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Stories of Love and Grace



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In 1972, Ms. Chiomenti graduated from Eastern Michigan University with degrees in English, elementary education, and special education for the deaf. She received an M.A. in theology from Andrews University in 1978. Presently, she is working on a doctorate in religious education from Andrews.

Frederick, Maryland, is home to Ms. Chiomenti and her husband, Peter, who works as records manager for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and also is a stained-glass artist. Together, they enjoy gardening, bird watching, reading, and exploring the nooks and crannies of the Appalachian Mountains that nestle behind their house. Their one-half-acre yard is registered with the National Wildlife Federation of the United States as an official habitat for wildlife.

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Parables of Jesus

Stories of Love and Grace

“Tell me a story!” is a request not often denied. And, “Do you want to hear a story?” is a question not often answered with, “Well, no, not really.” Good stories reach beyond culture, gender, age, and race. And good storytellers can inspire the hardest of hearts.

So it is with Jesus and the parables He told nearly 2,000 years ago. As we study some of these parables this quarter, it will be good to remember the following:

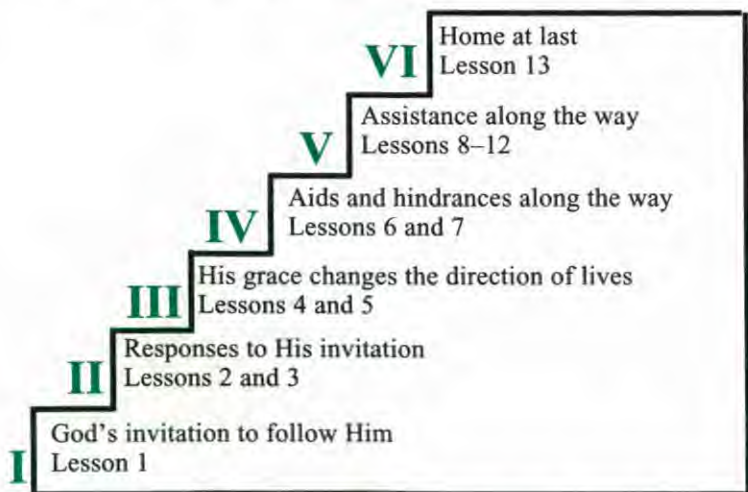
1. Generally speaking, a parable reflects truth; it is not truth itself. Sometimes a parable is a true story that illustrates important aspects of truth. (See the comment on the parable of the Good Samaritan in *The Desire of Ages*, p. 499.)

2. The context of the parable—where, when, and to whom Jesus told the parable—is the key to its interpretation.

3. A parable usually deals with one facet of truth. The details of the parable are important as they shed light on that truth.

4. Understanding Oriental customs and thought processes evident in the parable help you to understand the meaning of the parable.

There are many ways to organize a study of the parables. This quarterly will help you study them from the viewpoint of the Christian journey. Such a journey can be outlined as follows:



So come along! And as you travel, may the Master Storyteller inspire you to walk with enthusiasm, joy, and total commitment to His will. His love inspires such commitment—His love reigning in your heart because of the constant presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Lost and Found



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Luke 15.

MEMORY TEXT: “The Sovereign Lord says: ‘I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. . . . I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.’ ” (Ezekiel 34:11, 12, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: Salvation begins with God’s love and mercy. It comes not as much through our searching for God as it comes through God’s searching for us.

WHICH ONE OF US has not experienced frustration over the loss of some thing, then expressed joy at finding it? Thus we are drawn into Luke 15. Studied together, the stories in this chapter paint a mini-picture of Jesus’ ministry. Indeed, the entire chapter glows with His love and grace. It begins as Jesus is sharing a meal with tax collectors and sinners. (The Pharisees considered anyone a sinner who did not live according to their principles.) The word *receiveth* (Luke 15:2, KJV) or *welcomes* (NIV) implies that Jesus was the host. Because eating with someone symbolized acceptance (Acts 11:3; 1 Cor. 5:11), the Pharisees and scribes viewed Jesus as an irreligious man.

Jesus further displays His love and grace through the parables He tells. In the first two we will study, He compares God to a shepherd and a woman, people from two groups in His society who had no civil rights and whom the Pharisees disdained. In the third parable, He describes a father’s compassionate behavior toward a son who does things no proper Jewish son would ever do.

Jesus invites you to feast with Him, to experience His love and mercy.

THE LOST SHEEP (Luke 15:1-7).

The differences between Christ's behavior toward sinners and the Pharisees' behavior force us to ask, "What is God really like?" Luke 15:1, 2. How does Jesus personalize His storytelling to help us find the answer? Luke 15:3-6.

The questions with which Jesus begins not only relate to experiences we all have had but force us to evaluate our own response to this particular situation. "The Lord knew that because of the value of what had been lost any of these hearers would have left the ninety-nine to go seek the lost sheep. The search would not have been casual or of short duration; rather, it would have been diligent and would have extended until the valuable lost sheep was found. The search would have been initiated and pursued because of the value placed on what the owner had lost."—J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), p. 100. The intrinsic value of the sheep was not the major issue, but the value placed upon it by its loving master. Our divine Shepherd's love for us, the creation of His hand, gives us value beyond the possibility of human computation.

What is the main point of the parable? Verse 7. What does the parable teach about repentance? Does verse 7 mean there are some people who do not have to repent?

The Jews believed that before God could be merciful to the sinner, the sinner first must repent. This is probably one reason why the scribes and Pharisees muttered about the company Jesus was keeping. They thought He should associate only with those who had repented. But this parable teaches us that "we do not repent in order that God may love us, but He reveals to us His love in order that we may repent."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 189.

When a sheep is lost, it most likely will lie down helplessly. It will not even stand or run. Thus, when the shepherd finds it, he must carry it home. So it is with us. Sin renders us helpless. But Christ searches for us and restores us to His fold.

The lost sheep symbolizes not only an individual sinner, but the one world that went astray among the vast creations of God. Giving up the glory of heaven, Christ came to restore this world to its former sinless state.

Relate Ezekiel 34:1-14 to the parable of the lost sheep. What do these verses teach us about God?

THE LOST COIN (Luke 15:8-11).

Jesus continued to show the muttering scribes and Pharisees why He ate with sinners, by telling another parable similar to that of the lost sheep. The lost coin could have been part of the dowry the woman received at her wedding. Brides usually placed such coins in a headband they wore on their forehead for all to see. "The coins not only had a monetary value but an emotional value as well, for they signified the bond between the bride and the bridegroom."—Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 101.

The woman's home was probably windowless and had a dirt or stone floor covered with straw to alleviate dust, cold, and dampness. To look for the coin, she would have to light a lamp, remove the straw, and sift through it. But the value of the coin was worth the effort.

Summarize the meaning of the parable. What does the value of this one coin teach us about the value of one sinner who repents? Compare Matt. 26:33-35; Luke 22:54-62; John 21:15-17. Jesus uses a woman to illustrate God. What image of God does this portray?

We yearn to spread the gospel throughout the lost world. And indeed we should. Jesus even commanded us to do so (Matt. 28:18-20). But do we sometimes obey this command at the expense of our families? Do we show the same concern for an individual family member as we do the world at large? The coin, like a family member, was near at hand. Yet it was still lost at home.

"The woman . . . searches diligently for her lost coin. . . . So in the family if one member is lost to God every means should be used for his recovery. On the part of all the others let there be diligent, careful self-examination. Let the life-practice be investigated. See if there is not some mistake, some error in management, by which that soul is confirmed in impenitence.

"If there is in the family one child who is unconscious of his sinful state, parents should not rest. Let the candle be lighted. Search the word of God, and by its light let everything in the home be diligently examined, to see why this child is lost."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 194.

Does the lost coin symbolize any member of your family, or perhaps you yourself? (Consider also your work family, church family, etc.) How can you diligently search for that one? Consider the possibility that perhaps it was something you said or did that prevents this person from being found.

THE YOUNGER SON (Luke 15:11-20).

The Luke 15 parables share a definite progression. The sheep knew it was lost, just as some people realize they are separated from God. The coin did not know it was lost, symbolizing people who do not realize they need salvation. What type of person does the younger son portray? Luke 15:13, 14.

These parables also trace a progression of God's love. First, we witness God's measureless compassion. For the sake of the lost, He searches far into the wilderness of sin until His search is successful. From the coin we learn of the value God places on even one sinner. And as we watch the drama unfold in the last parable, we see that God's compassion and the value He places on us are established in the parent-child relationship. God is my father; I am His child.

Even though the younger son came from a rich family, he was restless to seek his fortune. Palestine itself was a poor country where famine and foreign troops often invaded. Perhaps reports from the Jews outside Palestine appealed to the son's dissatisfaction with things as they were at home. Thus he had the audacity to insult his father by asking for what would become his only at his father's death.

At what point during his independence did the younger son come to his senses? Luke 15:14-17.

"Joined himself." The Greek word means "to glue together." In desperation, the younger son basically sold himself to someone who could only offer him a job no self-respecting Jew would accept. A Jewish curse stated, "Cursed be the man who keeps swine." Doing so meant that he would be in contact with unclean animals (Lev. 11:7, 8).

"Such is life in the 'far country.' Distance from God means waste, want, degradation. Its full and final outworking may take time, or it may hasten with terrible rapidity. But it comes sooner or later."—*The Pulpit Commentary, The Gospel According to Luke*, vol. 2, p. 54.

"When he came to himself" (Luke 15:17) illustrates repentance. How can we reconcile the younger son's repentance with the lesson that "we do not repent in order that God may love us, but He reveals to us His love in order that we may repent."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 189. Think about the true nature of repentance and the role it plays in your life.

THE WAITING FATHER (Luke 15:20-24).

How do we know the father was concerned about and waiting for his younger son? Luke 15:20.

"It was undignified for an old man to break stride and run, but this father discarded dignity. . . . Before the first word of explanation, he flung his arms around his boy's neck and kissed him. In the Old Testament, members of a family commonly kissed one another, including a man kissing his son (2 Sam. 14:33); and an embrace was a classic expression of reunion (Gen. 29:11, 13; 33:4; 45:14)." —Peter Rhea Jones, *The Teaching of the Parables* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1982), p. 177. The father's joy was so great, it excluded any judgmental spirit. How his actions must have shocked the scribes and Pharisees listening to Jesus. They would have nodded their heads with satisfaction if the father had required repentance and proof of change before accepting his son back into the household. Yet once again, Jesus illustrates the nature of His salvation through the father's wholehearted acceptance of his son.

What in particular signaled the prodigal's return, not as a servant, but as the father's child? Luke 15:22-24.

Because he had asked for his inheritance before it was due him, the son knew he had no right to any more of his father's goods. And because he was aware that his request showed more concern for his father's property than for his father himself, he knew that the father had every right to reject him. Yet he knew that he would be no worse off if he were to become one of his father's servants. But he never got the chance to suggest it. Instead, his father hurried to give him the best robe, which only honored guests received. Upon his finger, the father placed what was most likely a signet ring that only those with authority received (Gen. 41:42; Esther 8:2). And upon his feet the father placed sandals, which only free men enjoyed.

Explain how the father's behavior confirms the role of repentance in the plan of salvation as taught by the first two parables.

How do you treat people who have left the church but later express a desire to reenter? Do you display the same love and affection as the father?

THE OLDER SON (Luke 15:25-32).

The lost lamb, lost coin, and lost son represent people who have not accepted salvation. The shepherd, woman, and father represent God and His salvation. Whom does the older brother represent? Luke 15:25-28.

The older brother's resentment is like the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees. "To them Jesus says: 'Behold the greatness of God's love for his lost children, and contrast it with your own joyless, loveless, thankless and self-righteous lives. Cease then from your loveless ways, and be merciful. The spiritually dead are rising to new life, the lost are returning home, rejoice with him.'"—Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 131.

"The elder brother is very unpopular—in the parable. He is not unpopular in society, and he has many descendants. He is sometimes an officer in the church, a leader in reform groups, a 'key citizen.' He thinks, or wills to think, that all other races are 'inferior.' A man out of work is simply unemployable. . . . A prodigal like the younger son is just a wastrel. . . . Any neighbor of progressive mind is to him 'a dangerous element in the community.' . . . Friedrich W. Krummacker has an honest and penetrating comment. A questioner asked his opinion of the identity of the elder brother. He replied: 'I learned it only yesterday . . . myself.'"—*The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 8, p. 279.

What may we imply about the religion of the scribes and Pharisees from the words of the older brother in Luke 15:29, 30?

The elder brother's attitude separated him from God just as much as did his brother's prodigal lifestyle. How this attitude exposes the Pharisaic spirit that often passes for religion! But the older brother and Pharisees were not hopeless. The father's words to his firstborn (Jesus' words to the Pharisees) in verses 31, 32, are in essence an invitation to enter into the joy of salvation.

Because Jesus wanted the parable to require a response from His listeners, He left it unfinished. We are not sure whether the prodigal remains within the bosom of his father's love. Neither do we know whether the older brother decides to join the celebration. Thus, we, the audience, must determine the outcome. Are you the older brother? The younger brother? How will you write the rest of the story?

FURTHER STUDY: Echoes of the parables in Luke 15 resound through the New Testament. Read Matthew 10:5-8; Acts 1:8; Romans 6:11-13; Galatians 4:7; Ephesians 2:1-22. Also review Psalm 23.

Read the following chapters in *Christ's Object Lessons*, "This Man Receiveth Sinners," pp. 185-197; "Lost and Is Found," pp. 198-211.

"The love of God still yearns over the one who has chosen to separate from Him, and He sets in operation influences to bring him back to the Father's house. . . . Miserable as he was, the prodigal found hope in the conviction of his father's love. It was that love which was drawing him toward home. So it is the assurance of God's love that constrains the sinner to return to God."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 202.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The setting of the three parables studied this week was a fellowship meal. How is this meal a parable in itself? (See Ezek. 34:23-31; Micah 5:2-4; Isa. 25:6-12; 49:8-13; Rev. 19:9.) What types of people might sit with Jesus today at such a meal?
2. The parables in Luke 15 teach us that God freely extends His mercy to sinners. What is the need then for the cross? In the last parable, where might we observe the element of the cross (sacrifice)? (See Phil. 2:7, 8; Heb. 12:2.) How does what Jesus did on the cross compare to the father's actions?
3. After studying this week's lesson, how would you answer the question "What is God really like?"
4. What element appears in all three parables? (See Luke 15: 7, 10, 24, 32.) What does this element teach us about God's character?
5. With which of the following do you identify most? The lost sheep? The lost coin? The younger brother? The older brother? Why?

SUMMARY: Yes, Pharisees and scribes, Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them. And that is the beginning, indeed the essence, of the gospel. Unwittingly, what was meant to be derogatory actually proved to be complimentary. A murmur against Him instead declared the truth: Salvation begins with Christ and His grace.



A Little Kindness

Leonard Atkins

Sister E. G. Malopa is a pastor's wife and Bible worker in Central Malawi. She has heard God's call for laborers to go and seek the lost, and she loves to find people who will listen to the call of Christ.

One day while visiting door-to-door, she met a family of seven people. She introduced her reason for visiting by reading John 3:16, "For God so loved the world. . . ." In the corner of the room, the family's grandfather lay on a bed, paralyzed. As Sister Malopa spoke about Christ, the grandfather began to ask questions about God and Christianity. Then he told her that he was discouraged and convinced that God had forgotten about him. She listened as he told his story.

Twelve years earlier he had gone into the bush to cut some trees for the house he was building. One tree fell on him and broke his back. He could not move, so his friends carried him back to his home. For 12 years he had lain on his bed, totally dependent on his family for all his needs. During all this time, no one had come to visit or offer him encouragement.

With tears in his eyes, he told Sister Malopa, "you are the first one who has spoken words of hope and courage to me in all these difficult years of my disability." Sister Malopa spent considerable time visiting with the family, offering words of hope and promises of God's loving care. Before she left that day, the grandfather told Sister Malopa, "Because of your kindness, today I choose Jesus to be my Saviour. Write my name and my wife's name in your Bible-class record book." The entire family joined their grandfather in requesting that their names be included in the Bible-class register.

Sister Malopa left that home rejoicing in God's goodness. She immediately reported her experience to the local Adventist church. The pastor organized a group to go regularly to pray with this family. They have organized a Branch Sabbath School near the village of these people so that they can fellowship with other Christians every Sabbath.

Sister Malopa has heard God's call for men and women who will go and search out every home where souls are longing to hear of God's love. She has answered the call to make herself available to God to witness and care for lost and longing souls, not just because that is her employment, but because God's voice has said, "Who shall go for us?" And, like Isaiah, she has answered, "Here am I, Lord. Send me."

Elder Leonard Atkins is the chaplain at Blantyre (Malawi) Adventist Hospital and pastors a church in Blantyre, as well.

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Claiming the Treasure



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 13:44-46; Luke 7:36-50; 12:13-34; 14:25-35.

MEMORY TEXT: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12:34).

KEY THOUGHT: The Father's love and grace compels Him to search for us. And once He finds us, the same grace offers to restore us to our original position as His children. How we respond to His offer determines the course of our lives.

THE PEARL OF ASIA was discovered by Persian divers in 1628. Drop-shaped, three inches long, and approximately two inches thick, it is the largest natural seed pearl in existence. Grave robbers stole the pearl from the tomb of Ch'ien Lung, Manchu emperor of China, in 1799, one hundred years after his death. The whereabouts of the pearl remained a mystery until it resurfaced 18 years later in Hong Kong as security for a large loan that eventually defaulted. After that, an unidentified buyer from Paris bought the pearl for an unknown price.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus told a story about another merchant who purchased a pearl of great price. This story and others that Jesus told help us to take the next step in our understanding of salvation. It is true that Jesus' loving grace seeks us out while we are yet sinners. It is equally true that His finding us requires us to respond to His love.

The parables we will study for the next two weeks deal with the value of truth, the effort necessary to secure it, various ways of receiving the truth, and things that might prevent us from accepting it.

