all of eternity to unfold the glories and bring out the precious treasures of the Word of God. Do not let any living man come to you and begin to dissect God’s Word, telling what is revelation, what is inspiration and what is not, without a rebuke. Tell all such they simply do not know. They simply are not able to comprehend the things of the mystery of God. What we want is to inspire faith. We want no one to say, ‘This I will reject, and this will I receive,’ but we want to have implicit faith in the Bible as a whole and as it is.

“We call on you to take your Bible, but do not put a sacrilegious hand upon it, and say, ‘That is not inspired,’ simply because somebody else has said so. Not a jot or tittle is ever to be taken from that Word. Hands off, brethren! Do not touch the ark. Do not lay your hand upon it, but let God move. It is with His own power, and He will work in such a manner that He will compass our salvation. We want God to have some room to work. We do not want man’s ideas to bind Him about.”*

I remember when I realized my husband loved me with a love that would last the rest of our lives. It was my senior year in college, and most of my friends and my boyfriend had graduated. I felt so alone, so unsure about the next stage of my life. Then one day I received a package containing a variety of songs and a poem from my boyfriend. I reread the poem a hundred times and listened to the songs daily. Afterward, our conversations seemed to have a different meaning, and it all made sense.

Similarly, when we know God, when we accept His sacrifice for us and remember the bigger picture of the great controversy we live in today, it all begins to make sense. Lucifer is skilled in the art of deception, but he’s all smoke and mirrors. The more he distracts us from reality, the less we live purposeful lives. Below are ways we can put God’s pieces into place:

- **Read the Bible daily.** Second Timothy 3:16, 17 tells us that all Scripture is from God. Your Bible is a full inbox from God.
- **Keep your relationship with God in the forefront.** Keep your eyes on the prize; if we don’t know where we are headed, we may get lost. If you speak and listen to God daily, your relationship with Him will grow. Imagine knowing God so well that you could buy Him a greeting card you knew He would just love. Only through an active relationship with Him can that be achieved.
- **Be willing to be used by God.** Jesus gave us an assignment to go and make disciples (Matt. 28:19). Often God will create an opportunity for us to do just that. So be watching for it.
- **Recognize that the ending is not the here and now.** In the book of Job, God patiently and lovingly reminds His “blameless and upright” servant (Job 1:1, NIV) that while we do not know the answers to the mysteries of the world, He does. How we have made the world a better place will be revealed in heaven when we sit at Jesus’ feet.

**REACT**

1. How do you see the great controversy playing out in your life?
2. What distractions are keeping you from reaching your full potential? How can you rid yourself of these distractions?
The largest commercial jigsaw puzzle ever made went on sale in March 2007. The 24,000 piece puzzle features land, sea, sky, and celestial images. It measures approximately 14 feet long by 5 feet high. Frankly, I’m not a fan of puzzles. In fact, one of the only puzzles I’ve mulled over is the one of God’s character. How can He be both perfectly just and merciful at the same time? How can the Bible teach “blessed are the peacemakers” in Matthew while Deuteronomy shows us how God led His people to obliterate the Hittites, Gergashites, Amorites, and all the other “ites”? How can God allow a prostitute to be saved when Joshua conquered Jericho, but not intervene for an entire city of priests, their families, and livestock when Saul ordered their massacre? (1 Samuel 22)? Why didn’t Jesus do more to abolish slavery or establish women’s rights? I find it troubling that Jesus calls Himself a God of love in some places (1 John 4:7, 8) and evidences His wrath or seeming indifference in others. Which is it? Are we serving a bipolar God who plays humans like a chessboard of fools?

Yet I know I can trust Scripture when it tells me that God is stable and trustworthy (Mal. 3:6; 2 Tim. 3:16). After hours of hashing out these questions with friends and mentors, researching the historical significance of various stories, and looking into the meaning of the original Hebrew and Greek texts, I have discovered a helpful analogy. When it comes to understanding God’s character, we’re collecting puzzle pieces. We see His mercy—and that’s a piece. His wrath—another piece, and so on. We gather our pieces from Scripture, the Spirit, personal experience, and trustworthy extrabiblical sources. Though no single piece is a complete portrayal, the more pieces we gather, the more accurate our picture becomes. Jesus is not either just or merciful, but both at once.

The problem comes when we try to view each piece as the whole. It’s like seeing someone sucker punch a granny and calling the police before realizing that the granny had pulled a .38 special out of her fanny pack and was holding up the Wal-Mart cashier. Sometimes we see a piece of the action and, not knowing the backstory, make wrong assumptions. Don’t call the cops on God. Study, pray, and have faith that the pieces will come together.


Amie Regester, Greenbrier, Arkansas, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE
If not for Scripture, our knowledge and understanding of God and His Son, Jesus, would be limited, perhaps even nonexistent. Yet what topic could be more important? The Bible really is a gift through which God reveals so much of Himself and His wonderful plan for our lives, both for now and for eternity. The interconnectedness of themes from the many authors who were chosen to be spokespeople for God, and the fact that the Bible was so well preserved throughout time, shows us just how much God desires to connect with us, how much He desires to have a meaningful relationship with us, and to what extent He’ll go to woo us into such a relationship.

CONSIDER
• Writing down three “essence words” that sum up the message of the Bible. Illustrate these words in color or texture to reflect their meaning.
• Researching the specific methods used by scribes when copying the Scriptures in order to ensure they were accurate.
• Listening to and reading the lyrics of the song “Thy Word Is a Lamp Unto My Feet” and making this your prayer to God today.
• Using clay, plants, rocks, or other natural materials to design a montage that represents how God reveals Himself through prophecy.
• Designing a personal action plan that focuses on understanding God’s prophecy in greater depth.
• Developing a series of podcasts that responds to the question, Is prophecy still relevant to us today?

CONNECT
Ps. 119:105; Matt. 24:35; 1 Thess. 2:13.
Humans—God’s Handiwork

“Know that the Lord, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture” (Ps. 100:3, NKJV).
In many African cultures, adults are not supposed to reveal to children certain information they deem unnecessary. Often this is to protect the children from learning inappropriate things for their age. When the children ask these kinds of questions, often they are silenced, given wrong answers, or told to wait to know when they are of age.

One day a curious child asked, “Mum, where did I come from?”
“I bought you from the market,” Mum said.

_Hmmm, that means my seller didn’t love me_, the boy thought to himself. He hesitated but asked, “Mum, are you going to sell me too?”
“No,” replied Mum with a reassuring smile.
“Why not, Mum?” continued the boy.
“Because you are mine, and I love you.”
“But what happens to other children who are sold to bad people who don’t love them?” the curious boy asked. “Don’t they eat the kids?”

Obviously, the Bible does not advise us to deceive like the mother in this story. It is against God’s commandments to tell lies (Exod. 20:16). However, the world has a habit of telling us the wrong answers. In answer to the question, Where did I come from? a biology professor will rush to explain the unending theories of evolution. A pastor will pull out his Bible to teach the Scriptures.

We keep asking and searching because the answers do not satisfy our inner need for belonging. Human beings have a natural need to belong. God is the only One who can satisfy this need. Genesis 1:27 tells us that God created man in His own image. But because of sin and disobedience, man sold himself to slavery. As a result, chaos and suffering followed.

However, with infinite love, God sent His only Son to buy us back from the market of sin, chaos, and suffering. His death allows us to become sons and daughters of God. This new family will not sell us. This is our rightful family, where we belonged before selling ourselves into disobedience and sin. Will you accept the call to join the family of God?

**REACT**

1. How can you explain to a three-year-old the origin of human beings and the love of Jesus?
2. Using our theme, how would you console a family that has lost a loved one?
The Power of the Spoken Word (Genesis 1)

God’s Creation account over the six days is marked by God’s own proclamation, “Let there be . . . and it was so.” An example from the fifth day: “And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind: cattle, and creeping thing and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so . . . And God saw that it was good” (Gen. 1:24, 25). The power of God’s spoken word brought the universe and all that is in it into existence.

All business in heaven had come to a halt.

The last stage in the act of creation by the spoken word is reached by the divine declaration of “Let us make man in our own image” (Gen. 1:26), as if all business in heaven had come to a halt because an extraordinary act was just about to take place.

This was the creation of a being to be unique from all other creation. The creature was to be in the likeness of the Maker—made different from the animals, with a moral capacity to choose and divinely given authority to rule over all other creation. Human beings were created for a purpose—to rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

The Nature of God (Gen. 1:27)

God gave the instruction to Adam that “of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it. For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16, 17). God knew that Adam had the moral capacity to choose to obey or disobey this commandment. But why would God want to take such a risk?

Humans aren’t able to comprehend God’s mind. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord” (Isa. 55:8). That is the kind of God we worship. His nature is love, and He will give us, His creatures, the freedom to choose even when He knows that our choice can be to our own detriment.

The good news, however, is that He is still our God and Maker even when we make wrong choices. “Ever since the Fall, humans are corrupted morally. They are not like God in their morality, but yet they
are still considered to be in God’s image (Gen. 9:6; Jam[es] 3:9). . . . Humans still have vestiges of moral potential.¹

“In Himself Christ already sums up all that humanity is to be. In this respect Christ is not, of course, to be abstracted from the Father and the Holy Spirit. To be made in the image of Christ is to be made in the image of God, for Christ is God, not alone, but in the eternal triunity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“. . . In His incarnate life as true God and true Man, Christ is again the image of God. He is a perfect representation of God to man. . . .

“As the God-Man, Christ is the prototype of the new, redeemed humanity. The Christian is the person who in repentance and faith, by the Holy Spirit, is identified with the Christ who died and rose again for him. He is dead, and the life he now lives is that of Christ in him (Gal. 2:20). He is a new creature (or creation); the old things have passed and new things have come (2 Cor. 5:17).”²

Those Christians who lean toward the belief that human beings are nothing more than a cosmic accident, simply evolving from lower life forms through random chance, will have no sense of value, no sense of purpose, and no sense of destiny. As believers, we must ask ourselves how such belief demeans the sacrifice that the Creator made for us, the created.

**REACT**

1. What part of your life would you change if given a chance, and why?
2. If you were to ask God what part you are to play in the plan of salvation, what do you think His answer would be?

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“At his creation Adam was placed in dominion over the earth. But by yielding to temptation, he was brought under the power of Satan. . . . When man became Satan’s captive, the dominion which he held, passed to his conqueror. Thus Satan became ‘the god of this world.’ 2 Corinthians 4:4. He had usurped that dominion over the earth which had been originally given to Adam. But Christ, by His sacrifice paying the penalty of sin, would not only redeem man, but recover the dominion which he had forfeited. All that was lost by the first Adam will be restored by the second.”

“It was possible for Adam, before the fall, to form a righteous character by obedience to God’s law. But he failed to do this, and because of his sin our natures are fallen and we cannot make ourselves righteous. Since we are sinful, unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us. He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.”

“Christ is ready to do large things for us, to restore our natures by making us partakers of his divine nature. He waits to link our hearts with his heart of infinite love, in order that we may be fully reconciled to God; but it is our privilege to understand that God loves us as he loves his Son. When we believe in Christ as our personal Saviour, the peace of Christ is ours. The reconciliation provided for us in the atonement of Christ is the foundation of our peace.”

**REACT**

1. How long does it take to have one’s sinful nature restored to the nature of Christ?
2. What would your life look like if you truly did “not let your heart be troubled, nor afraid”?

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One of the most fascinating and frequently asked question by lay people and scientists alike is, Where did life come from? The most widely acceptable scientific answer (hypothesis) to this question is that inorganic molecules in the earth’s prebiotic oceans combined to produce organic molecules. Eventually, the first cells arose when favored by the onset of oxygen-releasing photosynthesis. Protected from the sun’s intense ultraviolet radiation (by formation of the atmospheric ozone layer) through geological time, these cells eventually formed into varied multicellular forms that evolved to the most advanced forms today—humans. This response, however, fails to explain the origin and existence of the first components and the power behind their combination. Read Genesis 1:26–28. What does it say about the origin, pattern, and nature of the first human forms? (Compare with Gen. 2:19–23; Ps. 8:5–8.)

**Humans are God’s handiwork.**

God’s sovereign power, without our aid, formed the first human family out of clay and formed them in His own image. He placed them in the already created world (Genesis 1) with proper instruction to care for its and their well-being.

God’s relationship with and responsibility over humans as His handiwork did not end at creation. After their fall from the given instruction (and God’s original glory), and being destined to eternal death (Rom. 3:23), God brought them back to Himself through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:18, 19). He promised them new life—even after death—from Himself, the Life-Giver (1 Cor. 15:22). The amazing truth that humans are God’s handiwork cannot be broken by their physical, mental, spiritual, and social condition or geographical location. Even when deeply sinful to the highest magnitude, they can never go higher or deeper than the grace God provides to save them back in to His fold (Rom. 5:21). The way that He loves is so thrilling because His love reaches even me.
As a medical student, I’ve been blessed to experience life in ways others will never even imagine. As a Seventh-day Adventist with strong roots of belief in creation (Gen. 1:27), I stress that the mysteries of the human body can be explained only by the fact that we are created in God’s image. Seeking any other explanation will be denying the very existence of God.

“Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air” (Gen. 2:19). This has been a point of argument with many of my fellow medics who have labored to explain man’s origin through other ways rather than creation. Acts 17:26 says, God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.” Why is it so hard to see the truth that is written for the whole world to comprehend?

One memorable moment was when we had to observe the post-mortem of one of our own who had met a sudden death. I labored to explain to my friends the effect of sin in the world. It was so hard to believe that someone we had lunch with the previous day was now lying lifeless on a table in front of us.

At this point, most of them questioned the value of life. Romans 5:12 says, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” With sin, the world and man created in God’s own image was defiled, and so shall we all die. And with sin came all the evilness we see in the world.

My response to my friends has always been that there is no value to life if you have nothing prepared for the afterlife when the Lord comes forth. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

**REACT**

1. What is holding you back from claiming the redemption that cleanses you?
2. How have you helped the millions still asking numerous questions to know the truth?
We live in a world where humans struggle for meaning and identity. One thing that will always concern people is what others think of them. Some have even resigned to believe that they are the way they are and there is little or nothing they can do to change the situations they face. The question of who we really are continues to mystify man’s understanding and consciousness.

Men have labored to give God meaning, identity, and shape.

The most logical result of searching for who we are has been to explain where man came from and where he is going. In looking for such explanations, people have often developed theories that only lead to abominations and taking the Lord’s name in vain. Men have labored to give God meaning, identity, and shape. They have tried to reason, to explain why He has done some things the way He has. They have tried to explain God’s character and personality as they would that of a human friend. But they have failed.

God created the world in six days. All He had created was good. Many of us will be quick to claim an invention that has been labeled as good by the world. The mystery in understanding God’s nature is in going back to the basics and trying not to overcomplicate matters. Explaining how the Trinity can be Three in One can’t be done by using the reasoning of this world. However, listening to the silent voice inside each one of us that emphasizes that the Lord lives helps us to understand. Some have chosen to deny this voice and so continue with different lines of argument, but that will never work. God, who made heaven and earth in six days, will never be explained in a humanly and worldly way that has been defiled by sin. A parent might look upon his child and expect unquestioning obedience. The Lord looks at man as His handiwork, expecting obedience to His laws out of love. The patience of the Lord is not human. Whereas parents would be quick to rebuke and punish, the Lord gives free will and choice.

The best way to understand God’s nature is to do His will and walk in His ways.

**REACT**

1. How has your understanding of God affected your relationship with Him?
2. How have you reflected on His goodness in your daily life?
CONCLUDE
In Genesis 1, God brought structure to a void by expressing creativity in the elements through fish, fowl, and animals, and culminating with humans created in His image. The seventh day became a symbol of God’s rest. Pleased with the results, He then instructed the humans on how to reflect their Creator (Genesis 2). Instead of the random happenstance of evolution, God demonstrated intentionality in the creation of humankind. The nature of humankind includes reflecting God—His love, compassion, and freedom of choice. We don’t have to struggle for meaning or identity because we are made in God’s image. Therefore, we have definition and the opportunity to study the Bible for greater insight into His nature.

CONSIDER
• Creating a collage that includes elements illustrating the freedom to choose that God gives humankind.
• Reflecting on what it means to have dominion over the earth. Think about how you are fulfilling God’s instructions to care for what He has created.
• Reviewing books and/or the Internet for works of art that illustrate human nature. What do you agree with about these works, or how would you enhance these depictions?
• Writing a song about the nature of humanity as God originally intended it to be.
• Listing compassionate acts you could perform that would be examples of God’s love. To get started, read Matthew 24 and 25, where Jesus talks about what Christians should do as they wait for the Second Coming. Whom are we to serve?

CONNECT

Norma Sahlin, Springboro, Ohio, U.S.A.
Salvation—The Only Solution

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16, NKJV).
At one point in my life I was a humble person (or so I thought). I secretly took pleasure in the comments people made about how sweet I was for doing something thoughtful. I saw myself as a loving, caring, humble person. And I was proud of it! Sure there were times when I lied, hurt others, didn’t keep the Sabbath holy, and disrespected my parents. However, I went to church regularly, knew Christ died for my sins, and figured that because I believed in Him, I would go to heaven. In my mind, I knew that I would not get into heaven by my works, but my heart and feelings told me differently.

Only after I opened the Bible and truly sought God did I realize how blind I had been about my sin and how wrong I had been about myself! The Bible teaches that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9) and that we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). I was convicted of the sins I had committed, realized my true nature and need for a Savior, and was brought to repentance. We deserve to die, yet Christ took our place. How great is our God that He loved us so much that He died for us while we were still sinners! (Rom. 5:6–10). It is only through a daily walk with Christ and our complete dependence on His salvation that we are free from the bondage of sin and are able to be justified, sanctified, and reborn (Rom. 6:1–8).

If God looks at our own works, righteousness, and nature, instead of at Christ’s, not one of us will make it into heaven. However, our hope is in Jesus who is standing in our place in front of our heavenly Father (2 Cor. 5:18, 19). It is our choice to accept His free gift. Christ, in all His love and longsuffering, constantly seeks a personal relationship with us and asks to come into our hearts and transform us into His character. Our part is to respond with faith, to die daily, to live according to the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, and to endure to the end. This week, as we study the scope of the sin problem, let us gain hope and a deeper understanding of the ultimate solution—salvation, in which we experience justification, sanctification, and glorification in Christ.

