The Coming of 
Jesus

“‘For with God nothing will be impossible’”
(Luke 1:37, NKJV).
Introduction

You Have the Power, Why Not Access It?

The map to the largest power source in the entire universe lies in a pair of glasses, etched in a lens. Unaware of its value, the owner is auctioning it off online for very little money. Yet the real value does not go unnoticed because outside Earth’s atmosphere, a group of Transformers receives intelligence about the auction and decides to steal the glasses in order to harness this ultimate power source. Nothing will keep them from abandoning their mission, not even the reality of death. Their plan is to transform and rule the universe.*

As I sit contemplating this story line to the Transformers screen production, I think of how I have more than one pair of glasses. One sits on my study table. Another I carry with me everywhere I go, just in case. Yet many times I have missed instructions that would lead me to not only find the ultimate Source of power but also to realize that this Source is not an it but a Him. The Source is a Man who, though He has “all power,” chooses to share His power with us through His indwelling presence.

Luke starts his narrative with bold words to Theophilus. Luke wanted him to be very clear about the “certainty of the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:4, NIV). Many had been trained to understand the scriptures through cultural, emotional, or even intellectual eyes, a practice that has filtered down to our generation. Luke’s personal experience with Jesus is such that he “carefully investigated everything from the beginning” (verse 3, NIV), thus preparing him to write a chronological account that could be checked and validated historically.

The “lenses” we have, both old and new, have etched on them the person of Jesus—the greatest Power Source ever known to the universe. Colossians 2:9, 10 declares that “in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” and that He is the “head of all principality and power” (NKJV). As I contemplate this, I see that I need to spend more time harnessing the power that lies in Christ, who lies within me. If a few of us would do this, we could transform our communities. However, if many of us would do it, we could transform the world. Because unto us was born a Savior—the Son of God.

* Transformers, directed by Michael Bay (Glendale, Calif.: Dreamworks Pictures, 2007).

Elaine A. Thompson, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
The God of the Impossible (Luke 1:5–17, 37)

Since the beginning of sin, God had promised Adam and Eve that He would heal the broken relationship caused by their poor choice (Gen. 3:15). Such healing is impossible for people to do alone, so it makes sense that God would offer the solution to this problem. After all, with Him “nothing is impossible” (Luke 1:37, NKJV). Elizabeth and Zachariah experienced an impossibility in their own lives. They were a righteous pair who had devoted their lives to God. However, they had no children with which to share the blessings God had given them. God had a plan, however. He prepared the way for this plan by blessing this couple with a son who would “prepare the way of the Lord” (Isa. 40:3, NKJV). The Holy Spirit was poured out on this son, because impossible tasks require a great deal of God-given power.

Sometimes We Forget (Luke 1:18)

It’s interesting that even though Zachariah was “righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6, NKJV), he still doubted God. After all that he had experienced with God and from God, he still questioned whether God could give him and his elderly wife a son. Instead of focusing on the God of the impossible, he found himself focusing on the impossible situation. It seems that this occurs in our lives as well. We all have been blessed by God, and many of us may have seen God do impossible things in our lives. During such moments, we praise Him, and our faith seems great. However, after a while, we tend to forget such amazing experiences and continue to doubt that He can do impossible things in the future.

Prophecy Fulfilled (Mic. 5:2; Luke 2:4–7)

Imagine Mary and Joseph holding the Baby Jesus for the first time. Imagine the joy that must have been theirs to know that the Savior was born that day! They probably didn’t even realize the full significance of the One they were cradling in their arms. God saved our fallen world through that small Baby who was resting in the care of His earthly parents. Mary and Joseph undoubtedly had heard the prophecy about the coming Messiah: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, / Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, / Yet out of you shall come forth to Me / The One to be Ruler in Israel, / Whose goings forth are from of old, / From everlasting” (Mic. 5:2, NKJV).
Most likely they had been eagerly anticipating His arrival, and perhaps they even experienced some of the same doubts Zachariah had felt when the angel told him that he would bear a son in his old age. God was doing something impossible here, but this birth was just the beginning of God’s salvation plan.

**Faithfully Waiting (Luke 2:25–32; Rev. 14:6, 7)**

Waiting is something no one enjoys, because it takes a great deal of patience. Yet in Luke 2, we learn about Simeon, a man who devoted his life to waiting. The Bible tells us in Luke 2:25 that this “man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel” (NKJV). Simeon spent his days waiting for a Savior to be born! His only desire was to see the salvation of the Lord. After that, he could die in peace.

Think about it. Are we actively living our lives as if we are waiting for Jesus to return? Or are we so carried away by the troubles of this world that spiritual matters have become secondary in our lives? Simeon knew what was important. He knew that nothing in the world mattered more than waiting for his salvation. As soon as the Holy Spirit brought him to the temple, he rejoiced, knowing that he would indeed see his salvation! Simeon also pointed out some important truths as he blessed Jesus: (1) salvation is through Jesus (verse 30), (2) salvation is prepared by God (verse 31), and (3) salvation is for all peoples (verse 31).

These same truths apply to us. We are no longer waiting for the first coming of the Messiah. However, we are waiting for the Second Coming. We, too, have a message for all people. In fact, this message is a fundamental belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Revelation 14:6, 7 says, “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’” (NKJV). We are to share this message with everyone, no matter who they are, because Jesus loves us all so very much.

Telling others about the Messiah is all about bringing reconciliation between God and humanity, a reconciliation that God promised in Genesis 3:15. Yes, we have to wait for Jesus to return, but what type of people are we becoming while we wait? Are we becoming more like our Savior or more like the world? Are we revealing Jesus’ love to others? Are we loving others more?

As you think about the great love God has for you, consider what you will do as you wait for your Savior to return.

**REACT**

Why is it so hard for us to focus on the coming of our Savior when we know that it is so near?

Michelle Sevcik, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
“The Messiah's coming had been first announced in Judea. In the temple at Jerusalem the birth of the forerunner had been foretold to Zacharias as he ministered before the altar. On the hills of Bethlehem the angels had proclaimed the birth of Jesus. To Jerusalem the magi had come in search of Him. In the temple Simeon and Anna had testified to His divinity. ‘Jerusalem, and all Judea’ had listened to the preaching of John the Baptist; and the deputation from the Sanhedrin, with the multitude, had heard his testimony concerning Jesus. In Judea, Christ had received His first disciples. Here much of His early ministry had been spent. The flashing forth of His divinity in the cleansing of the temple, His miracles of healing, and the lessons of divine truth that fell from His lips, all proclaimed that which after the healing at Bethesda He had declared before the Sanhedrin,—His Sonship to the Eternal.”

“‘When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son.’ Providence had directed the movements of nations, and the tide of human impulse and influence, until the world was ripe for the coming of the Deliverer. The nations were united under one government. One language was widely spoken, and was everywhere recognized as the language of literature. From all lands the Jews of the dispersion gathered to Jerusalem to the annual feasts. As these returned to the places of their sojourn, they could spread throughout the world the tidings of the Messiah's coming.

“At this time the systems of heathenism were losing their hold upon the people. Men were weary of pageant and fable. They longed for a religion that could satisfy the heart. While the light of truth seemed to have departed from among men, there were souls who were looking for light, and who were filled with perplexity and sorrow. They were thirsting for knowledge of the living God, for some assurance of a life beyond the grave.”

God the Father sent His Son to die on the earth at the right time (Rom. 5:6). So why do we think that Jesus is taking too long to return? The Father knows the best time to send His Son to rescue us. Therefore, let us trust in God today, and we will be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6).

**REACT**

If Jesus returned today, would you be prepared for it? Why, or why not?

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2. Ibid., p. 32.
A story is told of a small farming community that had been faced with a prolonged drought. One day the residents of the community decided to dedicate a day to pray for rain. On the day the prayers were scheduled, a large crowd gathered. In back of the crowd, a little girl stood with an umbrella raised above her head. Before long, she began to attract the curiosity of those around her. When asked why she brought an umbrella when it had not rained in such a long time, the girl simply replied, “I came to pray and I believe that it will rain, so I brought my umbrella.”*

Sometimes we are like the people of that small community. We pray but do not believe that what we are praying for will come to pass. We pray for rain, but we leave our umbrellas behind. In Luke 1:11–19, we read about the angel Gabriel announcing the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah. God had chosen John as His special messenger to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, and Zechariah and Elizabeth were the instruments chosen through which God would mold the character of John.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were a righteous and God-fearing couple who had been praying for a long time to have a child. In biblical times, a woman who was not able to conceive a child was seen as being cursed of God. But while men saw Elizabeth's barrenness as an indication of the presence of sin and condemnation, God saw Elizabeth's condition as an opportunity for a blessing. Sometimes it may seem like we are being denied the things we greatly desire (good grades, money, etc.). God, however, sometimes lets us go through disappointing times so we can more fully appreciate His power and what He is able to do for us.

When the angel announced that God had finally answered their prayers, Zechariah's reaction was one of doubt. “‘How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years’ ” (Luke 1:18, NIV). Like Zechariah, we sometimes think of all sorts of reasons why God won’t be able to come through for us under a particular set of circumstances. Faith without works is dead. If we believe, our faith should reveal itself in our actions. So if you are going to pray, don't forget to take your umbrella with you!

**REACT**

How can we know when God’s answer to a prayer is “wait” or “No”?


Chifuka Chundu, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
We all like being around ordinary people who make us feel comfortable and are easy to talk with. This week’s lesson is about the first coming of Jesus. Something that stands out to me is how God used ordinary people to achieve His work in preparing the world for this event: priests (Luke 1:5), a barren woman (verse 18), a virgin and a carpenter (Matt. 13:53–55; Luke 1:26–34), and a wandering preacher (Luke 3:1–6), just to name a few. They were ordinary people doing extraordinary things for God. I’m sure many of you may be wondering, Wow, that’s crazy! I wish God could use me like that! But He can, and He will! It’s as easy as 1, 2, 3.

**Become familiar with your weaknesses.** The apostle Paul tells a candid story that should help all of us in our Christian journeys. He talks about a “thorn in the flesh” that God allowed to strike him. He needed to endure this thorn so that in the end, after becoming familiar with his weaknesses, he could actually glory in them (2 Cor. 12:7–10).

**Become familiar with Christ’s strength.** The beauty of 2 Corinthians 12:9 is that Paul sees how weak he is and he admits that God’s “‘power is made perfect in weakness’” (NIV). He also talks in 2 Corinthians 4:7 about how the power of the gospel is like treasure in clay jars. Because Jesus is our source of strength, we need to have His power through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, regardless of our positions in life.

**Make yourself available.** This is an area in which I have struggled, and I pray all the time that the Lord will make me willing to go wherever and whenever He leads. As long as we make ourselves available to Him in all aspects of our lives, His strength will be made perfect in us.

**REACT**

1. What are some of the things that keep you from making yourself available to Jesus?
2. What are some of your weaknesses, and how can they be used for God’s glory?
The Gospel of Luke is one of my favorite books because it goes deeper into the life of Jesus than Matthew, Mark, or John. It vividly describes Christ's ancestry, birth, and development. Luke was a physician, and as I read his words, I feel that he is describing every detail of Jesus just as if he were Jesus’ family doctor. Another point that amazes me is the faithfulness of Luke. Since he was a doctor, he could have been skeptical about Jesus’ miracles and argued over His words. However, Luke not only believes in Jesus, he also affirms that “for with God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37, NKJV).

Anyone who knows me has heard me say that I serve the God of the impossible. Throughout my 22 years of life, God has revealed Himself to me as just that. When I was 16 years old, I washed the patio of our house for my mother. When I was done, she told me to use some disinfectant; but as I reached for that container, I spilled another container full of sulfuric acid. Some of the acid splashed into my eyes. As I splashed my eyes with water, I prayed that God would work a miracle. And He did. The eye doctor pronounced my sight was perfect. If sulfuric acid can burn a wet sponge in seconds,* it also could have easily burned my eyes. But for God there is nothing impossible.

Miracles are directly connected with the impossible, such as Mary beholding an angel. She conversed with this messenger of God. The angel Gabriel told her that she would give birth to Jesus while she was a virgin, and at the same time, little did she know about the miracle God had worked in Elizabeth’s life (Luke 1:36).

The Bible is always encouraging us that there is nothing too hard for God (Jer. 32:17). Jesus is coming soon for those who died waiting for Him and for those who are waiting still. So do not ever be discouraged when facing a challenge, and always remember that the same God who opened the Red Sea, instructed Noah how to build an ark, and made a barren woman to give birth, is the same God we worship today. And He works miracles for us, if need be.

**REACT**

What “impossibility” are you currently facing that is keeping you from trusting in God?

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CONCLUDE

Jesus’ birth was the pivotal event in our world’s history so far. He brought God’s promise of complete healing and overturned what we consider as possible. Like those who waited for the promises of Jesus’ first advent to be fulfilled, we have a responsibility to make sure that the same hope influences all we do, say, and think. Yet waiting—with an unspecified time frame—presents us with significant challenges as we attempt to focus and move forward.

CONSIDER

• Listing things you might do while waiting for an appointment or anticipating the arrival of a plane or bus (e.g., pacing, reading, handiwork). What activities make time pass more quickly? What activities make it feel like forever? Why do you think that the activity we’re engaged in influences our perception of the passage of time? How does this relate to this week’s lesson?

• Writing an imaginary dialogue between Satan and one of his angel-minions, along the lines of C. S. Lewis’s Screwtape Letters. Discuss ways to misdirect God’s people so that they get side-tracked—things like date-setting, prophetic fine points, issues of perfection, and so on—from a healthy attitude toward Jesus’ second coming.

• Charting a comparison and contrast between a faithful Jew who lived 100 years before Christ, a hopeful Christian 100 years after Jesus’ death, and a modern-day believer. How might each one’s hope change their decision-making processes? Their short- and long-term planning? Their priorities for themselves, their families, the church, and society? How do you think each one’s expectations did, or might, match up with reality?

• Creating a PowerPoint presentation, video, or signing/interpretive dance to accompany John Waller’s song “While I’m Waiting.”

• Composing and performing a monologue that illustrates how people perceive time differently. Show how soon can mean different things in different contexts to people of different ages. Conclude with texts such as 2 Peter 3:9, 10 and Revelation 22:12.

• Reading or listening to some of your favorite Christian songs, listening for ideas that connect to something you read in this week’s lesson.

CONNECT


Sharon Wright, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.
Baptism and the Temptations

“And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, ‘You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased’ ” (Luke 3:22, NKJV).
“Hey, remember when George W. Bush was president of the United States and Arnold Schwarzenegger was governor of California? John Paul II was the pope back then. Remember when those famous people were in power? There was also this ‘nobody’ guy out in the desert who announced the arrival of the Savior of the human race and a few people heard him, maybe 30 people tops.” This is pretty much how Luke sets the scene for this week’s study.

**It was Jesus’ first secret to spiritual success.**

You understand by now that Luke was an excellent investigative journalist. He reported useful facts, and he understood the historical context and the themes of Jesus’ life. He also wrote a good story. All right, he had help from the Holy Spirit. But as we study Jesus’ baptism and temptations, we’ll learn about the historical setting and spiritual significance of these events that Luke brought to bear.

Something to look for is why God put a world-shaking announcement in the mouth of a dirt-poor backcountry kid with a reputation for trashing the corrupt establishment. Do you see a pattern when you consider the circumstances of Jesus’ birth and then the events of His debut as the Rabbi of rabbis and Savior of the people? And why did Jesus get baptized anyway? Did He need to prove something to His Father? Was He in need of a fresh start? Or did it symbolize something? Jesus was making some points there.

As you progress through the temptations of Jesus, you could be forgiven for thinking, *Isn’t this familiar? A person gets baptized and then the devil starts in with relentless temptations, and the person struggles like he never has before.* But consider this. Wasn’t there a Voice speaking at some point when Jesus was baptized? That was no ordinary voice. It’s the only Voice that brings spiritual power to the mind of the listener. It was Jesus’ first secret to spiritual success.

As if you needed something more to put on your to-do list, you’ll get to learn about Jesus’ second secret: knowing the instruction manual before you need it. Our Lord wasn’t doing a quick lookup in YouVersion when He said to Satan, “It is written.” However, knowing the verse by heart isn’t enough. Do you know when to apply it? Under pressure or before you really need it? Later in the week we’ll get to the issue of who deserves worship. You can’t believe the nerve of this devil, who says to Jesus, “Worship me.” I mean, really?

Pray this week for the Voice to speak the truth to you about how Jesus won the ultimate victory of His lifetime and what that means for you.

Tim Lale, Hagerstown, Maryland, U.S.A.
Luke 3:1, 2 introduces the authority figures who governed the people when Jesus' public ministry was about to begin. Tiberius Caesar was a "suspicious and ruthless" ruler. Pontius Pilate, who collaborated with the Jewish Sanhedrin to prosecute Jesus and later washed his hands to signify that he wanted to be innocent of Jesus' blood, was the governor of Judea. Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, while his brother Philip ruled Iturea and the region of Trachonitis throughout Jesus' ministry. In Luke 13:32, Jesus refers to Herod as "that fox." Lysanias "is mentioned repeatedly by Josephus . . . and the name, preceded by the title tetrarch, appears in a Greek inscription discovered at Abili. . . . Nothing else is known of his ancestry, life, and reign. Annas was the son of Seth and was appointed high priest by Quirinius. Josephus mentions the other high priest by his full name—Joseph Caiaphas. In 1990, archaeologists discovered a burial cave outside of Jerusalem that contained a casketlike box inscribed with his name.

Why does Luke mention these political and religious leaders? Could it be that he is painting a stark contrast between these elite dignitaries and the humble John the Baptist? The political leaders held jurisdiction over the laws of the land, but John represented One who would speak of love, repentance, and salvation. The religious leaders were looked upon as spiritual pillars, but Jesus could see through their white-washed facade (Matthew 23). Despite their erroneous ways, Jesus pleaded with them to repent and believe in Him.

As Luke describes John the Baptist's sermon, the excitement of the immediacy of the Coming One is palpable. It's like the appearance of the grand marshal at the start of a parade, signifying that something wonderful is about to begin. What an awe-inspiring day it was when Jesus asked John to baptize Him. This marks the beginning of His ministry, and His identity is clearly proclaimed. Jesus is none other than God's beloved Son.

**REACT**

Why did John the Baptist preach on this particular topic (Luke 3:7–19)?

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2. Ibid., s.v. "Pilate."
3. Ibid., s.v. "Lysanias."
4. Ibid., s.v. "Annas."

*Debbie Battin Sasser, Friendswood, Texas, U.S.A.*
John the Baptist—the First Evangelist (Matt. 3:1–12; Mark 1:1–13; Luke 3:1–14)

The coming of John the Baptist was part of God's plan to save Israel and all of humanity. Indeed, John's appearance marked the end of the old era and heralded the new covenant (Luke 16:16). There had been no prophet in Israel for almost four centuries. John's arrival embodies the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 40:3–5. Luke 3:5, 6 announces that the time when the plan of salvation is nearer “ ‘and all flesh shall see the salvation of God’ ” (NKJV).

John the Baptist remained faithful to the truth.

The Preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1–10; Mark 1:1–8; Luke 3:7–14)

John urged his contemporaries toward radical changes through the baptism of repentance. This powerful proclamation occurs mainly in the following passages:

The call to true repentance (Matt. 3:1–10). John invited the people to an authentic repentance. It was of no use to proclaim themselves “Sons of Abraham” if they did not produce fruits of true repentance, because “ ‘every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire’ ” (verse 10, NKJV).

“Compare Isaiah’s parable of the wild grapes (Isa. 5:1–7) and Christ's parable of the Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6–9). Implicit in Jesus' parable is the fact that God is long-suffering, but that if His offers of mercy are not appreciated, they are eventually withdrawn. The Jewish nation had practically outlived its day of mercy, and was about to be rejected.”

The call to a new standard of living (Luke 3:7–14). John gave specific instructions to the different crowds who listened to him. For example, he told tax collectors (publicans) that they should require nothing beyond what was commanded of them, while he told soldiers not to use violence toward anyone. This echoes Leviticus 19:18, which says, “ ‘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.’ ”

Prepare the Way of the Lord (Matt. 3:11, 12; 14:3, 4; Mark 1:7, 8; 6:17, 18; Luke 3:15–17; John 1:24–28)

It is essential to prepare for an important event such as the birth of a child, a wedding, an academic examination, or a job interview. Likewise, it was important to prepare for the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, God chose John the Baptist to announce Jesus' arrival and the good news of
redemption in Him. John’s mission was to prepare the hearts of God’s people to receive Christ. During his mission, he oriented his listeners to the One who would baptize them “with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16, NKJV).

John the Baptist remained faithful to the truth, even after Herod threw him in prison for rebuking him for all of his sins (Luke 3:19, 20).


In addition to all the people John had baptized, he also baptized Jesus. What a privilege this must have been for John. Luke emphasizes the presence of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove that descended upon Jesus the moment He arose from the watery grave. The term “bodily form” (Luke 3:22, NKJV) attests to the coming of the Spirit, who also plays a crucial role in the process of conversion. It is the Spirit who convicts us of sin (John 16:8–11); and the same Spirit equipped Jesus for His ministry. In Luke 3:22, God introduces Jesus as His beloved Son. While this introduction affirms Jesus’ divinity, verse 23 affirms His humanity. Also see Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1.

The Temptations of the Desert and Victory (Psalm 91; Matt. 4:1–11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1–13)

The temptations Satan presented to Jesus in the wilderness were part of His preparation for His ministry. He faced Satan after 40 days of fasting, so He was in a physically weakened condition, thus making the temptations ever more difficult to resist.

The first two temptations begin with the same phrase: “ ‘If You are the Son of God’ ” (Luke 4:3, 9, NKJV). Thus Satan attempted to attack the divinity of Jesus and to instill doubt in His mind regarding His true identity. He also hoped Jesus would use His divine powers for His own selfish interests by challenging the authority of the Father.

Satan’s third temptation shows the intentions he had from the very beginning of the cosmic conflict—getting people to follow him instead of their Creator. In Luke 4:9–12, he totally misrepresents Scripture. “The intention of Psalm 91 is to show God’s protection of his people, not to incite them to use God’s power for sensational or foolish displays.”

REACT

1. Compare the testimony God gave to Jesus in Luke 3:22 with John 1:12. What encouragement does He give us in our fight against Satan? How can we hear by faith the voice of our Father in heaven testifying to us His presence?

2. John’s baptism was for the forgiveness of sins, so why did Jesus insist on being baptized? Read Matthew 3:14, 15.

3. Consider the types of temptation Satan is sending your way. How are they similar in nature to the temptations with which he presented Christ? Are you combating them with your own strength or through Christ’s?


Gabin Gninkoun, Geneva, Switzerland
“At the Saviour’s baptism, Satan was among the witnesses. He saw the Father’s glory overshadowing His Son. He heard the voice of Jehovah testifying to the divinity of Jesus. Ever since Adam’s sin, the human race had been cut off from direct communion with God; the intercourse between heaven and earth had been through Christ; but now that Jesus had come ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ (Rom. 8:3), the Father Himself spoke. He had before communicated with humanity through Christ; now He communicated with humanity in Christ. Satan had hoped that God’s abhorrence of evil would bring an eternal separation between heaven and earth. But now it was manifest that the connection between God and man had been restored.”

