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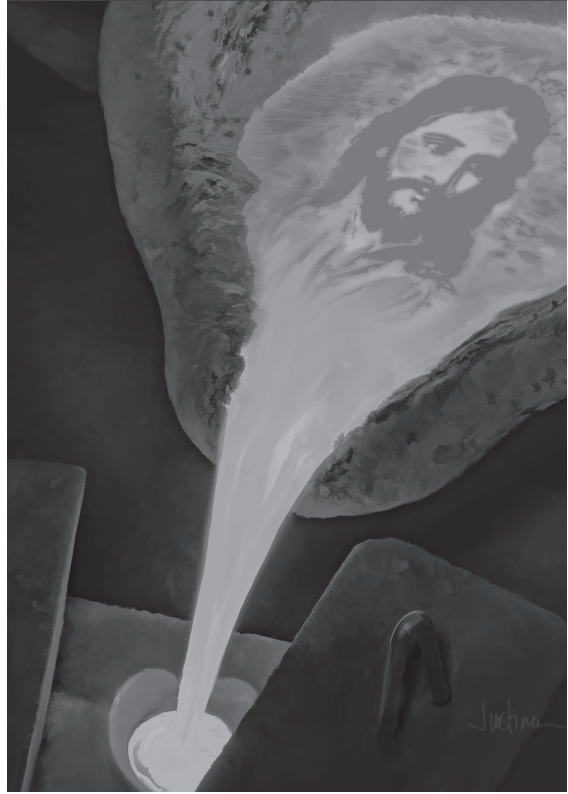
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The Crucified Creator



“All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (*John 1:3*).

All things” were made by Him, Jesus, and yet—according to Scripture—“Jesus wept” (*John 11:35*). The Creator wept? Even more so, Jesus was “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (*Isa. 53:3*). The Creator, a man of sorrows, despised and rejected? And He once cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (*Matt. 27:46*).

How could these things be? It’s because Jesus, our Creator, also was our Redeemer, and as such, He was the Crucified God—the Creator who took on humanity and in that humanity suffered through a life of privation and toil that ended with Him hung on a Roman cross.

Thus, our Creator, the One in whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (*Acts 17:28*), suffered in humanity in ways that none of us ever could. We can experience only our own griefs, our own sorrows; at the cross He bore “our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (*Isa. 53:4*)—all of them. It’s the most amazing act in all cosmic history.

With that background (that of the crucified God lifted up before us), we will for the next few months seek to better comprehend the incomprehensible—our own suffering, the sufferings of Christians, of those who have committed their lives to Christ. We make no claims to have all the answers or even many; we’re claiming

only that “God is love” (1 John 4:8) and that although these things happen, we can trust God despite them and, indeed, grow in grace through them, no matter how painful the process.

This quarter we will study the Word of God and see how other flesh and blood, though radiated in faith, nevertheless faced despair, betrayal, disappointment, loss, injustice, and abuse (sound like anything you can relate to?). How did they cope? What did they learn? What can their examples teach us?

As we look at these people, their experiences, their struggles, and their trials of faith (which might be much like our own), we must always see them contrasted against the background of the Cross. We must always remember that no matter what anyone faces, Jesus Christ, our Creator and Redeemer, went through worse.

Our God is a suffering God. Even Albert Camus, hardly a Christian, understood some of the implications of the Cross and the sufferings of God there: “The night on Golgotha is so important in the history of man only because, in its shadow, the divinity abandoned its traditional privileges and drank to the last drop, despair included, the agony of death.”—*The Rebel* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), p. 33. Or, as Ellen G. White expressed it: “The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God.”—*Education*, p. 263.

“The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 263.

Our lessons are not a theodicy, the justification of God in the face of evil. Instead, as we’ve said, they’re an attempt to help us work through the inevitable suffering we all face here in a world in which sinning is as easy as breathing. What we will try to show is that pain, suffering, and loss don’t mean that God has abandoned us; they mean only that, even as believers, we now share in the common lot of a fallen race. The difference is that through Jesus and the hope He offers, we can find meaning and purpose in what seems meaningless and purposeless and that somehow, even if we can’t imagine how, we can trust the promise that “all things work together for good to those who love God” (*Rom. 8:28, NKJV*)—the God who, though He made all things, suffered all things, too (and that’s why we love Him).

Gavin Anthony, this quarter’s principal contributor, grew up in Sri Lanka as a missionary kid. He worked as a pastor in England and was conference president in Iceland when he authored these lessons.

How to Use This Teachers Edition

“The true teacher is not content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. He constantly seeks higher attainments and better methods. His life is one of continual growth. In the work of such a teacher there is a freshness, a quickening power, that awakens and inspires his [class].”

—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 103.

To be a Sabbath School teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility. A privilege because it offers the teacher the unique opportunity to lead and guide in the study and discussion of the week’s lesson so as to enable the class to have both a personal appreciation for God’s Word and a collective experience of spiritual fellowship with class members. When the class concludes, members should leave with a sense of having tasted the goodness of God’s Word and having been strengthened by its enduring power. The responsibility of teaching demands that the teacher is fully aware of the Scripture to be studied, the flow of the lesson through the week, the interlinking of the lessons to the theme of the quarter, and the lesson’s application to life and witness.

This guide is to help teachers to fulfill their responsibility adequately. It has three segments:

- 1. Overview** introduces the lesson topic, key texts, links with the previous lesson, and the lesson’s theme. This segment deals with such questions as Why is this lesson important? What does the Bible say about this subject? What are some major themes covered in the lesson? How does this subject affect my personal life?
- 2. Commentary** is the chief segment in the Teachers Edition. It may have two or more sections, each one dealing with the theme introduced in the Overview segment. The Commentary may include several in-depth discussions that enlarge the themes outlined in the Overview. The Commentary provides an in-depth study of the themes and offers scriptural, exegetic, illustrative discussion material that leads to a better understanding of the themes. The Commentary also may have scriptural word study or exegesis appropriate to the lesson. On a participatory mode, the Commentary segment may have discussion leads, illustrations appropriate to the study, and thought questions.
- 3. Life Application** is the final segment of the Teachers Edition for each lesson. This section leads the class to discuss what was presented in the Commentary segment as it impacts Christian life. The application may involve discussion, further probing of what the lesson under study is all about, or perhaps personal testimony on how one may feel the impact of the lesson on one’s life.

Final thought: What is mentioned above is only suggestive of the many possibilities available for presenting the lesson and is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive in its scope. Teaching should not become monotonous, repetitious, or speculative. Good Sabbath School teaching should be Bible-based, Christ-centered, faith-strengthening, and fellowship-building.

The Shepherd's Crucible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Psalm 23, Rom. 12:18–21.*

Memory Text: “He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake” (*Psalm 23:3, NKJV*).

Sophie leaned back against her bedroom door and slid to the floor. Tears were welling up fast, and it was only a moment before she was sobbing. “How could he? How could he!” Sophie had just received news that was breaking her heart. Someone she thought was a friend, someone she respected and trusted, was spreading awful gossip about her in order to ruin her reputation and the work she had been doing. Grabbing her Bible off the bed, she suddenly found herself staring at some very familiar words: “He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (*Ps. 23:3, 4, NKJV*).

“Surely this can’t be!” she blurted out to herself. But the logic seemed inescapable. The Shepherd in the psalm was guiding His sheep in paths of righteousness, but these very paths also seemed to wind their way into the valley of the shadow of death. Could it be possible that even this painful betrayal by a friend, this dark valley, could be used by God to train her in righteousness?

The Week at a Glance: At what times have you grown more spiritually—through the easy times or the harder ones?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 2.

A Guide for the Journey: The Shepherd

“**The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want**” (Ps. 23:1, NKJV).

Some children were asked to draw a picture of God. Without exception, each one drew a picture with a heart somewhere in it. When asked why, they declared unanimously that God is love. It was as simple as that.

It is easy to have a good opinion of God and His purposes when everything is going well. But as we grow older and life becomes harder and more complicated, our view of God often changes. God doesn't change, of course (Heb. 13:8, James 1:17), but we do.

Because of the pastoral lifestyle of the people in Old Testament times, Psalm 23 uses the image of a shepherd to describe the way God cares for us. The symbol of a shepherd is used for God—in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It's a wonderful picture and one that is changeless, too. Before we look at Psalm 23, let's survey how different Bible writers understand the work and character of the Shepherd throughout the Bible.

What do you learn about the Shepherd from each text?

Isa. 40:11 _____

Jer. 23:3, 4 _____

Ezek. 34:12 _____

John 10:14–16 _____

1 Pet. 2:25 _____

Now turn to Psalm 23. What does the Shepherd do to care for His sheep?

Ps. 23:2 _____

Ps. 23:3 _____

Ps. 23:4 _____

Ps. 23:5 _____

Ps. 23:6 _____

What does it mean to you to know that there is Someone like this caring for you? How could you use this picture to encourage someone whose picture of God has been obscured because of his or her own struggles, whatever they are?

Locations on the Journey

“He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake” (*Ps. 23:3, NRSV*).

Imagine the “paths of righteousness” (*Ps. 23:3*) stretching out before you, way out into the distance. You cannot see the end, but you know that at the end of the journey is home, God’s house. As you focus a little closer to you, do you see where the path leads? You can see some places clearly, but other parts are totally obstructed by large or dangerous obstacles. Sometimes the path disappears over a ridge. Some parts of the path are easy to walk along; others are difficult. It was just like this as Israel traveled from Egypt to the Promised Land, and it is described the same way in this psalm.

Identify from Psalm 23 the locations that David sees the sheep passing through when following the paths of righteousness as they make their way to the house of the Lord.

But why are these paths called “paths of righteousness” or “right paths” (*NIV, NRSV*)? Here are four important reasons. First, they are the right paths because they lead to the right destination—the Shepherd’s home. Second, they are the right paths because they keep us in harmony with the right Person—the Shepherd Himself. Third, they are the right paths because they train us to be the right people—like the Shepherd. Fourth, they are the right paths because they give us the right witness—as we become the right people, we give glory to the Lord. They are “right” or “righteous” paths, whether the going is easy or hard.

It is important to realize that when God leads us, it is not simply a question of His delivering a parcel to the destination. It is much more than guidance and protection. Like the many examples all through the Bible in which God is leading His people (whether it is leading Abraham by His promises or leading Israel by the pillar of fire and cloud), when God is guiding, it is always about His training His people in righteousness.

How conscious are you that righteousness is the Shepherd’s priority for your life? How can trials change your life so that you better reflect the character of Christ?

Unexpected Detour 1: The Valley

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4, NKJV).

It would be nice if the paths of righteousness wound their way only along the grass-covered banks of cool streams. But that is not the way David paints it. Also, along these paths is the valley of the shadow of death—not a place that we are eager to visit! At certain times of the year, the wadis and ravines found in Israel are prone to flash floods that can come unexpectedly and prove overwhelming. These places also are characteristically narrow, with steep sides that block out the light. Hence, “the shadow of death” is an image for “very deep shadow,” or “deep darkness.”

Think about the times you have been in your own “valley of the shadow of death.” What has it been like? Did you have fear, even though you knew that the Shepherd was there? Which Bible texts were most precious to you at that time, and why?

How do you think the sheep ended up in the valley? Do you think the sheep went there on their own, or did the Shepherd lead the sheep that way Himself? Justify your answer.

Elisabeth Elliot writes, “A lamb who found himself in the valley of the shadow of death might conclude that he had been falsely led. It was needful for him to traverse that darkness in order to learn not to fear. The shepherd is still with him.”—*Quest for Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell Books, 1996), p. 218.

Have you ever felt that you have been “falsely led” into the valley? How did you respond to God during this time? Why do you think the Shepherd might be willing to risk being misunderstood by permitting us to enter a dark valley?

Unexpected Detour 2: The Surrounded Table

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over” (Ps. 23:5, NKJV).

Throughout our lives, we will inevitably bump into some enemies. How do you deal with them? Have you ever lain awake at night, tossing and turning, dreaming up ways to take revenge on those who are trying to hurt you or destroy your work? It can be hard for Christians to know how to handle enemies.

What types of enemies have you had in your life? How have you responded to those who have tried to hurt you or those you care for? How well did you follow Christ’s words to us in Matthew 5:44, or Paul’s in Romans 12:18–21?

In Psalm 23:5, David shows us an interesting way of dealing with enemies. He obscures their presence by looking instead at what God is doing in his behalf. And God is there preparing a banquet for him.

In David’s culture, when an honored guest came for a feast, the host would anoint his head with oil as the guest was about to enter the banqueting hall. The oil was a mixture of olive oil and perfume. Then the guest would be seated in front of far more food than one could ever eat.

How could the three items (table, oil, cup) in Psalm 23:5 help to remind us about how God provides, even when we are in the valley?

As Paul reminds us, “our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (*Eph. 6:12, NRSV*). Our enemies include those we see and those we don’t. Whether we like it or not, we are surrounded. Yet, when we are with the Shepherd, not one enemy, visible or invisible, can steal what He has provided for us.

Reflect on how the Shepherd has treated you when you have been surrounded by enemies. What can you see in these times that can enable you to give thanks even during such difficulties?

A Certain Promise for the Journey

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Ps. 23:6, NKJV).

When we are in the valley or surrounded by enemies, it is sometimes tempting to believe that we have been left alone. It does not always feel as though God has been doing much; we reason that if He had been helping, we wouldn’t be in this situation to begin with. But David obviously does not see it like this.

In spite of his trials, what two things does David say in Psalm 23:6 that he is certain of? (See also *Eph. 1:4*, *2 Pet. 1:10*, and *Heb. 11:13–15*.)

Some translations say that goodness and unfailing love (God’s covenantal commitment) will “follow” me all the days of my life. However, the original verb is much stronger, and the text should read that goodness and unfailing love will “pursue” me all the days of my life. (In fact, it’s the same Hebrew verb used in such verses as *Genesis 14:14*, *Joshua 10:19*, and *1 Samuel 25:29*, where the idea of “pursuit” is very clear.)

What picture do you get in your mind when you imagine goodness and unfailing love “pursuing” you? What do you think David meant to tell us about God by describing His care for us this way?

No matter how deep the valley or how persistent the enemies, the certainty of God’s goodness and unfailing love and the certainty of His guidance to the very end of our journey is unquestionable. If these thoughts could sustain Jesus through Calvary, we should take heart, as well.

There are times, however, when those we care for are full of questions. Like David, the best way to address these concerns is often not with a theological description of what God can do. Rather, as David shows us in *Psalm 23:6*, it is through an affirmation, the sharing of a personal conviction, of the truth about our God.

What evidence is there from your own knowledge of God that can illustrate the certainty that His goodness and unfailing love pursue us? What evidence could you add from the Bible? How could you share this with those who may be questioning the certainty of God’s care? How is the Cross the greatest example of this “pursuit”?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Missionaries in the Home,” p. 143, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4; “The Divine Shepherd,” pp. 476–484, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Those who are finally victorious will have seasons of terrible perplexity and trial in their religious life; but they must not cast away their confidence, for this is a part of their discipline in the school of Christ, and it is essential in order that all dross may be purged away. The servant of God must endure with fortitude the attacks of the enemy, his grievous taunts, and must overcome the obstacles which Satan will place in his way. . . .

“But if you keep looking up, not down at your difficulties, you will not faint in the way, you will soon see Jesus reaching His hand to help you, and you will only have to give Him your hand in simple confidence, and let Him lead you. As you become trustful, you will become hopeful. . . .

“You will find help in Christ to form a strong, symmetrical, beautiful character. Satan cannot make of none effect the light shining forth from such a character. . . . God has given us His best gift, even His only-begotten Son, to uplift, ennoble, and fit us, by putting on us His own perfection of character, for a home in His kingdom.”—Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People*, pp. 63, 64.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 To what extent have you been aware that the “terrible perplexity and trial” that comes into your life may actually be part of your “discipline in the school of Christ”?
- 2 How might our help, comfort, and encouragement to those in the valley be part of the Shepherd’s way of getting people through their crises? What things can you as a church do to be better used by the Lord to help those in need?
- 3 In class, go around and have each person talk about how goodness and mercy “pursued” them. What can you learn from one another’s experiences?
- 4 Think about the last hours of Christ’s life, as He entered into the crucible. From what you can tell, either from the Bible or Ellen G. White (*The Desire of Ages* is a great source), how was Jesus, in His humanity, able to endure? What can we take from His example for ourselves in whatever crucibles we face, as well?

Part 1: Possessed at 11

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Sweat poured down 11-year-old Eduardo's face as he raced his skateboard back and forth on the street outside his house on a hot summer morning.

"Eduardo Ferreira dos Santos!" his mother called. "Come in and take a shower before lunch."

Perspiring and panting, Eduardo headed straight for the kitchen, forgetting the shower and thinking only about lunch. Eduardo ignored a stranger seated in the living room, waiting for her nails to be painted. His mother ran her own home business, a beauty salon offering manicures and haircuts.

Before Eduardo reached the kitchen, he was stopped by his 12-year-old sister. "Sit down and catch your breath," she said.

Eduardo obediently plopped down onto a chair. Immediately, an unholy shriek escaped his lips. His body began to convulse. His mother rushed to him. A low, distorted voice spoke from Eduardo's mouth, telling his mother to hand over her son or watch him die. Eduardo's mother began to cry.

"Don't worry," the stranger told Eduardo's mother. "Your son has been chosen to be part of our group. I am a Candomblé leader."

Eduardo's mother had heard about Candomblé, a religion that arrived in Brazil on slave ships from Africa in the early 19th century. Candomblé teaches that people can be possessed by the spirits of gods. The spirits, however, aren't gods but fallen angels. Eduardo had been possessed by one of them, an evil spirit from a legion that surrounded the stranger.

After some time, the evil spirit left, and Eduardo returned to normal. He didn't remember the incident, but his mother couldn't forget, and she took him to the Candomblé temple. The temple priests welcomed Eduardo like a king.

"What an honor," one said. "You have been handpicked," said another.

Only 11, Eduardo was introduced to spiritism and devil worship. Over the next seven years, he spent much time at the temple, learning to be a priest. Evil spirits spoke to him and through him. The most important lesson, they said, was never to leave a job undone. If he started a task, he had to finish it.

As an adult, Eduardo became high priest of a temple. He earned money from people who wanted him to curse their enemies. But the evil spirits forbade him from cursing Seventh-day Adventists and other Protestant Christians. "They are protected," the spirits said, adding that any attempt to curse them would cause Eduardo to lose his powers. The spirits also banned Eduardo from communicating with Adventists and other Protestants.

Eduardo found a common-law wife, Sidilene Silva de Oliveira, and they had a son, Eduardo Junior. Life was peaceful until Junior said he wanted to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS lives.

Key Text: *Psalm 23:3*

Study Focus: *Psalm 23, Rom. 12:18–21.*

Part I: Overview

We are starting a long but all-important journey this quarter—a journey into the meaning of suffering, evil, and death. Yes, suffering can be studied as a separate phenomenon of human existence; it can be studied from a scientific or psychological perspective in such terms as *perception*, *affections*, and *consequences*. However, the biblical view on suffering is much deeper. The Bible explains the origin of suffering—an origin that exonerates God from any responsibility for bringing sin into existence. The Bible also shows how God uses suffering as a transformational framework for our own enrichment, victory, and eternal life. If we imagine life as a journey, Psalm 23 is one of the best places to start, because it talks about a path. This path takes us through the highs and lows of our lives. More important, Someone is guiding us on that path. That Someone is more than a Guide; He is a caring and loving Shepherd. The most important questions for our journey, for our highs and lows, are: Do we know the Shepherd? Do we trust Him whatever happens or wherever He may decide to take us?

Lesson Themes: This week’s lesson highlights three major themes.

1. It is very important to understand that our life is a journey that takes different turns.
2. It also is crucial to remember that this path does not wind chaotically, by chance. God is our Guide and Shepherd, and He may allow us to traverse, or actively take us through, the valleys of suffering and death. But God does not expect us to make this journey blindfolded. Rather, He gives us a sure promise that He will lead us to salvation.
3. There is no way to survive the crucibles of life if we do not trust our Shepherd to take us through them.

Part II: Commentary

The Two Paths

One biblical representation of life is of a path through a landscape. This path follows a trajectory from birth to death. There are not one but two paths. The

first is the good path, the path of justice or righteousness (*Prov. 8:20*) that leads to prosperity and life (*Ps. 1:2, 3*), for God Himself makes the path smooth (*Prov. 2:8, Isa. 26:7*). Those who walk on the good or righteous path are guided by the divine Word that serves as a lamp for their feet when life is dark (*Ps. 119:105*). Eventually, their path becomes progressively brighter as the midday (*Prov. 4:18*). Those on this path also acknowledge God in all aspects of life (*Prov. 3:5, 6*). Although this path leads to life, it is narrow, and few walk on it (*Matt. 7:14*). The second path is the bad, or the sinful, path. This is the wide path that leads to iniquity, superficial existence, and death (*Ps. 1:4, 5; Prov. 14:12; Matt. 7:13*).

The paths of our lives are visible to God; He examines them (*Prov. 5:21*) and warns us: “Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil” (*Prov. 4:14, NKJV; see also Ps. 1:1*). If someone is on the wrong, sinful path, God calls him or her to move to the good one: “‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’” (*Ezek. 33:11, NKJV*).

Two conclusions emerge from this brief Bible study:

(1) Yes, the end of each of the two paths is determined: the path of righteousness leads to life, and the path of iniquity leads to death. But being on one path or another is a matter of our choice. (2) If we decide to be on the path of righteousness, God promises that the righteous path will take us to life. Yes, the path of righteousness may be narrow; it may take us through dark mountains or valleys that may require additional light, food, persistence, patience, or strength. But the path of righteousness will end with light, happiness, and life. Through the prophet Isaiah, God promises to those who trust in Him that His path will become a highway, easy to traverse: “A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray” (*Isa. 35:8, NKJV*).

Religion as a Path

As in other Eastern worldviews, the Bible depicts the concept of “religion” as a path or journey. Enoch “walked with God three hundred years” (*Gen. 5:22, NKJV*). The prophet Micah depicts a time when many people from around the world will say: “‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD. . . . He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ . . . For all people walk each in the name of his god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever” (*Mic. 4:2, 5, NKJV*). God calls His people to walk faithfully before Him (*1 Kings 3:14, 1 Kings 9:4, Prov. 10:9, Zech. 3:7*), and when they wander off the path, God calls them back: “‘Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old

paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls' ” (*Jer. 6:16, NKJV*).

Fledgling Christianity was at first called “the Way” (*Acts 9:2; Acts 19:9, 23; Acts 22:4; Acts 24:14, 22*) or “the way to be saved’ ” (*Acts 16:17, NIV*). Apollos was “instructed in the way of the Lord” and received even more instruction while on it (*Acts 18:25, 26, NKJV*). The apostle Paul also associates religion with “walking” and insists that Christians can “no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind” (*Eph. 4:17, NKJV*). The apostle John exhorts us to “walk” in God’s commandments and in His love (*2 John 1:6*).

Jesus declared about Himself: “ ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’ ” (*John 14:6, NKJV*). The combination of “way,” “truth,” and “life” constitutes three major pillars of the Christian religion. Now, we may ask, Is the Christian religion important? Is it still relevant today? It is true that the history of Christianity is littered with apostasy, abuse, deception, and corruption; numerous times Christianity took divergent routes from Christ’s path. But this does not mean there is no path of righteousness to be followed. Jesus remains the Path, and He promises us that His path is the truth and that it will take us to life, eternal life. Jesus not only is the Path; but He also is, as He says about Himself, “ ‘the good shepherd’ ” (*John 10:11, NKJV*). What does that mean? Jesus explains: “ ‘I know My sheep, and am known by My own’ ” (*John 10:14, NKJV*), including those from other folds (*see John 10:16, NKJV*). There is more. Jesus as “ ‘the good shepherd gives His life for the sheep’ ” (*John 10:11, NKJV; see also John 10:15*) and will give “ ‘them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand’ ” (*John 10:28, NKJV*). So, following Christ on His path, the path of His righteousness, is the only and sure path to life (*Acts 4:12*). Even if it is narrow, even if it has crucibles, it is the only, and the best, path to life. Our Shepherd will take us there.

The Western concept and word “religion” comes from the Latin *re* (again) plus *ligare* (connect, tie)—to tie again, to reconnect. While it has been developed in the Western Christian environment, this term makes sense from the biblical perspective, too, and can be connected to the biblical view of religion as a “path” and “journey.” When humanity took the path to perdition, we lost the connection with God. Religion is that process through which humans and God are reconnected. But how do we reconnect with God? If religion is a “path” or “journey,” it is not an atemporal, ahistorical phenomenon, as in the pagan mythological or philosophical religions. Rather, in the biblical view, religion (or the reconnection of humanity with divinity) is a process in time and space. It is a personal and historical journey, both for God and for us. God comes to us and meets

us where we are, in history. Another difference between pagan and biblical religions is that in pagan religions people must clear a path for themselves, to find the way to the world of the gods, to earn their favors, to reconnect to them, or to steal their secrets or the secret to eternal life. In the biblical religion, on the contrary, it is God Himself who clears the path to us. He comes to us, seeking to save us, to take us back to the path of life, to take us back to Himself. In fact, He Himself becomes the Path and the Guide and the Shepherd. He walks with us through that valley, guiding us on that path of reconnecting to God. This is God's religion, the religion of grace!

Part III: Life Application

- 1. Examine the path of your life. What path are you on? What can you do to ensure you are on the path of righteousness that will lead you to eternal life?**

- 2. Have you encountered other people on the same path as yours? Have you encountered people on a path leading the opposite way? What can you do to help others to choose the path of, and to, Jesus?**

3. We can trust our Shepherd to take us through the crucibles of life because, before permitting us to pass through crucibles, the Shepherd Himself went through that crucible. But there is an essential difference between His crucible and ours. Many of our crucibles are caused by ourselves or other humans, or by the consequences of sin in general. The Shepherd's crucible was caused by us, and He took it upon Himself sacrificially, substitutionally, and redemptively. How does this understanding help you go through suffering?

4. Identify two crucibles you went through recently. Identify God's leading and care for you in those experiences.

The Crucibles That Come



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Pet. 4:12–19, 1 Pet. 5:8–11, Rom. 1:21–32, Jer. 9:7–16, 2 Cor. 12:7–10.*

Memory Text: “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (*1 Peter 4:12, 13, NKJV*).

In chemistry labs one often places various materials into a small container and heats them to extreme temperatures. As the container becomes hotter, the materials either melt, fizzle, spit, or burn brightly, depending upon what they are made of. The container is called a crucible.

A crucible is defined in the dictionary as (1) a vessel used for melting a substance that requires a high degree of heat, (2) a severe test, or (3) a place or situation in which concentrated forces interact to cause or influence change or development.

These definitions also give us a helpful insight into what happens in our spiritual lives. This week we’ll highlight some reasons we may suddenly find ourselves under pressure and experiencing tests in places in which circumstances cause us to change, develop, and grow in character. This will help to give us an awareness of what God is doing in our lives so that when we enter a crucible, we will have an idea of how to respond.

The Week at a Glance: What are the causes of the difficult times that we experience through our lives?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 9.

Surprises

“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you” (1 Pet. 4:12, *NKJV*).

Surprises, painful surprises, can come in many ways. A car veering across the road into your path. A sudden notification that you’re losing your job. A medical test that gives you unexpected bad news. Betrayal by someone you loved and who you thought loved you. As bad as the pain can be, it’s always made worse by the element of surprise.

This week we will look at a few specific types of painful situations or crucibles that should not take us by surprise.

To begin, let’s go back to the text for today in Peter. The Greek word for “surprised” in 1 Peter 4:12 means to be “alien” or “foreign.” Peter is urging his readers not to fall into the trap of believing that fiery ordeals and trials are alien to Christian experience. Rather, they are to be considered normal—they can and should be expected.

The word used for “fiery ordeal” (*NIV, NRSV*) or “fiery trial” (*NKJV*) comes from another Greek word, and it means “a burning.” In other places it is translated “furnace.” This experience of suffering for our faith could therefore be considered a “smelting process,” the process of the crucible.

Read 1 Peter 4:12–19. What is Peter’s message?

Many of us are surprised about suffering because we often have an oversimplified view of the Christian life. We know there are two sides—God, who is good; and Satan, who is bad. But often, we then automatically put everything that feels good in the box with God and everything that feels bad in the box with Satan. But life is not so simple. We cannot use our feelings to decide what is in God’s box or Satan’s box. Sometimes walking with God can be challenging and hard. And following Satan can appear to bring great rewards. Job, who is righteous yet suffering, illustrates this when he asked God, “ ‘Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?’ ” (*Job 21:7, NIV*).

Peter was referring to trials that are the consequence of standing up for Christ. But there also are other reasons that trials come. How could 1 Peter 4:12–19 help you to explain tactfully to a friend why he or she should not be surprised at the painful trials they might face?

Crucibles of Satan

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8, NKJV).

Read the above text. What’s the message there for us? Ask yourself, “How seriously do I take these words?” What things do you do in your life that show whether you take them seriously?

Have you ever watched a hungry lion? It’s awesome because you know it can catch and eat just about anything it wants. Peter says that Satan is prowling around in the same way. When we look around, we can see the consequences of his desire to kill. Death, suffering, and the twisting and perverting of morals and values are everywhere. We cannot escape seeing the work of Satan.

Read 1 Peter 5:8–11. How should Christians react to Satan’s prowling?

What does God promise to do for those who are suffering? 1 Pet. 5:10.

Peter writes these words in the context of responding to Satan’s attacks on Christian faith. But as we have mentioned, Satan is at work in many different ways. And although we must be aware of the reality and the power of our enemy, we must never be discouraged, for we must always remember that Jesus has beaten Satan; that Satan is a defeated foe; and that as long as we stay connected with Jesus, as long as we cling to Him in faith, we can never be defeated either. Because of the cross, Christ’s victory is our victory.

Think about the other ways that Satan causes pain. How could reading 1 Peter 5:8–11 help us to deal with the anguish that we experience because of our fate in living in a sinful world in which Satan wreaks havoc?

Crucibles of Sin

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18, NKJV).

Everything we do has a consequence. If you stand in the hot sun with ice cream, it will certainly melt. Cause and effect always go together. And no matter how desperately we may want things to be different, it is the same with sin. It always reaps consequences. It is not that God sits in heaven wondering what terrible things He can do to people who sin; no, sin itself comes with its own built-in consequences.

The problem is that many times we think that we can somehow outwit God and sin without experiencing the consequences. It never happens. Paul makes it very clear that sinning has consequences, not only for eternity but also painful and distressing consequences today.

In Romans 1:21–32, Paul describes the process when people fall into sin and the consequences of those sins. Read these verses prayerfully and carefully, and summarize the essence of what Paul is saying, focusing specifically on the stages of sin and its consequences.

A couple of verses earlier Paul describes these consequences as the “wrath of God” (Rom. 1:18). God’s wrath in this passage is simply God calling human beings to reap what they sow. Even for Christians, God does not always intervene immediately to remove the pain that results from our own actions. Many times He allows us to experience the consequences of our actions in order for us to understand how deeply damaging and offensive our sin is.

We have been considering the consequences of breaking God’s moral laws. But what about breaking God’s health laws? Our bodies are God’s home. If we abuse our bodies by failing to eat healthfully or to exercise, or if we regularly overwork, this also is sin against God. And this has consequences that can create the conditions of a crucible.

In your own life, how have you reaped the immediate consequences of your own sins? What lessons have you learned? What changes must you make in order not to go through something similar again?

Crucibles of Purification

“Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Behold, I will refine them and try them; for how shall I deal with the daughter of My people?’ ” (Jer. 9:7, NKJV).

“If the Spirit of God brings to your mind a word of the Lord that hurts you, you can be sure that there is something in you that He wants to hurt to the point of its death.”—Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 271.

How do you understand the quote and text above? What has been your own experience with the pains involved in the purification process?

Read Jeremiah 9:7–16. God says that He will “refine and test” (NRSV), or “melt” (KJV), Judah and Jerusalem (Jer. 9:7, NIV). What two reasons does God give for this? (Jer. 9:13, 14). How will the refining happen? (Jer. 9:15, 16).

God’s refining and testing involved drastic action. There are perhaps three reasons why refining and testing may feel like a crucible. First, we experience pain as God allows circumstances to bring our sin to our attention. A little earlier, Jeremiah unhappily writes, “ ‘The bellows blow fiercely to burn away the lead with fire, but the refining goes on in vain; the wicked are not purged out’ ” (Jer. 6:29, NIV). Thus, sometimes drastic action is needed in order to get our attention. Second, we experience anguish as we feel sorrow for the sin we now see clearly. Third, we experience frustration as we try to live differently. It can be quite uncomfortable and difficult to keep choosing to give up the things that have been so much a part of us.

Think about the sins that you struggle with. If God were going to refine and test you today, how might He do it? What action could you take now to deal with this before God would need to take drastic steps with you, as He did with Israel?

Crucibles of Maturity

“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure” (2 Cor. 12:7, NKJV).

There is a big difference between cutting down and pruning. We cut down plants that we don’t want anymore; we prune plants that we want to develop into greater fruitfulness. Both processes, however, do involve a sharp knife. Indeed, pruning requires cutting parts off the plant that might seem to a novice gardener like destroying it. In a spiritual context, Bruce Wilkinson writes, “Are you praying for God’s superabundant blessings and pleading that He will make you more like His Son?

“If your answer is yes, then you are asking for the shears.”—*Secrets of the Vine* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001), p. 60.

People have wondered what Paul actually meant by a “thorn in my flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7, NIV). Ideas range from Paul being under constant attacks from enemies to having a speech difficulty. It seems that this was actually a problem with his eyesight (see Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1107). Amazingly, Paul believed that his “thorn” was “given me.”

What do you think Paul meant by “given me”? Who gave it to him? How was God able to use it for Paul’s benefit?

Notice that Paul’s “thorn” had a definite purpose: “to keep me from becoming conceited” (2 Cor. 12:7, NIV). It was not because of any specific sin he had committed but to prevent him from sinning in the future. Paul recognized that by nature he had a weakness to sin and that this “thorn” could guard against it.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7–10. How does Paul deal with his “thorn”? Do you think that Paul’s weakness had any other spiritual benefits for him? How can the way that Paul responds help you to deal with “thorns” that you may have to carry?

In what ways might God’s ideas for your spiritual development be very different from your own? Think about areas in your life in which you need to become more fruitful in righteousness. What spiritual qualities would you like to ask God to develop in you through His “pruning”?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Effectual Prayer,” in *Signs of the Times*, November 18, 1903; Ellen G. White Comments, p. 1182, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4; “God Permits Trial and Affliction to Purify Me,” p. 92, in *My Life Today*.