THE PERFECT PEARL (Matt. 13:45, 46).

The Greek word for "merchant" refers to a wholesale dealer, as opposed to a retailer or tradesperson. Merchants were highly respected, and some priests even engaged in the profession.

"In the ancient world pearls had a very special place in men's hearts. People desired to possess a lovely pearl, not only for its money value, but for its beauty. They found a pleasure in simply handling it and contemplating it. . . . The main sources of pearls in those days were the shores off the Red Sea and far-off Britain itself; but a merchant would scour the markets of the world to find a pearl which was of surpassing beauty."—William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia, Pa.: The Westminster Press, 1975), vol. 2, pp. 86, 87.

The pearl was costly because it was perfect in every way. With this in mind, whom does the pearl symbolize? Col. 2:3; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 3:8.

Describe the merchant's behavior when he found the pearl. Matt. 13:46. What does his behavior tell us about the pearl's value? Does his behavior suggest we must somehow purchase salvation?

This parable represents people who search diligently for their Saviour. This Saviour is worth all any person has, just as the pearl was worth all to the merchant. But if there is nothing we can do to purchase salvation (Rom. 3:21-28), why must we be willing to relinquish all to gain it? Because what we own often owns us. Because possessions may control our lives, something that only God should do (Matt. 19:16-26). But deeper yet, salvation costs the price of pride, personal aspirations, and base habits. Yes, salvation costs all that we have. But its worth is inestimable.

How do we become aware of the perfect Pearl? John 14:16-18; 15:26; 16:13, 14; 1 Cor. 12:3.

Compare Paul's words in Philippians 3:7, 8 to the merchant's behavior when he found the pearl. Do you feel as Paul does? If not, why? If so, what can you do this week to share the "excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus" (NKJV), your Lord? (Note the "double significance" of the parable. See *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 118.)

BURIED TREASURE (Matt. 13:44).

Imagine that you live in a time when there are no banks. Thieves abound, and new political powers heavily tax your possessions. Furthermore, the threat of plundering armies looms frequently on the horizon. How would you safeguard what wealth you had? Bury it perhaps? In Jesus' day, that is exactly what many people did. But it would not be unusual for you to forget the exact spot where you had hidden the treasure. Or perhaps you die, are imprisoned, or exiled. Then your treasure is lost until someone comes along to till the land and, in so doing, unearths it.

Like the parable of the perfect pearl, this story symbolizes the value of the gospel treasure. And just as the plowman was ready to surrender everything he had to obtain the hidden riches, so "the finder of heavenly treasure will count no labor too great and no sacrifice too dear, in order to gain the treasures of truth."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 104.

What motivated the farmer to sell all to buy the field? Matt. 13:44.

"This selling of all is no arbitrary condition, imposed from without, but rather a delightful constraint acknowledged within: even as a man would willingly fling down pebbles and mosses with which he had been filling his hands, if pearls and precious stones were offered him in their stead."—Richard Chenevix Trench, *Parables of Our Lord* (New York, N.Y.: Fleming H. Revell, 1861), p. 106.

That the finder feels he must have the treasure for his very own signifies that true religion consists of a personal relationship with the Saviour. Christ says, "Come to *me*" and "Learn from *me*" (Matt. 11:28, 29, NKJV; italics supplied), while 1 John 5:12 states that "whoever has the Son has life" (NRSV). You must be able to believe that Christ loves *you*. He died for *you*.

Matthew 13 relates seven parables, four of which Jesus told to a multitude. But He told the parables of hidden treasure and the perfect pearl only to His disciples (verse 36). What do you think His reasoning was for doing this?

Ellen White states that "the field containing the treasure represents the Holy Scriptures."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 104. What, then, does this parable suggest about Bible study? How can you start improving your Bible-study habits today?

UNFINISHED TOWERS; OUTNUMBERED KINGS (Luke 14:25-35).

Read Luke 14:25-35. How do the parables in verses 28-33 relate to the parables we studied Sunday and Monday?

Describe the circumstance that prompted Jesus to tell these parables. Verses 25-27.

“He turned” (verse 25). As the multitude pursued Jesus, He stopped and turned to face them. He was on His way to Jerusalem and the cross. But most of the people following Him thought He was on His way to establish an earthly empire. Thus, He told them that anyone who followed Him must do so with a loyalty that would renounce their most cherished possessions.

“Hate not his father” (verse 26). “In the Bible, ‘to hate,’ often should be understood simply as a typical Oriental hyperbole meaning ‘to love less.’”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 811. (See Matt. 10:37.) Therefore, if we love anything or anyone more than we love Christ, we cannot be His disciple. The cost of discipleship includes all that a person has in this life—“plans, ambitions, friends, relatives, possessions, riches—anything, and everything that might interfere with service for the kingdom of heaven.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 812.

To emphasize the necessity of counting the cost of discipleship, Jesus then told the parables in verses 28-32. The tower could have been a reference to the high structures in vineyards where watchmen sat to guard against robbers who might steal the harvest. Or Jesus could have been thinking about Herod who was obsessed with constructing great buildings. Such buildings others would no doubt imitate. And no doubt many of these imitations remained unfinished, owing to insufficient planning and funding. But the cost of being a Christian must include a complete and lasting surrender of our wills to Christ.

“Here [Luke 14:34], the flavor of ‘salt’ represents the spirit of devotion. Discipleship without this spirit of devotion, Jesus declares, is without meaning.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 812.

Have you counted the cost of following Christ? What motivates your relationship with Him?

WHERE IS YOUR TREASURE? (Luke 12:13-34).

What situation prompted Jesus to tell the parable of the rich fool? Luke 12:13 (compare Deut. 21:17).

“According to the Mosaic law of inheritance, the older brother received two shares of his father’s goods, and the remaining brother or brothers a single share each. . . . Perhaps it was the younger son who in this case appealed to Jesus and objected to the older brother’s actually taking the double portion assigned to him by law.”
—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 795.

How is the rich fool different from the two characters in the parables we studied Sunday and Monday? How is the questioner in verse 13 like the rich fool?

The foolish rich man asked the right question (“What shall I do?”). But he gave the wrong answer (“I shall build bigger barns.”). And in so doing, he branded himself as a slave to the idol of his own greed. (See Col. 3:5.)

Notice how many times the fool used the words *I* and *my*. His love for self prevented him from fulfilling the first requirement of the law: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” (Luke 10:27, NIV; see Deut. 6:5; Exod. 20:3-11). Naturally, then, he could not fulfill the second requirement of the law: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27, NIV; see Lev. 19:18; Exod. 20:12-17). Instead of using his abundance to feed widows, orphans, and other impoverished people, he used it to gratify his own desires.

The verses immediately following the parable (Luke 12:22-34) pointedly provide an alternative lifestyle to that of the rich man in the parable. Jesus implies that even the birds and flowers know better than the wealthy fool! Verse 34 pronounces the folly of living for material goods and the final verdict against our poor rich fool—his heart was locked inside his musty storage buildings, withering away for lack of the Son’s light. We may safely assume that the life Jesus characterized as worthy in verses 22-34 is the life lived by the merchant who searched for the perfect pearl and by the man who found the buried treasure.

Where is *your* treasure stored? Why does this parable not rule out careful provision for our financial future?

THE TWO DEBTORS (Luke 7:36-50).

The parable of the two debtors displays the only two attitudes we can have toward God's forgiveness—gratitude or selfish indifference. The parable shows the principle that an individual's appreciation for God's forgiveness is based on that individual's sense of need for His forgiveness.

Identify and describe the three main characters in Luke 7:36-40.

Now match the people in the parable (verses 41-43) with the characters in verses 36-40.

The man who owed much	
The man who owed little	
The money lender	

The amount each debtor owed did not make a difference. Neither person was able to repay his loan. The difference lies in the appreciation each debtor exhibited toward the creditor's forgiveness.

As a Pharisee, Simon based his righteousness upon his own ability to follow a set of laws. Confident of his own strength, he felt he was already a good person. Therefore, he was not aware of his need for Christ's forgiveness. "The one thing which shuts a man off from God is self-sufficiency."—William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia, Pa.: The Westminster Press, 1956), p. 95.

With great scorn Simon viewed the scene before him. Pharisees believed that men incurred ceremonial defilement if a woman touched them. To have a prostitute touch you incurred serious defilement. And here was the rabbi Jesus allowing this harlot not only to touch Him, but to kiss Him and to anoint Him with costly perfume possibly purchased with funds gained from her profession. But this woman recognized her inability to redeem herself. Her behavior, unlike Simon's, demonstrated both this recognition and her profound appreciation for the Saviour's gift of grace.

How Simon must have bristled when Jesus did not declare his sins forgiven while pronouncing that the woman's sins were forgiven.

With which of the characters in today's lesson do you most identify? Are you honest enough to admit that maybe it might be Simon, whose debt was the greater? (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 567.) How deeply do you sense your need?

FURTHER STUDY: Wednesday's lesson dealt with greed and how it keeps us from accepting God's offer of salvation. Study the following instances of selfishness and selflessness. What does the outcome of each tell us about these two characteristics? Num. 22-24; 31:8; Joshua 6:24; 7:1, 19-25; John 6:1-14; Acts 9:36-42.

Read any of the following: *Christ's Object Lessons*, "Hidden Treasure," pp. 103-114; "The Pearl," pp. 115-121; "Gain That Is Loss," pp. 252-259; *The Desire of Ages*, "The Feast at Simon's House," pp. 557-568.

"There are some who are seeking, always seeking, for the goodly pearl. But they do not make an entire surrender of their wrong habits. They do not die to self that Christ may live in them. Therefore they do not find the precious pearl. . . .

"A daily consecration to God brings peace and rest. The merchant sold all that he had to possess the pearl. When those who are seeking for salvation refuse to fail or be discouraged, they will find peace and rest in the Lord. Christ will clothe them with His righteousness."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 399, 400.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Explain what you have learned this week about the value of truth, the effort necessary to secure it, various ways of receiving the truth, and things that might prevent us from accepting it.
2. What possessions guide your life and direct you away from God? Might God be asking you to give up these possessions in order to spend more time with Him? When does giving something up mean getting rid of it completely or controlling yourself in the use of it?
3. What does the parable of the rich fool teach us about the stewardship of abundance? Was Christ condemning wealth or one's attitude toward it? Explain your answer.
4. In Luke 7:50, Jesus tells the woman that her faith has saved her. What does this imply about the relationship of faith to forgiveness? (See Heb. 11:6.) What does the woman's behavior tell us about the relationship between faith and works? (See James 2:14-25.)

SUMMARY: God stands ready and able to grant us forgiveness and a new life in Him. If, with great appreciation, we are willing to give all of ourselves to Him, His saving power will take effect in our lives.



A Helping Hand

Néria da Silva Mendonça

On Sabbath afternoon, I went to visit a family whose name I had been given. A man, Joao, his wife, Lucilene, and four small children lived in a scene of intense poverty, hunger, and filth. I wondered how the family could focus on studying the Bible when their material needs were so great, but Joao eagerly told me about a dream he had. "I was going to a dance, but I came to a crossroad, and I did not know which way to go. A man dressed in white with a Bible in his hand stood beside me. I asked him for directions, and he opened the Bible and said: 'The way is this one.'" Then Joao added, "God has brought you here. Yes, we want to study the Bible."

I went to visit the family several Sabbaths in a row but did not find them home. Then I learned that they had moved. I located them living in a hut made of dirty planks under a tree infested with ants. Their month-old baby's body was covered with ant bites. Because of their need, some church members and I began a Branch Sabbath School there. We taught hygiene and health, and slowly we were able to change these people's habits. Community Services helped with clothing and shoes, and soon Joao and Lucilene asked for baptism. But Lucilene was a minor, and they had not been married, so they had to wait for baptism.

One day Joao called me, very upset. I went to see them and found that Lucilene had been beaten by the neighbors. Joao was so angry he wanted to kill the offenders. Weeping with them, I opened the Bible to Romans 12:19-21 and read, "Do not take revenge, . . . but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Slowly Joao calmed down.

We prayed and asked God to help them find another home. When I returned home, I met a friend who needed someone to live on an unoccupied ranch he owned. It had a house, water, and light. I hurried to tell Joao and his family. Two days later, the family moved. It was difficult for them to get to church, but they did not lose courage.

Today they live happily with their children. They have enough food and a good home. Daily they praise God, awaiting the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, because they heard the voice of an angel.

Néria da Silva Mendonça is a lay worker in the Ribeirao Preto Central Church in Sao Paulo State, Brazil.

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Seeds and Banquets



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23; Luke 14:16-24.

MEMORY TEXT: "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me" (Revelation 3:20, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: God's offer of salvation is received or rejected by different types of people. But those who fully accept His grace, He blesses beyond measure.

ANOTHER BUSY DAY IN JESUS' LIFE WAS COMING TO A CLOSE. Earlier He had healed a man who was blind, unable to talk, and devil-possessed (Matt. 12:22, 23). Afterward, the Pharisees accused Him of being in league with the prince of devils.

Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law expressed their desire for Him to prove He was the Messiah. In response, Jesus referred to Jonah and proclaimed that the people of Nineveh would stand at the judgment and condemn these Pharisees' generation.

Jesus proceeded to the seashore, only to be followed by a throng of people. Quite possibly, some of the Pharisees and scribes continued to haunt His footsteps. As He related the parable of the sower, He no doubt was considering the various people who had questioned and doubted Him earlier.

This week we will continue our study of parables that deal with the reception of truth. As you explore the parables of the sower and the great banquet, examine your life to learn how you receive God's truth.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER (Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23).

Last week we studied how a merchant's eagerness to buy the flawless pearl illustrates the reaction Christ would like all of us to have when we encounter His grace. But as our next parable shows, this will not always be the case.

Read Mark 4:1-20. Then match the items in Column B to the items in Column A.

Column A	Column B
1. the sower	a. the human heart
2. the seed	b. the person who accepts Christ with joy but soon becomes discouraged
3. the soil in general	c. the person who accepts Christ, obeys Him, and brings forth fruit
4. the soil by the wayside	d. Christ; those who do His work
5. stony soil	e. the person who hears God's word but does not obey it
6. thorny soil	f. God's word; the gospel
7. good soil	g. the person who hears the Word but will not give up the old life

It had been quite a day (Matt. 12:22-50). And toward the end of it, the press of the crowd forced Jesus to retreat to a boat (Matt. 13:1, 2). Nearby lay the plain of Gennesaret and beyond the plain rose the hills. From His floating pulpit, Jesus could see farmers casting the seed for the second crop of the year. (See *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 34.) In the crowd, there was no doubt every type of person represented by the four types of soil. All appeared most eager to receive His salvation. But He knew that not all would. Could it be, therefore, "that Jesus fashioned the parable in a kind of count-the-cost tone? . . . It may well be for the crowd a challenge to right hearing, the importance of attentive hearing. . . . Jesus presented a searching challenge to expose the depth and character of the crowd's initial flurry."—Jones, *The Teaching of the Parables*, pp. 70, 71.

Sit with the crowd by the edge of the sea. Earlier you witnessed Jesus healing the sick; you heard your religious leaders say He was in league with the devil. Why are you there now?

THE SOWER STARTS OUT (Matt. 13:3, 37).

"In Oriental lands, . . . farmers dwelt together in villages for protection against roving bands of robbers. In the morning, at daybreak, they 'went forth' [Matt. 13:3, KJV] from their villages to the surrounding fields, and at twilight they returned home again. In the same way Christ, the Sower of truth, came 'forth' from the Father in heaven to this world—the 'field' (see v. 38)—in order that He might 'bear witness unto the truth' (John 18:37; cf. ch. 10:10)."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 404.

"He [Christ] soweth the Word, and he is the Word. The spoken word will not live in the hearts of the hearers without his grace, his presence. Christians are born again of incorruptible seed—'by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever' (1 Pet. 1. 23; compare also 1 John iii. 9). That incorruptible seed is the grace of Christ, Christ's presence, Christ himself abiding in the heart by his Spirit. His grace lives in the soul, growing, spreading through the heart, filling it with a new life, transforming him in whom the seed abideth into the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."—*The Pulpit Commentary, The Gospel According to Matthew*, vol. 2, p. 18.

How would you describe a person represented by the wayside ground? Matt. 13:3, 4, 19.

The fields of Palestine sometimes consisted of long narrow strips with the ground between strips used as a path or wayside. These paths were worn rock hard by endless numbers of travelers. A farmer sowed using one of the following methods: (1.) He could broadcast the seed while walking through the field with the bag of seed slung over his shoulder. If the wind was blowing, some of the seed could easily fall on the wayside. (2.) As Barclay suggests, he could put a sack of seed on the back of an ass, tear a hole in one corner of the sack, then walk the animal through the fields while the seed leaked out of the sack. Some of the seed would surely fall on the hardened path as the animal crisscrossed over the waysides. (See Barclay, *The Gospel of St. Matthew*, vol. 2, p. 58.)

What does it take for a person to understand the gospel message? What causes lack of understanding? How can people's training and environment prevent them from hearing the gospel message? How can one presenting the gospel overcome the negative influence of people's backgrounds? What influences does the evil one exert to prevent people from understanding the gospel?

STONY PLACES (Matt. 13:5, 6, 20, 21).

Describe the type of person represented by the rocky soil. Matt. 13:5, 6:20, 21; Luke 8:13.

The stony soil consists of rocky ledges below a shallow surface of soil. People who are like this type of soil receive the gospel seed with joy, but fail to count the cost of discipleship. Considering only the soothing, material benefits of religion, they "have never thought deeply of the sharpness of the cross, of their own danger, of the sacrifices which the cross demands."—*The Pulpit Commentary, The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, vol. 2, p. 18. Thus when the scorching heat of affliction and temptation beats upon them, when God asks them to interrupt their cozy life to do an uncomfortable task or give up a pleasing yet harmful habit, the tiny gospel plant quickly withers.