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Chelsie Sampayan, Rochester, New York, U.S.A.
During two mission trips I took to Bangladesh and Honduras, I wondered what exactly we were bringing to the people we were supposed to be helping. Numerous Bible verses, including Matthew 25:35, 36, clearly state the need to help others. Reflecting on my work during these mission trips, I thought of how these verses should be used in combination with the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16–20). I wondered if there was something more to a mission trip than treating patients, helping the poor, and feeling privileged because we had so much more back home. Gradually, I came to the conclusion that the only thing that makes a true, lasting difference in the long-term lives of people everywhere is salvation. Salvation is the great equalizer.

Salvation is God’s solution to inequalities in material goods, environment, opportunities, and abuses. Christlikeness and godliness bind together God’s people, regardless of upbringing, race, or economics. The hope of salvation is one reason we can be so impressed by those who maintain godliness in the face of much greater obstacles than we face. Christ did not come to give riches, glory, recognition, healing, or happiness. He came to bring salvation to those who do not have it and peace and joy to those who accept it. If we daily renew our conversion with Christ, no matter what hardships we face on this earth, we will know that heaven is truly worth it when we hear those wonderful words, “‘Well done, good and faithful servant’” (Matt. 25:23, NKJV).

While we have a responsibility to bring healing to the suffering and poor, and to love others, our responsibilities as Seventh-day Adventist young people cannot stop there. We must make our greatest impact in the salvation of souls. Paul wrote, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16, NKJV). What good would it do if you lived your whole life simply helping people, yet none of them made it into heaven? God is calling us to a higher standard. “Do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11, NKJV).

**REACT**

Why is it easier to do good works for others than it is to share the story of Jesus?

Albert Kim, Rochester, New York, U.S.A.
Sin Is Not Just an Action or Series of Actions (1 John 3:4)
The classic definition of sin comes from 1 John 3:4. Sin is transgression of the law. However, the problem with seeing sin as only breaking the law often means that the solution to sin is to simply stop breaking the law. But this leaves us with a dangerously incomplete understanding of sin, because sin is not exclusively behavioral.

Our first inclination regarding sinful behavior is to correct the behavior. The gossip must be quieted. The cheater must be stopped. The murderer must be incarcerated. Jesus, however, makes it clear that these behaviors have a root cause—sin. When your car won’t start, you don’t kick it and yell until it starts. You take it to the mechanic to find the root of the problem buried in places you can’t always see. Jesus says the sin problem comes from a place buried deep inside each of us and only a qualified “heart mechanic” can fix the problem. The broken, or “sinful” heart leads to broken, or “sinful” actions.

Sin Is About Misplaced Love (Matt. 22:36–40; Luke 11:43; Rom. 3:23, 24; 2 Tim. 4:10; 1 John 2:15)
Everybody has a heart inclined to sinfulness and evil (Rom. 3:23, 24). We cannot escape it on our own. Jesus explained that the commandments are all about loving Him, He who created everything and everyone and then passes God’s love on to other people (Matt. 22:36–41). Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for loving recognition more than the Giver of power (Luke 11:43). Paul sadly announced to Timothy that their fellow worker Demas left the early Christian movement because he “loved this world” (2 Tim. 4:10, NIV). This is why John continued Christ’s urging not to love the world or anything in it (1 John 2:15). When our love is focused on anything or anyone other than on God, our natural, sin-loving heart is revealed.

It Is Possible to Keep God’s Law (Matt. 5:21, 22, 27, 28)
Just as Jesus showed that sin goes deeper than actions, He also revealed how the law covers much more than breaking the face value of the law. When you hate in your heart, you have committed murder. When
you lust in your heart, you have committed adultery. Transgressing the law takes on a much deeper meaning when we realize how far reaching the law really is. Anyone can keep the face value of the law. Only Christ, however, has kept the spiritual value of the law. Therefore, only Christ can give us the power to keep the spiritual value of the law.

**A Pure Heart Is a Gift (Rom. 3:23, 24; Eph. 2:8–10)**

You cannot earn salvation. It is a gift from God. It is like gifts on your birthday. You didn’t do anything to earn them. You don’t deserve the gifts just because you are alive. The gifts are yours because your friends want to give the gifts to you and because you are willing to accept the gifts. You are loved by God, and He has gifted you with salvation. Do you want to accept His gift?

**Salvation Is All-Encompassing (Rom. 5:18; 1 John 1:9)**

Jesus promises to forgive us of all sin and unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). One person’s rebellious heart passed sin on to all future people. However, Christ’s choice passes on the antidote to sin, promising total justification. Sin may be fully eradicated if we accept His antidote.

**Salvation Is Available to Everyone (John 3:16; Rom. 8:32)**

Christ did not die for a few people. He died for all! He didn’t die for just men or for just women. He didn’t die for just adults or for just young adults. He didn’t choose one race or nation over another; neither did He choose just the rich or just the poor. And Christ did not die for you or anyone else to determine who is worthy of salvation. We were all unworthy according to the spiritual value of the law, but Christ has made us worthy through His sacrifice.

**We Must Choose Salvation (John 3:16; Acts 16:30, 31)**

Salvation is available to all, but it is not unconditional. Jesus said whoever believes (John 3:16). Paul told the jailer and his family they had to believe in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:30, 31). The provisions of redemption are free to everyone. The results of redemption will be shared by those who have complied with the condition of believing. In other words, God has paved the way, but we must choose the road.

**REACT**

1. What difference does your definition of sin have on your understanding of salvation?
2. What have you been told is required for salvation? Are those stipulations supported by the Bible?
3. Have you ever met a “gatekeeper” at the church who tries to control who receives salvation and who does not? How should you react to someone like that?

Aaron Purkeypile, Syracuse, New York, U.S.A.
“We look to self, as though we had power to save ourselves; but Jesus died for us because we are helpless to do this. In Him is our hope, our justification, our righteousness. We should not despond and fear that we have no Saviour, or that He has no thoughts of mercy toward us. At this very time He is carrying on His work in our behalf, inviting us to come to Him in our helplessness and be saved. We dishonor Him by our unbelief. It is astonishing how we treat our very best Friend, how little confidence we repose in Him who is able to save to the uttermost, and who has given us every evidence of His great love.”

“The sanctification set forth in the Sacred Scriptures has to do with the entire being—spirit, soul, and body. Here is the true idea of entire consecration. Paul prays that the church at Thessalonica may enjoy this great blessing. ‘The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Thessalonians 5:23).”

“The most precious fruit of sanctification is the grace of meekness. When this grace presides in the soul, the disposition is molded by its influence. There is a continual waiting upon God and a submission of the will to His. The understanding grasps every divine truth, and the will bows to every divine precept, without doubting or murmuring. True meekness softens and subdues the heart and gives the mind a fitness for the engrafted word. It brings the thoughts into obedience to Jesus Christ. It opens the heart to the word of God, as Lydia’s was opened. It places us with Mary, as learners at the feet of Jesus. ‘The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way’ (Psalm 25:9).”

**REACT**

1. Why is it so difficult to allow ourselves to cultivate helplessness in Jesus and to totally depend on Him?
2. How would you explain to someone else why meekness is the “most precious fruit of sanctification”?

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2. The Sanctified Life, p. 7.
3. Ibid., pp. 14, 15.
According to the National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators (NAUPA), there is about 38 billion dollars of unclaimed property in the United States. Some of it could be yours! You could be missing out on a family member’s fortune. However, did you know that there is an even larger inheritance that you could be missing out on? I’m referring to eternal life with your Savior and Creator, because you’ve been adopted as a child of God through Christ before you were even born (Eph. 1:3–6). The NAUPA Web site lists steps on how to claim your property. The Bible also outlines the steps to claiming the gift of salvation. Please adhere to the following steps in order to claim the greatest inheritance ever offered:

### Salvation has offered you a way out!

*Believe in Him* (John 3:14, 15). Nicodemus wants to ask Jesus some questions, but before he can, Jesus gives him the answers. He tells Nicodemus that to inherit eternal life, he must believe that the Son of God came to free us from our sins. Jesus also explains that this is much more than a mere thought or utterance, that He was sent to save us from the deadly sting of sin, which would have killed each and every one of us had He not come. How can one show this belief?

*Repent and be cleansed* (Acts 2:36–38). You can show belief by repenting of the sins that have weighed you down for so long. Jesus came to die for you so that you would no longer be held in the grip of sin. Salvation has offered you a way out! Through baptism, we publically show our belief and become part of God’s family. As His children, we can rightfully claim our inheritance—eternal life.

*Continually show your belief* (James 2:14–26). Once you have been baptized, you are to continue believing that Jesus died for your sins. Through His death He offers you the inheritance of eternal life. Just saying that you believe that He died for your sins isn’t enough. Show that you believe by keeping God’s commandments and ministering to others’ needs. Then and only then does salvation truly become a part of your life.

**REACT**

1. Why do you truly believe that Christ died for you and your sins?
2. What are a few ways you can show your belief this week?
This is a story about two childhood friends. One became an honorable judge and the other a skilled accountant. The friends were meeting in a courtroom. One was the presiding judge; the other was the defendant in a case of embezzlement. The verdict had just been handed down. Guilty. The judge faced a dilemma. How could he save his friend, but still uphold the law?

After some deliberation, the judge returned to the courtroom and pronounced the sentence. The defendant must repay everything he had stolen, along with the maximum fines allowed by the law. The defendant’s heart sank. There was no way he could repay such a large sum. Then, the judge did something out of the ordinary. He stepped down from the bench, took off his robe, and went to stand by his friend. The judge put his arm around the defendant and announced to the court that he himself would pay the entire penalty.

Now the defendant had two options. He could gratefully accept his friend’s offer and be free from the penalty that was rightfully his; or he could let pride get in the way and reject the offer in anger over the harsh sentence. The same options have been given to us. We have all been found guilty according to God’s law (Rom. 3:23). The penalty required is death, but Christ paid the penalty in full. Much like the wedding garments in Matthew 22, the payment of our debt is offered to us as a free gift, but it is a gift that we must choose to accept.

The friend also had another decision to make. Would he leave the courtroom to continue in his former ways, or would he leave with the determination to change his ways and make his friend proud? In a similar manner, we also have a decision to make once we have accepted Christ. Will we continue in our former ways, or will we now live to honor and follow Him? How will we show our gratitude for the love and selflessness that Christ showed in His sacrifice on the cross? Accepting His sacrifice and offer of pardon is the first step. How we follow up that decision is what the world, and the universe, is anxiously waiting to see. What will your answer be?

**REACT**

How do we understand the difference between working to earn God’s favor, and living to show our thankfulness for His gift?

Sherwin Faria, Dayton, Ohio, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE
The perfect life of Jesus reveals sin in our lives and shows our need for a Savior. Even our attempts at righteous actions are stained by our sinful nature. Sin is not just an evil action. It is fundamentally the result of an out-of-order heart that fuels broken, wicked actions. Salvation is offered to everyone equally, because all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:22–24). Once we accept Christ as our Savior from the penalty of sin, we also choose to live to honor Him and follow His plans for our life.

CONSIDER
• Debating the concept of salvation by faith versus faith without works is dead. (See James 2:14–26; Eph. 2:8, 9.)
• Composing a poem about your thoughts on God’s amazing grace.
• Watching the film Luther (2003) to understand the origins of Protestantism, which upholds the belief in righteousness by faith.
• Praying for a deeper understanding of God’s plan of salvation and affirming your desire to be in a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.
• Filling a blank sketchbook with quotations, images, drawings, poems, and any other small representations of what your faith in God means to you. Consider it a scrapbook about your relationship with God.
• Surveying the following topics in a concordance: love, faith, grace, works, sin, life. Count the number of times each of these is listed in the concordance, and once you determine the word with the most occurrences, spend a week looking up five or six of those references each day.
• Playing the praise song “He Has Made Me Glad” and clapping joyfully to the upbeat melody: see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLcpLD5DHDU.

CONNECT
Eph. 1:7; Col. 2:6; James 2:17; 1 John 2:3–6.
Spiritual Gifts, vol. 1, chap. 3.
Growing in Christ

“Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:15, NKJV).

lesson five
OCTOBER 27–NOVEMBER 2
“A flower’s fragrance declares to the entire world that it is fertile, available, and desirable, its [reproductive] organs oozing with nectar. Its smell reminds us in vestigial ways of fertility . . . all the optimism, expectancy, and passionate bloom of youth. We inhale its ardent aroma and, no matter what our ages, we feel young and nubile in a world aflame with desire.”* In stark contrast, a plant incapable of producing seed or fruit is sterile and unable to support the growth of the species.

These two representations clearly dictate the goals of the two opposing forces in the Christian’s life. Christ desires that we become fragrant flowers ever in full bloom, while the enemy wishes for us to be unproductive, bare, and stagnant—not producing any worthwhile fruit. What a dismal, unattractive picture. Yet the Bible gives us hope that we can overcome our barrenness by conforming to the character of God as revealed in His Son Jesus. Christian maturity is realizing that God can bring about goodness in any situation, allowing His name to be glorified. This is true even in our weaknesses, failures, and disappointments.

As we strive for spiritual growth, our lives are to be consumed with constant and consistent prayer. Prayer relieves our anxiety and leads us into complete reliance on God. It is our lifeline and not merely our request line. When we pray little, our lives become stagnant and our growth stunted. Prayer is supplemented by reading God’s Word and understanding His instructions for our lives. Once we are fully tuned into Christ and communicate with Him through prayer, we will also allow Him to speak to us through the Bible.

The blood of the Lamb redeems the maturing Christian. In this process of redemption, our lives become focused on the message of 1 Peter 1:17–19. Like the flower, we become fragrant, attractive, and full of vigor. Jesus Christ within us is lifted up and attracts hurting humanity to the kingdom of God, just as the fragrant flower attracts butterflies, birds, bees, and other insects. Only then can our barren, empty lives become fertile. Sin loses its hold, and we embrace the Cross and its victory. In this week’s study, we will examine how the Christian develops, and how this growth blesses both our lives and our community.

Our physical growth is measured by height and weight gain. Likewise, there are benchmarks for our spiritual growth. I have seen different aspects of this growth demonstrated in my life and the lives of my sisters. In our different experiences, we have garnered distinct blessings from the Cross. Together we are a complete representation of the transformation that occurs when we piggyback on Christ’s victory over sin and make that victory our own.

**Logos**

**Something for My Sisters—Clinging to the Cross**

Lean Forward (Mark 10:45; Gal. 4:4–7; Heb. 9:12–14)

At the cross we ponder the greatest gift given to humanity. The Son of God was crucified that we might receive salvation and gain the victory over sin. Lean forward and stare into His face. Catch a glimpse of the Loving Teacher, and the King of heaven—our Savior. This is the One who came to serve that we would no longer be servants. Through His blood we can now be called heirs to the kingdom of God (Gal. 4:4, 5).

My birthplace was at this cross where Jesus died. The agony of His death was the thrill of my birth. He was faultless, and His unblemished life allows me the opportunity to daily serve the Living God.

Break Free (Romans 6)

Christ’s victorious triumph over sin extends beyond the grave. In His death, the penalty for our sins was paid. Through His resurrection from the grave, we are given the hope that we will also be raised to the fullness of His life (Rom. 6:5). Our entire experience as fallen human beings is played out in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. We are no longer slaves to sin’s evil desires. We victoriously bask in the righteousness of Christ.

The chains wrapped around my sister were instantly broken the moment she released her disobedience and clung to the cross. The power sin had in her life and the inevitable death she faced became powerless. Today she lives free as a true servant of God, eagerly looking toward eternal life (verse 22).
Overcome the Evil Force (John 12:31, 32; Rom. 8:38, 39; Col. 2:8, 13–15)

The forces of darkness in this world are undeniable and unavoidable. However, the prince of darkness was defeated at Calvary. We must now state our allegiance, name our side, and hold fast to our commitment. “Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons . . . nor any powers . . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38, 39, NIV).

Before conversion we were indebted to sin, being constantly condemned. At the cross, Christ’s victory over evil played out in a spectacle for the entire world to see (John 12:31, 32). We are now partakers of His salvation with this triumphant defeat of the principalities and powers of this world.

The victory over the evil thoughts that tormented my sister is evident today. She walks steadfastly and prays steadfastly, keeping her eyes ever lifted to the cross. Her journey to Calvary was a rough path of disillusionment and defeat. At the cross her heart was drawn into His love, and there she nailed her sins to His cross. My sisters and I cling to the cross of Christ because we have experienced its benefits in our spiritual walks.

The words of the song “Ain’t no grave can hold my body down” speaks volumes. It testifies to the fact that when we nail our frail humanity to the cross, we begin a new life in Christ. The power of death and the grave then has no hold on us. Our new lives flourish, bear fruit, and witness to the world. We become living testimonies of God’s grace and His redemptive power.

**REACT**

1. What experiences and victories have you gained from the cross of Christ?
2. How have you experienced growth in your spiritual life from your first encounter with Christ to your current experiences with Him?

Camaria Holder, St. John’s, Antigua, West Indies
“He had agonized in the garden of Gethsemane in conflict with satanic agencies. He had endured the anguish of the betrayal, and had seen His disciples forsake Him and flee. He had been taken to Annas, then to Caiaphas, and then to Pilate. . . . From insult to renewed insult, from mockery to mockery. . . . [Yet] Christ had not failed. He had spoken no word but that tended to glorify God.”¹

“Satan’s rage was great as he saw that all the abuse inflicted upon the Saviour had not forced the least murmur from His lips.”²

“To Jesus in His agony on the cross there came one gleam of comfort. It was the prayer of the penitent thief. . . . This man was not a hardened criminal; he had been led astray by evil associations. . . . [But] he had seen and heard Jesus, and had been convicted by His teaching.”³

“Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, ‘Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service.’ ”⁴

“There is no time or place in which it is inappropriate to offer up a petition to God. . . . A closet of communion may be found wherever we are.”⁵

One cold December night, following a horrific traffic accident, I poured my heart out to God to save the lives of my friends. Amid the horror, I felt the presence of our loving Lord. My faith was renewed as I realized that God still answers prayers. Living a life of prayer helps us grow stronger in Christ. Our strength to be victorious over Satan lies in a life of prayer.

**REACT**

1. In this age of instant messaging, how can we have a strong prayer life?
2. How do we demonstrate spiritual maturity when the answers to our prayers are no or wait?

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². Ibid., p. 735.
³. Ibid., p. 749.
⁴. *Steps to Christ*, pp. 69, 70.
⁵. Ibid., p. 99.

Chevaughn Jace Nicholas, St. John’s, Antigua, West Indies
Our eternal happiness is the most important thing God has in mind for us. When we look at the horrifying effects of terrorism, Japan’s tsunami, wars, starvation, and world poverty, we may wonder why a loving God would allow such events. We need to dispel the notion that it is God’s will that bad things happen to us.