“Jesus did not receive baptism as a confession of guilt on His own account. He identified Himself with sinners, . . . . His life of suffering and patient endurance after His baptism was also an example to us.”

“Baptism is a most solemn renunciation of the world. Those who are baptized in the threefold name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, at the very entrance of their Christian life declare publicly that they have forsaken the service of Satan and have become members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King. They have obeyed the command: ‘Come out from among them, and be ye separate, . . . and touch not the unclean thing.’ And to them is fulfilled the promise: ‘I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.’ 2 Corinthians 6:17, 18.”

“Christ knew that the enemy would come to every human being, to take advantage of hereditary weakness, and by his false insinuations to ensnare all whose trust is not in God. And by passing over the ground which man must travel, our Lord has prepared the way for us to overcome. It is not His will that we should be placed at a disadvantage in the conflict with Satan. He would not have us intimidated and discouraged by the assaults of the serpent. ‘Be of good cheer,’ He says; ‘I have overcome the world.’ John 16:33.”

**REACT**

1. What are the implications for our everyday lives when we “become members of the royal family”?
2. How can we make our own victories the Lord’s victories (John 16:33)?

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2. Ibid., p. 111.

Sarah Gninkoun, Geneva, Switzerland
To have Abraham as an ancestor, as a pillar of one's faith, or to be fully persuaded that Jesus is our High Priest, is not enough to save us. Just as the crowds coming to John asked him what they should do, we also should ask God what it is we should do. Following are a few answers.

**We must make God our priority in all aspects of life.**

*Let us live like Jesus.* With the help of the Holy Spirit, we are to be righteous in everything we do. As we share our faith, we should also share our material goods with those who have but little. According to people's needs, God puts kind yet wise words in the mouths of His servants, and He helps them to do good deeds. According to our talents, He personally prepares those of us who wish to share His love. However, we must always remember that it is He who works in us and through us to do His will. Only He can transform hearts and perform miracles.

*Let us be filled with the Holy Spirit.* Luke's words regarding how to treat others should be engraved upon our hearts, for they reveal a way for us to come closer to God in our everyday lives. The Holy Spirit guides us to “‘produce fruit in keeping with repentance’ ” (Luke 3:8, NIV). Paul describes this fruit in Galatians 5:22–26: the “fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other” (NIV).

*Let us fill our daily routines with praise and worship.* I know a church member who prays while she's washing the dishes that God will wash her heart clean of sin. She prays similar prayers while doing other daily household tasks. Having a specific time during the day devoted to communicating with God is important, but changing ordinary situations into times of prayer and meditation will strengthen our relationship with Christ and fortify us to resist Satan's temptations.

*Let God give you His armor against Satan.* God prepared Jesus before Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. God knows our limits and provides us with the weapons we need so that we are not helpless against Satan (Eph. 6). Christ fights for us. But we must have the Word of God in our hearts. This implies that we must have a constant relationship with Him. We must make God our top priority in all aspects of life. When we claim His promises, He will give us discernment, spiritual intelligence, discipline, common sense, and perseverance.
The world doesn’t need more speeches from politicians or world leaders who make grand promises to the citizens of their countries. Nor does the world need any more positioning of armies in takeover attempts. What the world does need are living landmarks—youth who reflect the light of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is possible only as we are born again through the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit.

Daily study of His Word will light our path to heaven.

Jesus’ baptism is an example for us. The sequence of events—His baptism itself, His prayer, and the Holy Spirit and the Father’s testimony in connection with the event—offer profound teachings regarding His death and resurrection and our being dead to sin and alive in God. The presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at every baptism is a spiritual reality. The world can feel it operate through the spiritual renewal that is a result of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This renewal is manifested in us through the following qualities: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22, 23, NKJV). By these fruits, people will know us (Matt. 7:20).

Every step we take after baptism should be taken with Christ by our side. Daily study of His Word will light our path to heaven. Of course, nobody has ever said that this new life will be free of difficulty. That is why it is important to remember that God loves us and cares about us and that His Holy Spirit lives in us to make us strong. The Spirit provides us with spiritual armor so that we can be victorious against sin—a conquest that Christ has made sure we can win because of His own triumph against Satan in the wilderness. “Paul describes this armor as consisting of the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, and the unfailing power of prayer. . . . Guarded with such armor, dependent completely on the unfailing power of the Spirit, we cannot but grow in spiritual valor and win the warfare in which we are engaged.”

So let us study the Scriptures, and let our footsteps be guided by the Holy Spirit. In this way, others will see that Christ dwells in us.

**REACT**

Right after Jesus was baptized, Satan tempted Him. How did Jesus combat this temptation, and what can we learn through His response?

2. Ibid., pp. 160, 161.

Jules Comlan Gninkoun, Cotonou, Benin
CONCLUDE

“One day Jesus left the carpenter shop in Nazareth, bade His family farewell, and went to the Jordan, where His cousin John was preaching. Approaching John, He asked to be baptized. Amazed, John tried to dissuade Him, saying, ‘I have need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?’

‘Permit it to be so now,’ Jesus answered, ‘for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness’ (Matt. 3:13–15).

‘Jesus’ baptism forever gave this ordinance divine sanction (Matt. 3:13–17; cf. Matt. 21:25). Baptism is an aspect of righteousness in which all can participate. Since Christ, the Sinless One, was baptized to ‘fulfill all righteousness,’ we, who are sinners ought to do the same.’*

CONSIDER

• Singing “The Cleansing Wave,” no. 332 in the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, or at http://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/1010. Which verse is most meaningful to you, and why?

• Illustrating your favorite verse from either “The Cleansing Wave” or “On Jordan’s Banks the Baptist’s Cry,” no. 333 in the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal.

• Personalizing one of the songs above by writing a verse that relates directly to your life and relationship with Christ.

• Singing “The Cleansing Wave,” and using American Sign Language for “cleansing” and “wave” when you sing those words. The sign for “cleansing” can be found at http://www.signingsavvy.com/sign/CLEANSE/6244/1, and the sign for “wave” at http://www.signingsavvy.com/sign/WAVE/7153/1.

• Getting baptized if you haven’t already done so. Share your interest in baptismal classes with a pastor or elder.

CONNECT

Mark 16:16; John 3; Acts 8:26–38; Romans 6:1–4.

Who Is Jesus Christ?

A work assignment took me to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in May 2013. While I was preparing to relocate, I made a deal with God that nothing bad would happen to me while I was there. The day I arrived, there was a small demonstration on Champ-de-Mars, which my driver took us through. However, deep down inside of me, there was the peace of knowing that I was safe in the arms of my Savior. My relationship with Christ kept me calm then, and it keeps me confident today. Through the many challenges I experienced, my coworkers would always ask whether I was afraid. And I would always answer, “I made a deal with God before I came to Haiti. So I have nothing to fear.”

However, there have been instances over the course of my life when I felt like John the Baptist behind prison bars, even though I theoretically knew that Christ was with me and would come through for me. Yet, in those moments when life seemed to have me cornered, I had to seek reassurance regarding who He is and that He was really with me. I have questioned, “‘Are you the one?’” (Luke 7:19, NIV). And every single time His love has proven to me that He is. I have seen the miracles of Christ in my life and in the lives of those around me. I personally have come to know the Christ of Luke’s Gospel. And He is my everything.

One month after arriving in Port-au-Prince, I no longer lived behind seven-foot walls, and there was no armed security guard at my gate. Work dictated that I would live approximately one hour outside of the city in the community that I served. There the tranquility of the water and the magnificence of the mountains clothed each day with Christ’s presence. Often, before I went to work, I would hike the hillside to watch the farmers going to their fields and the boats coming in from La Gonave on market days. But more importantly, I would find peace in nature. In times when my spirit was uneasy, I prayed that Christ would honor His promise to keep me safe. However, in my heart I was resolved that this experience would not be like every other—not simple preservation in this life—but preparation for the life to come. The question Who is Christ Jesus? can be answered only through study and a personal relationship with Him. This week, we will seek to individually answer this question as we continue our study of Luke’s Gospel.
The Son of God—the Son of Man (Luke 1:26–38; 3:21–38)

To show us how much He loves us, Jesus, the Son of the Most High God, wrapped Himself in the garb of humanity and was born in a stable in Bethlehem. Even though He is the Son of God, He also is the perfect example of humility. He did not think it shameful to be numbered among us. He never strutted around demanding to be worshiped or asserting His authority. Instead, He referred to Himself as the Son of Man. Thus, Jesus, in His wisdom, was able to avoid the full ire of the Jews until His ministry was complete.


Much of Luke shows Jesus healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, casting out demons, and raising loved ones back to life. This work was predicted in Isaiah 61:1, 2, which He read in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. Christ was anointed by the Holy Spirit to preach the good news of salvation to all types of people whose hearts were languishing for the enrichment of God's word and the blessed hope. He healed hearts devastated by the effects of sin. He delivered people who were under the influence of the evil one, and He gave sight to both the physically and the spiritually blind.

The Champion of the Underdog (Luke 8:1–3, 41–56)

In biblical times, women, children, foreigners, and the poor were deemed to be “low class.” Women and children were viewed as men’s possessions and were often sold into slavery to settle debts. Jesus, aware of this cultural inequality, exhibited a soft spot in His heart for these people. He welcomed and blessed little children, even declaring that “ ‘whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it’ ” (Luke 18:17, NKJV). He revolutionized cultural norms by treating women as equals with men. He ministered to women, and He allowed them to minister to Him (Luke 4:38, 39; 8:1–3).

However, this did not “fly” with the scribes nor with the Pharisees and Sadducees, who rigidly observed the ceremonial and moral laws. With great scorn, they avoided the ceremonially unclean, the dead, foreigners, lepers, and women experiencing their menses. Jesus’ actions defied their legalistic reasoning. He did not consider it defiling when He gave
the healing touch that raised Jairus's daughter back to life or when the woman with severe bleeding touched Him (Luke 8:41–56). To them, He was their Hero.


For centuries, the prophecies foretold the coming of the world's Savior. Every Jewish woman wondered whether He would be her Son, but God found favor with one Jewish girl, Mary. “‘Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God’ ” (Luke 1:30, NIV). When Jesus finally came unto His own, “his own received him not” (John 1:11) and some, in their unbelief, sought to toss Him over a cliff. Jesus did not fit their preconceived notions of the Messiah's purpose. They expected Him to ride in with much fanfare, but instead He came as an unassuming babe to a humble and lowly family. They looked for a savior from Roman oppression, but Jesus came to be the Savior from sin and its penalty of death. His very essence ran against their value system. Rather than condone their evil, He rebuked them for choosing to dwell in darkness rather than in light. Thus, they hardened their hearts to the message of salvation and eternal life.

John the Baptist, whom God had chosen to preach about the coming Messiah in the years before Christ's ministry, believed the Word of God. He and his followers looked forward with great anticipation to seeing the Savior. However, when Jesus did come, though they believed, they wanted to be reassured. They sought that reassurance by inquiring of Jesus, and He reassured them by His words and acts of healing (Luke 7:18–22).

The disciples also were receptive to Jesus. Though blinded at first by the prevailing culture, their searching hearts were opened to the truths Jesus taught them. Peter, through divine discernment, declared that Jesus was indeed “the Christ of God.” Jesus' transfiguration was even more proof of this assertion.

Jesus ultimately came to give His life as a ransom to save the lost. However, eternal life is only guaranteed to those who believe that He is the Savior. Jesus is still willing to save anyone who believes in Him. He calls us to repentance. He wants to be our Savior, Lord, and Friend. Who is He to you?

**REACT**

1. During Jesus' ministry on earth, there were different reactions to Him. If you were living back then, how do you think you would have reacted to Him?

2. Would you have despised Jesus because His rebukes would’ve cut at you, or would you have loved Him for showing you the truth and the way to salvation?
Throughout the pages of the Holy Scriptures, there are descriptions of the coming Savior, of the Man and of His work. “He was to stand between the sinner and the penalty of sin; yet few would receive him as the Son of God. He would leave his high position as the Majesty of heaven, appear upon the earth and humble himself as a man, and by His own experience become acquainted with the sorrows and temptations that humans would have to endure. All this would be necessary in order that He might be able to succor them that should be tempted.”¹ In time, through His life and His ministry, Jesus did indeed accomplish all this. But who is He to you?

“Our Lord Jesus Christ came to this world as the unwearied servant of man’s necessity. He ‘took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses,’ that He might minister to every need of humanity. Matthew 8:17. The burden of disease and wretchedness and sin He came to remove. It was His mission to bring to men complete restoration; He came to give them health and peace and perfection of character.”² Yet, who is He to you?

“My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 1 John 2:1, NKJV.”³ These comforting words speak to our yearning hearts, while at the same time they let us know that “we have an advocate at the throne of God, which is encircled by the bow of promise, and we are invited to present our petitions in the name of Christ before the Father. Jesus says: Ask what ye will in My name, and it shall be done unto you. In presenting My name, you bear witness that you belong to Me, that you are My sons and daughters, and the Father will treat you as His own, and love you as He loveth Me.”⁴ With all these promises to calm and to comfort our weary hearts, we are shown the very likeness of the man Christ Jesus. Who is He to you?

**REACT**

1. Jesus has been many things to many people. What experiences in your life define who Jesus is to you?

2. Out of the many roles Jesus fills, which role do you think is most vital?

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4. Ibid.

Wayne Duncombe, New Providence, Bahamas
The Bible is full of prophecies about the first advent of Christ. Jesus was the Promised Seed that would bruise the head of the serpent, Satan (Gen. 3:15). A Savior was needed because of sin. As time progressed and as civilizations changed, conflicts became more complex. Then prophesies of a King and a Redeemer began to fill the scrolls of the prophets. He would be “Prince of Peace” to the captives and a “Counselor” to the broken (Isa. 9:6).

Luke’s account of the birth of Jesus provides evidence of the birth of the promised Savior. Here, the Savior’s lineage fits the prophecy of the Old Testament. The virgin birth foretold in Isaiah 7:14 supports the details of Luke as he tells of the angel speaking to Mary. Then Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Recent archeological evidence also supports the account of Jesus’ birth, as a team working on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority unearthed a seal bearing the name Bethlehem. The seal would have been used to label tax shipments from Bethlehem to Judea.¹

Jesus, the One prophesied, came at the appointed time. However, “there is no beauty that we should desire Him” (Isa. 53:2, NKJV), and life carried on as usual for many people. Luke 7:24–30 tells us that He would be rejected by His generation. Luke presented the facts in a well-organized and irrefutable manner, and as a Greek physician, he was perhaps in the best position to present these facts to the Gentiles.

Luke presents to us a personal Christ. As pointed out in the memory text for this week, Peter, after seeing the actions of Jesus, refers to Him as the “Christ of God.” The word Christ in Greek is translated as “anointed.”² This description of Jesus may at first appear to have the words out of order. After all, we are used to the name Jesus Christ. Peter however describes Jesus as the “anointed” of God, and Luke concurs that He truly was the anointed of God.

**REACT**

1. Luke presented Jesus as he saw Him. How do you see Jesus?
2. How can your personal perspective of Jesus, the anointed of God, help others to draw closer to Him?

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Christ challenged His disciples with the question, “‘Who do you say that I am?’” (Mark 8:29, NKJV). Today, He challenges us with the same question. Jesus Himself tells us who He is: “‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’” (John 14:6, NKJV), “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last’” (Rev. 22:13, NKJV). Yes! Jesus knows exactly who He is, but do you have an answer to His question?

To the prodigal child, He is a loving father patiently waiting for the child to come home (Luke 15:11–32). To the emotionally sick, He is a Giver of life (John 10:10; Phil. 4:7). To the sex, drug, or shopping addict, He is a Healer (Exod. 15:26). To the financially weary student, He is a Provider (Phil. 4:19). To the depressed, He is a Peace-Giver (Phil. 4:7). Who do you say Jesus is? Get to know Him as your BFF (best Friend forever) by putting these following strategies into practice:

**Spend time with Him.** Take a special part of every day to get to know Jesus. James 4:8 tells us that if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us. Meditate on Him, His words, His lifestyle, and His gift of salvation. “‘And this is life eternal, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent’” (John 17:3, NKJV).

**Focus on pleasing Him rather than yourself.** Make a concerted effort to do what pleases Him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is first and great commandment’” (Matt. 22:37, 38, NKJV).

**Talk to Him.** Yes! Jesus is still listening to and answering prayers, and not just those offered during devotions or while we are on our knees. He answers the prayers spoken in our minds while we are working, walking to a class at school, or driving down the freeway. He is always ready to answer our prayers. “‘It shall come to pass, / That before they call, I will answer; / And while they are still speaking, I will hear’” (Isa. 65:24, NKJV).

**Trust Him.** Let Jesus be who He says He is. Why try solving your own problems or facing challenges alone, when Jesus promises to be there to help us? “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass” (Ps. 37:5).

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Nadia Ammitie King, Nassau, New Providence, Bahamas
Sitting in the synagogue one Sabbath day were people who had known Jesus as He was growing up. Others had only heard about Him, and some had seen Him only a few times. There also must have been close and distant relatives and curious travelers who came to hear the son of Joseph and Mary speak.

But wait! Did He claim that He was who the prophet Isaiah spoke of? Yes! He read as if each word were written about Him. Was it their imagination, or did it seem as if He recited the words of the scroll from memory? “‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me’” (Luke 4:18, NKJV). They struggled to listen as their confusion turned to alarm and then to anger. Who was this man?

They had heard the stories. The miracles surely could not be true. And even if they were, what difference would it make? He was still only the son of Joseph and Mary. Many people who had seen Him work miracles or who had been touched by Him still did not know who He really was. They were content with the things He had done, so they did not dig deeper.

We are in danger of doing the same today. Many of us are content to worship the God our parents and pastors describe instead of getting to know Him personally. Oswald Chambers wrote, “Always distinguish between what you see Jesus to be, and what He has done for you. If you only know what He has done for you, you have not a big enough God; but if you have had a vision of Jesus as He is, experiences can come and go, you will endure ‘as seeing Him Who is invisible.’”*

Have you really seen Jesus? Have you allowed Him to really enter every aspect of your life? Like the woman with the problem of bleeding, have you experienced Him personally (Luke 8:40–48)? When we have and when we continue to do so, then, like Paul, we, too, may say, “I know whom I have believed” (2 Tim. 1:12, NKJV).

REACT

1. Why is it important to differentiate between what Jesus has done for you and who He is to you?
2. What does it mean to experience Jesus for yourself? Think of an experience and prepare to share it with the class on Sabbath.
3. How would you answer the question Do you know Jesus?


Ogechi Nwankwo, Moreno Valley, California, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE

Knowing who Jesus is gets to the heart of who we are and what eternity holds for us. We can admire the works of Jesus, honor His words, extol His patience, advocate His nonviolence, acclaim His decisiveness, praise His selflessness, and stand speechless at the cruel end of His life. Many people may even be ready to accept Jesus as a good man who tried to infuse fairness where there was injustice, to offer healing where there was sickness, and to bring comfort where there was only misery. None of these things, however, come close to answering the question that Jesus Himself raised: “‘Who do you say that I am?’” (Luke 9:20, NKJV). It is a question that demands an answer, and on that answer the destiny of humanity hinges.

CONSIDER

• Designing a montage of all the things Jesus is to you personally.
• Singing the song “He’s Everything to Me.” You can find the words and music at http://www.angelfire.com/co2/inspiration/everything.html.
• Writing a new verse to “He’s Everything to Me” that reflects what Jesus means to you.
• Listing the character traits that define Jesus and evaluating how you are manifesting these traits in your own life. Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you grow in the areas you feel are weak.
• Preparing Communion bread and grape juice for a Friday night or Saturday evening vesper service. Before the attendees partake of these emblems, ask for volunteers to express what Christ’s sacrifice means to them personally.
• Watching a film or television show or reading a book about an aspect of nature that particularly interests you. What does this aspect teach you about our Creator?
• Listing the characteristics of Christ that attract you to Him. Consider how these characteristics manifest themselves in your life. Ask for the Holy Spirit’s guidance in developing these traits.

CONNECT

Psalm 23; Matthew 1:23.
David Marshall, Jesus and You.
The Call to Discipleship

“Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me’” (Luke 9:23, NKJV).
In our worship services at my home church, we sing a song during our invitation to prayer that is very dear to my heart: “Hear our earnest prayer O Lord / Hear our humble cry / Precious loving caring Lord, / On whom we rely / . . . All we ask is that you hear our prayers.”*

The phrase “on whom we rely” particularly stands out for me. God is the One whom we rely on for strength, guidance, love, and affection as we walk this earth. We also rely on Him to live in us. In essence, reliance upon God is at the very heart of this week’s lesson on discipleship.

We must first rely on God’s strength and not our own.

In the story of the calling of Peter, James, and John (Luke 5:1–11), Jesus instructed Peter to cast out his net into the water after an entire night of fishing without catching anything at all! Faced with Christ’s suggestion to cast his net on the other side, Peter had to come to terms with the twin facts that all of his efforts the night before had gotten him nowhere and that his strength had run out.

Yet Peter went forward at Christ’s word, and stepping out in faith, he caught so many fish that his boat began to sink. It is only after this exercise of faith that Christ tells him, “ ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people’ ” (verse 10, NIV). I believe this lesson was designed to impress upon Peter and future disciples of Christ that to be His disciples we must first rely on God’s strength and not our own.

Many beautiful things happen when we rely on God’s power. We become more Christ-centered and selfless. Through prayer and Bible study, we open the way for God to fill us with His love. Only when we experience this love and communion with God can we truly share God with others. God first fills us and then lets His love overflow to those around us. But in order for this to happen, we must first be reliant on Christ, for He says, “ ‘Apart from me you can do nothing’ ” (John 15:5, NIV). Throughout this week, keep in mind that at the heart of discipleship is reliance upon God.


Nyachom Chiek, Calgary, Alberta, Canada
Disciples are people who accept and spread their teacher’s message. It can be said that disciples are students whose sole purpose is to obtain the knowledge that the teacher bestows on them so that the students become like their teacher in both thought and conduct. This is noted in Luke 6:40: “‘A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher’ ” (NKJV). As Christians, we recognize that we are disciples of Jesus Christ, and as such, we are to be like Him. However, an important question lies before us. Do we have to see this Teacher and His works to become disciples?

Many students can attest to the fact that learning any subject without a teacher’s presence can be daunting. They wonder what steps they must take to best learn the subject they are studying. They wonder whether they are on the right path. They question whether they will succeed or fail. Will they be able to put into practice what they’ve learned in class?

These are just a handful of the queries that arise in our minds. Thus, being in the company of a teacher most certainly provides reassurance. Most questions are answered; new ways are taught; and a greater understanding is gained. Jesus’ disciples had such reassurance. In His presence, they witnessed the miracles He performed. They saw Him feed the 5,000, cast out demons, walk on water, and heal the sick.

What do we have in this present day as proof that will allow us to follow Him?