What have the stony-ground hearers not experienced? John 3:3, 7; Titus 3:4, 5. How does John 6:41-66 enlarge upon our understanding of stony-ground people?

A great many people soon heard about the miracles recorded in John 6:1-22. And seeking to satisfy their curiosity, they rushed to find Jesus. They also hoped rather vainly to secure their temporal needs by associating themselves with Him. Because Jesus was aware of their motives, He said to them, " 'Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him' " (John 6:27, NKJV). But His following speech regarding the true nature of what He had to offer offended their natural desires and long-standing traditions. "They had welcomed His miracle-working power; they were eager to be freed from disease and suffering; but they would not come into sympathy with His self-sacrificing life. . . .

"Praise and flattery would be pleasing to their ears; but the truth is unwelcome; they cannot hear it. When the crowds follow, and the multitudes are fed, and the shouts of triumph are heard, their voices are loud in praise; but when the searching of God's Spirit reveals their sin, and bids them leave it, they turn their backs upon the truth, and walk no more with Jesus."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 391, 392.

How deep has the gospel seed been able to take root in your heart? Read Luke 9:23. Are you willing to dedicate your life to Jesus every day, regardless of the cost?

WORRISOME THORNS (Matt. 13:7, 22; Luke 8:14).

What progression is evident regarding the ability of the seed to grow in each of the first three types of soil?

1. On the wayside ground, the seed _____.
2. On the rocky soil, the seed _____ but _____ soon after.
3. Among thorns, the seed _____, but _____.

In the stony ground, the young plants withered soon after the heat of the sun touched them. But in the thorny ground, the plants lived longer. Likewise, thorny-ground Christians become more mature in their Christian experience than stony-ground hearers. They appear to make a genuine start, and evidently experience the new birth. But eventually their preoccupation with the worries and concerns of everyday life chokes their Christian experience. They become too busy or worried to pray and study God's Word.

How would you define "the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches" (Matt. 13:22, NKJV) and the "pleasures of life"? (Luke 8:14, NKJ). What advice does Christ give us regarding these thorns? Matt. 6:24-34.

"There are many whose hearts are aching under a load of care because they seek to reach the world's standard. They have chosen its service, accepted its perplexities, adopted its customs. Thus their character is marred and their life made a weariness. The continual worry is wearing out the life forces. Our Lord desires them to lay aside this yoke of bondage. He invites them to accept His yoke; He says, 'My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' Worry is blind and cannot discern the future; but Jesus sees the end from the beginning." —*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 481.

What fruits of the Spirit are choked by worry, the deceitfulness of riches, and the pleasures of this world? See Gal. 5:22-25. What thorns might you need the Master Gardener to exterminate from your life? How do you plan to cooperate with Him in the process?

YOU ARE INVITED (Luke 14:16-24).

Describe the setting of the parable of the great banquet. Luke 14:1-16.

“The Jews had a series of ever-recurring conventional pictures of what would happen when God broke into history and when the golden days of the new age arrived. One of these was the picture of the Messianic banquet. . . . It is of this banquet that the man who spoke to Jesus was thinking. When he spoke of the happiness of those who would be guests at that banquet he was thinking of Jews, and of Jews only, for the average, orthodox Jew would never have dreamed that gentiles and sinners would find a place at the feast of God.”
—Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 192.

Match the following words or phrases to each part of the parable listed below: Jesus; giving the gospel to the Gentiles; God; the gospel feast; the Jews.

The great banquet	
The man giving the banquet	
The servant	
The guests who were invited first	
The highways and hedges	

The excuses some of the people gave for not attending the banquet are much the same as ours for not receiving Christ's grace. (1) The man who had purchased a field allowed *business* to override God's claims. How many of us are so immersed in our daily business that we neglect time to pray, study the Word, and worship God? (2) The man who had bought the oxen and desired to try them out was at the mercy of *novelty*. Does your new computer take up all your time? Or does the hobby you just started take precedence over spiritual matters? (3) This excuse involved a new spouse. Perhaps the man was thinking of Deuteronomy 24:5. But even *family* can crowd out God's invitation to mercy. Many people feel they cannot accept God's invitation, because of problems it could create for their family or problems family members might create for them.

How might tradition, business, novelty, or family be holding you back from accepting God's invitation?

FURTHER STUDY: In Luke 14:23, the man giving the banquet tells his servant to “compel” the people to come to the banquet. Through the ages, many people have thought this verse condoned the use of force to convert people to Christianity. What light do Matthew 5:43-47; 7:12; 10:14; 26:51, 52; Luke 9:51-55 shed on this problem? How does the parable itself give us an answer? How did Jesus “compel” people to believe in Him?

Read either one of the following chapters from *Christ's Object Lessons*: “The Sower Went Forth to Sow,” pp. 33-61; “Go Into the Highways and Hedges,” pp. 219-237.

“By the words ‘compel them to come in’ Jesus here simply emphasizes the urgency of the invitation and the compelling force of divine grace. Loving-kindness was to be the compelling force. . . . There is a vast difference between the insistent appeal that Jesus had in mind and the resort to physical force that many professed Christians in centuries gone by have considered appropriate, and that some who profess the name of Christ would rely on today if they had the opportunity to do so. . . .

“Any use of force or persecution in matters of religion is a policy inspired by the devil, not by Christ.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 810.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What have the parables of the sower and the great banquet taught you about the value of truth, various ways of receiving the truth, and things that might prevent you from accepting it?
2. Notice that Luke 14:1-24 revolves around banqueting. Jesus often referred to the kingdom in terms of a feast. What emotions do people usually exhibit on such occasions? What does this tell us about the type of Christianity that drains the color from life?
3. How might Christ illustrate today the same concepts He illustrated with the parables of the sower and the great banquet?

SUMMARY: The parables of the sower and the great banquet tell us how to receive the gospel into our hearts, and they teach us about the dangers of divided hearts. The blessings of salvation find fertile soil in hearts that accept Christ, obey, and thus bring forth fruit. Such hearts do not favor daily business or possessions—nor are they absorbed only by the concerns of family. They are singly focused on Christ.



I Should Have Died

Inge Gray and Ahissou Francis

"The doctor said that I should have died," Antoinette Hounga testified at a women's meeting. "But God worked a miracle for me, and I am alive and well. My doctor was so sure that I would die that when I survived, he asked what church I belonged to."

Antoinette and her family live in the village of Sô-Tchanhoue in the tiny African country of Benin. The village is built over a lake. Each building is constructed to stand several feet above the water. People travel from place to place by boat, transport their goods to market by boat, and even hold their marketplace in boats on the water.

When Antoinette's fifth child was due, she went to the village maternity clinic to give birth. But after the baby was born, she began to hemorrhage. Her blood pressure dropped to 70/40. Her husband donated blood for an emergency blood transfusion, but Antoinette continued to grow weaker. The only hope for her was to rush her to the nearest hospital, a one-hour trip by boat. The midwife was sure Antoinette would not survive the trip. Her husband cradled her and the new baby in his arms as his brother steered the canoe toward help.

When the family arrived at the hospital, Antoinette was unconscious. When the doctors learned how far the family had come, they were surprised that she was still alive. They operated immediately and were able to stop the internal bleeding. But they offered the husband little hope that she would recover. When Antoinette lived, her doctor could only say, "Your God saved you!"

Antoinette's family had not known God long. The Adventist message reached their village in 1993 when a pastor and a layman from a neighboring village began visitation and Bible studies. When they found interest in the village, the pastor held evangelistic meetings in an open field near the lake. When the rains were heavy, the pastor preached while standing in a foot of water. Large numbers of villagers came to hear him present the truths of the Bible, most listening from their canoes on the lake. Between 20 and 30 people now meet every Sabbath in a simple church in Sô-Tchanhoue.

God is at work in Sô-Tchanhoue, the village on the water. Antoinette and the other members can testify to it. But thousands of other villages in Benin have not yet heard the message of a soon-coming Saviour. Pray that they will receive the hope we hold dear.

Until 1995, Inge Gray worked with her husband in the Benin Mission. Today they work in Cote d'Ivoire. Ahissou Francis is a pastor in Benin.

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God's Grace Changes Our Direction



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 7:24-27; 12:43-45; Luke 13:20, 21.

MEMORY TEXT: "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: God's love for us compels Him to search for us. Our reaction to His finding us changes forever the course of our lives. If we accept His offer of salvation, His grace enables Him to forgive us *and* to transform our characters into His likeness.

TRANSFORMED DESIRES. Leo Tolstoy, the great Russian author, described his conversion to Christ this way: "Five years ago faith came to me: I believed in the doctrine of Jesus, and all my life was suddenly changed. I ceased to desire that which previously I had desired, and on the other hand, I took to desiring what I had never desired before. That which formerly used to appear good in my eyes appeared evil, and that which used to appear evil appeared good."

All people who accept God's offer of salvation exchange their pride for humility, their hatred for love, their selfishness for generosity, their temper for sweetness, their anxiety for peace. With God's help, they develop a character like His.

Are you undergoing this process of exchange? Have you begun the process, but stalled somewhere along the way? The parables we will be studying for the next few weeks will help us understand the importance of this process. This week we will learn about the foundation necessary to undergo the process of change and the power God gives us to reflect His character.

THE TWO BUILDERS, PART ONE (Matt. 7:24-27).

The parable of the two builders concludes Christ's Sermon on the Mount. What is this sermon's main point? Matt. 7:12; 5:17-20. What principle does Matthew 7:12 restate? 1 John 4:21.

"The entire Sermon on the Mount . . . is illustrative of this great truth."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 357. Matthew 7:12 summarizes the last six of the Ten Commandments. Those people whom God admits into His kingdom will have lived according to Matthew 7:12. How we treat our fellow human beings indicates our attitude toward God (Matt. 22:34-40; 1 John 3:14-24). The great truth in Matthew 7:12 is the righteousness to which Jesus calls us in Matthew 5:20. It is the righteousness of His character (Exod. 34:4-8; Lev. 11:44). The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees "consisted in external adherence to the letter of the law; Christ called for insight into, and cooperation with, the underlying principles of the law."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 333.

The parable tells us about the means by which we may live our lives according to Matthew 7:12. In the first part of the parable, whom/what does the rock symbolize? Ps. 89:26; 1 Cor. 10:1-4; 3:11; Isa. 40:8.

As the people heard the parable, they could see the streams that wandered through the valley to the Sea of Galilee. As summer advanced, these waterways withered into dusty troughs. But as winter's rainy blasts increased in number, these streams swelled into turbulent courses that often swept away the flimsy houses the peasants built upon the grassy plains.

In contrast, Jesus' listeners could also view houses built upon the high rocks surrounding them. People had constructed these houses with greater difficulty. But the houses on the rocks had withstood years of severe weather.

Through this parable, then, Jesus teaches us that we are to be like the people who built upon the rock. When we accept Jesus and vow to live by His principle of love, we make Him the foundation of our characters (symbolized by the houses). He then becomes the means by which we live according to Matthew 7:12.

Luke 6:48 says that the man who built upon the rock dug deeply to secure his foundation. How deeply do you dig into Christ's Word to secure your spiritual foundation?

THE TWO BUILDERS, PART TWO (Matt. 7:24-27).

In the study we began yesterday about the parable of the two builders, we learned that only in building our characters upon Christ the Rock are we transformed into His likeness. The parable also illustrates the importance of doing so, for when the harsh weather beat against the house on the rock, it stood firm. The same weather, however, completely destroyed the house built on the sand.

Compare the fate of both houses with the destiny of those people who choose to build upon Christ and those people who do not. Rev. 21:1-8.

"A man's character is like a house. . . . Every thought is like a piece of timber in our house of life, every habit like a beam, every imagination like a window, well or badly placed; and they all gather into some kind of unity, seemly or grotesque. . . .

"[Christ] is the architect: **Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them.** Only on his truth can the life of men or nations stand. We discuss our psychological methods, or our systems of national defense and world government, and we do not take seriously this claim of Christ; but history's logic falsifies us, and confirms him. The house cannot be built except on his vertical, the line between God and man which he has traced; and on his horizontal, the dealings of man with man which his truth requires. Those two lines are in his cross, one the grace of God toward man and man's answering obedience, the other a crossbeam running through every man's life in love."—*The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 7, pp. 334, 335.

If the rock represents Christ and His Word, what do you think the sand represents? Eph. 4:14. What might the foul weather symbolize?

Just as a well-built structure standing on a stable foundation can withstand natural forces, so can a person who depends on Christ withstand the forces of evil. None of us, whether we are grounded in Christ or not, can escape temptation, sorrow, and trial. But only those of us grounded in Christ can withstand devastation from the blast of this stormy trio.

Just as the builders chose the foundations for their houses, so God made us free to choose to live by His principles. Upon which foundation will you build?

CLEANING HOUSE (Matt. 12:43-45).

The parable of the two builders teaches us that grounding ourselves in Christ transforms our character into His likeness. For the rest of this week, we will study parables that teach us the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of that transformation.

To whom did Jesus specifically address the parable of the seven unclean spirits, and why? Matt. 12:22-45.

“This wicked generation” (verse 45). In general, Christ refers to the people of Israel living during His time. Specifically, He is addressing those scribes and Pharisees who were in the process of rejecting Him as their Redeemer. They had swept their lives of outward sins. But they remained barren of any loyalty beyond themselves. On a more personal level, He was warning the man whom He had just cured of a demon (Matt. 12:22). Empty houses do not remain empty for long. Quickly, the nooks and crannies succumb to spiders and dust, as vermin scurry across the floorboards.

The parable is also “particularly applicable to those who have listened to the gospel message gladly, but have not yielded to the Holy Spirit. . . . These had not yet committed the unpardonable sin [blasphemy against the Holy Spirit], and Jesus warns them not to.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 398.

What type of ground in the parable of the sower does the man in today’s parable remind you of, and why?

The man released from one devil had good intentions. But he did not expect the return of that devil, let alone seven others. Therefore, he declined to submit himself to Christ’s control. “The Spirit of God must come into the life and be placed in control of the thought and conduct (see 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:22).”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 399. Thus we see once again that it is not only release from sin that Jesus offers us but re-creation and renewal. Such renewal, gained through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, will empower us not only to avoid evil, but to devote ourselves thoughtfully and industriously to that which is pure and just. Christianity does not consist merely of prohibitions, but of a positive, constructive force for good (Amos 5:15; 2 Thess. 2:10).

What “devils” do you need to clean from your house? Ask the Lord now to help you replace them with His Spirit.

HARD AND DRY VERSUS SOFT AND POROUS (Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20, 21).

The parable of the leaven also deals with the role of the Holy Spirit in transforming our lives. To the Jews, it must have been a shocking story. Because Jewish thought usually connected leaven with sin (Matt. 16:6; 1 Cor. 5:6-8; Gal. 5:9), preparations for the Passover included removing every piece of leaven from the house and burning it. Yet this shock surely must have aroused their interest!

Perhaps the people most likely to grasp His meaning were the women who spent their days baking. Any woman who used leaven knew that it made bread soft, porous, and delicious, as opposed to dry, hard, and tasteless. Thus, this illustration "came nearer home than in any other because he [Jesus] took it from the kitchen of an ordinary house."—Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 2, p. 79.

Leaven completely transforms dough. In what ways does the Holy Spirit transform us? Gal. 5:16-26; 6:2; Eph. 4:17-24, 31-5:1. How do these texts relate to Matthew 7:12?

Christianity transforms the individual, improving life for many groups of people, as well. In its infancy, Christianity improved life for the following:

1. **The ill.** It was common to view such people as an annoyance. But Christians founded the first free dispensary, home for the blind, and hospital. How did Christ treat such people?
2. **The aged** who also were considered a nuisance. Read what the Bible says in Leviticus 19:32; Proverbs 23:22; 1 Peter 5:5. Can you find other verses?
3. **The child.** In the early Christian centuries, divorce was rampant. The lot of women was often very difficult. In such situations, having children could be disastrous. How did Christ view marriage and children?
4. **Women.** In his morning prayers, a Jewish man thanked God that he was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. How did Christ treat women?

As the Holy Spirit transforms your life to reflect Christ's character, how can you improve life today for a person in one of the above four groups? (Remember, however, that only with the second coming and the destruction of Satan will all ills be cured.)

HOW DOES IT WORK? (Matt. 13:33).

Yesterday we began studying the parable of leaven. We noted that just as leaven transforms a lump of dough into delicious bread, so the Holy Spirit transforms our lives into people who reflect Christ's character. Today we will compare the way leaven works with the way the Holy Spirit works.

Where does the woman put the leaven? Matt. 13:33. Relate this to how the Holy Spirit works in our lives.

“As the leaven . . . works from within outward, so it is by the renewing of the heart that the grace of God works to transform the life. No mere external change is sufficient to bring us into harmony with God. There are many who try to reform by correcting this or that bad habit, and they hope in this way to become Christians, but they are beginning in the wrong place. Our first work is with the heart.”
—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 97.

What element in the parable symbolizes the heart?

Leaven also works in the following ways:

1. **The leaven works unseen.** Likewise, the Holy Spirit works unseen. But we can see the work it does. The leaven turns an inert lump of dough into a bubbling, growing mound. The Holy Spirit has the power to change our lives just as dramatically. (See John 3:1-8.)
2. **While the leaven can do its work only from inside the dough, yet it comes from outside the dough.** The dough has no ability of its own to change itself. Neither can we change ourselves. When we try and fail (and we will fail), we plunge into the clutches of legalism. We need a power outside of ourselves. And that power is the Holy Spirit.

As we commit ourselves to studying and obeying God's Word, the Holy Spirit will convict us of sin and transform us to Christ's image. Then we will be equipped to do God's will and share with others what Christ, through His Holy Spirit, has done for us and can do for them.

Make a list of things you do each day. Note how much time you spend on each item. How much time do you spend studying the Bible? How might you find more time to do so?