**Do not think for a minute that God is not present.**

Let’s dissect Ephesians 6:12 to understand why this is misguided and very destructive thinking. “For we wrestle.” The Greek word used here, πάλη (pale), denotes a “wrestling” and then a struggle, fight, or combat. This spiritual warfare is the constant struggle of Christians.

Our main controversy is not with people, but with the invisible spirits of wickedness that seek to destroy us.

“In high places.” The term *high places* is used “in order to mark the higher range of their [the evil angels] powers than ours.” It is against such spirits, and all their malignant influences, that Christians are called to contend.

There is a lot of pain and suffering in the world today, but it is of paramount importance to understand and recognize God’s influence in the midst of all these calamities. It may appear impossible to see God’s providence in the face of tragedy. However, God will bring good out of everything, if we allow Him to do so.

Do not think for a minute that God is not present, does not feel our pain, is not working to bring us peace, or make the best of a bad situation (John 16:33). He wants us to have fulfillment and enjoyment in this life. But He is more interested in our eternal welfare, not in the fleeting and superficial satisfaction this world offers.

To win the victory over evil and sin, we must first put on the whole armor of Christ (Eph. 6:11–13) and submit to Him. By not donning the armor, we are fighting on our own. We must be consistent in prayer and seek God’s will. Only then will mighty things happen. The principalities and powers of this life will not stand. Using the authority of Jesus’ name and by the power of Christ within us, we can break all curses and gain victory.

**REACT**

1. Even if you don’t believe in evil curses, can they still affect you?
2. How “good” must a person be to be saved from bad things?

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Desni-Ann Hackett, Calgary, Alberta, Canada
The process of grafting merges two different types of plants of the same species together so they become one. One plant serves as the root system for the new plant. This is known as the rootstock. The other plant supplies the stem or branch that is to be joined to the rootstock. This is called the scion.* The new plant is a combination of the two. It is rooted in the earth and receives nourishment from one species, but bears the fruit of the other. We can experience this type of connection to Christ. How can this be accomplished?

**We are no longer capable of reflecting Christ’s character.**

* Connect to the True Rootstock. Many plants do not produce quality seeds that have consistent properties for reproducing a new crop. Others can have a hard time establishing effective root systems in certain climates. Likewise, as a result of sin, we are no longer capable of reflecting Christ’s character (Gal. 5:22, 23). Therefore, our heavenly Farmer produces new, healthy Christian crops by using an already successful Rootstock—Christ Jesus. God sent forth His Son that He might redeem us that we might be adopted as sons (Gal. 4:4, 5). This process of redemption is like grafting us to Christ.

* Allow God to begin the healing process. Successful grafting occurs when the scion is fully joined to the rootstock and the scars at the point of connection are no longer evident. The process takes time and special care by the farmer to ensure that the new branch begins receiving food through the roots. When we are first connected to Christ, God takes special care of us until we begin to thrive. He then continues to facilitate the healing process even after we become fully integrated into the life of Christ.

* Secure your survival. The kind of scion that farmers use to graft should be in the state of dormancy for them to survive. It cannot bear fruit of its own and must first be connected to the rootstock to obtain water and necessary nutrients for its survival. Our survival as Christians is only guaranteed by accepting what Christ has done for us through His death and resurrection (Rom. 6:4–10). When we live only on the food He feeds us, our survival will be sure.

**REACT**

1. What is the difference between a lifestyle separated from God and one connected to Him?

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Nickeza Jones-Wilson, St. John’s, Montserrat, West Indies
As a child, I had a problem with sucking my thumb. My parents tried everything to get me to stop. They had an entire arsenal of methods, but nothing worked. I don’t remember what caused me to finally stop. Maybe I just grew up.

**Sometimes we throw temper tantrums.**

The phases of our growth are described in 1 Corinthians 13:11. There is a time when we speak, think, and understand as children. As children of God, there comes a time when we must grow up. Actively putting away childish things is not an easy task, but God has given us the power to grow in Him. Children do not know what is in their best interest. They need to be clothed, encouraged to do assignments, and to behave appropriately. However, mature Christians seek God’s face daily. They realize that a relationship with God can grow only through communication and trust in Him alone.

Sometimes we throw temper tantrums even though we should be mature in Christ. Imagine that you saw two adults in a grocery store and one suggested to the other that maybe he shouldn’t purchase a certain item. The person who wanted the item threw the item in his shopping cart and spoke angrily to his friend. Does this seem unrealistic? Yet, as human beings, we behave this way daily. We throw tantrums in front of our Creator. We refuse to read His Word or even to talk to Him when things in our lives become difficult. Instead of trying to understand Him more in our trials, we often shut down even further.

God has no tricks or gimmicks to get our attention; He just offers unconditional love. We have the promise in Romans 8:39 that nothing can separate us from the love of God. We tend to measure affection by the lengths someone will go. Our attention is piqued when we receive gifts, flowers, exquisite chocolates, or home-cooked meals. Imagine: the Creator of the universe came to die as a ransom for our sins. Shouldn’t that be enough to get our attention? Shouldn’t this cause us to want to know Him more?

**REACT**

1. When was your last spiritual temper tantrum? Can you think of a time recently when you thought God wasn’t on your side? How did you feel when you realized He was the one fighting for you?
2. How have you been deficient in your growth with God? Are there steps you can take to draw closer to Him?

_Scheri-lyn Makombe, Indianapolis, Indiana, U.S.A._
CONCLUDE
In His infinite wisdom, God designed the life cycle of all living creatures to start small, grow, mature, bear fruit, and fulfill a purpose. It is no different in our spiritual journey. When we accept Christ as our Savior, we are born into a relationship with Him through His sacrifice on the cross. From that point, He draws us to Him to walk with us and to guide us as we grow in His likeness. Though Satan will attempt to stunt that growth or to destroy that relationship altogether, we have hope in Christ’s victory over sin and death. That victory can be ours every day.

CONSIDER
• Thinking back to the moment of your spiritual birth. Journal about how you felt and the expectations you had about your relationship with Christ. Reflect on how those expectations have been met.
• Creating a montage showing aspects of the struggle you face against Satan’s daily attacks. Use magazines, pictures, and other materials for your artwork.
• Reading Ephesians 6:10–18. Discuss with a friend how you can wear the armor of God in practical ways.
• Cooking a healthful meal with your friends. Discuss how healthful food compares to healthful spiritual nourishment. Also consider how you can “prepare” and “eat” spiritually healthful food and the benefits you receive when doing so is a daily habit.
• Praying for 15 minutes three times a day for a week. Evaluate your experience and document the impact this has on your spiritual growth.
• Role-playing a day in the life of a fruit-bearing Christian. Consider how what you role-play can become a reality.

CONNECT
Victory Over Evil

Forces

“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37, NKJV).
“Today, at my direction, the United States launched a targeted opera-
[that] . . . killed Osama bin Laden and took custody of his body,” an-
nounced President Obama on May 2, 2011.1

An order such as this one can only be given by someone with power
and authority. The centurion, whose servant was ill, didn’t find himself
worthy for Jesus to come to his home. He recognized that Jesus was a
Man of authority, saying, “ ‘I also am a man under authority, having sol-
diers under me’ ” (Matt. 8:9, NKJV).

Jesus, with His power and authority, directed the centurion, “ ‘Go your
way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you’ ” (verse 13,
NKJV), and in that very hour the centurion’s servant was healed.

Jesus gives that same power and authority to those who submit them-
selves to Him. Overcoming sin is possible only through Jesus! Many
Christians claim the promises found in James 4:7, saying, “Resist the devil
and he will flee from you,” forgetting that this is possible only if we “submit
to God” first (NKJV). The submission is what gives us the power to resist
the evil schemes of the devil. “He called His twelve disciples together and
gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases”
(Luke 9:1, NKJV). The power (dynamin, “spiritual ability”) and authority
(exousian, “the right to exercise the power”) over the demonic realm and
the physical realm of diseases is given to those who follow Jesus.2

Alone, it is impossible to follow God. Therefore, we need to be in Jesus, walking with Him daily,
dying to self, and letting His power overcome the temptations that are
constantly thrown at us by the enemy.

Are you willing to submit to God and allow His power to release you
from the chains of sin?

2. Luke 9:1–6, The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Colo-
rado Springs, Colo.: David C. Cook, 1983).
A snooze button can be a curse. Pushing it can result in a missed exam or a screaming boss. I am convinced it was invented to encourage procrastination. However, if you set your alarm clock far enough ahead so you can use the snooze, yet still wake up on time, then it can be a blessing. The best advice: Don’t use it at all!

Don’t hit the snooze button!

It was normal for Jews in Israel to delve into the practice of exorcism (Matt. 12:27). Paul condemned these methods. Everywhere he traveled, he chose God instead of sorcery. In Ephesus, “God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, . . . and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them” (Acts 19:11, 12, NIV). He was so gifted that Jewish practitioners of magic endeavored to mirror him. The seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish high priest, attempted to use the name of Jesus to exorcise an evil spirit (verse 14). They were unsuccessful; instead, the spirit assaulted them, leaving them naked and wounded. Word of this defeat quickly spread throughout the region; and the indisputable evidence showed that Jesus was superior to all the other gods. As a result, those who practiced magic cast their expensive manuals in a fire. “In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” (verse 20, NIV).

This exciting story is a testimony of victory over evil and how a curse can be turned into a blessing. “He thwarts Satan’s strategy of usurping Jesus’ power and he causes even the demon to advance God’s kingdom in a Gentile world.”*

The Greek word for demon is daimôn, meaning “unclean spirit.” Today, a more appropriate definition could be “distraction” and may appear in the form of the Internet, the iPhone, and Facebook. Anything that takes the place of God can be considered a demon in your life. With this constant bombardment of technology, why not counteract the devil’s attacks by turning your tweets into a testimony of God’s love? Evil will not have the victory! The Cross: Christ’s Redemption Obliterating Satan’s Schemes, squashes all of the devil’s attacks due to the love God has for us! Turn evil into good. Don’t hit the snooze button!

REACT

How can you use fast-advancing technology to spread the gospel?

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Iccarus D. Broach, Burtonsville, Maryland, U.S.A.
If we believe the Bible, we must believe its consistent testimony concerning the reality of the spiritual dimension of this world. Good and evil angels, or spirits, are present and active on Earth (Heb. 1:14; Eph. 6:12). While they are generally unobservable (2 Kings 6:16, 17), it is within their power to significantly impact the material world (2 Kings 19:35; Rev. 16:13, 14).

Demonic suggestion does not seem as frightening as demonic possession.

After losing the war in heaven (Rev. 12:7–9), and after having his head crushed by the Seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), Satan’s vicious “enmity” is now directed against the “remnant of her seed” (Rev. 12:17, KJV). The Bible records the fierce spiritual warfare faced by Jesus and the apostles, both subtle and overt (Matt. 16:21–23; Acts 13:6–12; 1 Pet. 5:8).

How much more fiercely will this war be waged when the devil “knows that he has a short time” (Rev. 12:12, NKJV)? The church, collectively and individually, is the object of constant and carefully crafted attacks. “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37, NKJV).


While boasting of freedom (Gen. 3:1, 5), Satan’s true desire is to control us, that we may accomplish “his will” (2 Tim. 2:26, NIV). He does this in two ways: demonic suggestion and demonic possession.

In Matthew 16:21–23, Jesus told His disciples of His sufferings and death. Peter rebuked Jesus, saying this would not happen to Him. Jesus then said to Peter, “ ‘Get behind Me, Satan!’ ” (verse 23, NKJV). A few verses before, Jesus had affirmed Peter’s reception of a heavenly revelation (verse 17). It is therefore highly unlikely that he was now the victim of demonic possession. No, Peter was the victim of demonic suggestion.

As he had with Eve, Satan suggested the thought, and Peter accepted, accomplishing the devil’s will. At first glance, demonic suggestion does not seem as frightening as demonic possession. However, with
every demonic suggestion we accept, we become more controlled by the
demon and less capable of exercising our will against his sug-
gestions. We become slaves and candidates for demonic possession
(Rom. 6:16).

The New Testament contains many examples of demonic posses-
sion. In most cases, we don’t know much about the individuals be-
fore their possession. The notable exception is Judas, who, John said,
“used to help himself to what was put into” the moneybag (John 12:6,
NIV). Judas repeatedly accepted this demonic suggestion, which pre-
pared him to accept the suggestion to betray Jesus (John 13:2). And fi-
nally, having become a slave of Satan, he was a candidate for demonic
possession, and “Satan entered into him” (verse 27, NIV).

The Weapons of Our Warfare (Matt. 12:28; John 8:31, 32; 1 John
5:4)

How can we escape being taken captive by demonic forces? First,
we must have faith in Jesus and His Word (1 John 5:4). Faith is the
shield that protects us against believing the suggestions of the devil
(Eph. 6:16).

By reading, studying, and meditating on the Word, Jesus promises
that we will know the truth. This will prevent us from being taken cap-
tive by demonic forces. If Peter had been studying and listening to
Jesus’ words, he would have known the truth of the nature of Christ’s
mission and could have rejected the suggestion of Satan.

To have victory over evil forces, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit.
Jesus said He cast out devils “ by the Spirit of God” (Matt. 12:28,
NKJV). It is through this same spirit that we may obtain the victory. His
fruit is faith (Gal. 5:22), He guides us into all truth (John 16:13), and He
will bring back Jesus’ words of truth to our remembrance (John 14:26).
Therefore, He is the active agent to guard us against the lying sugges-
tions of the enemy.

REACT

1. What are some demonic suggestions that I commonly accept?
What passages of scripture can help protect me against these in the
future? What is a good action plan when I’m faced with demonic sug-
gestion?

2. How can I remain filled with the Spirit (Luke 11:13; John 14:26;
Acts 5:32; Gal. 3:14)?

Ean Nugent, Bowie, Maryland, U.S.A.
Satan “will lay snares for those who claim to keep the commandments of God, and who are almost on the borders of the heavenly Canaan. He will use his powers to their utmost in order to entrap souls and to take God’s professed people upon their weakest points.”1

The good news is that God didn’t create us so that we would fail. Jesus faced the greatest temptations and won; with Him on our side, conquering Satan is also possible.

“This is no time to compromise.”

“We see Christ, the Captain of our salvation, meeting the prince of darkness in open battle, and single-handed, obtaining the victory in our behalf. We learn, too, that by this victory, was opened to us a door of hope, a source of strength, and that we may, as faithful soldiers, fight our own battles with the wily foe, and conquer in the name of Jesus.”2

The devil constantly tries to use his schemes to defeat us. However, if we put on the whole armor of God every day, Satan will lose again and again. Then one day soon, we will all be victorious in Jesus’ name when we receive our crowns of glory.

“We are pressing on to the final conflict, and this is no time to compromise. It is no time to hide your colors. When the battle wages sore, let no one turn traitor. It is no time to lay down or conceal our weapons, and give Satan the advantage in the warfare. But unless you watch, and keep your garments unspotted from the world, you will not stand true to your Captain. . . . Call to your fellow-watchmen, crying, ‘The morning cometh, and also the night.’ It is no time now to relax our efforts, to become tame and spiritless; no time to hide our light under a bushel, to speak smooth things, to prophesy deceit. Every power is to be employed for God. You are to maintain your allegiance, bearing testimony for God and for truth.”3

**REACT**

1. How does it make you feel to know that Satan hates you just as much as God loves you?

2. How many times have you not relied on God when faced with a challenge? How would the situation have been different if you had?

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Vivienne Greice Martinelli, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.
For all humans, God has outlined instructions to live life and claim victory over evil forces. The following are guidelines to help in your victory.

Praise God! There’s much to praise Him for. Jesus won the war of good versus evil (Rev. 20:10). It ended before it had begun. He is the only one worthy of praise! (Rev. 7:9, 10). Even in dark times, we should praise God (Job 1:21). We are able to see His victory in our lives.

We have an advantage too.

Envision His and your victory. While God surely needs no one, He has such an overabundance of love that He created us to be loved and to love. Imagine how wonderful your testimony of deliverance from evil will be. Imagine the tempter’s failure, and rejoice at the idea of overcoming his temptations.

Expect evil. Unfortunately, evil hides around every corner. Satan wants you to worry about each step to prevent you from enjoying daily life. He may use temptations that seem like a good thing but are actually twisting the clarity of morality and ethics (Gen. 3:6).

Know ourselves. The devil has an advantage: he knows our temptations. But we have an advantage too: we know our temptations. We have a chance to eschew evil (Prov. 4:14, 15). When we’re strongest, we can take precautions to prevent falling when we’re weakest. Whatever our iniquities, make plans to circumvent bad habits and introduce methods to remove ourselves from tempting situations.

Know the Word. Since we know what types of battles we’ll encounter, we can equip ourselves with the Word. Tape scriptures around your home. Memorize them. In troubling times, recite them aloud as Jesus did (Matt. 4:7).

Praise God! Through everything we endure, every time we fail and fall there is one constant—God’s love. So give praise (Ps. 96:8). His victory is promised. Add to it and share in it.

REACT
1. What can life’s daily trials teach me about God?
2. How can I know when I am being tested or tempted?
Our lifestyles are made up of choices. These are opportunities that can bring us closer to our Creator and Savior and closer to victory. But, it doesn’t just happen. We must purposely plan for it, prepare for it, and have foresight.

When people speak of overcoming temptations, they often put too much emphasis on what not to do. This can cause individuals to do what’s right only temporarily because the negative, such as guilt and fear, motivates them. We should, instead, be motivated by the positive. We should choose to be victorious because we love Jesus, not because we don’t want to be condemned.

We should . . . be motivated by the positive.

While taking an early childhood education course in college, I learned from my professor that instead of telling a child what not to do, one should tell them exactly what to do. Instead of saying, “Do not yell,” tell the child, “Please use your indoor voice.”

Perhaps a more pertinent example would be telling people who want to lose weight not to eat sweets. The people will start obsessing over the idea that they should not eat sweets, and they become frustrated because, inevitably, all they can think about is sweets! A better approach would be to tell the people to eat more fruits and vegetables. This gives them a viable alternative for which they can take action. Putting this into the Christian context, we should focus our thoughts on Jesus and doing what is pleasing to Him, instead of obsessing so much over temptations and failures.

Temptation is everywhere, even if it is not always apparent. By reflecting on each decision we make, we can ask ourselves if it is bringing us closer to God or leading us farther away. By praying earnestly, studying His Word daily, and letting Him take control of our lives, we can acquire wisdom and discipline to be victorious in overcoming our temptations—we just need to conscientiously choose to.