The same God who told Joshua to “‘not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go’ ” (Josh. 1:9, NKJV) is the same God who speaks to us today. God is still very much present in our modern times as He was in the times of the disciples. He has given us His Word, and we can confidently rely upon it because They are one and the same. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1, NKJV). We have no need to doubt. The only thing that is required of us is to exercise faith. Faith and discipleship share an intimate connection.

**REACT**

1. How can you be sure that Christ is leading you?
2. What is your response when Christ tells you to drop everything and follow Him?
The Path to Discipleship (Luke 5:1–11)

Peter, James, and John had been fishing by persistence and chance, not fully realizing that it was God who provided for them and all creation (Luke 12:24). Before Jesus intervened, it was important that persistence and chance fail first so that His alternative remedy, which is, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, / And lean not on your own understanding” (Prov. 3:5, NKJV), could be put into use. In Luke 5:4, Jesus commands Peter to do what he had done all night without positive results. The statement “‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God’” (Luke 4:4, NKJV) was a quotation taken from Deuteronomy 8:3 and used by Jesus Christ to resist one of Satan's temptations. This statement was the factor that Peter had to recognize as the unseen hand of God bringing to fruition what he thought was random coincidence. Just like Zachariah, who doubted the prophecy concerning the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:20), it is sinful human nature to doubt what God decrees. But if we are to embark on the path to discipleship, we need to first believe what God says in Isaiah 55:11. God's Word is as good as history. We can “take it to the bank.” Faith in God should not be first tested against personal historical experience but should be without doubt exercised because of who God is.

Discipleship is allegiance to God's kingdom.

Selection of the Twelve (Luke 6:12–16)

By worldly standards, one could make a very simple case against Jesus' choice of disciples. They were not the cream of the crop. To name a few, Jesus called Matthew (or Levi), who was a tax collector (Luke 5:29). Jesus also called James and John, the sons of Zebedee, nicknamed the sons of thunder or commotion. Among the called was also Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus and loved money more than His Savior. And the list goes on. Why Jesus called these particular individuals and eight others is a mystery, but one thing that we learn from Scripture is that God is no respecter of persons (2 Chron. 19:7; Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11).

The word whosoever is found throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, showing that from the beginning, God's call has always been to all of humanity, not just a select few. It is only when the disciples recognized how holy and trustworthy God's Word was that they realized how sinful
they really were as they were doubting God's unfailing Word. Jesus had reached their hearts and revealed His Word for effective and timely application (Exod. 4:12; Matt. 10:19, 20; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11, 12). Judas was the only disciple who chose death, even though God’s Word was available.


In Luke 9:1–6, Jesus called His 12 disciples, gave them power and authority to minister, and sent them to preach the kingdom of God without tangible provisions. They were to carry nothing except the clothes on their backs. The cost of discipleship is transferred to the recipients of the gospel (Matt. 10:10; Luke 10:1) and is similar to commission-based work, where service recipients honor the worker by apportioning to them something proportional to the work they performed. This taught the disciples to trust in God's providence as He would be leading them by the Holy Spirit in the fields of labor. Jesus also sent 70 other individuals with the same charge, and they also were expected to carry nothing but to receive accommodation and food wherever they were working.

Before these details were presented, Jesus had to tell the 12 disciples the level of commitment they had to bring to the table. In Luke 9:23–25, the stakes of discipleship are explained by Jesus in the light of all-or-nothing, complete surrender to His will or self-reliance. With each of these two choices a consequence was outlined: eternal life or eternal damnation.

Discipleship becomes an even more serious decision in verses 57–62, as Jesus relays the reality that discipleship is allegiance to God’s kingdom, and at the same time, waging war on Satan's kingdom, with no option to stand in the middle. Jesus was asking His disciples to follow Him wherever He went, even to the cross. He did not hide the fact that He would share both His rewards and afflictions with His followers. When Jesus places His Word in our cold hearts, the Word will start warming us until we radiate that heat and light to an icy and dark world. However, if we try to suppress it, it will burn us (Jer. 20:9). Light does not shine for itself, but it illuminates its surroundings. The Word that Jesus places in our hearts is for us to share with those around us.

**REACT**

1. What is the difference between a disciple and an apostle?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 11:1. What principle was conveyed in this verse by Paul to the Corinthians? Explain.
It’s easy to subjectively define discipleship, assume who fits its quota, and assess its effectiveness through success, while substantially neglecting God’s standpoint. God “evaluates” discipleship by the manifestation of three attributes: love, obedience, and unity.

“There are very many who claim to serve God, but who have no experimental knowledge of Him. Their desire to do His will is based upon their own inclination, not upon the deep conviction of the Holy Spirit.”

God wants self-denial, perpetuated by love.

“Love will be revealed in sacrifice. . . . Christ gave all for us, and those who receive Christ will be ready to sacrifice all for the sake of their Redeemer. The thought of His honor and glory will come before anything else.”

We often believe that discipleship is reserved for pastors or missionaries. Yet God desires all of us to be disciples no matter who we are. “The Christian who is such in his private life, in the daily surrender of self, in sincerity of purpose and purity of thought, in meekness under provocation, in faith and piety, in fidelity in that which is least, the one who in the home life represents the character of Christ—such a one may in the sight of God be more precious than even the world-renowned missionary or martyr.”

We equate success in discipleship by how many people we have “won” for Jesus. However, God doesn’t evaluate success in discipleship through quantity. He seeks for quality and obedience driven by love, which causes self-denial in the individual who embraces discipleship. “The Duke of Wellington was once present where a party of Christian men were discussing the possibility of success in missionary effort among the heathen. They appealed to the duke to say whether in his judgment such efforts were likely to prove a success commensurate to the cost. The old soldier replied: ‘Gentlemen, what are your marching orders? Success is not the question for you to discuss. If I read your orders aright, they run thus, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” Gentlemen, obey your marching orders.’”

Love, obedience, and self-denial should be the motivating forces that help us to share God’s message of love, peace, and hope. These three actions define true discipleship.

2. Ibid., p. 49.
3. Ibid., p. 403.
Accepting Jesus as your Savior is the biggest life-changing choice and experience you can make. You realize that there is a holy, just God who is offended by sin. You also recognize your sinful state and your inability to make yourself better in order to escape death (Rom. 6:23). But then you acknowledge that there is Someone who loves you so much that He died for your sins so that you could have eternal life (John 3:16)! Once you accept Jesus, you notice that there are changes in your life that must be made in order to remain in Him. You have become a new person (2 Cor. 5:17). Your old ways that are offensive to God can no longer suffice as your normal way of living. This is the call of discipleship—a journey that will take you to newer heights with Jesus. Luke 9:23–25 details three simple but difficult steps toward this engaging process. It requires a total transformation of self (Rom. 12:2) and sacrifice, which may even include death. But in the end, it will be worth it.

The cross is a symbol of sacrifice and humiliation.

Deny yourself. Because human beings are naturally wicked, directly contrasting with the character of God, following Jesus requires turning away from the natural, self-centered inclinations of the flesh. The focus must be on God, not self. And although self-improvement is the goal, discipleship encompasses much more than personal successes or achievements. It translates into character transformation into the likeness of God—imago Dei.

Take up your cross. The cross is a symbol of sacrifice and humiliation. It is the next step toward becoming a true disciple. Based on what Jesus did for us on the cross, we must be willing to do whatever He asks us to do. Naturally, no human being wants to be subjected to pain and humiliation. However, our love for Christ will compel us to make the necessary sacrifices for Him, regardless of what they are.

Follow Him. After we have denied ourselves and taken up our cross, we must accept the direction He has for us in our lives. The Holy Spirit will work in and through us to guide us along the right path. In addition, He will lead us on the Great Commission to go and make disciples (Matt. 28:19, 20), who also will be committed believers for Christ.

REACT

1. What things do you need to deny yourself of in order to be an effective disciple?
2. Think of practical ways you can go out and make disciples of others.
We often associate being a disciple with sharing the gospel with the world. Yet this is only part of the picture. In Luke 6:27, Jesus introduces an aspect of discipleship that is not easy for us fallen beings: “‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you’” (NKJV).

When Adam and Eve sinned, the harmony God had intended for this world fell apart. Luke shows Jesus, the Creator, taking a strong stand against the injustices caused by sin. He speaks for the oppressed. He heals the sick, casts out demons, and feeds the hungry. This shows how important we are to Him. It is therefore not surprising that He expects His followers to extend the same level of care regardless of the response they get from those for whom they are caring.

**We need to extend the love of Jesus to all.**

In His own life, Jesus personally demonstrated the “love your enemy” command. At His arrest, Peter followed his human inclination to defend his own personal interests by any means possible. Jesus immediately rebuked him and reminded him that God was in control. Jesus then did the one thing that only God can do—He restored the health of the very same man who was there to take His life.

What makes loving our enemies so difficult is our selfish natures. It is impossible for us to demonstrate the same level of selflessness that Jesus demonstrated without a strong connection with Him through prayer and Bible study. Then through the indwelling of the Spirit, our lives will reflect Christ, whom we profess. When things get difficult, our first instinct should be to ask God to guide our footsteps. That is the only way we can truly learn to love our enemies.

I therefore suggest that we use the “love your enemy” command as a litmus test for our level of faith. The way we respond when provoked and the way we relate to the people who hate us have a direct correlation to our relationship with Christ. If we are His disciples, we need to see the world and our fellow beings the way He does. We need to love people despite what they believe in or how they behave. We need to extend the love of Jesus to all.

**REACT**

Jesus commands us to love our enemies. Is it therefore ungodly to get angry when we are provoked? Explain your answer.

*Jidzo Hobona, Calgary, Alberta, Canada*
CONCLUDE

When Jesus walked the earth as one of us, He didn’t call the obvious choices to follow Him. Caiaphas was not among the 12 disciples. Nor did He obviously reward those He did call. His blood-stained trail marked the disciples’ way, and they all left their own trails of blood as they followed Jesus to their deaths. So what do you expect when you answer Jesus’ call to follow Him? You may expect that He will show His favor in material and temporal ways. Many successful ministries are built on this prosperity gospel. But maybe you are already beginning to experience the true cost of discipleship.

CONSIDER

• Reading Luke 9:57–62. Then on a sheet of paper, make two columns. In one column, list the excuses people gave for putting off following Jesus. In the second column, list the reasons you have heard others use, or even the reasons you have voiced yourself. Below those columns, write Jesus’ response to those who would follow Him (verses 23–25).

• Drawing a cross on a large piece of paper that you can hang where you have your devotions. For the duration of this quarter, ask God to reveal to you what attitudes, habits, actions, and lifestyle choices hinder you from following Jesus. Write these down on small pieces of paper as they are revealed to you and tack them to the cross. As you do so, pray for God to help you surrender these areas of your life to Him.

• Writing a poem describing your own decision to follow Jesus and how that journey has been for you since you first embarked upon it.

• Sharing your poem with your church. In Sabbath School or during the divine service, share how God is working and moving in your life.

• Praying for the Holy Spirit to reveal to you how you can follow Jesus through self-denial. Do you need to depend upon Him to be more disciplined in your own lifestyle choices? Do you need to focus on others more by giving your time to benefit someone else? Ask Him to help you see how He can work in and through you, and then give you the faith and courage to accept the challenge He impresses upon you.

• Finding a hymn or worship song, or writing one of your own, that expresses how Jesus walks with you on your discipleship journey and of the hope and promises He rewards you with as you depend on Him. Sing this in your personal worship time as you praise Him.

CONNECT

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship.
Christ as the Lord of the Sabbath

“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27, 28, NKJV).
How am I supposed to live without You? 
How am I to enjoy this life without You? 
How can I carry on to another week without You? 
How can I thank You, my Love!

It’s You who makes me appreciate life, my Deliverer. 
It’s You who unites me with my family after a long week. 
It’s You who unites me with my church family. 
It’s You who reminds me of creation.

I love the One who made the Sabbath for me.

I find rest in You, my Love. 
I feel more blessed when I meet with You. 
I thank God for creating this world for me. 
I look forward each week just to spend quality time with You.

When I’m with You, I feel that all my worries are gone. 
When I’m with You, I understand my Creator more. 
When I’m with You, I forget about my work. 
When I’m with You, I get a taste of heaven!

I get to spend quality time with the One who made me. 
I get to know what a blessing You are to this world. 
I get to spend quality time doing what I’m supposed to do. 
I get to share my blessings with my church family.

You are my blessing! 
You are my joy! 
You are my hope! 
You are mine, now and forever!

I know that when Christ comes again I will be with my Love, forever and ever! 
I love the One who made the Sabbath for me, 
The One who guides me daily, 
The One who teaches me how to enjoy this blessed day, the Sabbath.
During Old Testament times, the nation of Israel frequently turned away from God. Eventually, because of their idolatry and disregard for God’s law, they were carried into captivity (2 Kings 17:7–20; 2 Chron. 36:20). When they returned to their land, Nehemiah’s reforms led them to correct their observance of the Sabbath (Neh. 10:31; 13:15–22). However, by the time Jesus came to Earth, Sabbath keeping had degenerated into a rigid list of rules. Luke’s Gospel records Jesus’ efforts to restore the Sabbath to its rightful place.

Relieving human suffering can itself be an act of worship.

Jesus Regularly Kept the Sabbath (Isa. 61:1, 2; Luke 4:16–22)

Although Jesus challenged how people observed the Sabbath, He always observed it. Every Sabbath found Him worshiping with others. The Sabbath was not merely just another day; it was a time to worship God in special ways, both privately and publicly.

On one particular Sabbath, Jesus read from Isaiah 61:1, 2. This reading announced His mission: “To proclaim good news to the poor / . . . liberty to the captives / . . . recovering of sight to the blind / to set at liberty those who are oppressed, / to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18, 19, ESV). Since Christ is to be our Example (1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Tim. 1:16; 1 Pet. 2:21), we would do well to prayerfully consider how we can follow Him in His mission.

There are people today who observe the Sabbath without joining in the fellowship of a local church. Some have become disenchanted with other believers in their local church. Perhaps there have been serious conflicts. Others might be tired and decide to sleep late on Sabbath morning. But whenever possible, we should follow Jesus’ example in joining with other believers on the Sabbath. “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10:24, 25, ESV).

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:23–28; Luke 6:1–5)

Several of the regulations regarding Sabbath observance that were enforced during Jesus’ time revolved around handling grain on the Sabbath. Though the Bible clearly forbids work on the Sabbath, the Pharisees attempted to build a hedge around that day and so established burdensome rules to ensure that no one accidentally broke the Sabbath. Of course, such rules subverted the Sabbath instead of supporting it.¹

In Luke 6:1–5, Jesus cut through the man-made restrictions to shine a
light on the true meaning of the Sabbath: “‘The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath’” (verse 5, ESV). This verse is key for understanding the Sabbath, and it teaches us many things. First of all, we can only truly understand the Sabbath by knowing Christ. The Sabbath is much more than a list of forbidden activities; it is primarily about a special time with Jesus. The fourth commandment tells us not to work on the Sabbath because the Sabbath was created to facilitate our relationship with Jesus. Those who focus on the dos and don'ts of the Sabbath instead of on the Creator of the Sabbath betray a lack of understanding regarding the true nature of the Sabbath.

Another lesson Jesus taught us is that people have no authority to alter, redefine, or abolish the Sabbath. In the same way that the Pharisees’ rules for Sabbath observance were in error, so are modern claims that the Sabbath has been abolished or otherwise changed to another day. People who say, “I keep the Sabbath my own way!” make themselves lords of the Sabbath. But they are in error, for only Jesus is the true Lord of this holy day.


One of the Sabbath regulations that Jesus frequently challenged was the prohibition against healing on the Sabbath. The Pharisees permitted animals to be taken care of on the Sabbath, yet they insisted that the healing of people be delayed until after the Sabbath was over. This was contrary to Jesus’ teaching.

The Sabbath is a day for fellowship with God. So how can it be wrong to show mercy on the Sabbath? Jesus’ mission was “‘to seek and to save the lost’” (Luke 19:10, ESV). What better way to worship God than to participate with Him in this mission?

Relieving human suffering can itself be an act of worship. Jesus’ method was to show people that He cared for them. He satisfied their needs, thus showing God’s true character. Then He invited them into His kingdom.² Jesus didn’t take a break from this activity on the Sabbath. In fact, Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath was proactive. He often purposely healed on the Sabbath, even when He could have done so at another time. An example of this is found in John 5:1–17, where Jesus healed a man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath. This man’s condition did not require immediate healing, and since Jesus was in Jerusalem for a feast, He could have easily healed the man on another day. Yet He explicitly chose to make the Sabbath a day for mercy.

**REACT**

1. What other lessons can we learn from Jesus’ statement that the “‘Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath’” (Luke 6:5, ESV)?
2. What are some practical ways we can observe the Sabbath in light of the points made in this lesson?

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It is interesting to note that the Sabbath is tied to Christ as the Creator. The Sabbath directs us to the One who created us and our world. In John 1:3, the author boldly declares, “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (NKJV). Then God rested on the seventh day, which He declared should be a memorial to Creation.

“For Wherefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.’ These words are full of instruction and comfort. Because the Sabbath was made for man, it is the Lord’s day. It belongs to Christ. For ‘all things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made.’ John 1:3. Since He made all things, He made the Sabbath. By Him it was set apart as a memorial of the work of creation. It points to Him as both the Creator and the Sanctifier. It declares that He who created all things in heaven and in earth, and by whom all things hold together, is the head of the church, and that by His power we are reconciled to God. For, speaking of Israel, He said, ‘I gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them,’—make them holy. Ezekiel 20:12. Then the Sabbath is a sign of Christ’s power to make us holy. And it is given to all whom Christ makes holy. As a sign of His sanctifying power, the Sabbath is given to all who through Christ become a part of the Israel of God. . . .

“To all who receive the Sabbath as a sign of Christ’s creative and redeeming power, it will be a delight. Seeing Christ in it, they delight themselves in Him. The Sabbath points them to the works of creation as an evidence of His mighty power in redemption. While it calls to mind the lost peace of Eden, it tells of peace restored through the Saviour. And every object in nature repeats His invitation, ‘Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.’ Matthew 11:28.”*

**REACT**

1. What is the significance of Jesus being the Lord of the Sabbath?

2. When we worship on the Sabbath, what other truths about God are we affirming?

3. Take an inventory of how you are currently keeping the Sabbath. How does your inventory compare or contrast with what the Sabbath is really all about?

Each electronic device we purchase comes with an instruction manual that teaches us how to use that device. The Bible is God’s instruction manual regarding the Sabbath. Superior to any engineer’s plan, God designed and then created a home for humans. Genesis 1 outlines how He formed and then filled that home. As the week progressed, He filled it with living creatures. Then He formed two people, Adam and Eve, and gave them life. At the end of the Creation week, God blessed and sanctified the seventh day and spent the first full Sabbath resting with the two people He had just created (Gen. 2:2, 3).

We will be worshiping in heaven on the Sabbath.

In Isaiah 58, God gives examples of what pleases Him and what does not. God knows the best way for us to live, because He designed us. Verses 13, 14 especially pertain to the Sabbath and how we are to observe it. The Pharisees focused on the literal words of the law instead of on the spirit of the law (Matt. 9:14). They knew about fasting. But they kept for themselves any surplus that could have helped others. In Luke 6:9, Jesus pointedly and somewhat rhetorically inquired about the purpose of the Sabbath. During Creation week, God created the sun, plants, animals, and humans, none of which were to be self-serving. The sun shines and gives life to others. Plants bloom to give us food and beauty. Adam and Eve were to tend the garden. Each aspect of life was other centered.

The Sabbath is given by God in Genesis 2:2. Jesus kept the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). Paul always went to the synagogue on the Sabbath (Acts 17:2). Isaiah 66:22, 23, shows that we will be worshiping in heaven on the Sabbath. Hebrews 13:8 says that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (NKJV). He doesn’t change. He was present when the world was made. He is the Cofounder of the Sabbath. As such, He had a purpose for each decision He made, including His decisions regarding the Sabbath itself (Exod. 31:13).

**REACT**

1. Why are the principles regarding the Sabbath in Isaiah 58 so important?
2. In what ways do your Sabbath activities correspond with these principles?
At the end of Creation, God rested on the Sabbath and blessed it. Thus, we also are to observe the Sabbath by resting from our regular labor. However, somewhere along the way, the Sabbath became governed by strict rules. By the time Jesus came to earth, there were so many regulations regarding this day that even He, the One who instituted the Sabbath, was accused of breaking it.

**Nature can teach us many wonderful truths about God.**

Jesus’ observance of the Sabbath is a guide to help us in our celebration of this holy day. At a time when the laws governing the Sabbath had reached an absurd particularity, Jesus urged people to use their common sense when it came to Sabbath observance. The Sabbath was supposed to be a blessing, not a burden (Mark 2:27). Here are a few things Jesus did on the Sabbath that may give us an idea of how we can optimize our Sabbath experience.

*Jesus fellowshipped with others.* He regularly spent time with God, but He also taught people about God and about life. Whenever Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, He did more than just sit there. He taught and healed the people who were with Him (Matt. 12:9–13; Luke 4:16, 31).

*Jesus helped others.* How many Sabbaths go by without us having helped someone? We may not be able to heal, but we can help the elderly with things they find difficult to do. We can help a little child. We can help a colleague or friend who has had a rough week and just needs a hug. We can help our neighbors. Look around. There is no shortage of people needing help (Luke 4:31–35; 13:10–16). If we do good on the Sabbath, we will celebrate the Sabbath as Jesus did. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. But the Pharisees forgot that Jesus was more important than the rules they made for keeping the Sabbath (Matt. 12:3–8; Luke 6:9).

*Spend time outdoors in God’s creation.* He created a garden for Adam and Eve to live in. Nature can teach us many wonderful truths about God (Matt. 6:25–33; Luke 12:22–28). If you live in a large city, visit that city’s parks. If you are unable to be outside in safe places, search the Internet for interesting articles about nature. Or borrow books from a library that deal with nature.

**REACT**

1. How did the priests profane the Sabbath?
2. What might Jesus do today on the Sabbath that we would not approve of?
3. What can you do this Sabbath to make it special for someone else?
“What are you doing this Sabbath afternoon?” was a question students would ask each other when I was attending an Adventist college. At first, I was surprised by it, because my home church always had numerous activities lined up on Sabbath afternoons. There were Bible studies and Adventist youth events, in addition to visiting hospitals or the sick in their homes. On some Sab- baths, we would even be at the church until sundown. I never got bored on the Sabbath. In fact, I used to feel a little sad when the Sabbath was over.

Going overseas to study was another learning curve for me when it came to Sabbath keeping. At first, I couldn't understand why people slept for an entire Sabbath afternoon. Later, however, I found myself doing exactly that. We studied the whole week and stayed up late each night working on assignments. So on the Sabbath, we rested mentally and physically. We didn't give any Bible studies. We didn't evangelize or go witnessing. We just rested!

What did Jesus do on the Sabbath? “Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. And they were aston- ished at His teaching, for His word was with authority. Now in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!’ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be quiet, and come out of him!’ And when the demon had thrown him in their midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him” (Luke 4:31–35, NKJV).

As Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus shows us how to observe the Sabbath. Rather than checking out who was doing what on His holy day, He helped oth- ers. The Bible is clear on what we should do on the Sabbath. “If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord’s holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord” (Isa. 58:13, 14, NIV).

**REACT**

1. What activities can you and your friends take part in from sundown Fri- day to sundown Sabbath?
2. What activities do you think are acceptable for Friday night and Sabbath afternoon, and why?
CONCLUDE

The Bible begins and ends with the Sabbath. In Genesis 2:2, we read that on “the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done” (Gen. 2:2, 3, NIV). Then in Revelation 14:7, we read the following: “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” (NIV). This “is a direct reference to the fourth commandment of God’s eternal law. Its inclusion in this final warning confirms God’s special concern to have His widely forgotten Sabbath restored before the Second Advent.”* How can you help in restoring the Sabbath?

CONSIDER

• Going to the visitors’ center where you live to find interesting places to visit on a Sabbath afternoon. Especially inquire about nature centers and parks that offer safe places to observe God’s beautiful handiwork in nature. You could also arrange with your Sabbath School class to spend a Sabbath afternoon in such a place.

• Reading Matthew 12:1–13 and making a list of 12 things you could do on the Sabbath based on Jesus’ premise that “it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (verse 12, NIV). Plan to do one of these activities a month, either alone or with friends.

• Keeping a journal for two months that describes how you kept the Sabbaths during those months. Which activities were the most rewarding? Which were the least fulfilling? What do your journal entries teach you about how you want to keep the Sabbath in the future?

• Listening to the song “Come, O Sabbath Day,” at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXao-iOdfeY.

• Reading the book 52 Things to Do on the Sabbath by Glen Robinson. Which ideas appeal to you the most? How can you adapt some of the ideas to fit your particular situation?

CONNECT

Isaiah 58.
Richard Davidson, A Love Song for the Sabbath.


Leslie Jane Brewer, Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A.
“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. . . . There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26–28, NKJV).
Even in this modern world, the issues of gender bias and equality continue to rest on the shoulders of women the same way it did in the traditional Greek and Roman Empires. Many women faced neglect and belittlement on various levels, which did not allow them to express their opinions. During Jesus' ministry, women faced the same situation, which deprived them of the freedom to express their religious views and contribute effectively to ministry. However, the way Christ viewed women was quite different from society’s perspective.

While almost the entire society considered women to be of very little worth, Christ knew that women, just as men, had the same abilities and opportunities to serve God. Although many people did not agree with Him on this matter, He tried to show them that each person was equal in the eyes of God and that they therefore deserved the same opportunities to worship Him, confess their sins, and follow His teachings. The bias that existed during Jesus’ time still exists in the world today. Many women in certain parts of the world are still oppressed by their religious leaders just because they are women.

Even so, women continue to shine. In developing countries, for example, they continue to play a vital role in economic development. Women also have made great strides in spiritual revival in many parts of the world. Take, for example, Alice Wood, who arrived in Argentina in 1910 as a missionary and stayed there for 50 years. She helped initiate a church where she could minister to both the rich and the poor, thus bringing them closer to God. Her work touched the lives of various people, including bankers, doctors, lawyers, storekeepers, and field workers. Her efforts in Argentina helped lay the foundation for revival that continues to transform that country even today.*

Such efforts by women show that revival and spiritual movement have nothing to do with gender. The Bible says, “For you are all sons [and daughters] of God through faith in Christ Jesus. . . . There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26–28, NKJV). Women can minister and worship God the same way men can. This week we will learn about women who lived during Christ's ministry, their contributions, and what we can learn from their efforts that can help us with our spiritual revival.

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Siprose Ngina, Nairobi, Kenya
When we study about Christ and His ministry, it is important to remember that He did not have a permanent abode to call home. He spread the good news from one place to another, sometimes dealing with hostile weather, hunger, and other impediments. Against such odds, there were women who stood out in support of Christ and His ministry. The contrasting part of this situation is that the general society of the Middle East at that time considered women unfit to relate to any religious activity.

However, the Bible presents enough evidence to prove that Christ treated women in equal measure with men. The gratitude and compassion He had for women encouraged them to play vital roles in ministry, contrary to what the majority of society believed at the time. While most religious leaders considered women untouchable, Christ demonstrated that even they were children of God by speaking and interacting with them and by treating them with respect, dignity, and compassion.

Judean culture at that time did not allow any testimony from women. However, women became the first to testify about the birth and the resurrection of Christ. In Jewish culture, leaders did not believe that women could learn from the torah. Christ broke the chains of tradition when He quoted scripture to Mary, the sister of Martha. Such incidences should inform us about how we relate to women even today. When Jesus healed the woman who had suffered from bleeding for several years, He demonstrated that everyone is equal before God and that gender had no place in matters of salvation.

“The most striking thing about the role of women in the life and teaching of Jesus is the simple fact that they are there. Although the gospel texts contain no special sayings repudiating the view of the day about women, their uniform testimony to the presence of women among the followers of Jesus and to His serious teaching of them constitutes a break with tradition which has been described as being ‘without precedent in [then] contemporary Judaism.’”

Today, Christ still expects faith responses from women just as He expects from men. That is the hallmark of our salvation.

**REACT**

1. Is there evidence that men and women can equally serve God? Explain.
2. What can we learn from Christ’s way of handling women?

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Long before His birth, women became the first people to receive the revelation of Christ’s birth. The Bible mentions Mary, the mother of Jesus, paying a special visit to Elizabeth, who became the mother of John the Baptist. During this special and blessed meeting between the two women, words of praise filled the air, poems were recited, and both women were filled with the Holy Spirit. Although women were considered inferior to the extent that they could not fully express their religious views, the Bible mentions Elizabeth as an upright woman in the sight of God (Luke 1:6). Together with Mary, the mother of Jesus, they maintained their purity and determination to serve God, a decision that saw them become the very first recipients of the good news. The words uttered by Mary and Elizabeth during the special visit remain part of the Bible.

In addition to Mary and Elizabeth, the Bible mentions Anna, a devoted woman to God’s service, who could not wait to hear the good news of Christ’s birth. The Bible records that during Christ’s dedication, Anna “gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38, NKJV). These women rose above all odds to become great messengers of God, and their example should inform the minds of countless women today who choose Christ as their Savior.

Christ’s Healing Ministry: A Unifying Factor (Luke 7:11–17; 8:41, 42, 49–56)

Regardless of gender, Christ offered healing to men, women, and children. Perhaps the powerful religious leaders or opinion-makers may have thought that Christ would need to pass through them in order to perform any healing service to women. However, Jesus showed compassion to everyone, regardless of their gender. On raising the only son of a poor widow in Nain (Luke 7:11–17), Christ showed by example that both men and women were equal before God and therefore deserved equal opportunities for blessing, treatment, and service. His healing ministry served as a unifying factor for all Christians to operate as a single unit. The raising of Jairus’s daughter and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood underscored the level at which Christ viewed women. Commentator Sheila Graham writes, “Jesus’ honor and respect was . . . extended to all women—an attitude largely unexpected and unknown in his culture and time. Jesus, unlike the men of his generation and culture, taught that women were equal to men in the sight of God.”
Women could receive God’s forgiveness and grace. Women, as well as men, could be among Christ’s personal followers. Women could be full participants in the kingdom of God. . . . These were revolutionary ideas. Many of his contemporaries, including his disciples, were shocked.”


Women who stood by Jesus during His ministry exuded enough faith to believe the incredible. On a special invitation to the house of a Pharisee, a woman whom the whole community perceived as a sinner expressed unwavering faith in Christ and what He could do for her. Believing with all her heart, she brought an alabaster flask filled with a highly priced perfume. She “stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil” (Luke 7:38, NKJV). Based on her strong faith in Christ and His ability to transform her life as a sinner, her sins were forgiven and she was set free. On another occasion, a woman who had experienced bleeding for 12 years stealthfully touched Christ’s garment and her bleeding stopped instantly (Luke 8:43, 44).

The level of faith in Christ that these women had is an example of what is possible with God. In the particular circumstance of the bleeding woman, it is important to understand that “it was her faith and not her touch that made her whole. . . . Her faith was of the sort that laid direct hold upon the creative power resident in the Master’s person. With the faith she had, it was only necessary to approach the Master’s person.”


Following Christ is a calling that requires determination to follow His instructions; unceasing prayer; and the sacrifice of time, wealth, and life. This was evident in the lives of the women who followed Christ during His ministry. Although the Bible dwells a great deal on the male disciples, it is also important to note that Christ had female disciples as well. The Bible mentions Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, Priscilla, and many others who devoted their time and resources to ensure that the good news spread to the furthest ends of their communities. They led the way in proclaiming the gospel. Today also, there needs to be a greater acceptance of the presence of women in ministry.

**REACT**

1. What lessons can we learn from how Christ approached and treated women?

2. What can women do today to emulate the example of the women who followed Christ during His ministry?

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Of the miracles that Jesus performed, the healing of the woman with the blood issue stands out as a test of faith among those who believed in Him. The Bible says that the woman had sold all of her possessions while trying to access medical services but in vain. Fortunately enough, her faith is what cured her—instantly! Her cure was a clear indication of what faith in Christ can do for all who believe in Him, regardless of their gender or class in society.

“Looking toward the woman, Jesus insisted on knowing who had touched Him. Finding concealment vain, she came forward tremblingly, and cast herself at His feet. With grateful tears she told the story of her suffering, and how she had found relief. . . .

“The wondering crowd that pressed close about Christ realized no access of vital power. But when the suffering woman put forth her hand to touch Him, believing that she would be made whole, she felt the healing virtue. So in spiritual things. To talk of religion in a casual way, to pray without soul hunger and living faith, avails nothing. A nominal faith in Christ, which accepts Him merely as the Savior of the world, can never bring healing to the soul. The faith that is unto salvation is not a mere intellectual assent to the truth. He who waits for entire knowledge before he will exercise faith cannot receive blessing from God. It is not enough to believe about Christ; we must believe in Him. The only faith that will benefit us is that which embraces Him as a personal Savior; which appropriates His merit to ourselves. Many hold faith as an opinion. Saving faith is a transaction by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God. . . .

“After healing the woman, Jesus desired her to acknowledge the blessing she had received. The gifts which the gospel offers are not to be secured by stealth or enjoyed in secret. So the Lord calls upon us for confession of His goodness.”*

Like the woman who was healed of a predicament that had lasted for many years, we continue to receive relief from Christ even today. In Him, there is something for everyone, as long as you believe in Him as your personal Savior.

**REACT**

In what dilemma have you expressed faith in Christ so that your faith yielded immediate results? Must we always get immediate results for our faith?

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Rose Ndanu, Makueni, Kenya
The book of Luke teaches about women who supported the ministry of Christ in various ways. We also learn about Christ's involvement with women despite opposition from various quarters. We can learn great lessons from such women as Mary, the mother of Jesus; Elizabeth; the prophetess Anna; and many others who carried the gospel of Christ to the furthest ends of the globe. Their characteristics should provide a basis for present-day ministry. Women in ministry today should learn from their examples in their efforts to take their people to the Promised Land. The Bible records that such women supported Christ and His ministry through their own means (Luke 8:1–3).

Women in ministry today have the responsibility to further the gospel.

Women in ministry today have the responsibility to further the gospel and win souls for Christ. This is a noble duty, such as that of Christ during His ministry. Those involved in that duty should therefore have qualities that will help them to stand out from the crowd. Even in Christ's time, women stood out against all odds to make their voices heard as far as salvation is concerned. Women involved in ministry today need to learn from their counterparts mentioned in the book of Luke. Following are some of the qualities of these biblical women who were involved in the ministry of Jesus.

**Prayerfulness.** Ministry has its share of challenges, and so, without prayer, your spiritual well becomes dry.

**Risk taking.** If you are a woman in ministry today, you need to follow in the footsteps of the prophets. With faith as their shield, they courageously prayed and helped take the Israelites to the Promised Land. Women who were involved in Christ's ministry were great risk takers who defied the common opinions about them and chose to follow Him in faith.

**Humility.** Leadership in matters of salvation is a calling. Success in women's ministry depends on their ability to obey the call and to return the glory to the Person who has called them. Being humble is one of the virtues that dominated the lives of the women who followed Christ during His ministry. When you recognize your brokenness and accept your inability to manage without God's intervention, then you reflect the characteristics of these women.

**Delving into the Word.** Without active study of God's Word, no ministry can succeed. Through consistent study, we allow the Word to penetrate our heart.

**REACT**

What can you add to the list of characteristics for women in ministry?

*Joseph Wambua, Nairobi, Kenya*
Like in the days of Christ, the present church remains dynamic and constantly in need of fresh members who can minister for Christ’s cause. Many parts of the world continue to live in total darkness about salvation. It is for such reasons that both men and women of faith are needed to participate actively in spreading the gospel and in recruiting new members for Christ. The good news brought by Christ conquered the world in various dimensions. It broke the chains of tradition and hopelessness, and it brought equality for everyone before God. As a pioneer of this cause, Christ liberated women by giving them equal opportunities to minister.

“Our lesson this week shed light on the fact that both men and women are equal before God. For that reason, women should not be discriminated against at any level, especially when it comes to serving God. Although the Bible mentions that Christ had male disciples, it also mentions many women who were actively involved in ministry, both in faith and in action. Jesus showed compassion and recognized the dignity of women at all levels. He knew that, just like their male counterparts, they had the potential to proclaim the gospel and uplift the name of the Most High. He became the Bondage-Breaker for women who had languished in oppression by their male counterparts for many years.

The exemplary women who actively participated in ministry during Christ’s time are examples of what women can do in present-day evangelistic campaigns. Christ placed women on an equal platform with men. As one commentator says, “Jesus’ doctrine is liberating. According to his mission statement, he came: ‘to set at liberty those who are oppressed.’ (Luke 4:18). In biblical days, Jewish women were imprisoned by different forms of male oppression. But Jesus came to set the captives free. Therefore, he always treated women with dignity and respect.”*

Based on the equality with which Christ treated all women, our church should recognize the role women can play in taking the gospel to the next level. Instead of seeing them as weak, inferior, and incapable, women should be given equal positions with men so they may find opportunities to participate and exercise their potential as much as they want (1 Pet. 4:10, NRSV).

If the church restricts people based on their gender, it may be setting aside important gifts that could be used to glorify the name of God. The church should provide the best example by incorporating women at all levels of service.

CONCLUDE

Jesus’ ministry, through spoken words and actions, included men, children, and women. What did Jesus do to indicate that women are included in God’s family and His ministry? The presence of women in His ministry points to the value He gave to them. He equipped women for ministry by raising their dignity, by bringing the gospel directly to them, and by giving them roles in His own ministry. Let us follow Jesus’ example in this matter.

CONSIDER

• Interviewing the women’s ministry director or an active woman participant of your local church to find out what motivates her in her ministry. How can you let her know that you appreciate her ministry?
• Listening prayerfully to the lyrics of the song “Fill My Cup, Lord” or “The Woman at the Well” at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4I2yY2r95g, or hymn 493 in the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal. Determine to seek the same living water that Christ offers.
• Listing and then reading at least three of Jesus’ parables in which women are involved (for example, the lost coin). Meditate on the lessons derived from these parables.
• Counting at least five women who did not “count” during Jesus’ days, yet who played significant roles in His life and ministry. Think about why Jesus allowed such inclusion.
• Composing a short drama or skit that sensitizes the issue of neglect or abuse of women in our society. Perform this skit in a suitable venue such as Sabbath School or a youth club.
• Reading Just a Sister Away by Renita J. Weems. This book highlights commitment and giving as exemplified by the biblical women who ministered to Jesus.

CONNECT

John 4:1–42.
Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, chaps. 36, 43, 62, and 82.
Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and Prayer

“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened’ ”

(Luke 11:9, 10, NKJV)
Ali was a devout Muslim who had converted to Christianity and was turning his mission field upside down. As a science teacher, he struggled to find time to share his true passion—what Jesus had done in his life. So Ali left his position to be a full-time evangelist. In his first 27 years, he baptized 24,650 people.

Ali continually prayed for the people he was reaching out to. Some were so enraged by the work he was doing that they planned to kill him. They convinced a trusted friend to administer some poison. However, God spared Ali even as others condemned him. But trials were not yet over for him. Another group plotted to frame him for murder.

Ali cried out to God, “Lord, I will not stop praying until You vindicate Your name.” Days later, the body of the person Ali was accused of killing floated to the surface of the river. The 60-pound rock used to keep the body under the water was still tied to his waist. The accusers admitted to the killing, and God and Ali were vindicated.

It is important to note that Ali didn’t pray for his name to be vindicated. Instead, he focused on the impact it would have on God’s name with those he was trying to reach.

Imagine if Ali hadn’t continued to pray. Instead, what if he decided to feel sorry for himself and bitter toward his accusers, even though he knew he was innocent? What picture would that have painted of God’s faithfulness? If Ali could just give up, was God really worth living for?

Prayer is more than communication. Prayer is a lifeline connecting us to the One who gives us the power to keep going and to keep sharing His Word. Prayer gives us hope. Without the connection prayer gives us, life can seem desolate and hopeless. Imagine yourself in that prison cell, with no one to talk to, all hope seemingly lost. Even your friends think you are guilty of murder. Whom can you turn to? Ali made the choice to turn to God.

Ali’s dependence on God and continued communication with Him set an example for those around him to see that even though he was no longer Muslim and even though it seemed the whole world was against him, his faith was still very real.

The power of prayer is tangible. It is real. When we take the time to ask, to seek, to knock, we get answers.

Jordan Wagner, Chattanooga, Tennessee, U.S.A.

Luke records a series of events where ordinary people encounter the confluence of Son and Spirit. Mary, told by the angel that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, became the willing human vessel for the incarnation of the Son. A short time later, Elizabeth felt her unborn child stirring as a now pregnant Mary approached for a visit, and was herself filled with the Spirit. When the infant Jesus was brought to the temple for the purification offering, Simeon was guided by the Spirit to intercept the infant and pronounce a prophetic blessing.

The returning prodigal son asked only to be a slave in his father’s house.

Personal encounters with Jesus by those who embraced Him as their Messiah coincided with an infilling of the Holy Spirit’s power. Through His ministry, Jesus gave us a key that unlocks the storehouse of heaven, empowering us to conquer temptation and surmount obstacles to ministry. Through His example of prayer, we have access to the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The true pattern for Spirit-filled prayer is one that Jesus taught by example and by sample. There is no conflict between the sample prayer He taught and the prayer life that He modeled.

Our Father (Luke 3:21, 22; 23:46; Phil. 2:5–11)

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself . . . being born in human likeness” (Phil. 2:5–7, NRSV). Jesus accepted no honor for His own but pointed instead to the glory and power of His heavenly Father.

Following His baptism, Jesus immediately communed with the Father through prayer. Those privileged to witness the event saw the Holy Spirit manifested in the manner of a descending dove. They also heard the Father’s endorsement and words of approval. Then at the culmination of His work for our salvation, Jesus entrusted His spirit into the hands of a loving and all-powerful Father. There is no greater honor than the trust bestowed by children in the integrity and benevolence of their fathers. Hallowed be Your name.


The transfiguration mountain prefigured the Mount of Olives. Jesus and
three disciples separated themselves from the larger group, except that in this instance sleep did not prevail over watchfulness and prayer. By maintaining their attention on Jesus, Peter, James, and John were privileged to witness Jesus’ transfiguration into the glory of the only begotten Son of God.

As we address our own petitions to the heavenly throne, our first impulse should be to bear witness to the manifestation of Jesus’ kingdom here on earth—a kingdom based on compassion for those around us, a kingdom whose citizens feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, care for the sick, and reach out to those imprisoned by sin.

Thy Will Be Done (Luke 22:41–43)

In the Garden of Gethsemane, faced with the daunting burden of sin, humanity shrank from the demands of justice. A firm foundation of prayer and reliance on the power of God were the tools that kept Jesus true to His mission. “ ‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done’ ” (Luke 22:42, NRSV). Victory in matters of eternal consequence does not come from the force of individual will but in surrendering the will and elevating the will of the Father. On earth as it is in heaven.

Give Us This Day (Luke 11:5–13)

Satan had so thoroughly slandered the character of God that Jesus was compelled to pose a correction. He pointed out that even an unwilling friend is likely to accommodate a persistent request, if only to be rid of the interruption. Given that premise, we should definitely ask for our needs and desires to be satisfied, for even an earthly father is expected to favor a child’s request, even before it is expressed.

Jesus assured the disciples that their heavenly Father was even more eager than His earthly counterparts to give them good gifts. Ask and it shall be given you.


Finally, two juxtaposed prayers illustrate the attitude required to keep our prayer lives on track. The gratitude of the Pharisee for his hereditary status blinded him to the real Source of righteousness. The surety of our Father’s goodwill must never lead us to prideful celebration. The only test of eternal consequence comes down to a choice. Will we exalt our throne over the Most High, or humble ourselves, even to death on a cross?

The returning prodigal son asked only to be a slave in his father’s house. It was the father who restored and elevated him, deaf to the protest of unworthiness. Humility is required if we are to see the power of prayer manifested in our lives and ministry.

Father, be merciful to me, a sinner. Fill me with Your Spirit so my weakness and shame will be covered by Your glory and power.

REACT

How do you value persistent prayer? Is it a vote of no confidence or a sign of boldness? Explain Jesus’ persistent prayer in Gethsemane.

Steven J. Dovich, Andover, Massachusetts, U.S.A.
Opening the Heart to a Friend—“Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him.”

“Our prayers will take the form of a conversation with God as we would talk with a friend.”

Prayer Enables Us to Live in the Sunshine of His Presence—“It is our privilege to open our hearts, and let the sunshine of Christ's presence in. My brother, my sister, face the light. Come into actual, personal contact with Christ, that you may exert an influence that is uplifting and reviving. Let your faith be strong and pure and steadfast. Let gratitude to God fill your hearts. When you rise in the morning, kneel at your bedside, and ask God to give you strength to fulfil the duties of the day, and to meet its temptations. Ask Him to help you to bring into your work Christ's sweetness of character. Ask Him to help you to speak words that will inspire those around you with hope and courage, and draw you nearer to the Saviour.”

Prayer Brings Freshness to Spiritual Life—“Our life is to be bound up with the life of Christ; we are to draw constantly from Him, partaking of Him, the living Bread that came down from heaven, drawing from a fountain ever fresh, ever giving forth its abundant treasures. If we keep the Lord ever before us, allowing our hearts to go out in thanksgiving and praise to Him, we shall have a continual freshness in our religious life. Our prayers will take the form of a conversation with God as we would talk with a friend. He will speak His mysteries to us personally. Often there will come to us a sweet joyful sense of the presence of Jesus. Often our hearts will burn within us as He draws nigh to commune with us as He did with Enoch. When this is in truth the experience of the Christian, there is seen in his life a simplicity, a humility, meekness, and lowliness of heart, that show to all with whom he associates that he has been with Jesus and learned of Him.”

Prayer Is Both a Spiritual Necessity and a Privilege—“Those who have professed to love Christ, have not comprehended the relation which exists between them and God. . . . They do not realize what a great privilege and necessity are prayer, repentance, and the doing of the words of Christ.”