“He who reads the hearts of men knows their characters better than they themselves know them. He sees that some have powers and susceptibilities which, rightly directed, might be used in the advancement of His work. In His providence He brings these persons into different positions and varied circumstances that they may discover in their character the defects which have been concealed from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to correct these defects, and to fit themselves for His service. Often He permits the fires of affliction to assail them that they may be purified.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 471.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 It really can be hard while we are reaping the consequences of our sin. “Will I ever be able to be made right with God again?” we ask. What promises does God make that can encourage us to persevere through such times and not give up? (See what Paul writes later in Romans 5:1–11.) What can you say to someone who is asking this very question?
- 2 What does Ellen G. White mean by “His providence”? How does this work? How do you know when something happens by God’s providence? What acts of God’s “providence” have led to trials in your own life? As a class, discuss what you’ve learned at this time. How might you help someone else who is wondering whether some event is indeed “His providence”?
- 3 If you know someone who is going through a crucible experience right now, does it matter, or should it matter, what brought it on? That is, how should you react to this person and his or her suffering, regardless of what caused it?
- 4 A Christian young man living in South America went through a bitter trial. After it was over, he moved to Europe and later commented to someone, “I left my corpse in South America.” What does that mean? Why must we all, in a sense, leave our corpse somewhere? What role do trials have in that process?
- 5 As a class, plan an outing to a hospital or somewhere where you could be of help, comfort, and cheer to those who, for whatever reason, are in a crucible.

Part 2: Bullied at School

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Mother was worried about Junior. The usually cheerful 15-year-old boy had become uptight and hostile in their home in Manaus, Brazil. Against her wishes, he had signed up to learn Capoeira, an African-Brazilian martial art.

“Eduardo, I don’t like Junior learning martial arts,” she told her husband.

“It’s no problem for me to take him,” he replied. “The classes are just up the street from the Candomblé temple where I work.”

“That also bothers me,” Mother said. “I didn’t know whether Capoeira and Candomblé are somehow related, but I don’t want my son doing either.”

Father scowled. “Junior told me that some boys are bullying him at school,” he said. “That’s why he decided to take martial arts.”

The next day, as Mother waited at school to take Junior home, she poured out her heart to Dilma Araujos dos Santos, the mother of one of Junior’s classmates, Clifferson. “My son doesn’t have any good friends,” she said.

A few days later, Clifferson invited Junior to a video gamers club at his house. Mother, pleased that Junior had found a friend, allowed him to go.

At Clifferson’s house, Junior found several boys playing a sports video game. After a few minutes, Clifferson turned off the game and invited the boys to sing about Jesus. Then the boys opened Bibles and talked about what Jesus meant to them. “Are you Christians?” Junior asked. “Yes,” Clifferson said. “At our club, we play sports games and talk about Jesus.”

Junior liked his new friends; he didn’t miss any meetings after that.

One day, Clifferson’s mother invited Junior to go to church with the family. Junior was happy to spend more time with Clifferson, and stopped going to martial arts classes. He didn’t tell Mother he was visiting Alpha Seventh-day Adventist Community Church. He only said he was going out.

Mother soon noticed that Junior was eager to leave the house on Saturday, and she asked what he was doing. He showed her the YouTube channel where the church live-streamed its Sabbath services. Mother began to watch.

One Sabbath, Junior told Mother that a man had given his heart to Jesus and been baptized at the church. “I want to be baptized,” he said.

A few Sabbaths later, Mother accompanied Junior to church. She listened as the Sabbath School teacher taught from the adult Bible study guide. Someone gave her a Bible, and she looked up the verses the teacher read from Revelation. A chill ran down her spine when she read, “ ‘But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death’ ” (*Rev. 21:8, NKJV*).

That’s the destiny of my husband, Mother thought. He will perish in the lake of fire. She began to pray for Father.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) and his family live.

Key Text: *1 Peter 4:12, 13*

Study Focus: *Jer. 9:7–16, Rom. 1:21–32, 2 Cor. 12:7–12, 1 Pet. 4:12–19, 1 Pet. 5:8–11.*

Part I: Overview

Trials of all types battered Peter in successive waves throughout his life. He battled the literal foaming waves of the lake during the cold nights that he spent fishing for his family. He battled the waves of bitter remorse when he betrayed his Lord. He battled the waves of uncertainty in the prison after preaching the gospel. He battled the waves of frustration when working to establish the fledgling Christian church. He became, as it were, a student in the school of suffering, tracing his trials from cause to effect, thereby becoming enabled to grow through his experiences. But he especially learned to understand the role that suffering had both in God's work of salvation and in his own personal hope to do, and become, what God wanted for him. Because Peter became an expert in suffering and trials, he is best suited to teach us this week. This week's lesson highlights several types of crucibles: crucibles generated by Satan, crucibles generated by our sin, crucibles used by God to purify us and form our character, and crucibles of maturity. Each of these crucibles has its source (Satan, us, or God) and criteria for management and response.

Lesson Themes: This week's lesson highlights two major themes.

1. Suffering is a present reality in our fallen world and, as Christians, we must learn to deal with suffering and to learn from it.
2. As stewards of our own spirituality, we need to learn to distinguish between different types of trials and suffering. This will help us to understand how to deal with crises in our lives and to draw the best lessons.

Part II: Commentary

Suffering With Christ

First Peter 4:12, 13 intrigues us with two major themes. First, what does Peter mean by telling us that we should not be surprised when trials hit our lives? Evil and sin are intruders in God's created order. They are not natural to biological life or to moral life, as originally created by God. We must not permit ourselves to become accustomed to them or accept them

as part of God's original world. Evil and sin will not endure. The time is coming when God will put an end to them.

What Peter is communicating here is that it is in a post-Fall world that sin, evil, suffering, and death are ubiquitous. To survive in this world, we must accept that this new reality, albeit temporary, is present. Although we should not live in a constant angst, fearing that evil is going to befall us any moment, we do need to be ready for what may happen as a consequence of evil.

In this context, being ready means: (1) being aware of the panorama of the great controversy; (2) being continually connected to God in prayer and through His revelation of Himself; and (3) having spiritual friends who will be ready to wisely, compassionately, and biblically console and support us in times of suffering.

Second, what does Peter mean by telling us to rejoice as we participate in the suffering of Christ? Peter highlights the suffering of Christ several times in his first epistle. In chapter 1, the entire event of the first coming of Christ, as predicted by the Holy Spirit, is described as the "sufferings of Christ" (*1 Pet. 1:11, NKJV*). In chapter 2, Peter explains that Jesus suffered unjustly because He is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 (*1 Pet. 2:21–25*). In chapter 3, Peter emphasizes that Jesus "suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God" (*1 Pet. 3:18, NRSV*). In chapter 4, Peter adds that "Christ suffered in his body" (*1 Pet. 4:1, NIV*), and in chapter 5, he confirms that he himself witnessed "Christ's sufferings" (*1 Pet. 5:1, NIV*).

Peter also relates all our suffering to Christ's suffering.

In chapter 1, Peter tells Christians that they need to rejoice in Christ's salvation, even though "for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials" (*1 Pet. 1:6, NIV*). This suffering, however, will only "result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (*1 Pet. 1:7, NIV*).

In chapter 2, Peter explains that to suffer unjustly is commendable (*1 Pet. 2:19, 20*), because Jesus, too, suffered unjustly (*1 Pet. 2:21–25*).

In chapter 3, he continues with the same theme of unjust suffering: "If you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed," for "it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil" (*1 Pet. 3:14, 17, NIV*). This is so because, humanly speaking, there was nothing just about Jesus, the righteous, dying for the unrighteous; but this very act resulted in good and salvation for the sinners, for God, and for the universe. The same holds true for us in regard to our suffering as Christians; there is nothing just about our suffering persecution for being Christians, but such suffering can be used for good, because it will lead to character transformation for us and to salvation for many other people, while bringing glory to God (*1 Pet. 1:6, 7*).

In chapter 4, Peter explains the good that suffering does in us and for us: suffering helps us discipline both our bodies and our desires (*1 Pet. 4:1, 2*). But such moral discipline is not simply a natural result of the suffering caused by our various wrongdoings (*1 Pet. 4:15*). Our suffering is effective because we “share the sufferings of Christ” (*1 Pet. 4:13, NASB*), we suffer “as a Christian” bearing God’s name (*1 Pet. 4:16, NASB*), and according to God’s will (*1 Pet. 4:19*).

In chapter 5, Peter reminds us that we are not alone, for many other Christian brothers and sisters throughout the world are “undergoing the same kind of sufferings” (*1 Pet. 5:9, NIV*). We have the assurance that, in the perspective of God’s grace and salvation, this suffering is just for “a little while” (*1 Pet. 5:10, NIV*).

The Enlightenment’s Devil (*1 Pet. 5:8–11*)

The figure of the devil was real for Christians throughout history. The Protestant Reformers viewed his existence as real. However, during and after the Enlightenment, philosophers and theologians built a worldview that rejected the existence of persons or phenomena that operated beyond the known world. This worldview conditioned liberal Christianity, today, to deny the existence of the devil as a real person. Instead, this group declares that the devil is merely a mythical representation of the principle of evil. Consequently, evil is now regarded as the result of ignorance or is a product of a long, violent evolutionary process from which the human race emerged. Thus, evil is the result of a material, genetic, and social determinism. Even if some Christians would admit the existence of the devil, they would find it difficult to believe he is indeed as wicked and powerful as depicted in the Bible.

As Bible-believing Christians, however, we regard the existence of the devil as real. For Jesus, Satan was a real being, not a symbol of some inner dark aspects of His mind (*see, for instance, Matt. 4:1–11*). Paul, too, saw the Christian as engaged in a fight that is waged against “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (*Eph. 6:12, NIV*). And here, in our lesson, Peter reminds us to be on our guard against the attacks of the devil (*1 Pet. 5:8*). However, though he is real, the Christian does not focus on the devil. Yes, we must be aware of his existence and careful not to fall for his deceptions, but the center, the essence, and the joy of our life is Christ and His salvation.

Ellen G. White: The Role of Suffering After the Fall

“And the life of toil and care which was henceforth to be man’s lot was appointed in love. It was a discipline rendered needful by his sin, to place a check upon the indulgence of appetite and passion, to develop habits of self-control. It was

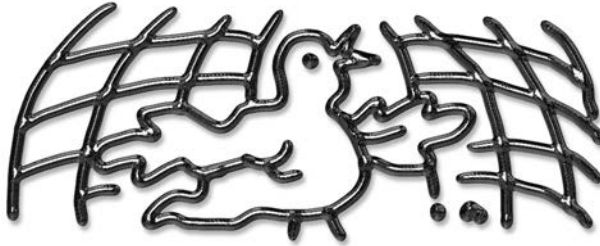
a part of God's great plan for man's recovery from the ruin and degradation of sin."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 60.

Part III: Life Application

1. How can you live focused on Christ knowing that Satan is real and active in the world?

2. While we may no longer be surprised that there is suffering in the world, it always comes as a surprise when trials strike us personally. Being prepared to encounter suffering in personal life and respond to it in a Christian manner is essential. Christians are aware of various types of crucibles and take them seriously. They want to learn the right thing from them. Many times, the Christian wants to be assured that he or she is not responsible for some personal crisis in life. In the case of illness, a Christian would feel much better knowing that he or she is not responsible for the cause of his or her disease, right? Such an assurance makes a world of difference to the Christian undergoing the trial. At the same time, we must recognize that if a disease comes because of one's own lifestyle, the experience can be rightly viewed as a crucible of sin and needs to be treated as such (*1 Peter 4*). What types of crucibles have you gone through recently? What have you learned? How have you overcome?

The Birdcage



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exodus 14, Exod. 15:22–27, Exod. 17:1–7, Luke 4:1–13, 1 Pet. 1:6–9, Proverbs 3.*

Memory Text: “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials” (*1 Peter 1:6, NKJV*).

In the full light of day, and in hearing of the music of other voices, the caged bird will not sing the song that his master seeks to teach him. He learns a snatch of this, a trill of that, but never a separate and entire melody. But the master covers the cage, and places it where the bird will listen to the one song he is to sing. In the dark, he tries and tries again to sing that song until it is learned, and he breaks forth in perfect melody. Then the bird is brought forth, and ever after he can sing that song in the light. Thus God deals with His children. He has a song to teach us, and when we have learned it amid the shadows of affliction we can sing it ever afterward.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 472.

Notice that the one who carries the bird into the darkness is the master himself.

It is easy to understand that Satan causes pain, but would God Himself actively take a part in guiding us into crucibles where we experience confusion or hurt?

The Week at a Glance: What examples can you think of in the Bible in which God Himself leads people into experiences that He knows will include suffering? What do you think were the new songs He wanted them to sing?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 16.

To the Promised Land via a Dead End

“And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD” (*Exod. 14:10, NKJV*).

Have you ever been set up, led into a trap or to a dead end? Sometimes it can be nice, like walking unexpectedly into a room of waiting friends who all shout “Surprise! Happy birthday!” At other times it can be quite a shock, even a very unpleasant one. It may have been bullies when you were at school or a work colleague who unexpectedly tried to make you look bad.

From the day the Israelites left Egypt to the day they reached the Promised Land, “the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night” (*Exod. 13:21, NIV*). Every part of their journey was led by God Himself. But look at where He led them first: to a place where the sea was before them, mountains were on either side, and Pharaoh’s army was within eyesight right behind!

Read Exodus 14. Why did God bring the Israelites to a place where He knew they would be terrified?

Following “the pillar” doesn’t assure us of constant happiness. It also can be a hard experience, because training in righteousness takes us to places that test our hearts, which are so naturally deceitful (*Jer. 17:9*). During these difficulties, the key to knowing when we are truly following God is not necessarily the absence of trials or pain but, rather, an openness to God’s instruction and a continual submission of our minds and hearts to His leading.

What lesson did the Israelites learn from this experience? *Exod. 14:31*.

Why is trusting God sometimes so hard, even though we may know many of the wonderful promises He has for us? Recount a difficult situation you believe the Lord led you into in order to teach you to “believe” in and to “fear” Him.

Bitter Waters

“The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink” (Exod. 17:1, NIV).

Perhaps we might not get from God everything we want, but couldn’t we expect to get all that we need? Not what we think we need but what we truly need?

There was one thing the Israelites certainly needed, and that was water. Just after God in the cloud led the Israelites through the Red Sea, they followed Him through the hot, waterless desert for three days. Particularly in the desert, where finding water is so critical, their desperation is understandable. When would they get the water they needed?

So, where does God lead them? The pillar goes to Marah, where, at last, there is water. They must have been excited. But when they tasted the water, they immediately spat it out because it was bitter. “So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, ‘What are we to drink?’ ” (Exod. 15:24, NIV).

Then, a few days later, God does it again. This time, however, the pillar actually stops where there is no water at all (Exod. 17:1).

Read Exodus 15:22–27 and Exodus 17:1–7. What did God reveal to Israel about Himself at Marah and at Rephidim? What lessons should they have learned?

In Rephidim, what question did the children of Israel ask? Exod. 17:7. Have you ever asked the same question? If so, why? How did you feel, and what lessons did you learn after you had it answered? How many times do we need to get it answered before we stop asking it altogether?

The Great Controversy in the Desert

“Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil” (Luke 4:1, 2, NKJV).

Read Luke 4:1–13. What lessons can you learn from this account about how to overcome temptation and not give in to sin?

Temptations can be so difficult because they appeal to things we really desire, and they always seem to come at our weakest moments.

Luke 4 is the beginning of the story of Jesus’ temptation by Satan, and it brings some difficult issues to our attention. At first glance, it appears that the Holy Spirit is leading Jesus into temptation. However, God never tempts us (*James 1:13*). Rather, as we have been seeing, God does lead us to crucibles of testing. What is striking in Luke 4 is that the Holy Spirit can lead us to times of testing that involve being exposed to Satan’s fierce temptations. At such times, when we feel these temptations so strongly, we may misunderstand and think we have not been following God correctly. But this is not necessarily true. “Often when placed in a trying situation we doubt that the Spirit of God has been leading us. But it was the Spirit’s leading that brought Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. When God brings us into trial, He has a purpose to accomplish for our good. Jesus did not presume on God’s promises by going unbidden into temptation, neither did He give up to despondency when temptation came upon Him. Nor should we.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 126, 129.

Sometimes, when in the crucible, we get burned rather than purified. It is therefore very comforting to know that when we crumple under temptation, we can hope again because Jesus stood firm. The good news is that because Jesus is our Sin Bearer, because He paid the penalty for our failure to endure that temptation (whatever it was), because He went through a crucible worse than any of us will ever face, we are not cast off or forsaken by God. There is hope, even for the “chief” of sinners (*1 Tim. 1:15*).

What temptations are you facing now? Spend some time in prayer, asking the Lord to teach you how to apply the lessons from Jesus’ example to your own life. Remember, you don’t have to succumb to temptation, ever! Remember, too, that if you do succumb, you have a Savior.

An Enduring Legacy

Read 1 Peter 1:6, 7. What is Peter saying?

Peter was writing to people who were battling through difficulties and often felt very alone. He was writing “to God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (1 Pet. 1:1, NIV). This is the area we know today as western Turkey. A few verses later, Peter says that he knows that they are experiencing “grief in all kinds of trials” (1 Pet. 1:6, NIV).

What does Peter mean by saying that they are “exiles” and “scattered”? How might that add to their trials?

Being a Christian during those times was a new thing; believers were small in number and in various places where they were a decided minority who were often misunderstood at best, persecuted at worst. Peter assures them, however, that these trials are not random or chaotic (1 Pet. 1:6, 7). Genuine faith is the goal of those who persevere through “all kinds of trials.”

Read 1 Peter 1:6–9. What ultimate assurance does Peter seek to give these people amid their trials? What does this hope mean for us, too?

Whatever their trials, whatever they suffer, how can it be compared to the eternity that awaits them when Christ returns? Peter’s words to them are God’s words to us, regardless of whatever we are facing. However difficult or painful our trials, we must never lose sight of the ultimate end, eternal life in a new heaven and new earth, without pain, suffering, or death. With such a promise before us, a promise guaranteed us through the death of Jesus, how important that we not lose faith, but instead, amid our trials, ask the Lord to purge us of everything and anything that stands in the way of our faith.

Trial by Fire

There was a young man whom we'll call Alex. He had come out of a very troubled youth: drugs, violence, even some time in jail. But then, through the kindness of a local church member (whom Alex had stolen from), Alex learned about God and gave his heart to Jesus. Though he still had his problems and struggles, and though elements of his past still lingered, Alex was a new person in Jesus. He loved God and sought to express that love by obeying His commandments (*1 John 5:1, 2*). At one point, Alex felt impressed that he should be a minister. Everything pointed to it. He was answering God's call, no doubt about it.

At college things went well at first. Then one thing after another went awry, and his life began coming apart. His source of money started to dry up; a close friend turned against him, making accusations about him that were false but that damaged his reputation. Next, he kept on getting sick; no one knew what it was, but it impacted his studies to the point where he was afraid that he was going to have to drop out of school completely. On top of it all, he was fighting fierce temptations with drugs, which were readily available in the local community. At one point he even fell in that area. Alex couldn't understand why all this was happening, especially because he was sure that the Lord had led him to this school to begin with. *Was Alex wrong about that? If so, was his whole experience with God a huge mistake?* Even the most basic elements of his faith were coming under doubt.

Imagine that, amid this crisis, Alex comes to you and asks for advice. What would you say? What experiences of your own have you had that could help someone like him? What Bible texts would you use? How helpful might the following texts be in such a situation? *Proverbs 3, Jer. 29:13, Rom. 8:28, 2 Cor. 12:9, Heb. 13:5.*

Almost all who follow the Lord have had crises during which they've been tempted to doubt the Lord's leading. The important thing in such situations is to cling to the promises, recount God's leading in the past, and pray for faith and endurance. The Lord will never give up on us. The question for us is: How do we not succumb to the temptation to give up on Him?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Exodus,” pp. 281–290; “From the Red Sea to Sinai,” pp. 291–302, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Temptation,” pp. 114–123, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“But of old the Lord led his people to Rephidim, and he may choose to lead us there also, to test our loyalty. He does not always bring us to pleasant places. If he did, in our self-sufficiency we should forget that he is our helper. He longs to manifest himself to us, and to reveal the abundant supplies at our disposal, and he permits trial and disappointment to come to us that we may realize our helplessness, and learn to call upon him for aid. He can cause cooling streams to flow from the flinty rock. We shall never know, until we are face to face with God, when we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known, how many burdens he has borne for us, and how many burdens he would have been glad to bear, if, with childlike faith, we had brought them to him.”—Ellen G. White, “Rephidim,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 7, 1903.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 We often talk of temptation as an individual thing, which, of course, it is. At the same time, are there any corporate temptations, things that we as a church or a local church family might have to guard against as a group? If so, what?
- 2 Ask those who are willing to talk about any of the “unpleasant places” that they have been brought to. Why were these unpleasant? If they had to revisit those experiences today, would they view them any differently?
- 3 We all understand the principle behind God allowing us to be purified and refined by trials. How, though, do we understand the situation in which trials appear to have no value—for instance, someone is killed instantly in a car wreck? As a class, seek to work through possible answers.
- 4 As a class, take time together to pray for each other, that each might be strengthened to endure trials and stay faithful.
- 5 Does your class know of anyone who, having faced trials, lost the way? If so, as a class what could you do in a very tangible way to help lead that person back?

Part 3: Abandoned by Father

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Father always seemed to be angry after Mother told him that she was going to the Adventist Church. Every little thing irritated him. One night, he exploded with rage when Mother arrived home late from a church event.

The next morning, Mother arrived at the dental clinic, where she worked as a secretary, in Manaus, Brazil, and learned that she no longer had a job. The clinic had closed. All the way home, she wondered how to tell Father. But he wasn't at home, and he didn't answer phone calls. Then Mother noticed that his clothes were missing from the closet. He had left home.

Mother didn't say a word to their son, Junior. The boy, busy at school and the gamers club, only noticed that Father was gone three days later when he received a WhatsApp video message on his cell phone. Father said Adventism and his faith, Candomblé, could not coexist in the same house.

Mother also received a WhatsApp message. Father said he had moved to the Candomblé temple, where he worshiped evil spirits as a high priest.

"I'm never going to give up my religion," he said. "You have to accept it."

Mother had never heard about the great controversy between Christ and Satan. But she was worried, and she met with Ricardo Coelho, pastor of Alpha Seventh-day Adventist Community Church. Weeping, she confided that Father worked as a Candomblé high priest and had deserted the family.

Pastor Ricardo comforted Mother and, opening his Bible, said kindly, "Let me share some advice with you." In 1 Corinthians 7:3, he read, "Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband" (NKJV). In Proverbs 14:1, he read, "The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands" (NKJV). Looking at Mother, he said, "Be a good wife to your husband, Eduardo, and pray for him."

The Bible verses encouraged Mother, and she decided to pray even more.

Weeks passed, and Mother ran out of money. She found strength in the Bible and prayed the promise of Joshua 1:9, which says, "Be strong and of good courage . . . for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (NKJV).

When Grandmother, Father's mother, learned that the family was low on food, she called Father, and he began to deliver groceries.

One day, Grandmother told Mother that spirits had summoned her and Junior to the temple. When the pair arrived, Father was possessed by an evil spirit who spoke through him in a low, distorted voice. The spirit said Father could go back home but threatened to kill him if Mother or Junior tried to teach him about their religion or invited him to church.

Father returned home that day. He had been gone for two months. Mother prayed even more.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) and his family live.

Key Text: *1 Peter 1:6*

Study Focus: *Exodus 14, Exod. 15:22–27, Exod. 17:1–7, Proverbs 3, Luke 4:1–13, 1 Pet. 1:6–9.*

Part I: Overview

Last week, we studied various types of crucibles. This week’s lesson focuses more on crucibles of maturity. While it is true that many of our troubles are created by us, God is ultimately the Sovereign of the entire universe and the history of nations, as well as our individual lives. God not only wants us to grow as individuals but also as families, as communities, and as nations. In the context of our fallenness, growth takes on additional dimensions.

Yes, God saves us by His grace. Yes, He justifies us by the substitutional sacrifice of Jesus Christ and by our acceptance of that sacrifice by faith. But God’s grace is not a cheap fix, stopping at the declarative level. His grace is educational and transformative. Life and salvation are not theoretical experiences. We grow only when we actually experience His unconditional love for us, when we commit to loving Him back unreservedly, and to living with Him and permitting Him to live in us. And, as both we and God are involved in a cosmic conflict, we commit to take God’s side and to promote His kingdom in response to His rescuing us from the kingdom of sin and Satan. This way, God becomes the Lord of hosts, the One leading us in this experience, the One leading us to grow, to be transformed.

Lesson Themes: This week’s lesson highlights two themes.

1. God leads us through the struggle of this fallen world. While this comforts us, it also gives us strength and confidence in God.
2. It is only when God leads us through the battles of our life that we grow and are transformed.

Part II: Commentary

“Lead Us Not Into Temptation but Deliver Us From Evil”

In May–June of 2019, Pope Francis sparked a controversy by officially endorsing a change in the Lord’s Prayer. Instead of “lead us not into temptation,” the new Roman Catholic version of the Lord’s Prayer would read “do not let us fall into temptation.” The pope’s main argument was that the translation “lead us not into temptation” is wrong from theological and pastoral points of view, as this phrase identifies God as the tempter instead of Satan. A father, claimed the pope, would not lead his son into

temptation but, rather, help the son up when he falls. One may very well relate to this attempt to exculpate God from the status of tempter.

But changing the text of the Lord's Prayer is not justifiable. Numerous other biblical phrases, much as this one, pose difficulties. The principles of biblical hermeneutics and the history of theology teach us that we must try to understand the text and its message rather than to change the biblical text or its translation to help resolve its mysteries in a way that a certain culture or person feels is more appropriate.

A brief study of Matthew 6:13 and its key concepts in both the immediate and broader biblical contexts will help us better understand this phrase in the prayer. In the New Testament Greek, both Matthew 6:13 and Luke 11:4 use exactly the same wording to render the phrase “ ‘ “lead us not into temptation” ’ ” (*NIV*). Thus, the phrase is correctly translated in most versions. Rather than trying to rearrange or reinterpret this verse, we need to understand its meaning. The key verb “lead” in Greek is the active aorist subjunctive form of the verb *eispheró*, which means “to carry inward,” “to bring in,” “to introduce” (see, e.g., Henry George Lindell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1996], p. 497). So, there is no mistake here, no way of reinterpretation: Jesus meant to say “Do not lead us,” not “Do not let us fall.” In Matthew 26:41 (see also Mark 14:38; Luke 22:40, 46), Jesus describes temptation as something one could “enter into” (*NKJV*) or “fall into” (*NIV*).

Those who argue in favor of changing the wording of this phrase in the Lord's Prayer focus on the word *temptation*, concluding that God cannot tempt us because He cannot be the source of temptation. But the Greek word for “temptation” (*peirasmos*) has two distinct meanings. The first is “temptation” and is related to allurement or enticement to sin (see, e.g., Matt. 26:41, 1 Tim. 6:9). In this sense, it is true that God is not, and cannot be, leading us into temptation, because He is not the tempter, as James 1:13, 14 clearly establishes. The second meaning of temptation is “experiment,” “trial,” “probation,” or “test.” In Galatians 4:14, Paul's illness was a trial to the Galatians, and in 1 Peter 4:12, Peter admonishes Christians not to be surprised by the trial or ordeal that befell them.

Perhaps James gives the most explicit explanation of the process of temptation, especially as he uses the two meanings of temptation together in the same passage. He affirms that Christians meet trials with joy and endurance (*James 1:2, 12*) and must not say that God tempts them, because God does not tempt anyone (*James 1:13*). Rather, each person wanders away from God when enticed or tempted by their own desire (*James 1:14*). Thus, in the New Testament, temptation means both seduction to sin and probation.

This brief study helps us better understand the phrase “lead us not into temptation.” While God is not the tempter, He does lead us in the struggles that befall us. His leading in these trials helps us exercise our freedom, grow in love and commitment to Him, and grow in our understanding of Him and

ourselves in the context of the history of the great controversy. Only when we truly experience trials can we also truly experience freedom and growth. God created us to live and thrive in a perfectly happy world. But He also created the tree of the knowledge of good and evil so that we could have the opportunity to choose. God did not create the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to entice humanity to sin. Rather, God gave Adam and Eve the opportunity to express their freedom and grow in their love and loyalty to Him by obeying His commands. God led the Israelites to the cul-de-sac at the Red Sea, not to allure them to sin but to help them grow in their trust and love for Him in individual and collective spiritual discipline.

But if the hardships of life in the context of the great controversy only help us grow, why does Jesus teach us to ask God not to take us through these trials? This part of the Lord's Prayer teaches us about at least two important aspects of the Christian life. First, whatever the benefit of suffering, it is not an enjoyable experience, because God did not create us to suffer. Jesus Himself, who came to take upon Himself our suffering and death, prayed in the hour of His utmost distress: " 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not what I will, but what You will' " (*Mark 14:36, NKJV; see also Matt. 26:39, Luke 22:42*). By including "do not lead us into temptation" in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to feel free to tell our Father how much we want to avoid the trials of life, even if they can, at times, be beneficial. However, He taught us by example that we must always lovingly yield to God's will and leading, because He knows what is best for us and for the plan of salvation.

Second, "lead us not into temptation" is immediately and purposefully coupled with "but deliver us from evil." Given that suffering is unavoidable in this world tainted with sin, we want God to lead us through all of our trials; but we do not want to be overcome by the enticement of Satan. Here the Lord's Prayer proclaims the very essence of the gospel of grace, because it teaches us that, as Christians, we are not saved as superhumans fighting the battles of life and the devil himself. Rather, it is God who delivers us from the evil one. But how are we delivered from Satan? Matthew 4:1 tells us that "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (*NKJV*). Of course, we understand that the Holy Spirit did not lead Jesus into the desert to make Him sin but to reveal Jesus as the Messiah, as the Savior of the world, as the One who overcame where Adam failed, and as the One who overcame evil and Satan (*see Matt. 4:1–11, Matt. 12:28, Mark 1:13, John 12:31, John 14:30, Heb. 2:14–18, 1 John 3:8*). When facing trials and the enticements of the devil, the Christian is delivered by Christ's victory over sin and Satan. So, though suffering and trials are not pleasant and desirable, we must go through them for our own benefit. We pray that God leads us, covered in Christ's victory over Satan.

Thus, the proposal to change the wording of the Lord's Prayer is not only unjustifiable and unbiblical but also superficial, rendering an impoverished theological and pastoral content. Such revision also is dangerous for another reason: it sets yet another precedent for changing the Word of God because of human and cultural impulse. Changing the wording in question in the Lord's Prayer will involve changing many other biblical texts and concepts. It is imperative to leave the text as it is and seek to understand it rather than to change it simply because it does not fit a particular theology or practical concern.

Handel's New Song

By the third decade of the eighteenth century, George Frederic Handel (1685–1759) could consider himself an accomplished composer, having written various genres of music. As he wrote mostly nonreligious music, many in the Church of England viewed him as a secular composer, which led to tensions with the church. However, Handel always thirsted for God and for salvation. In April 1737, he suffered a stroke or some other psychological affliction. Although he recovered, he soon landed in a financial, relational, and spiritual crisis. In conflict with the church, in conflict with many at the court and with other musicians, Handel thought he would collapse. On April 8, 1741, he gave what he thought was his last concert and at the age of 56, retired from public life.

But Handel was looking for a new song! He soon found it. A friend, Charles Jennings, shared with Handel a libretto that focused on the life of Christ, containing three parts: (1) prophecies about the coming of the Messiah; (2) the first coming of the Messiah and His passions; and (3) the future glory of His second coming, the end of sin, and the eternal acclamation of the Messiah. Handel rediscovered the glorious image of Jesus as the Messiah and Savior and decided to dedicate to Him an oratorio. An invitation from Dublin for Handel to compose something for a charity concert served as the catalyst, and, thus, *Messiah*, the greatest oratorio of all time, was born.

Handel was so absorbed by the writing of his new work that he wrote all three parts on some 260 pages in 24 days. During those days, Handel did not leave his apartment at all, barely touching the food prepared for him. Sometimes, during the composition, he would sob or cry at the great biblical texts he included or at the glory he was seeing in Jesus the Messiah. When the "new song," *Messiah*, was presented at the charity concert in Dublin, it collected 400 pounds, which resulted in freeing 142 men from debtor's prison. But it also freed Handel from the spiritual, and multifaceted, crucible he was in, and it has blessed numerous people around the globe since that time. Handel died on the morning of Good Friday, April 14, 1759, just eight days after having conducted his masterpiece, *Messiah*, for the last time, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. The monument in the Abbey in his honor represents him holding the manuscript of *Messiah*, part 3, at the place where it reads, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

One inspirational source for this amazing story may be found in Patrick Kavanaugh's *Spiritual Lives of the Great Composers*, revised and expanded (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 3–7. Perhaps if it were not for the deep crisis that Handel went through, the world never would have enjoyed the greatest oratorio ever known. It was Handel's humility before God, his search for God's salvation in the midst of his angst, and his relentless spirit to push forward through adversity that helped him to rise again and sing a new song.

Part III: Life Application

1. **John the Baptist was the faithful servant of God in a unique time in history. He received the privileged call to announce the advent of the Messiah and His mission. John lived an austere lifestyle and conducted his life with utmost spiritual and moral integrity. He accomplished his mission without any hesitation or attempt to take an iota of credit for himself. Yet, when Jesus started His ministry, John was led into a crucible. Yes, John was imprisoned, tried, and executed, but he did not yield to evil. For dedicated students of the Bible, John emerges as a victorious figure, despite death, setting an example for us all. Put yourself in the place of John the Baptist in prison. What thoughts would be going through your mind while you waited for the outcome of the trial? When facing the clear prospect of execution at the hands of the wicked Herod—a situation in which Jesus makes no move to intervene and extricate you—how and what would you feel?**

2. **Have you had cul-de-sac experiences in your life, similar to the one experienced by the Israelites at the Red Sea? Share them with your class. What principles and faith strategies can you think of that would help one successfully navigate these types of experiences?**

Seeing *the* Goldsmith's Face



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 5:16, 1 Cor. 4:9, Eph. 3:10, Job 23:1–10, Matt. 25:1–12, Dan. 12:1–10, Eph. 4:11–16.*

Memory Text: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18, NKJV).

Amy Carmichael took a group of children to a traditional goldsmith in India. In the middle of a charcoal fire was a curved roof tile. On the tile was a mixture of salt, tamarind fruit, and brick dust. Embedded in this mixture was gold. As the fire devoured the mixture, the gold became purer. The goldsmith took the gold out with tongs and, if it was not pure enough, he replaced it in the fire with a new mixture. But each time the gold was replaced, the heat was increased. The group asked, “How do you know when the gold is purified?” He replied, “When I can see my face in it.”—Amy Carmichael, *Learning of God* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1989), p. 50.

God is seeking to purify us, to refine us like gold, to transform us into His image. That's an astonishing goal, and it seems even more astonishing that a Christlike character is developed in us only as we pass through life's crucibles.

The Week at a Glance: What role does suffering have in the purifying process? How do we understand all this in the context of the great controversy?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 23.