FURTHER STUDY: Study the lives of Saul and Judas: 1 Sam. 10:9-13; 16:14; 18:10, 11; 19:9; 31:1-6; Matt. 10:1-4; Luke 22:3-6; John 13:21-30; 18:2-5; Matt. 27:3-10. How were they like the man in the parable of the seven unclean spirits? What had both men failed to do with their lives?

Review Monday's and Tuesday's lesson. Then read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. How has your study of the parable of the two builders helped you to understand better this great chapter?

Read *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, "Not Judging, But Doing" [comment on Matthew 7:25], pp. 147-152; *Christ's Object Lessons*, "Like Unto Leaven," pp. 95-102.

"The leaven hidden in the flour works invisibly to bring the whole mass under its leavening process; so the leaven of truth works secretly, silently, steadily, to transform the soul. The natural inclinations are softened and subdued. New thoughts, new feelings, new motives, are implanted. A new standard of character is set up—the life of Christ. The mind is changed; the faculties are roused to action in new lines. Man is not endowed with new faculties, but the faculties he has are sanctified. The conscience is awakened. We are endowed with traits of character that enable us to do service for God."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 98, 99.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does the parable of the two builders define wisdom and foolishness? (Review Matt. 7:24-27; see also Ps. 14:1; Prov. 1:7; 3:7; 12:15; 1 Cor. 1:20; 3:20-23.)
2. Review the parable of the seven unclean spirits. What illustrations might be used today to illustrate the same point?
3. Finish the following: Leaven transforms dough into soft, porous, delicious bread. The Holy Spirit transforms our lives into . . .

SUMMARY: God forgives us. But He doesn't stop there. His grace also transforms us so that we reflect His Son's character. This transformation is produced by the power of the Holy Spirit as we ground ourselves firmly on Jesus Christ, the Rock of Salvation.



Atul Invited Us, Part 1

V. J. Khandagle

Atul Auchite (OW-she-tay) has every reason to be unhappy. Childhood polio left him unable to walk or play as other boys. He cannot work with his father or help his mother carry water. But Atul, who lives in a small, two-room house in a village in Maharashtra (Ma-ha-ROSH-tra) State in western India, is a happy, outgoing 12-year-old. He enjoys school and is an eager learner.

Until three years ago, Atul's family worshiped Hindu gods. Then an Adventist minister came to his village. He visited Atul's parents and told them about God and His love for them. As Atul listened, he became excited. He wanted others to hear these stories, as well. He begged his parents to invite the pastor back.

When the pastor returned, he found the family's small home crowded with people waiting to hear the stories about Jesus. When he asked who had invited them, the visitors answered, "Atul invited us." He had crawled or been carried from home to home and invited relatives and friends to learn about Jesus. Atul's eyes glistened with excitement as the pastor praised his efforts.

The pastor visited Atul's home regularly, teaching the people about God. Each time the pastor came, people crowded into Atul's home. Hindus, who had not known God, grew to love Him, and Christians of other faiths began to study their Bible more as they learned new truths from the Bible. Many began keeping the Sabbath.

When the pastor announced evangelistic meetings in the village, Atul invited everyone he knew—school friends, relatives, Hindus, and Christians. More than 60 people crowded into Atul's small home for the meetings. And 25 accepted the pastor's invitation to accept Jesus and be baptized, including Atul. Following further studies, the new believers were baptized in a public ceremony, all because a young boy who had every good reason to be unhappy with the world found his joy in Jesus.

(Continued next week)



Atul (left); V. J. Khandagle is director of Sabbath School and personal ministries in the Southern Asia Division. This story originally appeared in the Mission quarterly. Next week read what Atul is doing today to witness.

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Growing in Grace



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Mark 4:26-32.

MEMORY TEXT: "I pray that out of his [the Father's] glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Ephesians 3:16, 17, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: The kingdom of God consists of the work of His grace in our hearts. The Holy Spirit transforms Christ's words into a dynamic force that prepares us for eternal life and motivates us to proclaim the last message of God's mercy (Rev. 14:6-14).

THE SCENE IS A FAMILIAR ONE. Jesus retreated to the seashore, only to be followed by such a crowd that He had to seek refuge in a boat.

The majority of those following Him probably believed that the Messianic prophecies promised a political messiah who would deliver them from Rome and assist them in establishing an earthly kingdom of their own. Many of them hoped that Jesus was this messiah. Little did they care, or perhaps even realize, that Rome's dominance over them was a direct result of their disregard of God's love. (See *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 30-33.)

Thus, many of Jesus' parables instructed His followers regarding the true character of His kingdom. The two parables we will study this week are of this nature. They emphasize, as did the parables we examined last week, the role of the Holy Spirit in the growth of our Christian experience. As you study, ask yourself what role the Holy Spirit has played or is playing in your life.

THE GROWING SEED, PART ONE (Mark 4:26-29).

Last week we learned that when we are established in Christ He transforms our character into His likeness. We also studied the Holy Spirit's role in this accomplishment. The parable of the growing seed expands upon this theme.

Give titles to the three main sections of this parable as found in Mark 4:26-29.

"According to verse 27, the seed germinates and sprouts; it springs up and matures in a mysterious manner that goes almost unnoticed. This is the emphasis behind Mark's phrase 'he knows not how.' In verse 28 it is stressed that it is not by human intervention that the seed grows; the earth produces fruit 'spontaneously.' This does not mean that the sower abandons his work, nor that he is uninterested in what takes place. . . . It means that the seed must be allowed its appointed course, as the process of growth and ripening advances toward a harvest that is approaching. The sower takes account of the growth of the seed, but he cannot fully understand it. His ultimate interest is in the purpose for which the seed was sown."—William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), vol. 2, p. 169.

What do the following parts of the parable symbolize: (1) the growth of the seed; (2) the power motivating that growth? John 3:1-8.

This parable illustrates the same truth Jesus spoke to Nicodemus regarding the work of the Holy Spirit. To be "born of the Spirit" is to have God as our Father and to be like Him in character (1 John 3:1-3). As children of God who are constantly receiving the grace of Christ, we do not have to yield to sin (Rom. 6:12-16; 1 John 3:9; 5:18); we seek always to maintain union with Him. We are unable to explain the process of Christian growth and character transformation, but like the growth of the planted seed, it carries on invisibly.

Which of the following characterizes your Christian growth? (1) The seed has not yet been planted. (2) The grain is flourishing. (3) There is a drought. Consider what farmers do to help the seed grow. What things can you do to assist your spiritual growth? What efforts might actually hinder spiritual growth?

THE GROWING SEED, PART TWO (Mark 4:26-29).

Review yesterday's lesson, then meditate upon the following statement: "As the plant receives the sunshine, the dew, and the rain, we are to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit. The work is to be done 'not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.' Zech. 4:6. . . . By constantly relying upon Christ as our personal Saviour, we shall grow up into Him in all things who is our head."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 67. Record one or two of your thoughts regarding this quote in the space below.

Just as the seed grows to produce grain, so the object of Christian growth is the reproduction of Christ's character in the believer's life. How does Galatians 5:13-26 describe this reproduction?

The fruit of the Spirit are those traits that develop when people invite the Spirit to live in their hearts. This fruit is not the harvest of human nature, but the result of a force entirely external to us that works within us.

"Salvation is not just a business transaction. It is a relationship. . . . We need salvation not only from death and the ravages of sin but from sin itself, from the iniquity that cuts us off from God. We need to have re-established the harmony and unity that Adam enjoyed with God before the Fall. . . .

"To re-establish this relationship, to bring man into harmony with God and in line with the stipulations of the covenant, is the work of the Holy Spirit."—Raymond H. Woolsey, *The Spirit and His Church*, pp. 57, 58.

The Jews wanted a messiah who would coerce other nations to submit to Israel. But through the parable of the growing seed, Jesus taught that the Messiah's kingdom begins in an individual's heart, affects every aspect of a person's life, and spills over into the lives of others with the vibrant strength of His love.

When Jesus came to us as the Son of man, He veiled His glory as the Son of God. The kingdom He established then was His kingdom of grace. At His second advent, the eternal kingdom that He then inaugurates (Dan. 7:14, 27; Rev. 11:15) will be His kingdom of glory.

Name three instances from the life of Christ illustrating how He exhibited the fruit of the Spirit. These fruit demonstrate His character, a character the Holy Spirit longs to help us develop. Pray for the Spirit to transform your heart and the church at large.

THE GROWING SEED, PART THREE (Mark 4:26-29).

For what purpose (other than developing a Christlike character) does the grain grow? Isaiah 55:10, 11 gives a clue.

“There can be no growth or fruitfulness in the life that is centered in self. If you have accepted Christ as a personal Saviour, you are to forget yourself, and try to help others. Talk of the love of Christ, tell of His goodness. Do every duty that presents itself. Carry the burden of souls upon your heart, and by every means in your power seek to save the lost. As you receive the Spirit of Christ—the Spirit of unselfish love and labor for others—you will grow and bring forth fruit. The graces of the Spirit will ripen your character. Your faith will increase, your convictions deepen, your love be made perfect. More and more you will reflect the likeness of Christ in all that is pure, noble, and lovely.”—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 67, 68.

Who in the Bible exemplified the seed growing to bring forth fruit for others? What types of thing did she do, and for whom? Acts 9:36-42.

“**All the widows**” (Acts 9:39). In ancient times, the life of a widow was usually difficult (Luke 21:2-4). But Judaism and Christianity did much to improve their situation (Deut. 14:29; 27:19; Mark 12:40; James 1:27). Under the Mosaic law, widows, who were often exploited (Ps. 94:6; Isa. 1:23; Mal. 3:5), were granted protection. Exodus 22:22 states that widows were not to be taken advantage of, while Deuteronomy 24:17 states that a creditor could not take a widow's clothing as collateral for a debt. Widows received a portion of the third-year tithe (Deut. 26:12), and they shared the right to glean the fields (Deut. 24:19-21).

The same Holy Spirit who enabled Peter to raise Dorcas from the dead guided Dorcas' good deeds. Her work for others was proof that she had accepted Christ.

Look around you. What groups and individuals are being exploited or taken advantage of in your church, place of employment, neighborhood, etc.? Now honestly consider your life over the past few months. What have you done for someone like this without seeking any gain in return? Finally, in what ways have you shared your faith? Determine with the Holy Spirit's help to be a blessing to others every day of your life.

A SMALL BEGINNING, PART ONE (Mark 4:30-32).

As you read the parable of the mustard seed, consider the following description:

The plant to which Jesus most likely referred is the black mustard, whose seed is about a millimeter in diameter. Yet a mature plant can grow as high as 12 feet with branches an inch or more thick. Its four-petaled yellow flowers produce tiny black seeds that attract goldfinches and linnets to feed among the foliage.

“The smallest seed you plant” (Mark 4:31, NIV). While the mustard seed was not technically the smallest of seeds, it was noted for its minuteness. Jews referred to a drop of blood as small as a mustard seed. Or if they were discussing a minuscule infraction of the ceremonial law, the rabbis would talk about it in terms of the smallness of the mustard seed. Thus it was not unusual for Jesus Himself to refer to it.

Women often used the black mustard to cook with. In the spring, they prepared the tender leaves to eat. And when the seeds matured, they would grind them for use as a dressing or flavoring. They also mixed the seeds in a plaster used to relieve pain. Oil from the seeds worked as a laxative. Thus the mustard seed and plant provided an illustration to which most of the people listening to Jesus could relate.

The parable of the growing seed emphasized the growth of the seed and the power behind that growth. What does the growth symbolize? Mark 4:31, 32.

“The Jewish leaders looked with contempt upon the motley throng now intently listening to Jesus, particularly the few unlearned peasants and fishermen who, as His disciples, sat next to Him. They concluded that Jesus could not possibly be the Messiah and that the ‘kingdom’ He proclaimed, composed of this insignificant group of followers, would never amount to anything. Jesus could have chosen no better representation of the way His ‘kingdom’ appeared to the minds of unregenerate men than the illustration of the insignificant mustard seed. . . .

“Here the figure of a ‘tree’ represents the triumph of the gospel message throughout the world. The kingdom and its subjects might appear insignificant now, but, says Christ, this will not always be the case.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 409.

Explain the role the Holy Spirit plays in the “triumph of the gospel message throughout the world.” How can you have a part in this “triumph”?

A SMALL BEGINNING, PART TWO (Mark 4:30-32).

As you review Mark 4:30-32, ask yourself how the parable of the mustard seed assures us of the growth and success of God's kingdom.

This is one of Jesus' most personal, touching parables. His immediate band of disciples was very small compared to the largeness of the work they were to initiate. They were pitted against some difficult odds, not the least of which included coming from a low rung of the socioeconomic ladder. In addition, they were often tripping over their own egos and temperaments. Surely they would despair again and again. But now their Leader, through the use of a most familiar object, was reassuring them of success. Indeed, it would be a parable to encourage them long after His return to heaven. Jesus would send His emissary, the Holy Spirit, to remind them (John 14:26).

What do the birds (Mark 4:32) and their act of nesting in the branches of the mustard plant represent?

"Could this be related to Daniel 4:12 and Ezekiel 17:23; 31:6, where the people of all nations are given the promise of a place in God's kingdom? Rabbinical literature at times used the phrase 'birds of heaven' to refer to the Gentiles. . . .

"Let all the birds of the air find a place in the mustard tree. The gospel of Jesus must create a nesting place for all the peoples of the world—for men and women, for Black and White, for the rich and the poor, for the educated and the illiterate, for the caste and the casteless, and all the in-betweens. For in Christ, we have no division, but oneness; we have no nation, but one commonwealth of God (Phil. 3:20)."—John M. Fowler, "Appreciating the Importance of Little Things," *Adventist Review*, October 22, 1992, p. 7.

Compare the symbolism of the mustard plant providing shelter for the birds with the symbolism of the seed growing to provide sustenance.

"In us as individuals, is the seed of grace growing, giving shelter to the 'birds of the air'?"—Fowler, p. 7. What can you do to provide shelter for someone in need of Christ's grace? A kind word, a smile, a thoughtful deed are small seeds that can make a vast difference.

FURTHER STUDY: The parable of the mustard seed is about great things coming from small beginnings. Read the following Bible stories that pertain to the same theme. What does each account teach you about yourself? About God? 1 Kings 17:1-24; Matt. 16:5-12; Luke 21:1-4.

Choose from the following: *Christ's Object Lessons*, "First the Blade, Then the Ear," pp. 62-69; "Like a Grain of Mustard Seed," pp. 76-79; "Other Lessons From Seed-sowing," pp. 80-89; *Steps to Christ*, "Growing Up Into Christ," pp. 67-75; "The Work and the Life," pp. 77-83; *The Desire of Ages*, "Nicodemus," pp. 167-177.

"The only way to grow in grace is to be disinterestedly doing the very work which Christ has enjoined upon us—to engage, to the extent of our ability, in helping and blessing those who need the help we can give them. Strength comes by exercise; activity is the very condition of life. Those who endeavor to maintain Christian life by passively accepting the blessings that come through the means of grace, and doing nothing for Christ, are simply trying to live by eating without working. And in the spiritual as in the natural world, this always results in degeneration and decay. A man who would refuse to exercise his limbs would soon lose all power to use them. Thus the Christian who will not exercise his God-given powers not only fails to grow up into Christ, but he loses the strength that he already had."
—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 80, 81.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Relate this week's memory text to the two parables we studied this week. Consider what these verses say about the Holy Spirit. Where do you see the element of growth in these verses? (see also verses 18 and 19.)
2. Consider who the sower might be in each of the parables. (Matthew 13:31, 32 mentions a sower.) In what ways could it be Christ? His followers? How do you see yourself as a sower?

SUMMARY: Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of grace, sprouting like a tiny seed in each of our hearts, rooting and grounding itself in Christ's love through the power of the Holy Spirit, and growing to produce the fruit of the Spirit for the benefit of others.



Atul Invited Us, Part 2

V. J. Khandagle

When young Atul first heard about Jesus, he became excited and shared the good news with anyone who would listen. Following evangelistic meetings in Atul's home, the boy and 25 others, most of whom Atul had invited to attend, accepted Jesus as their Saviour and were baptized.

Although Atul cannot walk, he eagerly witnesses for God. He is a natural leader and has helped to form a singing group that witnesses for the Lord. His faith and testimony are a strong attraction to the people who hear him. His zeal in his newfound mission for Christ is an important factor in the growth of the church in his village.

The polio that crippled Atul has crippled thousands in India. And Atul has encouraged and witnessed to others who share his affliction. He uses an old hand-pedaled tricycle to get around on the dirt roads in his village. The rough roads are hard on the tricycle, which often needs repair. But Atul or his father do the best they can to repair it so he can continue his missionary work for Jesus. Atul is witnessing to three Hindu friends, all crippled by polio. The three ride to church on the back of Atul's tricycle. The Hindu boys are learning about God as Atul shares his hope, his courage—and his tricycle. Atul hopes that soon his friends will accept Jesus as Lord of their lives.

The church in Atul's village is growing, and members hope that soon they can build a church, but for now they crowd into Atul's parents' home. A church will cost about \$5,000, far beyond the peasant believers' ability to pay.

Pray for Atul and his family, as they struggle with daily living in a harsh and unforgiving land where millions of children are hungry, needy, blind, or handicapped. Pray that God will provide a simple church in which to worship. Pray for Atul, who refuses to accept discouragement as he shares his hope in Jesus with anyone who will listen to him.



Atul (left), now 13 years old, continues to witness for the Lord he loves. V. J. Khandagle is Sabbath School and personal ministries director of the Southern Asia Division.

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Prayer Power



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8.

MEMORY TEXT: "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers" (1 Peter 3:12, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: A healthy prayer life is as necessary to sustain Christian growth as breathing is to sustain our physical existence. Prayer is the breath of the soul.

PRAYER WARRIORS. When William IV of England died, a 17-year-old girl was sleeping in the palace. After awakening to the news that she was now the Queen of England, she fell to her knees and prayed that the Lord would guide her through the years ahead. Thus Queen Victoria began one of the greatest reigns of British history.