Jesus is always with us when challenges, dilemmas, or disappointments come our way. Nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:28–39). Stick to your loving Savior, and He will make you victorious. Choose Him today, in all things!

**REACT**

1. What do you already do that shows that Jesus Christ is your priority?
2. Give some examples that can help you defeat temptation.
3. How can you choose Jesus consistently through your daily tasks?

Lilian Lima, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE
There are many practical advantages to living the Christian lifestyle. However, we must always remember that Christianity has an “otherworldly” outlook. As Christians, we know that there exists another dimension of reality beyond the material world. How thankful we can be for the promises of victory for us in both dimensions. The great controversy between Christ and Satan helps us to understand our role in both dimensions. Christianity does not abandon us to the mercilessness of Satan’s opposition, for in Christ we have the promise of victory.

CONSIDER
• Singing the hymn “For All the Saints” (no. 421 in The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal). Then consider how your life is reflected in the words of this hymn. For example, how has Christ been your “captain in the well-fought fight” against sin?
• Creating an object out of metal, wood, sculpting clay, or paper that symbolizes to you the victory over evil that we have in Christ. What will you title this piece and why?
• Looking up the word victory in a concordance. What is the context of each verse? Rank the verses you find in order of their relevance to your relationship with Christ.
• Walking in a place of natural beauty and photographing things that remind you of the hope we have in Christ. What titles would you give each photograph?
• Posting something on Twitter or Facebook about a recent victory Christ helped you to win.
• Reflecting on times in your life when God gave you victory over a particular sin or problem. Then consider a situation or a habit you currently need help with and ask God to help gain victory over it.

CONNECT
Hebrews 11; 1 John 3:8, 9.
Steps to Christ, pp. 98–104; Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, pp. 141–144.
“Arming” for Victory

“Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:13, NKJV).
Researchers put a group of four-year-olds through a classic test designed to measure self-control. The children were left in a room with cookies, marshmallow treats, and pretzel sticks. One researcher told them that if they could wait for him to return, they could have two treats instead of just one. The children also had the option of ringing a bell while the adult was away. Then the researcher would return, and the child could eat one treat but not the second. The children were then rated as either having low, average, or high self-control depending on how long they could wait to eat the treat.* As Christians, temptations surround us daily. However, we can gain strength from the idea behind this experiment. If the children could find the patience to wait and believe they would receive a better reward in the end, then we as Christians have an even greater anticipation of the reward awaiting us—eternal life.

In the experiment, the children who waited for their reward resisted instant gratification by distracting themselves, but we, as Christians, have an even better method of resisting temptations. Our only hope of salvation comes by wearing the full armor of God. How can we do that? It will be a struggle. It will be a fight. Sin abounds more so today than ever before. There are so many different darts Satan throws (Eph. 6:16). By carefully reading Ephesians 6:10–18, we learn that we need every part of God’s armor and that prayer also is essential.

In this week’s lesson we will discuss how to put on the armor of God. Even though temptations at times seem ever harder to resist, we have many pieces of armor to help us in our fight. Don’t give up. Salvation is attainable. Holiness is reachable. Keep running the race. Keep battling temptations in the Lord’s strength, until that glorious day when we won’t ever be tempted again.

“Would you leave the house without your clothes on?” My friend giggled. “Of course not,” I replied. There are some things you find time to do, no matter how late you’re running or how sleepy you are. Think of your devotions like putting on clothes. What time do you get up? Get up fifteen minutes earlier. Start there. It seemed simple, but how does one read a book that has lost its appeal? Devotions shouldn’t be solely a matter of passion. Otherwise, we become seasonal worshipers—immersing ourselves in God’s Word when we are delighted in Him, but straying from the Bible when it ceases to amuse us or fit our schedules. Devotions, however, require just that—devotion. And devotion is just as important as passion. In this way, devotions might be more like a uniform or business suit than play clothes. They shouldn’t be haphazard, something you just throw on. Paul explains precisely what sort of outfit we should be putting on. Read Ephesians 6:11–17.

Why is it that we subject ourselves to sweaty foreheads and helmet hair?

Because we are all different, each person’s armor must be tailor-made. Likewise, devotions are a deeply personal thing. Each of us must consider our own weaknesses, the challenges we face, and the successes we’ve accomplished. If you have been moved by a particular author, start there. If music stirs your soul, surround yourself with it. Find ways you connect with God and begin there. Eventually, add new devotional methods. Lengthen your devotionals, meditate on God’s Word, pray at 4:00 A.M., write poetry, or illustrate Bible stories. But no matter what custom designs you incorporate into your suit, there are a few key pieces that are essential.

A Good Soldier Needs a Belt (Eph. 6:14)

The fight is dire enough without having the added battle of keeping your pants up. A belt protects the sword and holds in place the soldier’s clothes. Without the belt of truth, if we are trying to get by with deceit and lies, we will find ourselves constantly having to keep things up at the risk of being exposed.

A Righteous Plate (Eph. 6:14)

Next Paul mentions the “breastplate of righteousness.” This piece of armor protects the chest. Being good, just, and decent helps keep our hearts in a pure state and spares us from experiencing many of the terrible blows of sin and guilt.
A Good Pair of Shoes (Eph. 6:15)
Shoes “fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace” (NIV) are another essential component of a soldier’s outfit. With the gospel of peace readily fixed in your mind, you will be able to navigate any rough situations you come across.

The Power of a Shield (Eph. 6:16)
“In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (NIV). Faith is a solace when our burning questions just don’t have any answers. We can trust that God is good and that He will open our eyes when the time is right. Without this assurance, how could we withstand Satan’s attacks?

Where Is Your Helmet? (Eph. 6:17)
I remember complaining as a child about all the knee pads, elbow pads, and wrist pads my mother insisted I wear whenever riding my bike. She gradually rescinded on all but the helmet. Why is it that we subject ourselves to sweaty foreheads and helmet hair? Because our faces and brains are some of our most important features. We see, hear, taste, and communicate with our faces. They are also how people identify us. Without the hope of salvation, every accident, mistake, and tragedy would be that much more grave; but with the promise of eternity, we know that our identities and characters are safe from harm, no matter what may befall our bodies.

A Sword Is Necessary (Eph. 6:17)
Up until this point the pieces of armor have been for self-defense, but now Paul calls for an implement of aggression. Swords pierce, attack, and kill. So why are we to carry one? God’s Word can pierce through the blackness surrounding a cold heart. His Spirit is what can actively engage others. When Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted, He and Satan engaged in aggressive back-and-forth challenges wherein the fate of the world hung upon an apt reply. Satan is happy to take those sorts of jabs at our biblical knowledge. If we are unprepared, he can deal us a blow that can shake our faith, perhaps beyond recovery.

Having completed the list of armor, Paul concludes by urging his readers to pray “at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication” (Eph. 6:18, ESV). His repetition stresses the importance of what he is saying. We must pray that we may remain alert to the dangers surrounding our souls. We must pray for those around us so that they, too, might not forget the urgency with which we ought to seek Christ daily. We can do all things, but only through Him who gives us strength.

REACT
1. Why can’t we wear only part of the armor?
2. Why is a sword, an implement of aggression, included in the list?

Melissa Breetzke, Burtonsville, Maryland, U.S.A.
“See the storms and tempests. Satan is working in the atmosphere; he is poisoning the atmosphere, and here we are dependent upon God for our lives—our present and eternal life. And being in the position that we are, we need to be wide awake, wholly devoted, wholly converted, wholly consecrated to God. But we seem to sit as though we were paralyzed. God of heaven, wake us up! . . .

“Through earnest prayer, [Jesus was a] conqueror.”

“Those who engage in the work of God’s cause today will meet just such trials as Paul endured in his work. By the same boastful and deceptive work Satan will seek to draw converts from the faith. Theories will be brought in that it will not be wise for us to handle. Satan is a cunning worker, and he will bring in subtle fallacies to darken and confuse the mind and root out the doctrines of salvation. Those who do not accept the Word of God just as it reads, will be snared in his trap.

“Today we need to speak the truth with holy boldness. The testimony borne to the early church by the Lord’s messenger, His people are to hear in this time: ‘Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed’ (Gal. 1:8).”

“If the Savior of men, with His divine strength, felt the need of prayer, how much more should feeble, sinful mortals feel the necessity of prayer—fervent, constant prayer! When Christ was the most fiercely beset by temptation, He ate nothing. He committed Himself to God, and through earnest prayer, and perfect submission to the will of His Father, came off conqueror. Those who profess the truth for these last days, above every other class of professed Christians, should imitate the great Exemplar in prayer.”

**REACT**

1. What radical changes would take place in our lives if we took these warnings and admonitions seriously?
2. In what ways can you make Bible study a part of your life so that you will be able to detect the subtle fallacies of Satan?
3. Is prayer a vital part of your life? How can you make it more central?

2. Counsels on Diet and Foods, pp. 52, 53.
As God’s child, you must personally choose to wear each piece of the armor. Paul’s armor was modeled after the Roman soldier’s garb.∗

The belt of truth: Soldiers wore a knee-length tunic over an undergarment. For freedom of movement, they shortened their tunics by using their belts, which also held a short sword and a dagger. Truth brings you freedom (John 8:32). You must choose to know truth, and to live and speak it as well, if you desire to remain with God (Ps. 15:1, 2).

The breastplate of righteousness: This was often made of interlocking metal rings bound together by leather thongs. It wrapped around the body, protecting vital organs. You are only righteous because of Jesus, but you must choose to walk in that righteousness. It is another requirement for you to remain with God (Ps. 15:1, 2).

The shoes of the gospel: Roman soldiers wore boots, which protected their feet from rocky terrain and perhaps even metal that fell during battle. Part of your armor is readiness to be used of God, so others can hear about Him (see Rom. 10:14, 15).

The shield of faith: In hand-to-hand combat, a soldier carried a small portable shield made of thick leather, framed with wood or metal. This deflected a blow by a sword, spear, or dart. When Satan comes at you with a wrong thought or temptation, your faith in God and His promises will be your shield (1 John 5:4).

The helmet of salvation: A blow to the head can be fatal, so the iron or bronze helmet with its long cheek protectors and wide flaring neck protector in back was vitally important. Knowing you have salvation (1 John 5:13) places you in a position of confidence with God so that you can come boldly to Him for help (see Heb. 4:16), resting in the assurance that help will be given.

The sword of God: A soldier’s only offensive weapons were a short two-edged sword, a dagger carried in the belt, and sometimes two six-foot-long javelins. The Bible is your offensive weapon. Study it every day, and whenever you face temptation.

Armor has been used throughout history to protect soldiers in battle. A suit of plate armor with a narrow slit through which the wearer could see was used by late medieval knights. This mental picture is probably what most of us visualize when we read about the spiritual armor described in Ephesians 6:11–17. Unlike medieval knights, Christians have available to them the whole armor of God—free of charge—purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ. Satan is like a roaring lion constantly seeking to devour us (1 Pet. 5:8). It is critical, therefore, that we not only put on the whole armor of God, but that we keep it on! Following are some practical ways we can use God’s armor effectively:

**Study the road map before the day’s journey begins.**

*Plug into the Power Source.* Jesus set the standard for doing this. “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (Mark 1:35, NIV). If prayer was so essential to our Savior while He was on earth, then just imagine how essential it is for us to connect with God this way.

*Study the road map before the day’s journey begins.* It is important to read God’s Word every day. If we don’t take time to put good thoughts into our minds, we will be easily sidetracked from our Christian walk.

*Memorize Scripture and meditate upon it.* Committing Scripture to memory may seem a bit old fashioned when most of us whip out our smart phones and access the Word through our mobile browser. Yet nothing helps us resist temptation like keeping passages of Scripture stored in our minds and hearts (Ps. 119:11). Jesus was able to use the sword of the Word because He memorized Scripture (Luke 4:1–13).

Whatever you do, remember not to let your armor just sit on a shelf and collect dust!

**REACT**

1. Why is it important to begin your day with prayer and Bible study?
2. How can you balance your busy schedule to include quiet time with God every day?
3. Why does the Bible liken the Word of God to a sword?
4. Why is it important to memorize Scripture?

David Peters, Bridgeport, Connecticut, U.S.A.
God commands us to put on all of His armor because every moment of every day we are walking in the enemy’s territory, and the only way we can withstand his advances is by wearing that armor. With this truth, it is important to know how each piece plays a role in its overall purpose.

**We are saved! We must keep hold of that truth.**

The *belt of truth* protects us from Satan’s lies. We must not underestimate these lies, for they are often mixed with truth. Jesus, though, offers the remedy: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). He is the belt that gives us security in this insecure world. The *breastplate of righteousness* is a central component to this armor. A breastplate shields one’s upper body from fatal blows. Likewise, wearing God’s righteousness—obeying His commandments—delivers us from death. We are called to go throughout the world with the *shoes of preparation* of the gospel of peace. In other words, we are to share with others the gospel in Christ. While a shield guards one physically, faith guards one spiritually—especially in the midst of trial. Instead of focusing on the discouraging things of this world, we must focus on Christ and His gift of salvation with the *helmet of salvation*. We are saved! We must keep hold of that truth.

Most parts of God’s armor are forms of protection. However, the *sword of the Spirit* engages the enemy in combat. Ephesians 6:16 says the devil uses fiery arrows against us. If He wanted, God could have given us ranged weapons, making it easier to stand back in safety and fight the devil from a distance. He didn’t, though, for a reason. God does not want complacent or fearful Christians. He calls us to be bold fighters, ready and willing to defend our faith and send the enemy running.

Even with God’s armor, we will still need to know how to fight this spiritual battle. It is natural to always keep your eyes on the enemy in any fight. Take boxing or wrestling matches, for example. The minute you take your eyes off of your opponent, he strikes. To safeguard against Satan’s crippling attacks, we must keep our eyes fixed on Christ. Then victory will inevitably be ours!

**REACT**

1. What factors do you think persuade Christians not to lead God-filled lives?
2. Are there any pieces of God’s armor that you find yourself lacking today?

Vanessa Estime, Norwalk, Connecticut, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE
This week’s lesson presents the need for preparation to ward off and combat Satan’s assaults. The necessary tools are profound in their apparent simplicity: connection to Christ through prayer, Bible study, and internalizing biblical truth through meditation upon and memorization of God’s Word. Paul equates that preparation to the body armor used by the Roman soldiers familiar to his readers, and he emphasizes the power of God’s Word by calling it a sword, the ultimate weapon available to the Roman foot soldiers. We foot soldiers of Christ must rely on the “armor of God” to serve Him as stalwartly as those early soldiers served Rome.

CONSIDER
• Updating the Roman armor analogy by analyzing the applicable components of a spacesuit found at http://www.nasa.gov/audience/foreducators/spacesuits/home/clickable_suit.html. Emphasize the shoes, suit layers, and helmet as you compare them to the function of the Roman armor equivalent. What similarities exist with their antecedent’s spiritual meanings?
• Composing a song about the “armor of God” and its relevance to today’s Christian.
• Role-playing a meeting between an earnest Roman soldier (hypothetically wearing full Roman armor) who genuinely wants to learn from a Christian about the message of Jesus of Nazareth. His Christian listener proceeds to compare the soldier’s armor elements to the spiritual meanings of the “armor of God.”
• Contemplating or observing “armors” found in nature such as protective shells, plating, bark, exoskeletons, and so on, and brainstorming comparisons to the spiritual meanings of the “armor of God.”
• Interviewing a soldier who is wearing full combat gear or who can discuss the components of full combat gear and comparing that to the spiritual meanings of the “armor of God.”
• Composing a poem about the spiritual meaning of the “armor of God.”

CONNECT

Rick Blondo, Clarksville, Maryland, U.S.A.
The Church—In Service to Humanity

“These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:14, 15, NKJV).
A few months ago, our Adventist Youth leader led an activity that required two people sitting on the floor to lean their backs against each other and use only their legs to stand up. This is a difficult, if not an impossible task; but with the help of a third person, both were able to stand. We tried this activity with three and then four people, and it became increasingly easier as each person was added.

"Seek companions; be a team member."

The take-home message was clear—a person who has fallen needs assistance to stand. This idea of lending a hand to someone who has fallen in any sense of the word is crucial, regardless of why a person has fallen. God highly values the unity and cohesiveness required to help others pick themselves up. In fact, God Himself works in unity as the Godhead. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work together toward a singular purpose. While on earth, Jesus prayed that the unity He had with His Father could occur among His followers (John 17:21–23). And because we are made in God’s image (Gen. 1:26), we are to reflect this concept of unity in how we deal with each other in the church, especially as we work together to spread the gospel message and to be a light to the world.

Solomon recognized the futility of anyone who works in seclusion, and he praised the advantages of companionship. Read Ecclesiastes 4:7–12. “There are advantages to cooperating with others. Life is designed for companionship, not isolation, for intimacy, not loneliness. Some people prefer isolation, thinking they cannot trust anyone. We are not here on earth to serve ourselves, however, but to serve God and others. Don’t isolate yourself and try to go it alone. Seek companions; be a team member.”

As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are encouraged to lift up fellow church members and anyone else who needs our help. In studying this week’s lesson, keep in mind the importance of serving others both inside and outside the church, and remember that as we are of service, we are reflecting Christ to others.

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Throughout Scripture, God urges the unity of the church and of the members within it. “Brothers and sisters, I ask all of you to agree with one another. I make my appeal in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then you won’t take sides. You will be in complete agreement in all that you think” (1 Cor. 1:10, NIV).

**God equips us with everything we need.**

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we must be committed to giving up everything to God, to be in perfect unity with the Lord. A unit can be described as a whole or a totality that is composed of different parts. Unity is one of the fundamental principles that we as a church should focus on. In John 17:21–23 Jesus focuses upon the unity that He, the Father, and the Holy Spirit share.

In John 20:19–22, Jesus explains to the disciples the power and influence the Holy Spirit will have upon them when He returns to the Father. The unity of the Trinity will guide the disciples and influence the world through their ministries.

As a church, how can we become more united and work together for the good of God? The disciples came from different walks of life, but they were put together to work for one goal and purpose. How were they able to work as a whole in order to accomplish their God-given task?

God sent them the Holy Spirit to guide them (John 16:7–16). We can be united because Jesus has given us salvation. It does not matter where we come from, because Jesus has come into our lives and has shown us His love. Furthermore, God equips us with everything we need. United in Christ, we stand not by our own means but by God’s means. When we put God first and keep His Word deep within our hearts, we will have unity. For “just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Rom. 12:4–6, NIV).