“In His Image”

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29, NKJV).

In the beginning, God made us in His image (*Gen. 1:27*), but that image has been corrupted by sin.

In what ways do we see this defacing of God’s image in humanity?

It’s obvious: we all have been corrupted by sin (*Rom. 3:10–19*). Yet, God’s desire is to restore us to what we should have been originally. This is where our verse today fits in. It reveals God’s plan that those who submit their lives to the Holy Spirit may be “conformed to the image of his Son” (*Rom. 8:29, NIV*).

But there’s another dimension. “The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

How do you understand what Ellen White says to us in the quote cited above? (See also *Job 1*, *Matt. 5:16*, *1 Cor. 4:9*, and *Eph. 3:10*.)

As Christians, we must never forget that we are in the midst of a cosmic drama. The great controversy between Christ and Satan is unfolding all around us. The battle takes many shapes and is manifested in many ways. And though much is hidden, we can understand that, as followers of Christ, we have a part to play in this drama and can bring honor to Christ through our lives.

Imagine being on the field of a huge stadium. Sitting on the bleachers on one side are heavenly beings loyal to the Lord; on the other side are beings who have fallen with Lucifer. If your life for the past 24 hours were played out on that field, which side would have more to cheer about? What does your answer tell you about yourself?

Faith Amid the Refining Fire

It’s one thing to be in a battle; it’s another not even to see the forces arrayed in that battle. In a sense, this is what we as Christians deal with. We know that the forces are out there, we can feel them in our lives, and yet, we have to press ahead in faith, trusting Him “who is invisible” (*Heb. 11:27, NKJV*).

Read Job 23:1–10. What is the essence of Job’s struggle? What does he not see? At the same time, what does he take on faith, despite all his trials?

Even amid his terrible trials, Job trusted in the Lord. Despite everything, Job was determined to endure. And one of the things that kept him persevering was gold—not a gold medal; rather, he was looking into the future and realized that if he held on to God, he would come out the better for it—he would come out like gold. How much Job knew of what was happening behind the scenes, we aren’t told. Regardless of how much was hidden from him, he endured the refining fire anyway.

Do you fear the fire? Do you worry about the heat that circumstances generate? Perhaps, as with Job, the heat of God seems unexplainable. It may be the difficulty of adjusting to a new job or a new home. It could be having to survive ill treatment at work, or even within your own family. It could be illness or financial loss. Hard as it is to understand, God can use these trials to refine you and purify you and bring out His image in your character.

Being proven to be gold seems to be an incentive for Job here, something to fix his eyes upon, and that helps pull him through his troubles. It’s a powerful testimony to his character already that, amid all the pain and suffering, he was able to sense the reality of the purifying process. Also, however much he didn’t understand, he knew that these trials would refine him.

In your own experience, how do trials refine and purify? What other ways could you be refined, other than through suffering?

Jesus' Last Words

Jesus was in Jerusalem, about to die. According to Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' last teaching hour before Passover is spent telling His disciples parables, including the ones about the ten virgins and the sheep and the goats. These stories are related to the way we should live as we wait for Jesus to come. Thus, their relevancy to today—with the signs of Jesus' soon return all around us—has never been more significant.

In the parable of the ten virgins (*Matt. 25:1–12*), many commentators point out that the oil is a symbol for the Holy Spirit. Ellen White agrees, but also says that this oil is a symbol for character and that it is something no one can acquire for us.

Read the parable. In what ways does the meaning of the story change, depending on whether you see oil as a symbol of the Holy Spirit or of the possession of character? What are the implications of this story for you if the oil represents the Holy Spirit, or a Christlike character?

Holy Spirit: _____

Character: _____

Read the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31–46. What criteria are used in separating the sheep and the goats?

Notice that the king separates the sheep and the goats based on their works, their character. Though Jesus is not teaching salvation by works here, we can see how important character development is in the plan of salvation and how those who are truly saved by Christ will reflect that salvation through their lives and characters.

It has been said that “character is what a person is in the dark.” What sort of person are you when no one is looking? What does the answer tell you about changes that you need to make?

“The Wise”

Yesterday we looked at the importance of character for those waiting for the Second Coming. Today we will look more specifically at the importance of character for those who are alive at the second coming of Jesus.

Read Daniel 12:1–10. What is the context? What time in earth’s history is being referred to? Most important, what can we tell from these verses about the character of God’s people during these times? What characteristics are given them, in contrast to the wicked? (See also Rev. 22:11.)

Daniel is told that just before Jesus comes, there will be a time of distress unequalled at any other time of history. In Daniel 12:3, 10, we’re given a depiction of the righteous and the wicked during this time. Notice how the wicked “‘shall do wickedly’ ” (*Dan. 12:10, NKJV*) in contrast to the righteous, who in verse 3 shine brightly, perhaps because they have been “‘purified, made spotless and refined’ ” (*Dan. 12:10, NIV*) during this “‘time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time’ ” (*Dan. 12:1, NKJV*). In contrast, too, the wicked do not understand, but the righteous are “wise” and do understand.

Understand what? Math, science, higher criticism? Proverbs says that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (*Prov. 1:7, NKJV*). Perhaps, in this context, the “wise” are wise because they have an understanding of these final events, the time of trouble as it unfolds. They are not taken by surprise; from their study of the Word, they know it’s coming. And most important, they know enough to allow this time of trouble to purify and refine them; the wicked, on the other hand, are just made more obstinate in their rebellion and thus continue in their wickedness.

The crucial point is that here we are given a depiction of a people who have been through a refining and purifying process.

Though we’ve looked at these texts in the context of the very last days, what principles do we see here that can help us to understand better what the purifying and refining process is all about, even today?

Character and Community

A song goes like this: “I am a rock, I am an island.” Have you ever felt like that—wanting to stand alone? You may even have heard people say, “Well, my walk with God is a private affair. It’s not something I want to talk about.”

Read Ephesians 4:11–16. What’s the point Paul is making here? What role does he give here for community?

When Paul writes to the Ephesians, he describes the church as a body. Jesus is the Head, and His people make up the rest. If you look at Ephesians 4:13, you will notice the ultimate purpose of living in such a community—it is to experience “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (*NIV*). And for that we need each other!

It certainly is possible to be a Christian all alone. Indeed, as for many people throughout the centuries who have been ridiculed or persecuted, standing alone is often unavoidable. It is a powerful witness to the power of God that men and women do not buckle under the pressures that surround them. However, while this is true, Paul emphasizes a critical truth: ultimately, we experience and reveal the fullness of Christ when we are working together in fellowship with each other.

In today’s text, what does Paul say must happen before the fullness of Christ may be revealed in our Christian community?

In what way is the witness of a community that is revealing the fullness of Christ different from the witness of an individual that is revealing the fullness of Christ? What are the implications for this in the context of the great controversy? (See *Eph. 3:10*.)

It’s easy to be nice when you are by yourself or with strangers, but it is much harder to be nice to people you either know really well or don’t like. This means that when we still show these people grace and kindness, we provide an irresistible witness to the truth about God.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “God Promises Us a New Heart of Flesh,” p. 100, in *Sons and Daughters of God*; “‘To Meet the Bridegroom,’ ” pp. 405–421, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “The Time of Trouble,” pp. 613–634, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Character building is the most important work ever entrusted to human beings; and never before was its diligent study so important as now. Never was any previous generation called to meet issues so momentous; never before were young men and young women confronted by perils so great as confront them today.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 225.

“In the parable, the foolish virgins are represented as begging for oil, and failing to receive it at their request. This is symbolic of those who have not prepared themselves by developing a character to stand in a time of crisis. It is as if they should go to their neighbors and say, Give me your character, or I shall be lost. Those that were wise could not impart their oil to the flickering lamps of the foolish virgins. Character is not transferable. It is not to be bought or sold; it is to be acquired. The Lord has given to every individual an opportunity to obtain a righteous character through the hours of probation; but he has not provided a way by which one human agent may impart to another the character which he has developed by going through hard experiences, by learning lessons from the great Teacher, so that he can manifest patience under trial, and exercise faith so that he can remove mountains of impossibility.”—Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*, January 16, 1896.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What does “character building” mean? How can you do this? How much of a visible priority is character building within your own life and your church community?
- 2 Thursday’s study talked about the important role of community in the life of a Christian. How well does your local church function as the body of Christ? How well do you represent the Lord as a community? As a class, talk about what you can do to improve.
- 3 As a class, talk about the question of why character building is important, even though we are saved by faith alone in Jesus. Since His righteousness and His perfect character are what save us, then why do we need to develop character?
- 4 Helen Keller, who was deaf and blind from an early age, wrote, “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”—*Leadership*, vol. 17, no. 4. Do you agree? Discuss the relationships between character, suffering, and the great controversy.

Part 4: Plotting With Spirits

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Months passed before Mother and Junior learned why Father had abandoned them for two months and lived in the Candomblé temple in Manaus, Brazil. It was because Junior wanted to become a Seventh-day Adventist.

After seeing a man baptized at Alpha Seventh-day Adventist Community Church, Junior told Mother that he also wanted to be baptized. Mother told Father, and Father, at the temple, was ordered by evil spirits to stop the plan.

At home, Father tried to convince Junior to reconsider, but the boy stood firm. The evil spirits stepped up their pressure, telling Father that he would be destroyed if he did not stop Junior. Father didn't understand how Junior's baptism could destroy him, but he agreed to a plan by the spirits to move out of the house. The spirits said Mother would lose both her husband and her job on the same day, and she would stop taking Junior to church. Father didn't want to leave home, and he worried about the plan all day. But when Mother arrived home late from a church event that night, he angrily decided to leave.

At first, the plan unfolded as predicted. The next day, Father left the house, and Mother lost her job. But the rest of the plan fell through. The spirits had hoped that Mother would run out of money and stop taking Junior to church. But when Mother couldn't afford to buy gasoline, church members offered rides in their cars. After two months, the spirits declared that they would create a new plan to prevent Junior from being baptized. They told Father to return home.

Meanwhile, Junior had started Bible studies in preparation for baptism. He joined Pathfinders, participated in the church's music program, and helped operate the church's sound system. Although the evil spirits had promised to stop Junior from being baptized, the boy's desire only grew. To Father's chagrin, Mother also started talking about getting baptized.

Pastor Ricardo set the date for Junior's baptism on October 29, a year after the boy had first heard about the Adventist Church at his friend Clifferson's house. Mother longed to be baptized at the same time. When she told Pastor Ricardo, he gazed at her seriously. "You cannot be baptized because you're not legally married," he said. The words hit Mother like a punch. Her common-law marriage was blocking her desire to be baptized with Junior. Pastor Ricardo saw her disappointment. "Don't worry," he said. "Ask Eduardo to marry you."

Tears flowed down Mother's cheeks as she left church. She doubted Father would agree, but she sought him out. "I have a question. No matter how you answer, our relationship won't change. Will you marry me?"

Father pursed his lips into a pouty, puppy-dog expression. Then his face grew serious. "No," he said. "I'll never marry you."

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) and his family live.

Key Text: *2 Corinthians 3:18*

Study Focus: *Matt. 5:16, 1 Cor. 4:9, Eph. 3:10, Job 23:1–10, Matt. 25:1–12, Dan. 12:1–10, Eph. 4:11–16.*

Part I: Overview

This week’s lesson focuses on the crucible of purification. Purification requires a standard. In our case, the standard is the image of God in us and the image of Jesus Christ, who is the perfect reflection of the image of God (*Heb. 1:3*). Purification also requires an agent of purification, which the Bible often presents as fire (*1 Pet. 1:7, Rev. 3:18*). The result of purification is seen in our character, represented by the oil in the lamps of the ten virgins in the parable of Jesus (*Matt. 25:1–13*). The book of Daniel describes the character of those purified as “wise” in the things of God (*Dan. 1:19, 20; Dan. 2:47, 48; Dan. 3:26–30*).

Lesson Themes: This week’s lesson highlights four major themes.

1. Suffering plays an essential role in the process of character formation and purification.
2. We will see that character formation is the restoration of the image of God in humans, as they were created by God in the beginning, as well as the shaping of our characters according to the image of Christ.
3. This formation of character entails the theme of the cosmic conflict. It is in this conflict between good and evil, God and Satan, that we experience the crucible of maturity.
4. Purification and maturity are never achieved by individuals in isolation; rather, purification and maturity are achieved by individuals in communities.

Part II: Commentary

Ellen G. White on Suffering Trials

The subject of the relation between crucibles and purification is very important. Ellen G. White’s comments on this subject are revealing and relevant. In one of her major books, she quotes John Huss’s letter to a friend in which Huss relates the suffering of Jesus to our suffering. In that same letter, Huss also relates suffering to purification: “Jesus Christ suffered for His well-beloved; and therefore ought we to be astonished that He has left us His example, in order that we may ourselves endure with patience all things for our own salvation? He is God, and we are His crea-

tures; He is the Lord, and we are His servants; He is Master of the world, and we are contemptible mortals—yet He suffered! Why, then, should we not suffer also, particularly when suffering is for us a purification? Therefore, beloved, if my death ought to contribute to His glory, pray that it may come quickly, and that He may enable me to support all my calamities with constancy.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 105.

Elsewhere, Ellen G. White writes in a similar vein herself: “Complain not bitterly of the trial which comes upon you, but let your eyes be directed to Christ, who has clothed his divinity with humanity, in order that we may understand how great is his interest in us since he has identified himself with suffering humanity. He tasted the cup of human sorrow, he was afflicted in all our afflictions, he was made perfect through suffering, tempted in all points like as humanity is tempted, in order that he might succor those who are in temptation. He says, ‘I will make a man more precious than fine gold, even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.’ He will make a man precious by abiding with him, by giving unto him the Holy Spirit. He says, ‘If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?’ ”—*The Signs of the Times*, March 5, 1896.

To a church member controlled by appetite, she writes: “Now he should so estimate the eternal reward, the treasure in the heavens, the immortal inheritance, the crown of glory that is unfading, that he can cheerfully sacrifice the gratification of depraved appetite, let the consequence or suffering be ever so great, in order to accomplish the work of purification of the flesh and of the spirit.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 99.

To “Brother G,” Ellen G. White writes a letter explaining the relation between suffering and purification in the Advent people preparing for the second coming of Jesus: “The purification of the people of God cannot be accomplished without their suffering. God permits the fires of affliction to consume the dross, to separate the worthless from the valuable, that the pure metal may shine forth. He passes us from one fire to another, testing our true worth. If we cannot bear these trials, what will we do in the time of trouble? If prosperity or adversity discover falseness, pride, or selfishness in our hearts, what shall we do when God tries every man’s work as by fire, and lays bare the secrets of all hearts? True grace is willing to be tried; if we are loath to be searched by the Lord, our condition is serious indeed. God is the refiner and purifier of souls; in the heat of the furnace the dross is separated forever from the true silver and gold of the Christian character. Jesus watches the test. He knows what is needed to purify the precious metal that it may reflect the radiance of His divine love.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 85, 86.

She continues this topic in the same profound manner: “God brings His people near Him by close, testing trials, by showing them their own weakness and inability, and by teaching them to lean upon Him as their only

help and safeguard. Then His object is accomplished. They are prepared to be used in every emergency, to fill important positions of trust, and to accomplish the grand purposes for which their powers were given them. God takes men upon trial; He proves them on the right hand and on the left, and thus they are educated, trained, disciplined. Jesus, our Redeemer, man's representative and head, endured this testing process. He suffered more than we can be called upon to suffer. He bore our infirmities and was in all points tempted as we are. He did not suffer thus on His own account, but because of our sins; and now, relying on the merits of our Overcomer, we may become victors in His name.

“God’s work of refining and purifying must go on until His servants are so humbled, so dead to self, that, when called into active service, their eye will be single to His glory. He will then accept their efforts; they will not move rashly, from impulse; they will not rush on and imperil the Lord’s cause, being slaves to temptations and passions and followers of their own carnal minds set on fire by Satan. Oh, how fearfully is the cause of God marred by man’s perverse will and unbridled temper! How much suffering he brings upon himself by following his own headstrong passions! God brings men over the ground again and again, increasing the pressure until perfect humility and a transformation of character bring them into harmony with Christ and the spirit of heaven, and they are victors over themselves.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 86.

Part III: Life Application

1. **We have learned that we are purified from our sins by the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus. But we also have learned that we are purified by suffering. Is there a contradiction between these two ideas? Not at all. We are justified by God’s grace, and we receive His forgiveness of sins by faith; thus, we are set apart for God and live for God. Justification and forgiveness are both declarations and deep spiritual experiences. But then we continue in the experience of grace in the context of the great controversy, in which we are tried and in which we prove ourselves as faithful and loving to our Lord. In this experience, we discover that many times we may fail. We also discover hidden characteristics that must be abandoned. We purge them by God’s grace. Purification is a real experience that happens to real persons in a real history. How does this understanding help you in your experience of purification? In what ways have you personally noticed that the Holy Spirit is purifying your character?**

- 2. How do you experience continually contemplating the image of Christ in your life? How have you experienced a transformation of your character and personality according to His image?**

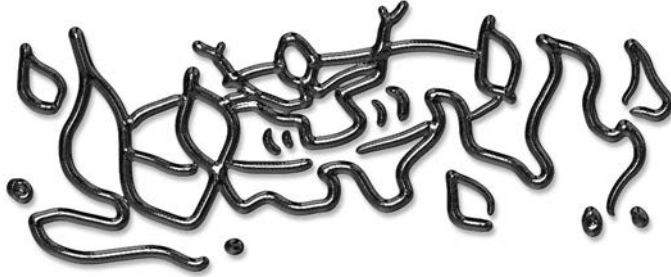
- 3. In what ways have you experienced growing more mature in your faith as an individual? How could you describe this growth?**

4. How has your church congregation matured spiritually? In what ways have other people, within and without your faith community, noticed the same growth? Describe what you and other members of your community of faith have observed.

Notes



Extreme Heat



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 22, Hos. 2:1–12, Job 1:6–2:10, 2 Cor. 11:23–29, Isa. 43:1–7.*

Memory Text: “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand” (*Isaiah 53:10, NKJV*).

As the wife of the famous Christian writer C. S. Lewis was dying, Lewis wrote, “Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not ‘So there’s no God after all,’ but ‘So this is what God’s really like.’” —*A Grief Observed* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1961), pp. 6, 7.

When things become really painful, some of us reject God completely. For others, like Lewis, there is the temptation to change our view of God and imagine all sorts of bad things about Him. The question is, Just how hot can it get? How much heat is God willing to risk putting His people through in order to bring about His ultimate purpose of shaping us into the “image of his Son” (*Rom. 8:29, NIV*)?

The Week at a Glance: Why do you think God is willing to risk being misunderstood by those He wants to know Him and love Him? How much do you think God is willing to be misunderstood in order to mold you into the “image of his Son”?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 30.

Abraham in the Crucible

Read Genesis 22. Out of nowhere and without explanation, God suddenly calls Abraham to offer his own child as a burnt offering. Can you imagine how Abraham must have felt? It was a totally revolting idea that a holy God should request that he sacrifice his own son. Even if Abraham thought that this was acceptable, what about God’s promises of an inheritance? Without his son, the promise would be gone.

Why did God ask Abraham to offer this sacrifice? If God knows everything, what was the point?

God’s request and its timing were not random. Indeed, it was calculated to exact the deepest possible anguish, for “God had reserved His last, most trying test for Abraham until the burden of years was heavy upon him, and he longed for rest.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 147. Was this the test of a mad God? Not at all, for “the agony which he endured during the dark days of that fearful trial was permitted that he might understand from his own experience something of the greatness of the sacrifice made by the infinite God for man’s redemption.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 154.

This was just a test—God never intended for Abraham to kill his son. This highlights something very important about the way God sometimes works. God may ask us to do something that He never intends for us to complete. He may ask us to go somewhere He never intends for us to arrive at. What is important to God is not necessarily the end, but what we learn as we are reshaped by the process.

Jesus may have been thinking about Abraham’s experience when He said to the Jews, “ ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad’ ” (*John 8:56, NIV*). Abraham could have missed out on this insight, dismissing the instructions as from Satan. The key to Abraham’s surviving and learning through the whole process was knowing God’s voice.

How do you know the voice of God? How do you know when God is talking to you? What are the ways He communicates His will to you?

Wayward Israel

The story of Hosea has some powerful lessons to teach us. Hosea’s situation is remarkable. His wife, Gomer, runs away and has children with other men. Though she is sexually unfaithful, God calls Hosea to take his wife back and fully show his love to her again. This story is meant as a parable about God and Israel. The Israelites had left God and were prostituting themselves spiritually to other gods, but God still loved them and wanted to show His love to them. But just look at God’s methods!

Read Hosea 2:1–12. What methods does God say He will use to pull Israel back to Himself? What would these experiences have felt like?

Hosea 2:2, 3 _____

Hosea 2:5–7 _____

Hosea 2:8, 9 _____

Hosea 2:10 _____

This story raises two important issues about the way we experience God when He is bringing us to repentance.

First, we risk not recognizing that God is at work. When Israel went through such hard and painful experiences, it might have been hard for them to recognize that their God was working for their salvation. When our path is blocked by sharp thorns or we are walled in so that we don’t know where we are going (*Hos. 2:6*)—is this God? When our basic necessities disappear or we are embarrassed (*Hos. 2:9, 10*)—could our Father be in the middle of it all? The truth is that whatever we feel, God is always working to bring us to repentance, because He loves us so very much.

Second, we risk misunderstanding God when He is at work. We may recognize that God is at work, but we don’t like what He’s doing. While we are feeling hurt and embarrassed, it is easy to blame God for being cruel, for not intervening, or for not caring. But God is always working to renew us through His covenant of love.

Read Hosea 2:14–23. What does this passage reveal about God? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if you have been running from God in any area of your life. If you are convicted that you have been, why wait to go through the crucible? What’s stopping you from surrendering all to the Lord now?

Surviving Through Worship

Read Job 1:6–2:10. What caused Job’s suffering?

There is something astonishing here. The angels come to see God, and Satan comes with them. God asks Satan where he has been, and Satan replies that he has been “ ‘roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it’ ” (*Job 1:7, NIV*). Then God poses this question: “ ‘Have you considered my servant Job?’ ” (*Job 1:8, NIV*). The question itself is not remarkable; what is remarkable is the One who asks it. It isn’t Satan who points out Job as a subject for examination—it’s God. Knowing exactly what is going to follow, God calls Job to Satan’s attention. Down on the earth, Job has absolutely no idea how hot his crucible is about to become. And though it’s very clear that it is Satan, not God, who causes Job’s suffering, it also is clear that it is God who gives His explicit permission for Satan to destroy Job’s possessions, children, and his own physical health. If God is giving permission for Job to suffer, what difference does it make whether God or Satan is personally inflicting the suffering? How can God be righteous and holy when He actively allows Satan to cause Job such pain? Is this situation a special case, or is it characteristic of the way God still deals with us today?

In Job 1:20, 21, how does Job respond to the trials?

It is possible to respond to such suffering in two ways. We can become bitter and angry, turning our backs on a God we believe to be cruel or nonexistent, or we can hang on to God more tightly. Job deals with his catastrophe by staying in God’s presence and worshiping Him.

In Job 1:20, 21, we see three aspects of worship that may help when in anguish. First, Job accepts his helplessness and recognizes that he has no claim to anything: “ ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart’ ” (*Job 1:21, NIV*). Second, Job acknowledges that God is still in total control: “ ‘The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away’ ” (*Job 1:21, NIV*). Third, Job concludes by reasserting his belief in the righteousness of God. “ ‘May the name of the LORD be praised’ ” (*Job 1:21, NIV*).

Going through a trial? Follow the steps that Job used. How might they help you, as well?

Surviving Through Hope

“We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:8, 9, NIV).

As God’s chosen apostle, Paul endured more than most people. Yet, Paul was not crushed. Rather, he grew in his praise for God. Read his list of hardships in 2 Corinthians 11:23–29. Now read 2 Corinthians 1:3–11.

In 2 Corinthians 1:4, Paul states that the reason for receiving God’s compassion and comfort is “so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (NIV). To what extent might suffering be a call to ministry? How could we become more alert to this possibility?

God wants to minister through us to hurting people. This means that He may first allow us to experience the same sort of hurts. Then we’ll offer encouragement, not from theory but from our own experience of the compassion and comfort of God. This is a principle from Jesus’ life (see Heb. 4:15).

Paul’s vivid descriptions of his hardships are not to make us feel sorry for him. They are for us to know that even when we’re in the depths, the Father still can intervene to bring His compassion and comfort. We may despair even of our own lives, and even be killed, but fear not, God is teaching us to rely on Him. We can trust Him, for our God “raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:9, NIV).

As Paul continues to set his eyes on proclaiming the gospel, he knows that God will rescue him in the future, as well. Paul’s ability to remain firm is supported by three things he mentions in 2 Corinthians 1:10, 11. First, God’s proven track record: “He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us” (2 Cor. 1:10, NIV). Second, Paul’s determination to fix his concentration on God Himself: “On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us” (2 Cor. 1:10, NIV). Third, the saints’ continual intercession: “as you help us by your prayers” (2 Cor. 1:11, NIV).

What can you learn from Paul that can help you keep from falling into self-pity amid your own struggles?

Extreme Heat

So far this quarter, we have considered many examples of the crucibles that God uses to bring purity and Christlikeness to our lives. However, some people may view these examples and conclude that God is a severe and demanding taskmaster. Sure, some may say, “We know that God wants something good for us, but these examples don’t reveal much care and love. Instead, God looks more like a bully. He sets out with a purpose that causes us considerable hard times, and there’s nothing we can do about it.”

It’s true that while living on this sin-filled earth, we will understand only a little of why things happen. In heaven we’ll understand so much more (*1 Cor. 4:5, 1 Cor. 13:12*), but for now, we will have to live with the tension of believing that God is present and cares for us, even though things don’t always feel too good. Isaiah describes this tension very well.

Read Isaiah 43:1–7. In verse 2, God says that His people will pass through waters and through fire. These are figurative of extreme dangers, but perhaps they hint at the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan, both fearful times—but times that paved the way to a new life. You may expect that God might say that He would protect His people from these dangers, that He would guide them along an easier route. But like the Shepherd in Psalm 23, He says, rather, that when the difficult times come, God’s people need not be overwhelmed, for He is with them.

Look back at Isaiah 43:1–7. Write down the different ways in which God assures His people of comfort during the times of water and fire. What picture of God does this paint in your mind? Which promises can you claim for yourself?

We can summarize what we have learned about God’s crucibles in three ways. First, God’s extreme heat is to destroy not us but our sin. Second, God’s extreme heat is not to make us miserable but to make us pure, as we were created to be. Third, God’s care for us through all things is constant and tender—He will never leave us alone, no matter what happens to us.

What do these texts teach you about the actions and character of God? *Ps. 103:13, 14; Matt. 28:20; 1 Cor. 10:13; and 1 Pet. 1:7.* How have you experienced the reality of these verses in your own life?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Test of Faith,” pp. 145–155, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Praise Ye the Lord,” pp. 315–319, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5.

“God has always tried His people in the furnace of affliction. It is in the heat of the furnace that the dross is separated from the true gold of the Christian character. Jesus watches the test; He knows what is needed to purify the precious metal, that it may reflect the radiance of His love. It is by close, testing trials that God disciplines His servants. He sees that some have powers which may be used in the advancement of His work, and He puts these persons upon trial; in His providence He brings them into positions that test their character. . . . He shows them their own weakness, and teaches them to lean upon Him. . . . Thus His object is attained. They are educated, trained, and disciplined, prepared to fulfill the grand purpose for which their powers were given them.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 129, 130.

“If in the providence of God we are called upon to endure trials, let us accept the cross and drink the bitter cup, remembering that it is a Father’s hand that holds it to our lips. Let us trust Him in the darkness as well as in the day. Can we not believe that He will give us everything that is for our good? . . . Even in the night of affliction how can we refuse to lift heart and voice in grateful praise, when we remember the love to us expressed by the cross of Calvary?”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 316.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, have someone recount his or her own test of faith that, if not quite as intense as Abraham’s, was still hard enough. What can you learn from that person’s experience, from his or her successes or failures?
- 2 Review the last 24 hours of Christ’s life before His crucifixion. What extremes did He face? How did He endure? What principles can we take from His example and apply for ourselves when we are in the midst of our own crucibles?
- 3 Discuss the idea, touched on this week, about how through our own suffering we can minister to others who are suffering. No matter how true it might be, what are some of the problems we might encounter with this idea?
- 4 Ellen G. White wrote above: “Let us trust Him in the darkness as well as in the day.” That’s easier said than done. How can we help each other develop the kind of faith that will enable us to do just that? Why is it important to trust God in the bad times?

Part 5: Crashing a Baptism

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The day of Junior's baptism arrived. Five people, including Junior, were to be baptized at 4:00 P.M. at Alpha Seventh-day Adventist Community Church in Manaus, Brazil. "I won't go," Father said. "Drive me to the temple."

On the way to church, Mother wondered out loud whether Father might still show up in his high priestly robes from the Candomblé temple. "I don't care if Father comes in all his robes," Junior said. "I'll accept him."

At the church, Pastor Ricardo announced that Junior would be baptized first and invited him to share his story as he stood near the baptismal pool. Junior shared how he was bullied at school and his classmate Clifferson had invited him to a video gamers club that sang about Jesus and discussed the Bible. When Junior finished, he waded into the baptismal pool and turned around to look at the congregation. At that moment, Father, wearing his high priestly robes, entered the sanctuary. Mother burst into tears. "He's here," she said. "He said he wouldn't come, but he's here."

Heads turned to look at the back of the hall. Mother prayed silently, and church members familiar with Father's work also prayed. Others stared in amazement at Father's flowing robes. Everyone treated him with respect.

A church deacon stood beside Father, greeting him. "Welcome, Eduardo!" said the deacon, Roberto Fernandez. "We were waiting for you. Come!" He led Father to the baptismal pool, where Junior was waiting to be baptized.

A million thoughts filled Junior's mind. *God planned everything*, he thought. *No one knew in advance that I would be baptized first, and Father arrived just as I entered the pool. God's plans are perfect!*

Each of the five baptisms was supposed to take 10 minutes, but Junior's lasted an hour. Several friends from the video gamers club stood up to praise God for Junior's decision and to encourage him to be faithful. Pastor Ricardo asked the Pathfinders to sing, and everyone joined in.

As Junior came out of the water, the Pathfinders joyfully waved their yellow scarves. Junior, dripping wet, hugged Father. "Daddy, despite your religion, I love you very much," he said. Looking at the audience, he added, "I thank you for being here. But most of all I thank my father for being here."

Then Father addressed Junior. "Son, I accept your religion because many supernatural things have happened," he said. "I have kept you away from my religion this whole time, and I didn't want you to become involved in any religion. However, I accept your religion because I sense a supernatural energy right now. I only hope that my own path to Jesus isn't painful."

As the family got into the car afterward, Father said, "This is such a nice place, and the people are so nice." He was beaming with joy.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) and his family live.

Key Text: *Isaiah 53:10*

Study Focus: *Genesis 22, Job 1:6–2:10, Isa. 43:1–7, Hos. 2:1–12, 2 Cor. 11:23–29.*

Part I: Overview

This week’s lesson focuses on several biblical examples that help us to understand further the “whys” of suffering and the “hows” of overcoming evil and suffering. The example of Abraham’s readiness to sacrifice his own son in obedience to God teaches us an unreserved trust in God, even when God’s commands do not make sense. Hosea’s painful relationship with his unfaithful wife reveals God’s own suffering caused by our unfaithfulness, His continued presence in our lives, and His work to restore relationships with a wayward, backslidden people. Job’s resolute loyalty to God, even when his own wife was calling him to curse God, teaches us that avoiding suffering and death is not the ultimate goal in life. Together with Job, Paul teaches us that love and faithfulness to God, His kingdom, and His mission in the world is the most fulfilling experience of Christian life. Of course, there are things we do not understand. But the Christian goes through suffering and death armed with the apostle Paul’s view on the struggle: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (*Rom. 8:35, NKJV*).

Lesson Themes: This week’s lesson highlights two major themes.

1. Our first theme will engage us in a profound study of relevant examples of suffering that will help us understand why God allows suffering in our experiences.
2. In our second theme, we will engage with vivid illustrations from the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah and how father and son survived their crucibles, learning and growing through these experiences.

Part II: Commentary

God’s Suffering With Us

In the second half of the twentieth century, process theology proposed a new theodicy or explanation of how evil originated and exists in the kingdom of the all-loving, all-powerful, and perfectly just God. Process theologians (such as John B. Cobb Jr.) envision a universe composed of

free and self-creating entities engaged in a continuous progressive process of building an ever-changing world. However, since these entities also think that God's power is limited, they conclude that evil and suffering have somehow sprung out of this complex process of building. The only good news that process theology can offer us is that God is sympathetic to us and suffers with the universe. He cannot eradicate evil because He cannot impinge upon our freedom, but He works to persuade all the entities of the entire universe to move toward a balance of harmony, creativity, and enjoyment.

This theme of God's suffering with us has been used frequently beyond the circles of process theologians. Yes, the concept of God's suffering with us is essential to our understanding of the gospel, but it must be understood correctly in the light of Bible truth. The major threat of the concept that God is suffering with us is that it has become a theodicy in and of itself, excluding other important aspects of biblical theodicy.

As innovative as these ideas may be, process theology and its theodicy are incompatible with the biblical revelation and cannot be accepted by Bible-believing Christians. Yes, in our fallen world, suffering is real and inevitable. And yes, God is suffering with us. But this reality is not the end of the story. One of the numerous problems of process theology is its speculation that evil is intrinsically related to creation; process theology is evolutionary in nature. By contrast, the biblical explanation is that evil is not "natural"; it does not belong to the original order of creation or of nature. Evil is opposed to God's character, to His love and justice. God created a perfect world, perfect nature, perfect animals, and humans.

The fact that God created us free does not make evil necessary, and thus the following three points are especially relevant: (1) Evil has its roots in the freedom and moral agencies of free beings, such as angels and humans. (2) Evil did, and does, affect nature, but it does not emerge out of nature. (3) Evil is not eternal or coeternal with God or with creation (creation was intended to be and actually was perfect and without evil in the beginning); evil was brought into existence by our abuse of freedom, but it will be brought to an end by God's loving and powerful intervention to rid the universe of its existence and threat.

Thus, because of His loving nature, God truly suffers with us, sharing with us the crucibles we have brought on ourselves and on nature and on His entire kingdom. But God does not suffer helplessly, powerlessly, as if nothing can be done because evil is part of the evolutionary emergence and growth of the universe. No! God did, and is doing, something about evil. He took the ultimate consequence of sin upon Himself in Christ and is actively working to counter evil. He calls all

people to accept His grace and to be ready to return to His kingdom, from which He will eradicate evil forever.