Fanny Crosby always prayed before she attempted to write a hymn. Considering that she wrote approximately 8,000 hymns, she must have prayed a great deal.

And Martin Luther said that he prayed an hour each day, except on those days which he knew would be particularly busy. Then he spent two hours in prayer.

The parables we will study this week teach us the importance of prayer in the process of Christian growth. Is prayer a vital element of your life? Take some time this afternoon to consider your daily activities. How often do you find yourself praying throughout the day? As you study this week, think of ways to improve your prayer life, and resolve that, with God's help, you will draw closer to Him through prayer.

“TEACH US TO PRAY” (Luke 11:1-13).

List at least three things you notice about the setting of this parable. Luke 11:1-13.

The disciples seemed to realize the importance of prayer in establishing and maintaining a close relationship with God. In answer to their request, Jesus instructed them by giving them a sample prayer and telling them a parable.

Jesus' sample prayer teaches us much about prayer. The order of the prayer suggests that before we ask anything for ourselves, we first should give God the glory due Him. When we do so, we will put other items in their proper place.

Notice how the prayer immediately goes from the heights of adoration to the most basic of human needs. Jesus knows that we cannot live by bread alone. But He also knows that we cannot live without it. Thus He teaches us that He is concerned about our physical well being and that it is proper for us to dialog with Him about it. This particular request is also one of compassion. The plural pronouns *us* and *our* imply that we should pray not only for personal needs but for the needs of others, as well.

Review the rest of Jesus' sample prayer by listing phrases of the prayer that go with each item below.

Prayer about past sin

Prayer about one's relationship with others

Prayer about future trials and protection

“Truly to pray ‘lead us not into temptation’ is to renounce the ways of our own choosing and to submit to the ways of God's choosing.” —*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 348. Furthermore, *temptation* (KJV) can mean any situation that tests our faith or challenges our principles.

Use the elements of Jesus' sample prayer to compose your own prayer. Such an exercise can infuse new life into the sometimes all-too-familiar verses we have studied today. (1) Adoration/praise to God. (2) Our needs for the day. (3) Forgiveness of sin. (4) Our relationship with others. (5) God's care and protection.

ASK, SEARCH, AND KNOCK (Luke 11:5-13).

Immediately after Jesus gave the disciples a sample prayer, He further instructed them by telling them a parable. Read Luke 11:5-8. Several customs are apparent in these verses: (1) During hot weather, people often traveled at night. This could explain the midnight hour. (2) Hospitality was a sacred duty. But because just enough bread was baked in the morning for one day's use, the friend could not fulfill this duty. Thus he was faced with quite a predicament. (3) Doors were usually left open during the day. But closing them in the evening signaled the householder's desire not to be disturbed. Thus, it was considered quite rude to knock on a closed door, unless the need was crucial. (4) A Palestinian house was usually divided into two parts by a low platform that comprised about one-third of the floor space. On the platform sat a charcoal stove around which the entire family slept on mats. If one person arose, it was likely that others would be disturbed. Thus the friend felt he could not arise.

Summarize three things this parable tells us about prayer. In what way is the meaning of the parable similar to certain sections of the Lord's Prayer? Luke 11:5-13.

Christ is not saying that God is one from whom we must wring a blessing. Instead, He is *contrasting* the householder with our heavenly Father. He is saying, "If this irritable person will give whatever is needed, how much more will your heavenly Father give?"

But the central theme of the parable is "steadfastness in prayer. The parable also defines the kind of requests for which our Lord counsels steadfastness—prayers whose object is the blessing of our fellow men and the extension of His kingdom."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 790.

Verses 9 and 10 state that if we ask, we will receive. Why is the request of verse 13 vitally important?

Verses 9 and 10 do not mean that whatever we ask for, God will give us. But when we ask for the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts and transform our lives, God will not refuse us. As the Holy Spirit influences our lives, God's will becomes our will. When that happens, our requests will be in line with God's desire for our lives.

How would a modern parable about persistence in prayer read? Over what would you show insistence?

PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF (Luke 18:1-8).

Read Luke 18:1-5 and decide upon one word or small phrase that you think best describes (a) the widow, (b) the judge, and (c) the point Jesus is trying to get across about the nature of prayer.

This description of a Mesopotamian court “room” helps us visualize the parable better: “On a slightly raised dais at the further end sat the *kadi*, or judge, half buried in cushions. Round him squatted various secretaries and other notables. The populace crowded into the rest of the hall, a dozen voices clamouring at once, each claiming that his cause should be the first heard. The more prudent litigants joined not in the fray, but held whispered communications with the secretaries, passing bribes, euphemistically called fees, into the hands of one or another. When the greed of the underlings was satisfied, one of them would whisper to the *kadi*, who would promptly call such and such a case. It seemed to be ordinarily taken for granted that judgment would go for the litigant who had bribed highest. But meantime a poor woman on the skirts of the crowd perpetually interrupted the proceedings with loud cries for justice. She was sternly bidden to be silent, and reproachfully told that she came there everyday. ‘And so I will,’ she cried out, ‘till the *kadi* hears me.’”—H. B. Tristram, *Eastern Customs in Bible Lands* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1894), pp. 228, 229.

Amid such a scene, hear the widow cry out, “Grant me justice against my adversary” (Luke 18:3, NIV). But what chance did she have against such a system? Even the Greek word for *widow* means “forsaken” or “left empty.”

What prompted the judge to answer the widow’s plea? Verses 4, 5.

To “always pray and not give up” (verse 1, NIV) means that we should always be quick to pray when the need arises, whether that need be to praise and thank God, or to request special help and guidance. But sometimes we all feel as powerless as the widow. Then meditate upon Jesus in Gethsemane praying again and again (Matt. 26:36-44; Luke 22:39-43). And memorize Paul’s counsel in Ephesians 6:18.

How can the widow’s example encourage you to keep on praying? Think of one or two matters about which you are ready to give up praying. Then ask God to help you be as persistent as the widow. Never give up!

A PRAYER FOR VINDICATION (Luke 17:20-34; 18:1-8).

Jesus probably told the parable of the widow and the corrupt judge as a follow-up to His sermon on last-day events in Luke 17:20-34, where He dealt with falsehoods that could cause even His followers to go astray. Thus, the parable of the widow and judge “applies specifically to the experience of God’s people in the last days . . . in anticipation of the deception they must meet and the persecution they must suffer.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 843. Thus the widow’s pleas for justice against her adversary (Luke 18:3) become our prayers for vindication.

Who is our adversary and the father of lies (John 8:44), including the falsehoods Jesus mentioned in Luke 17:20-34? 1 Peter 5:8. (See also Zech. 3:1-4.) How does the parable reassure us that God will indeed deliver us from our adversary? Luke 18:5-8.

In the original language of 1 Peter 5:8, the adversary (*antidikos*) is identified with the devil. The same word for *adversary* is used in Luke 18:3.

“The worse this judge appears, . . . the more does the voice of the Saviour seem to say to us, ‘Men ought always to pray, and not faint.’ ”—Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Miracles and Parables of Our Lord* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, reprinted 1992), vol. 3, p. 439.

“Will he keep putting them off?” (Luke 18:7, NIV). It often seems to us that God delays His answers to our prayers. But all the while He is actually working quickly, setting “in operation those forces that will accomplish His good will for the ‘elect,’ and these forces may be in operation long before the results become apparent. Furthermore, God may at times delay ‘avenging’ His ‘elect’ in order that those who are persecuting them may have time and opportunity to repent. God loves the persecutors as well as the persecuted [see 2 Peter 3:9].”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 845.

We should also remember that a delay can help us understand our dependency upon Christ, an understanding that makes it possible for God to work on our behalf. When you suffer injustice, remember the widow’s perseverance and the words of Peter in 1 Peter 2:20-24.

The parable gives us hope and assurance. But it also gives us cause for self-examination. Will you pursue any of the falsehoods abounding in the last days? (Luke 17:20-34). Or, like the widow, will you pray for vindication until the need to do so no longer exists?

SWEET HOUR OF PRAYER (Ps. 5:1-3).

One morning, Cynthia Coston, homemaker and mother of two young boys, reviewed the activities she needed to accomplish that day. When she realized she would need guidance in arranging her schedule, she asked God for help. She writes, "When I allowed the sweetness of prayer into my day, it seeped down through my busy activities and made the duties seem more manageable. My outlook improved and the things I didn't accomplish seemed less important."—Adapted from *Among Friends*, Rose Otis, editor, pp. 344, 345.

This week, our study of two parables has instructed us regarding prayer. Today, we will consider what Scripture has to say about various aspects of prayer. For each aspect, summarize what the texts tell us about it.

The benefits of prayer. James 4:8; 5:16.

Conditions of answered prayer. 2 Chron. 7:14; Heb. 11:6; 1 John 5:14, 15.

What to pray for. Matt. 5:44; 26:41; 1 Tim. 2:1, 2; James 1:5; 5:13-16.

How to pray. Ps. 62:8; Matt. 6:7; Phil. 4:6.

Matthew 22:37-40 tells us that "the whole Law and the Prophets" depend upon the greatest command of loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and a second command to love your neighbor as yourself. But it is foolish to expect that we can love God so completely without a personal knowledge of Him. How can we obtain such a knowledge? The disciples guessed it when they asked Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). Thus, "Jesus gave His disciples a plan through which they could love God and become an expression of His love to their fellowmen. The method of Jesus for discipleship was to teach men and women to pray. Prayer would usher them into a loving, intimate relationship with the Father."—Sammy Tippit, *The Prayer Factor* (Chicago, Ill.: The Moody Bible Institute, 1988), p. 67.

Is the disciples' request yours? In what ways do you expect the Lord to answer you when you pray, "Lord, teach me to pray"?

FURTHER STUDY: Read the following prayers found in the Bible. What prompted the people involved to pray? Where and how did they pray? Did their lives meet the conditions of answered prayer? How did their prayers compare with the principles behind the Lord's Prayer (see Sunday's lesson)? 1 Sam. 1:8-20; 2:1-10; Dan. 9:1-23; John 17.

Read any or all of the following: *Steps to Christ*, "The Privilege of Prayer," pp. 93-104; *Christ's Object Lessons*, "Asking to Give," pp. 139-149; "Shall Not God Avenge His Own?" pp. 164-180.

"The soul that turns to God for its help, its support, its power, by daily, earnest prayer, will have noble aspirations, clear perceptions of truth and duty, lofty purposes of action, and a continual hungering and thirsting after righteousness. By maintaining a connection with God, we shall be enabled to diffuse to others, through our association with them, the light, the peace, the serenity, that rule in our hearts. The strength acquired in prayer to God, united with persevering effort in training the mind in thoughtfulness and care-taking, prepares one for daily duties and keeps the spirit in peace under all circumstances."
—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 85.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The disciples did not ask Jesus to teach them to work miracles, to heal, or to preach. Instead, they asked Him to teach them to pray. Before studying this lesson, what would you have asked Jesus to teach you? Why? How has this lesson changed your mind about what you would like to learn from Christ?
2. Read Matthew 26:36-45. Contrast Christ's example with the disciples' actions. Why had the disciples failed to pray, even though earlier they had expressed a desire to learn to pray from the Master Himself? Why do you think we often fail to pray?
3. Read Luke 6:12 and Mark 1:35. Is Jesus' example practical for us today? Why or why not? Should our lifestyle dictate our prayer life? Or should our prayer life dictate our lifestyle?

SUMMARY: Prayer is as important to our spiritual health as eating is to our physical health. Just as it is essential to eat the right foods, so it is essential for us to pray in the right way. Through daily heartfelt prayer, both public and private, we draw closer to Christ, who then infuses us with more of His love and grace.



Changing Teams

Neumoel Stina

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One Sabbath, I was preaching in a church in the city of Bauru, Brazil. As I preached on the seven great miracles of Jesus recorded in John's Gospel, I noticed a tall young woman sitting in the front row, weeping. I was troubled over her tears, concerned that I had said something to hurt her. At the end of the sermon, I appealed to people to accept Jesus as their personal Saviour. Many stood, including this girl. After the service she approached me, her eyes filled with tears, and said, "I did not know Jesus loved me so much. I want to be an Adventist." She told me a little about herself, that her name was Ana Maria, and that she was a basketball player. I promised to pray for her.

Three months later at a youth congress in another city, I received a message that a girl was looking for me. Soon Ana Maria arrived. "Pastor, you may not remember me," she greeted.

"I do," I answered. "You are the basketball player."

"No, Pastor, ex-basketball player; today I am an Adventist, and I want you to baptize me."

Ana Maria had gone through unpleasant situations in professional basketball, and while desperately searching for meaning and happiness, she said that something—or Someone—spoke to her of a God, but she wondered, "Will God accept me?"

While in her mother's home in Bauru, a windstorm swept through the area, destroying the house. No one was injured, but it was a traumatic experience. A group of young people helped the family and invited Ana Maria to attend a lecture as part of a spiritual retreat. Ana Maria accepted the invitation as a gesture of gratitude for what the young people had done for her mother.

During the lecture, Ana Maria asked God to fill the void in her life. She said that her prayer was answered when she heard the news that Jesus' miracles showed His great love for her.

I baptized Ana Maria, along with 14 other people, a few months later. Today Ana Maria is on Jesus' team in the great game of life. She wants to study theology and to be a Bible worker. And while she prepares for the theology course, Ana Maria is preparing others for baptism.

Elder Neumoel Stina is president of the West Sao Paulo Conference in Brazil.

Six



— 1992

1996 —



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How Much Will You Pay?



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Luke 14:7-11; 18:9-14; Matt. 21:28-32.

MEMORY TEXT: "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 18:14, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Last week we learned how essential prayer is to Christian growth. This week we will learn that pride is a malignancy that surely will stunt that growth, if not destroy it altogether.

LIFE'S MOST VALUABLE DISCOVERY. In 1847, Scotland's Dr. James Simpson discovered that chloroform could be used as an anaesthetic, making it possible for patients to have pain-free surgery. Many doctors felt that this was one of the most important breakthroughs of medicine in their time.

Years later, Dr. Simpson was lecturing at the University of Edinburgh. A student asked him what he thought was the most valuable discovery of his career. Of course, everyone expected Dr. Simpson to mention chloroform. But he answered, "My most valuable discovery was when I discovered myself a sinner and that Jesus Christ was my Saviour."

Such an attitude of humility fosters Christian growth, while pride will effectively stunt or destroy our spiritual development. This week, the parables we will study give us an in-depth look at pride and the price it exacts from those who are all too willing to pay. As you study, remember that pride caused Lucifer's fall (Isa. 14:12-14; Eze. 28:11-19) and is, therefore, the root of all sin. Also, consider how you would have answered the student's question if you had been Dr. Simpson.

PRIDE'S FOCUS (Luke 18:9-14).

What two characteristics did the people possess to whom Jesus addressed the parable in Luke 18:9-14?

Although verse 9 does not specify that Pharisees were present, Jesus had them in mind when He told this parable. It was the Pharisee in the story who epitomizes the two characteristics of the people whom Jesus was addressing.

"The Pharisaic, legalistic concept of righteousness operated on the premise that salvation was to be earned by observing a certain pattern of conduct, and gave little or no attention to the necessary devotion of the heart to God and the transformation of man's motives and objectives in life. . . . The concept that outward conformity to divine requirements was all that God asked, irrespective of the motive that prompted compliance with them, actuated their thinking and living."
—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 846.

What was the focus of the Pharisee's world? What does this tell us about his attitude toward himself, other people, and God? Luke 18:10-12.

"Two men went up into the temple to pray" (Luke 18:10). Every day, there was time set aside for prayer during the morning and evening sacrifices. People could also go to the temple at any time for private prayer.

"I fast twice in the week" (Luke 18:12). The Mosaic law did not command fasting except for the Day of Atonement. But the Pharisees fasted regularly (Matt. 6:16).

How proud the Pharisee was of his own accomplishments in the name of goodness! The frigid winds of pride swirled around him as he stood alone upon his mountain of self-righteousness—alone because pride needs no god or companion other than oneself. And therein lies the sin of pride. It separates us from the only Source of true righteousness and mercy, making it impossible for us to be merciful to others. Unlike Dr. Simpson in Sabbath's lesson, the Pharisee had not yet discovered that he was a sinner and that Jesus was his Saviour.

How are you tempted to exalt yourself? What does it do to you when you contrast yourself with those upon whom you look down? If we are not aware that pride exists in our hearts, what can enable us to see ourselves as we really are?

HUMILITY'S FOCUS (Luke 18:9-14).

While the Pharisee was thought to represent the highest level of holiness in Jewish society, the tax collector portrayed the lowest. Jews ostracized those of their heritage who collected the Roman poll and land taxes because paying the poll tax was a concession to Roman overlordship, while paying the land tax was an insult to God, whom they believed was the sole owner of the land. Tax collectors often took more than the required taxes.

Even though Jesus did not condone the behavior of most tax collectors (Matt. 5:46, 47), He did spend time with them, thus inciting the wrath of the Jewish authorities (Matt. 9:10-13; 11:19).

After reading the tax collector's prayer, decide what was the focus of his world. What does this tell us about his attitude toward himself, others, and God? Luke 18:13.

"Have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13, NIV). Literally, *the* sinner. The tax collector viewed himself as if he were the *only* sinner (Compare 1 Tim. 1:15-17).

Humility "is not so much a self-consciousness as a God-consciousness; not so much a mean thinking of ourselves as a thrilling, penetrating consciousness of him who is perfect holiness and truth. . . . The publican felt God at his heart; and the sight awoke the longing to be holy as God is, and the longing to be holy called out the sense of wrongness. Oh, how he had offended! how selfish and grasping and wicked he had been! All else fades into indistinctness; in that temple there are to him but the two presences, God and his soul, and the soul cries, 'God be merciful!' "—*The Pulpit Commentary, The Gospel According to St. Luke*, vol. 1, p. 117.

How would you describe the results of the two prayers? What do these results teach us about the role of pride and humility in a person's religious experience? Luke 18:14.