**REACT**

1. How can your local church work together for the good of God?
2. How can you personally put God first in everything that you do?
**More Than a Building (1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Pet. 2:9)**

When most people hear the word *church*, they instantly picture a building with stained glass windows and a cross on top, with nicely dressed people inside listening to someone preach. But is that all a church is? Dictionary.com gives these definitions of a church:

1. A building for public Christian worship.
2. Public worship of God or a religious service in such a building.
3. The whole body of Christian believers.¹

The first two definitions summarize what most people think, while the third definition defines a collection of people as opposed to just a building. Such a definition should help us to understand the purpose of the church.

In 1 Corinthians 1:2, Paul greets the people by saying “Unto the church of God . . . to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.” Here Paul makes no reference to a building or a weekly Sabbath service. Instead, he relates to the church as a group of people sanctified, or made holy, in Jesus. In the Bible, *church* is always translated from the same Greek word—*ekklēsia*, which means “the called out ones.”² Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, and the others do not reference a place of worship, but people who are called out. Called out from what, you may ask? “Called . . . out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

**Orders, Captain? (Matt. 10:5–8; James 1:27; Eph. 1:19–23; Rev. 14:6, 7)**

It is important to know that the church is truly the people and not simply a building. It is also important to know what our work is and who our Leader is. “What is the exceeding greatness of his power . . . which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body” (Eph. 1:19–23). Yes, Jesus Christ is our Master and Commander.
We are to devote our lives to Him. Notice that after calling Christ the Head of the church, Paul calls the church Christ’s body. This is a common analogy in Paul’s letters (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4.) Why use this particular imagery? You see, unless there is a serious problem in the body, it will always follow the orders, and execute the will of the brain. In the same way, we being the members of Christ’s body, are to follow His will. We are to look to Him for our example and mission.

A great part of Christ’s ministry on earth was to “heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18). He understood the necessity of helping people with their temporal needs. God loves to provide for the needs of His children (Matt. 6:31–33). Thus, we must be His agents to serve the needs of those around us. Jesus actually sent His disciples into the world to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons—for free (Matt. 10:5–8)! After all, God provided for them freely, so they should provide for others freely.

In Gethsemane, Jesus said He had finished God’s mission for Him using two different phrases. He said that He had glorified God in the earth and had manifested God’s name to those around Him (John 17:4–6). What does it mean that He glorified God? It is important to know because in the first angel’s message (Rev. 14:6, 7), we read that the ekklēsia must glorify God. In Moses’ encounter with God on Sinai (Exod. 33:17—34:7), it is made abundantly clear that glory and name are synonymous with character. In the great controversy, Satan claims that no one can show God’s character by keeping His laws. Jesus, however, proved him to be a liar, and it is up to us to do the same thing. Through the Holy Spirit’s power, we must be lights in a world darkened by sin, showing the glory, the name, and the character of God to others, not just in what we preach, but in how we live our lives. James 1:27 summarizes our mission nicely, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

**REACT**

1. When you see the church as the body of God’s people rather than just a building in which you meet to worship, what changes might you want to make in how you relate to the church?

2. As a member of God’s ekklēsia, you are called out. How does this apply to you personally? What specific sins do you struggle with? Ask God’s help, not just in general, but specifically with your problem. Find and memorize Bible texts that speak specifically to your struggle.

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In a world where we are taught to be self-reliant, my first instinct, when faced with a difficult situation, is not to go to God. I simply do not know how to “let go and let God.” Here are some solutions that can help us when we are faced with being inappropriately self-reliant:

“The Christ in us will meet the Christ in our brethren.”

“We have no right to keep our minds stayed on ourselves, our preferences, and our fancies. We are not to seek to maintain a peculiar identity of our own, a personality, an individuality, which will separate us from our fellow labourers. We have a character to maintain, but it is the character of Christ. Having the character of Christ, we can carry on the work of God together. The Christ in us will meet the Christ in our brethren, and the Holy Spirit will give that union of heart and action which testifies to the world that we are children of God. May the Lord help us to die to self and be born again, that Christ may live in us, a living, active principle, a power that will keep us holy.”

1. Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 187.
2. Ibid., p. 190.
3. Ibid., pp. 187, 188.

Nyamal Pal Chang, Calgary, Alberta, Canada
A few years ago, the pastor of my local church accepted a call to relocate. On his last Sabbath, we hosted a farewell party. Toward the end of the celebration, the master of ceremonies gave the audience a quiz about the details of the pastor’s tenure. She asked, “What’s the one thing our pastor always says in each of his sermons?” I specifically remember a look of bewilderment on some people’s faces. “You know, that trademark phrase he always says?” she coaxed. To the mild embarrassment of the pastor, no one remembered!

While recalling every detail of a sermon isn’t necessary for salvation, one must question if waking up early Sabbath mornings and sitting through a church service is worth our time—and God’s time—if it makes no impact on our lives or on the lives of others. The church in the days of Paul wasn’t just a once-a-week gathering in a well-furnished sanctuary. It was a group of like-minded believers—friends and relatives—who traveled between houses, tents, and neighborhoods, seeking to grow together in the knowledge of Christ. We do ourselves a disservice by limiting our Christian experience to one day a week. Once we start making our everyday lives about fulfilling the mission Jesus gave us (Matt. 28:18–20), we can achieve the unity promised us (Rom. 15:5, 6). To quote a friend of mine, “We’ve become so comfortable being Seventh-day Adventists, that we’ve forgotten to be seven-day Adventists!”

Here are a few ways you can keep the messages you hear on Sabbath relevant during the week:

* Simplify the message. Bring a notebook to church, and make note of any key phrases the speaker mentions as well as any Bible verses used. Break down the sermon into two or three sentences that capture the message.

* Write down what you feel. What is most important in the service isn’t what is verbally pronounced, but how what is said will influence your daily life. Make inferences about the points in the message, and imagine as if it were God speaking directly to you.

* Review your notebook during the week. Read it at work, at school, or for devotional time. If what you heard in church doesn’t apply on Monday morning, then it probably wasn’t worth being said at all.

* Discuss your ideas with close friends. After the service or during the week, ask each other how the message made an impact on your life.
Early in life I realized that everything in the world had some way that it was. A little later I learned that the way a thing is is called its nature. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines nature as “the inherent character or basic constitution of a person or thing: ESSENCE.” This definition causes me to wonder about the nature of God’s church. What was the church like? What was its essence? To find answers, I turned to Scripture.

Jesus told the first believers that we would be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). Primarily then, the church is a body of believers who witness for Christ. So could it be then that my witness as a Christian is somehow connected with the nature of the church? The answer the Bible gives is a definite Yes.

Consider the fact that the church is the body of Christ. The members that form the church each have their various abilities, talents, and life experiences. The Holy Spirit gives to each member spiritual gifts to help the church realize its mission. Everyone has unique gifts and abilities. But while one might think that this would lead to confusion, it is, rather, God’s plan that it should lead to harmony and efficiency in accomplishing the work. In fact, 1 Corinthians 12:27 tells us, “now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” We are different, but it is the same Holy Spirit who works through us all, enabling us to be the body of Christ, so that just as Christ helped others, so can we. We are His hands, and just as His hands stretched out to people in need, so our hands are to be stretched out. We are His mouth, and just as Christ spoke words of encouragement about the tender love of the heavenly Father, so our mouths are to utter Christ’s words of love to a fallen humanity and joyfully tell them about Christ’s return. This is the nature of the church.

REACT

1. In view of the nature of the church, what is our role as individual Christians?
2. How does the working of the Holy Spirit help to define the nature of the church?
3. As an individual Christian, how do you fit into the body of Christ?


Yual Chiek, Kingston, Ontario, Canada
CONCLUDE
How is it that a church full of individuals can agree upon anything, much less work together for the same cause? It’s possible only when they share the same focus. As Christians, our focus must be on Jesus—what He’s done for us and what He’s commissioned us to do for Him. To obtain that focus we must reject our natural tendency toward self-centeredness and turn our eyes upon Jesus. Dying to self is not a one-time event, but a moment-by-moment decision to do things God’s way. Those who die to self and live for God will be ready to receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Then the church will carry out its final mission, proclaiming God’s final invitation to a dying world.

CONSIDER
• Designing a poster or assembling a collage that illustrates the idea of oneness.
• Listing the benefits of belonging to a church family. Then decide how you would rank them from greatest to least, considering your own personal needs.
• Rewriting 1 Corinthians 13 in your own words and looking for ways to show love to people both inside and outside the church.
• Skimming through hymns 355–375 of The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal. In this section entitled “Mission of the Church,” choose the song you feel best illustrates the mission of our church at this time. Read or sing the song, contemplating how you could be more involved with the work it describes.
• Thinking of people in your church who need encouragement of some kind. Call, e-mail, text, or visit at least one of them during the next seven days.
• Journaling about the roles you play in your church. If you have been mainly a spectator, write down how you could become more actively involved and then take action.

CONNECT
W. Clarence and Dianna Schilt, How to Die Right and Live to Tell About It (DVD series), http://www.alifetodiefor.com/archives/1.

Renee Coffee, Gobles, Michigan, U.S.A.
“Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ ” (Acts 2:38, NKJV).
As the child of a pastor, I went to church every week from my birth until I went to college. Being at church so frequently brought to my attention at a very young age the special time my parents and their friends would get to have a “snack” during the church service. I was very young, but that didn’t prevent me from being envious and upset when I saw them eating a small cracker and drinking some purple juice. I’d had enough of my Cheerios. I wanted to branch out and try something different! Yet I was always told that I was not allowed to eat the crackers or drink the purple juice. The reason had something to do with my not being baptized. In my childish thinking, being baptized was an excuse to go swimming during the church service (something I was jealous of my pastor father for getting to do). I could not understand why adults got to have all the fun. Some of them not only got to swim during church, but they also had their own snack time! It all seemed so unfair.

As I grew older my jealousy waned, but I still was upset that I couldn’t have these forbidden treats. Then in fifth grade I was able to take baptismal classes, and I jumped at the offer to “go swimming.” I’m not really sure if my reason for taking the classes was because I knew what being baptized meant, or I wanted to be like my friends, or I wanted to eat a cracker and drink purple juice. Still, I took the classes and was baptized—to the delight of my parents and friends.

Now that I look back on those years, I don’t feel as if I was ready to be baptized then. I wasn’t ready for the commitment that being baptized signifies. Baptism means that you are inviting Jesus into your heart, that you want Him to lead you, and that you will try to put Him first in all aspects of your life. I really didn’t get that as a kid. Now that I better understand what this monumental step truly means, I plan to better my relationship with God and be baptized again for the right reasons, not because my friends are doing it, or because I want to eat crackers and drink purple juice, but because I love Jesus and have accepted Him as my Savior.

Nathan Zollman, Smithsburg, Maryland, U.S.A.
“I don’t always remember what you preach about,” said a woman to her pastor at the end of the Communion service one day. “But,” she continued, “I always remember what I do.” This confession reveals the power of rituals and rites. They charge the spiritual life with meaning and energy. They can be life-changing moments we will always remember.

Every society and religion has such rites and rituals that help transition from one stage to another. Some initiate the participant into a new place in the community—“rites of passage.” Others confirm one’s continuing place in a community. In Christianity we have three rituals that God has given us to reinforce His love for us and to help us respond in faith: baptism, footwashing, and the Lord’s Supper.

**Baptism (Acts 2:38, 41; Rom. 6:3–8)**

Baptism is the transition from darkness to light—from death to life. Just as history has a B.C. period (Before Christ) and an A.D. period (Anno Domini—“In the year of our Lord”), so does each individual Christian. There was the time before we had Christ in our lives. We were lost. Then, when we accept Christ, we number the years based on how long we have been serving Him. Because baptism marks that change in our lives, it would be appropriate to celebrate one’s baptism day as another birthday because we are born again (see John 3:1–21, 2 Cor. 5:17!)

Peter tells of the wonderful change that takes place at baptism. In Acts 2:38, he says that at baptism we have forgiveness of our sins. They are washed away in the waters. Though the baptismal water may look no different physically after one’s baptism, it has actually become a spiritual cesspool. How wonderful to realize that it is our sins that are going down the drain—forever gone because of God’s grace.

In Romans 6:3–8, Paul compares baptism with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Just as Jesus died, we, too, die to our old lives of sin. Furthermore, just as Jesus was raised from the dead, after baptism we, too, are raised spiritually to walk in the newness of life. In this illustration, Paul declares that our spiritual new lives are guaranteed by Jesus’ death and resurrection. It’s all about what He has done, and through baptism we can share in His eternal life.

Though baptism is a one-time experience for most people, Jesus also knew that we would need a continued cleansing from our sins. This is why He gave us the foot-washing service. On the last night He was with His disciples, they celebrated the Passover. However, someone was missing—the slave to wash each person's feet. Though each disciple realized that he could—and should—do the task, they could not bring themselves to do so. Why? It would answer the question that they had been quietly arguing about when Jesus was not around: which one of them was the greatest? They were not excited about winning the title of “greatest slave.”

Jesus, however, was happy to accept that title. Realizing the situation, He arose from the table and went around washing each man's feet, thus showing that the greatest among them would be the slave of all. That was the theme of His entire life, but they had missed it. Here was His last opportunity to point out their sins of pride and jealousy. After He finished washing their feet, He simply said, “You are clean.” Thus, He revealed the cleansing purpose of the foot-washing service. The same wonderful miracle happens each time we kneel—in His place—and wash the feet of a brother or sister in Christ. He said that if He, the Master, has washed their feet, we ought also to wash one another's feet. Seventh-day Adventists take these words literally.

The Lord’s Supper (Matt. 26:26–29; John 6:54; 1 Cor. 11:23–26)

Jesus understood the power of ritual to help us remember that which we easily forget. Thus, He gave us the Lord’s Supper. Jesus said that when we eat of the bread, we remember His body, which was broken for us. The cup reminds us of His blood, which was spilled like the blood of the sacrificial lamb to signify forgiveness of sins. Paul tells us that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Heb. 9:22). Celebrating the Lord’s Supper helps us to focus on the dreadful yet wonderful sacrifice Jesus made on the cross in our place.

Each time we partake of the tokens of Jesus’ passion—the bread and the wine—it helps us to renew our faith and express our love for Him. It provides us the opportunity to say, “Yes!” again and anew. Jesus gave us this special service to link together our faith in what He has already done with that which He has yet to do. We’ll proclaim it “until He comes”; and until He comes, we can sit at the table with Him to receive the bread and the wine.

REACT

1. Reflect on your baptism. What do you remember? Do you know the date? If not, how could you find out?
2. What was your most memorable foot-washing service you experienced?
3. How could the Lord’s Supper be more meaningful to you?

Franke Zollman, Smithsburg, Maryland, U.S.A.
“The ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are two monumental pillars, one without and one within the church. Upon these ordinances Christ has inscribed the name of the true God.

“Christ has made baptism the sign of entrance to His spiritual kingdom. He has made this a positive condition with which all must comply who wish to be acknowledged as under the authority of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Before man can find a home in the church, before passing the threshold of God’s spiritual kingdom, he is to receive the impress of the divine name, “The Lord Our Righteousness.” Jeremiah 23:6.

“The vows which we take upon ourselves in baptism embrace much.”

“The vows which we take upon ourselves in baptism embrace much. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit we are buried in the likeness of Christ’s death and raised in the likeness of His resurrection, and we are to live a new life. Our life is to be bound up with the life of Christ. Henceforth the believer is to bear in mind that he is dedicated to God, to Christ, and to the Holy Spirit. He is to make all worldly considerations secondary to this new relation. Publicly he has declared that he will no longer live in pride and self-indulgence. He is no longer to live a careless, indifferent life. He has made a covenant with God. He has died to the world. He is to live to the Lord, to use for Him all his entrusted capabilities, never losing the realization that he bears God’s signature, that he is a subject of Christ’s kingdom, a partaker of the divine nature. He is to surrender to God all that he is and all that he has, employing all his gifts to His name’s glory.”

1. Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 91.
2. Ibid., pp. 98, 99.
Our culture does not value humility. No TV reality show emphasizes it. No lyrics honor it. Have you ever heard a parent after a glowing piano recital emphasize, “Now be humble, Johnny?” The only place you might hear it mentioned is when some victorious sports team “humiliates” its opponent.

The distaste for humility was just as common in Jesus’ time, and there was no more humiliating work than that of washing feet. When Jesus knelt and scrubbed the grime from the feet of His friends, the parable He was living left them wide-eyed! Peter was the only one who had the gall to react verbally, and Jesus’ careful response wiped away dirt that was deeper than the dust on Peter’s feet.

It is normal for attendance to be low on Communion Sabbath. Some choose to stay home because of the length of the service. Some may absent themselves because they do not want to take Communion “unworthily” as forewarned by Paul (1 Cor. 11:27). But could it be that many of us shy away because footwashing stresses humility? And could it be that it is not the humility of Christ that we struggle with as much as it is the humility of Peter?

Recently, our Sabbath School class was discussing humility, and I asked what it was about the foot-washing service that made them uncomfortable. One college student responded with passion, “I’d a hundred times rather wash someone’s feet than have them wash mine!” Yes, modern culture thinks highly of those who are involved in magnanimous activities. Go on a mission trip; dig a well in a third world country; help a child of a different ethnicity learn to read, and receive accolades. Bowing before someone to wash his or her feet can create within us a good feeling about ourselves. We can look at someone’s unmanicured feet or see the fuzz from their socks floating in the water and feel almost smug. But when there is another person kneeling at our feet looking at our calluses, we shrink at the vulnerability and the feeling of weakness. Could it be that we, like Peter, are caked with an inner arrogance that we think shields us from a need for deeper cleansing?

**REACT**

Jesus said, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me” (John 13:8, NKJV). Does that apply to the foot-washing service today? Explain your answer.
The Bible gives us three rituals: baptism, footwashing, and the Lord’s Supper. Each was designed to connect us with the community of believers and to enhance our faith. “How can these become a meaningful part of my life?” you may ask. Here are three steps you can take to make these rituals a central part of your Christian experience.

Follow Christ’s example. All four Gospels give an account of Jesus’ baptism. Although John the Baptist felt unworthy, Jesus encouraged him to baptize Him so that He could “ fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15, NKJV). As soon as He was baptized, the Spirit, in the form of a dove, descended upon Him, showing God’s approval for what He had done. Then, just before Christ ascended to heaven, He commanded His followers to baptize people “ in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19, NIV). He set the example for us; it is our job to follow.

Humble yourself. Footwashing is the ultimate sign of humility. In the upper room before Christ was crucified, the disciples were unwilling to take on the servant’s job of washing each other’s feet. Yet their Master knelt down and did the task that none of them were willing to do. Likewise, we must humble ourselves, not just when we participate in footwashing, but in all aspects of our lives, just as Christ did.