The Sacrifice of Isaac

God's command to sacrifice Isaac was a unique command with multiple purposes. On the one hand, God's call to Abraham was a trial or a test. Ellen G. White writes that on Mount Moriah God tested Abraham's fidelity: "Heavenly beings were witnesses of the scene as the faith of Abraham and the submission of Isaac were tested. The trial was far more severe than that which had been brought upon Adam. Compliance with the prohibition laid upon our first parents involved no suffering, but the command to Abraham demanded the most agonizing sacrifice. All heaven beheld with wonder and admiration Abraham's unfaltering obedience. All heaven applauded his fidelity. . . . God's covenant, confirmed to Abraham by an oath before the intelligences of other worlds, testified that obedience will be rewarded."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 155.

On the other hand, God's command was more than a test. In fact, its primary purpose was threefold: a revelation, a prophecy, and a typology. God wanted to teach Abraham and the entire world about God's own sacrifice of His Son for us (*John 3:16*). Ellen G. White emphasizes this point in a number of her writings. In *The Desire of Ages*, she affirms: "Abraham had greatly desired to see the promised Saviour. . . . And he saw Christ. . . . He saw His day, and was glad. He was given a view of the divine sacrifice for sin. Of this sacrifice he had an illustration in his own experience. The command came to him, 'Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, . . . and offer him . . . for a burnt offering.' Genesis 22:2. Upon the altar of sacrifice he laid the son of promise, the son in whom his hopes were centered. Then as he waited beside the altar with knife upraised to obey God, he heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me.' Genesis 22:12. This terrible ordeal was imposed upon Abraham that he might see the day of Christ, and realize the great love of God for the world, so great that to raise it from its degradation, He gave His only-begotten Son to a most shameful death."—Pages 468, 469.

Elsewhere, Ellen G. White brings together the two purposes of God's command in Genesis 22: "It was to impress Abraham's mind with the reality of the gospel, as well as to test his faith, that God commanded him to slay his son. The agony which he endured during the dark days of that fearful trial was permitted that he might understand from his own experience something of the greatness of the sacrifice made by the infinite God for man's redemption. No other test could have caused

Abraham such torture of soul as did the offering of his son. God gave His Son to a death of agony and shame. The angels who witnessed the humiliation and soul anguish of the Son of God were not permitted to interpose, as in the case of Isaac. There was no voice to cry, 'It is enough.' To save the fallen race, the King of glory yielded up His life. What stronger proof can be given of the infinite compassion and love of God? 'He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' Romans 8:32."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 154.

If the primary purpose of Genesis 22 was for it to be part of God's revelation of His plan of salvation, it is important to emphasize that the divine command to Abraham was a singular, unique, prophetic event in the history of the world. Through this unique experience of Abraham, God has efficiently communicated His plan to save humanity through the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Therefore, no one else in the history of humanity has ever received, nor will anyone ever receive, that command of sacrificing another human being again. Even in the case of Abraham, the sacrifice of Isaac was immediately replaced with an animal sacrifice. For this reason, Abraham's experience cannot be justifiably associated with the ancient practice of child sacrifice or with any child abuse, ancient or contemporary.

Another important aspect of this experience is Isaac's own participation and reaction in this experience. While we focus on Abraham's anguish and suffering, we need to point out that this experience was Isaac's crucible, too, and his reaction is inestimable. Indeed, he could have reacted in many ways, such as dubbing his father a mad old man or escaping by running away. But Isaac did not do so. His upbringing in faithfulness and in trusting God and his father makes Isaac a perfect example for the Christian going through crucibles. Ellen G. White highlights this point in a colorful narration of this scene:

"Abraham . . . in obedience to the divine command . . . pursues his journey with Isaac by his side. He sees before him the mountain which God had told him He would signalize as the one upon which he was to sacrifice. He removes the wood from the shoulder of his servant and lays it upon Isaac, the one to be offered. He girds up his soul with firmness and agonizing sternness, ready for the work which God requires him to do. With a breaking heart and unnerved hand, he takes the fire, while Isaac inquires: Father, here is the fire and the wood; but where is the offering? But, oh, Abraham cannot tell him now! Father and son build the altar, and the terrible moment comes for Abraham to make known to Isaac that which had agonized his soul all that long journey, that Isaac himself is the victim. Isaac is not a lad; he is a full-grown young man. He could have refused to submit to his father's design had he chosen to do so. He does

not accuse his father of insanity, nor does he even seek to change his purpose. He submits. He believes in the love of his father and that he would not make this terrible sacrifice of his only son if God had not bidden him to do so.”—*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 205.

Part III: Life Application

1. **Share three principles from the story of Abraham and Isaac that show you how to overcome crucibles.**

2. **How did Job and Hosea respond to their suffering? What can their responses teach you about how to overcome a crucible?**

Notes

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TOTAL MEMBER INVOLVEMENT TIME

What is Total Member Involvement?

- ▶ Total Member Involvement (TMI) is a full-scale, world-church evangelistic thrust that involves every member, every church, every administrative entity, every type of public outreach ministry, as well as personal and institutional outreach.
- ▶ It is a calendar-driven, intentional soul-winning plan that discovers the needs of families, friends, and neighbors. Then it shares how God fulfills every need, resulting in church planting and church growth, with a focus on retaining, preaching, sharing, and discipling.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT TMI TIME IN SABBATH SCHOOL

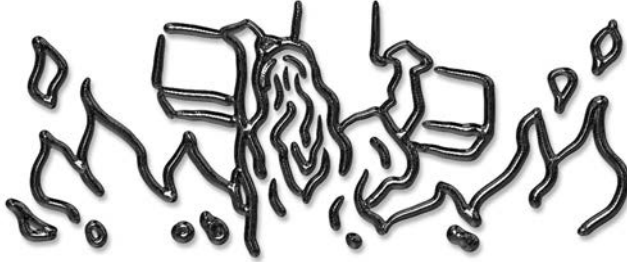
Dedicate the first 15 minutes of each lesson to plan, pray, and share:*

- ▶ **TMI IN-REACH:** Plan to visit, pray, care for missing or hurting members, and distribute territory assignments. Pray and discuss ways to minister to the needs of church families, inactive members, youth, women and men, and various ways to get the church family involved.
- ▶ **TMI OUT-REACH:** Pray and discuss ways of reaching your community, city, and world, fulfilling the Gospel Commission by sowing, reaping, and keeping. Involve all ministries in the church as you plan short-term and long-term soul-winning projects. TMI is about intentional acts of kindness. Here are some practical ways to become personally involved: 1. Develop the habit of finding needs in your community. 2. Make plans to address those needs. 3. Pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ **TMI UP-REACH:** Lesson Study. Encourage members to engage in individual Bible study—make study of the Bible in Sabbath School participatory. Study for transformation, not information.

TMI	Time	Explanation
Fellowship Outreach World Mission	15 min.*	Pray, plan, organize for action. Care for missing members. Schedule outreach.
Lesson Study	45 min.*	Involve everyone in the study of the lesson. Ask questions. Highlight key texts.
Lunch		Plan lunch for the class after worship. THEN GO OUT AND REACH SOMEONE!

**Adjust times as necessary.*

Struggling With All Energy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 16:5–15; Col. 1:28, 29; 1 Pet. 1:13; Matt. 5:29; Genesis 32.*

Memory Text: “To this end I strenuously contend, struggling with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me” (*Colossians 1:29, NIV*).

A man and woman sat together on a talk show. Both had experienced the murder of a child. The woman's son had been murdered 20 years before, and her anger and bitterness were as great as ever. The man was totally different. His daughter had been murdered by terrorists a few years earlier. He spoke about forgiveness toward the killers and about how God had transformed his hurt. However terrible the pain, this man had become an illustration of how God can bring healing to the darkest moments of our lives.

How can two people respond so differently? How does spiritual change occur in the life of a Christian, enabling that individual to mature through life's crucibles rather than being completely overwhelmed by them?

The Week at a Glance: What is the role of our wills, and willpower, in the battle with self and sin? How can we avoid the mistake of letting our feelings rule the decisions we make? Why must we persevere and not give up when in the crucible?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 6.

The Spirit of Truth

Have you ever prayed “Please, God, make me good!” but little seems to change? How is it possible that we can pray for God’s great transforming power to work within us, but our lives seem to remain the same? We know that God has unlimited supernatural resources that He so eagerly and freely offers us. We really want to take advantage of it all, and yet, our lives don’t seem to change in a way that matches what God is offering.

Why? One reason is disturbingly simple: while the Spirit has unlimited power to transform us, it is possible by our own choices to restrict what God can do.

Read John 16:5–15. In this passage, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of truth” (*John 16:13, NIV*). What does this imply that the Holy Spirit does for us?

While the Holy Spirit can bring us the truth about our sinfulness, He cannot make us repent. He also can show us the greatest truth about God, but He cannot force us to believe or obey it. If God did compel us in even the slightest way, we would lose our free will, and Satan would accuse God of manipulating our minds and hearts and would thus be able to accuse God of cheating in the great controversy. When the great controversy broke out in heaven, our Father did not compel Satan or any of the angels to believe that He was good and just or compel them to repent. And in the Garden of Eden, when so much was at stake again, God made the truth about the tree in the middle of the garden very clear but did not prevent Eve and Adam from exercising their free will to disobey. God will not act any differently with us today. So, the Spirit presents the truth about God and sin and then says, “In view of what I have shown you, what will you do now?”

It is the same when we are in the crucible. Sometimes the crucible is there precisely because we have not obeyed or repented of our sins. For our Father to work in such cases, we must consciously choose to open the doors of repentance and obedience in order for God’s power to enter in and transform us.

What convictions has the “Spirit of truth” brought to you recently? How well are you listening to His voice? And, most important, what choices are you making with your free will?

The Divine-Human Combination

What is your greatest accomplishment ever? Chances are, whatever you achieved did not happen simply by rolling out of bed in the morning. If we want to achieve something worthwhile in this life, it takes time and effort. Our discipleship to Christ is no different.

Read Colossians 1:28, 29. **Though Paul talks about God working in him, in what ways does he show the human effort also involved?** (See also Deut. 4:4, Luke 13:24, 1 Cor. 9:25, and Heb. 12:4.)

In Colossians 1:29, there is a very interesting insight into the way Paul sees his relationship with God in this work. He says that he is struggling—but with the power of God.

The Greek word translated “labor” means to “grow weary,” to “work to the point of exhaustion.” This word was used particularly of athletes as they trained. The word for “struggle,” which comes next, can mean in some languages “to agonize.” So, we have the word picture of an athlete straining with everything to win. But then Paul adds a twist to the idea, because Paul is straining, not with everything he has, but with everything that God gives him. So, we are left with a simple conclusion about Paul’s ministry—it was a ministry done with great personal effort and discipline but done with God’s power. This relationship works in exactly the same way as we pursue the development of Christ’s character in us.

This is important to remember, because we live in a world in which we want more and more with less and less effort. That idea has crept into Christianity, too. Some Christian evangelists promise that if you just believe, the Holy Spirit will fall upon you with amazing supernatural power and perform great miracles. But this can be a dangerous half-truth, because it can lead people to the conclusion that we just need to wait for God’s power to come while sitting comfortably in our seats!

What is your own experience with the kind of striving Paul talked about? What things has God laid upon your heart that you are struggling with? How can you learn to surrender to God’s will?

The Disciplined Will

One of the greatest enemies of our wills is our own feelings. We are increasingly living in a culture bombarded with pictures and music that can appeal directly to our senses, triggering our emotions—anger, fear, or lust—without our realizing it. How often do we think such things as *What do I feel like eating for supper? What do I feel like doing today? Do I feel good about buying this?* Feelings have thus become intimately involved in our decision-making. Feelings are not necessarily bad, but how I feel about something may have little to do with what is right or best. Indeed, our feelings can lie to us (“The heart is deceitful above all things” [Jer. 17:9]) and can create a false picture of reality, causing us to make bad choices, setting us up for a crucible of our own making.

What examples can you find from the Bible where people made choices based on feelings rather than on God’s Word? What were the consequences? (See, for example, Gen. 3:6; 2 Sam. 11:2–4; and Gal. 2:11, 12.)

Read 1 Peter 1:13. What is Peter concerned about, and what does he want his readers actually to do?

Peter understood that the mind is the rudder for the body that we control. Take away the control of the mind, and we will be controlled by whatever feelings blow our way.

Imagine walking along a narrow path to the Shepherd’s home. Along the way there are many paths leading in different directions. Some of these paths go to places that we would not want to visit. Others look tempting; they appeal to our feelings, our emotions, our desires. If, though, we take any one of them, we get off the right path and go in a way that might be exceedingly difficult to get off.

What important decisions are you facing? Ask yourself honestly, *How can I know if I am basing my choices on feeling, emotion, or desire, as opposed to the Word of God?*

Radical Commitment

“If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (*Matt. 5:29, NIV*).

Dwell on the words of Jesus in the above text. Would you call them radical? If so, why?

Radical action is necessary not because God has made the Christian life difficult, but because we and our culture have drifted so far away from God’s plans for us. People often wake up and wonder to themselves, *How could I have gone so far away from God?* The answer is always the same: just one step at a time.

Read Matthew 5:29, 30. Jesus is speaking in the context of sexual sin. However, the underlying principles apply to dealing with other sin, as well. Indeed, the principles can apply to our growth in Christ in general.

What crucial point is Jesus making with those words? Are we really called literally to maim ourselves?

Jesus isn’t calling us to harm our bodies physically—not at all! Rather, He is calling us to control our minds and therefore our bodies, no matter the cost. Notice that the text does not say that we should pray and that God will instantly remove the sinful tendencies from our lives. Sometimes God may graciously do this for us, but often He calls us to make a radical commitment to give up something, or start doing something, that we may not feel like doing at all. What a crucible that can be! The more often we make the right choices, the stronger we will become, and the weaker the power of temptation in our lives.

God sometimes uses crucibles to catch our attention when there are so many noisy distractions around us. It is in the crucible that we realize how far we have drifted from God. The crucible may be God’s call for us to make a radical decision to return to our Father’s plan for us.

The Need to Persevere

Read the story of Jacob wrestling with God (*Genesis 32*). What does this story say to us about perseverance, even amid great discouragement? (Keep the whole context of Jacob’s situation in mind before you answer.)

We can know what is right and exercise our wills to do the right thing; but when we are under pressure, it can be very difficult to keep holding on to God and His promises. That’s because we are weak and fearful. Therefore, one of the important strengths of the Christian is perseverance, the ability to keep going despite wanting to give up.

One of the greatest examples of perseverance in the Bible is Jacob. Many years before, Jacob had tricked his brother, Esau, and his father into giving him the birthright (*Genesis 27*), and ever since, he had been running in fear of Esau’s desire to kill him. Even though he had been given wonderful promises of God’s guidance and blessing in his dream of a ladder reaching to heaven (*Genesis 28*), he was still scared. Jacob was desperate for God’s assurance that he was accepted and that the promises made to him many years before were still true. As he fought someone who was actually Jesus, Jacob had his hip dislocated. From that point on, it could not have been possible to fight, as the pain would have been too excruciating. There must have been a subtle shift from fighting to hanging on. Jacob is hanging on to Jesus through unbearable pain until he receives an assurance of His blessing. So, Jesus says to him, “ ‘Let me go, for it is daybreak’ ” (*Gen. 32:26, NIV*).

Jacob’s blessing came because he held on through the pain. So it is with us. God also may dislocate our “hip” and then call us to hang on to Him through our pain. Indeed, God allowed the painful scars to continue—Jacob was still limping when he met his brother. To outside appearances it was a weakness, but for Jacob it was an indication of his strength.

What are some practical choices you can make (associations, lifestyle, reading material, health habits, spiritual life) that will help you better persevere with the Lord amid discouragement and temptation?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Night of Wrestling,” pp. 195–203, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Consecration,” pp. 43–48, in *Steps to Christ*.

“This will, that forms so important a factor in the character of man, was at the Fall given into the control of Satan; and he has ever since been working in man to will and to do of his own pleasure, but to the utter ruin and misery of man.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 515.

“In order to receive God’s help, man must realize his weakness and deficiency; he must apply his own mind to the great change to be wrought in himself; he must be aroused to earnest and persevering prayer and effort. Wrong habits and customs must be shaken off; and it is only by determined endeavor to correct these errors and to conform to right principles that the victory can be gained. Many never attain to the position that they might occupy, because they wait for God to do for them that which He has given them power to do for themselves. All who are fitted for usefulness must be trained by the severest mental and moral discipline, and God will assist them by uniting divine power with human effort.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 248.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 To what extent do you think that we actually recognize that our wills were “at the Fall given into the control of Satan”? How, by focusing on the character of Jesus, can we better understand just how fallen we are and how great God’s grace is toward us?
- 2 Read the story of Jesus in Gethsemane (*Matt. 26:36–42*). What were Jesus’ own feelings and desires, as opposed to God’s will? What can we learn from this example?
- 3 As a class, talk about the distinct things in your own culture that can work to break down our defenses and leave us more vulnerable to Satan’s attacks. What can we do to help other church members be aware of these dangers, as well as help those who feel the need for help?
- 4 Do you know someone in your church who hasn’t been there for quite a long time, who might be getting ready to give up or already has given up? What can you do as a group to encourage this person, to help him or her not turn away from Jesus? What practical things can you do to help?

Part 6: Temple Plot Foiled

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Months passed before Junior and Mother found out why Father had changed his mind and went to Junior's baptism. Evil spirits had forbidden Father from going to the Sabbath afternoon baptism, so he had turned down his son's invitation to attend. On the day of the baptism, Father felt restless and asked Mother to drive him to the Candomblé temple in Manaus, Brazil. Around 5:00 P.M., spirits at the temple told Father to dress in his high-priestly robes and go to Alpha Seventh-day Adventist Community Church. They promised to possess people in the church to prevent Junior from being baptized.

Father donned his robes and hailed a taxi. He could hear an invisible legion of evil spirits swirling around him. At the church's entrance, the spirits suddenly declared that they could not go in.

Father remembered the most important lesson that the spirits had taught him years earlier: Never leave a job undone. If he started a task, he had to finish it. Father boldly entered the church. As he walked into the crowded main hall, a sweet, sanctified energy flowed over him. It was unlike anything he had ever experienced, and it felt good. Later he realized that it must have been the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Father's anger about the baptism vanished. A deacon, Roberto Fernandez, met him at the back, gave him a hug, and led him to the baptismal pool. Father turned around and looked at the congregation, where he saw people with bowed heads. He thought they were frightened but later understood that they were praying. When he saw Junior in the baptismal pool, he realized that the spirits had lied to him. Junior wasn't being forced to join the Adventist Church. It was his own decision.

After a song, Pastor Ricardo raised his arm and said, "As a minister of the gospel, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen." Then he immersed Junior under the water.

After the baptism, Junior took the microphone and looked at Father.

"Daddy, despite your religion, I love you very much," he said.

He hugged Father and started crying. His words broke Father's heart.

When the ceremony ended, church members showered Father with hugs. He was shocked. He never expected to be treated with such love. "This is such a nice place, and the people are so nice," he said as he got into the car.

Back home, Father called everyone he knew to announce proudly that his son had been baptized. He described the experience as incredible.

Mother realized that the Holy Spirit had started to work in his heart. An unbelievable peace filled their home for four days. Then the evil spirits ordered Father to kill Mother and Junior.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) and his family live.

Key Text: *Colossians 1:29*

Study Focus: *Genesis 32; Matt. 5:29; John 16:5–15; Col. 1:28, 29; 1 Pet. 1:13.*

Part I: Overview

This lesson focuses on several essential elements that help us build a threefold strategy for overcoming crucibles. First, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we must cultivate understanding of the truth about God, evil, and ourselves in the immediate context of our life and in the larger context of the great controversy. While it is true that merely understanding our situation is not enough, this understanding is the crucial, foundational stepping-stone upon which the other elements are placed to construct the right response to the crucible. We need to know why things happen and answer these questions: Whose side do we choose to stand on, and why?

Second, we must understand the nature of our God-given free will. Yes, it is true that God is sovereign and gives us salvation and all the good things for living and prospering. However, He created us with true freedom, without which we would not be the same. That is why God empowers and calls us to exercise our free will and collaborate with Him in the great work of salvation and the development of His kingdom.

Third, this collaboration requires of us radical commitment and perseverance. We cannot collaborate with two different kings that are at war with each other. We must know the truth, choose the just and loving King of heaven, align our lives with His principles, and fully commit to the cause of His kingdom, no matter what. These principles will give us the full, ever-renewable energy to fight and overcome in the crucible of this life.

Lesson Themes: This week's lesson highlights three major themes.

1. The role of truth in overcoming crucibles
2. The role of our free will in overcoming crucibles
3. The role of commitment and perseverance in overcoming crucibles

Part II: Commentary

Augustine and Pelagius on the Freedom and the Power of the Will

Many Christians find it difficult to understand how our free will relates to the origin of evil and suffering, as well as to salvation. Some fall into one of two extremes as illustrated by the fifth-century fierce debate between British ascetic

Pelagius, who settled in Rome (c. 355–420), and Augustine (354–430), the bishop of Hippo in North Africa. Their debate was over the issue of free will and salvation. Having arrived in Rome and seen the spiritual and moral laxity of the Christians in the capital of the Western Roman Empire, Pelagius concluded that the problem was rooted in the teachings of Augustine on original sin and grace.

Thus, Pelagius decided to confront the bishop of Hippo (present-day northeastern Algeria). Augustine taught that God is love, and the essence of love is freedom (there is no love without freedom). Further, Augustine posited that God created a perfect and good universe. He also created humans in His image, which means that humans were created perfect, good, loving, and free. Thus, according to Augustine, when Adam and Eve abused their freedom and sinned, they generated the original sin. As a consequence, they were covered in guilt, their nature changed from perfect to sinful, and they lost their freedom. They could still perceive the good or the perfect but could not live it out.

What Augustine proposed was that sin is more than an individual act or error; rather, it is a condition of human existence separate and against God. Original sin comprised guilt and proclivity to evil. After the Fall, all humans are sinful, Augustine opined, because we are born with Adam's guilt and with a sinful nature that enslaves our wills and lives. Thus, Augustine believed that we cannot be saved simply by choosing to do good, because we *are* sinful; we cannot be saved simply by receiving an instruction or encouragement or by following an example, because we cannot do away with Adam's guilt. Nor do we have the power to overcome our sinful condition and do good, Augustine further asserted. In his opinion, the only way to be saved is if we could die to the sinful nature and resurrect to another nature. But according to Augustine, we cannot do even this by ourselves. The only way we are saved is by God's grace. In His grace, Augustine explained, God exercises His sovereign will and decides to save us by Himself: He removes Adam's and our guilt from us through His grace and the sacrament of baptism and subdues our sinful nature through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who regenerates in us a new spiritual nature and gives us the power to live a righteous life. For this reason, Augustine introduced the concept of divine predestination: because we are enslaved by sin after the Fall, we cannot repent on our own; thus, God predestines some of us to salvation and the rest to perdition.

Pelagius thought that Augustine's position led to spiritual laxity, as Christians would now blame their moral decadence on the original sin and would shun personal responsibility for sin and evil. For this reason, Pelagius proposed another perspective. Like Augustine, Pelagius believed that God created a perfect universe and humans as free beings. Evil originated in Adam's free choice to sin. However, Pelagius rejected Augustine's idea that humans inherit a sinful nature and guilt from Adam. According to Pelagius, Adam's sin affected only him and not his children. Thus, Pelagius reasoned, the innocence and free will of Adam's posterity were fully preserved, and therefore, each child that is born into the world is born with a perfect nature and a perfectly operational free will.

Further, Pelagius asserted that all humans sin, not because they are born with Adam's guilt and sinful nature, but all sin because all of us are born and live in a corrupt social environment and exercise our will and choose to sin. According to Pelagius, a person is guilty, not because of the guilt inherited from Adam but because of his or her own choice to sin. Therefore, Pelagius maintained, God holds us accountable for our sins because we are truly free. God calls us to conduct a righteous life because He knows we can do so. Jesus lived a perfect life and showed us that this is possible. Yes, we live by God's grace, but in Pelagius's view, the divine grace consisted in the fact that God created us with free will, gave us His law and instructions for living out good and perfect lives, and gave us the example of Jesus. Furthermore, God gives us forgiveness in Jesus in case we fall by choosing to sin and gives us the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our spiritual journey. For additional reading on the Augustine-Pelagian debate, see, for example, Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (Oxford, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 18–20.

Each of the two contenders were, no doubt, sincere and highlighted good points. However, each of them fell into extremes. Augustine fell into predestination and sacramentalism (God's grace comes to us through the sacraments). Pelagius fell into a superficial treatment of sin and salvation by works. The truth lies in the Bible! The Bible presents God as love (*John 3:16; 1 John 4:8, 16*). He created Adam and Eve innocent (*Gen. 1:31, Gen. 2:25, Eccles. 7:29*) and with freedom of choice (*Gen. 2:15–17*). However, our parents chose to sin (*Gen. 3:6*).

The Bible is clear that sin is not a simple past act of Adam and Eve. Rather, the Genesis account of the Fall describes immediate and profound changes appearing in their nature, relationships, environment, lifestyle, and descendants (*Gen. 3:7–24, Gen. 4:1–16*). The apostle Paul stipulates that with Adam sin and death “entered” (invaded) and pervaded the world in space and time (*Rom. 5:12–14, NKJV*). Sin brought upon humanity suffering, death, and condemnation for all men (*Rom. 5:16–18*). Because of the transgression of Adam, all people “were made sinners” (*Rom. 5:19, NKJV*). For this reason, all humans are born in sin, and none is born righteous (*Rom. 3:9–18, 23; Ps. 14:1–3; Ps. 51:5*). Thus, the Bible rejects Pelagianism and presents sin as more than an individual human act. Rather, sin is described as both an external and internal force that enslaves and destroys all humanity in all its aspects. Facing this grim outlook, Paul exclaimed desperately: “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (*Rom. 7:24, NKJV*). By itself, humanity cannot solve the problem of sin and evil. The only hope for sinful humanity is in the sacrificial and transformative ministry of Jesus Christ (*Rom. 3:24, 25; Rom. 5:6–19; Rom. 7:25*) and in the regenerative and mediating ministry of the Holy Spirit, who gives us a new heart (*Ezek. 36:26, 27; John 3:5–8; Rom. 8:3–6, 9–17*).

Furthermore, the Bible does not teach the Augustinian concept of predestination and sacramentalism. Yes, at the foundation of the biblical teaching

of salvation is always God's initiative, intervention, solution (the sacrifice of Christ), and power for redemption (*Gen. 3:8, 15; Exod. 20:2; Rom. 5:6–8*). However, God did not predestine some humans for salvation and some for perdition. Rather, God always gave humans the individual freedom to choose (*Josh. 24:15*) and holds the individuals and nations accountable for their acceptance or rejection of His salvation (*see, for example, Gen 4:4–12, Gen. 15:16*). The golden text of the gospel declares that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (*John 3:16, NKJV*). The Bible insists that God wants, and invites, all to be saved (*Ezekiel 33; John 1:12, 13; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:2; Rev. 22:17*). And once the people respond to God's invitation, they collaborate with God in His salvation (*2 Pet. 1:10, James 4:8, Rev. 3:20*). Scripture also rejects any sacramental view of the divine grace; on the contrary, the New Testament emphasizes that God gives all of us His grace, only—and directly—through Jesus Christ (*Acts 4:12; Heb. 5:9; Heb. 7:24, 25; Hebrews 9; Hebrews 10*).

Historically, most Christians rejected Pelagius and embraced Augustine's understanding that all humans are born with a sinful nature and that sin is an invincible force for humans. Roman Catholics integrated into their theology Augustine's idea that all humans inherit Adam's guilt and the need for sacraments but rejected his views on predestination. In contradistinction, Protestantism rightly rejected Augustine's idea that we inherit Adam's guilt and that God's grace comes through the sacraments, but large parts of Protestantism erroneously accepted his concept of predestination. In the wake of the Enlightenment, modern and postmodern societies tend to reject the Augustinian ideas and think more in line with Pelagius. To reach people in these societies, we not only need to emphasize the biblical teachings on the free will and our profound responsibility for our individual and communal history but also share the biblical teaching about the seriousness of the power of sin and our only hope of salvation in Jesus Christ. This illustration helps us understand that knowing the truth is essential for our understanding of suffering and trials in our lives. But it also helps us understand our own nature and the power of free will. Such understanding helps us always seek and accept God's help, guidance, and power to overcome our crucibles.

Part III: Life Application

1. ***Spiritual discipline and cheap grace.*** Of course, Augustine and Luther taught salvation by divine predestination as a celebration of God's tremendous grace. However, this concept has led some Christians to think that if we are irreversibly elected and saved by God, we do not,

and cannot, participate at all in the process of salvation. This concept, also called “cheap grace,” leads to a lack of spiritual discipline in many Christians. If God irreversibly elected us, why pray? Why read the Bible? Why be vigilant? Why participate in the life of the community of faith? Why evangelize? Great historical movements of revival in Protestantism, such as late seventeenth-century Philipp Spener’s pietism in the German Lutheran context and several Great Awakening movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in North America, responded to this peril by proposing deliberate spiritual discipline programs for both families and communities. Examine your individual spiritual life, the spiritual life of your family, and the spiritual life of your community. What is the state of spiritual discipline in these circles? What can you do to make meaningful and profound changes so as to bring about a spiritual discipline in accordance with the biblical exhortations (*see Col. 1:28, 29; 1 Cor. 9:23–27*)? Design a project to promote a lifestyle of spiritual discipline for your personal life, and, if necessary and possible, for your family and community.

2. **Radical Commitment.** Some Christians think Christianity is synonymous with the absence of suffering and troubles. Other Christians do allow for some amount of inconvenience. But how many Christians are radically committed to God, to His call to follow Christ, to His kingdom, and to His mission in the great conflict between God and Satan, good and evil? In the context of increasing persecution of contemporary Christians in various parts of the world, numerous Christians feel the need for a better—indeed, radical—preparedness to go through crucibles. Examine your level of commitment to God and His kingdom. Design a scale of personal commitment. Based on your scale, what is radical commitment for you? To what extent are you ready in your Christian commitment to serve God in whatever way He may ask of you?

Indestructible Hope



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Hab. 1:1–4, Job 38–41, Isa. 41:8–14, Jer. 29:1–10, Heb. 12:1–13.*

Memory Text: “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (*Romans 5:5, NKJV*).

When in church surrounded by smiling people, how easy it is to talk and sing about hope. But when we find ourselves within the crucible, hope does not always seem so easy. As circumstances press in around us, we begin to question everything, particularly the wisdom of God.

In one of his books, C. S. Lewis writes about a make-believe lion. Wanting to meet this lion, someone asks if the lion is safe. The person is told that he’s not safe, “but he’s good.”

Even though we don’t always understand God and He seems to do unpredictable things, that doesn’t mean that God is against us. It simply means that we don’t have the full picture yet. But we struggle with the idea that for us to have peace, confidence, and hope, God must be understandable and predictable. He needs to be, in our thinking, “safe.” As such, we set ourselves up for disappointment.

The Week at a Glance: How does our understanding of the character of God help us maintain hope in the crucible?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 13.

The Big Picture

When we are hurting, it is very easy to presume that what happens to us is the only thing that matters. But there is a slightly larger picture than just “me” (see Rev. 12:7, Rom. 8:22).

Read Habakkuk 1:1–4. What did Habakkuk face?

You might expect that God would say something like, “That’s really terrible, Habakkuk; let Me come and help you immediately.” But God’s answer is the opposite. He tells Habakkuk that it is going to get worse. Read this in Habakkuk 1:5–11.

Israel had been taken into captivity by the Assyrians, but God promises that worse is coming: The Babylonians will now carry away the people of Judah. Habakkuk cries out again in verses 12–17 and then waits to see what God is going to say.

How does God’s introduction to the promised destruction of Babylon in Habakkuk 2:2, 3 bring hope?

Habakkuk 2 is God’s promise of the destruction of the Babylonians. Hebrews 10:37 quotes Habakkuk 2:3, hinting of a Messianic application to this promise in the future. With the same certainty that the destruction of Babylon was promised, so we also have the certainty of the destruction of “ ‘Babylon the Great’ ” (Rev. 18:2, *NIV*).

Habakkuk was trapped between the great evil surrounding him and God’s promise of worse to come. Yet, this is precisely where we find ourselves in salvation history. Great evil is around us, but the Bible predicts that much worse is to come. The key to Habakkuk’s survival is that he is brought to see the whole picture. Therefore, in chapter 3 he is able to pray an incredible prayer of praise because of what God will do in the future.

Read Habakkuk 3:16–19. What does Habakkuk identify as his reasons for hope? What is the hope of God’s people as we wait for the last prophetic scenes to unfold? How can you make this hope your own?

Who Our Father Is

Oswald Chambers writes, “Have you been asking God what He is going to do? He will never tell you. God does not tell you what He is going to do; He reveals to you Who He is.”—*My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour & Company, Inc., 1963), January 2.

What do you think Chambers means by this idea?

As we know, the book of Job begins with great personal tragedy for Job. He loses everything, except his life and his wife, and she suggests that he “curse God and die!” (*Job 2:9, NIV*). What follows is a discussion in which his friends try to work out why it has all happened. Throughout all of these discussions, God remains silent.

Then suddenly in Job 38, God appears and speaks: “‘Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?’” (*Job 38:2, NIV*). Without pausing, God asks Job some 60 jaw-dropping questions. Open your Bible and scan through these in Job 38 and 39.

After the last question, Job replies, “‘I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more’” (*Job 40:4, 5, NIV*). But God is not finished. He then begins again and asks another set of “big” questions in succession.

Read Job’s final response in Job 42:1–6. What was God trying to tell Job, and what was the effect on him?

God never answers any of the “why” questions of Job’s friends. But God does paint a picture of His unparalleled greatness as revealed through the astonishing works of Creation. After this, Job certainly does not need any answers. The need for explanations has been eclipsed by an overwhelming picture of the magnificence of God.

This story reveals a fascinating paradox. Hope and encouragement can spring from the realization that we know so little. Instinctively, we try to find comfort by knowing everything, and so we become discouraged when we cannot know. But sometimes God highlights our ignorance so that we may realize that human hope can find security only in a Being much greater than ourselves.

Are things that you just can’t understand happening now? If so, focus on the character of God. How can doing that give you the hope that you need to persevere through what’s, for now, incomprehensible?

Our Father's Presence

“ **For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you** ’ ” (Isa. 41:13, NIV).

Someone once said, “When God seems far away, who is the one who has moved?” When problems strike, we presume that God has deserted us. The truth is that He hasn't gone anywhere.

God's presence seemed very far away to the Jews in exile. Yet, through Isaiah, God assures them of future deliverance. However, while the actual return to Jerusalem was still many years in the future, God wanted His people to know that He had not moved away from them and that there was every reason for hope.

Read Isaiah 41:8–14. What reasons for hope can you identify for people waiting eagerly for future deliverance? How does this promise help us as we wait for our exile on earth to end?