"Justified" (Luke 18:14). This means declared righteous (Rom. 4:1-8) and made righteous in the sense of receiving the gift of the Spirit in the new-birth experience (Titus 3:5-7). "The publican knew himself to be a sinner (see v. 13), and this realization opened the way for God to pronounce him sinless—a sinner justified by divine mercy It was the attitudes of the two men toward themselves and toward God that made the difference." —*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 848.

WHEN YES MEANT NO (Matt. 21:28-33).

Jesus tells another parable that deals with pride and the price it exacts in Matthew 21:28-33. Why did Jesus relate this parable, and to whom? Matt. 21:23-27, 31, 32.

“By what authority are you doing these things?” (Matt. 21:23, NIV). This is a reference to the events earlier in the week, which included Jesus’ triumphal entry (Matt. 21:1-11), the second cleansing of the temple along with the healing of the sick (Matt. 21:12-16), and His present teaching in the temple courts (Matt. 21:23).

Centuries later, human nature has not changed, and there are still some persons who dare to profess Jesus while questioning His authority. To discover just how much a person pays for such an attitude, examine more closely the words and behavior of the two sons in the parable.

If the two sons were yours, which one in the end would you be most concerned about?

False professions then. “The son who said, ‘I go, sir,’ represented himself as faithful and obedient; but time proved that his profession was not real. He had no true love for his father. So the Pharisees prided themselves on their holiness, but when tested, it was found wanting. . . . They had no true love for God or man. God called them to be co-workers with Him in blessing the world; but while in profession they accepted the call, in action they refused obedience.” —*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 278, 279.

False professions today. “Self-righteousness is not true righteousness, and those who cling to it will be left to take the consequences of holding a fatal deception. Many today claim to obey the commandments of God, but they have not the love of God in their hearts to flow forth to others. Christ calls them to unite with Him in His work for the saving of the world, but they content themselves with saying, ‘I go, sir.’ . . . They are living a lie.” —*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 279.

People who display such an attitude are incapable of confessing their sin, because they cannot recognize their need of Christ. As long as they are so intent upon admiring themselves in the mirror of their self-righteousness, they will be ill-equipped to heed Micah 6:8 and Matthew 23:23.

How will you answer the Saviour’s call to work? What does the word *today* in Matthew 21:28 mean for your life?

WHEN NO MEANT YES (Matt. 21:28-32).

Yesterday we studied about the son who agreed to his father's instructions in word only. Now we will consider the son who declined his father's command, but later obeyed.

Contrast the attitude and response of this son with the attitude and response of his brother. Matt. 21:30.

"Pride dies hard, but this son admitted his wrong without any attempt at excuse. Then he went. Perhaps his work was not impressive, perhaps his former insolence had impaired both his skill and his staying power. But he did his best, and God reckoned the attempt for the deed."—*The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 7, p. 511. The laying aside of pride reflects several promising qualities: (1) reflectiveness; (2) humility; (3) willingness to admit wrong; and (4) a desire to do better.

The son we studied yesterday represented the Pharisees. Whom does this son represent, and why? Matt. 21:31, 32.

Tax collectors and prostitutes symbolize all social and religious outcasts. But Jesus states that there is more hope for people such as these than there is hope for people who wrap their pride around them like flamboyant scarves. Pride recognizes no need. But those who recognize themselves as sinners realize they need a Saviour and become dismayed at the thought of being eternally separated from God. They respond to Him who has said, "Anyone who comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37, NRSV).

Pride corrodes. Beginning with its launch in 1938 until its retirement 40 years later, the Queen Mary was the largest ship to navigate the seas. During its conversion to a floating hotel and museum in Long Beach, California, workers removed its three enormous smokestacks in order to paint them. But as they began their task, the stacks crumbled. All that remained were 30 coats of paint applied over the decades. The 3/4-inch steel that had formed the stacks had completely rusted away. The Pharisees' religion was much like those smokestacks; their profession like the 30 coats of paint. Theirs was the appearance of holiness. But pride had long ago rusted their substance.

The parable of the two sons points out the choice the religious leaders had made about the gospel proclaimed by John the Baptist and Jesus. What choice have you made regarding this gospel? Which son are you?

PLACES OF HONOR (Luke 14:7-11; Matt. 23:1, 2, 6).

As you read Luke 14:7-11, ask yourself when you might have seen or heard someone trying to obtain “a place of honor.” What about human nature causes us to do so?

As these verses suggest, a parable need not necessarily be a story. Obviously, Jesus based His words of advice on what He saw take place before His very eyes (Luke 14:7). But His words for the time being apparently had little effect, for even at the Last Supper the disciples abandoned their Leader’s advice for the sake of arguing about who among them was the most distinguished (Luke 22:24).

The place of honor (Luke 14:8, NIV). Jewish tradition stated that places of honor were those closest to the host.

“The usual law of life is to use our invitations and our social clout to acquire friends and prestige. We want to put in our debt those who can enhance our social and business status.”—Bruce Larson, *The Communicator’s Commentary: Luke* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983), p. 220.

Immediately after telling the parable, Jesus instructed His host not to invite to dinner only people who could repay the favor. Instead, He declared that he also should invite those who could not repay. Notice that the people Jesus mentioned should be invited were social outcasts; people who, due to their station in life, needed some assistance; people who could not clamor for the places of honor.

Attitudes of pride and humility are best witnessed in how we treat other people, especially those people upon whom society often frowns. While pride motivates us to seek the pleasure and profit we can obtain only from the popular and prestigious, humility urges us “to remember that God sees mankind as one family, and that his love runs most quickly to the neediest.”—*The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 8, p. 254.

How does James present Jesus’ teaching on pride? James 2:1-5.

How can we obtain and retain humility? First of all, consider the facts: any one of us actually knows very little compared with the sum of all knowledge; and however important we believe ourselves to be, life existed before we were born and will go on without us when we die. Second, meditate upon Christ’s example of humility as described in 1 Peter 2:21-25. (Compare Luke 14:11.) Behold Him dying on the cross. He died for you. Third, communicate with Jesus, asking Him to change your attitude from love for self to supreme love for Him and for your fellow humans.

FURTHER STUDY: Contrast the disciples' pride with Jesus' humility as displayed at the Last Supper. John 13:1-17; Luke 22:24-27. How did Paul, a once proud person himself, reinforce Christ's example of humility? Rom. 12:10; Gal. 5:26; 6:14; Eph. 4:1-6; Phil. 2:3, 4.

Read *Christ's Object Lessons*, "Saying and Doing," pp. 272-283; "Two Worshipers," pp. 150-163.

"Christ would have His disciples understand that although He had washed their feet, this did not in the least detract from His dignity. 'Ye call me master and Lord; and ye say well; for so I am.' And being so infinitely superior, He imparted grace and significance to the service. No one was so exalted as Christ, and yet He stooped to the humblest duty. That His people might not be misled by the selfishness which dwells in the natural heart, and which strengthens by self-serving, Christ Himself set the example of humility. He would not leave this great subject in man's charge. Of so much consequence did He regard it, that He Himself, One equal with God, acted as servant to His disciples. While they were contending for the highest place, He to whom every knee shall bow, He whom the angels of glory count it honor to serve, bowed down to wash the feet of those who called Him Lord. He washed the feet of His betrayer."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 649.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Contrast Lucifer's desire for equality with God (Isa. 14:12-14; Eze. 28:11-19) with Christ's thoughts on the subject (Phil. 2:6-8).
2. After studying this week's lesson, what would you say pride costs? (Consider the origins of pride, what needs to be done about it, and the expense involved to the individual, the church, the Godhead, and society.)
3. In Luke 14:13, Christ instructed His host also to "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" (NIV). How do you feel about following these instructions? What do these instructions suggest about church membership?

SUMMARY: Pride is a cancer that hinders us from enjoying a meaningful relationship with Christ. It prevents us from making the most valuable discovery of all—that the only place of honor worth having is beside our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.



Global Mission Pioneers in Russia

James H. Zachary

The young man walked to the front of the room, then spoke. "I am Valery Starchenko," he began. "You would not have wanted to know me a year ago. I drank and smoked and spent my time and money on selfish pleasures. I had no interest in God." He hesitated again, seemingly reluctant to continue.

"Two years ago my wife became a Christian. I was angry. When I came home drunk, I often heard her say my name in prayer. 'Dear Lord, please help Valery to accept Jesus as his Savior. I love him and want him to experience the peace and joy You have given me.'

"At first her prayers angered me. I was an atheist. I wanted only to make money and have a good time. Religion was not for me."

Valery's expression changed. "Then something happened," he said. "I saw that my wife was kind and forgiving, but I was cruel. I began to repent of the evil I had done to her, and I asked her forgiveness.

"I began studying the Bible. This brought great joy to my family. Then last year I was baptized. Now I have a new life in Jesus. The old ways are gone. I have never been happier. Now my wife and I plan to spend a year working together as Global Mission Pioneers in the Ukraine. I know that there are other men who need to find a new life. I will tell them what Jesus has done for me and invite them to share the joy He gives."

During two recent training seminars in the Ukraine, some 140 Global Mission Pioneers were trained to establish new companies of believers in unentered areas in Russia or the Ukraine. After each team works in their assigned territory for six months, Quiet Hour evangelistic teams will conduct reaping meetings and help establish new churches in these formerly Communist countries.

Pray for the Starchenkos as they start their new life together in Jesus. And pray for all the Global Mission pioneers and the people who will come in contact with them, that they may accept the message of hope and life.



Valery Starchenko (left). James H. Zachary is evangelism coordinator for the Quiet Hour television broadcast.

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Serving the Master



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 16:1-9.

MEMORY TEXT: "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:23, 24, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: Part of being transformed by Christ and growing in grace through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit means that we will become active members of society, attracting others to the Saviour as we use our talents and gifts in service to the world.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING? During one summer, a pastor visited a woman who had a magnificent collection of rose bushes. She took him out into her yard to see them—white roses, red roses, yellow roses, climbing roses. She had every species he had heard of and a great many he had never heard of.

The woman began plucking roses right and left. Even when a bush had only one rose on it, she picked it. The pastor remonstrated, "You are robbing yourself, dear lady; you are spoiling your rose bushes."

"Ah," she said, don't you know that the way to make the rosebush flourish is to pluck its flowers freely? I lose nothing by what I give away."

This is a universal law. We don't lose by giving; we increase our capacity to give.

This week in our study of Christian growth, we will discuss the stewardship of our lives as God's children. We will examine, among other things, the purpose and results of such stewardship.

THE MASTER (Matt. 25:14-30).

When did Jesus tell His disciples the parable of the talents, and why? Matt. 24:3, 42.

“Christ on the Mount of Olives had spoken to His disciples of His second advent to the world. He had specified certain signs that were to show when His coming was near, and had bidden His disciples watch and be ready. . . . Then He showed what it means to watch for His coming. The time is to be spent, not in idle waiting, but in diligent working. This lesson He taught in the parable of the talents.”—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 325.

Christ was telling His disciples that soon He would be going back to heaven. But while they were waiting for Him to return, they were to continue their work on His behalf.

In the parable, the master gave a different amount of talents to each servant (Matt. 25:14, 15). What about the Christian life does this symbolize? Does it mean that God “plays favorites”?

What if God had made only one type of flower, one species of animal, one source of light? How interesting or practical would this world be if we were all the same?

God values variety for its beauty, as well as for its usefulness. Some of us are architects. We know how to draw plans for a church. Some of us are skilled craftspersons. We turn the blueprints into wood and stone. Others come along to fill the finished structure with word and song. The janitor, the painter, the gardener who brings flowers, and many with other talents—all the gifts of all the church members are needed! There is only one common element: God has given all of us at least one gift necessary to both the growth and maintenance of His church.

The master's reaction to what each of his servants did with the talents assures us that God is indeed impartial. When the master returned, he did not condemn the man who had only two talents for still having fewer talents than the servant who started out with five. Instead, he congratulated them both for being faithful. Notice also that the reward he gave each was the same (Matt. 25:21, 23). Likewise, God does not view us merely in light of what we can do, but whether or not we do what we can.

How can God's impartiality help you to view others you think are more talented than you? How can it help you to use faithfully the talent or talents God has given you?

THE SERVANTS (Matt. 25:14-30).

Yesterday in our study of the parable of the talents, we concentrated on the master. Today we will take a closer look at the three servants.

What can you conclude about each servant's relationship with the master? Matt. 25:20, 22, 24, 25. How did their relationship affect their behavior? Matt. 25:16-18.

Our relationship with Jesus is the essence of our Christian service. We can be effective servants only as we trust Him to (1) forgive us of our sins and (2) empower us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to display His love and concern for other people.

The servant with one talent did not view his master as a "hard man" because the master truly was such, but because the servant did not truly know the master. The servant was motivated not by a desire to serve well or to please his master, but by his fear of failure (Matt. 25:25). Such fear paralyzes us from doing our best. Indeed, as we learn from the parable, it prevents us from even trying.

Contrast the third servant's attitude with David's words in Psalm 119:76, 77: "May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant. Let your compassion come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight" (NIV). When the Word lives in our hearts (Ps. 119:11; John 1:1, 9, 12, 13), service on His behalf becomes a pleasure. Any fear of failure will evaporate along with concern for the number of talents God has given us.

If you had been the third servant, how would you have felt about receiving only one talent?

"However small your talent, God has a place for it. That one talent, wisely used, will accomplish its appointed work. By faithfulness in little duties, we are to work on the plan of addition, and God will work for us on the plan of multiplication. These littles will become the most precious influences in His work.

"Let a living faith run like threads of gold through the performance of even the smallest duties. Then all the daily work will promote Christian growth."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 360.

How does your relationship with God affect your attitude toward what you do? How can you faithfully improve the talent or talents God has given you?

THE TALENTS (Matt. 25:14-30).

The master, the servants, the talents. Christ, ourselves, and the abilities God has given each one of us that we are to use in service for Him. So far this week, we have concentrated on the characters in the parable of the talents. Today we will discuss the talents themselves.

The term *talent* first referred to a unit of weight, then to a unit of coinage. Modern use of the term to indicate an ability or gift stems from the parable.

Below is a list of talents or gifts. Describe how each might be used for the growth and maintenance of God's church. Can you think of others?

intellectual abilities	
organizational skills	
speech	
time	
money	
influence	

Influence "is a responsibility from which we cannot free ourselves. Our words, our acts, our dress, our deportment, even the expression of the countenance, has an influence. Upon the impression thus made there hang results for good or evil which no man can measure."
—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 339, 340.

What does the parable of the talents tell us about the relationship between the use of our talents and Christian growth?

Do you think of yourself as a five-talent person, a two-talent person, or a one-talent person? Explain.

How can you put to better use the talents God has given you?

WHICH MASTER WILL YOU SERVE? (Luke 16:1-9).

We read of people “subordinating the eternal to the temporal, the claims of the future to the affairs of the present”; people “mistaking phantoms for realities, and realities for phantoms”; refusing to view the unseen world by faith while greedily viewing “the things of this life as all-attractive and all-absorbing.” (See *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 366.) Do you know people like this? The next parable we will discuss tells how the attitudes of such people affect the stewardship of their lives on Christ’s behalf. We will meet a dishonest manager who abused his position and defrauded his employer, and hopefully learn a lesson from his behavior that will help us concentrate on things that draw us closer to our Saviour.

To whom did Jesus address this parable, and why? Luke 16:1, 14.

Jesus presented this parable “directly to the disciples.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 368. It was a few months before the end of His earthly ministry. As the grip of His “last-day events” took hold upon the disciples, they would need to remember that their devotion to Him must be single-minded. When Jesus spoke the words in verse 13, perhaps He even had in mind the disciple who would betray his Master to the authorities for 30 pieces of silver—the price of a slave.

“The master commended the dishonest manager” (Luke 16:8, NIV). It “is apparent that Jesus found in the rich man’s commendation of his steward something useful in teaching a lesson to the disciples and to the listening audience. . . . The cleverness with which this scheming rascal brought his career of misconduct to a climax was so amazing, and the thoroughness with which he carried out his plan so worthy of more noble objectives, that the rich man could not help admiring his steward’s sharpness and diligence.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 826.

Compare the unfaithful manager with the one-talent servant in Matthew 25:14-30. Which “masters” did they serve? What effect does each of these “masters” have on one’s service for the Lord?

In these last days, what prevents you from working single-mindedly for Christ? List some things you can do to concentrate more on Christ and His service.

CREATIVE MANAGING (Luke 16:1-15).

Yesterday we began discussing the parable of the unfaithful manager. Below, list the four lessons this parable teaches. How does each lesson relate to the stewardship of our lives as growing Christians?

Verse 8 _____

Verse 9 _____

Verses 10, 11 _____

Verse 13 _____

“Use worldly wealth to gain friends” Luke 16:9, NIV. “We are to use the material things entrusted to us to advance the interests of our Father in heaven, by applying them to the needs of our fellow men (Prov. 19:17; Matt. 19:21; 25:31-46; Luke 12:33) and to the advancement of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:13; 2 Cor. 9:6, 7).”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 827.

Faithfulness in small matters. People, cities, countries enjoy boasting about their best features, their largest building, their most powerful weapon of destruction, etc. But this parable tells us what greatness really is. It is “not the size of the means, but the intensity of the need to which it ministers. A lantern of itself is a small affair, but not when it shines to mark a harbor for some lost ship. A cup of cold water is almost trivial, but not to a man dying of thirst in a desert. What makes greatness? Not the measure of man’s body or even of his mind, but his willingness to work in double yoke with Jesus.”—*The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 8, p. 285.

Which of the four lessons above are the most meaningful to you at this point in your life?

How can you use material possessions to advance the gospel?

What small thing can you do for someone today that would make a great difference in that person’s life?

FURTHER STUDY: Think about the following people in the Bible. What gift or talent did each one receive from God? What was the outcome of their use or abuse of that gift or talent? What does that outcome teach us about stewardship and the growth of the Christian life? Dorcas (Acts 9:36-43); Mary, the sister of Lazarus (John 12:1-8); Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11); Joseph (Gen. 39-41).