Remember. As Jesus passed around the bread and the cup at the Last Supper, He instructed His disciples to “ do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19, NIV). Each time we participate in the Lord’s Supper, we must think on the beautiful gift Christ gave us when He died—the gift of eternal life with Him! We also may experience a new and wonderful oneness with Him now. As we reflect on this gift, it changes our entire outlook and the way we approach life.

Christ did not do these rituals without thought. He meditated on each one so carefully, knowing that He calls us to follow His example. As we participate in each of them, our faith grows stronger. As we engage in these activities ourselves, they enrich our faith and help us to know our Savior more intimately.

**React**

1. Which of these rituals is the most meaningful to you? Why?
2. In which of these rituals might you need to become more Christlike?
3. How can your faith grow by performing each of these rituals?

Allison Saucedo, Dayton, Ohio, U.S.A.
I was first baptized when I was eleven years old. I remember coming out of the water feeling like a new person. I was on fire for Jesus. However, as I grew older, I became complacent in my faith. I drifted from Christ’s will. After a particularly difficult few years, I finally began an authentic relationship with Him. So many things had happened, and I felt as though I were a spiritual baby starting from the beginning. Yes, I knew Jesus had loved me during those trying times, but because I felt so “new,” I decided I wanted to be rebaptized. Some friends came to me, concerned because they knew I had been baptized when I was younger, and they could not understand why I wanted to be baptized again. They encouraged me to delve into Scripture and search my heart—trying to ascertain if this was something I should do.

The Bible does not give a position on rebaptism. Some churches may look down on it, while others may encourage it. There may even be different opinions among pastors. However, as I studied, I grew to believe that the issue is not whether rebaptism is right or wrong, but if the person has committed his or her life to Christ. Just because you were baptized when you were young and have not been growing in Him much since then does not necessarily mean that you are no longer covered by His blood. The beautiful truth about the gift of salvation is that it is there for us all the time—no matter what! We don’t have to be rebaptized in order to claim it!

After much soul searching and discussion with friends and family, I decided I did not need to be rebaptized. I had given Him my life when I was eleven, but now that I was older, I realized I must make the choice to give my life to Him each day. Each day holds actions and choices that I must let Him take hold of. In doing so, I am a better witness and am able to show all with whom I come in contact that I belong to Jesus forever!

**REACT**

1. Have you ever fallen away from your “first love” for Jesus? How so?
2. Have you ever felt like you wanted to be rebaptized? Why or why not?
3. A friend comes to you and tells you that they want to be rebaptized. How do you react?

Denise Sanders, Washington, District of Columbia, U.S.A.
Rituals in the Christian life keep us grounded in meaning. While they are undoubtedly important for children, they likewise provide meaningful experiences and memories for adults. Jesus, the Creator of our three central rituals (baptism, footwashing, and the Lord’s Supper), clearly knew how important actions are in relationship to spiritual meaning, and didn’t want us to ever forget Him (Luke 22:19). Publicly declaring one’s allegiance to God is the objective of baptism. Humility was an important characteristic that Jesus wanted to drive home to His followers in the act of footwashing. Remembering Jesus’ gift of atonement on the cross is something He didn’t want us to take for granted. May each of these rituals be rich in meaning with the purpose of deepening our relationship with God.

CONSIDER
- Listening to the song “Give Me Jesus” sung by Fernando Ortega or the hymn “Just as I Am” and reflecting on the heart response that God desires of us in conjunction with such rituals.
- Writing a letter to Jesus from the perspective of one of the disciples, knowing what you know now in hindsight. Reflect specifically on the experience in the upper room, of Jesus’ footwashing, and the last Communion meal together. What did the experience look like, feel like, sound like?
- Analyzing the different ways the rituals of baptism and Communion are expressed in various religious traditions, and identifying what is special about the way your church does these rituals.
- Role-playing the scenario from the upper room as described in the Gospel of John.
- Identifying unique natural objects that could be used in baptism, footwashing, or the Lord’s Supper to enhance the meaning of these rituals.
- Formulating three questions you have for God about these three rituals.

CONNECT
The Desire of Ages, pp. 650, 659, 660.

Nina Atcheson, Margate, Queensland, Australia
The Law and the Gospel

“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him”

(1 John 2:3, 4, NKJV).
My late father once confided in me that he saw the fourth commandment as a punishment by Moses upon the children of Israel for the hardness of their hearts. Moreover, my dad, a good Christian man who believed in an unquenchable hellfire, struggled with the idea that God would eternally roast people who had never known or understood the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is not a prescription for torture.

I couldn’t help Dad very much. I was making my own way back to Christ after too many years in the spiritual wilderness. I was just learning the distinction between the true gospel and the legalistic view of Christianity that had attended my initial experience with Adventism. Moreover, I was just beginning to understand that legalism was not obedience of the law but the belief that the law could earn God’s favor and secure His saving grace. Later, I would understand that the legalist was not Abel, who followed God’s law and depended on His grace, but Cain, who made up his own law and depended on the law to save him, something no law could do.

Oh, how I wish I could turn back the hands of time! How I wish my father could ask me those questions about the Sabbath after my reading of this week’s CQ lesson! The writers of this week’s articles give us the following: an elucidation of the difference between the Ten Commandments, God’s enduring moral law, and the ceremonial laws that were nailed to the cross; a clear statement of how the moral law relates to grace and the good news of salvation; and a glimpse into the interrelationship between the gospel and the Sabbath.

I wish I could turn back the clock and tell Daddy, in the words of Monday’s article, that God’s moral law is, in fact, “God’s Love Letter.” I wish I could show him how the Sabbath is not a prescription for torture but a recipe for love. I wish I could whisper to Daddy that the fourth commandment, like the remainder of the moral law, is a reminder that we can, like Abel and unlike Cain, rest in God’s love, His Word, and His truth.

We don’t need to sweat to re-create what God has already created. God’s law is already perfect. And it’s all about love. Wow! That’s why I like this lesson so much.
It is easy for me to misunderstand the purpose or even the importance of God’s law. While I was growing up, there were countless occasions when my school volleyball team would play in a Saturday sports tournament. Every time I would be crushed that I could not attend. I saw God’s law as a “checklist” that needed to be followed every day. Only recently have I started to see the Ten Commandments in a different light.

Misunderstanding the importance of God’s law is a mistake that Christians often make. It is much easier to want to follow His expectations with our heads than to live the commandments with our hearts. Yes, there is a difference between following and living God’s expectations.

The Ten Commandments are an expression of God’s character. What is God’s character, you ask? Love (1 John 4:8). Therefore, the law itself is a definition of perfect love (not this primitive-imperfect-infatuation-codependency stuff we like to call “love”). Psalm 19:7, 8 declares, “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (NKJV). Another word for converting in this passage is restoring.

God is a catalyst for change! “By this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3, 4, NKJV).

It is impossible for any human to truly know God and not change his or her behavior. The two always come (and go) as a package deal. I do not mean this in the sense that we become more legalistic in our behavior, but rather we become more loving. Legalism involves a judgmental attitude; love does not.

God’s desire for us is not that we become “masters of the law” but rather “seekers of the Truth.” As we search to know God, He will begin to show us bits and pieces of Himself that we have never seen before. The Bible warns that bad company corrupts good character (1 Cor. 15:33). On the flip side, God’s presence restores good character. When it comes to obeying God’s commandments, let us become seekers instead of masters.
**Teammates With Jesus**

During the 1990s, I was a fan of the Michael Jordan–led Chicago Bulls. When they would win the championship, I would say, “We won!” We who? I wasn’t on the court. I didn’t get the block or shoot the free throws. What did I mean? I was closely identified with the Bulls—when they won, I won too. Friends at school would have the audacity to root against my team. In return, I would tease and mock them the following day during class, just to rub it in. “We beat you!” I would proclaim.

In a similar sense, when Jesus died, you died. When Jesus rose, you also rose. When Jesus comes back, you will rise to be with Him because you are so closely identified with Him. By faith, Jesus and you have become teammates. His victory becomes yours. This identification with Jesus has major implications for how we ought to live (1 John 2:3–6).

**The Moral Law and the Gospel**

All laws in God’s Word are an expression of His desires and character and are more protective than restrictive. Paul describes them as “the embodiment of knowledge and truth” (Rom. 2:20, NIV), while the psalmist declares, “Your law is true” (Ps. 119:142, NIV). We uphold these commands when we live lives devoted to love for God and love for humankind.

The gospel, through Jesus, extends to us the grace of God and enables us to live righteous lives (Phil. 2:13). When we were dead in our sins (Eph. 2:1–3), we could not live out the law. However, in Christ, we can live out God’s high and holy standards by the Holy Spirit’s power. “It is not what we do that determines who we are; it is who we are that determines what we do.”¹ The power to overcome sin and live out the law comes only through supernatural power. Paul wrote, “Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Gal. 5:16, NIV).

**The Moral Law Versus the Ceremonial Law**

The Bible presents two sets of laws. The Ten Commandments—the moral law—were not given by inspiration (see 2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Instead, God wrote them Himself with His finger. Jesus said about the moral law, “ ‘Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not...
come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matt. 5:17, 18, NIV).

The ceremonial law involved ceremonies and sacrifices in the sanctuary system. These pointed to the future work that Jesus would do on our behalf. After Christ’s death, the ceremonial law was no longer to be observed. Therefore, “blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:14, 15).

The Sabbath and the Gospel

The Sabbath and the gospel are joined by one ultimate goal—to give your soul “rest.” The Sabbath day provides you with physical rest and is a weekly reminder that God is your “resting” place (Heb. 4:9, 10). The gospel message is to assure you that salvation is not something you ought to stress over in your own strength to achieve. You can count on what God has given in Christ for you to have a secure spot in the kingdom.2

The Sabbath and the Moral Law

The Sabbath day is a gift from God that frees us from the guilt of “unfinished business and helps us to focus exclusively on spiritual issues. It is a time where we can ignore the external demands and direct our mind to God for spiritual renewal and refreshment.”3 It is a time of character growth and development, a time to increase in the understanding of God and His goodness, to be strengthened by the faith and experiences of fellow Christians.

REACT

1. In what areas have I failed to give God my full obedience?
2. How can I keep the Sabbath in a manner in which I can receive more spiritual refreshment from it?

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While everything in nature is governed by natural law . . . to man alone, the crowning work of His creation, God has given a conscience to realize the sacred claims of the divine law, and a heart capable of loving it as holy, just, and good; and of man prompt and perfect obedience is required. Yet God does not compel him to obey; he is left a free moral agent.”

“The Law of God reaches to those secret purposes, which, though they may be sinful, are often passed over lightly, but which are in reality the basis and the test of character. It is the mirror into which the sinner is to look if he would have a correct knowledge of his moral character. And when he sees himself condemned by that great standard of righteousness, his next move must be to repent of his sins, and seek forgiveness through Christ.”

“When the Spirit of God reveals to man the full meaning of the law, a change takes place in his heart. The faithful portrayal of his true state by the prophet Nathan made David acquainted with his own sins, and aided him in putting them away. He accepted the counsel meekly, and humbled himself before God. ‘The law of the Lord,’ he said, ‘is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple’ ” (Psalm 19:7).

“Christ came to mediate between God and man, to make man one with God by bringing him into allegiance to His law. There was no power in the law to pardon its transgressor. Jesus alone could pay the sinner’s debt. But the fact that Jesus has paid the indebtedness of the repentant sinner does not give him license to continue in transgression of the law of God; but he must henceforth live in obedience to that law.”

“The divine law requires us to love God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves. Without the exercise of this love, the highest profession of faith is mere hypocrisy. . . . ‘On these two commandments,’ says Christ, ‘hang all the law and the prophets’ ” (Matt. 22:37–40).

1. Selected Messages, bk. 1, p. 216.
2. Ibid., p. 219.
3. Ibid., p. 212.
4. Ibid., pp. 229, 230.
5. Ibid., p. 218.
It is almost commonplace these days for young adults to take time off and travel around the world trying to find themselves. Often, after enduring untold hardships, the adventure ends and they return to the same school or job, tired, anxious, and confused. As the old saying goes, *Sometimes the answer is at our fingertips.* How do we find ourselves and know who we are? We begin by opening our hearts and allowing God to tell us who He is and what we can become in Him.

We cannot find God or ourselves by traveling somewhere, but we will find Him when we seek Him with all our heart (Jer. 29:13). Heart-searching is opening the heart for His revelations as He is defined in the Ten Commandments or in Jesus—the living expression of God.

We cannot find God or ourselves by traveling somewhere.

Man was the most godlike when he was just created and had never sinned; he knew himself then. Now we are all sinners (Rom. 3:19), and we can never again be our true selves until we find ourselves in Jesus.

When the love of God constrains us, we start to act and talk as God-pleasing persons. We respect and worship God as Someone bigger than ourselves.

No one understood this better than David, whom the Bible calls “a man after God’s own heart.” David wrote, “The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes” (Ps. 19:7, 8, TNIV).

Like David, when we can see the good news or gospel in the law, which is “natural refreshment” to the soul, and replaces our too-big-for-God attitude with simple obedience, only then can we find true joy and be ourselves in Jesus.

**REACT**

1. How has the Bible provided you with the moral compass you use in everyday life?

2. Why do you think people choose a way that leads to a nothing life, although the Bible shows the way to an abundant life?

3. How are the tools that God lays out for us in the Bible the keys to finding peace, love, and happiness?
As I hurried into a schoolyard parking spot, I noticed from my rearview mirror that a police car had pulled up behind me. That was odd. I remembered seeing police cars in the school yard only on curriculum-related visits. I knew of no scheduled visit that day.

Quickly getting out of my car, I tentatively walked by the blue-striped car parked behind mine.

“Take a look at that.” The police officer pointed to the radar on his dashboard. “You were going 82 [kilometers per hour]. This is a 50-kilometer zone.”

I was shocked as he looked up my profile on his computer.

“Why were you going so fast?” he asked.

“I was rushing to get back to school to pick up my students after the lunch break,” I sheepishly replied. “It’s OK. Just do what you have to do.”

I wanted this experience to end quickly. I felt ashamed, certain that my students could see from the classroom window. Thankfully, I did not receive a ticket that day. The officer was gracious, but reminded me to slow down in the future.

If we are required to obey civic laws, how much more important it is to obey God’s laws. David, in Psalm 119:5, 6, expresses the desire to have his ways directed by the law. He recognizes that keeping God’s law frees us from shame.

If I had not broken the traffic law by speeding, I would not have experienced humiliation that day. But the police officer gave me the “gospel”—the good news—that freed me from the embarrassment I felt. He extended grace by withholding the ticket—he did not change the law.

When Adam and Eve sinned, all humanity was condemned to death (Rom. 5:12). In rescuing us, God did not nullify the law. Rather, He gave us the gospel, consisting of a promise (before the cross) and a fulfillment (at the cross) of redemption through a Savior, Jesus Christ.*

**REACT**

1. How could you respond to someone who says that Jesus’ death means that we no longer have to obey the law?
2. Why should love for God be the ultimate motivation for obeying the law?

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Lisa Nicely-Peterkin, Ajax, Ontario, Canada
God and the Law: Mercy Personified

Ps. 19:7, 8

CONCLUDE

God’s law gives structure and guidance, like a recipe. Follow it, and the outcome is love and rest in God. When we observe God’s law, we become changed by learning how God’s ways differ from the ways of humankind. The outcome is a change of perspective. For centuries, the human approach has been to understand and perfectly implement the law. But God has a different idea. We need to change our perspective and focus on seeking the truth. Changing our perspective allows us to join God in the truth—to become teammates in victory.

CONSIDER

• Designing a team logo and choosing colors to represent Team Jesus. Detail a line of products that could carry the logo and communicate your affiliation with Jesus.
• Creating an artistic rendering of the fourth commandment for your life (for example, a painting or sketch that represents Sabbath rest or a poem that demonstrates a break from multitasking.)
• Using a mirror to observe the area behind you. How does your perspective change when you see the area from a new angle? Compare this to viewing the Ten Commandments from the perspective of Psalm 19:7, 8.
• Going for a walk and looking for things in nature that reflect rest and renewal. How might that change according to season or weather?

CONNECT

Faith and Works (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 1988).
“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us.

And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren”

(1 John 3:16, NKJV).
“The love of God is greater far / Than tongue or pen can ever tell; / It goes beyond the highest star, / And reaches to the lowest hell; / The guilty pair, bowed down with care, / God gave His Son to win; / His erring child He reconciled, / And pardoned from his sin. . . . / Could we with ink the ocean fill, / And were the skies of parchment made, / Were every stalk on earth a quill, / And every man a scribe by trade, / To write the love of God above, / Would drain the ocean dry. / Nor could the scroll contain the whole, / Though stretched from sky to sky.”*

The Christian life is indeed a way of life. More than just a collection of concepts and ideas, Christianity is, above all else, practical. It is faith with deeds. Yet, what is it that compels a person to manifest such behavior? What is it that inspires someone to deliberately choose such a way of life? I’d like to propose that it is the love of God. As the lyrics above imply, Jesus’ love for the human race, as demonstrated on the cross, motivates the Christian to live a life that is pleasing to God. It is exactly this love that urges us to develop a working faith. Thus, the love of God functions at the center of Christian life.

This week’s memory text provides an excellent summation: “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16, NKJV). Here is the essence of the Christian life—that we come to know God’s love after having beheld the sacrifice of Christ. What’s more, our actions are influenced by Christ’s model. Hence, the Christian life is not about what we give up for Christ’s sake. Rather, it is about what Christ gave up so we could have eternal life. The love of God, then, is the foundation upon which the Christian life is based.

This week, as you contemplate the Christian life, I urge you to survey the love of God, for by beholding, you become changed.

Hard Acts to Swallow (Mic. 6:7, 8)

I go to church every Sabbath. I read my Bible. I sing hymns. I pray every day. I bring food for the potluck dinner. The list could go on and on. But these good activities might be inadequate. Repeatedly, the prophets of the Old Testament proclaimed that religion without direct action to avert injustice is empty ritual. God says it’s not only missing the point, it’s actually disgusting to Him! In the time of Micah, the people of Israel were attending the temple services in Jerusalem to make their sacrifices. They thought this was all God required of them. However, while they were meeting their religious obligations, people were being oppressed. Fellow Israelites could not meet their basic needs but they were being ignored. So Micah pointed out that their temple sacrifices were mere acts, and that God wasn’t going to allow them.

Jesus made a conscious effort to challenge social injustices in first-century Palestine.