One of the most powerful images in these verses is found in verse 13. The sovereign God of the universe says that His people do not need to fear, because He is the one who takes “ ‘hold of your right hand’ ” (NIV). It is one thing to imagine God guiding events on earth from a big throne light-years away from our earth. But it is an altogether different picture to realize that He is close enough to hold the hands of His dearly beloved people.

When we are busy, it can be hard to remember that God is so close to us. But when we do remember that He is Immanuel, “God with us,” it makes such a difference. When God's presence is with us, so are His purposes, His promises, and His transforming power.

Over the next few days, try an experiment. At every moment possible, try to remind yourself that the God of the universe is close enough to you to hold your hand and is personally promising you help. Keep a record of how this changes the way you live. Be prepared to discuss your experience in class on Sabbath.

Our Father's Plans for Us

Everyone is looking for hope. But where is it found? For some people, hope is found in the smile of a friend. For others, hope grows out of financial security or a stable marriage. Where do you normally look for hope and courage?

In the book of Jeremiah, the prophet is writing to people who had lost hope in their exile. "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion" (*Ps. 137:1, NIV*). But even though they are heartbroken, Jeremiah lays out reasons they should not give up hope.

What reasons for hope are given in Jeremiah 29:1–10?

In this passage, there are three important sources of hope worth highlighting.

First, God tells His people that they should not give up hope, because their situation is not the result of chance or unpredictable evil. For God Himself says, "I carried [Judah] into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon" (*Jer. 29:4, NIV*). Though evil seems to surround them, Judah has never left the center of God's hands.

Second, God tells His people that they should not give up hope, because He can work even within their present difficulties. " 'Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper' " (*Jer. 29:7, NIV*).

Third, God tells His people that they should not give up hope, because He is going to bring an end to their exile at a specific time: "This is what the LORD says: 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place' " (*Jer. 29:10, NIV*).

After God explains how He was in charge of their past, is in charge of their present, and will be in charge of their future, He then beautifully conveys His tender care for His people (*see Jer. 29:11–14*).

Read Jeremiah 29:11–14, saying your name after the word *you*, as if God is making these promises to you personally. Apply these promises for yourself in whatever your present struggles might be.

Our Father’s Discipline

Read Hebrews 12:5–13. What’s the message to us here, and how does it fit in with what we have been studying this quarter?

In Hebrews 12:5–13, Paul describes trials in the context of discipline. In the New International Version Bible translation of this passage, various forms of the word “discipline” appear ten times. In the Greek world, this word was the most basic word for “education.” So, to understand “discipline” is to understand how God educates us in the school of faith that Paul has been describing before in Hebrews 11.

Throughout Hebrews 11, Paul has been painting pictures of men and women of faith. Their faith was what kept them going when they were faced with all sorts of trying situations. As we enter chapter 12, Paul turns to us, the readers, and says that since so many people before us have persevered against incredible odds, we also can run and finish the life of faith. The key is to fix our eyes upon Jesus (*Heb. 12:2*), that He may be an Example when times are difficult (*Heb. 12:3*). Reading chapter 12 is like being given a set of reading glasses. Without these glasses our vision or understanding of hardship will always be fuzzy. But looking through these glasses will correct the blurred explanation of suffering that our culture presses upon us. Then we will be able to understand clearly and be able to respond to trials intelligently.

Read through the “glasses” of Hebrews 12:1–13. Now concentrate on verses 5–13 and answer these questions:

What is the source of discipline? _____

What is our response to discipline? _____

What is the goal of discipline? _____

Read through Hebrews 12:1–13 again. Make a list of all the reasons you can identify with as grounds for hope. How have you experienced this hope in your own times of spiritual “education”?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The School of the Hereafter,” pp. 301–309, in *Education*; “Help in Daily Living,” pp. 470, 471, in *The Ministry of Healing*.

“Into the experience of all there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement—days when sorrow is the portion, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind benefactor of His earthborn children; days when troubles harass the soul, till death seems preferable to life. It is then that many lose their hold on God and are brought into the slavery of doubt, the bondage of unbelief. Could we at such times discern with spiritual insight the meaning of God’s providences we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, striving to plant our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills, and new faith, new life, would spring into being.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 162.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Ellen G. White says that “all” of us experience times of “keen disappointment and utter discouragement.” How well do we notice each other as we go through such times? How can we better learn to be agents of hope for each other when we experience such bitter disappointments?
- 2 As a class, go over your answers to Tuesday’s final question. What difference did it make in your life as you kept the reality of God’s nearness ever before you?
- 3 In class, read aloud sections in Job 38–41. What kind of picture of God does it present? What do you learn that gives you hope and encouragement? How does the Sabbath fit into this picture? How does it help keep before us the nature and character of God?
- 4 Hope that transforms comes from heaven. This means that we can pray for hope to be brought into each other’s lives. Spend some time praying for those whose hope has been faltering recently, that their hope may be renewed. More than that, what can you do for others who are in a losing struggle to find hope?
- 5 If someone is willing, ask that person to recount a time that despair and trials caused him or her to lose hope and faith. What turned that person around? What can we share with one another that can help when we are in times of doubt and despair?

Part 7: Father Surrenders

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Four days after Junior's baptism, evil spirits ordered Father to kill his family. Otherwise, they warned, Junior and Mother would destroy him because they were praying for him. For the first time, Father mustered up the courage to talk back. "How?" he asked. "Aren't our prayers more powerful?"

The spirits backed down and told Father to leave his home in Manaus, Brazil. They told him to take a boat to one of five cities where Candomblé priests were waiting for him. But when Father sought to buy a boat ticket, none was available to those cities. The only tickets were to Coari. Remembering an uncle in Coari, Father decided to sail there.

Uncle Cesario Ferreira was thrilled to see Father, and he organized a family reunion. Father didn't know the relatives well, but he confided that a spiritual conflict had erupted at home. Ninety-two-year-old Aunt Tereza patted him on the shoulder. "Son, it's time for you to give up," she said. "You have been serving evil spirits your whole life. Now it's time to serve God."

Father looked shocked. "Are you a Protestant Christian?" he asked, remembering that the evil spirits had told him to stay away from them.

Aunt Tereza smiled and motioned toward the other relatives, who also were smiling. "Son, we're all Protestant Christians!" she said.

The next day, Father worriedly called a temple priest for advice. Uncle Cesario, who was preparing breakfast, overheard the conversation. After Father hung up, he said, "Son, did you know that Jesus cast out evil spirits?"

"How did He do that?" Father asked.

For the next three days, Uncle Cesario read Bible stories about how Jesus cast out evil spirits. On the fourth day, he told about the man possessed by a legion of evil spirits in Mark 5:1–19. Father was surprised that the spirits told Jesus, "My name is Legion; for we are many" (*verse 9, NKJV*). "That's true!" he said. "When I went to the church for Junior's baptism, I went with a legion of evil spirits."

The fifth day, Uncle Cesario didn't tell any stories. Father was afraid to ask why, and he went for a long walk. That evening, he became upset when a temple priest called him to ask for help securing animals for sacrifices.

"Let the spirits be the sacrifice!" he blurted out. "They commanded me to kill my own son. Solve your problems without me!"

Father, still upset, sat down at the table for supper. "Son," Uncle Cesario said, "did you know that the devil killed Job's own son and other children?" Father had never heard of Job, and he wept as he heard the story from the Bible. At the end, Father said, "I've made a decision. I'll leave Candomblé and get to know the Adventists' God. Please pray. The devil will try to kill me."

The next day, Father returned home and announced his decision to Mother. "I'm willing to follow your God," he said.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) and his family live.

Key Text: *Romans 5:5*

Study Focus: *Job 38–41, Isa. 41:8–14, Jer. 29:1–10, Hab. 1:1–4, Heb. 12:1–13.*

Part I: Overview

With postmodernism promoting the deconstruction and revision of concepts and worldviews, many feel the notion and source of hope for humanity needs a revision too. What is hope? What is its source or foundation? The previous lesson focused on the importance of truth and understanding. This week's lesson looks at hope from the perspective of the biblical truth about God, who is the Source of real hope. In times of crises, the hope we need is not a self-generated desire, but a solidly grounded trust in God's promises. Several lessons emerge in our present study. First, God widens our horizon so that we may locate ourselves and our experience within the larger framework of the plan of salvation and prophetic events. This reality is exemplified in the lives of Daniel, Habakkuk, and Job. Second, God presents Himself to us as the Creator and the Redeemer, as the One who loves us and is present with us. Third, God reveals to us His plans with us and for us. We are not some expendable elements in a crisis. We are indispensable parts of God's creation, life, and plans. Even if we are in a crisis, God will never allow us to be lost. In John 10:10–15, 28, 29, Jesus tells us with all solemnity that we are His sheep, that He is our Shepherd, that His plan is to give us eternal life, and that no one will ever snatch us out of His or the Father's hands. Yes, God may allow us to go through various crises, but these crises are designed to help us grow.

Lesson Themes: This week's lesson highlights two major themes.

1. Understanding the larger framework of the plan of salvation and prophetic events plays a crucial role in helping us to cultivate the hope that helps us overcome the crucibles of life.
2. The biblical source of hope lies in understanding who God is; that He is with us; and that He has plans for, and with, us.

Part II: Commentary

Hope in the New Testament

From the first moments of the crisis of sin on our planet, God wove hope into the very fabric of our history by promising us He would save us and

restore us to His kingdom. A brief study of hope in the New Testament reveals several important aspects: first, in the New Testament, it is the apostle Paul who treats hope in a more systematic way. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul enumerates three major Christian virtues: faith, hope, and love (*1 Cor. 13:13*). It is true that he picks love as the “greatest” of the three, but elsewhere he explains that both faith and love “spring from . . . hope” (*Col. 1:5, NIV*). In the definition of hope, Paul says hope is an “anchor of the soul”; it is “both sure and steadfast.” But such hope is anchored in Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary (*Heb. 6:19*).

Faith also is defined in terms of hope (*Heb. 11:1*). Hebrews 11 lists the heroes of faith along the centuries. All of them went through trials (*Heb. 11:33–38*), but what they have in common is faith defined in terms of promise and hope. None of them received the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise (*Heb. 11:39*); yet, they all looked beyond their time to the future country, the eternal kingdom of God (*Heb. 11:15, 16*).

Paul treats the subject of hope in the context of suffering. He glories in his suffering because suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces character, and character produces hope (*Rom. 5:4; see also Rom. 12:12*). Paul was hopeful amid his suffering and huge crises (*2 Cor. 4:9*). When we are being disciplined, he explained, we must not give up hope (*Heb. 12:5*). Paul also sees the entire creation struggling with “futility” in its own crucible, not because of its own fault but because of God “who subjected it in hope” (*Rom. 8:20–24, NKJV*).

In Romans 8:18–27, Paul takes time to discuss hope extensively. But he starts with the suffering that we presently go through: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (*Rom. 8:18, NKJV*). Paul does not stop at our human suffering but highlights the fact that all nature suffers (*Rom. 8:19–22*). Suffering is a complex package. Nothing in the natural world is exempt. Suffering also encompasses the totality of what makes us human—the physical, moral, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of our being (*Rom. 8:23*).

Thus, God’s redemption also must, by necessity, encompass all His creation—nature, body, emotions, and all the other aspects of the human being. Paul underlines that this plan of restoration is our Christian hope because we are “saved in this hope” (*Rom. 8:24, NKJV*). While this restoration is certain, it is not visible yet; that is, it has not yet been actualized in history. It is something that God promises; therefore, we can be sure it will take place (*Rom. 8:24; see also 1 Cor. 9:10*). Now, it is hope precisely because it is not actualized; it still is in the future, and “we eagerly wait for it with perseverance” (*Rom. 8:25, NKJV*).

Yes, we do experience suffering, disappointment, lack of understanding, lack of ability to properly express ourselves and pray, but the Holy Spirit helps us with His mediation before God (*Rom. 8:26–28*).

Ultimately, the essential aspect in this entire situation is to trust God that “all things work together for good to those who love God” (*Rom. 8:28, NKJV*). This is why Christians exercise the “patience of hope” (*1 Thess. 1:3*).

A more extensive Bible study on hope provides several additional points:

1. Biblical hope is anchored in God, not in ourselves (*Ps. 42:11, 2 Cor. 1:9, 1 Tim. 6:17*). All three Persons of the Godhead are part of the fountain of hope. God the Father “loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace” (*2 Thess. 2:16, ESV; see also 1 Tim. 4:10, Titus 1:2*). Christ Jesus and His gospel of grace are our hope (*Eph. 1:12, Col. 1:27, 1 Tim. 1:1, 2 Tim. 1:1*). The Holy Spirit brings and maintains hope in the lives of the believers (*Rom. 5:5, Rom. 15:13, Gal. 5:5*). Without God, there is no hope in life, no covenant, and thus, we are estranged from God (*Eph. 2:12, 1 Thess. 4:13*); but in Christ, we all have the same hope given by God to Israel through the gospel (*Eph. 3:6, Col. 1:23*). The apostle Peter tells us that God is our Father who gave us a “living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (*1 Pet. 1:3, NKJV*).
2. The content of biblical hope is God’s promise of saving us from sin, death, and suffering through Jesus Christ. Matthew quotes Isaiah to describe Jesus as the Hope of the nations (*Isa. 42:1–4, Matt. 12:21*). Jesus says that Abraham hoped to see the day of the Messiah (*John 8:56*). That is the hope of righteousness by faith (*Gal. 5:5*).
3. God’s hope is already valid for our present life. Our hope is fixed on salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. This hope gives us, in this life, numerous benefits, both spiritual (such as a relationship with God) and psychological (peace, optimism, etc.). The “hope of the glory of God” (*Rom. 5:2*) is the justification of sinners by grace through faith, by which God gives us peace in Jesus Christ (*Rom. 5:2, 3*). This hope “does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (*Rom. 5:5, NKJV*). So, this hope is not a false one. Rather, this hope is based on God’s concrete actions; that is, just at the right time, “Christ died for the ungodly” (*Rom. 5:6, NKJV*). Thus, Jesus demonstrated His love for us (*Rom. 5:8*), saving us from our sins and reconciling us with God (*Rom. 5:9–11*).
4. But Christ’s first advent and His sacrifice on the cross are not the end of the redemption story. The apostle Paul tells us that “if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable”

(*1 Cor. 15:19, NKJV*). For this reason, our hope is anchored in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, who will resurrect us for an eternal and glorious life (*Col. 1:5, 27; Titus 1:2; Titus 3:7; Heb. 10:23; see also 2 Cor. 1:9, 1 Tim. 4:8*). Paul declared that he was persecuted because of the hope of the resurrection (*Acts 23:6, Acts 24:15*). The resurrection was not an invention of Paul but was the same hope that God gave to the fathers of Israel (*Acts 26:6; Acts 28:20*). According to Paul, Abraham became the father of many nations because, “against all hope” (*Rom. 4:18, NIV*), he “believed in hope” (*Rom. 4:18*), trusting in the “God who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist” (*Rom. 4:17, AMP*). The hope of resurrection will be consummated at the second coming of Jesus, which itself is the “blessed hope” of the Christian (*Titus 2:13*).

5. It was precisely this hope that constituted the call, identity, ethos, life, and mission of the nation of Israel (*Acts 26:7*). This hope of salvation that God offers us through Christ reached humanity through the patriarchs, Israel, and later the church (*Rom. 15:4, 1 Cor. 1:7, Eph. 2:12*). We are participants in distributing God’s hope to all the people. God promised Eve that her Seed would save the world (*Gen. 3:15*). God promised Abraham that blessings and salvation for the nations would come through him; that is, through his Seed (*Gen. 12:3, 7; Gen. 18:18; Rom. 9:4; Gal. 3:8, 15, 16*). God promised David that his Seed would sit forever on the throne (*Rom. 15:12; see Isa. 11:1, 2; 2 Sam. 22:51*).
6. Paul invokes hope in his blessing upon God’s people amid suffering: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (*Rom. 15:13, NKJV; 2 Thess. 2:16*). Hope serves as the helmet in the armor of the Christian (*1 Thess. 5:8*).

Part III: Life Application

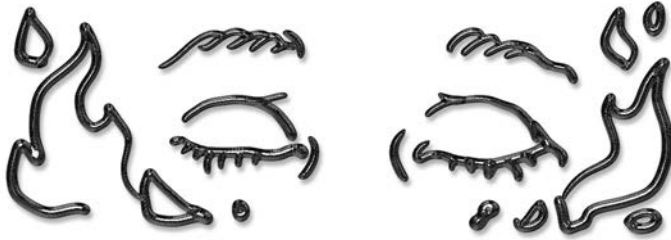
1. **Daniel goes through a similar “waiting experience” to Habakkuk’s. By the end of his life, Daniel expects the 70 years of exile prophesied by Jeremiah (*Jer. 25:11, 12*) to end and for God’s salvation to be manifested. However, God reveals to Daniel that the history of suffering and death will extend by an additional 70 weeks (490 years). What is more, this period will continue for an additional 1,810 years beyond the additional 70, for a total of 2,300 years! Some Christians do not like prophecy because it “darkens” their horizon. Perhaps they do not need to focus on prophecy all the time. But moments come and situations in life arise when the bigger picture is necessary, no matter**

how painful the prophetic answer may be. This bigger picture is painted by God's revelation through His prophets. Without such prophecies, including the apocalyptic ones, God's people will struggle desperately to maintain hope as they live through an ever-increasing number of global and personal crises. How does the bigger picture of prophetic revelation help you trust God and His providence to overcome crucibles?

Notes



Seeing *the* Invisible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Rom. 8:28–39, John 14:1–14, Eph. 1:18–23, Isa. 40:27–31.*

Memory Text: “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (*Hebrews 11:27, NKJV*).

The definition of faith in the book of Hebrews is always challenging. “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (*Heb. 11:1, NIV*). How can we be sure about what we do not see? Yet, this is exactly what Moses illustrates in our memory verse: “He persevered because he saw him who is invisible” (*Heb. 11:27, NIV*).

It is even more challenging to realize that we are called to see “him who is invisible” not simply when times are good but especially when everything is going wrong. For this we need faith, a Christlike faith that must be shaped by the truth about God and God’s kingdom. The truth about our Father’s goodness, the power in the name of Jesus, the power of the Resurrection, and the compassion of God are essential truths that will enable us to stand strong when we are in the crucible and may be tempted to doubt everything.

The Week at a Glance: What truths about God can help sustain us through even the worst situations?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 20.

Our Father's Extravagance

"If God really loved me, He would certainly do _____ for me!" I wonder how many times that thought has flickered through our minds. We look at our circumstances and then begin to wonder whether God really loves us, because if He really did, things would be different.

There are two rationales that often lead us to doubt God's goodness. First, when we have a burning desire in our hearts and minds for something that we believe is good, the idea that God might want something different for us may seem ridiculous. Second, we may doubt God's goodness because our experience clashes with what we believe. If something looks good or feels good or sounds good or tastes good, then it must be good. And so we get angry with God when we can't have it.

This is where faith comes into play. Faith comes into action precisely at those times we are tempted to doubt God and His goodness.

Romans 8:28–39 is a powerful passage that describes the goodness of God toward us. What reasons can you find in the text that can guard our minds against doubting God's goodness?

In Romans 8:32, there is an important piece of logic that is extremely helpful in guarding us from becoming overwhelmed by our circumstances. "If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us?" (*The Message*). How could we possibly think that God would send Jesus to die for us and then turn mean and stingy?

This means that the truth of God's generosity to us, seen in the death of Christ, must have a stronger impact in our thinking than all of the doubts that the crucible may generate inside us.

How is it possible for a truth (God's goodness) to have a more powerful effect on you than your doubts? Spend some time meditating on the truth that God has given Jesus to die in your place, and that this incredible generosity continues in a thousand different ways for you today. What does this do for your faith?

In the Name of Jesus

“**If you ask anything in My name, I will do it**” (*John 14:14, NKJV*).

Jesus was not going to be with the disciples much longer. The One who had been their support and encouragement was going to heaven, and the disciples were beginning to feel confused and powerless. But though the disciples would not be able to see Him physically any longer, Jesus gave them a remarkable promise.

Read John 14:1–14. According to verses 13 and 14, Jesus promises to do for us “anything” that we ask in His name. Because of this, we almost always add on to the end of our prayers, “In Jesus’ name, amen.”

When we say this, what do we normally think it means? What does Jesus mean when He encourages us to pray like this? What clues are there in these verses that help us to understand the point He’s making?

When our request is “in the name of Jesus,” we can be certain that the whole machinery of heaven is at work on our behalf. We may not see the angels working all around us. But they are—sent from the throne of heaven in the name of Jesus, to fulfill our requests.

Sometimes when we pray in the name of Jesus, we open our eyes and expect everything to be different around us—but it all looks the same. However, while the power of God may come with dramatic effect, as when Jesus calmed the storm, it also may come in quietness, unnoticed, as when the power of God sustained Jesus in Gethsemane. Something dramatic may not suddenly happen, but that doesn’t mean that God is not at work for us.

Read John 14:1–14 again. As you read, imagine that Jesus is talking directly to you, face-to-face. What hope and encouragement can you draw from these promises? At the same time, ask yourself, “What things in my life could be standing in the way of having these promises fulfilled for me? What changes must I purpose in my heart to make?”

The Power of the Resurrection

The Resurrection addresses the problem of human powerlessness. When we think about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we often think about how the death of Jesus was the event that made us legally right with God. And that, of course, is true.

However, the Resurrection adds a specific dimension to salvation. The resurrection of Jesus is meaningful not just because it shows us that one day we will be resurrected, as well. The Resurrection placed Jesus at the right hand of the Father in a position of power and authority. This Resurrection power is the same power that God makes available for us today!

In Ephesians 1:18–23, Paul talks about the power of God. What does this text teach us about the power of the Resurrection? What hope and promises for yourself can you find in these verses?

Paul is praying that the Ephesians understand a few things that can be understood properly only with divine help: (1) that there is the hope of transformation and an eternal future to which Jesus has called us and (2) that we understand the power that was manifested in our behalf.

Paul then tries to describe how astonishing this power is. The power that is available to us today is the same power that resurrected Jesus not just out of the ground and back to life, but to the place of power at the Father's right hand.

But Paul doesn't stop there. The Resurrection didn't simply give Jesus just any sort of power. It gave Him the power to rule and provide every possible thing His people could ever need—for all eternity!

Make a list of the areas in your life where you need the power of the resurrected Jesus. When you have finished, pray that this power will be applied to all these areas of need. At the same time, what can you do better? What choices can you make that can allow this power to work more freely in your life?

To Carry All Our Worry

There is a plaque that some people have in their homes that reads “Why pray when you can worry?” It makes us laugh because we know how often we worry rather than come to God and give Him our concerns.

Someone once said that when our life becomes all tied up, we should give it to God and let Him untie the knots. How God must long to do this for us. Yet, amazingly, we manage to hang on to our problems until we are about to snap. Why do we wait until we are desperate before we go to the Lord?

Read 1 Peter 5:7. Peter is quoting from Psalm 55:22. What’s the basic message here for us? (See also Matt. 6:25–33.)

It is a very simple text. There is no secret hidden in it, and it means exactly what it says. To cast means to do just that, to throw, to give away, so that what is causing the aching and the concern no longer has any connection to you. But, of course, our burdens are not thrown just anywhere. Our worry does not disappear into a void. It is given to our Father in heaven, who promises to sort it out. That’s what Jesus is telling us in the verses in Matthew. The problem in doing this is not that it’s hard; rather, it’s that it just seems too easy, too good to be true.

Anxiety is caused by all sorts of things. It could be due to pressure from work, unexpected criticism, feeling that we are unwanted or unloved, health or financial worries, feeling that we are not good enough for God, or believing that we are not forgiven.

Whatever the reasons are, one reason we hang on to our problems is that we think we can sort them out better than anyone else can. But Peter urges us to reconsider any such idea. The reason we don’t have to worry is that God cares. But does God still care enough to intervene when a divorce is looming or we feel totally useless? The Bible says that He cares enough to transform any situation.

What are things that cause you worry now? However legitimate they are, however troublesome they are, is there anything too hard for the Lord? Maybe our biggest problem is that even though we believe that God knows about it and can fix it, we don’t believe that He will resolve it the way we would like it resolved. Dwell on that last point and ask yourself how true it is in your own life.

Still Faithful When God Cannot Be Seen

To think that no one cares about what is happening to us is very unpleasant. But to think that God does not know or care about us can be most distressing.

To the Judaeans exiled in Babylon, God did not seem to care much about their situation. They were still exiled, still feeling abandoned by God because of their sin. But Isaiah speaks words of comfort to them. Isaiah 40 is a beautiful passage in which Isaiah speaks so tenderly to the people about their God: “He tends his flock like a shepherd: he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young” (*Isa. 40:11, NIV*). But after so long, the exiles were thinking, *Where are You, O Lord? We can’t see any evidence that You are still there—or care!*

Read Isaiah 40:27–31. In what ways does Isaiah describe God? How is this description of God meant to answer their belief that “‘my way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God’” (*Isa. 40:27, NIV*)?

Another group of people who might have considered that their way was hidden from God is found in the book of Esther. In this book, God is not mentioned even once. However, the whole story is an unfolding drama of God’s intervention to save His people from an irrevocable law to have them destroyed. Not only does this story describe events of the past, but it also symbolizes a time in the future when God’s people will again be persecuted and a law again will be introduced for their destruction (*Rev. 13:15*). Can you imagine how easy it would be to conclude that if such terrible circumstances existed, God must surely have deserted His people? But we are not to fear. The same God who saved His chosen ones in the story of Esther will save them again in the final crisis.

We have read how Isaiah described God to the exiles. How would you describe God to people who felt that God had disappeared and had abandoned them? How would you teach them to see through the eyes of faith and not be dependent on what they see around them with their human eyes?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “In the Days of Queen Esther,” pp. 598–606, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“Has not God said He would give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him? And is not this Spirit a real, true actual guide? Some men seem afraid to take God at His word, as though it would be presumption in them. They pray for the Lord to teach us and yet are afraid to credit the pledged word of God and believe we have been taught of Him. So long as we come to our heavenly Father humbly and with a spirit to be taught, willing and anxious to learn, why should we doubt God’s fulfillment of His own promise? You must not for a moment doubt Him and dishonor Him thereby. When you have sought to know His will, your part in the operation with God is to believe that you will be led and guided and blessed in the doing of His will. We may mistrust ourselves lest we misinterpret His teachings, but make even this a subject of prayer, and trust Him, still trust Him to the uttermost, that His Holy Spirit will lead you to interpret aright His plans and the working of His providence.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 6, p. 225.

“Faith grows strong by coming in conflict with doubts and opposing influences. The experience gained in these trials is of more value than the most costly jewels.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 555.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, talk about the kinds of things we believe in that we do not see, things that we know are real yet are beyond our sight. How can this help us understand what it means to see “Him who is invisible”?
- 2 Discuss the final question found at the end of Wednesday’s study. How often do we find ourselves in that situation? What can we do that will better enable us to trust that the Lord’s way is the best, even if it’s not what we want?
- 3 If “faith grows strong by coming in conflict with doubts and opposing influences” and this leads to something extremely valuable, “of more value than the most costly jewels,” how should this shape the way we look at such conflicts?
- 4 Most of us have seen people, even fellow Christians, in situations in which, at least from our perspective, the outcome was horrible. The worst thing we imagined happened, despite the prayers and best efforts. How do we understand this in light of what we have been studying?

Part 8: Married to Christ

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

A week after giving his heart to Jesus, Father started to clear out the temple in Manaus, Brazil. He gathered the images and the stone altars where he had sacrificed animals and bowed to evil spirits. At the spirits' request, Father shipped the temple paraphernalia to two women in another town.

He finished the task on a Friday. As he got into his car, evil spirits growled that they were going to kill him. Suddenly, a dark shadow shaped like a man and comprised of three spirits entered the car. The spirits showed Father a distant light. Out of the light loomed a cross, filled with mud. The spirits sneered that it was the end for Father. "As a dead man, can I make a last statement?" Father asked. Without waiting for a reply, he said, "Jesus, please sit beside me in the car and take me home." The dark shadow vanished. It was the first time that Father had called on Jesus, and he felt protected.

The next morning, Father attended Sabbath worship services for the first time. It was a Communion Sabbath, and he sensed a supernatural energy similar to what he had experienced at Junior's baptism. As someone washed his feet, Father's sins passed before his eyes. Tears flowed as he asked God for forgiveness. He felt as though the Holy Spirit was washing him clean.

A short time later, Father proposed to Mother, and they officially got married. Mother was especially happy. Now she could be baptized.

The day before her baptism, Father and Junior went to Alpha Seventh-day Adventist Community Church to listen as Mother rehearsed with a choir. A ladder, which was being used to decorate the church, suddenly toppled over, and the man standing on it slammed into Father, knocking him to the floor.

Father offered assurances that he was fine but, a moment later, began to shriek. Two evil spirits had possessed him.

Junior ran to Father. He lay on the ground, his body quivering. A spirit snarled through his mouth that he had wanted to kill Father with the ladder.

Junior had heard about the great controversy between Christ and Satan, but he had never witnessed it in real life. He prayed. The choir spontaneously sang, "Jesus Christ, You are the Bridegroom, the Sower, my Father and my Shepherd, the Pearl of Great Price. Christ, You are everything."

Mother grabbed Father's twisted hands and tried to straighten them. They felt terribly cold. A spirit spewed hatred at her.

Then Father spoke in a small and distant voice. "It hurts," he said.

After about an hour of praying and singing, Father returned to normal.

Although in pain, Father joined Junior at church for Mother's baptism on Sabbath morning. With joy, Mother sank into the water.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) and his family live.

Key Text: *Hebrews 11:27*

Study Focus: *Isa. 40:27–31, John 14:1–14, Rom. 8:28–39, Eph. 1:18–23.*

Part I: Overview

Faith is another pillar of the three theological virtues of 1 Corinthians 13:13. Like hope, faith is a complex reality and pertains to our spiritual and relational nature. The apostle Paul defines faith in relation to hope and the unseen: “Now faith is the certainty of things hoped for, a proof of things not seen” (*Heb. 11:1, NASB*). As God is unseen, the only way we approach Him is by faith (*Heb. 11:6*). However, as Hebrews 11:1 establishes, this act of believing in Him is not a human imagination or an act of human self-projection into the absolute. Rather, our faith grows out of the evidence of God’s promises and fulfilled prophecies; evidence of God’s Creation; evidence of God’s providence and care for us in our personal or collective histories; evidence of His love for us in the incarnation of the Son when God became flesh and walked with us and died in our place (*John 1:1–3, 14; John 3:16, 36*); and evidence that, in the resurrection of Christ, He has power over evil, sin, suffering, and death (*Eph. 1:18–21*). By this evidence the biblical believer “sees” the invisible by faith.

Lesson Themes: This week’s lesson highlights two major themes.

1. Doubt arises when we do not trust God for the best solution to our problems.
2. The greatest foundation for our faith is Christ, His incarnation, sacrifice for us, and resurrection. Jesus is God’s evidence that He can carry our sin, suffering, and death upon Himself so that we may overcome our crucibles.

Part II: Commentary

“Seeing God”

What do we, as Christians, mean by “seeing” God? Ever since sin separated us from God, taking us through the valley of suffering and death, we have longed to see God. But what does it mean to see God in the context of sin? After waking up from his dream about the ladder connecting heaven and earth, Jacob concluded that he had seen God “face to face” (*Gen. 32:30*). Moses also is known as the prophet who spoke with

God “face to face” (*Exod. 33:11, Num. 12:8, Deut. 34:10*). Moses even declared to the people of Israel that God had spoken to them “face to face” (*Deut. 5:4*). Moses also blessed Israel by appealing to God to “shine” and “turn” His face on the nation and bestow upon them blessings, protection, providence, peace, and grace (*Num. 6:25–27*). In the same vein, when Moses expresses his desire to know God more, God assures Moses that His “presence” will accompany the people of Israel (*Exod. 33:14*). However, Moses desires a more “face to face” encounter and asks God to show him His divine glory (*Exod. 33:18; see also Exod. 3:6*). God explains to Moses that no one can see His face and live (*Exod. 33:20; see also Isa. 6:5*) and that humans are able to “see” of God only that which demonstrates His glory: His name, His goodness, His compassion, and His mercy (*Exod. 33:19, 21–23*).

Similarly, David was thirsting to see God’s face. As Job (*Job 13:24*) when in distress, David feels as if God hides His face from him and His people (*Ps. 13:1, Ps. 27:9, Ps. 30:7, Ps. 44:24, Ps. 69:17, Ps. 88:14, Ps. 102:2, Ps. 143:7; see also Lev. 20:3, 6; Deut. 31:17, 18*). But David finds encouragement in the promise that God does not hide His face from the afflicted righteous (*Ps. 22:24, Ps. 24:6*). Even when in trouble or suffering from sin, David places his hope in God, who will save him and will shine His face on David again (*Ps. 17:15, Ps. 31:16, Ps. 80:3; see also Ps. 51:9*). Therefore, David can always sing: “When You said, ‘Seek My face,’ my heart said to You, ‘I shall seek Your face, LORD’” (*Ps. 27:8, NASB; see also Ps. 105:4; Ps. 119:58, 135*).

As a leader of God’s people, David knows that Israel will be blessed only if God shines His face on them (*Ps. 4:6*). Obviously, David understands, as Jacob and Moses did, the act of seeing God’s face as figurative, and not in the literal sense. This figure points to God’s presence among His people through the Holy Spirit, to divine forgiveness, to salvation, to assurance, care, providence, protection, blessings of health and peace, prophetic revelations, and God’s guidance of His people in their existence and mission. All these concepts and experiences embody “seeing” God through faith!

Of course, we cannot see God as He is in His divine nature. We are in the universe; God is with us, but He also is transcendent, or beyond our reality. We are finite; God is infinite. Moreover, we are sinful; God is holy. That is why we simply cannot see God as He is in Himself. But we can see what and how He chooses to reveal Himself to us. What He reveals to us is His glory in the universe, which is His creation and the domain of His kingdom. He reveals His love and care for us through His revelations and providence. For this reason, in Hebrews 11:1 and 6, the apostle Paul concludes that in the context of sin, faith is “seeing” the evidence and prophetic revelations of God’s existence and presence with us. Love, for instance, is materially “unseen,” but it is evident in the manifestation of the person who loves us.

On the other hand, we can literally “see” God in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, being God, became human so that He could dwell among us in order that we may “see” God’s “glory” and His “grace and truth” (*John 1:14; see also Matt. 1:23, Phil. 2:6–9*). For this reason, John declares: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us” (*1 John 1:1–3, NIV*).