Ashley Wagner, Whitesboro, New York, U.S.A.
Do you ever have trouble praying? Sometimes it’s hard to know what to talk to God about. This is because we often struggle to fully grasp what He’s really like and who He really is. Trying to communicate our lives that seem so complicated to a God who often seems so distant can sometimes be discouraging. Making matters even more convoluted, the Person of the Godhead that is responsible for working with us and for answering our prayers is a Spirit. How can we relate to this Spirit? How can this Spirit hear us? How do we know the Spirit cares?

What if someone asked you to draw a picture of God? What would you draw? There are no wrong answers, because each of our renditions would reveal where we are in our walk with Him. However, the Bible is very clear. There is a right answer. John 14:8, 9, Colossians 1:15, and Hebrews 1:3 tell us that when we think of what God looks like, we are to think about Jesus. Colossians 2:9 says that the fullness of God dwelled in Jesus. God cloaked all of His glory in a human body so that we can visually see and understand just who He is. Sin hid God’s face. Jesus’ life reveals it.

Neuroscience tells us that in order for the brain to process more abstract truths, we first have to establish a mental image of that concept. That’s why when someone mentions our favorite dessert, we can see it in our minds and already know what it tastes like. Jesus is the image that God has chosen to give us so that we might understand His amazing character. “Taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8, NIV). We see that goodness in Jesus. It is nearly impossible to see a correct picture of God without Jesus.

We are often confused about God’s will for our lives because we forget to remember that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One. When we think of God, we are to think of the image that He has given us to understand Him. That image is Jesus. So when we pray, we really and truly can believe we are talking to Jesus. It is much easier for us to understand how He cares and wants to pour out His power in answer to our prayers.

**REACT**

1. What does your picture of God look like?
2. How do your life experience, education, and upbringing hinder or help you to understand what God looks like?
3. How does it make a difference in your prayer life to understand God and His will through the Person of Jesus?
The Israelites had done it again. Their disobedience had separated them from the God who had led them out of slavery. Their actions caused them to lose the very symbol of God's presence among them. The ark of the covenant had been taken by the Philistines, who held it for seven months. However, this action had brought them nothing but grief. So they were ready to return this troublesome symbol to the Israelites.

Eventually, the ark ended up at the home of Eleazer, where it stayed for 20 years. During that time, the people of Israel turned back to God. Samuel called them to remove everything from their lives that separated them from having a relationship with God. “Samuel then took a large stone and placed it between the towns of Mizpah and Jeshanah. He named it Ebenezer (which means ‘the stone of help’), for he said, ‘Up to this point the Lord has helped us!’ ” (1 Sam. 7:12, NLT). As God’s followers, we should have personal Ebenezers set up in our lives. This happens in several steps.

We must have a daily time of prayer and listening. Without these moments, we cannot lay claim to God’s promises. Starting a daily prayer time can be intimidating if you think you have to immediately begin praying for a solid hour every morning. Begin with five minutes. Be prepared with specific things you want to pray for, but also spend time listening for what God might be prompting you to lift up to Him.

Be persistent in your requests. Answers to prayer aren’t always immediate. Use these times to grow in your trust that God will work everything out according to His purpose. Remember to ask for God’s will to be accomplished.

Note when you begin to see a shift in your desire to spend more time with God. When did praying to Him become more like a conversation with a friend? When did your prayers become filled with more of what is truly on your heart?

Don’t forget to raise your Ebenezer as you begin to recognize answers to your prayers. Be bold and share with your loved ones how God is working in your life. Tell them about the “stone of help” that you have discovered.

Your prayer life will be as personal as you make it. There is no right or wrong way to spend time in prayer. The important thing is to talk daily with God. Because you are His child, He wants to give you your heart’s desire.

**REACT**

How can you make time to spend in prayer? What changes can you make to experience renewal during this time?

Deena Bartel-Wagner, Whitesboro, New York, U.S.A.
The memory text for this week does not tell the whole story. “Ask, and it will be given to you” sounds like God is a vending machine. But that’s not how prayer works. Let’s look at the verses that come before it. “Then Jesus continued, ‘Let me explain to you what praying is like. Suppose you went to your friend’s house about midnight, knocked on his door and said, “Friend, do you have three loaves of bread I could borrow? A friend of mine has come to see me unexpectedly, and I’m all out of food.” The friend inside will say, “Do you realize what time of night it is? Why couldn’t you wait until morning? My kids are sleeping, and if I get up and go looking for bread, I’ll wake up the whole family.” Though your friend will hesitate to wake up his family, if you continue to ask, he’ll get up and get the bread you asked for because he’s your friend’ ” (Luke 11:5–8, Clear Word).

Prayer takes persistence. We shouldn’t just ask once and expect that to be enough. There will be times when we must bring our requests before God over and over again. Keep knocking. Keep asking. Keep looking for answers. When I go on a long road trip, I bring a map with me. But the map won’t do me any good if I only look at it when I leave. I have to keep looking at it with every turn and every change. Otherwise, I’ll get hopelessly lost. The same goes for our relationship with Jesus. We must keep asking for directions so we can safely make it to heaven.

We all can remember when we were kids and saw “the toy” in the store. We wanted “the toy” more than anything we had ever wanted before. So we asked our parents for it. Did we ask just once and then they gave it to us? Probably not. But if we were persistent in our asking, eventually they would buy it for us. Or they would gently explain why we couldn’t have “the toy.”

Now we shouldn’t approach prayer like whiney children, begging for something we want. The point is to be persistent. Keep asking. Keep looking for answers. Keep knocking, and eventually you will get an answer. It may not be the answer you want, but God knows what is best for us. He will give us the answer we need because He is our Friend.

**REACT**

1. Describe a time when you prayed persistently for an answer. Did you receive the answer you wanted?
2. Are you guilty of praying for something once and expecting an answer right away?

*Ashley Cheney Wagner, Chattanooga, Tennessee, U.S.A.*
CONCLUDE
When we pray to God, we are not only praying to a god but to the Almighty One—the One who knows the desires of our hearts (Ps. 37:4). When Jesus was baptized, He prayerfully looked up toward heaven, from which the Holy Spirit was uncaged in the form of a dove. Luke encourages you and me to look to the heavens and let God’s blessings flow down upon us. It is when we pray that the skies will open up, the heart of God will listen to us, and our souls and bodies will be refreshed in His abounding love and grace. Just look heavenward.

CONSIDER
• Finding a prayer partner. Intercessory prayer is powerful. Pick a friend, family member, classmate, or coworker, and commit to pray together in person, by telephone, via text, or even Skype. Set a time during the week to pray, and stick to it.
• Writing your prayer requests on sticky notes in Sabbath School class or during a Bible study. Place them in a basket and pray over them. Then distribute one sticky note to each member, asking them to pray over the request during the upcoming week. The next time you meet, share how God, who always answers your prayers with a yes, no, or wait, has responded to your sticky-note prayers.
• Finding prayer “models.” Get a few friends to model how they pray to God. Photograph their different styles of prayer. For example, folding hands, looking heavenward, kneeling down, or falling prostrate on the floor. With their permission, share their pictures online, encouraging viewers to pray, and reminding them that it doesn’t matter how you pray, just that you do so.
• Googling “statistics on prayer.” Research and analyze the percentage of Christians who pray and why they do or don’t. Share with your church your findings and how you can make a difference in your community.
• Praying during your exercise routine. Listen to Christian music, and pray to God while you run, hike, bike, and so on. Not only will you become more physically fit, but you will become more spiritually fit as well.

CONNECT
2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 5:3.
Ruthie Jacobsen, Because You Prayed: Heartwarming Stories About Our Listening God.

Rocky Dionysus, Honolulu, Hawaii, U.S.A.
The Mission of Jesus

“The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10, NKJV).
Many people are embroiled in an unrelenting battle to get more. If you were to list everything you currently wanted in your life, how long would your list be? Is your mission to seek more of anything and everything, thus replacing God’s mission for your life? The problem with seeking more would not exist if people did not compare themselves to other people who had a great deal. And so many of us thirst for more of what we desire, thus making our desires all important. Like the prodigal son in Luke 15:11–32, we are quick to desire what is not really ours and even what is not good for us.

The word *want* means “to be lacking.”* Many of us feel that we have not acquired enough. In a sense, this proves that those who want to possess more of the world are themselves possessed by the world. Do you own the things you want more of or do they own you?

The Bible is clear in Mathew 6:33 that we should “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (NKJV). What God means for each of us to be cannot be enlarged upon; it can only be realized. Thus, our struggle and strain to be grand in the eyes of the world blinds us to the futility of our efforts and puts us in direct conflict with everyone and everything that is trying to deny us our need for more.

As your list for more grows, you may want to ask yourself what God has in store for you. What mission does He want you to accomplish? This week, as you study the mission of Jesus, ask yourself how your mission and goals compare or contrast with His. What you think is your mission or what you personally want your mission to be could be nothing like what God has in mind for you! So ask yourself the following questions: How is your desire for more shaping your mission in life? As a Christian, how do you balance your God-given mission with your wants and desires? And finally, what possible steps can you take to adopt a mission that reflects Christ’s mission?

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Imagine losing important documents while on your way to a crucial interview. That could be disheartening, but it is probably better than getting lost in a foreign city. Losing something important or getting lost fills us with uncertainty and makes us feel hopeless until we find what is lost or find our way. However, getting lost and staying lost spiritually guarantee uncertainty and hopelessness.

Many people often get lost in the tumults of life—the meaninglessness of some types of entertainment, the clamor of a crowd of peers, the fads of fashion, the highs of recreational drugs, and the pleasures of feasting. It is also easy to lose ourselves in the worries of tomorrow, the lack and needs of now, or the haunting of our past. All of these and more lead us away from that which pertains to eternity.

Jesus is the best Janitor in town.

The prodigal son found his way home after much introspection. The lost sheep quite possibly bleated relentlessly as it realized it was in a strange grassland. However, our situation may be like that of the lost coin. Because we are unaware that we are lost, we do not know how to find our way back, nor do we even have the will to do so.

We thank God for Jesus, who is willing to light a candle that we may find our way back to Him. He is willing to sweep away the dust that buries us and to seek diligently for us in all the dark corners until He finds us. The parable of the lost coin underscores the fact that Jesus works in us to feel the need to find our true home and to take those first steps toward that home.

Yes, Jesus is the best Janitor in town. He will sweep and polish off the dust of sin, leaving you sparkling clean. He will not give up until you shine. No matter what character defects you have, Jesus will make you perfect. His flashlight needs no batteries. He ensures that you will see a light at the end of your spiritual dark tunnel. His lamp, the Bible, will lead you to Him. Study by the light of that lamp each and every day (Ps. 119:105; John 1:1–5). Jesus is also a Relic Hunter. You are the gem that He will continue to look for until He finds you or until you find Him. Regardless of the cost to Him, regardless of your plight, Jesus will find you. Do not despair.

REACT

1. Why would God be interested in finding us even when we don't desire to return to Him?
2. Why is it so easy to get lost, especially when we think of ourselves as being close to God?
The History of Sin (Gen. 3:1–7)

Genesis 3 could very well be described as the saddest chapter of the Bible. It is part of the mystery of iniquity that sin had its origins in perfect beings within a perfect environment. God had pronounced everything that He had made as “very good” (Gen. 1:31). He provided for all the dietary needs of our first parents. They could eat the fruit of every tree in the Garden except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 1:29, 30; 2:7–9, 15–17). This was more than just a test of appetite. It also was a test of faith, trust, and obedience, which is in many ways the same as the tests we face on a daily basis. Adam and Eve had such an abundance of food. So why should that one tree have been such a temptation? The answer helps us to better understand Satan’s techniques.

God Himself gives us the assurance of victory.

First, Satan created a desire for the fruit by appealing to Eve’s curiosity. This also cast a shadow of doubt in her mind about God’s instructions. Satan then engaged her in a dialogue that weakened her willpower, thus leading her not only to look at the fruit but to touch it and to eventually eat it, even though God expressly forbade her to do so. It is all about our God-given right to choose! Humanly speaking, we could place the blame on God for trusting our first parents with such a life-and-death choice, a choice upon which hung the fate of the entire human race. Should God have done it any differently, however, He only would have confirmed the accusation that Satan laid upon Him when he first rebelled in heaven—the accusation that God was “severe and tyrannical.”

The sin was not in looking or even in touching. Remember, however, that these were the very acts that led to the sin of eating.

The Dimensions of Our Sin (Rom. 3:10, 23; 1 Cor. 10:13)

As a result of Adam and Eve’s disobedience, the human race is condemned. “ ‘There is none righteous, / not even one.’ . . . For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:10, 23, NIV). Through the Fall, we inherited the natural tendency to commit sin. It is unfortunate that we are born with sinful natures so that we cannot help but con-
continue breaking God’s commandments. Now for us, it is much easier to do wrong than it is to do right at any one time. The good news, however, is that God Himself gives us the assurance of victory.

“At the same time that God permits the trial or temptation to come, He will also have in readiness the means whereby we may gain the victory and escape from committing sin. Jesus, the Christians’ example of right living, found that ‘way out’ in the written Word of God (see Luke 4:4, 8, 12). So we, His followers, may find the ‘way out’ in Jesus the living Word (see John 1:1–3, 14). He is ever ready and willing to deliver those who call upon Him and to keep them from falling in sin (Ps. 9:9; 27:5; 41:1; 91:15; 2 Peter 2:9; Rev. 3:10).”

**Christ—the Solution (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8)**

Despite our apparent hopelessness, there is still the reassurance that “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). These two texts awaken us to the principle that salvation is an individual matter for which each one of us must make a personal choice. God declares that it is the soul who sins who will pay the ultimate penalty for rebellion—eternal separation with the Father. This is the separation Christ felt as He writhed in agony on the cross, crying out, “‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Matt. 27:46, NIV).

Having paid the ultimate price (John 19:30), Christ now is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one will see the Father except through Him who came to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10; John 3:16). It would be for no other reason that Christ would suffer and die. That is how much He loves us. And because He won the victory over sin on our behalf, whoever accepts Him has eternal life (1 John 5:11–13).

**REACT**

1. How have you responded to the manner of love with which God loves you?

2. Considering all the biblical accounts of the hardship sin has caused, all the current accounts of hardship caused by sin, and what Christ has done for us, what would you like to say to Adam and Even when you meet them in heaven?

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*Paul D. Kawanguzi, Bracknell, Berkshire, United Kingdom*
On a wall facing the main entrance of the Bugema Adventist Secondary School, people can read a statement regarding the school’s mission. It is written in bold black letters inscribed on a white slab. Elsewhere in the world, corporations, businesses, and other schools display their mission statements for people to read. Christ’s mission statement is found in Luke 19:10. He came “to seek out and to save the lost” (NRSV). Before He returned to heaven, He gave His followers the following mission statement: “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15, NRSV).

“Christ commits to his followers an individual work.”

“Everywhere there is a tendency to substitute the work of organizations for individual effort. Human wisdom tends to consolidation, to centralization, to the building up of great churches and institutions. Multitudes leave to institutions and organizations the work of benevolence; they excuse themselves from contact with the world, and their hearts grow cold. They become self-absorbed and unimpressible. Love for God and for man dies out of the soul.

“Christ commits to his followers an individual work—a work that cannot be done by proxy. Ministry to the sick and the poor, the giving of the gospel to the lost, is not to be left to committees or organized charities. Individual responsibility, individual effort, personal sacrifice, is the requirement of the gospel. . . .

“To everyone who becomes a partaker of His grace the Lord appoints a work for others. Individually we are to stand in our lot and place, saying, ‘Here am I; send me.’ Isaiah 6:8. Upon the minister of the word, the missionary nurse, the Christian physician, the individual Christian, whether he be merchant or farmer, professional man or mechanic—the responsibility rests upon all. It is our work to reveal to men the gospel of their salvation. Every enterprise in which we engage should be a means to this end.”*

As Christians, we are called upon by our Savior Jesus Christ not only to minister to the people but to teach them to minister. Every church member should be engaged in some line of service for God to roll back the tide of disease and distress that is sweeping around the world. This is our mission as Christians.

**REACT**

1. What is your mission in life when it comes to ministering to others?
2. How do you balance God’s mission with your specific talents?

No matter how rough life gets, always remember that you are still alive and that God’s mission for your life is not yet completed. Also remember that often times God makes us stronger when our lives get difficult. I once had a friend whose circumstances caused him to fall into a deep depression. He could see no logical reason to keep living. Nor could he could see any purpose to his life.

Perhaps you are not depressed, but you are confused about what your true purpose in life might be. Not having a mission is like driving along not knowing where you are going. How can you prevent yourself from being confused and depressed about this lack of direction? Following are four different ideas that might help.

Get out of the driver’s seat. If you knew your destination and purpose, you would have already gotten there. God is waiting for you to let Him drive. The fact that you struggle is proof of your unwillingness to let Him be in control of your life.

Get closer to God. When God seems far away, chances are that you are the one who has wandered away. Put Him back into the center of your life. Determine to learn from Him about the mission He has for you.

Remember that it is never too late. Even if you have strayed from the mission God has for you, it is never too late to return to it and to Him. This surety should be the strength you need to come back to the plan He has for you. Instead of talking to God about your problems, try telling yourself how big your God is, because when you are down to nothing, you can be sure God is up to something! No matter how powerful God is, He will not answer a prayer you have not prayed. Don’t focus on where you are or what you are struggling with. Focus instead on the strength of your faith and hope as you endeavor to achieve God’s mission for your life.

Follow Christ’s example of being steadfast in His mission. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day watched every move He made. They listened carefully to everything He said. They were jealous of Him, and we all know too well what their jealousy led to. Christ, however, remained faithful, even unto His death. Let this be our mission also.

**REACT**

How can you help struggling Christians remain on course in their missions?

Muthai Innocent, Nairobi, Kenya
It seems that almost everyone keeps a to-do list in order to help them focus on what they want to accomplish. Many people actually believe that their success is directly related to how many items on their list they can complete. But how many people actually keep a not-to-do list or a to-stop list, particularly when it comes to accomplishing the mission God has for them?

As a Christian, your mission in life should never be different from God’s plan for you. You may go to the ends of the earth searching for your mission, but, oh, what a waste of time if the mission you find is not God’s mission for you. “The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me’ ” (Jon. 1:1, 2, NIV). But Jonah ran away from the Lord. He headed for Joppa, where he boarded a ship that was sailing for Tarshish. In the end, however, the Lord still led him to Nineveh.

If God’s mission for you is to go to a specific place or to perform a specific task, it won’t matter how far you flee from it or where you hide. You’ll still end up in “Nineveh.” So often we spend time and energy doing things we think will bring us happiness. Often, we even ignore what is obviously God’s wish for us in favor of doing what we want to do. A popular African proverb says, “If there is no enemy within, the enemy without can do you no harm.”*

As you pray earnestly for God to help you discover your mission in life, a good idea would be to think about the things in your life that you need to stop doing that are clearly taking you away from God’s mission for you. The longer you spend running away from “Nineveh,” the longer you postpone your happiness and freedom in the Lord.

**REACT**

1. What do you need to stop doing that is preventing you from accepting God’s mission for you?
2. How do you distinguish between God’s mission for your life and your own desires?
3. How can you personally follow God’s purpose for your life despite the numerous possibilities offered by the world?

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Joan Namutebi, Kampala, Uganda
CONCLUDE
Jesus Christ had a clear mission: to seek out and redeem fallen humanity. The lost-and-found parables illustrate various aspects of His search. As Christians, we should make sure that our personal purpose and goals are shaped by Him rather than by our sinful heritage or worldly desires. God wants to help each of us discern and follow the mission He has in mind for us.

CONSIDER
• Asking several friends or acquaintances the following questions. Include, if possible, at least one non-Adventist and at least one non-Christian. How do you figure out where you are (or should be) headed in life? How can you recognize when someone knows what his or her mission is? Whom do you think of as a man or a woman with a mission?
• Creating a Pilgrim’s Progress–style map of your life. Label your starting point and intended goal. Then add regions to represent various experiences you have had or look forward to having. For example, you might identify an area of particular challenge as the “Mountains of Difficulty,” or a battle with grief or addiction as a “Dark Canyon.” Decorate your map with illustrations if you wish.
• Researching one or more individuals whose lives illustrated clarity of mission, such as Albert Schweitzer or Paul Tournier. At what point in their lives did their missions become clear? What events or people contributed to their understanding of their missions?
• Listening to “Do Something,” by Matthew West, or “Give Me Your Eyes,” by Brandon Heath, while you reflect on the thought questions from this week’s lesson.
• Using your favorite word processor, desktop publishing program, or artistic media to create a poster version of the quote by Ellen White, “The greatest want of the world . . .” from Education, p. 54. Highlight the phrases that apply to your own personal mission.
• Finding an organization in your community (e.g., Habitat for Humanity) that has a clear, service-oriented mission. Spend a few hours volunteering, and talk to one or more staff members to get a sense of how they personally relate to and support the mission.

CONNECT
Proverbs 21:13; 31:8, 9; Zechariah 7:8–10.
Tracy Kidder, Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World.

Sharon Wright, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.
Jesus, the Master
Teacher

“And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority” (Luke 4:32, NKJV).
You return to school for the next semester and you're sitting in your first class. You don't know the professor well, but you are eager to start a new year. Suddenly, the door opens. The professor enters, takes a seat in front, and starts talking. Oh no! His voice is so monotonous. And he just sits there. He doesn't write anything on the whiteboard, and he doesn't ask any questions that your class can discuss with him. All the students are getting restless, and some are even beginning to pass notes and check for messages on their cell phones. Do you still have time to drop this class and replace it with another one?

Now imagine the same scene, but it is Jesus who walks into the room and to the head of the class. He smiles and greets everyone kindly. All the students are stunned, and they put away their cell phones. Surely everyone in the class is planning on attending regularly!

What would be so special about attending a class that Jesus is teaching? First of all, He has different teaching methods. Instead of lecturing, He tells stories—parables that are interesting, that relate to daily life, and that are easy to understand (Matt. 13:34). He is also interested in the welfare of His students. He heals people who are sick (Mark 6:56), and He once fed thousands of hungry people with what started out to be just a little bit of food (John 6:1–13). He has so much knowledge that He is willing to impart to anyone who is interested, and He communicates well with people from all backgrounds and educational levels. And He is pragmatic! He talks about subjects that deal with everyday life, subjects such as loving your enemies, helping people in need, dealing with anger and lust, how to pray, and what to do with your money (Matthew 5–7).

You can't help but realize the impact His words can have on your life, and you know that His class is one you surely won't be skipping (Matt. 7:28).

This week, as you study about the Master Teacher, may you find how special His teachings are and how you can benefit from them.

In the book of Matthew, we read about Jesus, the great Teacher. Mark’s book shows Him as a Miracle Worker and a Man of action. John teaches us about Jesus, the Messiah, and the book of Luke shows us “the human side of His nature, and presents Him as the Friend of humanity.”