Peace Here and Now (Rev. 22:1–5)

In vision, John saw extraordinary scenes ranging from events contemporary to the time of writing to events that will occur at the end of the world. Even scenes of heaven were given to the privileged author. Revelation 22 contains an exquisite description of our heavenly home, though it is clear John is struggling to describe the indescribable. As with other heavenly objects and functions, there is often a reflection of them here on earth. In Revelation 22:2, we are given a beautiful sight of God’s people living harmoniously in heaven. However, while we reside on earth, we should provide opportunity for people of all cultures and of all socioeconomic backgrounds to experience harmony with God here and now.

Right Back at Ya! (Matt. 22:34–39)

Jesus was frequently placed in dangerous situations. During one such time, a Pharisee asked Him which of the commandments was the greatest. The Pharisee and his friends were hoping Jesus would say that one particular commandment was more important than another, and therefore they could publicly ridicule and humiliate Him and perhaps even accuse Him of heresy. However, Jesus responded by quoting directly from Deuteronomy 6:5 and then by offering the second greatest commandment as it
is found in Leviticus 19:18: “‘You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord’” (NKJV). Jesus’ listeners, particularly the Pharisees and the religious lawyer, would have known the entire verse. It is interesting that Leviticus 19:32–35 “explains” in part what is meant in verse 18. Jesus’ answer sends the Pharisees home empty-handed and possibly a little embarrassed and self-conscious about their wealth. Jesus also succeeds in driving home a powerful message to His wealthy, religious, social-elite accusers: “Stop acting solely to preserve your social status and wealth. Stop oppressing those who look to you for leadership. Salvation is not dependent upon knowing the religious and social commandments and using them to your advantage.”

**Jesus Christ—Challenger of Social Oppression (Isa. 58:6, 7; Mic. 6:7, 8; Matt. 25:31–46)**

Jesus made a conscious effort to challenge social injustices in first-century Palestine. He spoke to outcasts. He embraced the untouchables. He healed those who were ostracized due to illness, and He challenged the religious elite. In some of His last words to His followers before His execution, He sought to put their minds at ease about the coming judgment. He spoke to them in parables as He had often done before. He wanted to impress upon them the importance of meeting the needs of those around them. Our verdict in the judgment depends upon this! Not upon attending the temple or synagogue; not upon going to church every Sabbath; not upon reading Scripture. Our verdict is dependent upon feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, and visiting inmates. Jesus is not introducing a new idea. He is echoing what has been written by the prophets. Fulfilling these ethical responsibilities is the key to our being declared innocent.

**REACT**

1. How should we, as Seventh-day Adventists, interact with people of other religious backgrounds or those of no particular religious background?

2. While on earth, Jesus made a distinct effort to reach people from all levels of society—from the social outcasts (prostitutes, chronically ill, etc.) to the religious and social elite (Pharisees, Romans, etc.). In what way does the Seventh-day Adventist Church attempt to reach people of all socioeconomic backgrounds? Where and how can we improve?

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*Ben Green, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia*
“The soul that loves God rises above the fog of doubt; he gains a bright, broad, deep, living experience, and becomes meek and Christlike. His soul is committed to God, hid with Christ in God. . . . Every true Christian will be strong, not in the strength and merit of his good works, but in the righteousness of Christ, which through faith is imputed unto him.

“The true Christian will love to wait and watch for the teachings of God and the leadings of His Spirit.”

“We are to occupy some place in the Lord’s spiritual temple, and the important question is not as to whether you are a large or a small stone, but whether you have submitted yourself to God that He may polish you and make you emit light for His glory. If we are in the Lord’s temple we must emit light. Are we permitting the heavenly Builder to hew and square and polish us? Have we faith to rest in Him?”

As such, “If we have habits of speech and deportment that do not rightly represent the Christian religion we should at once set about the work of reform. As we represent Christ to the world, let us form such habits as will honor Him. Everywhere hidden from observation, agencies are at work to draw souls from Christ, and God would have still more powerful agencies at work among His people to attract souls to Christ.”

Yet “many who claim to be Christians are not Christians. . . . God takes none to heaven but those who are first made saints in this world through the grace of Christ, those in whom He can see Christ exemplified.”

“The true Christian will love to wait and watch for the teachings of God and the leadings of His Spirit. But with many, religion is merely a form. Vital godliness is lacking. Many dare to say, I will do this, or that, or I will not to this; and the fear of offending God is scarcely thought of. Those thus described, I saw, could not enter heaven as they are. They may flatter themselves that they will be saved, but God has no pleasure in them. Their lives do not please Him.”

**REACT**

1. In what ways does your life honor God?
2. How can you give yourself to God more fully this week?

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1. That I May Know Him, p. 150.
2. Ibid., p. 151.
3. God’s Amazing Grace, p. 66.

Matt Atcheson, Margate, Queensland, Australia
In Bible times, it was not unusual to walk down the street and see lame, leprous, blind, and hungry people. It’s difficult to estimate demographics during biblical times, but we do know that tribal war was commonplace and death, homelessness, and hunger were a part of everyday life.

May our prayer be, “Help me to help others more.”

Around the world today, it seems that more people than ever before are in need. The issue of social justice is enormous. Why don’t people with the means help those with little? God requires it. Most of us know about Matthew 25:31–46, the account in which Jesus sits on His throne and separates the sheep from the goats according to what they have done for Him. “‘The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”’” (verse 40, NIV). “These acts do not depend on wealth, ability or intelligence; they are simple acts freely given and freely received. . . . Jesus demands our personal involvement in caring for people’s needs.”* Isaiah 58:7 says that the kind of fast God requires is for us to feed the hungry, clothe and shelter the poor, and be there for our own families. This list is not exhaustive; instead, it represents every type of good deed.

When did you last help when you saw people in your own neighborhood who were in need? Micah 6:8 says, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (NASB). In practice, this is easier said than done. But let’s try. May our prayer be, “Help me to help others more.”

**REACT**

1. Why don’t we give more of our time or money? If we really treated other people as if they were Jesus, how much more would we actually do?

2. If everyone who called themselves Christians acted “justly, loved mercy, and walked humbly” with God, how would the world be different? How would your community be different?

3. How can you use your talents this week to serve the needs of people you meet?

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Tatiana Green, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia
How do we live like Christ in a world that is not focused on Him? The topic of Christian living has been debated over many dinner tables where professed Christians don’t live the Christian life. What advice does the Bible give us on this important topic?

**God will complete the good work He has begun in you.**

*Put away selfish desires.* As ruler of our world, Satan’s first lie to Eve still rings in our ears. Our human nature whispers selfish ambition and conceit to our hearts, and it is a challenge to be constantly mindful of God’s call for us to be humble and selfless (Phil. 2:3, 4). By elevating others above ourselves, we will model Jesus’ attitude—a central part of living the Christian life. There are countless practical ways we can live as Jesus did.

*Our actions reveal our hearts.* It’s easy to allow human nature to take over when it comes to how we treat others, whether they are those with whom we have a conflict or with strangers who need our compassion. Perhaps we should ask ourselves whether our attitude is detracting from their sense of worth, or if we are building them up. This could apply to everyone, from those closest to us, to those we pass on the street. Can you live this week knowing and showing others that Jesus lives in you?

*Let love abound.* We read 1 Corinthians 13 and Romans 12:9–21 and recognize all those admirable qualities that, as Christians, we should emulate. Yet in the heat of the moment, it is easy to abandon love and let selfishness rule. However, if we make love the focus of our every word and action, perhaps we will be amazed at the changes that will occur in our relationships. May your love “abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight” (Phil. 1:9, NIV). Love should be the primary characteristic present in our knowledge and in our attitudes.

*Have confidence in God’s good work.* God will complete the good work He has begun in you (Phil. 1:6). We may at times doubt our purpose and whether we are living God’s will for our lives. However, Philippians 1:6 assures us that we can have full confidence in God to use us to the very end, if we are willing.

**REACT**

1. How can your actions become more like the actions of Jesus while He was on earth?
2. What relationships can you focus on more, in light of the Bible’s advice on Christian living?

Nina Atcheson, Margate, Queensland, Australia
God knows the hearts and nature of human beings far better than we can imagine. This is why the Ten Commandments were not the only rules given to the children of Israel but also judgments and statutes as well. Time and again we read of warnings and rebukes given to them so that they would remember their Creator. These principles should guide our lives also. Even in all of this, we see and experience the love of God toward us, as He seeks to restore us and to set aright that which reflects His image in us.

The spirit of heaven is to give, while the spirit of the world is to get. Most people spend their lives trying to get things that have no permanence. If they recognized their positions as stewards, they would spend their lives giving. Only in this way can they obtain eternal possessions.

What does God require? You can fake witnessing, prayer, evangelism. However, show me your checkbook and it will reveal what type of steward you are. Your checkbook tells the story of your life. It tells of your values, how much you save, what you spend, to whom you give. It tells us more about your priorities than anything else. It acts as a spiritual barometer.

Webster defined a steward as “a manager of another’s financial affairs; a person responsible for maintaining household affairs.”* We are God’s stewards on earth. He owns it all (Ps. 24:1) and therefore has rights. Stewards, on the other hand, have responsibilities. God can choose to entrust us with as much or as little as He desires, but in no case will we ever take ownership. Stewardship neither begins nor ends with money. It includes every aspect of our lives. It has to do with the way a Christian lives. God is concerned with our attitude. He wants His love to be an ever-flowing witness to the world in all that we do daily. It is a way of showing gratitude to God for the many blessings God has given us.

**REACT**

1. What does your faithfulness or unfaithfulness regarding the fulfilling of your responsibilities say about your relationship with God?
2. How should we prioritize our responsibilities in light of growing in Christ through practical, daily Christian living?

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Jocelyn Beale, Winterville, North Carolina, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE

In 1 John 4:19, we find the entire concept of Christianity summarized in one simple sentence, “We love because he [God] first loved us” (NIV). God’s love compels us to care for and to help others. By beholding His unconditional love, we become changed. Christ came to put people at ease about judgment, and likewise, we should never use Christian ideas to oppress others. God’s love, exponentially displayed in our lives, reveals our heartfelt desire to be like Jesus. After all, Christianity is a way of life, not just an idea.

CONSIDER

• Photographing objects that are symbolic representations of your faith in God. Then post the photos on your Facebook page or an online photo gallery and share with your friends what the images mean to you. Include Bible verses, if applicable.
• Baking a loaf of some type of bread and sharing it with a neighbor or acquaintance. Include a handmade card with an encouraging Bible verse about God’s love.
• Interviewing a senior member of your church about how he or she became a Christian. Ask this person a few questions about the highs and lows he or she experienced during his or her life as a believer.
• Writing about several experiences you have had that were inspiring and uplifting to you. Rank these experiences from least meaningful to most meaningful. Plan two or three specific ways you can repeat these times of spiritual refreshing.
• Scheduling a one-hour nature observation session into your busy schedule. Spend this time in a quiet park observing the sounds, sights, smells, and textures. Listen for thoughts God might impress upon you during this quiet time, or just be thankful to Him for His beautiful creations.
• Gathering some friends to sing a favorite praise song about God’s love. Record a video of this time of worship and upload it to YouTube to share with friends and family.

CONNECT

Deut. 6:4–6; 1 Thess. 4:1–12; Heb. 10:23–25.
The Ministry of Healing, chap. 6.
Elizabeth Viera Talbot, Surprised by Love (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 2010), chaps. 5 and 6; Philip G. Samaan, Christ’s Way of Reaching People (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 1991), chap. 4.

Debbie Battin Sasser, Friendswood, Texas, U.S.A.
Last Things—Jesus and the Saved

“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:19–21, NKJV).
The big day was drawing near for the couple to tie the knot. Marion* and I had been selected by a committee to spearhead operations on the final day. As the matron, Marion was busy with rehearsals. As the chairman, I ensured that no anomalies occurred on the big day for Sarah and Jack. As Marion concentrated on the marches, instruments, and coordinating invited choirs and guests, I made sure on my part that harmony prevailed on the ground, with each activity taking place as planned.

With only three days to the occasion, we were burdened with preparations and arrangements that would result in a well-rounded ceremony and a peaceful celebration. Where necessary, corrections and replacements were made. Everyone was striving to look new and fresh to reflect the mood that would envelope the eventful day.

These types of preparations are typical for big occasions such as weddings, funerals, or religious activities. Big ceremonies, big preparations. These experiences guide me to the core of our study this week.

As Christians, there are remarkable pillars that define and distinguish us from the rest of the world. After accepting Christ as our personal Savior, it’s important to strengthen our relationship with Him daily while we fix our eyes on the ultimate goal of eternal life. As the end of the earth draws nearer with each passing day, the devil has also intensified his war against Christians in an effort to deceive the faithful.

In essence, the final events are in the offing. Like a wedding ceremony that is to happen in a short while, preparations should be well under way to solidify the relationship between our Savior and us. In order for this to happen, we need to dig deeper into the intercessory work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Again, we need to face the issue of His soon return with a renewed patience, vigilance, and hope, so that this climactic event may prove worth the wait.

Finally, the resurrection of the faithful dead and the subsequent meeting in the air with the Savior will be the climax of the journey for Christ’s followers. Our study this week is four-part in nature, covering the heavenly sanctuary, the second coming of Christ, our patience and hope in waiting for Him, and the resurrection of the faithful.

* The name Marion is a pseudonym.
Christ’s work in the heavenly sanctuary teaches us that God is interested in forgiving us, reconciling us to Him, and restoring His image in us. His priestly ministry applies the merits of His sinless life and atoning death to any person who desires to be reconciled with God (Rom. 8:35). Thus, we are cleared from the guilt of sin.

“Our hope as Christians [would have been] all in vain.

“For Christ’s sake God forgives the repentant sinner, imputes to him the righteous character and obedience of His Son, pardons his sins, and records his name in the book of life as one of His children (Eph. 4:32; 1 John 1:9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:24; Luke 10:20). And as the believer abides in Christ, spiritual grace is mediated to him by our Lord through the Holy Spirit so that he matures spiritually and develops the virtues and graces that reflect the divine character (2 Pet. 3:18; Gal. 5:22, 23).”¹

For this reason, the resurrection of Christ means a great deal in the life of a faithful Christian. If He had not been resurrected and taken to heaven as our High Priest, our hope as Christians is in vain. We can rest assured that in the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary, Jesus is engaged in mediation (1 Tim. 2:5), purification (Mal. 3:1–4), and judgment. The entire process leads to the blotting out of the sins of those who were previously pardoned.

“In the great day of final award, the dead are to be ‘judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.’ Revelation 20:12. Then by virtue of the atoning blood of Christ, the sins of all the truly penitent will be blotted from the books of heaven. Thus the sanctuary will be freed, or cleansed, from the record of sin.”²

Christ’s priestly work in the heavenly sanctuary leads to the cleansing of the sanctuary and the transfer of all sins to Satan. With the completion of His priestly duties, Christ will rejoice that the original plan for humans to live in God’s presence will be restored.

REACT

What can we do in return for what Christ is doing for us in heaven right now?

². Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 357, 358.
The Sacrifice of Christ (John 3:16)

After man committed sin in the Garden of Eden, God offered forgiveness to humanity (John 3:16). Christ was the substitutionary Lamb, whose blood was shed to wash away our sins. Through Him, we were justified freely by God’s grace. If we believe in Christ, our sins and names can be erased from the book of death. As a result of this reunion, human beings will enjoy the cordial relationship they had with God before sin.

The Second Coming of Christ (Job 19:25; Ps. 50:3; Matt. 24:27–31)

The climax of events here on earth is the second coming of Christ. This promise has been the blessed hope of all faithful believers from the day He ascended to heaven. The prophets foretold it in the Old Testament, and the gospel in the New Testament has confirmed it (Matt. 24:27–31).

As all of this takes place, the enemy of truth also works hard to cloud the minds of many people about Christ’s return. Satan uses technological innovations of the day to create more spiritual decadence and to cause confusion in people around the world. Some people say Jesus has already come, so He won’t or can’t come back. Others declare He came and is living here with us. Many people are not sure about Him or His return.

However, amid all the theories and fantasies regarding Christ’s return, the Bible guides us clearly to this climactic event. If Job, amid successive tribulations of this world, still expressed strong optimism about Christ’s return, why should we lose hope? As much as we live in this sinful world, with its everyday tribulations, we can go to bed at the end of each day with the hope of Christ’s second coming to relieve us of the burden of this world forever.
Waiting for Christ’s Return (Matt. 25:1–13)

Many people wonder if Christ’s return is worth the wait. As humans, we think and reason with finite minds. As a result, some of the divine matters may not appeal to us. Christ used stories, called parables, to help us better understand spiritual things. The parable of the ten virgins illustrates the degrees of preparedness we should have as we wait for Christ’s return.

We can all be waiting, but we might not have the power to endure the cold, sleepless nights until the Bridegroom comes. In a world teeming with all sorts of pleasures, we have the challenge to go against the worldly tide. Even if we “sleep” before He comes, our lamps will have enough spiritual oil to give us immediate light when Jesus appears. The Bible is clear that we do not know the day or the hour, but our preparedness is important in ensuring that we don’t fumble at the sound of the final trumpet.

Like the five wise virgins, our loyalty should be grounded in Christ in order that His coming will not take us by surprise or fear. Instead, it should spell relief and deliverance of God’s faithful people because we have prepared and remained vigilant as we have waited for Him.

REACT

1. How does Christ’s work in the heavenly sanctuary make you perfect?

2. If we do not know the day or hour of Christ’s return, does it mean we are working on a goal without a completion date? Explain your answer.

3. As we wait for Christ’s return, what are the conditions under which we must live to ensure that we remain faithful to Him?
Christ is our Example of what God can accomplish in us. As His followers, we have a lot to learn from the life of Christ, His death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. The bottom line of these events is Christ’s resounding victory over death at the resurrection.

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth [John 5:28, 29]. This voice is soon to resound through all the nations of the dead, and every saint who sleeps in Jesus shall awake and leave his prison house.”¹

“To the believer, Christ is the resurrection and the life. In our Saviour the life that was lost through sin is restored; for He has life in Himself to quicken whom He will. He is invested with the right to give immortality. The life that He laid down in humanity, He takes up again, and gives to humanity. ‘I am come,’ He said, ‘that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.’ ‘Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.’ ‘Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.’ John 10:10; 4:14; 6:54.”²

“I dwell with pleasure upon the resurrection of the just, who shall come forth from all parts of the earth, from rocky caverns, from dungeons, from caves of the earth, from waters of the deep. Not one is overlooked. Everyone shall hear His voice. They will come forth with triumph and victory.”³

“Then the righteous dead shall be raised incorruptible, and the living righteous shall be translated to heaven without seeing death. . . . By His word and His works, He declared Himself the Author of resurrection.”⁴

**REACT**

1. If Christ is the Author of resurrection, what hope does that give us as believers in Him?

2. Why is death still painful to us even if we know Christ has the power to restore us to immortality?

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1. Last Day Events, p. 276.
2. The Desire of Ages, pp. 786, 787.
3. Last Day Events, p. 278.
4. The Desire of Ages, p. 530.