By sharing his testimony about what he had touched, seen, and heard, the apostle John wants us to “fellowship with,” or share in, his experience with the Word made flesh. This fellowship evokes another way by which we may “see” God. In Psalm 34, David recounts his fears, also elaborating upon his understanding that “the angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them” (*Ps. 34:7, NKJV*). Then, David calls us to “taste and see that the LORD is good” (*Ps. 34:8, NKJV*). The figure of speech signified by “tasting” God reflects an intimate way of knowing God through personal experience. In the Christian experience, while we read John’s testimony about seeing and hearing the incarnate God, we also need to “see” Him for ourselves through the mediation of the Holy Spirit (*John 14:16–18, John 16:14, Rom. 8:2–17*). For this reason, David concludes that blessed is the one who “trusts in Him” (*Ps. 34:8, NKJV*), and Paul concludes that no “tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword” can “separate us from the love of Christ” (*Rom. 8:35, NKJV*).

Ultimately, “seeing” God in our situation means to experience—through God’s Word and the work of the Holy Spirit in us—God’s providence, love, and assurance, to sense His presence with us, and to have His peace and assurance in our hearts that He is there with us. This experience is faith.

Christ’s Resurrection; Our Suffering and Death

Resurrection plays a crucial role in the Christian theodicy or explanation of the origin, existence, and fate of evil in God’s universe. Three points may be highlighted in this regard:

1. The Bible places resurrection at the heart of our faith in God and hope for the future. The apostle Paul concludes that “if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (*1 Cor. 15:19, NIV*). Evil and death will end with the resurrection of those who put their trust in God.

2. This restoration is guaranteed by Christ's resurrection, which demonstrates His divinity. Our only hope for salvation resides in God, who takes our sin upon Himself and resurrects us with His power. Had Christ not been resurrected, He would have been proven a mere human in need of salvation, and we would have been left in our sins, destined for the wages of sin, which is to say, death (*1 Cor. 15:12–17, Rom. 6:23*).
3. God's promise of our resurrection is the best way to explain God's permission for His people to suffer and die. The apostle Paul affirms that "this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead" (*2 Cor. 1:9, NIV*). God "can afford," so to speak, to allow His people or children to suffer and die because He created them, and therefore, He can re-create or resurrect them. Indeed, it would be noble enough for those who put their trust in God to die for Him and His cause, even without any possibility of resurrection. But such an outcome, ultimately, would deprive God of His status and power as One who can create life out of nothing, thereby rendering Him another powerless, selfish entity in the universe. The people on His side would have died for nothing, because in the end they would not have proved anything about the claims of God. But because God has the proven power of resurrection, He can allow His people to die.

However, this argument applies to God only because He alone holds the power of resurrection. As no one in the universe, apart from God, possesses the power of creation and resurrection, no other being in the world can allow people to die or kill them and be justified in the allowance of such horrific acts. Hence, the prohibition of the sixth commandment for the human race (*Exod. 20:13*). For a good synthesis on the importance of resurrection for the Christian faith, see Josh McDowell, "Support of Deity: The Resurrection—Hoax or History," *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1999), chap. 9, pp. 203–284.

Part III: Life Application

1. ***Cast your anxiety upon God.*** When the apostle Peter taught the church members to cast their anxiety upon God (*1 Pet. 5:7*), he did not mean to endorse spiritual laziness or irresponsibility (*2 Pet. 1:5–7*). Similarly, Jesus taught His disciples not to worry, but to trust in God (*Matt. 6:25–33*). At the same time, Jesus taught Christians that they must be diligent and responsible (*Matt. 24:45–51, Matthew 25*). How can we understand these paradoxical Bible truths correctly in our lives? How can we teach the principles in these verses to our youth?

A Life of Praise



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Phil. 4:4–7, Josh. 5:13–6:20, Psalm 145, Acts 16:16–34, 2 Chron. 20:1–30.*

Memory Text: “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice!”
(*Philippians 4:4, NKJV*).

It's always easy to shout with joy to the Lord when we feel joy. It's not so easy, however, when things are bad, when we are in the worst situations imaginable, when the crucible heats up. Yet, it's precisely then that we need—perhaps more than ever—to praise God, for praise is a means of helping us sustain faith.

Indeed, praise can transform even our darkest circumstances, maybe not in the sense of changing the facts around us, but in the sense that it can change us, and those around us, in a way that helps us face challenges.

Praise is faith in action. It may not always be natural to us, but when we practice praise so that it becomes a natural part of our lives, it has the power both to convert and to conquer.

The Week at a Glance: What is praise? How could praise be such a powerful spiritual weapon in difficult circumstances? How can praise transform us and the situation around us?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 27.

Framework for Praise

The great Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky had been sentenced to death, only to have the sentence commuted at the last moment. He spent years in prison instead. Talking about his prison experience, he wrote: “Believe to the end, even if all men go astray and you are left the only one faithful; bring your offering even then and praise God in your loneliness.”

In these lessons, we already have seen how Paul endured incredible opposition and persecution. But now he is sitting in a Roman prison. And yet he is not depressed; instead, he is eagerly writing to encourage the believers in Philippi!

Read Philippians 4:4–7. How do you think Paul could have written such things when he himself was sitting in a prison? In this passage, what are the keys to gaining the “peace of God”?

It is one thing to rejoice when everything is going well. But Paul exhorts us to rejoice always. That may sound strange. If we take what Paul writes literally, there are two critical implications for us.

First, if we are to rejoice always, it must mean that we should be rejoicing even when circumstances do not appear to give any grounds for rejoicing. Second, if we are to rejoice always, it also must mean that we are going to have to learn to rejoice at times when we do not feel like it.

Paul is calling us to praise God even though many times it may seem quite unnatural to us. It may even seem unreasonable. But as we will see, it is precisely because there are times when it appears unreasonable that we are called to rejoice. In other words, praise is an act of faith. Just as faith is based not on our circumstances but rather on the truth about God, so praise is something we do not because we feel good but because of the truth of who God is and what He has promised us. And amazingly, it is such faith that begins to shape our thoughts, feelings, and circumstances.

What is the truth about God that Paul identifies in today’s passage—truth that enables him to rejoice, even in prison? Write down a short list of what you know to be the truth about God. Go through the list and praise God for each item. How does this change the way that you feel about and view your circumstances?

Praying Down Walls

There’s an expression in English: “to be painted into a corner.” Imagine painting the floor of a room but then realizing that you have wound up in a corner and cannot get out—except by walking over the fresh paint. You have to stay there until it dries!

Sometimes our faith seems to paint us into a corner. We arrive at a situation, and, like the wet paint on the floor, our faith “traps” us. We look at the situation, and either we have to reject God, faith, and everything we have believed in, or our faith compels us to believe what appears impossible.

God brought the Israelites to a corner. After they had wandered for 40 years in the wilderness, God did not lead His people to empty, peaceful grasslands. God led them to one of the most strongly fortified cities in the whole area. Then they had to walk around Jericho in silence for six days. On the seventh day, God told them to shout—and that shouting, together with the trumpets, would bring victory.

Read Joshua 5:13–6:20. What is God trying to teach the Israelites?

Shouting loudly was not going to cause vibrations to trigger the walls to collapse. When God called the Israelites to “shout,” it was the same type of shouting that David writes about in Psalm 66: “Shout for joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious!” (*Ps. 66:1, 2, NIV*). This shouting was praise! After six days of looking at the huge walls, they must have concluded that they hadn’t a chance of breaking them down themselves.

How does this idea help us understand the meaning of Hebrews 11:30?

When God is on the verge of doing something new in our lives, He may bring us to a Jericho, for He may need to teach us that the power to triumph does not come in our own strength and strategies. Everything we need comes from outside of ourselves. So, no matter what is in front of us, no matter how insurmountable it may seem, our role is to praise God—the Source of everything we need. This is faith in action.

The Life of Praise

Praising the Lord might not be natural to us, even in good circumstances. Thus, how much more difficult to do it in bad ones? Yet, that is what we are called to do. Praise is something that we must practice until it changes from being an activity done at a particular time to an atmosphere in which we live. Praise shouldn't so much be a specific act but a specific way of life itself.

Read Psalm 145. What are the reasons David gives for praising God? In what ways should the words of this psalm be your own?

The great British preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote a book called *The Practice of Praise*. It is based on verse 7 of today's psalm. In this short verse, Spurgeon calls our attention to three important things that can help in developing praise in our lives.

1. *Praise is practiced as we look around us.* If we do not look around us to see the greatness of God, we will have no reason to praise Him. What can you see in the created world that is praiseworthy, such as the beauty of God's creation? What can you see in the spiritual world that is praiseworthy, such as the growing faith in a young Christian?

2. *Praise is practiced as we remember what we have seen.* If we want to live in an atmosphere of praise, we must be able to recall the reason for it. In what ways can we remember the great things about God (such as by developing new rituals or symbols that remind us of His goodness), so that His goodness and the truth about Him do not slip from our minds?

3. *Praise is practiced as we talk about it.* Praise is not something that we do in our heads. It is meant to come out of our mouths, to be heard by those around us. What reasons can you think of to praise God verbally? What will the effect of such praise be, and on whom?

Take a pen and some paper and spend some time working through these three points. What can you do to develop the habit of praise in your life?

A Witness Who Convicts

In the book of Acts, praise had an astonishing effect on those who heard it. Read Acts 16:16–34. Having been stripped and beaten hard, Paul and Silas were thrown into prison. No one was there to put ointment on their badly cut and bruised backs. In great physical pain and with their feet in stocks, they were placed in the darkness of the inner prison. But as the other prisoners sat listening, Paul and Silas begin to pray and sing.

After the earthquake, and after he had discovered that neither Paul nor Silas nor any of the other prisoners had escaped, the jailer “fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ ” (*Acts 16:29, 30, NIV*).

Why did this event cause the jailer to focus on his own need of salvation? What role do you think Paul and Silas’s prayers and songs played in the prisoners’ not running away, and in the conversion of this man and his whole family?

It is amazing to think that our praise can transform the eternal destinies of those around us. If Paul and Silas had sat in the dark mumbling and complaining as prisoners often do, do you think anyone would have been saved that night?

We don’t know what happened to the jailer and his family later on, but can you imagine them reading the words that Paul later wrote from another prison in Rome: “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have” (*Phil. 1:29, 30, NIV*). If they did read this and reflect on how Paul’s suffering had brought them joy, it surely must have brought a song to their hearts and a fresh challenge to remain faithful, no matter the cost.

Who do you think could be influenced for God by a song of praise that could come from your heart? Make a concerted effort to be more open and effusive in your praise to God around others. You don’t know the positive effect it could have.

A Weapon That Conquers

Read 2 Chronicles 20:1–30. As Jehoshaphat discovered, praise is a powerful weapon. After receiving the report that a “vast army” was coming against him, Jehoshaphat did not immediately jump to military action, but “resolved to inquire of the LORD” (2 Chron. 20:3, NIV). As the people of Judah came to Jerusalem for a fast, Jehoshaphat admitted the reality of the situation, saying that “ ‘we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you’ ” (2 Chron. 20:12, NIV).

When you see a “vast army” approaching, what is your instinctive reaction? From Jehoshaphat’s response in 2 Chronicles 20:3–12, what can you learn about dealing with overwhelming opposition?

As the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, he boldly announced: “ ‘ “You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you” ’ ” (2 Chron. 20:17, NIV). After that, they worshiped God and sang praises to Him “with a very loud voice” (2 Chron. 20:19, NIV). Even though God was going to fight for them, they still had to go out to face the enemy.

But this was no ordinary march to war. Jehoshaphat appointed a choir to sing praises to the Lord as they marched out. “As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated” (2 Chron. 20:22, NIV). According to the author, God intervened at the very moment they exercised their faith in His promise, as they began to “praise him for the splendor of his holiness” (2 Chron. 20:21, NIV).

Read through the texts for today again. What spiritual principles can you find there that can apply to your own walk with God, especially in times of trial and stress?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Jehoshaphat,” pp. 190–203, in *Prophets and Kings*; “The Fall of Jericho,” pp. 487–498, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“Then let us educate our hearts and lips to speak the praise of God for His matchless love. Let us educate our souls to be hopeful and to abide in the light shining from the cross of Calvary. Never should we forget that we are children of the heavenly King, sons and daughters of the Lord of hosts. It is our privilege to maintain a calm repose in God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 253.

“And while I adore and magnify Him, I want you to magnify Him with me. Praise the Lord even when you fall into darkness. Praise Him even in temptation. ‘Rejoice in the Lord always,’ says the apostle; ‘and again I say, Rejoice.’ Will that bring gloom and darkness into your families? No, indeed; it will bring a sunbeam. You will thus gather rays of eternal light from the throne of glory and scatter them around you. Let me exhort you to engage in this work, scatter this light and life around you, not only in your own path, but in the paths of those with whom you associate. Let it be your object to make those around you better, to elevate them, to point them to heaven and glory, and lead them to seek, above all earthly things, the eternal substance, the immortal inheritance, the riches which are imperishable.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 593, 594.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What role does community praise have in the life of the Christian? How would you describe the praise in your Sabbath services? Is it uplifting? Does it encourage members to maintain faithfulness amid trial and trauma? If not, what can be done?
- 2 What does it mean to “praise the Lord even when you fall into darkness” or to “praise Him even in temptation”? How can praise help us through these situations?
- 3 Let members give testimonies on how praise has affected their lives. What can you learn from one another’s experiences?
- 4 As a class, pick a psalm of praise and spend time reading it. What does it teach you about praise? What impact does praise have on your faith?

Part 9: Growing in Christ

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

After Mother's baptism, Father faced a severe spiritual struggle. Evil spirits possessed him at night, and he struggled to sleep. Whenever he was possessed and saw Mother, the spirits spewed hatred at her.

Father and Mother strengthened their faith by praying and studying the Sabbath School lesson every day. Father learned to pray on his knees and to have personal time with God. The couple made it a habit to pray, have personal devotions, and study the Sabbath School lesson daily.

Mother trusted God, and she felt His constant care. She found faith and assurance in the Bible, and several verses especially helped her during Father's struggle with evil spirits. "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you," she read in James 4:7. "But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one," she read in 2 Thessalonians 3:3. She claimed the promise of Jesus in John 10:10: "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." When she found a Bible verse that helped or gave hope, she copied it into a special journal and prayed those verses to God during her 5:00 A.M. prayer time.

Mother also wrote a special prayer for Father that she prayed every morning for a year. She prayed, "Lord, I ask You for my husband, Eduardo, and for him to turn to You with all his heart. Help me to love him and to renew my love for him. I surrender to You, Lord, and ask You to bless him as he seeks to honor You. Discipline him when needed. Transform him into a man who will desire to follow You. Help me to encourage him and to respect him. Help me to love him. I pray this in the name of Jesus, amen."

Father, meanwhile, started Bible studies in preparation for baptism. He wanted to be baptized on October 29, exactly a year to the day after Junior's baptism.

As Father studied the Bible, he curiously watched YouTube sermons by preachers from the Adventist Church. He also watched sermons from other Christian denominations, wanting to test their teachings against the Bible. To his shock, evil spirits taunted him as he listened to the other preachers, saying that they would have sent him to one of their churches rather than the Adventist Church if they had known that he was interested in those preachers.

Father stopped watching the other sermons. *Now I know that I'm in the right church!* he thought.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) and his family live.

Key Text: *Philippians 4:4*

Study Focus: *Josh. 5:13–6:20, 2 Chron. 20:1–30, Psalm 145, Acts 16:16–34, Phil. 4:4–7.*

Part I: Overview

“How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a foreign land?” lamented the Jewish captives by the rivers of Babylon upon being asked by their captors to sing some of the songs of Zion (*Ps. 137:1–4, NKJV*). Indeed, how can we sing and praise God amid suffering and death? This question embodies one of the great paradoxes of Christianity. Once again, the essential aspect here is understanding the source of joy and praise: God Himself. Having such an understanding does not mean that God forces, or programs, us to sing His praises. On the contrary, if it were true that God predestines us to praise Him, the world would be doing just that in unison; but this is obviously not the case.

Rather, God is the Source of praise by being who He is, our Creator and our Savior, our King and our Father, our Judge and our Friend. He is awesome! One basic principle of Christian life in this world is that praising God in the crucible is possible when we live a continuous—not occasional—life of praise. Another principle is that praising God in times of crises springs out of our relationship with God, in which we know, love, and trust Him.

Lesson Themes: This week’s lesson highlights two major themes.

1. Joy and praise are rooted in our deep and meaningful relationship with God, as part of our life, as a lifestyle.
2. Christian joy and praise are not only beneficial to our health and to overcoming crucibles but also are used by God in saving others.

Part II: Commentary

Joy in Suffering

Horace Williams, Jr., the author of award-winning *Unleash the Power of Prayer in Your Life*, identifies eight purposes God achieves in our lives when He uses our own suffering for our benefit. According to Williams, God uses suffering to “divulge sin in our lives, develop our faith, demolish our pride, determine our paths, demonstrate His grace, display His love, deepen our commitment to Him, deliver hope, comfort, and joy.”—Horace Williams, Jr., *The Furnace of Affliction: How God Uses Our Pain and*

Suffering for His Purpose, Kindle ed. (Black Lillie Press, 2020), p. 11. How does God give us joy through suffering? Williams shares that “joy is more than happiness based on an outcome or circumstance. Joy is the supernatural delight in God’s purpose for our lives. Joy is something that God offers us in the midst of our pain and suffering. We must choose to live with joy. ‘But as for me, I shall sing of Your strength; yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness every morning, for You have been my stronghold and a refuge in the day of my distress’ (Psalm 59:16).”—*The Furnace of Affliction: How God Uses Our Pain and Suffering for His Purpose*, p. 90. Williams concludes that “experiencing joy doesn’t mean that I no longer experience pain. Instead, it means that God is bringing me to a place where I now have the inclination to ask Him, ‘What do You want me to see in this distressing circumstance, Lord?’ ”—*The Furnace of Affliction: How God Uses Our Pain and Suffering for His Purpose*, p. 97. What Williams himself sees in his sufferings that gives him joy is God’s presence in the present and eternal life in the future.

Polycarp Praises God on the Pyre

Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138–161) continued Emperor Trajan’s policy and practice of persecuting Christians. In A.D. 155, a crowd brought a group of Christians to the authorities of the city of Smyrna in Asia Minor to be convicted and punished. When the Christians refused to acknowledge the gods of the empire, they were punished by death. Afterward, the crowd demanded that Polycarp, the bishop of the church in Smyrna, be brought before the city. A disciple and friend of the apostle John, the old Polycarp also was a widely known and influential Christian leader in Asia and beyond. When Polycarp finally was brought into the amphitheater, the proconsul tried to persuade him to recant his faith and curse Christ.

The faithful disciple of Jesus replied: “For eighty-six years I have served him, and he has done me no evil. How could I curse my king, who saved me?” When, eventually, the proconsul condemned him to be burned on the pyre and the soldiers tied him to the stake, Polycarp prayed and praised God with a loud voice: “Lord Sovereign God . . . I thank you that you have deemed me worthy of this moment, so that, jointly with your martyrs, I may have a share in the cup of Christ. . . . For this . . . I bless and glorify you. Amen.”—Justo L. González, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, The Story of Christianity, vol. 1, revised and updated ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), p. 54.

Polycarp was only one of thousands of Christians who, following biblical characters such as David and Paul, praised God from amid persecution and the trials of life. Those early Christians praised God from the flames, from the stakes, from the amphitheaters full of wild animals, from crosses, from the prison cells, and from the chambers of torture. They did not think about the injustice done to them; they did

not calculate the cost-benefit ratio of their act. They loved and trusted God and did not hesitate to make a radical and ultimate commitment to Him. They did not consider it a hardship to die for their Lord. Rather, they considered it a privilege to suffer and die for their beloved Savior. They unhesitatingly trusted God and His promise of resurrection and considered death but a moment in time on their way to meet their Lord in glory. Writing about the experience of David as he faced the rebellion of his son Absalom, Ellen G. White notes David's habit in resorting to singing and praising God in times of trouble: "What were the feelings of the father and king, so cruelly wronged, in this terrible peril? 'A mighty valiant man,' a man of war, a king, whose word was law, betrayed by his son whom he had loved and indulged and unwisely trusted, wronged and deserted by subjects bound to him by the strongest ties of honor and fealty—in what words did David pour out the feelings of his soul? In the hour of his darkest trial, David's heart was stayed upon God, and he sang . . . Psalm 3:1-8."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 741, 742.

In chapter 2 of *The Great Controversy*, entitled "Persecutions in the First Centuries," Ellen G. White describes how singing and praising God gave Christians the most genuine and deep joy and peace amid the fiercest affliction and persecution: "Like God's servants of old, many were 'tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.' . . . These called to mind the words of their Master, that when persecuted for Christ's sake, they were to be exceeding glad, for great would be their reward in heaven; for so the prophets had been persecuted before them. They rejoiced that they were accounted worthy to suffer for the truth, and songs of triumph ascended from the midst of crackling flames. Looking upward by faith, they saw Christ and angels leaning over the battlements of heaven, gazing upon them with the deepest interest and regarding their steadfastness with approval. A voice came down to them from the throne of God: 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.' Revelation 2:10."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 41.

Conditions for Rejoicing in Crucibles

Praising God and rejoicing in Him in a crisis are possible only when we are certain about the goodness and justice of the cause or the Person for whom we fight. In our case, the cause and the Person are One. Rejoicing amid trials and persecutions is possible when we trust God, when we understand Him and His plans, when we are convinced that God is just and good and that He and His cause are worthy of our total and radical commitment. Thus, rejoicing amid crucibles springs out of the realization (1) that God is real and that He is good; (2) that He created us, that we are His, that He loves us, and that we love Him back; (3) that the great controversy is real, that it is Satan's attack on God and on us, and that God is on our

side and we are on His; (4) that God redeems us from the power of sin and of Satan and that we and God, in Christ, are, and will be, victorious; and (5) that God's cause or mission of bringing salvation to the whole world is worth all the suffering we must endure, even, if need be, unto death.

Part III: Life Application

- 1. Read Habakkuk 3:16, 17, and think about how you can rejoice in your own suffering. How can you praise God in moments of affliction?**

- 2. Music is a powerful motivation for such human activities as working, exercising, and fighting. For instance, military forces around the world have their own music that raises the morale of their soldiers. Examine the music that motivates your spiritual life. How much joy and peace do you experience in your life of praise and singing to God?**

3. Commit to learning old and new songs by heart in order to sing them from memory and with understanding. When in a difficult situation, sing a song. How will this experience help you become victorious and/or sustain you?

Notes



Meekness *in the Crucible*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Ezek. 24:15–27, Exod. 32:1–14, Matt. 5:43–48, 1 Pet. 2:18–25, Ps. 62:1–8.

Memory Text: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5, NKJV).

We don’t hear the word *meek* used much, except maybe when reading about Moses or studying the Beatitudes. It’s not hard to figure out why, either. Meekness is defined as “enduring injury with patience and without resentment.” No wonder we don’t hear much about it; it’s hardly a trait well respected in cultures today. Sometimes the Bible translates this word as “humble.” Again, humility isn’t a character trait seen as desirable by most cultures either.

But meekness, enduring injury with patience and without resentment, is one of the most powerful characteristics of Jesus and His followers. And yet, it’s not an end in itself: meekness of spirit can be a powerful weapon in the hands of those who are in the midst of pain and suffering. Indeed, the crucible is a great place to learn meekness of heart, for through our own meekness and broken places we can be powerful witnesses for God.

The Week at a Glance: What is the relationship between suffering and meekness? How can we, in our own meekness and broken places, be a witness to others? How can meekness really be a strength, not a weakness, for the Christian?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 3.

“Broken Bread and Poured-Out Wine”

Consider: Oswald Chambers has said that we are to become “broken bread and poured-out wine” for others. What do you think he means by this?

All through the Bible there are examples of people who were “broken” to serve others. Moses was called to endure unending waves of gossip and criticism as he led people to the Promised Land. Joseph was called to a journey that involved betrayal and imprisonment as he was brought to a position of service in Egypt. In each case, God permitted the situations in order that His people’s lives could become theaters of His grace and care, not only for themselves but also for the good of others, as well. God may use us in the same way. It is easy to feel angry or hurt in such situations. But as we noted yesterday, meekness is the God-given ability to endure such things “with patience and without resentment.”

Read Ezekiel 24:15–27. What’s happening here? Why was Ezekiel put through this crucible?

In Ezekiel 24:24, God says, “ ‘Ezekiel will be a sign to you; you will do just as he has done. When this happens, you will know that I am the Sovereign LORD’ ” (NIV). Through Ezekiel’s example, the people of Israel were going to be convicted of the truth about who God was, the Sovereign Lord—and they would see this truth as they experienced the fulfillment of the prophecy that Ezekiel’s life symbolized and the suffering that he had faced. Who knows how many people will see “the Sovereign LORD” through us in our own broken places, as well?

Sooner or later life itself breaks us all. What has been your experience with being broken? What lessons have you learned? How can your own broken soul be used by the Lord to help other people?

Interceding for Grace

Read Exodus 32:1–14. What role do we find Moses playing here?

After the people began worshipping the golden calf, God decided they had gone too far and announced that He would destroy the people and make Moses a great nation. But rather than taking up God’s offer, Moses pleaded for God to show grace to His people, and God relented.

Exodus 32:1–14 raises two important issues. First, God’s offer to destroy the rebellious people and bless Moses was a test for him. God wanted Moses to demonstrate just how much compassion he felt for these desperately disobedient people. And Moses passed the test. Like Jesus, he pleaded for mercy for sinners. This reveals something very interesting: sometimes God also may allow us to face opposition; He might allow us to be in a crucible so that He, we, and the watching universe can see how much compassion we have for those who are wayward.

What reasons did Moses give for asking the Lord not to destroy Israel?

Second, this passage shows that opposition and disobedience is a call to reveal grace. Grace is needed when people least deserve it. But when they least deserve it also is the time that we feel the least like offering it. But when Moses’ sister Miriam was criticizing him, he cried out to the Lord to heal her from leprosy (*Numbers 12*). When God was angry with Korah and his followers and threatened to destroy them all, Moses fell on his face to plead for their lives. The next day, when Israel grumbled against Moses for the death of the rebels and God threatened to destroy them all again, Moses fell facedown and urged Aaron quickly to make atonement for them all (*Numbers 16*). In his own meekness, in his own selflessness in the midst of this crucible, Moses sought grace on behalf of those who certainly didn’t deserve it.

Think about the people around you who you think are the least deserving of grace. How can you, with meekness and selfless humility, be a revelation of God’s grace to them?

Loving Those Who Hurt Us

Someone once said: “Loving our enemies, then, does not mean that we are supposed to love the dirt in which the pearl is buried; rather it means that we love the pearl which lies in the dust. . . . God does not love us because we are by nature lovable. But we become lovable because He loves us.”

When you look at your “enemies,” what do you normally see—the pearl or the dirt around it?

Read Matthew 5:43–48. Jesus calls us to love and pray for our enemies. What example from nature does Jesus give us there that helps us understand why we should love our enemies? What’s the point He is teaching us?

In Matthew 5:45, Jesus uses the example of His Father in heaven to illustrate how we should treat those who hurt us, who perhaps put us in the worst kind of crucibles. Jesus says that His Father sends the blessing of rain to both the righteous and the unrighteous; if God gives even the unjust rain, how then should we treat them?

Jesus isn’t trying to say that we should always have warm, fuzzy feelings toward everyone who causes us trouble, though this also may be possible. Fundamentally, love for our enemies is not meant to be a feeling we have for them but specific actions toward them that reveal care and consideration.

Jesus concludes this passage with a verse that often causes a lot of debate: “ ‘Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect’ ” (*Matt. 5:48, NIV*). But the meaning is very clear in the context: those people who want to be perfect as God is perfect must show love to their enemies as God shows love to His. To be perfect in God’s sight is to love the opposition; and to do this takes a meekness of heart that only God can give.

Keeping in mind our definition of meekness (“enduring injury with patience and without resentment”), list the changes you must make in order to allow the Lord to give you the kind of meekness of heart that will help you have the right attitude toward “enemies.”

A Closed Mouth

The most powerful examples of meekness in the crucible come from Jesus. When He said to come and “learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (*Matt. 11:29*), He meant it in ways we probably can’t imagine.

Read 1 Peter 2:18–25. Peter is offering some surprising advice to slaves. He describes how Jesus responded to unjust and painful treatment and suggests to them that He has left them “an example, that you should follow His steps” (*1 Pet. 2:21, NKJV*). What principles of meekness and humility in the crucible can we learn from Jesus’ example, as expressed here by Peter?

It is terrible to watch someone else treat another unjustly. And it is extremely painful when we are on the receiving end of such treatment. Because we normally have a strong sense of justice, when injustice occurs, our instincts are to “put things right” while holding on to what we believe to be a righteous and just anger.

It is not easy to live meekly. It is perhaps impossible unless we embrace one critical truth—that in all unjust situations, we must believe that our Father in heaven is in control and that He will act on our behalf when it is according to His will. This also means that we must be open to the possibility that like Jesus, we may not always be saved from injustice. But we must always remember that our Father in heaven is still with us and in charge.

Peter’s advice, modeled on Jesus’ life, is surprising because it seems that silence in the face of unjust suffering is a greater witness to the glory of God than “putting people right.” When questioned by Caiaphas and Pilate, Jesus could have said a lot of things to correct the situation and to justify Himself, but He didn’t. His silence was a testimony to His meekness.

How do you deal with situations in which you have been treated unfairly? How can you better apply some of the principles looked at here today to your own life?

Our Rock and Refuge

So often the most proud people, the most arrogant and pushy, are those who suffer from low self-esteem. Their arrogance and pride—and total lack of meekness or humility—exist as a cover, perhaps even unconsciously, for something lacking inside. What they need is something we all need: a sense of security, of worthiness, of acceptance, especially in times of distress and suffering. We can find that only through the Lord. In short, meekness and humility, far from being attributes of weakness, are often the most powerful manifestation of a soul firmly grounded on the Rock.

Read Psalm 62:1–8. What seems to be the background for this psalm? What points is David making? What spiritual principles can you learn from what he is saying? Most important, how can you learn to apply these principles to your own life?

“Without cause men will become our enemies. The motives of the people of God will be misinterpreted, not only by the world, but by their own brethren. The Lord’s servants will be put in hard places. A mountain will be made of a molehill to justify men in pursuing a selfish, unrighteous course. . . . By misrepresentation these men will be clothed in the dark vestments of dishonesty because circumstances beyond their control made their work perplexing. They will be pointed to as men that cannot be trusted. And this will be done by the members of the church. God’s servants must arm themselves with the mind of Christ. They must not expect to escape insult and misjudgment. They will be called enthusiasts and fanatics. But let them not become discouraged. God’s hands are on the wheel of His providence, guiding His work to the glory of His name.”—Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 177.

How immune are you to the reproaches and barbs of others? Most likely not that immune, right? How can you cleave to the Lord and anchor your sense of self-worth on the One who loves you so much that He died for your sins, and thus help protect yourself against the slights of others?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Importance of Seeking True Knowledge,” pp. 453, 454, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “The Sermon on the Mount,” pp. 298–314, in *The Desire of Ages*; “The Worker and His Qualifications,” p. 630, in *Evangelism*.

“The difficulties we have to encounter may be very much lessened by that meekness which hides itself in Christ. If we possess the humility of our Master, we shall rise above the slights, the rebuffs, the annoyances, to which we are daily exposed, and they will cease to cast a gloom over the spirit. The highest evidence of nobility in a Christian is self-control. He who under abuse or cruelty fails to maintain a calm and trustful spirit robs God of His right to reveal in him His own perfection of character. Lowliness of heart is the strength that gives victory to the followers of Christ; it is the token of their connection with the courts above.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 301.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How does humility allow us to “rise above” hurts and annoyances? What do you think is the most important characteristic of humility that allows us to do this?
- 2 In your own particular culture, how are the characteristics of humility and meekness viewed? Are they respected, despised, or what? What kind of pressures do you face in your culture that work against you in cultivating these characteristics?
- 3 Are there any great examples of meekness and humility among people alive today? If so, who are they, how have they expressed these traits, and what can you learn from them?
- 4 Why is it that we so often equate meekness and humility with weakness?
- 5 We saw how David sought the Lord as a refuge. But how does that work? How is that refuge always manifested? In other words, how can we, as a church, be a refuge for those who need a refuge? What kind of refuge does your own local church provide? What can you do to help make it a place of refuge for those who need it?

Part 10: Power of a Name

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Father was awakened by invisible hands clutching his throat in Manaus, Brazil. Futilely he tried to pull away the hands. Finally, he gasped, “Lord, please help me!” But the deadly grip tightened. When all hope seemed lost, he heard a soft voice say, “Ask Jesus to help. Say the name of Jesus.”

“Jesus, save me!” Father cried. The unseen hands immediately released their grip. Father, gasping, understood the power of Jesus’ name for the first time. Still lying in bed, he exclaimed joyfully, “I am saved by the name of Jesus! I am saved by the blood of Jesus and Jesus’ sacrifice!” From that day, Father called on Jesus’ name whenever evil spirits harassed him.

As baptismal studies continued, Father was astonished to learn that God condemns the spiritism that he had practiced in the Candomblé temple. In Deuteronomy 18:9–14, he read, “There shall not be found among you anyone . . . who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord’ ” (*verses 10, 11, NKJV*). In the Ten Commandments, he read, “‘You shall have no other gods before Me’ ” (*Exodus 20:3, NKJV*). He thought, *I was worshipping other gods*. Continuing the chapter, he read, “‘You shall not make for yourself a carved image’ ” (*verse 4, NKJV*), and told himself, “I have been following everything that God calls an abomination.” When he reached the Fourth Commandment—“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy”—he told Mother, “I got the wrong day. The spirits told me to keep another day holy.”

In Revelation 21:8, he read, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” It was the same verse that Mother read when she first went to Sabbath School and that had prompted her to start praying for Father. When Father read the verse, he realized that he had been headed for the lake of fire.

Father reached a breakthrough when the Bible study focused on the state of the dead. He read that people sleep after death and do not have spirits that fly around. “The body dies, and that’s the end,” he told Mother with surprise. “The gift of life is what goes back to God.” The evil spirits had taught that people’s spirits float around after their bodies die and some of those spirits were among the legion of evil spirits that accompanied Candomblé leaders.

The evil spirits continued to annoy Father. But the more they attacked, the more Father called on the name of Jesus. A desire grew in him to lead others to Christ. *Instead of teaching people the way of darkness*, he thought, *I should use my knowledge and own experience to guide people to the light*.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) and his family live.