Read one or both of the following chapters from *Christ's Object Lessons*: "Talents," pp. 325-365; "Friends by the Mammon of Unrighteousness," pp. 366-375.

"Whether we recognize it or not, we are stewards, supplied from God with talents and facilities, and placed in the world to do a work appointed by Him.

"To every man is given 'his work' (Mark 13:34), the work for which his capabilities adapt him, the work which will result in greatest good to himself and to his fellow men, and in greatest honor to God.

"Thus our business or calling is a part of God's great plan, and, so long as it is conducted in accordance with His will, He Himself is responsible for the results. . . . Thus there is no place for anxious care."—*Education*, pp. 137, 138.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. What specific gifts has God given the Seventh-day Adventist in particular? What is the corporate role in using these gifts for the advancement of the gospel and service to humanity? What is the individual church member's role?**
- 2. After studying this lesson, do you think that faithful stewardship regarding one's talents and gifts is essential to Christian growth? Why?**
- 3. List the talents and gifts possessed by each member of your Sabbath School class. Discuss ways in which your class as a unit can use these gifts in service for God. Then carefully plan to put at least one of these ways into action.**

SUMMARY: As Jesus' followers, under His direction, become faithful stewards of their gifts and talents, they will attract others to Him. Thus the church as a unit and members as individuals will grow stronger in the Christian graces.



Allah Answers

Riccardo Orsucci

Yaheya Nomao (YAY-ee-yah No-MAH-o) was a Muslim hired to help with an ADRA literacy program set up among the Touareg people, wandering nomads who live in the southern portions of the Sahara Desert in West Africa. As a conscientious Muslim, he had many questions about religion. Yaheya prayed to Allah, the Creator God of Islam, to show the way to full salvation. Yaheya searched for answers inside and outside his Muslim faith. He visited several Christian churches, but he was not satisfied. Then a friend introduced him to Zacharie, a young Muslim man who now worshiped the Christian God and had returned to his hometown to preach.

Yaheya and another friend, Alio (AH-lee-oh) soon began studying eternal truths with Zacharie. After many weeks of Bible study, the men were convinced that Allah had answered their prayers and had directed them to Zacharie.

Yaheya and Alio began to share with others what God had done for them. In time, Zacharie invited a pastor to travel to Tahoua and conduct a stop-smoking plan and a short evangelistic program. In the past, evangelical pastors had encountered fierce opposition from the Islamic community. But the villagers had heard Yaheya and Alio's testimony, and more than 300 persons attended the meetings. The pastor used the *Taurat*, the Muslim equivalent to the first five books of the Bible, to present basic Christian truths. Presentations were made on areas of Christian living that Adventists and Muslims have in common. More than 100 young people stayed for the question-and-answer period each night.

Yaheya and Alio committed their lives to Christ and were baptized, the first Adventists in this area of Muslim-dominated Niger. Alio is preparing to teach. When he finishes, he will return to lead the literacy program in his home area and become a lay evangelist to his own people. Yaheya has built a small straw hut in his yard where he holds Bible studies and witnesses to his family and friends.

Pray for Yaheya and Alio, true pioneer missionaries among their people. Thousands like Yaheya and Alio are praying to "Allah" for a knowledge of the true "Way, the Truth, and the Life." And pray for the desert people of West Africa who, for the first time, have an opportunity to hear the everlasting gospel.

Riccardo Orsucci is ADRA Director for the Sahel Union in West Africa.

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True Love



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Luke 10:25-37.

MEMORY TEXT: “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind’; and ‘your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Luke 10:27, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: Growing in grace enables Christians to react to fellow humans with compassion, regardless of race, gender, or beliefs.

NO LONGER ENEMIES. During the American Revolution, Peter Miller enjoyed the friendship of General George Washington. But the same could not be said regarding his relationship with Michael Wittman, a nasty sort of person who took great delight in opposing and humiliating Miller at every turn.

One day Wittman was arrested for treason and sentenced to death. Upon hearing the news, Miller walked 70 miles to plead with Washington for Wittman's life.

“No!” Washington insisted. “I cannot pardon your friend.”

“My friend!” exclaimed Miller. “He's my worst enemy!”

“You've just walked 70 miles to plead for the life of an enemy?” Washington cried. He was so impressed by Miller's gesture that he granted the pardon. Later, Miller took Wittman back home—no longer a foe, but a friend.—Adapted from Larson, *Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching*, p. 142.

In Luke 10, Jesus tells a similar story. As you study Jesus' answer, ask the Holy Spirit to help you determine which character in the story you most resemble.

COLORFUL CHARACTERS AND ROCKY ROADS (Luke 10:25-30).

Why did Jesus tell the parable of the good Samaritan? Luke 10:25-29.

Being an expert in the law, the lawyer knew the answer to his first question (Luke 10:25-27). But because he held the popular belief that the heathen and Samaritans were not "neighbors," he really wanted to know, "Which of my fellow Israelites are my neighbors?" Rabbis, priests, and elders engaged in endless ceremonies to purify themselves. Associating with the masses of their people caused defilement that dictated tiring effort to erase. Thus the question of whether or not they should consider these "unclean" Hebrews as their neighbors caused continual debate.

The parable itself is full of colorful characters and action. Even the setting is intriguing—the dangerous road between Jerusalem and Jericho. Because Jerusalem is 2,300 feet above sea level and Jericho 1,300 feet below sea level, this road is rather steep. In fact, in less than 20 miles, it drops 3,600 feet! Add to that its numerous rocky and narrow passageways, and you have excellent hideaways for bandits to lurk behind while they await their prey.

In the nineteenth century, travelers still paid safety money to the local sheiks to travel it. And in the 1930s, H. V. Morton related that someone warned him to get home before dark because a certain thief had gained his reputation by highjacking cars, robbing the occupants, and escaping into the hills before the authorities could arrive.

The evidence suggests that Jesus was describing an actual occurrence. (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 499.)

List the six characters in the parable, describing their role.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Consider the steep and rocky roads of life that you must travel. What "thieves" await to rob you of your relationship with God?

ABUSE AND NEGLECT (Luke 10:30-33).

Yesterday, you were to list the six characters in the parable of the good Samaritan. Today and the rest of the week, we will take a closer look at the role each played regarding the meaning of the parable.

The first person to appear on the scene is the victim (Luke 10:30). Based on what you learned yesterday about the road he was traveling, why was he taking a great risk?

The thieves are the next people we meet, and because they acted as one, we will consider them as "one" character. By taking the victim's possessions, robbing him of his clothes, and beating him until he was nearly dead, they displayed a lack of respect not only for a fellow human, but for themselves, as well.

What laws were the priest and Levite probably considering as they saw the helpless victim? Num. 19:11; Lev. 21:1-4. What admonition were they ignoring? Micah 6:8.

"He [the priest] could not be sure but he feared that the man was dead; to touch him would mean losing his turn of duty in the Temple; and he refused to risk that. He set the claims of ceremonial above those of charity. The Temple and its liturgy meant more to him than the pain of man."—William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 139.

"Came and looked on him" (Luke 10:32). Thus the King James Version implies that the Levite was perhaps a bit more interested in the victim's welfare than the priest. But he also "passed by on the other side." Maybe he too was concerned with the disruption that contamination would bring to his life. In addition to this, both the priest and the Levite were probably aware that bandits often used a member of their gang as a decoy to play the part of a wounded traveler. Then, when an unsuspecting person stopped to help, the other gang members would overpower him. The motto "Safety first" therefore could have been another factor in their decision to keep going.

Do you know people who are in difficult situations because of something they did or did not do? How can you help people who are victims of their own carelessness?

Can helping people sometimes enable them to continue with destructive behaviors? Explain.

THE HATED HELPS (Luke 10:33-35).

Imagine the victim's plight, drifting in and out of consciousness, perhaps long enough each time to realize that even "religious" men were not stopping to help him. Surely after the Levite passed by, hope did so, as well. But then the unexpected happened, a Samaritan took pity upon him.

Good Hebrews had shunned the Samaritans ever since the days of Ezra, when the Samaritans began intermarrying with pagans during the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests. (See 2 Kings 17:24-41.) The Samaritans built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim, and they accepted only the first books of the Bible. Thus the Hebrew people viewed the Samaritan religion as impure. You can review the trouble the Samaritans caused the Jews by reading Ezra 4 and Nehemiah 2, 4, and 6.

List at least four specific ways in which the Samaritan helped the victim. Luke 10:34, 35. What does the nature of the Samaritan's assistance teach us about what it means to "take pity" on someone?

"The fact that the Samaritan was traveling in what was to him a foreign district made his deed of mercy even more noteworthy. In this district it would be likely that the unfortunate wayfarer was a Jew, a member of the race that cherished the most bitter enmity against the Samaritans. The Samaritan knew well that if he had been the wounded victim lying beside the road he could have expected no mercy from any ordinary Jew. However, the Samaritan, at considerable risk to himself from the attacks of robbers, determined to help the poor victim."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 783.

The innkeeper does not figure as prominently in the story as the other characters do. But judging from the request of the Samaritan in Luke 10:35, what can we assume about him?

We can well reason that the Samaritan and innkeeper knew each other. The innkeeper's willingness to allow the victim to remain at his establishment based on the Samaritan's promise of reimbursement, plus the Samaritan's willingness to leave the victim in the innkeeper's care implies a certain level of trust toward each another.

The Samaritan asked the innkeeper to help care for the injured man. How eagerly do you respond when someone asks you to assist a person in need?

“WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?” (Luke 10:27, 29, 36, 37).

This week the parable of the good Samaritan has taught us that (1) we must help people who are victims of circumstances beyond their control, as well as those who seem to have brought their troubles on themselves (Monday's lesson), and (2) the help we give must be practical, not a mere feeling sorry for them (Tuesday's lesson). True compassion brings forth kind deeds.

But what about the answer to the lawyer's question, "Who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29)? Remember that he already believed the Samaritans and heathen could not be so. What he really wanted to know was who of the Jewish people should he consider his neighbors.

After carefully reviewing the parable and the previous days' lessons, answer the lawyer's question using your own words.

The parable also graphically portrays the meaning of Luke 10:27. (See also Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18.) Judging from the parable, what does it mean to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength"? (Deut. 6:5, NIV).

How do we love our neighbor as ourselves?

It is the natural order of things always to seek our own good first. And that is how we are to love our neighbors—by seeking *their* good first. The priest and Levite put their "needs" ahead of the victim's by being concerned only for their personal security and ritual cleanliness. But the Samaritan, without considering his own safety, stopped to assist a critically wounded man, someone who could even have been his enemy. Without reservation regarding the victim's status in life, without the assurance that the man would recover, he gave of his own resources to care for him.

Matthew 28:18-20 is known as the Christian's great commission. What other commission do we receive in Luke 10:37? How do the two commissions relate to each other? How can you "go and do likewise" today?

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27, NIV).

THE UNEXPECTED GOOD SAMARITAN (Phil. 2:4-8).

As part of our study of Luke 10:25-37, we took note of each of the characters in the parable. Today, we will study in even more detail the Samaritan.

Review again the Samaritan's actions. Whom does he symbolize? Phil. 2:4-8.

“In a very real way the mercy exhibited by the Samaritan reflects the spirit that moved the Son of God to come to this earth to rescue humanity. God was not obliged to rescue fallen man. He might have passed sinners by, as the priest and the Levite passed the luckless traveler on the road to Jericho. But the Lord was willing to be ‘treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves’ (DA 25).”
—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 783, 784.

In Tuesday's lesson, you listed ways in which the Samaritan helped the victim. Compare each item on your list with what Christ does for you as a sinner.

Christ was the unexpected good Samaritan to Zacchaeus, Bartimaeus, Mary Magdalene, the hungry crowd, the centurion, a dead girl, a sick woman, and Saul of Tarsus (see Matt. 8:5-13; 9:18-26; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 8:1, 2; 19:1-9; John 6:1-13; Acts 9:1-31). Can you think of others?

“Our Saviour manifested for us a love that the love of man can never equal. When we were bruised and dying, He had pity upon us. He did not pass us by on the other side, and leave us, helpless and hopeless, to perish. He did not remain in His holy, happy home, where He was beloved by all the heavenly host. He beheld our sore need, He undertook our case, and identified His interests with those of humanity. He died to save His enemies. He prayed for His murderers. Pointing to His own example, He says to His followers, ‘These things I command you, that ye love one another’; ‘as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.’ John 15:17; 13:34.”—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 381, 382.

How has Christ been an unexpected good Samaritan to you? Thank Him now for His wonderful gift of salvation and the many other ways He has shown compassion toward you. Ask Him to help you share His compassion with others, regardless of who they might be.

FURTHER STUDY: Compare the rich young ruler of Matthew 19:16-22 with the lawyer, the priest, and the Levite in the parable of the good Samaritan. Also read 1 John 3:11-20 and Matthew 5:43-48.

Read one or all of the following: *Christ's Object Lessons*, "Who Is My Neighbor?" pp. 376-389; *The Desire of Ages*, "The Good Samaritan," pp. 497-505.

"Love is the basis of godliness. Whatever the profession, no man has pure love to God unless he has unselfish love for his brother. But we can never come into possession of this spirit by *trying* to love others. What is needed is the love of Christ in the heart. When self is merged in Christ, love springs forth spontaneously. The completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within.

"Whatever the difference in religious belief, a call from suffering humanity must be heard and answered. Where bitterness of feeling exists because of difference in religion, much good may be done by personal service. Loving ministry will break down prejudice, and win souls to God."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 384, 386.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Describe the Samaritan's actions from the point of view of (a) personal inconvenience, (b) financial cost, and (c) risk. How much of a factor is each of these in discouraging your own neighborly actions?
2. Sabbath morning, Michael and Beth are ready to leave for church when a distraught neighbor appears at the door asking to use their telephone because her son, who is prone to outbursts of rage, has just torn hers from its outlet. Should they (a) show her where their phone is, then politely excuse themselves and leave for church? (b) tell her they are in a hurry to leave, but the neighbors across the street are home? (c) let her use their phone and stay with her until help arrives?

SUMMARY: The parable of the good Samaritan not only teaches us that true religion involves compassionate deeds to whomever is in need, but it also reminds us of the extent of Christ's love toward us.



Freed From Bondage

Leonard Atkins

“[Women] can do a work in families that men cannot do. . . . They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach.” (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 21, p. 30).

In Central Malawi, a young wife lived a miserable life as a prisoner in her own home. Her husband would not allow her to leave the house, and no one was permitted to visit her at home.

One day Mrs. E. G. Malopa, a pastor's wife, felt impressed to visit this woman. She found the young woman alone and was invited in. The young wife seemed nervous and kept watching the doorway, fearful that her husband might come home and chase Mrs. Malopa away. But the Lord kept the husband away, and the two women visited for more than an hour. During that time, the young wife shared the pain and stress that her husband's actions caused her.

Mrs. Malopa encouraged the young wife to trust the Lord, who could change her husband's heart if she asked Him. The women made a covenant with God. The young woman would set aside an offering of 50 kwacha (about \$3.75) as a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord, and the two women would pray for the husband throughout the following week. Then the wife would ask her husband to allow her to go to church.

On Friday, the young wife timidly approached her husband. Too afraid to ask to go to church, she asked if he would allow a friend to come to their home so he could meet her. To her surprise, he agreed. Excited, she sent an urgent message asking Mrs. Malopa to come quickly. “My husband wants to meet you. God has heard our prayers.”

Mrs. Malopa hurried to the woman's home, where the couple met her at the door. After a pleasant visit the man said, “I am delighted to have met you. Feel free to come to our house anytime. It would please me if my wife could attend the church where you pray, because you will be there with her.”

Today, this wife participates in many activities of the church. Her husband even provides transportation for the women when they need it. Now when Mrs. Malopa visits in their home, the husband insists that she pray before leaving, that God will bless their home. Join these two women in prayer for the husband's conversion.

Leonard Atkins is a pastor and hospital chaplain in Blantyre, Malawi.

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“To Forgive is Divine”



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matthew 18:21-35.

MEMORY TEXT: “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: The concept of forgiveness is crucial to Christianity. Without it there would be no such religion. Growing in grace enables Christians to forgive people who have harmed them, regardless of the offense.

COULD YOU BE THIS FORGIVING? The Norwegian writer Johan Bojer in *The Great Hunger* tells of a man whose child was killed by a neighbor's dog. Because he was not a vengeful person, the father found another means of relieving his grief. When a famine laid the neighbor's field bare and he had no corn to plant for the next year's harvest, the father went out one night and sowed the neighbor's field, explaining: “I sowed seed in my enemy's field that God might exist.”—Adapted from *A Treasury of Sermon Illustrations*, Charles L. Wallis, ed. (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), p. 126.

God will continue to exist despite anyone's ability or inability to forgive. But when we forgive another person, He will dwell not only in the heart of the person who forgives, but in the heart of the person being forgiven. This week we will study a parable of Jesus that deals with the importance of the difficult act of forgiving. Pray that the Holy Spirit will teach you how to forgive even that person who has hurt you the most.

WHAT IS FORGIVENESS? (Isa. 43:25; Micah 7:19).

Let's consider the nature of forgiveness. The words *forgive* and *forgiveness* are translations of Greek and Hebrew words "which have in common the idea of releasing an offender from guilt and of restoring the personal relationship that existed prior to the offense." —*SDA Bible Dictionary* (revised edition), p. 388. The two most common Hebrew words mean "to take away [guilt]," "to lift up," "to pardon," and "to forgive." The most common Greek words mean "to give graciously [as a favor]," "to cancel," "to let go," and "to send away." The Greek word for forgiveness used in Luke 4:18 and Colossians 1:14 (*aphesis*) means "release from captivity."

Who is involved in the process of forgiving? Matt. 6:12.