This friendship is viewed by Luke as encompassing all people, regardless of their race, culture, or gender. Salvation is given to the Gentiles and also to the Samaritans. The same opportunity for salvation is offered to men and women, to publicans and sinners, as well as to honored men. Jesus talked with and shared His thoughts with the rich (Luke 19:2) as well as with the poor (Luke 1:53), thus proving that there are no borders or barriers between Jesus and people. He longs to save everyone.

Jesus the Preacher (Luke 6:17–49)

Of Jesus’ sermons recorded in the Gospels, the greatest is the one we know as the Sermon on the Mount. The first part of this sermon consists of a set of teachings known as the Beatitudes. A beatitude is a “condition or statement of blessedness.” Each “blessed are” first states a condition and then a result, for example, “Blessed are you who hunger now, / For you shall be filled” (Luke 6:21, NKJV). The condition is hunger. The result is that those who hunger will be filled.

“Luke lists only the first, fourth, second, and eighth [beatitude] in that order. In the Beatitudes, Christ announced that the objectives of His ministry and of His kingdom were to bring happiness to humanity. The principles He enumerated cut across the concept that happiness is to be found on the material or carnal level.”

Jesus the Healer (Luke 8:43–47)

Every good teacher has lesson plans, and healing was one of Jesus’ plans. Many people who were sick came to Him to be healed. In Luke 8:43–47, we read about a woman who had been “subject to bleeding for twelve years” (verse 43, NIV). But as soon as she touched the hem of Jesus’ garment, the bleeding stopped.

Now Jewish law dictated that if a man touched a woman who was men-
struating, he would be ceremonially unclean (Lev. 15:19–28). Yet, in “Jesus’ mind, this suffering woman was not to be overlooked. As God’s creation, she deserved attention and respect.”


One of the great methods of teaching that Jesus used was the telling of parables. A parable is a “short tale that illustrates a universal truth; it is a simple narrative. It sketches a setting, describes an action, and shows the results.”

“With Jesus a parable was a bridge by which He led His hearers by a pleasant and familiar path from where they were to where He wanted them to be, from the known to the unknown, from concrete facts to abstract truths, from the seen to the unseen, from the earthly to the heavenly. It was a window through which He invited His hearers to gaze upon vistas of heavenly truth.”


More than any other Gospel, Luke describes how often Jesus went by Himself to pray. Prayer was the key to His service on earth and the source of His strength when He felt down. It was how He maintained His connection with God. Just before He died on the cross, He uttered the following prayer to His Father, “Into your hands I commit my spirit” (Ps. 31:5, NIV).

One night when the disciples heard Jesus praying, they were so impressed that they asked Him to teach them to pray as He did. His answer was to repeat the Lord’s Prayer as He had prayed in His sermon on the mount. “This prayer might more appropriately be called the Disciples’ Prayer, for it is not altogether the type of prayer that Jesus would have prayed. It seems more appropriate for erring mortals. For instance, Jesus had no need to pray for forgiveness of sin.”

“In the Lord’s Prayer Jesus rescued from the mass of literary verbiage that which was essential and restored it to a simple and compact form whose meaning could be comprehended by the most simple soul. . . . Its universal acceptance reflects the fact that it expresses more perfectly than any other prayer the fundamental needs of the human heart.”

**REACT**

1. Read Luke 6:20–49. What beatitude do you relate to the most, and why?
2. Why do you think Jesus’ parables are still relevant today? What is your favorite parable? How has it changed your life?
3. How often do you pray? Why do you pray? Consider other aspects of your prayer life. How can Jesus’ prayer life inform your own?

3. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, s.v. “beatitudes.”
6. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, s.v. “parable.”
8. Ibid., p. 346.
“Who is this Jesus? they questioned. He who had claimed for Himself the glory of the Messiah was the son of a carpenter, and had worked at His trade with His father Joseph. They had seen Him toiling up and down the hills, they were acquainted with His brothers and sisters, and knew His life and labors. They had seen Him develop from childhood to youth, and from youth to manhood. Although His life had been spotless, they would not believe that He was the Promised One.

“Jesus met the questionings of His hearers.”

“What a contrast between His teaching in regard to the new kingdom and that which they had heard from their elder! Jesus had said nothing of delivering them from the Romans. They had heard of His miracles, and had hoped that His power would be exercised for their advantage, but they had seen no indication of such purpose.

“As they opened the door to doubt, their hearts became so much the harder for having been momentarily softened. Satan was determined that blind eyes should not that day be opened, nor souls bound in slavery be set at liberty. With intense energy he worked to fasten them in unbelief. They made no account of the sign already given, when they had been stirred by the conviction that it was their Redeemer who addressed them.

“But Jesus now gave them an evidence of His divinity by revealing their secret thoughts. ‘He said unto them, Doubtless ye will say unto Me this parable, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done at Capharnaum, do also here in Thine own country. And He said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is acceptable in his own country. But of a truth I say unto you, There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land; and unto none of them was Elijah sent, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman, the Syrian.’ Luke 4:23–27, R.V.

“By this relation of events in the lives of the prophets, Jesus met the questionings of His hearers. The servants whom God had chosen for a special work were not allowed to labor for a hardhearted and unbelieving people. But those who had hearts to feel and faith to believe were especially favored with evidences of His power through the prophets.”*

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My wife works in an international school that has a sophisticated security system. One Sunday, she went to her office to work. When she arrived, she texted the chief security officer of the school to let her pass through the main gate. A person with authority has “the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience.” Consider the privilege and the right that the chief security officer has to grant permission to get into the school.

In Matthew 28:18, Jesus said, “ ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’ ” (NKJV). And during His time on earth, Jesus demonstrated that authority quite well. “Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, ‘What a word this is! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out’ ” (Luke 4:36, NKJV).

In Luke 4:36, we see two important words: “authority” and “power.” The original word for “authority” comes from the Greek word exousia, while “power” is dunamis. Dunamis can simply be understood as the ability to do something, while exousia is the right to do it. So, when people were amazed at Jesus, they saw that He had both exousia and dunamis.

Throughout the New Testament, we see how Jesus demonstrated His authority. He had the authority to teach whatever He wanted to teach (Luke 4:31, 32), to heal and to cast out demons (Luke 4:36), to forgive sin (Matt. 9:6), to make people children of God (John 1:12), to execute judgment (John 5:27), to give up His life and take it again (John 10:18), and to give eternal life (John 17:2). Can you imagine having such a friend as He?

Going back to my wife, what if she were to ask permission from an ordinary security guard instead of from the chief security officer who has the right to grant access? She would be denied. Jesus is our Chief Security Officer. He is the Chief Commander, and He has everything we need. Connect to Him always, so that your life will be meaningful and fruitful.

**REACT**

1. How does it feel to have a connection to the One who has all authority?
2. What should we do in order to have a daily connection with Jesus?

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Having a clear and positive mind helps us to focus on our goals. We also need a balance between our thoughts, words, and deeds. Jesus is the perfect example when it comes to such focus and balance. During His life on earth, He did many things in three different areas of life that we should model and make a part of our daily lives. When we do so, our lives also will be focused and well balanced.

He still cares and understands more deeply than we can understand.

*Jesus established well-defined objectives for His life.* He had clear objectives that focused on the vision and mission of the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:11). He taught openly and with well-defined objectives. His purpose in teaching was, and still is, to instill within His disciples lofty ideals that assist with the formation of faith and a strong relationship with Him and with other people.

*Jesus chose His words carefully.* Many people during Jesus’ time didn’t know how to read and had little or no formal education. Thus, He chose words that everyone could understand. He lectured, preached, and shared proverbs, parables, and other illustrations that related to the conditions, the natural environment, and the various types of work that the people back then experienced (Luke 4:43; 10:25–37).

*Jesus worked for the good of others.* On His way to preach the gospel, there were many things Jesus did for others. He healed the sick, raised the dead, and forgave sins (Luke 6:17–19, 27–36; 7:1–17; 10:25–27). Everything He did, He did out of love. He still cares and understands more deeply than we can understand.

The influence of Jesus, the Teacher sent by God, can also be experienced in our lives. “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30, 31, NKJV).

**REACT**

1. What is your favorite teaching of Jesus, and why?
2. Think of one of Jesus’ parables and how you can apply that parable to your life.
While on earth, Jesus was the ultimate Teacher and Servant. He never shirked His duty. He remained devoted to His work, even when it was time for Him to die the cruelest of deaths on behalf of sinners everywhere.

Do you ever find yourself avoiding a difficult situation? Today, many people turn and run when things get hard. They run away from difficult marriages. They quit jobs if they think they are not being paid enough or if they believe they are being treated unfairly. They'll drop difficult classes if they think they will fail them, instead of seeking help from their professors. They run from anything that makes them uncomfortable, past or present.

Jesus, however, gave us an example of what it means to be committed. He never shirked His mission—a mission that included teaching us not only how to live but how to be saved by accepting His death for us on the cross. Remember that while He was dying, Jesus could not see beyond His death. He felt that the weight of our sins for which He was dying would separate Him forever from His beloved heavenly Father. Yet the Holy Spirit within Him kept Him true to His purpose. Servants finish their tasks, fulfill their responsibilities, keep their promises, and complete their commitments. And as God's Servant, He did all of that.

Jesus didn’t leave His work half done. He didn’t quit when He got discouraged or when the crowd jeered at Him as He hung in both spiritual and physical agony upon the cross. What faith it must have taken for Him to remain there.

Any measure of faithfulness on our part is often a rare quality. Can others count on you? Are there promises you need to keep, vows you need to fulfill, or commitments you need to honor? When you consider what Jesus did for you, are you really faithful to Him?

Imagine, Jesus longs to one day come to you and say, “‘Well done, good and faithful servant’” (Matt. 25:23, NIV).

REACT

1. Consider your own life. Can others count on you? If so, how? If not, why? What promises do you need to keep or commitments do you need to honor, and when do you plan on doing so?

2. In what areas of your life do you need to be more faithful? Ask God to help you.
CONCLUDE
As the Master Teacher, Jesus taught His disciples many things, including how to pray. “Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him. . . .
“Perseverance in prayer has been made a condition of receiving. We must pray always if we would grow in faith and experience.”*

CONSIDER
• Journaling your prayers for one week, either by writing them or recording them. At the end of the week, review each prayer and consider the answers to the following questions: How often did you pray? What did you pray for? Did you spend time praising God and thanking Him? Based on this week of prayer, how could you improve your communication skills with God?
• Reading one or two of the articles on prayer found on Focus on the Family’s Web site: http://www.focusonthefamily.com/faith/faith_in_life/prayer.aspx. What new thought about prayer did you glean from your reading?
• Reciting the words to, singing, or playing the song “God Be in My Head,” no. 679 in the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal. How can music itself be a prayer to God?
• Going on a prayer walk with your Sabbath School class on a Sabbath afternoon. If you’ve never prayer walked before, there are several interesting articles on the Internet that explain how to do so.
• Walking through a community park and photographing objects from nature that turn your thoughts toward the Creator. When you return home, view the photos as if they are prayers without words. Also consider what each photo teaches you about God.
• Asking one of your grandparents or an aunt or uncle about a time when God answered one of his or her prayers.

CONNECT
Psalms 66:18, 19; 145:18; Matthew 5:43, 44.
Derek J. Morris, The Radical Prayer.

* Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, pp. 93, 97.
Following Jesus in Everyday Life

“And the apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith’ ”
(Luke 17:5, NKJV).
What does it mean to serve God in our daily lives? How can we allow Him to increase our faith? These are two of the fundamental questions that will be addressed in this week’s lesson. Though Scripture is clear that we need to let go of human traditions and serve God through Jesus’ example (Mark 7:8), many times such passages are complicated by personal opinion or doctrinal theorizing. Whether it was the Pharisees trying to gain salvation through their works or individuals today who try to seek God’s approval through gaining knowledge or trying to follow the law perfectly, Scripture still stands as the ultimate truth regardless of any one’s misconceptions of it.

The Bible was not written only for the well educated, the wealthy, or the scholarly. It was composed in a way that anyone, regardless of background, status, or education, could comprehend it.

In this week’s lesson, the focus is on finding Jesus in everyday life. Following God doesn’t have to involve going on a noble crusade to a far-off land or coming up with some illustrious plan to cure world hunger. Yes, many people are called to work towards such goals, but what we need to remember is that these are not the only avenues for seeking God.

John Wesley is quoted as saying, “One of the principal rules of religion is, to lose no occasion of serving God. And, since he is invisible to our eyes, we are to serve him in our neighbour; which he receives as if done to himself in person, standing visibly before us.”

There are numerous times in our daily lives when we are given opportunities to reflect Christ to others. Jesus was clear in that by serving Him we must serve others. His words were simple: “‘Come follow me, and I will make you fish for people’” (Matt. 4:19, NCV). Living for Jesus should not just be about conceptual philosophy, an obscure doctrine, or making the decision to do good. Though following God involves learning new concepts, philosophical ideas, and sound doctrine, and, of course, doing good deeds—these are not the core. Faith is.


Matthew Shaffer, Roseville, California, U.S.A.
The earlier part of Luke 17 seems to have no connection with the previous chapter regarding the nature of what was being taught. Chapter 16 shows where Jesus was in dialogue with the Pharisees concerning their hypocrisies and covetousness, but you find in chapter 17 that there is a shift. Jesus is no longer addressing the Pharisees but rather His disciples. The Pharisees do not appear again until verse 20. Because there is a shift between these two chapters, it is most likely that there was also a transition of time and place when the events recorded occurred. Verse 11 of chapter 17 may be the answer as to what was happening. It seems that Jesus and His disciples were heading to Jerusalem and had to pass through Samaria and Galilee before getting there.

**The journey itself was a long one.**

This disconnect between the verses “has led some to think that Luke here reports the gist of what was given upon various occasions.” This is more likely because in verses 1, 2 Jesus talks about how leading someone to sin is a sin in itself and horrible enough for that person to have a millstone hung about his neck and cast into the sea to drown. In verses 3, 4, Jesus talks about having a forgiving attitude when others sin against you. Verses 5, 6 talk about the power of faith. Here Jesus points out that it’s not the amount of faith one has but the authenticity of that faith. Verses 7–10 tell a short parable about a servant and how he is honored for his services. Jesus is saying that much is expected from His servants and that we should not be expecting more than our wages. All these topics were more likely talked about on their way to Jerusalem.

The journey itself was a long one. “The journey here referred to seems to be in the nature of a circuit, first through Samaria, then the borders of Galilee, then probably through Peræa, and eventually, arrival at Jerusalem.” It may be possible that this was the same journey mentioned in John 11:54, where Jesus retreated from the Jews and headed north to dwell there for a time. This journey would be the last circuit Jesus made just before His death.

**REACT**

1. What does it mean to lead someone to sin?
2. Read Luke 17:7–10. As a servant of God, what attitude should you have when doing His work?

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2. Ibid., p. 838.
Life is filled with decisions—some more important than others. Waking up in the morning presents basic choices, such as what to wear, what to eat, or where you will go that day. But not all decisions are as light as these. For example, whom will you marry? This decision can affect the entire course of your future and therefore should not be taken lightly. Deciding to follow Jesus or not also will affect the rest of your life. In fact, it is the biggest decision you will ever have to make. It goes beyond just knowing about Him. It expands into living each moment of our lives for Him.

Following Jesus means more than just admiring Him.

More Than Just a Fan (Matt. 7:21–23)
Many people are fans of Jesus. They love hearing about the great things He did, such as feeding 5,000 people at once. People like reading about His great miracles, but when it comes to following Him themselves, they have second thoughts. Following Jesus is not the same as following a TV show. You can’t just go to where you left off last time and resume with the current episode. There is a cost. In Luke 9:57–62, we read a conversation that Jesus had with some people who wanted to follow Him. They are interested in Him because they just heard about and experienced His miracles. But Jesus turns to them and says, “‘Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head’” (verse 58, NIV). In that same verse, we see that as soon as the people heard Jesus say those things, they no longer wanted to follow Him.

Being Called by Jesus From Where We Are (Luke 5:27–33)
Time after time, we see examples of Jesus reaching out to people who were deemed by society to be “unrighteous” or “unworthy.” In Luke 5, He reaches out to the tax collector (much to the scorn of the Pharisees). Yet notice what Jesus said to him: “Follow me.” He didn’t say, “Quit collecting taxes. Pray more, and get your life together. Then you can follow Me.” He took the tax collector right where he was. He didn’t condemn him. Instead, He showed him mercy and acceptance.

In a similar way, Jesus doesn’t ask us to completely reform ourselves before reaching out to Him. He asks us to come to Him right where we are, and from there He will transform us. Many times people think they must be perfect before trying to seek God, but so many times Scripture shows us that it is God who seeks us, and all we have to do is accept His invitation.
Taking Up Our Crosses (Matt. 16:24)

Following Jesus means more than just admiring Him. Though Christ calls us to follow Him from wherever we are, He also tells each of us to take up our cross. What does this mean? Following Jesus means removing things from our lives that may not be easy to remove. It’s an active and daily surrender to Him. Matthew 10:22 talks about how many of Christ’s followers will be hated for His sake, but whoever endures to the end will be saved. It’s not difficult to fall into the mind-set of wanting the easy way out. Following Jesus will not always be easy. Scripture shows us that. But it also shows us that if we hold on to Him, He will help us endure whatever life throws at us.

God Rewards Our Faith (Luke 5:5, 6)

Many people lose sight of the fact that Jesus wants what’s best for us. Many times, people see this picture of a vengeful God who wants to catch us doing something wrong so He can punish us. Yet the God of the Bible is vastly different. We are called to have faith, and we are told that our faith will accomplish what God desires. We shall have joy and peace (Isa. 55:10–13). In Luke 5, we read how the disciples’ nets were overflowing with fish because they did what Jesus commanded them to. They had faith. Many times throughout the Bible, we can find examples of the Lord rewarding people’s faith and showing them that He is looking out for their best interest.

He Wants Our Friendship (Matt. 11:28)

Think of your favorite TV show. What about that show draws you in? Could it be the suspense, the actors, or the plot? Then think about following Jesus. What attracts you to Him? Many people want Him to be part of their lives. They want His guidance. They want Him to provide them with money and good health. They approach Him from the position of what they desire. Jesus longs to know each of us as His friend. He wants each of us to know Him as our Friend. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus gives a clear invitation as a father who wants to assure and protect his children: “ ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’ ” (NIV).

REACT

1. Think of other ways people confuse fandom with following Christ and how we can daily follow Jesus in all that we do.

2. How can we view Jesus as a personal Being who longs for our friendship as opposed to just a figure from the past who did some good deeds?

3. Think of other examples from Scripture when Jesus called people out of their current situation to follow Him.

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Steven Shaffer, Collegedale, Tennessee, U.S.A.
As I read the sections of Luke pertaining to faith, I see that Jesus is continuously saddened by the lack of faith among those who follow Him. Then comes the prayer session on the Mount of Olives before Jesus is crucified. The disciples are being opinionated, especially Simon Peter. Jesus turns to him and says, “‘But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers’” (Luke 22:32, NIV). That’s when the pattern of annoyance becomes desperate pleas to His followers to have more faith.

“Christ did not fail, neither was He discouraged.”

Ellen White says that the night before He would be crucified, Jesus “did not speak of the humiliation that was before Him, but sought to bring to their [the disciples’] minds that which would strengthen their faith, leading them to look forward to the joys that await the overcomer. . . .

“‘These things I have spoken unto you,’ He said, ‘that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.’ John 16:33. Christ did not fail, neither was He discouraged; and the disciples were to show a faith of the same enduring nature. They were to work as He had worked, depending on Him for strength. Though their way would be obstructed by apparent impossibilities, yet by His grace they were to go forward, despairing of nothing and hoping for everything.”

In order to continue spreading the truth, the disciples needed the same faith Jesus had. They needed to rely completely on God. Jesus was frustrated by the disciples’ lack of faith. Because they spent every day with Him, the implicit trust He had in the Father should have rubbed off on them. In His last hours, He tried His hardest to strengthen their faith by reminding them to have hope in the future and to remember that good things come to those who persevere through doubt, hate, pain, lies, and unfortunate situations. He told them that no matter what happens, they can have peace because they have faith in their heavenly Father who keeps His promises. As you spend time with Jesus, look for instances where He is reminding you to have more faith.

**REACT**

1. What do you think faith is?
2. What is one thing you can do to grow your faith in God? Do it this week, and report back to the Sabbath School class.

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Anna Bartlett, Collegedale, Tennessee, U.S.A.
Have you ever set out to do something someone told you to do and then wondered, *Wait, how do I do this?* Don't worry; you're definitely not alone. Most of us have come across this question in a number of ways on many occasions. Jesus’ disciples were no different. For three and a half years, they went where He went. Then suddenly, He was about to leave their physical presence. How do you follow someone you can't see, hear, or even touch? How do you have a relationship with someone who isn't physically present? No one answers that question better than Jesus Himself. Here, then, are some ideas He gives us to help us follow Him in our everyday lives:

**Step 1: Who?** In John 14:5, Thomas asks Jesus how they can know the way they are to go. In verse 6, Jesus tells Thomas that He is “‘the way and the truth and the life’” (NIV). Jesus is essentially saying to us that He is the how. “I am how you do it.” And whatever the “it” is determines how we look at Jesus in answer to our personal how-to.

**Step 2: What?** Jesus: “‘What do you seek?’” (John 1:38, NKJV)

The disciples: “‘Where are You staying?’” (verse 38, NKJV).

Jesus: “‘Come and see’” (verse 39, NKJV).

Knowing what you want to do is important. But the great news is that even when we don't know what we want, God does!

There are many applications and commands when it comes to following Jesus in everyday life. However, it can be strongly argued that in all of Jesus' commands, believing in Him and loving one another is the sum of all that He wants for us (Rom. 13:8; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8; 1 John 3:23; 4:7, 8). Everything else we do is predicated on these.

**Step 3: How?** “‘As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another’” (John 13:34, 35, NIV). This last step is quite personal and takes some intentionality. We are to love others because Christ loves us. However, we all know some people who are difficult to love. But with Christ in one's heart, loving even the unloveable is possible.

**REACT**

1. Why is it important to believe and understand that Jesus loves you?
2. What are some of the ways you would apply step 3 in light of question 1?
Today’s society teaches us to be assertive. Stepping on people’s toes in order to get what we want is the norm and many times expected. Humility is often defined as weakness; aggression is often defined as strength.

Though there are times when being assertive is necessary (consider Jesus’ example with the money-changers in the temple), should assertiveness be our constant attitude? Though Jesus had His assertive moments, He also had a way of surprising people with His humility and submission in the many difficult situations He experienced.

Rich Mullins, a Christian musician who died at a young age in the 1990s, is quoted as saying something quite profound. He was known for making politically incorrect statements or for saying things that shocked many Christians. And what he says here struck me: “We do not find happiness by being assertive. We don’t find happiness by running over people because we see what we want and they are in the way of that happiness so we either abandon them or we smash them. The Scriptures don’t teach us to be assertive. The Scriptures teach us—and this is remarkable—the Scriptures teach us to be submissive.”* He then went on to say that this is not a popular idea, even among many Christians.