Key Text: *Matthew 5:5*

Study Focus: *Exod. 32:1–14, Ps. 62:1–8, Ezek. 24:15–27, Matt. 5:43–48, 1 Pet. 2:18–25.*

Part I: Overview

Biblical religion, in both the Old and the New Testaments, is characterized by meekness. Moses is known for being the meekest person on earth (*Num. 12:3*). David declared that “the meek shall inherit the earth” (*Ps. 37:11, NKJV*). The prophets announced that God will bless the meek (*Isa. 11:4; Isa. 29:19; Isa. 66:2; Zeph. 2:3; Zeph. 3:11, 12*). God Himself is described as meek and as promoting meekness (*Ps. 25:9, Ps. 45:4, Ps. 147:6*). Jesus was meek (*Matt. 11:29, Matt. 21:5, 2 Cor. 10:1*) and placed meekness at the foundation of Christianity (*Matt. 5:5*). The apostles were meek (*2 Cor. 10:1*) and urged Christians to be meek (*Gal. 5:23, Eph. 4:2, Col. 3:12, 1 Tim. 6:11, 2 Tim. 2:25, Titus 3:2, James 1:21, James 3:13, James 4:6, 1 Pet. 3:15, 1 Pet. 5:5*). While the empires and kingdoms of the earth are constructed on such values as audacity, power, and military conquest, the religion of God builds and conquers with meekness, love, and grace. However, God’s meekness does not mean that He is powerless. Rather, meekness is an essential trait of God’s character and His way of relating to the universe and to us sinners.

Lesson Themes: This week’s lesson highlights two major themes.

1. Meekness is essential to Christianity. However, just as essential is a correct understanding of biblical meekness and living it out in our lives. Biblical meekness does not spring out of a political calculation; rather, it is a genuine outlook on the world through the prism of God’s most fundamental attribute, love.
2. Christians are not meek in and of themselves. Rather, their source of meekness is in their loving, gracious Three-in-One God: the Father; the Son and Savior, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit.

Part II: Commentary

Is Meekness Slave Morality?

One of the strongest attacks on Christianity and its concept of humility and meekness in the modern period came from the German existentialist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). Not only was suffering an integral part of Nietzsche’s life, but it also was an essential area of inter-

est in his philosophy. At a very young age, he lost his father and many other members of his family. Throughout his life, Nietzsche struggled with debilitating health issues and was eventually isolated by a mental illness during the last 11 years of his life. As he studied classical languages and philosophy, Nietzsche became especially interested in ancient Greek culture and philosophy. From this lens, he concluded that Europe had lost its ancient vigor. The culprit? None other than Christianity! Nietzsche thought Christianity had robbed Europe of its classical Greek and Roman culture of heroism, power, and nobility. The West, indeed, humanity in its entirety, according to Nietzsche, needed to redeem that classical outlook if it wanted to survive and thrive.

According to Nietzsche, there are two types of morality: the morality of the masters, of the noblemen, of the strong-willed man, and the morality of the slaves or of the weak. Master morality sets its own values, decides on its own course of actions, and evaluates them through the prism of their consequences, such as helpful (good) or harmful (bad). Thus, autonomy, power, wealth, nobility, optimism, exuberance, and courage are regarded as good, while weakness and meekness are regarded as bad. By contrast, slave morality does not generate values or actions but merely reacts to, and opposes, the values or actions set by the master morality. While master morality focuses on action, slave morality is reactionary (or, as Nietzsche would put it, resentment); while master morality is oppressive, slave morality is subversive and manipulative; while master morality is more individualistic, slave morality is more communitarian.

Thus, because the weak are unable to overthrow the powerful by sheer force, they resort to reinterpreting and disparaging the value system of the masters. Instead of enjoying the morality of the strong man, the weak project their situation of humiliation into the absolute, universalizing their values.

According to Nietzsche, Christianity is a religion of the weak, of slave morality. In his own words: “Christianity has taken the side of everything weak, base, failed; it has made an ideal out of whatever contradicts the preservation instincts of a strong life; it has corrupted the reason of even the most spiritual natures by teaching people to see the highest spiritual values as sinful, as deceptive, as *temptations*. The most pitiful example—the corruption of Pascal, who believed that his reason was corrupted by original sin when the only thing corrupting it was Christianity itself!”—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 5.

For Nietzsche, Christianity is another reaction of the poor and weak, designed to overthrow and control the powerful through manipulation. Christians have resigned themselves to their fate of slavery and do not have the will to become masters of their own destiny. For this reason,

they hypocritically denounce as sinful what the powerful people have and exalt as virtue what Christians cannot have, imposing their new morality onto all humans. Thus, because Christians could not overpower the rich and the powerful by other means, they devised a way to control the strong with their morality. In this Christian morality, for instance, Christians would convert their inescapable weakness and submission to other people into the virtue of obedience. And the Christians' inability to take revenge would impel Christians to invent the virtue of forgiveness. Likewise, they would design other virtues, such as piety, love, reciprocity, and equality. No matter how noble these virtues may seem to many, for Nietzsche, Christian morality was unacceptable, irrational, and repulsive, because, in his view, Christians used these virtues to reverse the morality of the strong and noble man of this world, to enslave and even oppress him. To Nietzsche, Christian morality keeps people under control, keeps them in obscurity, and makes them ordinary, unexceptional.

Obviously, Nietzsche's criticism of Christian morality and its fundamental concept of meekness is a lamentably wrong understanding of Christianity. The Christian virtue of meekness does not spring out of powerlessness—but out of God's power, justice, and love. When Jesus was taken to the Jewish court and one official slapped Him, Jesus demanded an answer for that unjust act (*John 18:23*). The Gospels make it clear that Jesus died on the cross, not because He did not have any way of escaping (*Matt. 26:53*) but because He voluntarily and lovingly gave His life for our salvation (*John 10:17, 18; John 18:4–11; John 19:11; Phil. 2:6–9*). Christian meekness is the result not of fear but of love.

Paul teaches Christians to live “with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love” (*Eph. 4:2*). Paul explains that we rejoice in our suffering and know that “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts” (*Rom. 5:5, NKJV*). Paul further clarifies that God manifested His love to us when we were powerless and rebellious (*Rom. 5:6–8*). John affirms this Bible truth when he declares, “We love Him because He first loved us” (*1 John 4:19, NKJV*).

By describing humans as powerless, Paul does not denigrate humanity, but, rather, describes the reality of the human condition (*see also Rom. 3:26, Romans 7*). The Bible does not regard human powerlessness as class struggle—but, rather, depicts all humans as powerless in the face of sin and death. Also, biblical Christianity does not falsely denigrate humanity in order to deceive them into making people cry out to God for grace. Rather, the Bible realistically describes the sinful condition of human beings and portrays a God who voluntarily and lovingly humbles Himself to save an arrogant, rebellious humanity (*John 1:11, 12; John 3:16*).

As someone said, it takes strength to be meek! And it takes divine

power to love sinful, arrogant, rebellious people! Perhaps one of the most memorable examples of Jesus' meekness was His prayer on the cross for the people who crucified Him and were mocking Him: " 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do' " (*Luke 23:34, NKJV; see also Matt. 12:15–20, Acts 8:32, 1 Pet. 2:21–23*). Meekness is part of the fruit of the Spirit; it is God's empowering us to overcome the crucibles of this world.

Moses' Meekness and God's Wrath

How could Moses, the servant of God, be designated the meekest person ever to walk the earth, while at the same time the Bible portrays God as full of wrath? We need to understand that God's wrath is not the opposite of meekness. The divine wrath is God's reaction to, and His repulsion toward, sin. But God genuinely loves the sinner. If God were arrogant, He would not have waited about sixteen hundred years for the antediluvians to return to Him. Neither would He have waited for more than four hundred years for the Canaanites to fill up the cup of their iniquity. Nor would He have waited some fifteen hundred years for the Israelites to be faithful to Him. Likewise, God would not have waited some two thousand years for Christians to fulfill their mission. An arrogant god would have exterminated each of these entities immediately. But God addresses each of them in love and hope, calling them to return to a relationship with Him.

Part III: Life Application

- 1. Our God is a perfect communicator. He tells people openly and comprehensibly what He likes and what He does not like. Thus, God leaves us in no doubt as to His feelings about sin: He rejects it. At the same time, God does not humiliate the sinner with the purpose of subjugating him or her. Rather, God talks about the situation generated by sin; at the same time, He provides solutions. Yes, His reaction against sin is unequivocal, but so is His invitation to sinners to be reconciled to Him. Think of how you can be meek, yet denunciatory of sin in your life and in the lives of your family and community members.**

2. Think about the idea that our life is a theater for the other worlds to see and learn. Share with the Sabbath School group your feelings when thinking about this idea. How does your life change when you are aware of this larger picture?

Notes



Waiting in the Crucible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 15:4, 5; Rom. 5:3–5; 1 Samuel 26; Ps. 37:1–11.*

Memory Text: “But the fruit of the Spirit is . . . longsuffering” (*Galatians 5:22, NKJV*).

Scientists did an experiment with four-year-old children and marshmallows. Each child was told by a scientist that they could have a marshmallow; however, if the child waited until the scientist returned from an errand, they would be given two. Some of the children stuffed the marshmallow into their mouths the moment the scientist left; others waited. The differences were noted.

The scientists then kept track of these children into their teenage years. The ones who had waited turned out to be better adjusted, better students, and more confident than those who didn't. It seemed that patience was indicative of something greater, something important in the human character. It is no wonder, then, that the Lord tells us to cultivate it.

This week, we'll look at what could be behind some of the most trying of all crucibles: the crucibles of waiting.

The Week at a Glance: Why do we sometimes have to wait so long for things? What lessons can we learn about patience while in the crucible?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 10.

The God of Patience

Read Romans 15:4, 5. What is found in these verses for us?

We are normally impatient about things that we really want or have been promised but don't have yet. We are often satisfied only when we get what we are longing for. And because we rarely get what we want when we want it, it means that we are often doomed to irritation and impatience. And when we are in this state, it is almost impossible to maintain peace and trust in God.

Waiting is painful by definition. In Hebrew, one of the words for "wait patiently" (*Ps. 37:7, NKJV*) comes from a Hebrew word that can be translated "to be much pained," "to shake," "to tremble," "to be wounded," "to be sorrowful." Learning patience is not easy; sometimes it's the very essence of what it means to be in the crucible.

Read Psalm 27:14, Psalm 37:7, and Romans 5:3–5. What are these verses saying to us? What does patience lead to?

While we wait, we can concentrate on one of two things. We can focus on the things that we are waiting for, or we can focus on the One who holds those things in His hands. What makes such a difference when we wait for something isn't so much how long we have to wait but our attitude while we wait. If we trust the Lord, if we have placed our lives in His hands, if we have surrendered our wills to Him, then we can trust that He will do what's best for us *when* it's best for us, no matter how hard it is sometimes to believe it.

What things are you desperately waiting for? How can you learn to surrender everything to God and to His timing? Pray your way into an attitude of complete surrender and submission to the Lord.

In God's Time

Read Romans 5:6 and Galatians 4:4. What do they tell us about God's timing?

In these verses, Paul tells us that Jesus came to die for us at exactly the right time. But Paul does not tell us why it was the right time. It is very easy to read these verses and wonder, *Why did Jesus wait for thousands of years until He came to the earth to deal with sin—didn't the universe understand that sin was a very bad thing long before then?* We may ask why Jesus is waiting to come the second time, as well. We also may ask, *Why is the Lord waiting so long to answer my prayer?*

Think about, for instance, the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27, the prophecy that points to Jesus as the Messiah (review it if you need to). How long was this time period? What does this tell you about learning to wait for things in God's time, even if it takes what seems to us a long time?

There are many important spiritual reasons why we will experience waiting times. First, waiting can refocus our attention away from “things” and back to God Himself. Second, waiting allows us to develop a clearer picture of our own motives and desires. Third, waiting builds perseverance—spiritual stamina. Fourth, waiting opens the door to developing many spiritual strengths, such as faith and trust. Fifth, waiting allows God to put down other pieces in the puzzle of the bigger picture. Sixth, we may never know the reason we have to wait; hence, we learn to live by faith. Can you think of any other reasons for waiting?

What examples can you find in the Bible of God doing things in His own time that can help you learn to trust that He will do for you what's right in His own time, as well? (Think, for instance, about Abraham and Sarah and the promise of a son.) At the same time, ask yourself, “What might I be doing that could be delaying the answer to a prayer that could have been answered long ago?”

David: An Object Lesson in Waiting

In 1 Samuel 16:1–13, we see David anointed by Samuel as king. However, it was a long journey from the fields of his father, Jesse, to the throne in Jerusalem. No doubt, at times, he felt he was in the midst of a crucible.

First, the lad is called to play music to soothe Saul’s troubled spirit (*1 Samuel 16*). Later, he becomes Israel’s hero as he kills Goliath (*1 Samuel 17*). Then there are many years during which David is running for his life. Both Saul and his son Jonathan know that David is destined to be the next king (*1 Sam. 23:17, 1 Sam. 24:20*). But David does nothing to advance his God-given destiny. In fact, he appears to do the opposite. Even when Saul tries to kill him and David snips a piece of cloth off the king’s robe, he wishes he had never done such a thing (*1 Sam. 24:5–7*). Again when Saul is trying to kill David, David refuses to kill Saul when the opportunity arises (*1 Sam. 26:7–11*).

Read 1 Samuel 26:1–11. Why does David refuse to kill Saul? What principles does this teach us about the way God brings about His plans for our lives?

Now read 1 Samuel 26:12–25. How does David’s refusal to kill Saul affect Saul? What does this teach us about the advantages of waiting for God?

Looking at the whole of David’s road to the throne, we could perhaps summarize it in a short sentence—don’t grab what God has not yet given. God’s gifts are always best received from His hand and in His time. This may require a very long time of waiting. Bean sprouts may literally grow up within hours, while an oak tree will take many years. But then when the strong winds come, the tree will not be uprooted.

Think about how easily David could have justified killing Saul. (After all, David was told he’d have the throne, and Saul was so evil anyway.) Yet, his actions speak of true faith in God. What conclusion might you be able to draw from this example for yourself in light of whatever you might be waiting for?

Elijah: The Problem of Rushing

The showdown on top of Mount Carmel had ended (*1 Kings 18*). Fire had come out of heaven, all the people had acknowledged the true God, and the false prophets had been put to death. God had been vindicated. You would have thought that Elijah had been growing in spiritual strength as the day went on, but suddenly he heard something that terrified him so much that he wanted to die. Read the rest of the story in *1 Kings 19:1–9*. The last words in the text are worrisome: “And the word of the LORD came to him: ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” (*1 Kings 19:9, NIV*). Evidently, Elijah’s fear caused him to run and find himself in the wrong place.

After such a powerful intervention by the Lord on Mount Carmel, Elijah should have been full of faith and trust; instead, he ran in fear for his life. What lesson can we learn from this bad example?

This story illustrates something important: when we rush, we can very easily find ourselves in the wrong place. In Elijah’s case, it was his fear that caused him to be overwhelmed and rush into the desert, wishing that he had never been born. But there are other things that cause us to rush outside of God’s plan for us.

Read the following texts. What things caused the characters depicted here to rush outside of God’s will? *Gen. 16:1–3; Num. 20:10–12; Judg. 14:1–3; Matt. 20:20, 21; Luke 9:52–56; Acts 9:1.*

How easy it is to let such things as ambition, anger, passion, lack of faith, or a supposed “zeal” for the Lord cause us to rush ahead to where we shouldn’t be. No one is immune to this danger. The key is to cultivate a trusting faith in the goodness and mercy of God, who we know loves us and wants what’s best for us. This doesn’t happen automatically. Faith might be a gift, but it’s a gift that needs to be cultivated, nurtured, and jealously guarded.

Learning to Take Delight in the Lord

“Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (*Ps. 37:4, NRSV*).

Psalm 37:4 is a wonderful promise. Imagine getting what you have always wanted. But getting the desires of our hearts hinges on having hearts that take delight in the Lord. So, what does it mean to “take delight in the LORD”?

Read Psalm 37:1–11. The context for Psalm 37:4 is, perhaps, a little surprising. David is writing about being surrounded by people who are working against God and against him. When people are working against us, the natural response is often to get angry or to set out to justify ourselves. But David advises something different.

In the following verses, what is David’s counsel to God’s people in this situation?

Ps. 37:1 _____

Ps. 37:5 _____

Ps. 37:7 _____

Ps. 37:8 _____

Read Psalm 37:4 again. In the context of the verses you have just made comments on, what does it mean to “take delight in the LORD”?

David is repeating again and again, in different ways, “Trust God.” Trust Him to act. Don’t get upset, because God is your God, and He is working for you—even right now. You don’t have to charge in and try to sort things out by yourself. Your Father in heaven is in charge. Trust Him. Trust Him completely.

It is in this context that David writes about taking delight in the Lord. To take delight in God means that we live in a state of perfect trust. Nothing can ruffle our peace, because God is here and at work. We can praise Him, we can even smile, because no one can outwit our God! When we can learn to do this, we really will receive what our hearts long for, because we will receive what our loving Father wants to give us, at the time that most benefits us and His kingdom.

How can you learn to “take delight in the LORD”? Spend some time in prayer, seeking God’s guidance as to how this may become a reality in your life.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Anointing of David,” pp. 637–642, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

God’s plan for us may require that we do a lot of waiting, and this really can feel like a crucible. Learning patience during this time can happen as we focus on the person of God and trust that He is acting for us. There are many reasons for waiting, but all are concerned with the fulfillment of God’s plans for us and His kingdom. We can lose much if we rush ahead of God, but we can gain much by maintaining an attitude of trust and delight in Him.

The Lord weighs and measures every trial.

“I cannot read the purpose of God in my affliction, but He knows what is best, and I will commit my soul, body, and spirit to Him as unto my faithful Creator. ‘For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day’ (2 Tim. 1:12). If we educated and trained our souls to have more faith, more love, greater patience, and a more perfect trust in our heavenly Father, I know we would have more peace and happiness day by day as we pass through the conflicts of this life.

“The Lord is not pleased to have us fret and worry ourselves out of the arms of Jesus. More is needed of the quiet waiting and watching combined. We think unless we have feeling that we are not in the right track, and we keep looking within for some sign befitting the occasion; but the reckoning is not of feeling but of faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 242.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What does it mean that Jesus “weighs and measures” every trial? How can knowing this help us while we wait?
- 2 Ask people in class to give personal testimonies as to what patient waiting is all about. What were their fears, their joys? How did they cope? What did they learn? What promises did they cling to?
- 3 What can you do as a church or a class to help others who are in the crucible as they await God’s timing for something?
- 4 What is the role of prayer in the development of patience? Are there others you can pray for so that the Spirit will develop patience in their lives?

Part 11: The Final Attack

By ANDREW McCHESENEY

Two weeks before Father's baptism, he inexplicably grew angry after guests left the house following a small-group Bible study in Manaus, Brazil, on Friday evening. He announced that he would sleep in the living room.

The night was darker than usual. Electricity went out in the neighborhood, leaving the houses and streets in pitch blackness.

About 1:00 A.M., Junior woke up to the sound of a voice shrieking that Father was not going to be baptized.

Junior was scared and didn't know what to do. He stayed in his room to see what would happen.

The voice screamed again, saying that Father was not going to be baptized. Junior waited.

He heard someone enter his room.

"Please, Son, pray with me," Father said. "The enemy is attacking again."

Another voice spoke. "What are you doing?" It was Mother. When she heard the screams from the living room, she had sunk onto her knees and began to pray. Now she invited Father and Junior to join her in pleading for Jesus to chase away the evil spirits.

After some minutes of prayer, Mother suggested that they step outside the house where they would be able to see one another in the dim moonlight.

Outside, Father said he was thirsty. Junior volunteered to go back in and fetch a glass of water. In the kitchen, he spotted a mysterious dark spot on the floor. Calling for Mother, he pointed at the spot and asked, "What's that?" Mother looked closely at the floor. "That's hair!" she said.

Back outside, Junior and Mother took a closer look at Father. Big tufts of hair were missing from his head. It looked as if someone had taken a pair of scissors and chopped off his hair haphazardly.

Father put his hands to the top of his head and winced.

"I'll have to shave my head," he said. "I don't care if I'm bald."

When the sun rose on Sabbath morning, Father felt terribly tired. He was unusually weak after the nighttime attack by evil spirits, as if he had received a severe beating. He decided to pray at home instead of going to church.

After Mother and Junior left, he prayed, "Jesus, don't let them take over my body. Please be close to me. I don't want to be possessed anymore."

Opening his Bible, he read in Psalms 37:5, "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (*NKJV*).

Father understood that Jesus was telling him not to be afraid. Jesus would guide him to his baptism. Sure enough, evil spirits never possessed Father again after that Friday night. But he could still hear them.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) and his family live.

Key Text: *Galatians 5:22*

Study Focus: *1 Samuel 26; Ps. 37:1–11; Rom. 5:3–5; Rom. 15:4, 5.*

Part I: Overview

Hope and meekness, as essential tools for overcoming crucibles, are both defined by waiting. However, the concept of biblical waiting is not only about waiting but also waiting with patience. This patience is not a political stratagem but is part of the fruit of the Spirit. God’s people wait patiently in the crucible, because God Himself is patient. God is patient because He is loving in character and because He also chooses the best moment to intervene. But that best moment is calculated by God to offer as much time as possible for the salvation of as many people as possible. Again, waiting is possible only when we trust the One for whom we are waiting.

Lesson Themes: This week’s lesson highlights two major themes.

1. We understand that patient waiting is part of the fruit of the Spirit and is crucial in our overcoming crucibles.
2. Waiting patiently becomes possible when we know and trust the person we are waiting for.

Part II: Commentary

The Patience of God

One biblical expression that describes God’s patience is “slow to anger” (*Neh. 9:16, 17; see also Exod. 34:6, Num. 14:18, Ps. 103:8, Jon. 4:2, Nah. 1:3*). Notice that most of these texts place the expression “slow to anger” in the context of other divine descriptions, such as God is “abundant in lovingkindness,” “compassionate and gracious,” “merciful.” In addition, the Bible presents God as “putting up” with people (*Gen. 18:17–33; Num. 14:27; Deut. 8:2; Neh. 9:30, 31; Ps. 78:38; Isa. 42:14; Ezek. 20:17; Acts 13:18; 1 Pet. 3:20*). At the same time, it is emphasized that God is “abounding in goodness and truth” (*Exod. 34:6, NKJV*) and is the Author of “wondrous deeds” (*Neh. 9:17, NASB*). At the same time, He “by no means clears the guilty” (*Num. 14:18, NKJV; see also Nah. 1:3, 1 Pet. 3:20*).

Thus, clearly God’s patience is not to be confused with indifference, powerlessness, or undecidedness. Neither is God’s patience a facade for calculating the best time for revenge. Rather, God is patient because

He abounds in love for us and wants to save as many as possible. Paul asks us rhetorically: “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (*Rom. 2:4, NKJV; see also Rom. 9:22–24*). Peter also declares that “the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (*2 Pet. 3:15, NKJV*) because “the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (*see in the larger context of 2 Pet. 3:9, NKJV*).

Our Patience

The biblical explanation of God’s patience will help all Christians, and especially us as Seventh-day Adventists, to understand the delay of the second coming of Jesus. In addition, it will help us evaluate and grow our own patience. A brief, noncomprehensive biblical study on patience produces several points:

1. The Bible teaches that patience is an integral part of Christian life and comes from God. God clothes us with patience, together with mercy, humility, and meekness, because “Christ is all and in all” (*Col. 3:11, NKJV*), and because God has “elected” us (*see Col. 3:12*). Jesus works in us His patience (*1 Tim. 1:16*). We are patient because of the “calling” that God extended to us (*Eph. 4:1, 2; 2 Tim. 4:2*). Christian patience is part of the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit (*Gal. 5:22*). It comes in a package with other Christian virtues, such as love, hope, and meekness (*Gal. 5:22; Col. 3:12; Eph. 4:1, 2; 2 Tim. 4:2*). Love is patient (*1 Cor. 13:4*), and our hope enables us to wait with patience (*Rom. 8:25*). We are strengthened through patience with joy (*Col. 1:11*), and patience produces character (*Rom. 5:3, 4; James 1:3, 4*).
2. Patience is a key characteristic of the end-time remnant of God: “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV; see also Rev. 13:10*). The remnant understand that they must be patient until the coming of the Lord in the same way that a farmer is patient until the harvest is ready (*James 5:7, 8; see also Luke 8:15, Heb. 6:12, Heb. 10:36, Rev. 14:14–20*). We take courage from God’s injunction to Habakkuk that even if, at times, certain end-time prophecies may appear to be far from their final fulfillment, we must persevere in our waiting: “The vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (*Hab. 2:3, NKJV*). God calls us to “be still, and know that I am God” (*Ps. 46:10*). David insists that a believer must learn to “wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!” (*Ps. 27:14, NKJV*).

3. In the meantime, an entire cloud of witnesses in patience cheers us on the way: “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (*Heb. 12:1, 2, NKJV*). Among the great examples of patience are Abraham (*Heb. 6:15*) and the prophets and Job, who prove “that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (*James 5:11, NKJV*). Jeremiah decided to wait on the Lord, no matter what: “I say to myself, ‘The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him’ ” (*Lam. 3:24, NIV*), because “the LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him” (*Lam. 3:25, NKJV*).

Paul explains that the examples we have in the Scriptures are appointed to help us develop our endurance and give us hope (*Rom. 15:4, 5*). Numerous other men and women of faith, both during and after the New Testament times, patiently endured tribulation and courageously bore God’s name and cause: “And you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary” (*Rev. 2:3, NKJV; see also Rom. 12:12, 2 Tim. 2:24, 2 Thess. 1:4, Rev 1:9, Rev. 2:19, Rev. 3:10*). Of course, Jesus is our greatest Example of patience and meekness in suffering: “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth’; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (*1 Pet. 2:21–23, NKJV*).

4. Yes, there are practical aspects of patience for this life: its opposite, impatience, ruins our present lives, and makes us fools (*Prov. 14:29; Prov. 15:18; Prov. 16:32; Prov. 25:15; Eccles. 7:8, 9*). But patience is that virtue that God gives us in the crucible of tribulation that helps us overcome and secure eternal life. In His teachings about tribulation in the world, Jesus instructs us: “ ‘By your patience possess your souls’ ” (*Luke 21:19, NKJV*). The apostle Paul declares that God will give “eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality” (*Rom. 2:7, NKJV*). Through the prophet Isaiah, God promises us: “But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (*Isa. 40:31, NKJV; see also Ps. 37:7–9, Ps. 40:1*).

Patience Is Trusting

Ian lay in the hospital with cancer. It was a hard winter, with extremely low temperatures. One morning, when the nurse entered his room to check on him, Ian told the nurse that his wife, Anastasia, would come to visit him that day. The nurse replied: “I do not think so, it is minus 30 degrees outside!” The man retorted: “I know my wife, and I trust her. She is special! When she promises something, she will fulfill that promise no matter what!” One hour later, Anastasia walked into Ian’s hospital room. Later that day, the nurse told Ian: “I seriously doubted your wife would come. But now I know she is indeed special!” Our waiting is determined by our knowledge of, and trust in, the person we are waiting for. If we know God and trust Him, our waiting will not lead us to despair, but rather to a patient, and active, waiting.

Part III: Life Application

- 1. Our patience manifests itself—and, indeed, we sorely need it—in various aspects of life: family, business, health, spirituality, et cetera. However, our genuine patience will always be rooted in the fruit of the Spirit. Write down an evaluation of your patience in various areas of your life. What have you discovered? In which areas of your life can it be improved? How can you make that happen, with God’s help?**

- 2. Impatience is considered a characteristic of immaturity. Children generally find waiting difficult; mature people are able to wait more easily. The mature have been enabled by experience and by trust to wait patiently. Evaluate your spiritual maturity. How do you plan to continue growing in your patience?**

Dying Like a Seed



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Phil. 2:5–9; Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Sam. 2:12–3:18; 1 Sam. 13:1–14; Zech. 4:1–14.*

Memory Text: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; . . . but if it dies, it produces much grain” (*John 12:24, NKJV*).

Jesus' picture of a kernel of wheat dying is a fascinating analogy of our submission to God's will. First, there is the falling. The kernel that falls from the wheat stalk has no control over where or how it falls to the ground. It has no control over the ground that surrounds and then presses over it.

Second, there is the waiting. As the kernel lies in the earth, it does not know what the future holds. It cannot “imagine” what life will be like in the future, for it is only a kernel of wheat.

Third, there is the dying. The kernel cannot possibly become a wheat stalk unless it gives up its safe, comfortable situation as a kernel. It must “die”; that is, it must give up what it has always been before so it may be transformed from a seed into a fruit-bearing plant.

The Week at a Glance: If we know that God's will is best for us, why do we have such a hard time accepting it? What example of submission has Christ left for us? How do you see the analogy of the kernel of wheat as applying to your own life?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 17.

Submission for Service

Read Philippians 2:5–9. What important message is there for us in these verses?

Contemporary culture urges us all to demand and assert our rights. And all this is good and often is the way it should be. But as with Jesus, the will of God may be for us to give up our rights freely in order to serve the Father in ways that will make an eternal impact for God’s kingdom. This process of giving them up may be difficult and uncomfortable, creating the conditions of a crucible.

Look at how Jesus did this (*Phil. 2:5–8*). These verses describe three steps that Jesus took in submitting Himself to the Father’s will. And at the beginning, Paul alarmingly reminds us: “Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus” (*Phil. 2:5, NIV*).

In order to be in a position to save us, Jesus gave up His equality with the Father and moved to earth in the form and limitations of a human being (*Phil. 2:6, 7, NIV*).

Jesus did not come as a great and glorious human being, but as a servant of other human beings (*Phil. 2:7, NIV*).

As a human servant, Jesus did not live a peaceful and long life but became “obedient to death.” He did not even die in a noble and glorious manner. No, He was “obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (*Phil. 2:8, NIV*).

In what areas of life is this example of Jesus a model for us? If rights and equality are good and should be protected, how would you explain the logic of sometimes needing to give them up? Now read Philippians 2:9. In what way does this verse help us to understand the logic of submission to the Father’s will?

Pray for wisdom from the Holy Spirit, asking, “What rights am I holding on to right now that actually might be a barrier to submitting to Jesus’ will in serving my family, my church, and those around me? To what extent am I willing to endure discomfort to serve others more effectively?”

Dying Comes Before Knowing God’s Will

Many Christians sincerely seek to know God’s will for their lives. “If only I could know God’s will for my life, I would sacrifice everything for Him.” But even after promising this to God, we still may be confused about what His will is. The reason for this confusion may be found in Romans 12:1, 2. Paul is describing how we can know God’s will, and he makes an important point: if you want to know what God’s will is, you have to sacrifice first!

Read Romans 12:1, 2. Paul writes that we will be able to “test and approve what God’s will is” (*Rom. 12:2, NIV*) when the following things happen:

1. We have a true understanding of “God’s mercy” for us (*Rom. 12:1, NIV*).
2. We offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God (*Rom. 12:1*).
3. Our minds are renewed (*Rom. 12:2*).

It is only the renewed mind that truly can understand God’s will. But this renewal hinges on our death to self first. It was not enough that Christ simply suffered for us—He had to die.

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you any areas in which you are not completely “dead.” What things does the Holy Spirit need you to give up in order for you to become a “living sacrifice” for God?

When areas of our lives are not completely dead to self, God permits crucibles to bring them to our attention. However, our suffering not only helps us confront our sin—but it also gives us an insight into Jesus’ giving Himself up for us. Elisabeth Elliot writes, “The surrender of our heart’s deepest longing is perhaps as close as we come to an understanding of the cross. . . . Our own experience of crucifixion, though immeasurably less than our Savior’s, nonetheless furnishes us with a chance to begin to know Him in the fellowship of His sufferings. In every form of our own suffering, He calls us to that fellowship.”—*Quest for Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1996), p. 182.

Read and pray over Romans 12:1, 2. Think about the things you need to give up in order to become a sacrifice. How does this help you to understand the sufferings Jesus faced for you on the cross? How can this knowledge help you enter into fellowship with Jesus and His sufferings?

Willingness to Listen

“The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ Then Samuel said, ‘Speak, for your servant is listening’ ” (1 Sam. 3:10, NIV).

Have you ever heard that still, small voice of the Holy Spirit but ignored it? Consequently, everything went wrong, and you thought to yourself later, *Oh no, why didn't I listen?*

First Samuel describes the story of an old man and his two wicked sons who didn't listen to the Lord and a little boy who did. Though there were strong warnings from God, those who needed to change their course didn't.

Read their story in 1 Samuel 2:12–3:18. What contrast is made apparent here between those who listen to God and those who don't?

Eli's sons had other things on their minds than the things of God. And even when Eli, after hearing what God wanted, spoke to his sons, he didn't seem to do anything else. And his sons were obviously not ready to submit the details of their lives to God's will. What a contrast to the young Samuel!

Preacher Charles Stanley describes how essential it is to cultivate openness to God's voice in what he calls “shifting into neutral.” He says: “The Holy Spirit . . . does not speak for the sake of passing along information. He speaks to get a response. And He knows when our agenda has such a large slice of our attention that it is a waste of time to suggest anything to the contrary. When that is the case, He is often silent. He waits for us to become neutral enough to hear and eventually obey.”—*The Wonderful Spirit-Filled Life* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), pp. 179, 180.

What do you think Stanley means by becoming “neutral enough”? When you think about your openness to God, what things often prevent you from being “neutral enough to hear and eventually obey”? What do you need to do in your life to cultivate openness to God's voice and a decisiveness to be obedient to His direction?

Self-Reliance

When Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, it wasn't simply because she doubted God's word. At the heart of the problem was her belief that she had enough wisdom to decide for herself what was good and right. She trusted her own judgment. When we rely on our own judgment as opposed to trusting God's Word, we open ourselves up to all sorts of problems.

The story of Saul describes his steps to self-reliance and the tragedy that so quickly follows. Samuel anointed Saul as God's king (*1 Sam. 10:1*). Then he gave Saul specific instructions (*1 Sam. 10:8*), but Saul disobeyed.

Read the next part of the story in **1 Samuel 13:1–14**. What did Saul do that led to his own downfall?

There are three steps that led Saul down the road to self-reliance so soon after having been made king. The problem is that none of the steps were that bad in themselves. Yet, they contained the seeds of tragedy because they were each taken independently of God. Notice the order in which Saul's fall occurred.

1. Saul said, "I saw" (*NIV*)—the scattering of his troops and Samuel's absence (*1 Sam. 13:11*). Saul was under pressure, and he evaluated with his own eyes what was happening.

2. Saul moved from "I saw" to "I said"—that the Philistines would conquer them (*1 Sam. 13:12, NKJV*). What he saw with his own eyes shaped what he said, or surmised, about the situation.

3. Saul moved from "I said" to "I felt"—compelled to offer sacrifice (*1 Sam. 13:12, NKJV*). What Saul thought now shaped his feelings.

All of us have done this: we rely on our own human eyesight, which leads us to rely on our own human thinking, which leads us to rely on our own human feelings. And then we act on these feelings.

Why do you think it was so easy for Saul to follow his own judgment, even though he had God's clear instructions still ringing in his ears? If we know that we are so fragile and have such imperfect knowledge, why do we still try to rely on ourselves? What can we do to learn to trust in the Lord's commands more than trusting in ourselves?

Substitutes

As we saw yesterday, submission to God's will can be undermined as we rely on our own strength. It also is possible to rely on other substitutes for God. When some people feel depressed, they go shopping for something to make them happy. When some feel inadequate, they pursue fame. When others have difficulties with their spouse, they look for someone else to give them intimacy and excitement.