Hellen Atieno, Rongo Township, Kenya
Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, His second coming, and the special resurrection of the faithful dead have the same purpose. These three events take place to restore the sinner to an original sinless state. God, through His love for humankind, sent His only Son so that He could restore us to righteousness.

What Christ is doing in the heavenly sanctuary presently is tied closely to His second coming and the resurrection. For He will come back only after the blotting out of sins is done, and then the forgiven sinners become free of guilt. However, as all these take place to fulfill God’s love for humankind, there is always a missing piece on the part of the sinner that he or she must do to make the whole process complete.

Moral perfection or holiness of His people was God’s original plan, and He takes responsibility through Christ to makes us morally perfect. However, God cannot do this without our willing cooperation. As the Spirit of Prophecy says, “He takes no pleasure in a forced obedience; and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.”

Therefore, as Christians living in the twenty-first century, what must we do as the world’s closing events are taking place? What does God expect of us?

We must be born again. We cannot be made perfect by the ministry of Christ if we don’t allow ourselves to be reborn through baptism and then obtain spiritual growth through the Spirit (John 3:3).

We must eat the Scroll. The Written Word of God is capable of transforming our attitudes, our actions, and the way we relate to God and our fellow man (Ezek. 3:1; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

We must be daily sanctified. We need daily to conform more and more to the image of Christ, deny ourselves the pleasures of this world, and focus our attention on Christ’s righteousness (Luke 9:23, 24; 1 Pet. 4:1).

**REACT**

1. If Christ is our Chief Mediator and is acting on our behalf, why then do we have to fulfill these conditions?
2. What would you do differently for an overhaul as an Adventist?

* Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 34.
As a Christian, I uphold the belief that Christ will come again as King. From the day of His ascension, Christians have cherished the promise that Jesus will return for His followers.

As a young adult embracing a postmodern mind-set, the subject of the second coming of Christ is something I want to study more deeply. What difference will belief in the second coming of Christ make in me?

My life is packed with issues revolving around education, finances, relationships, and careers. With the advancement of technological innovations, we are living in a global village, where the social network has been much improved. For most of us, time moves faster and days swiftly turn into years as we become occupied with temporal issues of this world. We often don’t remember the work Christ is doing on our behalf. Little do we recognize that our probation will soon close.

Right now we still live together as inhabitants of this world, like grain and chaff in one container. However, when Christ comes, He will separate the grain from the chaff. Ellen White writes, “When the work of the investigative judgment closes, the destiny of all will have been decided for life or death. Probation is ended a short time before the appearing of the Lord in the clouds of heaven.”

My actions in a sinful world should reflect that of a reformed person who is looking forward to the second coming of Christ. As I live together with other sinners who have not accepted Christ, my prayer for them is that they may recognize Christ on the cross and submit their lives in order to inherit the kingdom of God. Let’s unite as Christians, move as Seventh-day Adventists, and accept the free gift of salvation so that when Christ comes again, we shall not be found wanting. Are you with me?

**REACT**

1. What is the best way to fight sin in this world where we live?
2. Are you clean or unclean? What is the reason for your answer?

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* The Great Controversy, p. 490.
CONCLUDE

Everyone who’s been on a trip knows the importance of preparing for it. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we have preached about the trip of a lifetime for more than 150 years. But as we wait for departure, we sometimes lose focus and overlook the essential preparation we need to be ready. Jesus lovingly reminds us through His work in the heavenly sanctuary that He died for our sins and that He wants us to be with Him every day and for eternity.

CONSIDER

- Sculpting with Play-Doh® or modeling clay the following furnishings found in the sanctuary: the altar of sacrifice, the laver, the shewbread, the candlesticks, the altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant. Research the meaning of these pieces of furniture.
- Discussing with a friend the personal relevance of Jesus’ work as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.
- Reading Matthew 25:1–13. Rewrite the parable in a modern context, taking into account that Jesus was painting a picture of His people in the last days of this earth.
- Singing or listening to the hymn “Jesus Is Coming Again.” Try to imagine what that glorious day will look like.
- Creating a “must see” list of Bible characters you want to meet in heaven. Why is it important for you to meet these people?
- Asking five people these questions: “Would you want Jesus to return today? If so, why?” Add your response.
- Reflecting about what you need to do in your life to prepare for Christ’s return. Write your thoughts in your prayer journal.

CONNECT

When All Things Become New

“‘God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away’ ”

(Rev. 21:4, NKJV).
Introduction

We Are Home

The Thessalonians patterned their lives after the apostles and the Lord. They were living letters, known and read by other Christians. They had a strong influence in the firmness of faith and zealous in spreading the gospel, which speaks highly of the quality of their Christian witness. Paul emphasized the widespread influence of the faithful Thessalonians.

This is our influence.

When Jesus ascended to heaven, His followers were promised that He would come back to earth again. Christ conquered death and the grave by dying and taking back His life. When Jesus returns, proclaiming His victory, no longer can the enemy, death, hold any of the redeemed.

To be among the redeemed, we must be like the Thessalonian believers. Our lives should be a reflection of Jesus. The people who know us must be able to see the difference the story of Jesus has made in our lives. This is our witness. This is our influence.

With the Second Coming, heaven will be opened and God will sit on His throne. “All will be a happy, united family, clothed with the garments of praise and thanksgiving—the robe of Christ’s righteousness. All nature in its surpassing loveliness will offer to God a constant tribute of praise and adoration. The world will be bathed in the light of heaven. The years will move on in gladness. The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold greater than it is now. Over the scene the morning stars will sing together, and the sons of God will shout for joy, while God and Christ will unite in proclaiming, ‘There shall be no more sin, neither shall there be any more death.’ ” *

In this week’s lesson, we will see how God will make all things new in heaven and earth. All of the saints will say, “We are home.”

* My Life Today, p. 348.

Stephanie Loriezo, Ebeye, Marshall Islands
Logos

How All Things Become New

The world today is buzzing with apprehension over the events we see all around us. They are leading to the end of the world when Jesus will return to take His people home. Many questions must be asked. Are we prepared? Do we know what will transpire? Where will we be? Our study will lead us to the Bible’s answers. We will look at the events when Jesus comes, corresponding with the beginning of the thousand years (the millennium), and the events during and after the thousand years.

When Jesus Comes (1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 20:3, 6)

Several of the six great events marking the beginning of the millennium are simultaneous. The most important, leading to all the others is the literal, visible, audible coming of Jesus. Paul wrote, “The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven” (1 Thess. 4:16, NKJV). At that time, the first resurrection spoken of in Revelation 20:6 occurs as “the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16, NKJV). They will be joined in the air by those “who are alive and remain,” to “be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (verse 17, NKJV).

While this is happening, those who have not accepted Christ as their Savior will be slain by the brightness of the coming of Jesus (2 Thess. 1:8; 2:8). After the righteous have been taken to heaven, the wicked slain, and the earth destroyed by earthquakes and other natural disasters, what is left is a place of desolation. Because Satan then has no one to tempt, his situation will be as a prisoner in the “bottomless pit” of earth where he will stay until “the thousand years were finished” (Rev. 20:3).

During the Thousand Years (1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Rev. 15:3; 20:4)

At this time, Christ will be in heaven with the redeemed who “lived and reigned with Christ” (Rev. 20:4). It is said we will cast our crowns at the feet of Jesus and shout, “Worthy is the Lamb” (Rev. 5:12) and “sing the song of Moses . . . and the song of the Lamb” (Rev. 15:3) in celebration of the victory given by Him over the beast.

During that time, judgment will be committed to the saved. Each one will be permitted to view the records of others who did not make it to heaven. God’s justice will be vindicated. Satan will remain bound on the earth, and the earth will remain desolate.
**The End of the Thousand Years (Rev. 20:5, 8–10)**

These events will at one time seem the most atypical of God in eternity, and yet the most anticipated by all the righteous beings of the universe since sin began. They will probably happen rapidly—some joyously, and the others with extreme sadness. Perhaps simultaneously, the Holy City descends from heaven (Rev. 20:9; 21:2), the wicked dead are resurrected in the second resurrection (Rev. 20:5, 13), and Satan is loosed to prepare his attack on the Holy City (Rev. 20:7–9). It is an attack that never gets to be played out because there is no need to allow it to proceed. All the attackers have already been judged and their judgment confirmed by the universe. Their sentence is made known to them, they declare that God is righteous, and they and Satan are destroyed by fire from heaven (Rev. 20:9). What a solemn event that will be!

The fire consumes not only the wicked, but all the earth, wiping out every sign of man’s inventions and evil work. The earth is then re-created (Rev. 21:1; 2 Pet. 3:10–14) to the beautiful condition it possessed in Eden. We will then begin to live with Christ for all eternity.

**REACT**

1. What events inspire you as you wait for Christ’s return?
2. At what time in the prophecy of our move from earth to heaven will the promise that God will wipe away every tear, and so on, be fulfilled, and how does that affect your view of the process?
“Human language is inadequate to describe the reward of the righteous. It will be known only to those who behold it. No finite mind can comprehend the glory of the Paradise of God.”

“The great city, it’s coming.”

“With Jesus at our head we all descended from the city down to this earth, on a great and mighty mountain, which could not bear Jesus up, and it parted asunder, and there was a mighty plain. Then we looked up and saw the great city, with twelve foundations and twelve gates, three on each side, and an angel at each gate. We all cried out, ‘The city, the great city, it’s coming, it’s coming down from God out of heaven!’ And it came and settled on the place where we stood. Then we began to look at the glorious things outside of the city. There I saw most glorious houses, that had the appearance of silver, supported by four pillars set with pearls most glorious to behold. These were to be inhabited by the saints. In each was a golden shelf. I saw many of the saints go into the houses, take off their glittering crowns and lay them on the shelf, then go out into the field by the houses to do something with the earth; not as we have to do with the earth here—no, no. A glorious light shone all about their heads, and they were continually shouting and offering praises to God.

“I saw another field full of all kinds of flowers, and as I plucked them, I cried out, ‘They will never fade!’ Next I saw a field of tall grass, most glorious to behold; it was living green and had a reflection of silver and gold as it waved proudly to the glory of King Jesus. Then we entered a field full of all kinds of beasts—the lion, the lamb, the leopard, and the wolf, all together in perfect union. We passed through the midst of them, and they followed on peaceably after.”

“There we shall know even as also we are known. There the loves and sympathies that God has planted in the soul will find truest and sweetest exercise. The pure communion with holy beings, the harmonious social life with the blessed angels and with the faithful ones of all ages, the sacred fellowship that binds together ‘the whole family in heaven and earth’—all are among the experiences of the hereafter.”

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2. Ibid., p. 546.
3. Ibid., pp. 548, 549.

Stewart Van Loriezo, Taculing, Bacolod City, Philippines
God leads us to the path of righteousness, salvation, and eternal life through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Apart from Him, Christian growth and maturity are absolutely impossible (John 15:5).

“I do not like ignorant, filthy people.”

Growing in Jesus is to surrendering all to Him. Any single thing in life not surrendered to Christ will become one of the avenues of Satan to snatch us from the Master’s hand. Originally, Peter was weak in spirit and deficient in character. The converted Peter grew more and more in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and at the end of his life became an example of courage, filled with the Spirit of Christ.

As essential as food is for physical growth, the Word of God is equally essential for spiritual growth and development. Only those who are fed by the Word of God will be nourished and then thoroughly furnished with divine wisdom and strength by the Holy Ghost.

In the conflict with Satan, Jesus could not have relied upon God’s Word for victory unless He had first stored its precious truths in His heart and mind. To follow His example, we must set aside time for study and Scripture memorization.

The highest evidence of Christian growth is love (Col. 3:14). It includes all the graces of the Spirit and unites all others in making the character perfect in Jesus. The apostle John wrote, “If we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us” (1 John 4:12, NLT).

A missionary was asked whether he liked his work in Africa. He replied, “I do not like dirt! I do not like crawling into their frail huts. I do not like ignorant, filthy people. But the love of Jesus constrains me to do as He bids.” When we reflect Christ’s love, we will reflect His character and be ready to stand with the redeemed.

**REACT**

1. How sure are we that we are waiting for Christ’s second coming? Explain your answer.

2. How are we reflecting Christ so that others can see Him in our lives?
Everybody (hopefully) wants to be in heaven—that’s our ultimate goal in life. All of us want Jesus to come now so that our suffering on this earth will end. “In the City of God ‘there shall be no night.’ None will need or desire repose. There will be no weariness in doing the will of God and offering praise to His name. We shall ever feel the freshness of the morning and shall ever be far from its close.”

Never lose sight of the goal.

To endure hardships on this earth and be one of the redeemed, we must, with God’s help, do the following:

Trust. No matter what happens, God has allowed sufferings for a purpose. We need to trust God’s wisdom and resign ourselves completely to His plan (Prov. 3:5). Remember that God will not put you in any situation for which He won’t provide a way out (1 Cor. 10:13). When you cannot see the light, keep trusting God.

Abide. There are many examples we can apply to our lives to help us overcome trials. They point us to Jesus, who is the perfect Example in all things. He tells us in John 15:4–7 to abide in Him.

Focus. Never lose sight of the goal (Phil. 3:13, 14).

Persevere. It’s important to keep in mind that no matter how rough the way, those who endure to the end will be saved (Matt. 10:22). Place yourself under His continual influence through prayer (Gal. 5:25).

Surrender. “Submit yourselves, then, to God” (James 4:7, NIV). Surrender your will and life to His authority. Resist the doubts of Satan. Remember how God has led in the past. Sincerely pray for strength to endure until Christ will return to take His children home.

REACT

1. Describe why you want to be in heaven. How would you explain this to a friend who doesn’t know Jesus?
2. What will you do to survive hardships in life while we are still here on earth?

* The Great Controversy, p. 676.
The story is told of a loyal dog that always waited for his master to return home. The dog would usually stay at the door and wait for the sound of the key in the lock. He knew his master had come home! As children of God, how much more are we waiting for our Lord Jesus on His second coming?

He knew his master had come home!

Jesus paid the price on the cross so that everyone who chooses to follow Him can go to heaven when He returns. “The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God” (1 Thess. 4:16, NKJV). “‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (Matt. 25:34, NKJV).

Ellen G. White states, “Then the redeemed will be welcomed to the home that Jesus is preparing for them.”1 How wonderful it will be to live in a new heaven and a new earth.

God’s Word never fails. To prepare for our heavenly home, we should prepare our hearts and our minds for Christ’s soon return. Every day make a special moment to seek God’s presence. If we are really aiming for our new heavenly home, let us continue to make Him the center of our lives. “There is necessity for diligence in prayer; let nothing hinder you. Make every effort to keep open the communion between Jesus and your own soul. Seek every opportunity to go where prayer is wont to be made.”2

God is the Owner of our lives. The same Jesus who came and died for us returned to heaven to prepare our heavenly home. When He comes back, all things will become new. The apostle John had a vision of the new heaven and the new earth. Everywhere he looked was beauty beyond compare.

Every day God is calling us to come to Him. Are we ready to join Him? He is eager to bring us to our new home in heaven filled with glory!

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2. Ibid., p. 98.
CONCLUDE
When Christ concludes His work in the heavenly sanctuary for the salvation of humanity, He will return to earth with a glory never before seen. Those who died in Him will rise from their graves, and those saints who are alive will be translated. All of them will reign with the Lord in heaven for 1,000 years. This “millennium” (derived from the Latin words for thousand years) marks the onset of the only paradise humans will have known since Eden before the Fall. During this time, the redeemed will examine God’s ways and judgment regarding sin. At the end of these years, Satan and those people who followed him will be destroyed, and the earth will be made new. “ ‘God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away’ ” (Rev. 21:4, NKJV).

CONSIDER
• Researching a 1,000-year period of time. What were the good and bad highlights of that time period? How do they contrast with the millennium we will have with Jesus?
• Using American Sign Language (or the sign language for the deaf that your country uses), portray one or two of your favorite verses from Revelation 21:1–7. The following Web site will help you: http://www.aslpro.com/cgi-bin/aslpro/aslpro.cgi.
• Forecasting what any given day’s weather will be like in heaven and on the earth made new.
• Envisioning God wiping the tears from your eyes. What will it mean to you that there will be no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain of any kind?
• Doing a choral reading with a group of friends of Responsive Reading no. 783 in The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal. Arrange with the Sabbath School superintendent of the adult Sabbath School or with the minister to perform the reading during Sabbath School or church.
• Reading the headlines in a world newspaper for one week. Contrast that with what the headlines might be like in heaven for a week.

CONNECT
Rev. 2:11, 17, 26, 27; 3:5, 12.

E. R. Woerkom, Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A.
If you have not received a copy of CQ for first quarter 2013, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

**Lesson 1: Jesus, Creator of Heaven and Earth**

**Logos:** Gen. 1:1; Pss. 19:1–3; 33:6, 9; Jer. 51:15, 16; John 1:1–3; 2:1–11; 6:4–13; Rom. 1:18–20.

**Memory Text:** “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1, NKJV).

**Key Thought:** In response to such a wondrous truth, how are we to live our lives?

This God is the same One who lived among us as a human being and who bore the punishment for our sins. Sometimes we hear of things that are “too good to be true.” But, as sinful beings, there is nothing better for us than to know the truth of our Creator’s love. This love is so great that He came to us in the person of Christ and linked Himself to each of us with ties that can never be broken.

**Lesson 2: Creation—Forming the World**

**Logos:** Gen. 1:1, 3–8; Ps. 139:12; Isa. 45:18; 2 Cor. 4:6; 2 Pet. 3:3–5; 1 John 1:5; Rev. 22:5.

**Memory Text:** “For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: ‘I am the Lord, and there is no other’ ” ( Isa. 45:18, NKJV).

**Key Thought:** The universe has no inherent will of its own. The creation is not an entity independent of God. Instead, it is God’s chosen arena in which He can express His love to the creatures He has made.

Scientists are increasingly impressed by the fitness of the world for living creatures. And no wonder, for design and purpose are affirmed throughout the Bible, beginning in Genesis 1. God spent the first three days forming the world for occupation and the last three filling it. This week’s lesson focuses on those first three days of the Creation week.