Though the idea of serving God through serving others sounds simple, doing so can test an individual’s limits. It’s an easy concept. However, it’s not easy to put into action. It’s a lot harder to maintain an even state of mind when someone cuts you off in traffic. Many times in such situations, people make excuses for losing their patience or for trying to get ahead. It’s easy to lose sight of our behavior when we experience anger or impatience. But what is elemental in such situations is looking at every second as an opportunity to show the love of Christ.

**REACT**

1. How can you practice humility through service in even the small areas of life?

2. Think of other examples in Scripture when Jesus was submissive rather than assertive. Why are these examples also something to take into consideration?

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Hannah Goldstein, Collegedale, Tennessee, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE

Even though Jesus was a great Teacher, He did not establish a school of theology or philosophy. His purpose was “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). He came to reveal the character of God, a revelation that culminated in the cross, where He showed humanity and unfallen worlds what God was really like and paid the penalty for sin so that we could be redeemed. In doing so, He created a redeemed community of people who, having been saved by His death, have chosen to model His life and teachings. The call to be part of this community is a call to absolute allegiance to Christ Himself. What He desires becomes the disciple’s sole purpose in life.

CONSIDER

• Making a chart of your daily activities, Sunday through Saturday. Include in that chart a column that describes how performing that activity can model the life and teachings of Christ.
• Singing the hymn “Have Thine Own Way, Lord” from the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, no. 567. Read the history behind this hymn at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Have_Thine_Own_Way,_Lord.
• Writing a fifth verse to the hymn “Have Thine Own Way, Lord” that reflects your life and feelings about following Christ.
• Watching the sign language video showcasing one of Casting Crowns’s songs at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooUJ9N5w1Os. Follow along with the signs as best you can.
• Reading the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31–46. This story is an excellent example of how Jesus used nature to instruct the people who came to hear Him. How would you use nature to teach one of Jesus’ kingdom principles?

CONNECT

Isaiah 58; Micah 6:8.
The Kingdom of God

“They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God’” (Luke 13:29, NKJV).
“A horse! A horse! my kingdom for a horse!”* These are the famous words spoken by King Richard III in the play by Shakespeare. It is interesting to note how unimportant his kingdom became when he was faced with death on the battlefield without a trusty steed. All earthly kingdoms seem to lose that illustrious allure when weighed up against the most significant things of life, such as death. But is this the same with God’s kingdom?

**The kingdom of God is right here, right now.**

“The kingdom of God” is one of the most prominent themes Jesus taught, and even though the book of Luke alone records this phrase more than 40 times, there is still much mystery surrounding it. It leads to such questions as, What is God's kingdom all about? Where does it come from? How does it arrive? How does it work? We find the Pharisees drilling Jesus on this very topic in Luke 17:20, 21. Jesus’ response touches on just one aspect of God’s kingdom: “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, “Here it is,” or “There it is”” (NIV). Jesus is very clear that God’s kingdom will not arrive with the usual pomp of an earthly kingdom, accompanied by a parade and marching band. Neither will it be noticed and pronounced by those arrogantly seeking its arrival. Jesus seems to portray God’s kingdom in stark contrast to any kingdom this world has ever seen. However, these aren’t the answers the Pharisees are most eager to hear. They want to know the exact arrival time.

Jesus continues to explain why the Pharisees will not notice the kingdom’s coming: “The kingdom of God is in your midst” (verse 21, NIV). With all the anticipation and careful watching, the Pharisees didn’t recognize that God’s kingdom had already arrived and He was standing right there in front of them. How incredible! The kingdom of God is right here, right now, and we have full access to it.

King Richard was willing to trade his kingdom for a horse, and I don’t blame him. What earthly kingdom would you want to trade your life for? What about the kingdom of God? Would anything be worth trading for God’s kingdom? Popularity? Money? Your career? Relationships? A horse? As you contemplate the kingdom of God this week, I pray that you will come to the same conclusion as myself: a resounding no!

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The Kingdom: A Central Theme (Matt. 4:17; 5:2, 3; Mark 1:14, 15; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10)

Ever since sin entered our world, humankind's attention has been drawn to the coming kingdom of God. As an expression, “the kingdom of God” may either refer to the future kingdom of glory (1 Cor. 6:9, 10) or to the present kingdom of grace (Matt. 4:17; 5:2, 3). The kingdom of heaven (or God) was a central theme in Jesus' teaching, whether He taught about it through parables or through teaching His disciples how to pray for the coming kingdom.1

A Kingdom of Grace (Matt. 4:17; 5:2, 3; Luke 17:21)

One aspect of the kingdom of God is that it “lies not in things external, but in the inward graces of the spiritual life.”2 Jesus stated, “For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21, NKJV). The kingdom of God, therefore, can be found within those who have surrendered their lives to God; yet this requires a change of heart where human pride and self-sufficiency are cast aside. The kingdom of God can come increasingly into our lives as we surrender daily to Him.

Through His life, Jesus demonstrated the characteristics to which we aspire: a gentleness of character, a knowledge and understanding of Scripture, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and a close walk with God. When we accept the gift of grace, God’s kingdom can dwell in our hearts while we wait for Him to take us to His kingdom of glory. “Men must qualify for entrance into God’s kingdom of grace on this earth now if they are to be candidates for the kingdom of glory in the hereafter.”3

A Kingdom of Glory (Dan. 2:44; Luke 1:32, 33)

The kingdom of grace is preparatory for the kingdom of glory. Without having the kingdom of God within us, we cannot enter the fullness of God’s eternal kingdom, which will only be experienced at Jesus' second coming. This eternal kingdom is described in detail in Revelation 21 and 22.

Thus, the kingdom of God also refers to the physical kingdom that is being prepared for us right now (John 14:1–3). It is a kingdom that shall “consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Dan. 2:44, NKJV). The apostle Paul writes about the kingdom of God. For him, it is an actual kingdom, where Christ is King (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; 6:9; Col. 4:11; 2 Thess. 1:5). Jesus referred to the kingdom of God as a kingdom that would be set up when He returns to judge the living and the dead (Matt. 25:31–34).4
The Kingdom Requires a Pure Love Relationship (Luke 18:16–30)

In Luke 18, Jesus shows us how much He loves children. Here He teaches the importance of a pure, simple relationship with Him. He challenges His adult audience by saying that unless they have faith like these children, they cannot enter the kingdom of God. This challenge is of equal significance to us today, as it is easy to become consumed in theological debates while missing out on the gift of grace that Jesus offers us. A relationship with God doesn't need to be complex.


Our sinful human natures often seek worldly pleasures and personal gain above godly things. So often we try to fit into mainstream society for the sake of not appearing too different. We push aside time needed with God when, in fact, it is our relationship with Him that brings peace and security to everything else. In Luke 12:22–34, Jesus clearly appeals to us not to worry about our lives, our food, or our clothes. Furthermore, He challenges us to seek first the kingdom of God, and He promises that He will lavish these other blessings onto us as a result.

In Luke 9:57–62, Jesus tells us that His home is not of this world and that He has nowhere to lay His head. He then appeals to His hearers to follow Him, to go and preach the kingdom of God. However, these things can't be done with one hand “on the plough” or in worldly pursuits that consume our time and energy. Jesus calls us to put God’s kingdom (an eternal relationship with Him) at the top of our priorities.

Jesus also shares that it is more challenging for wealthy people to enter the kingdom of God (Luke 18:18–23). The rich young ruler came to Him seeking guidance about what he could do to be guaranteed eternal life. However, he left dismayed, as Jesus’ response was for the ruler to surrender all, including his wealth. God’s kingdom calls for our full commitment, but those who leave riches or family for the sake of this kingdom will inherit much more.

His kingdom, embodied in an intimate, living relationship with Jesus and a longing to be with Him in heaven, should be our number one, daily priority. As we seek eternity with the One who gave us His all, as we respond to the loving relationship that God offers each one of us, we can have assurance that eternity will be truly incredible because we will be spending it with the King of kings.

REACT

1. What childlike characteristics do you need to embody more of?
2. In what ways are you like the rich young ruler?

2. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, 2nd ed., vol. 6, p. 640.
3. Ibid., p. 699.

Nina Atcheson, Brisbane, Australia
“Christ does not acknowledge any caste, color, or grade as necessary to become a subject of His kingdom. Admittance to His kingdom does not depend upon wealth or a superior heredity. But those who are born of the Spirit are the subjects of His kingdom…….

“……Christ does not find His subjects fitted for His kingdom, but He qualifies them by His divine power.”

“We must study the life of Christ, and imitate the divine Pattern.”

“The converting power of God must be upon our hearts. We must study the life of Christ, and imitate the divine Pattern. We must dwell upon the perfection of His character, and be changed into His image. No one will enter the kingdom of God unless his will is brought into captivity to the will of Christ.”

“The faces of men and women who walk and work with God express the peace of heaven. They are surrounded with the atmosphere of heaven. For these souls the kingdom of God has begun. They have Christ's joy, the joy of being a blessing to humanity. They have the honor of being accepted for the Master's use; they are trusted to do His work in His name.”

“As intelligent beings, we need to sit down and think whether we are really seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. The very best thing we can do is to think soberly and candidly whether we desire to put forth the effort necessary to obtain the Christian hope and secure the Christian's heaven. If through the grace of Christ we decide that we do, the next question is: What is there that I must cut away from my life in order that I shall not stumble?”

Jesus came “to open to you the kingdom of love and righteousness and peace. Open your hearts to receive this kingdom, and make its service your highest interest. Though it is a spiritual kingdom, fear not that your needs for this life will be uncared-for. If you give yourself to God’s service, He who has all power in heaven and earth will provide for your needs.”

**REACT**

In your opinion, what are the prerequisites for entering the kingdom of God?

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Matt Atcheson, Brisbane, Australia
The word *kingdom*, translated from the Greek *basileia*, as Luke used it, denoted kingship, sovereignty, authority, and rule, especially of God, both in the world and in the hearts of men.*

In Luke's time, vivid pictures of the "kingdom of God" were confusing. The kings and kingdoms that people would have recalled were good and evil ones. They rose quickly and similarly fell into oblivion, usually amid conflict and bloodshed. Kings were often seen as saviors, and the kingdom of God, no doubt, invoked the promise of freedom from Roman oppression. This resulted in disappointment for many who, like the disciples, had failed to understand Jesus' words (Luke 24).

**The kingdom of God is full of mystery.**

In most countries today, the term *king* is hard to relate to. Generally, when we think of leaders, we think in terms of prime ministers and presidents. Yet the kingdom of God and its King are not only supremely relevant but vitally important to this generation and generations yet unborn.

The kingdom of God is full of mystery. Its Sovereign King came as a human child. The Master of all came as the Servant of all. His kingdom transcends time, geography, and culture, yet it always has been available to everyone in history. Jesus said, "'My kingdom is not of this world'" (John 18:36, NKJV), and yet He promised that His kingdom came for us who live in the world. Only those who enter this kingdom can be saved (Acts 4:12), and He desperately reaches out to all who are lost to receive His invitation to come home (Luke 15).

In Luke's account, we are invited to take our place in eternal history as it unfolds. The promised King arrives and ushers in His kingdom amid conflict with the dark kingdom. Jesus teaches His subjects the principles of the kingdom of God, and His life displays these principles in the flesh, even as He is sacrificed for all who will enter it. His resurrection gives further evidence regarding His authority as King over His enemies, including sin, sickness, death, and us—the created and redeemed. He extends His invitation to all who would join His kingdom through submission to His Kingship.

How do we receive Jesus as King? By submitting to Him as King. As part of His kingdom, we are called to extend His kingdom until that day when He will return in glory to establish His kingdom in its entirety once and for all (Luke 21:5–38)!

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Many view the kingdom of God as a heavenly place, a physical prize to be inherited upon Jesus’ return by those justified by His grace. Jesus certainly spoke about this in Luke 21, but He also encouraged us to recognize that God’s kingdom is a reality in our own time, here and now; a physical manifestation of God’s Word and Spirit alive in us! He explained, “‘The kingdom of God is in your midst’” (Luke 17:21, NIV).

God’s kingdom can be seen in the lives of His followers. It is manifested in their humility and willingness to serve and follow Him, even when it doesn't seem profitable for them to do so (Luke 18:22–25).

When we live in harmony with God’s kingdom, we are guaranteed a peace and assurance that come from knowing that God will provide for all our needs when we give our lives fully for His purposes (Luke 12:31–34; Phil. 4:19).

Following are a few tips on how to live in His kingdom today.

Find perspective, and seek His kingdom in prayer (Luke 11:2). Jesus taught that when we pray, we should first focus our minds on God’s holy character, considering His righteousness, wisdom, and sovereignty. Then, once we recognize His authority in our world and lives, we can align ourselves with Him daily, asking for His kingdom to be a part of who we are. “He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come” ’” (Luke 11:2, NIV).

Follow Him even when it’s difficult (Luke 9:57–62). Sometimes in life, we may recognize God’s leading but feel as though it conflicts with our plans, our responsibilities, our church, and our loved ones. Jesus calls us to walk closely with Him, not looking back to the responsibilities that we think are ours, but rather, to trust Him to provide for and take care of our needs and the needs of those in our care.

Be humble, be willing to listen and to act (Luke 18:16, 17). Jesus pointed out the value of a childlike faith. When we recognize that God is trustworthy and sovereign, we respond to Him in love, with a desire to obey Him, and like little children, excitedly tell others about how great our heavenly Father is.

**REACT**

1. Could you surrender your responsibilities more fully to God with a childlike faith? If so, how?

2. What is the most important thing in your life? Is this consistent with God's desire for you to build His kingdom in the lives of those around you?
The phrase “the kingdom” has become one of the bywords of “cool” Christianity in recent years. When one hears a word, phrase, or idea often enough, we can almost become inoculated to its original intent. Caution is needed so we don’t become blasé about the kingdom of God! The kingdom of God is like wearing a pair of colored glasses. These glasses are not blinders that impede our view of the world. Rather, they give us the capacity to experience the world in a new way. The world is a nasty place. There is horror everywhere you look: acts of violence, abuse, manipulation, deceit, and neglect, instigated by our fellow humans against neighbors, lovers, children, coworkers, and strangers. All of it testifies to the degradation of the world we live in. My “glasses” help me to see through the carnage and consequences of my backstory to the beauty and peace that come from intimacy with my God. If we choose not to accept the gift of the kingdom, we are choosing to see the world in its raw state and can easily become engulfed in misery, hopelessness, bitterness, and hate.

If we seek the kingdom with all our hearts, Luke tells us that our Father will gladly give us the kingdom (Luke 12:31). My heart is not able to look beyond myself into the hearts of those around me if I am caught up in the disappointments of my own life. It is while wearing these “glasses,” living in the kingdom of God, that our eyes are opened to the genuine needs around us. It is then that we can truly reach out to see and to love others in Jesus’ name. The marginalized and disenfranchised are neglected when God is absent from our lives. Galatians 3:26–29 reminds us that we are all members of Christ’s family, where God’s love and embrace do not consider our differences. As heirs of the kingdom, if we were to rise up and live in the kingdom now, then God’s glory would radiate for all to see, unchecked and unbridled and inviting.

I choose to wear God’s “glasses” so that instead of focusing on the rubbish in the world, I can look beyond it into a life of growing intimacy with Christ and His loving family.

**REACT**

1. What is holding you back from wearing the kingdom “glasses”?
2. Do you allow yourself to see people in their need?
CONCLUDE

As Seventh-day Adventists, we are mission-focused on Jesus’ return, at which time He will crush Satan and bring us fully into His everlasting kingdom. Yet Jesus also teaches us that His kingdom is already with us and that He wants us to join Him in inviting others to enter into that kingdom. If you call yourself a Christian, your greatest challenge is whether or not you will surrender “all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.”

CONSIDER

• Creating an artistic rendering (chart, graph, abstract, or lifelike art) of what you think it looks like to be a kingdom citizen.
• Brainstorming with your family or friends about how you can implement a service project in your church or community that would help others to respond to the healing and grace available to them in God’s eternal kingdom.
• Putting together a list of your hopes and goals, both personal and professional. Include a list of the activities and things that are important in your life. Review the list and ask yourself, Are these goals and activities building up God’s kingdom? If you cannot answer with a confident “Yes,” then ask God to give you kingdom “glasses” to help you experience the world in a way that helps you to open up to God’s leading.
• Praying the Lord’s Prayer, and when you say, “Thy kingdom come,” add “in me.” When you pray, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,” add “by using me to help spread Your kingdom and to invite and welcome others into Your eternal grace.”
• Reading or singing all of the verses to “Seek Ye First the Kingdom,” hymn no. 224 in the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal. Write a sixth verse that applies specifically to your life.

CONNECT

Matthew, chaps. 5–7.
Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, pp. 67–75.

* Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, p. 70.

Jean Kellner, Fulton, Maryland, U.S.A.
Jesus in Jerusalem

“Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it” (Luke 19:41, NKJV).
The Chinese culture loves the color red because it symbolizes good luck and chases away bad luck. According to Chinese legend, a monster used to come out on New Year’s Eve, but it was afraid of the color red. So the ancient Chinese used blood to color their doorposts and frames to scare away the monster. Today, on New Year’s Eve, they put red paper or cloth on their doors and burn firecrackers to scare away bad luck. Afterward, they sit at their dinner table and eat an overabundance of chicken and fish.

His crucifixion was the climax of the cosmic conflict between good and evil.

The Israelites performed their first Passover by sprinkling lambs’ blood on their doorposts and eating roasted lamb before escaping from Egypt. The families who didn’t sprinkle the blood lost their oldest son on the night the angel of the Lord passed over their houses. They had to eat the roasted lamb with unleavened bread in positions ready to leave Egypt. Today, Jewish people celebrate Passover annually to commemorate the leading of God, who miraculously freed them from Egyptian bondage.

The lamb sacrificed at Passover symbolized Jesus, the Lamb of God. So when Jesus participated in Passover, He was celebrating His coming to Jerusalem to die for us (John 1:29, 36; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19; Rev. 12:11). However, this time would be His last Passover on earth. He had “eagerly desired to eat this Passover with [His apostles] before [He] suffered” (Luke 22:15, NIV). He knew what would happen to Him in a few days to come. He knew the agony He would bear at Gethsemane, the unfair and bloody trial, and the thought of eternal separation from His Father. His crucifixion was the climax of the cosmic conflict between good and evil, freeing His followers from Satan’s bondage.

Jesus arose on the first day of the week. Because He lives, we can face all our tomorrows.* We can face the same kind of freedom the Israelites did.

Are you ready to accept Jesus as your Passover Lamb? This week, we will learn about the last week of Jesus’ time on earth and how we can accept His saving grace.

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Daniel Saputra, Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia
Evidence
Jerusalem, O Mighty City

Millions of Christian pilgrims from different races annually visit Israel. Many are eager to get acquainted with where Jesus spent His life. They come to see Nazareth, where He was born, and Galilee, where His ministry began. They also visit the many towns and places where He preached, shared parables, and performed miracles.

Of all the places Jesus visited, Jerusalem is the most significant in terms of His ministry. He had visited the city many times, and what made it an extraordinary place was that in the closing week of His earthly ministry, multiple events took place. This city and this week brought the great controversy between good and evil to its apex. And only Jesus knew what was about to unfold.

On the first day of this week, Jesus made a triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a colt upon which no one had ever ridden. Multitudes of people spread their clothes on the road as they praised God and rejoiced. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, His eyes filled with tears over the city that had been the pride and glory of the Jews, knowing that one day it would be leveled to the ground. Then Jesus went into the temple, drove everything out that defiled it, and returned it to the dwelling place of God. Later that week, He told the parable of the wicked vinedressers. The chief priests and Pharisees knew He was referring to them (Matt. 21:33–46). Finally, at the end of the week, He instituted the Lord’s Supper.

We are no different from the multitude in Jesus’ time. We turn our eyes upon the Savior and praise His name. Yet we pierce His heart when we talk about church members behind their backs or when we neglect people in need of friendship and a helping hand. We conscientiously look for the warnings of impending attacks from Satan, yet many of us still stumble and fall. We must faithfully submit our lives to Jesus, for it is as Jesus said of Himself, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:15, NIV).

REACT
1. If you had experienced the events that occurred in Jerusalem just before Jesus’ death, would you have recognized who He really was? Would you have accepted Him or rejected Him? Why, or why not?
2. What are some principles that will keep you faithful while living in the middle of the great controversy between good and evil?

Glenn Simanjuntak, Safford, Arizona, U.S.A.
He Came as a King of Peace (Zech 9:9; Matt. 21:4, 5; Luke 19:28–48)

An interesting event occurred during the last week of Jesus’ ministry. He entered the city of Jerusalem riding a donkey. This initiated a great celebration welcoming Him as the people’s king. At that time in the Middle East, a donkey was a symbol of peace, unlike a horse, which was a symbol of war. Thus, Jesus entering on a donkey demonstrated that He came as the King of Peace.

He Came and Wept (Luke 19:41–44)

This joyful celebration did not last long. It was followed by the weeping response that came from deep within the heart of Jesus. Jerusalem had become the center of Israelite activities up to Jesus’ time. Jesus did not come to Jerusalem to be crowned king. He wept over the city because the citizens had failed to see the true meaning of His ministry—to die for them. He knew what would happen to Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–44), and He could see clearly that the citizens would refuse to repent.

Christ, obviously aware that the people and their leaders had hoped for a Messiah who would fix their political matters, wept because He had pity on those who would soon be faced with great punishment. The Greek word for “cry” is kraugazó, meaning a loud unrelenting cry—the cry of a suffering soul. Jesus showed not only His feelings but also how crushed God’s heart was because of the people’s stubbornness to repent and receive His salvation. Today, these people symbolize those in every generation who reject divine, persuasive love.

He Came to Reestablish the Holiness of the Temple (Luke 19:28–48)

Jesus’ tears over Jerusalem, His cleansing of the temple, and His enemies who were out to get Him made Him all the more determined to rid the temple of its sins. “The one unifying feature that ties these three accounts (Luke 19:41–44, 45–46, 47–48) together is that they all witness to the failure on the part of official Israel to submit itself to God’s rule and the horrible consequences of this. Official Israel, represented by the ‘chief priests, teachers of the law and the leaders among the people’ (19:47),
misunderstood the purpose of the temple and misused it (19:45, 46). They not only sought to squelch the ‘heavenly’ praise of their King in their day of visitation (19:39, 40) and refused his rule over them (19:14), but they also increased their guilt by seeking their King’s death (19:47, 48). This can only result in a visitation of divine judgment (19:42–44), and knowing this, Jesus wept for Jerusalem.”

The event of cleansing the temple of God showed the public ministry of Jesus’ righteous indignation. In His great anger, He drove out the greedy people who were defiling the temple and desecrating its holy purpose. Jesus, within a three-year span, had cleansed the temple twice (John 2:13–25). Following are lessons we can learn from these cleansings.

1. Christ really desires holiness and sincerity in His house. He died because He “loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25–27, NKJV).

2. We must worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:24). The church must be a center of prayer and unity (Matt. 21:13).

3. Our sincere love for God is how we should respond to the sacrifice of Jesus so we should glorify His house through our behavior (1 Tim. 3:15).