Many of the things we use can relieve the pressure, but they do not necessarily solve the problem or teach us how to handle the situation better the next time. Only supernatural help from God can do that. The problem is that many times we depend on substitutes for God rather than on God Himself.

Here are three substitutes that we may use instead of God:

1. We use human logic or past experience when we need fresh divine revelation.
2. We block problems from our minds when we need divine solutions.
3. We escape reality and avoid God when we need communion with Him for divine power.

Zechariah helps us to focus on what really matters when we are tempted to use substitutes. After many years away, the exiles had finally returned from Babylon and immediately began to rebuild the temple. But there was an incredible amount of opposition to this (some background can be found in Ezra 4–6). So, Zechariah came with this message of encouragement to Zerubbabel, who was leading the work.

Read this message in Zechariah 4. What does God mean in Zechariah 4:6? How could the completion of a building project be affected by the Holy Spirit? What does this teach us about the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the practical things that we do?

God did not prevent the opposition to the temple or spare Zerubbabel from the stress of dealing with it. And God will not always protect us from opposition. But when opposition comes, God may use it as a crucible to teach us to depend on Him.

When stress comes, what's your first reaction? Food? Television? Prayer? Submission to God? What does your answer tell you about yourself and the things you need to learn or to change?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Eli and His Sons,” pp. 575–580, and “The Presumption of Saul,” pp. 616–626, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

Submission to God’s will comes as we die to our own desires and ambitions. This opens the way for true service to others. We cannot live for God without becoming sacrifices and living in continual openness to God’s voice. For us truly to submit our wills to our Father’s will, we must recognize the dangers of relying on ourselves and on substitutes for God’s Word and power. As submission to God’s will is at the heart of a Christlike life, God may allow crucibles to teach us dependence on Him.

“The neglect of Eli is brought plainly before every father and mother in the land. As the result of his unsanctified affection or his unwillingness to do a disagreeable duty, he reaped a harvest of iniquity in his perverse sons. Both the parent who permitted the wickedness and the children who practiced it were guilty before God, and He would accept no sacrifice or offering for their transgression.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 276.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, talk about the incredible condescension of the Son of God in coming to earth as a human being in order to die for our sins. What does this tell each of us about what self-sacrifice and self-denial for the good of others means? Though we certainly can’t do anything like what Jesus did, the principle is there and should always be before us. In what ways can we, in our own spheres, emulate the kind of submission and self-sacrifice that Jesus showed us at the cross?
- 2 For many people, submitting to God without knowing what will happen next can be a terrifying thing. How would you counsel people who are relying on themselves rather than God? What would you say to help remove their fears of not knowing—or being able to control—the future?
- 3 As a class, spend some time praying for people you know who have difficulty in submitting to God’s will, that they may see that trusting God’s will is the only route to a lasting peace. At the same time, what practical things can you do for these people to help them see that they can surrender to God and that His way is the best? In other words, how can God use you to help others know of His love and willingness to provide?

Part 12: Father Is Baptized!

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The day of Father's baptism finally arrived, and he arrived with Mother and Junior at Manaus Central Seventh-day Adventist Church, a larger church where the baptism would be held, in Manaus, Brazil. About 400 people were seated in the main sanctuary. Pastor Sergio Alan A. Caxeta, president of the Adventist Church's Central Amazon Conference, whose territory includes Manaus, asked Mother how she felt as she and Junior took a seat on the front row. "We're fine," she said, smiling happily.

The pastor acknowledged feeling uneasy until that very afternoon. Then he had prayed, "Lord, please help me. I'm not sure about my own strength. I want Your peace so I can have the certainty that Your power is here when I baptize Eduardo." After the prayer, all doubt had vanished.

Ricardo Coelho, pastor of the family's Alpha Community Church, led Father to the second floor, where seats were reserved for Alpha's 300 members. Father greeted Dilma Araujos dos Santos and her son Clifferson, who first introduced the family to the Adventist Church, and the others. Then Pastor Ricardo asked Father to return downstairs to don a baptismal gown.

As Father descended the stairs, a man suddenly darted up and rushed toward him. Father turned to look at the man and, as their eyes met, the man's pupils slid up into his head and his eyes went white. Then the man fell down and writhed on the stairs. "I've been ordered to kill him!" he shrieked.

Concealed in a pocket, the man was carrying a small dagger, the type that Father once had used to sacrifice animals at the temple. But before the man could pull out the dagger, Pastor Ricardo and several other men lifted him up and led him to a back room, where they found the weapon.

A short time later, Father waded into the baptismal pool. Alpha church members sang a hymn from the second floor as he went under the water.

Afterward, Pastor Ricardo told the congregation about the attempted attack and invited a physician, Luiz, up to the front to speak. Luiz, who had examined the attacker in the back room, was a frequent guest at the church but had never committed his life to Jesus. "I didn't understand the reality of the great controversy between Christ and Satan until today," he said, his voice shaking. "I saw it right here. Praise the Lord that nothing bad happened. It was God's power." He began to weep. "As a cardiologist, I felt for the attacker's pulse," he said. "I have never seen anything so abnormal. His pulse was too fast. No human could have such a high pulse rate and live."

The experience changed Luiz's life, and he decided to be baptized.

The knife attacker, it turned out, had struggled with satanic possession for some time. The evil spirits left when a pastor gave him Bible studies several months later. Through Father's baptism, at least two souls were led to Jesus.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) and his family live.

Key Text: *John 12:24*

Study Focus: *1 Sam. 2:12–3:18; 1 Sam. 13:1–14; Zechariah 4; Rom. 12:1, 2; Phil. 2:5–9.*

Part I: Overview

Death is a fascinating element in all religions. In biblical Christianity, death has two connotations. On one hand, death is the result of, and punishment for, sin. On the other hand, our life with God starts with death—death to sin. Only when we experience this death to sin can we fully enjoy life in God’s kingdom. Death to sin leads to overcoming and confronting the death that is the result of sin. But both events are possible because of Christ’s death for us.

Lesson Themes: This week’s lesson highlights two major themes.

1. Death to sin sets the framework for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit Himself personally implements the transformation of our characters unto the image of Jesus Christ and empowers us to live lives of sacrificial service and obedience to God.
2. If we do not experience death to sin, we will continue a life of self-centeredness and self-service, a life of sin that, in fact, leads to death.

Part II: Commentary

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (*Gen. 2:9, 17*)

Quite a name for a tree! But God designated the tree by this name in the Garden of Eden when He instructed our parents on the preservation of their lives: “ ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’ ” (*Gen. 2:16, 17, NKJV*).

Two points are important for our present discussion. First, the biblical text does not allude to any poisonous or mind-altering substances contained in the fruit of the forbidden tree. On the contrary, God created all things “good” and “very good”; He did not create anything incomplete, imperfect, bad, or evil (*Gen. 1:21, 31; see also Gen. 2:1–3*). Sin and evil were not present in God’s perfect creation, but, rather, “entered the world” through Adam’s act (*Rom. 5:12, NKJV*). In addition, during the temptation, the serpent insists that if Eve eats of the forbidden tree, her “ ‘eyes will be opened’ ” and she “ ‘will be like God, knowing good and evil’ ” (*Gen 3:4, 5, NKJV*). Eve, then, “saw that the tree was good for food, that

it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise,” and she ate and served her husband, as well (*Gen. 3:6, NKJV*). The result of the consumption of the forbidden fruit was that “the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked” (*Gen. 3:7, NKJV*). Also, the tree is not named “the tree of knowledge” of God or of knowledge, in general, but “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” relating it to morality.

Thus, the name of the tree and the narrative of Genesis 2 and 3 indicate that what changed was Adam and Eve’s perspective, their view, their attitude, and their relation to God. Their choice was a matter of moral disobedience or rebellion against God. The expression “to know good and evil” in the Bible refers to moral maturity, when a person becomes an adult and autonomous, or a moral judge (*see Deut. 1:39, 2 Sam 14:17, 1 Kings 3:9, Isa. 7:16, Heb. 5:14*). The issue around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was who was the judge, and who was the source and standard of morality. By forbidding the eating of the fruit of the tree, God established Himself as the ultimate Source of morality on earth in the same way that He was in the universe. By eating from the tree, Eve and Adam decided that they were the source of morality. It is one thing for someone to exercise morality and distinguish between good and evil through the prism of God’s revelation (*Deut. 30:14–16, 2 Sam. 14:17, 1 Kings 3:9, Heb 5:14*). But it is another thing to set oneself as the source and standard of morality over against God’s revelation and command; to do so is tantamount to declaring oneself God, to rebel against God, and to want to overthrow His throne.

This is exactly what the serpent suggested (*Gen. 3:4, 5*), and this is exactly what Satan had done in heaven and continues doing on earth (*Isa. 14:13, 14; Ezek. 28:2, 12–17*). Thus, the serpent suggested to Eve that by eating the forbidden fruit, “‘your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’ ” (*Gen. 3:5, NKJV*). Being “like God” does not mean to become divine in nature but to be the source of one’s own morality, defining what is good and evil. This independence is self-sufficiency and autonomy from God, an act of sedition that constitutes replacing, or substituting, God with ourselves or somebody or something else.

Second, and consequently, eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, rebelling against God and attempting to sit on His throne, leads to death. That is why God immediately warned Adam and Eve that eating from the forbidden tree leads to death (*Gen. 2:17*). God is the only Source of life (*Gen. 2:7; Deut. 30:20; John 1:1–4; John 4:13, 14; John 6:32–35; John 11:25–27; John 15:1–5; Rom. 6:23; Col. 1:16, 17*). For a creature to sit on the throne of God is tantamount to removing himself or herself from the only Source of life, which is the same as consigning oneself to death.

But such death is not an ordinary death. It is a willing separation from God, a decision not to live according to God’s government (*1 John 3:4*;

Isa. 14:9, 10, 16; Ezek. 28:2, 9, 16, 17). This separation is the essence of sin and of death. We do not know what Adam and Eve thought when they heard the word “death,” but they surely thought of something grim. But we, after 6,000 years, know all too well that death is a tragedy.

Death as the Solution to . . . Death

Is there a solution to death? Yes! And we know it from the essence of the gospel: “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*Rom. 6:23, NIV*). How, though, do we receive this gift of eternal life? Paradoxically, the gift of eternal life comes with . . . death! Two types of death are indicated here. First, Jesus Christ died in our place and for us; He took our death upon Himself and gave us the hope of eternal life (*John 3:16, Rom. 3:25, Rom. 5:8, 2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Pet. 1:18–20*). Second, our own death is indicated, as well. But this death is not punishment for sin; Jesus died that death in our place. Rather, our death is to sin itself. This death (to sin) is required if we want to enjoy eternal life and God’s kingdom. Sin is a controlling power that keeps us separate from God (*Rom. 7:18–20, 23, 24*). To be saved from its power, we need to die to sin and be alive to Jesus and to the Holy Spirit (*Rom. 7:4–6*)! This death is symbolized by baptism (*Rom. 6:1–4*). Paul presents the most beautiful depiction of this process: “If we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*Rom. 6:5–11, NKJV*).

By “death to sin” the Bible means exactly what it says. It does not say that we attain to eternal life by literally dying. We are not—and cannot be—paying for our sins with our own deaths. There is no salvific merit in our deaths. The only literal death that counts for our salvation is the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Neither does the Bible use “death to sin” to communicate an indifference to the world, as in Buddhism, for instance. God created the world perfect for our enjoyment and for us to care for it (*Gen. 1:26–28, Gen. 2:15*). Death to sin, then, means accepting the Lordship of God and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and rejecting the control of sin (*Rom. 8:1–11*). We enjoy obeying God and serving Him. We are transformed into the image and mind of Christ, who did not

consider holding on to power, but stooped down to earth and took our status and our place to save us (*Phil. 2:2–8*).

Part III: Life Application

1. It is true that we have what we call fundamental rights. But we live in a very complicated world of sin, a world that, more often than not, tends to ignore or trample upon our rights. Read *Philippians 2:1–9* again. The incarnation of the Son was the crucible of crucibles! How does Jesus' example help you go through the various crucibles created by sin, even if this means losing your fundamental rights? What is the crucial element for you in this passage that changes your perspective on overcoming the trials of your life?

2. The story of Samuel is more than a story about simply hearing as an auditory act of registering someone's words to us; it is about obeying what we hear. The prophet's name itself meant "God heard" (*see 1 Sam. 1:20*). God heard and was merciful to Hannah (*1 Sam. 1:17, 19, 20, 27*). Samuel heard and obeyed God. Realizing that Samuel does not at first recognize God's voice, Eli teaches Samuel how to relate to God: "Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears" (*1 Sam. 3:9*,

NKJV). In fact, the rest of the book of Samuel—indeed, the entire Bible—is about hearing and obeying, or the lack of obedience: at some point, the people stopped hearing God, and thus God stopped hearing them. One big problem in our lives is that we listen to each other, we listen to God (through His revelation), but we fail to take His words to heart and obey them. How can you better listen to and hear the members of your family? How can you better hear and obey God? Think of three ways to meaningfully improve your way of hearing and relating to other people and to God.

Notes

Christ in the Crucible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 2:7, 22–24; Matt. 2:1–18; John 8:58, 59; Luke 22:41–44; Matt. 27:51, 52; Rom. 6:23; Titus 1:2.*

Memory Text: “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ ” (*Matthew 27:46, NKJV*).

Whenever we look at the issue of suffering, the question comes: How did sin and suffering first arise? Through divine revelation we have good answers: they arose because free beings abused the freedom God had given them. This leads to another question: Did God know beforehand that these beings would fall? Yes, but obviously He thought it was, as C. S. Lewis wrote, “worth the risk.”

Worth the risk? For whom? For us, while God sits in heaven on His throne? Not exactly. The freedom of all His intelligent creatures was so sacred that, rather than deny us freedom, God chose to bear in Himself the brunt of the suffering caused by our abuse of that freedom. And we see this suffering in the life and death of Jesus, who, through suffering in our flesh, has created bonds between heaven and earth that will last throughout eternity.

The Week at a Glance: What did Christ suffer in our behalf? What can we learn from His suffering?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 24.

The Early Days

Scripture gives us little information about the early years of Jesus. A few verses, however, tell us something about the conditions He lived under and the kind of world the Savior entered.

Read Luke 2:7, 22–24 (see also Lev. 12:6–8) and Matthew 2:1–18. What do we see in these texts that gives us an indication of the kind of life Jesus faced from the start?

Of course, Jesus was not the first person to live in poverty or to face those who wanted to kill Him, even from an early age. There is, however, another element that helps us understand the uniqueness of what Christ suffered from the earliest times.

Read John 1:46. What element does this add to help us understand what sufferings the young Jesus had faced?

With the exceptions of Adam and Eve before the Fall, Jesus was the only sinless Person who ever lived on the earth. In His purity, in His sinlessness, He was immersed in a world of sin. What torture it must have been, even as a child, for His pure soul constantly to be in contact with sin. Even in our hardness because of sin, we ourselves often shrink away from exposure to sins and evil that we find repulsive. Imagine what it must have been like for Christ, whose soul was pure, who wasn't the least bit tainted by sin. Think of the sharp contrast between Himself and others around Him in that regard. It must have been exceedingly painful for Him.

Ask yourself, "How sensitive am I to the sins that exist all around us? Do they bother me, or am I hardened to them?" If you are hardened to them, could it be because of the things you read, watch, or even do? Think about it.

Despised and Rejected of Men

Read the following texts, all the while keeping in mind the fact that Jesus was divine, the Creator of heaven and earth, and that He came to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (*Matt. 12:22–24; Luke 4:21–30; John 8:58, 59*). How do these texts help us understand the sufferings that Jesus faced here on earth?

Whether by leaders, or even by the common people, Jesus' life, acts, and teaching were constantly misunderstood, leading to rejection and hatred from people He came to save. In a certain sense, it must be like a parent who sees a wayward child in need of help, and though the parent is willing to give everything for that child, the child spurns the parent, heaping scorn and rejection upon, perhaps, the only person who can spare that child from utter ruin. That's what Jesus faced while here on earth. How painful it must have been for Him.

Read Matthew 23:37. What does it tell us about how Christ felt about the rejection? As you read, ask yourself, too, *Was He feeling bad for Himself (as we often do when facing rejection), or was it for another reason? If for another reason, what was it?*

We've all felt the sting of rejection, and maybe our pain was similar to Christ's in that it was unselfish: we were pained, not because we were rejected, but because of what the rejection would mean for the one who was rejecting us (perhaps someone we care about who refuses to accept salvation in Christ). Imagine, though, how it must have felt to Jesus, who was fully aware of what He was to face in order to save them, and at the same time fully aware of what the consequences of their rejection would be. "It was because of His innocence that He [Christ] felt so keenly the assaults of Satan."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 129.

What can you learn from Christ that can help you better cope with the pain of rejection? What does His example show you? How can you apply it to your own life?

Jesus in Gethsemane

“And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch” (*Mark 14:34*).

Whatever Jesus suffered throughout His 33 years here on earth, nothing compared to what He began to face in the last hours before the Cross. From the eternal ages (*Eph. 1:1–4*; *2 Tim. 1:8, 9*; *Titus 1:1, 2*), the sacrifice of Jesus as the offering for the world’s sin was planned, and now it was all coming to pass.

What do the following texts tell us about Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane? *Matt. 26:39*, *Mark 14:33–36*, *Luke 22:41–44*.

“He went a little distance from them—not so far but that they could both see and hear Him—and fell prostrate upon the ground. He felt that by sin He was being separated from His Father. The gulf was so broad, so black, so deep, that His spirit shuddered before it. This agony He must not exert His divine power to escape. As man He must suffer the consequences of man’s sin. As man He must endure the wrath of God against transgression.

“Christ was now standing in a different attitude from that in which He had ever stood before. His suffering can best be described in the words of the prophet, ‘Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, saith the Lord of hosts.’ *Zech. 13:7*. As the substitute and surety for sinful man, Christ was suffering under divine justice. He saw what justice meant. Hitherto He had been as an intercessor for others; now He longed to have an intercessor for Himself.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 686.

Dwell upon what was happening to Jesus in Gethsemane. Already, the sins of the world were starting to fall upon Him. Try to imagine what that must have been like. No human being has ever been called to go through anything like this before or since. What does this tell us about God’s love for us? What hope can you draw from this for yourself?

The Crucified God

Death by crucifixion was one of the harshest punishments the Romans meted out to anyone. It was considered the worst way to die. Thus, how horrific for anyone to be killed that way, in particular the Son of God! Jesus, we must always remember, came in human flesh like ours. Between the beatings, the scourgings, the nails hammered into His hands and feet, and the harrowing weight of His own body tearing at the wounds, the physical pain must have been unbearable. This was harsh, even for the worst of criminals; how unfair, then, that Jesus, innocent of everything, should face such a fate.

Yet, as we know, Christ's physical sufferings were mild in contrast to what really was happening. This was more than just the killing of an innocent man.

What events surrounding the death of Jesus showed that more was going on than most people there understood at the time? What significance can we find in each of these events that can help reveal what happened there?

Matt. 27:45 _____

Matt. 27:51, 52 _____

Mark 15:38 _____

Clearly, something much more was happening here than just the death, however unfair, of an innocent man. According to Scripture, God's wrath against sin, our sin, was poured out upon Jesus. Jesus on the cross suffered a righteous God's righteous indignation against sin, the sins of the whole world. As such, Jesus suffered something deeper, darker, and more painful than any human being could ever know or experience.

As you go through whatever struggles you are facing, what hope and comfort can you draw from the reality of Christ suffering for you on the cross?

The Suffering God

We might as well get used to it: as long as we are here, in this world, we are going to suffer. As fallen creatures, it is our fate. Nothing in the Bible promises us anything different. On the contrary:

What do the following texts have to tell us about the topic at hand? *Acts 14:22, Phil. 1:29, 2 Tim. 3:12.*

Yet, in the midst of our suffering, we should keep two things in mind. First, Christ, our Lord, has suffered more than any of us ever could. At the cross, He “has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (*Isa. 53:4, NKJV*); what we know only as individuals, He suffered for us all corporately. He who was sinless became “sin for us” (*2 Cor. 5:21*), suffering in a way that we, as sinful creatures, couldn’t begin to imagine.

But second, as we suffer, we should remember the results of Christ’s suffering; that is, what we have been promised through what Christ has done for us.

Read John 10:28, Romans 6:23, Titus 1:2, and 1 John 2:25. What are we promised?

Whatever our sufferings here, thanks to Jesus, thanks to His bearing in Himself the punishment of our sin, thanks to the great provision of the gospel—that through faith we can stand perfect in Jesus right now—we have the promise of eternal life. We have the promise that because of what Christ has done, because of the fullness and completeness of His perfect life and perfect sacrifice, our existence here, full of pain, disappointment, and loss, is no more than an instant, a flash, here and gone, in contrast to the eternity that awaits us, an eternity in a new heaven and a new earth, one without sin, suffering, and death. And all this is promised to us and made certain for us only because of Christ and the crucible He went into so that one day, coming soon, He will see “the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (*Isa. 53:11*).

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Gethsemane,” pp. 685–697, and “Calvary,” pp. 741–757, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Three times has He uttered that prayer. Three times has humanity shrunk from the last, crowning sacrifice. But now the history of the human race comes up before the world’s Redeemer. He sees that the transgressors of the law, if left to themselves, must perish. He sees the helplessness of man. He sees the power of sin. The woes and lamentations of a doomed world rise before Him. He beholds its impending fate, and His decision is made. He will save man at any cost to Himself. He accepts His baptism of blood, that through Him perishing millions may gain everlasting life. He has left the courts of heaven, where all is purity, happiness, and glory, to save the one lost sheep, the one world that has fallen by transgression. And He will not turn from His mission. He will become the propitiation of a race that has willed to sin. His prayer now breathes only submission: ‘If this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 690, 693.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How does it help us in our own sufferings, this knowledge that God Himself, in the person of Christ, suffered more than any of us ever could? What should the sufferings of Christ in our behalf mean to us? What comfort can we draw from this amazing truth? As you think about your answer, keep in mind the following statement from Ellen White: “All the suffering which is the result of sin was poured into the bosom of the sinless Son of God.”—*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 129.
- 2 As a class, go over the sufferings of Christ examined in this week’s lesson. What were the crucibles that Christ faced? In what ways are they like our own, and in what ways are they different? What can we learn from how He handled these challenges that can help us amid our own crucibles?
- 3 What are some of your favorite Bible promises, promises that you can cling to amid sorrow and pain? Write them out, claim them for yourself, and share them in class.
- 4 Write out a summary paragraph, highlighting whatever main points you got from this quarter’s lessons. What questions were resolved for you? What issues still remain unanswered? How can we help each other work through those things that still greatly perplex and trouble us?

Part 13: Preparing to See Jesus

By ANDREW McCHESNEY

The evil spirits have fallen silent. Father believes Christ won a victory over Satan with the baptism, and that is why the devil tried so hard to prevent it.

Peace has filled the family home. Mother is a church deaconess, and she still sings in the choir. Junior is 17 and finishing high school.

Father, who is 43, has shared his incredible story in churches around Brazil, and many of those who have heard it have committed their lives to Jesus. In Coari, where Father decided to follow Jesus, 16 people gave their hearts to Christ after hearing his testimony.

Father credits the Holy Spirit, not his story, for changing hearts.

“My experience is shocking, but I see the Holy Spirit working in their hearts as they listen,” he said.

In addition to sharing his story, Father sells Bibles and has presented them to his mother, his older sister, and his two younger brothers. He is praying for them. His mother stopped worshiping in the Candomblé temple long before his baptism. When she learned that evil spirits were trying to kill him, she resolved to have nothing more to do with them.

While Father is rejoicing in his new life in Christ, he remains watchful by praying and reading the Bible every day. He remembers 1 Peter 5:8, which says, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (NKJV). He also is mindful of the warning in Matthew 12:43–45, where Jesus said, “When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first” (NKJV).

But Father is not afraid. “Even now, the devil has no power over me,” he said. “That’s what I preach in every church that I visit.”

He dreams of the day when he will meet Jesus face to face. “I pray that the Lord will never give up on me. I also pray not to give Him up,” he said. “I pray that I remain faithful and persevere until the end. I have hope that I will see Him. That is my hope.”



Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) lives with Mother and Junior (pictured).

Key Text: *Matthew 27:46*

Study Focus: *Matt. 2:1–18; Matt. 27:51, 52; Luke 2:7, 22–24; Luke 22:41–44; John 8:58, 59; Rom. 6:23; Titus 1:2.*

Part I: Overview

The greatest point of biblical religion is that sin and suffering were generated by us but were borne by our God. There is no other divinity in the religions of the world who would condescend to make such a sacrifice. That is why biblical Christianity is called the religion of love and grace, from Creation to salvation. God created us by grace (and without our contribution) because He loved us, and God saves us by grace (without our contribution, as well) because He loved us.

In both cases (Creation and salvation), however, we have a choice to accept or reject His action of grace. After being created by grace, Adam and Eve made the decision to reject God's act of creation and chose the path of rebellion that leads to annihilation or death. After being saved by grace through Christ's death on the cross, each one of us has a choice to accept God's sacrifice in our place and return to His kingdom of light, grace, and love, or to reject His great salvation and disappear into eternal nonexistence. Choose today. But choose love, choose grace, choose life. Choose God's love, God's grace, and God's life. This will make you happy, this will make your loved ones happy, and this will make God happy.

Lesson Themes: This week's lesson highlights two major themes.

1. Jesus Christ's suffering does not represent merely the suffering of another being. Rather, His suffering is the essence of God's love and salvation for us. Jesus Christ suffered for us and in our place to rescue us from the power of sin, suffering, and death forever.
2. What Jesus suffered in Gethsemane and what it means for us.

Part II: Commentary

The Early Days of Jesus' Ministry

Yes, from the first hours of His life, Jesus experienced, and was surrounded by, human tragedy and suffering: denial, rejection, poverty, and humility (born in a manger), physical suffering (circumcision), massacre, persecution, and flight. Throughout His childhood, Jesus continued to

experience human suffering. However, Jesus' baptism at the beginning of His ministry pointed to His entrance into the crucible He had come for, to the type of ministry He had come to offer. Why was He baptized if He did not have any sin?

Of course, He was baptized to set us an example. Ellen G. White notices that "Jesus did not receive baptism as a confession of guilt on His own account. He identified Himself with sinners, taking the steps that we are to take, and doing the work that we must do. His life of suffering and patient endurance after His baptism was also an example to us."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 111. But there is more to Christ's baptism than it being an example.

The apostle Paul explains the meaning of baptism in terms of death and resurrection: "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (*Rom. 6:3, 4, NKJV*). Elsewhere, Paul explains that God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (*2 Cor. 5:21, NKJV*). Jesus came into the world to take our sins upon Himself and to die in our place, so that we, instead, could take upon ourselves His righteousness. Ellen G. White writes: "Upon coming up out of the water, Jesus bowed in prayer on the river bank. A new and important era was opening before Him. He was now, upon a wider stage, entering on the conflict of His life. Though He was the Prince of Peace, His coming must be as the unsheathing of a sword. . . . No one upon earth had understood Him, and during His ministry He must still walk alone. . . . As one with us, He must bear the burden of our guilt and woe. The Sinless One must feel the shame of sin. . . . Alone He must tread the path; alone He must bear the burden. Upon Him who had laid off His glory and accepted the weakness of humanity the redemption of the world must rest."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 111.

This exchange could be figuratively seen in baptism. When Jesus was baptized, He was not baptized for His own salvation: instead, He announced that He came to take our sins upon Himself and die in our place. When we are baptized, we die, together with Jesus, to our own sins, receive His righteousness, and then rise from the baptismal waters in the newness of life!

Jesus in Gethsemane

In *The Cross of Christ*, John R. W. Stott (1921–2011), the famous Anglican theologian and evangelist, attempts to understand Jesus' crucible in Gethsemane by comparing Jesus to Socrates, facing death. Socrates (470–399 B.C.), one of the founders of Western philosophy and worldview, was about seventy years old when an Athenian court condemned him to death for corrupting the youth and for impiety (rejecting

the gods of the city). Socrates was to die by drinking a cup of poisonous hemlock. Although Socrates could escape the trial and condemnation, he chose to remain in the city and face his death. At the place of execution, Socrates was surrounded by his supportive disciples, who were crying for their teacher. When handed the cup with the poison, the father of Western thought took it with all cheerfulness and confidence and courageously drank it to the bottom (for Plato's account of this story, see Plato, *Phaedo*, in *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, translated by Harold North Fowler (London: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 393–403).

By contrast, Jesus Christ spent His last hours in the Garden of Gethsemane. When He asked His disciples to “‘stay . . . and watch’” with Him because His soul was “‘exceedingly sorrowful, even to death’” (*Mark 14:34, NKJV*), they fell asleep. In fact, one of His disciples sold Him for money, and the others fled the garden after the multitude arrived to arrest Jesus (*Mark 14:10, 11, 50*). But Jesus, unlike Plato, agonized over the cup He must drain to the dregs. Far from describing Jesus as cheerfully and courageously taking the cup, the evangelist Luke points out that “His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (*Luke 22:44, NKJV*), while praying, “‘Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me’” (*Luke 22:42, NKJV*). Can Jesus, who is the incarnate God, really be the Savior of the world if He is so fearful of that cup and of death? Why does He seem weaker than Socrates? Or *is* He?

Stott asks similar questions and then hints at an answer: “What is this cup? Is it physical suffering from which he shrinks, the torture of the scourge and the cross, together perhaps with the mental anguish of betrayal, denial and desertion by his friends, and the mockery and abuse of his enemies? Nothing could ever make me believe that the cup Jesus dreaded was any of these things (grievous as they were) or all of them together. His physical and moral courage throughout his public ministry had been indomitable. To me it is ludicrous to suppose that he was now afraid of pain, insult and death. Socrates in the prison cell in Athens, according to Plato's account, took his cup of hemlock ‘without trembling or changing colour or expression.’ He then ‘raised the cup to his lips, and very cheerfully and quietly drained it.’ When his friends burst into tears, he rebuked them for their ‘absurd’ behaviour and urged them to ‘keep quiet and be brave.’ He died without fear, sorrow or protest. So was Socrates braver than Jesus? Or were their cups filled with different poisons?”—John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 74.

Stott concludes that “the cup from which he [Jesus] shrank was something different. It symbolized neither the physical pain of being flogged and crucified, nor the mental distress of being despised and rejected even by his own people, but rather the spiritual agony of bear-

ing the sins of the world, in other words, of enduring the divine judgment which those sins deserved.”—*The Cross of Christ*, p. 76. Indeed, Socrates died the death of the common, sinful man. And, as Stott points out, the Christian martyrs had a seemingly much more heroic death than Jesus when they died on the pyre. The death of Jesus, like His baptism, was unique. While all humans who die will experience death as sinful human beings, Jesus, the sinless Son of God, died the death that represents God’s judgment on sin. This is why the resurrection of Jesus is the most singular, extraordinary event in the history of the universe. No human—Socrates included—could die that death and live again. No human could die that death and become the Savior of the world.

Ellen G. White describes the content of the cup, as well: “As He [Jesus] neared Gethsemane, He became strangely silent. He had often visited this spot for meditation and prayer; but never with a heart so full of sorrow as upon this night of His last agony. Throughout His life on earth He had walked in the light of God’s presence. When in conflict with men who were inspired by the very spirit of Satan, He could say, ‘He that sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him.’ John 8:29. But now He seemed to be shut out from the light of God’s sustaining presence. Now He was numbered with the transgressors. The guilt of fallen humanity He must bear. Upon Him who knew no sin must be laid the iniquity of us all. So dreadful does sin appear to Him, so great is the weight of guilt which He must bear, that He is tempted to fear it will shut Him out forever from His Father’s love. Feeling how terrible is the wrath of God against transgression, He exclaims, ‘My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.’ ”—*The Desire of Ages* (1898), p. 685.

Part III: Life Application

- 1. Recollect the experience of your baptism. How do you perceive your baptism in light of Jesus’ baptism? How does your perception help enrich your experience of death to sin and coming alive for the kingdom of God? How does this perception deepen your covenant with God and your commitment to God’s cause, no matter what?**

2. The section on Sabbath afternoon of this week's lesson gives an amazingly beautiful explanation of why God created the universe and the intelligent beings, even though He knew that evil would emerge out of His creation: it was worth it! It was worth it for Him, but it also was worth it for us. Otherwise, we would have never existed. But there is more: God could afford to decide that it was worth it because He not only had the power of creation, but in the case of the Fall, He also had the solution (to take our sin upon Himself), which is the power of salvation and the power of resurrection! How does this understanding change your perspective on God, on His creation and salvation?

The adult Bible study guide for next quarter, *Life Everlasting: On Death, Dying, and the Future Hope*, by Alberto Timm, deals with the subject of the great controversy between good and evil from two perspectives. One is the origin and ongoing existence of sin and death. The other is God's enduring work to solve these problems and bring the world back to its original perfect condition. Special emphasis is given also to the mortal nature of human beings and how the resurrection is the condition for immortality. In reality, we should not fear death because Christ died for us and overcame the power of death. Actually, we are assured that He holds "the keys to death and to the place of the dead" (*Rev. 1:18, NCV*).

With the fall of Adam and Eve, death engulfed not only the human race but all life as well. Expressions of death can be seen all around us. Our world is full of suffering and tears. We need assurance in the present and hope for the future. Next quarter, we will explore the painful subject of death, but through the lens of the hope offered us through Jesus.

Lesson 1—Rebellion in a Perfect Universe

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Creation: An Expression of Love** (*1 John 4:8, 16*)

MONDAY: **Free Will: The Basis for Love** (*1 John 4:7–16*)

TUESDAY: **Mysterious Ingratitude** (*Ezek. 28:12–19*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Price of Pride** (*Isa. 14:12–15*)

THURSDAY: **The Spread of Unbelief** (*Revelation 12*)

Memory Text—*Isaiah 14:12*

Sabbath Gem: Genesis 3 tells us that the fall of Adam and Eve brought sin, evil, and death to our world. But even before the Fall, evil already existed, manifested by the "serpent," who deceived Eve (*Gen. 3:1–5*). So, we need to go back before the Fall to find the source and origins of the evil that so dominates our world.

Lesson 2—Death in a Sinful World

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Statements in Tension** (*Gen. 2:16, 17*)

MONDAY: **Deceived by the Serpent** (*Gen. 3:1–7*)

TUESDAY: **"You Will Not Die"** (*Gen. 3:4*)

WEDNESDAY: **Consequences of Sin** (*Gen. 3:7–19, Rom. 5:12*)

THURSDAY: **The First Gospel Promise** (*Gen. 3:15, 21*)

Memory Text—*Romans 5:12*

Sabbath Gem: With the fall of Adam and Eve, sin and death took over our world, but God planted a seed of hope for humanity even back in Eden.

Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; email: info@christianrecord.org; website:www.christianrecord.org.