4. It is important that every true Christian rightly represent the kingdom of God: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9–11, NKJV).

The people and leaders of Jerusalem were blinded by their traditions. Jesus wept over their condition and their impending fate. He knew what would happen to those who refused Him as their Redeemer. This is also a warning to us who are waiting for the return of Christ. People who are building up a wall of ignorance and stubbornness are separating themselves from His love and commandments.

Don’t let Jesus weep over you upon His return.

2. Ibid., p. 486.
“It was on the first day of the week that Christ made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Multitudes who had flocked to see Him . . . now accompanied Him, eager to witness His reception. Many people were on their way to the city to keep the Passover, and these joined the multitude attending Jesus. All nature seemed to rejoice. The trees were clothed with verdure, and their blossoms shed a delicate fragrance on the air. A new life and joy animated the people.”

“If Jerusalem would but repent, it was not yet too late.”

“The dignitaries of the temple are dumb with astonishment. Where now is the boasted power of priests and rulers over the people! The authorities had announced that whoever should acknowledge Jesus to be the Christ was to be put out of the synagogue and deprived of its sacred privileges. Yet here are the enthusiastic multitude shouting loud hosannas to the Son of David, and recounting the titles given Him by the prophets. As well might the priests and rulers attempt to deprive the earth of the shining face of the sun, as to shut from the world the beams of glory from the Sun of Righteousness. In spite of all opposition, the kingdom of Christ was confessed by the people.”

“If Jerusalem would but repent, it was not yet too late. . . . Beautiful and unholy city, that had stoned the prophets, that had rejected the Son of God, that was locking herself by her impenitence in fetters of bondage,—her day of mercy was almost spent!

“Yet again the Spirit of God speaks to Jerusalem. Before the day is done, another testimony is borne to Christ. The voice of witness is lifted up, responding to the call from a prophetic past. If Jerusalem will hear the call, if she will receive the Saviour who is entering her gates, she may yet be saved.”

Today, we must proclaim: “We, His disciples, declare, This is Jesus, the Messiah, the Prince of life, the Redeemer of the world.”

**REACT**

1. Why did the people of Jerusalem, along with its citizens, the chief priests, and the Pharisees fail to recognize the coming of Jesus?

2. As a “royal priesthood,” how must we live in order to show people that we have hope in Christ’s second coming?

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4. Ibid., p. 579.
The final days before the cross must have been rather exciting for the disciples. There was a feeling that this time their visit to Jerusalem would be different. Something big was about to happen! Jesus’ request to ride a donkey into the city seemed to be an unmistakable sign that He was about to claim David’s throne.

We live in exciting times too. Yet, just like the disciples who misinterpreted Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem, we also can be disappointed with the delay of His second coming to earth. Following are some suggestions, which are based on the events surrounding Jesus’ last visit to Jerusalem, to bring balance to our excitement.

**Make God the focus of your worship.**

_Praise Him, and be joyful in His presence (Luke 19:37–40)._ Jesus does not hold people back from welcoming and praising Him. Praising God is important to keep us spiritually positive. Paul wrote that we should rejoice always (1 Thess. 5:16). It is easy to get discouraged with the dreadful, everyday news we hear, but looking to and praising God can put these reports into perspective. Make it a habit to read psalms of praise and to sing praise songs during your daily worship time.

_Mingle with people, and attend to their needs (Luke 19:41–44, 47, 48)._ Jesus chose to be among the people. One of His reasons for going to the Jerusalem temple was to teach and heal people. During His last visit, He wept because He cared for them. In contrast, the scribes and the Pharisees stayed away from the people, thinking they were above the common population. We need to follow Jesus’ example when it comes to caring for all types of people, understanding their needs, and using our individual gifts to help fulfill their needs.

_Make God the focus of your worship (Luke 19:45, 46)._ When Jesus came to Jerusalem, the temple was being misused as a way to make a profit. This ignited Jesus’ indignation and motivated His desire to clean it up. Are we focused on God during the worship service or church activities? Do we use our talents to praise Him or to show off our skills? Are we strengthening each other or gossiping about each other? Reflect on your motivation, and find ways to make sure God is glorified in all of your activities.

**REACT**

1. Which other lessons from Jesus’ last days in Jerusalem can you apply to your life while you wait for His soon return?
2. How can you get your church to be more excited about Jesus’ return?

_Danny and Rachel Handoko, Eindhoven, Netherlands_
He was a superstar in His time. He performed miracles, multiplied food, raised people from the dead, and threw out demons. His authoritative teachings were different from what the religious leaders taught. He would be the people’s Savior from the pain and agony of their past suffering. He would be their King. He would bring back the glory of Israel like King David and King Solomon did. He was, after all, Jesus Christ.

He had to be destroyed, because He was becoming too popular.

Jesus knows everything because He is omniscient. He knew that His journey to Jerusalem would cost Him persecution and death. Even so, He was determined to go there. He obeyed His Father’s will. He knew that He would be praised as a king, not because they believed He was the Savior or believed His teachings to be true, but merely because of His miracles. His miracles made them deaf to the words of the prophets and blind to His real mission. When it became apparent that Jesus was not going to fulfill their hopes, those who praised Him became those who crucified Him (Luke 19:38).

The religious leaders and the leaders in politics, commerce, and law hated Jesus. He was the victim of the most horrific conspiracy that has ever taken place. Why? They had several reasons for wanting to get rid of Him. He had disrupted business in the temple by driving out the merchants. He was preaching against the injustice of the legal system, and His teachings often favored the poor over the rich. Furthermore, His great popularity was in danger of attracting Rome’s attention, and the leaders of Israel wanted as little as possible to do with Rome (Luke 19:47).

He had to be destroyed, because He was becoming too popular. The evil plan was being prepared. Another horrific fact was that one of the disciples who had been with Him for three years would betray Him. He knew it all, but He was determined to go to Jerusalem because the ultimate fate of so many people required that He do so.

It was all part of the plan to win the great controversy against Satan. And Jerusalem was to be the arena where this was to happen. He was Jesus, the most controversial Figure of all time. He was more than just a star. He is the Superstar.

2. Ibid., p. 1595.
Jesus’ last week of earthly life unfolded in Jerusalem. What tumultuous events marked that week: His triumphal entry, Jesus weeping over the indifferent city, the cleansing of the temple, the scheming and the plotting against Him, the pathos of the Last Supper, the agony of Gethsemane, the mockery of a trial, the Crucifixion, and, finally, the Resurrection. Never before and never since has any city witnessed such a progression of history, a progression that brought the cosmic conflict between good and evil to its climax, even though no one but Jesus understood the significance of what was unfolding.

CONSIDER

• Choosing one or two of the nine events listed in the paragraph above to learn more about. The book The Desire of Ages, chapters 63–81, is a good place to start. As you read, imagine being there yourself. What do you hear? How do you feel? What are your innermost reactions to what is happening to your Savior?
• Getting together with some friends for Friday night vespers to discuss the events leading up to the Crucifixion. Include in your discussion how each of these events can positively affect your relationship with Christ.
• Creating a poster depicting one of the events that occurred during Jesus’ last week. Let the sights, sounds, and even the smells guide you as you portray the event.
• Using the ACTS (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication) prayer format as you read or think about any portion of Jesus’ last week of earthly life.
• Singing one of the following songs from the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal during one of your private worships or with a group of friends for Friday night vespers: “O Sacred Head Now Wounded” (no. 156), “Were You There?” (no. 158), “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today” (no. 166).
• Baking bread and pressing juice for a Friday evening vesper service and meal to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. As you prepare these two items, think about the symbolism behind them.
• Looking at the stars in the night sky as you ponder the wondrous love of God and Christ that motivated Them to devise the plan of salvation.

CONCLUDE

Isaiah 53.

The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Crucifixion.”


Leslie Jane Brewer, Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A.
Crucified and Risen

“‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again’” (Luke 24:7, NKJV).
Shari tromped to the car with a pouting face when her mother picked her up from school. “Shari, what's the matter?” her mother asked. Shari replied, “Marissa told a lie about me today. I should have never become friends with her!”

Have you ever been hurt by a close friend? Did you contemplate ending the friendship because of how this person offended you? Have you ever stopped to think of how Jesus felt when He was placed in the same situation? He knew that Judas was going to betray Him, yet He befriended him and appointed him as one of His disciples. At the Last Supper, Jesus knew that one of His closest friends would deny Him (Luke 22:34). This reveals the incomprehensible depth of God's love. If we were given the opportunity to know which one of our friends would hurt us before that friend knew, how differently would we treat that person?

Despite His suffering on earth, Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice so that we might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). Even though we forsake Him at times, He still protects us and guides us so that our faith in His Word might be strengthened. How gentle and loving is our Savior—even in the Garden of Gethsemane, He healed the high priest's servant who came to take Him away (Luke 22:49–51). Just as Jesus showed compassion to all, even when they sought to destroy Him, we are to show the same compassion to those who hurt us. In these situations, we are to pray for a heart like His.

On His crucifixion day, Jesus was nailed to the cross for our transgressions. Some of those who had witnessed His miracles stood mocking Him, saying, “He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God” (Luke 23:35, NKJV). We should be grateful that the comforting promise of Jesus can erase our transgressions and remove them from His memory (Isa. 43:25). We have redemption through His crucifixion and resurrection, so why not forgive others who hurt us as He forgave us? Micah 7:18, 19 reads, “Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression / of the remnant of his inheritance? / You do not stay angry forever / but delight to show mercy. / You will again have compassion on us; / you will tread our sins underfoot / and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea” (NIV).

As we go through this week’s lesson, let us be mindful of Jesus’ human nature and strive to be like Him. I invite you today to pray for this depth of love.

Sheneka Davidson, St. Catherine, Jamaica, West Indies
Part of Jesus’ mission on earth was to give humans a chance to receive eternal life. Since childhood, He knew that His purpose and mission was to fulfill His Father’s will (Luke 2:41–50). Our mission today also should be to introduce all nations to Jesus, preparing them for baptism. Are you participating in this mission? Look to Jesus, the perfect Example, who shows us that once we have been assigned a mission, we should start it and never look back.

Are we, as Christians, ever similar to Pilate?

During His ministry, Jesus ministered through His words and actions. Yet, even within His own circle of disciples, He was betrayed by one and denied by another! Jesus Himself told us that the world will hate us for His name’s sake, but if we endure to the end we shall be saved (Matt. 10:22). With such a promise from Him, what other encouragement do we need? In times when we are attacked and our characters are challenged by the enemy, we can find refuge in Jesus, the One who promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5). Remember always that there will be times when God will allow us to face tough situations that are intended to strengthen our faith. As such, we should not be discouraged. Instead, we should be faithful, trusting and obeying His commands. We need to put our hands in His hands, for He is the One who can transform the impossible into possible.

When Jesus was brought to Pilate, Pilate found no fault in Him. Jesus was then sent to Herod, since He was under Herod’s jurisdiction. Herod, however, sent Him back to Pilate after mocking Him. On His second appearance before Pilate, Pilate again found no fault in Him and therefore planned only to chastise Him and release Him. So the crowd of angry people requested that Barabbas, a murderer, be released instead. Again, Pilate asked what evil Jesus had done, but the people were adamant that Barabbas be released.

Pilate had the power to release Jesus, but he succumbed to the requests made by the people for the release of a criminal, rather than the release of the most innocent Man who ever lived. Are we, as Christians,
ever similar to Pilate? Do we have the power to represent Christ, to share Him with others, but we relinquish that power and instead give glory to the enemy? Once we fail to represent Christ correctly, we willingly transfer power to Satan, disappointing the One who died so that we might live. Let us remember that “we never grow closer to God when we just live life. It takes deliberate pursuit and attentiveness.” So move forward, working for the Lord and keeping in mind that “what you are is God’s gift to you, what you become is your gift to God.”


Mocked, embarrassed, and crucified, Jesus fulfilled His mission, even though it was an excruciatingly difficult one. Thank God that He was able to endure so that He was raised on the third day, triumphing over evil and providing hope to all those who believe in Him. If we would but only lay all of our sins, burdens, and worries at the foot of the cross so Jesus could take full control of our lives, then we would be victorious just as He was victorious. Wherever you are, whoever you are, live for Jesus. Be a lighthouse for Him. As Christians, we have been saved and are separated from the world, but it doesn’t end there. We are sent out to witness to others so they, too, can be saved. Witnessing does not only mean handing out pamphlets or preaching to others. Witnessing also can be known as evangelliving. Our lives should be testimonies to others. People who come in contact with us should know that we are followers of God and that we practice what we preach. Matthew 7:3–5 tells us that we should first remove the beam from our own eye before we can remove the mote from another person’s eye.

Follow Jesus’ example. Pray; read Scripture; and apply it to your life. Love all, including your enemies. Selective loving will not suffice. Bear these things in mind as we march onward and upward in our walk with Christ.

**REACT**

1. How do we as Christians sometimes cause people to reject Christ?
2. What are some practical ways we can witness to others?

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Annalisa Miller, St. Catherine, Jamaica, West Indies
“And they all cried out at once, saying, ‘Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas’ ” (Luke 23:18, NKJV).

Pilate was forced to action. He now bethought himself of a custom which might serve to secure Christ’s release. . . . This custom was of pagan invention; there was not a shadow of justice in it, but it was greatly prized by the Jews. The Roman authorities at this time held a prisoner named Barabbas, who was under sentence of death. This man had claimed to be the Messiah. . . . By giving the people a choice between this man and the innocent Saviour, Pilate thought to arouse them to a sense of justice. He hoped to gain their sympathy for Jesus in opposition to the priests and rulers. So, turning to the crowd, he said with great earnestness, ‘Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?’

“Like the bellowing of wild beasts came the answer of the mob, ‘Release unto us Barabbas!’ Louder and louder swelled the cry, Barabbas! Barabbas! Barabbas! Thinking that the people had not understood his question, Pilate asked, ‘Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews?’ But they cried out again, ‘Away with this Man, and release unto us Barabbas!’ ‘What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?’ Pilate asked. Again the surging multitude roared like demons. Demons themselves, in human form, were in the crowd, and what could be expected but the answer, ‘Let Him be crucified’?”

“The people of Israel had made their choice. Pointing to Jesus they had said, ‘Not this man, but Barabbas.’ Barabbas, the robber and murderer, was the representative of Satan. Christ was the representative of God. Christ had been rejected; Barabbas had been chosen. . . . In making this choice they accepted him who from the beginning was a liar and a murderer. Satan was their leader. . . . His works they would do. . . . That people who chose Barabbas in the place of Christ were to feel the cruelty of Barabbas as long as time should last.”

Christ’s trial and crucifixion are over, but we still have to decide whose side we are on. How many times have you given in to temptation, despite your spiritual convictions? Remember that when we sin presumptuously, we crucify Jesus afresh (Heb. 6:6).

**REACT**

Are the choices you make on a daily basis reflecting Christ? How so?

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2. Ibid., pp. 738, 739.

Reco Phillips, St. Catherine, Jamaica, West Indies
Destiny can be defined as “a predetermined course of events considered as something beyond human power or control.” Many people believe that their destinies are determined at birth and cannot be changed. Others believe that they can make their own destinies. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we believe that God has a purpose for our lives before we are even born (Jer. 1:4, 5; 29:11; Rom. 8:28–30). We are a chosen people and are called to do His will.

We are a chosen people and are called to do His will.

Christ also had a divine work to perform, a destiny to fulfill. His was the task of atoning for the sins of the world, thus providing for our salvation. The Old Testament depicts atonement as being obtained through sacrifices (Exod. 29:36; Num. 15:25). As seen in Old Testament times, these sacrifices were the divinely appointed method that directed the attention of God’s people to the sacrifice His Son would make on their behalf. “The daily sacrifice was carried out in the [Old Testament] context that recognizes that death is the penalty for sin (Gen. 2:16, 17; Ezek. 18:4, 20), yet the God of the [Old Testament] graciously told His penitent people that the death of a sacrificial victim would substitute for the death of a sinner.” These sacrifices symbolized the death of Jesus, God’s Son, who freely offered His life in order to save us. His was the divine task of being the sacrificial Victim for sin. He was keenly aware of His destiny, but He also wondered whether there was a possible alternative. Thus, He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that if it were possible, to please remove from Him this sentence of death. Yet even then, not His will but the Father’s (Luke 22:42).

Yes, Jesus needed to die as the atonement for our sins. His crucifixion was the ultimate atoning sacrifice. It signified there was no longer a need for daily sacrifices. It provided for us a new life in Him, and it removed every trace of enmity between us and God so that we could be justified and sanctified.

**REACT**

1. Put yourself in Jesus’ position. Would you have been willing to die for another person’s sins? Why, or why not?

2. Can God change your destiny without your input? Is your destiny the result of your own choices, or is it from outside forces? If so, how does this collaboration work?

3. How has Jesus’ death on your behalf affected your life? How can you show how much you appreciate the sacrifice He made for you?

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Have you ever lifted weights? Have you ever woken up the following day feeling like your arms and legs were about to fall off? Jesus suffered due to bearing the weight of our sins. And because of the weight He carried for us, we no longer have to wake up sore. The following are thoughts on how to trust in His wonderful love.

**Where would we be if it were not for the Cross?**

*The disciples’ unbelief doesn’t make sense.* It would seem as though Jesus’ disciples, who had heard Him teach for three years, would have known what to expect regarding His death and resurrection. Instead, when He died, they were filled with doubt and fear.

How often have we read in the Bible about the trials and tribulations that we, as Christians, must face? Yet, when unpleasant circumstances arise in our lives, we become despondent and weary. If only the disciples had remembered the teachings of Jesus and that He had said He would rise on the third day. Then they would have responded to His death in a completely different manner. No wonder Jesus said to them, “‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’” (Luke 24:25, 26, NKJV).

How can we prevent ourselves from making the same mistakes the disciples made?

Forgiveness became available to us when Christ died on the cross. Christ said, “‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they do’” (Luke 23:34, NKJV). Repentance is our response to the forgiveness that Christ offers, and as a result of our repentance, we are reconciled to God. This, therefore, means that reconciliation to the Father is only possible through Jesus’ death. “He was wounded for our transgressions, / He was bruised for our iniquities; / The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, / And by His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5, NKJV). What a merciful God we serve! He is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

Our response should be to love Him and keep His commandments. Furthermore, we should daily seek to lead others to Christ so that they, too, can partake of the blessings He has promised to those who believe in Him.

Where would we be if it were not for the Cross? What hope would we have if Jesus had not died the death that we deserve? When we ponder these questions, our hearts can only melt within us, and we can only do that which pleases the Father in heaven.
The opportunity to claim favor and mercy is appealing and often misused. Some people continue to sin because they believe they can just repent and God will forgive them. They do not consider the sacrifice embodied in the Crucifixion and the magnitude of that sacrifice on their behalf. Due to accurate documentation of historical practices, the details of crucifixions are fairly accurate. Crucifixion is a slow and painful death.

Crucifixion is a slow and painful death.

Before a crucifixion, the criminal would be whipped. To prepare for this ordeal, he was stripped of his clothing and his hands were tied. The traditional whip (flagrum) was short and consisted of several heavy leather thongs with two small balls of lead or thorns attached at the end of each thong. The heavy and flesh-tearing whip would then be brought down with full force again and again. At first, the heavy thongs cut through the skin only, but as the blows continued they cut deeper and deeper.

Afterward, the person would be forced to carry a cross to the site of the crucifixion. Crosses would weigh well over 300 pounds. Nails were then hammered through the hands to hold up the body weight. This was aided with the help of a rope.

The length of time required to reach death could range from hours to days, depending on the method, the victim’s health, and the environment. Based on scholarly support, death included heart failure, asphyxia (suffocation), dehydration, and sometimes even animal predation. While the crucifixion was an execution, it was also a humiliation because the condemned person was so vulnerable to nature’s elements and the cruelty of any onlookers.

This should put into perspective the sacrifice Jesus made for us. He had the most perfect existence, yet He “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). Then He ultimately died the most horrible of deaths, thinking that He would forever be forsaken by His Father (Matt. 27:46). What a great Savior we have!

REACT

1. How does contemplating the details of the Crucifixion affect your perception of Jesus’ sacrifice on your behalf?

2. How does the magnitude of His sacrifice affect your view of mercy toward you?
**CONCLUDE**

Through the events that led to His sacrifice and death, Jesus experienced the severest of emotional and physical pain. No other person has ever or will ever endure such pain. The people who tortured Him and sentenced Him to death were not aware of the truth He was telling them—that He was their Messiah, their Savior. Today, the story of His sacrifice may seem almost unbelievable because such love is humanly unimaginable. However, let us not be a part of the people who seal their destinies by their disbelief in the One who loves us all supremely. Let us put our trust in Him who became the perfect Sacrifice and who was resurrected to give us life.

**CONSIDER**

- Composing a song about the sacrificial love of Jesus. Include the idea of how happy you are to live for Jesus who died for you.
- Meditating on the following three prophecies of the Old Testament that point to the sacrifice of Jesus: Psalm 22:14, 15; Isaiah 50:6; 52:14.
- Watching the video “Jesus Crucified” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Ag9TPzLLik.
- Writing a journal reflection entitled “Real Love” based on the love Jesus displayed when He chose to die for you.
- Reading *The Great Controversy and the Bible Made Plain*, chapters 9–12. These chapters portray the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.
- Drawing a timeline of the sequence of events beginning with Jesus’ trial and ending with His resurrection. Use the details given in the four Gospels.
- Giving a Bible study on Jesus’ death and resurrection to a neighbor, coworker, or friend. Base the study on one of the following sets of chapters: Matthew 26–28; Mark 14–16; Luke 22–24; or John 13, 19, 20.

**CONNECT**


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Prema Gaikwad, Silang, Philippines
If you have not yet received a copy of *CQ* for third quarter 2015, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1  **The Missionary Nature of God**


**Memory Text:** “See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples” (Isa. 55:4, NIV).

**Key Thought:** Our world is a mess, and we are the reason why. That’s because we are sinners, fallen creatures whose very nature is evil. However, as much as we like to think of ourselves as improving, the history of the past century isn’t too encouraging. And here we are, not even a quarter of the way into this century, and things don’t look that bright from here either. If the past is a sign of what the future holds, all we can expect, to quote a former British politician, is “blood, toil, tears, and sweat.” However, all is not lost. Christ died for our sins that we might have salvation and restoration. God initiated the plan of salvation in order to do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

Lesson 2  **The First Missionary**


**Memory Text:** “So also Abraham ‘believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you’ ” (Gal. 3:6–8, NIV).

**Key Thought:** It is no coincidence that three of the world’s major faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are sometimes called the “Abrahamic faiths.” That’s because all three trace their roots back to
Abraham. Though he is admired as the defining example of faithfulness, this week’s lesson will examine this faithfulness from a different angle. We will view him as a missionary called by God to go to another land and witness to the people about the Creator and Redeemer. God gave Abraham, and his family after him (Gal. 3:29), a threefold purpose: (1) to receive and guard the truth of God’s kingdom that had been lost in the earlier history of humankind; (2) to be the channel through which the Redeemer would enter history; and (3) to be a light to the nations to those who needed to know the Lord.