All of us have sinned against God (Rom. 3:23) and stand before Him condemned to death unless we repent (Rom. 6:23; Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 3:19). When we ask, we obtain forgiveness and are restored to a right relationship with God (1 John 1:9; Rom. 5:1).

"God is not obliged to forgive the guilty sinner, but His gracious character impels Him to do so whenever forgiveness is desired and requested (Ex 34:6, 7; Lam 3:22). The request, however, must be made in all sincerity and with the intent not to take advantage of the grace thus freely bestowed. When God forgives He does so completely and without reserve, restoring the sinner to the same state of favor he formerly enjoyed and removing all estrangement and alienation."—*SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 388.

How do the following texts describe God's forgiveness?

Micah 7:19 _____

Ps. 103:12 _____

Isa. 38:17 _____

Jer. 31:34 _____

Have you ever heard anyone say, "I can forgive [person's name], but I can't forget what [he, she] did to me"? What is wrong with this statement? Is it possible to recall the *fact* of a wrong without rancour or bitterness? Is it possible to forgive someone without regaining complete trust in that person? Explain.

QUANTITY VERSUS QUALITY (Matt. 18:21, 22).

As is so often the case, Jesus once again answers a question with a parable. What question prompted the parable of the unmerciful servant? Matt. 18:21.

Verses 15-20 of Matthew 18 contain instruction regarding conflicts and misunderstandings. Perhaps this instruction caused Peter to ask his famous question. But just as famous as his question is the answer he himself gave before Christ even had a chance to respond. (Peter was always so sure of himself!)

It has been suggested that the Pharisees misinterpreted Amos 1:3 to mean that a person should forgive an offender three times. But because Jesus taught that true righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20), and because the number seven was a Hebrew symbol of perfection, Peter thought his assessment of the issue was more than adequate.

How did Christ answer Peter's question? Matt. 19:22.

Read the quote below, and underline a sentence that to you gives the meaning of Christ's answer.

"Forgiveness is not a matter of mathematics or legal regulations, but an attitude. He who harbors within himself the idea that at some future time he will not forgive, is far from extending true forgiveness even though he may go through the form of forgiving. If the spirit of forgiveness actuates the heart, a person will be as ready to forgive a repentant soul the eighth time as the first time, or the 491st time as the eighth. True forgiveness is not limited by numbers; furthermore, it is not the act that counts, but the spirit that prompts the act."
—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 449.

Later, Peter realized the full truth of Jesus' answer and the parable that followed it. As his words betrayed his faith, as the Lord looked straight into his eyes, as the rooster crowed, as the tears flowed, Peter experienced the true nature of forgiveness (Luke 22:54-62). In Christ's "gentle countenance he read deep pity and sorrow, but there was no anger there."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 713.

Recall a time in your life when you experienced either God's forgiveness or the forgiveness of another person. How did this forgiveness improve your quality of life? In what ways did it improve your relationship with God?

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS (Matt. 18:23-35).

If the parable of the unmerciful servant were a play, it easily could be divided into three acts. As you read Matthew 18:23-35, try to determine which verses fall into each act. Give a title to each act.

Act 1 _____

Act 2 _____

Act 3 _____

The king's behavior symbolizes the way God deals with us. Whom then does the king represent?

Just as the king pardoned his servant an enormous sum, so Christ pardons us of our sin. If not, we would be sold into the slavery of sin.

The servant pleaded for the king to have patience, promising that he would pay back his debt. But his debt was enormous. Most likely it was more than the total budget for the province in which he lived. In other terms, it equaled 60 million working days! Obviously, the king knew there was no way the servant could repay him. Likewise, there is nothing we can do to pay the debt of sin we owe. But when we sincerely repent, God frees us from that debt.

What does the servant's behavior in Matthew 18:28-30 tell us about the nature of his repentance? Compare his fellow servant's speech with the speech he himself had made to the king (verses 26, 29).

The second servant's debt was 100 denarii, which amounted to only 100 days' wages. Contrast that to the debt owed by the first servant, and you can better understand how selfish the first servant was. He did not need the money to pay back his debt, for the king had pardoned it. Obviously he cared only for himself. Such selfishness blinded him to the vastness of his own debt, prevented him from appreciating the king's exceptional mercy, and caused him to deal harshly with a fellow human.

How real to you is your indebtedness to God? Think of someone you are having difficulty forgiving. How would it help to compare this person's actions to what God has forgiven you? Even though you feel that this person's debt to you is great, how can you acquire a forgiving spirit?

HOW TO LOSE IT ALL (Matt. 18:32-34).

We have discussed the king and the servant who owed him a sum too enormous to repay. Today we will take another look at the king. Describe his reaction when he heard about the first servant's behavior toward another servant. Matt. 18:32-34.

The king's response is shocking, especially when we consider how compassionate he had been earlier toward the same person! Yet such a stunning reaction tells us precisely how serious an offense it is not to forgive a fellow human. (See verse 35.)

The king's question in verse 33 sums up the meaning of the parable. "In so far as his finite limitations permit, the Christian will emulate the perfect and complete manner of God's forgiveness whenever someone offends him. . . . The fact that the Christian has been the recipient of a full measure of divine forgiveness places him under the most strict obligation to forgive his fellow men when occasion arises to do so—the same extent that he has been forgiven." —*SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 370.

What do Christians lose if they refuse to forgive others? Matt. 6:12-15.

Jesus ends this parable with the following admonition, "So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister *from your heart*" (Matt. 18:35, NRSV; italics supplied). Thus He returns us to Peter's question, How often should I forgive someone who has offended me? It is not a matter of how *often*, but simply of *how*. If we say we have forgiven someone but continue to hold a grudge, have we forgiven that person *from the heart*? If we say we have forgiven someone because circumstances dictate that we do so or because we are motivated by an ulterior motive, have we forgiven that person *from the heart*? "It is the attitude of the heart that imparts to the words ['I forgive you'] a fullness of meaning they would otherwise lack. The pretense of forgiveness . . . may deceive the one to whom it is accorded, but not Him who looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7)." —*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 450.

Jane spread an untruth about Linda. Years later, Linda still finds it difficult to forgive Jane. What should Linda do? How will an unforgiving attitude affect Linda's spiritual freedom and fellowship with God?

A PRIME EXAMPLE (Luke 23:34).

The parable of the unmerciful servant teaches us that because God has forgiven us our great debt of sin, we are to forgive others the offenses, large and small, they have committed against us. It also teaches us that forgiveness is attitude, not arithmetic. With this in mind, let us now contemplate the greatest story of forgiveness ever told.

As you read Luke 22:47–23:34, consider what it cost Jesus to be so forgiving and where we would be today if He had not been so. Thinking about these things will help us understand why forgiveness is so essential to Christianity.

Jesus spoke a host of amazing words, but none as amazing as “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). How wonderful Christian forgiveness is! When we are tempted to hold a grudge or give in to bitterness, let us hear again Jesus asking forgiveness for those who dared to crucify Him. Then let Paul’s advice be our course of action: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:32, NIV).

Why do you think Jesus was able to extend such forgiveness? Luke 6:12; 22:39–46 will give you clue. Use your Bible’s concordance and cross references to find similar verses.

Just as Jesus’ spirit of forgiveness upon the cross is an example to us, so is the relationship He maintained with His Father. Such a relationship took time and effort. Yet the price of neglect was far higher.

In Galatians 5:22, 23, Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit—Jesus’ character. Even though these verses omit the word *forgiveness*, we cannot imagine that someone described in such a way could be otherwise than forgiving. The apostle continues by stating in verse 24 that “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature” (NIV) described in verses 19–21. Surely an unforgiving spirit can cause hatred, disagreement, jealousy, fits of rage, conflict, division, and envy. In a sense, it can even cause idolatry, for when we hold such a spirit, we are basically worshiping our selfish inclinations. Let us therefore stand at the cross with those whom we need to forgive and look, not at each other, but at our Saviour, bleeding and dying, so He could pardon us all.

FURTHER STUDY: Read Acts 6:8–8:1. Especially notice Acts 7:60. What effect must Stephen's act of forgiveness have had upon Saul? See *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 101.

Read one or both of the following: *Christ's Object Lessons*, "The Measure of Forgiveness," pp. 243-251; *The Desire of Ages*, "Calvary," pp. 741-757.

"Our Saviour taught His disciples to pray: 'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.' A great blessing is here asked upon conditions. We ourselves state these conditions. We ask that the mercy of God toward us may be measured by the mercy which we extend to others. Christ declares that this is the rule by which the Lord will deal with us: 'If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.' Wonderful terms! but how little are they understood or heeded. One of the most common sins, and one that is attended with most pernicious results, is the indulgence of an unforgiving spirit. . . . We are dependent upon the pardoning mercy of God every day and every hour; how then can we cherish bitterness and malice toward our fellow sinners! If, in all their daily intercourse, Christians would carry out the principles of this prayer, what a blessed change would be wrought in the church and in the world! This would be the most convincing testimony that could be given to the reality of Bible religion."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 170, 171.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What obligation does the person being forgiven have? What should be our attitude if the person being forgiven does not sense the need of forgiveness and, therefore, does not accept it?
2. How does forgiveness affect community, or fellowship, within the church?
4. What does Matthew 18:31 suggest about how we should react toward injustice?
5. If a conference treasurer embezzled church funds, would we recommend that he be forgiven and then reinstated in his former position?

SUMMARY: Without forgiveness, we are estranged from God and our fellow humans. With it, we become children of God, brothers and sisters to each other, and radiant examples to the world of Christ's love.



Adriano's Witness, Part 1

Quirino Alencar

Young Adriano loved music. An Adventist musical group performing in his city caught his attention. He met the members of the group and began asking questions about their music and their church. Their beliefs thrilled him, and he began studying the Bible with them. At age 16 he joined the Adventist Church. He also joined the musical group that had shared the gospel with him.

Adriano's parents were not happy that he had left the family's church. They pressured him to return to their faith. His father, a butcher, often brought home pork, which his mother cooked with many foods, making it difficult for Adriano to avoid eating unclean meat. Often the boy went without food rather than compromise his beliefs.

The family kept up the pressure on Adriano, but he refused to give in. He remained faithful and often invited his family to come to the church to hear his musical group perform. But they refused to attend. They did not want to hear anything about the Adventists.

Adriano was a natural leader and was popular among the church's youth. He became a youth pastor and a deacon. But music was his first love. He often sang solos with the youth choir, both at the church and in rallies held in nearby towns.

On the way home from a neighboring town where the church's young people had held a rally, the vehicle in which the youth were riding was involved in an accident. Two young people were killed instantly. Adriano died on the way to the hospital.

When the pastor learned of the tragic accident, he and several young people from the church went to visit Adriano's family. They found the family's home filled with people who had come to mourn the loss of this young man. The family's own pastor had not come to the home, and when Adriano's father saw the Adventist pastor, he said, "My son loved music. Please sing to comfort us." The group sang, and members of the Adventist Church stayed with the family throughout the day and night. The next day Adriano would be buried. Would his death be the end of the family's contact with the Adventist Church?

(Continued next week)

Quirino Alencar is now a pastor in Maranhao State in Brazil. Adriano's family lives in the city of Imperatriz, Brazil.

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We're on Our Way



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Luke 12:35-40; Matt. 25:35-40.

MEMORY TEXT: "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Luke 12:40, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: This week's lesson answers the question, How should Christians await their Lord's return?

AN AIRLINE STEWARD HELPED THE NERVOUS YOUNG MAN find his seat next to a young woman who was a frequent flyer. Noticing that her seatmate even listened to the monologue concerning passenger safety, she smiled and asked, "Is this your first flight?"

The young man nodded and grinned in return. Then he pulled out of his carry-on bag a picture of an attractive woman who appeared to be about his age. "I'm going to visit my fiancée and meet her parents." Just then another steward announced that the captain had turned on the fasten-seatbelt sign. The apprehensive passenger released the photo only long enough to click his seatbelt into place and tuck his duffle bag under the seat in front of him. He was interested in and concerned about everything relating to the Boeing 747 that would carry him to the arms of his beloved.

As Christians, we are on our way to see our Beloved—Jesus Christ. Are we as interested in how we make the trip as the young man in the illustration? Yes, we are going to see our Saviour. What should we be doing as we await our arrival?

TO BE OR NOT TO BE—FAITHFUL (Luke 12:35-40).

Even though Jesus is speaking to His disciples (Luke 12:22), there is a crowd of thousands gathered around Him (Luke 12:1). Thus, with this parable, Jesus teaches publicly for the first time about His second coming.

In Luke 12:40, Jesus states the meaning of the parable. What does the parable tell us about what it means to be ready? Verse 35.

“Let your loins be girded about” (Luke 12:35) refers to how a man would gather the loose folds of his outer garment and tuck them into his belt so he could work unhindered.

“And your lights burning” (Luke 12:35). A typical artificial source of light in Bible times consisted of a wick floating in a “sauce boat” of oil. The wick constantly needed to be trimmed and the oil refilled or the light would fail.

The servants in the parable are waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet. Such a “banquet might consist only of a single meal; but if the host were a person of wealth, the feasting could continue for days. When the master of the servants attended a wedding banquet, he would be absent from the household for an indeterminate length of time. Because of the uncertainty a servant might neglect normal responsibilities and become lazy. Such a servant would be faithless. On the other hand a servant might diligently attend to the usual duties regardless of the master’s absence and the uncertainty of the time of the master’s return.”—Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 83.

One of those duties included waiting by the gate for the master so one could open it immediately upon his return (verse 36). Because people then did not usually travel at night, it would be logical for a servant to assume that once the sun had set, his master would not be coming. The next logical thought easily could be to neglect to wait by the gate until it was daylight.

What did Jesus say about performing a duty, regardless of the apparent need for that duty to be done? Luke 12:38.

The second watch was three hours before midnight, while the third watch occurred three hours after midnight.

What “outer garment” prevents you from faithfully serving Christ while you await His return?

SERVICE WITH A TWIST (Luke 12:37).

What interesting, unexpected turn of events occurs in the parable? Luke 12:37.

Certainly this master is the one to work for! His fringe benefits are highly unusual. And not only that, he himself sets the example of service for his employees.

List at least three specific occasions and their texts when the Son of Man served people while He lived on earth.

"In His life and lessons, Christ has given a perfect exemplification of the unselfish ministry which has its origin in God. God does not live for Himself. By creating the world, and by upholding all things, He is constantly ministering for others. . . . This ideal of ministry God has committed to His Son. Jesus was given to stand at the head of humanity, that by His example He might teach what it means to minister. His whole life was under a law of service. He served all, ministered to all. Thus He lived the law of God, and by His example showed how we are to obey it."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 649.

In what ways does Christ serve us now?

Heb. 4:14 _____

Heb. 5:9 _____

Ps. 5:12 _____

Ps. 29:11 _____

In the future, Christ will serve us at the grandest wedding banquet of all—the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9). Thus this little parable teaches us that in order to be served by Christ, we must be willing and faithful to serve others.

As Jesus showed when He washed the disciples' feet at their last Passover together, service for another need not be on a grand scale. What little service that could bring great comfort can you do for someone today?

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS (Luke 12:39).

The parable we have been studying teaches us that while we are waiting for Christ to return, we are to engage in faithful service on His behalf. How did Christ further develop this concept within this passage? Luke 12:39.

The person who owned the house not only provided for the material needs of the people under his care. He was responsible for protecting them, as well. Thus, it was his obligation to make sure the gate was guarded at all times. Furthermore, if the owner were to be warned of an approaching burglar, he would defend the gate with extra guards.

We have a duty to protect what Christ has delegated to our care. What might some of the things be that He has asked us to safeguard? Think of ways we can safeguard them.

Gen. 1:28; Ps. 115:16 _____

Ps. 127: 3 _____

1 Thess. 2:4 _____

Rev. 12:17; 19:10 _____

God "has given to every man his work; and every true worker sheds forth light to the world, because he is united with God and Christ and heavenly angels in the grand work of saving the lost. From divine association he becomes more and more intelligent in working the works of God. In working out what divine grace works in, the believer becomes spiritually great. He who works according to his entrusted ability will become a wise builder for the Master; for he is under the apprenticeship to Christ, learning to work the works of God. He will not shun burdens of responsibility, for he will realize that each one must lift in the cause of God to the extent of his ability, and he places himself under the pressure of the work; but Jesus does not leave His willing and obedient servant to be crushed. It is not the man who carries heavy responsibilities in the cause of God who needs your pity, for he is faithful and true in cooperation with God; and through union of divine and human effort, the work is made complete. It is he who shuns responsibilities, who has no realization of the privilege to which he is called, who is an object of pity."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 376.

HOW CAN I HELP YOU? (Matt. 25:35-40).

The first parable we studied this week taught us that we must be ready for Christ to return even when we do not expect Him, and that to be ready means to be active in His work. Today and tomorrow we will study a parable that describes in more detail what our service should consist of while we await His return.

Once again, Jesus uses items familiar to the people to get His point across. In Palestine, sheep and goats were often tended together in one flock. Thus, Matthew 25:32 depicted a familiar sight.

On what basis does the Son of Man separate the people? Matt. 25:34-36, 41-43.

What principles about helping others can we learn from this parable? Matt. 25:35-40.

1. Matt. 25:35, 36. Associated with the all-important sharing of the gospel is the effort to satisfy people's basic needs for food and water, clothing, shelter, healthcare, and companionship. We need people who can fund the building of a new hospital or university science laboratory. Not everyone has such resources. But we can all give simple help to the people whose lives we touch.

2. Matt. 25:37-39. The type of help God accepts is that which is a natural reaction of a loving heart. In the parable, those who helped did so, not because they wanted to earn favor with God, but because they were constrained by love to serve others. The people on the right and the left both asked the same question, "Lord, when did we see you?" (verses 37, 44, NIV). But what the people on the left actually meant was "Lord, if we had known it was really You instead of just some homeless beggar, we would have helped!"

3. Matt. 25:40. Whatever we do for another person, we do for Christ. How is this so? If you really want to make parents happy, do something for their child. God is our parent, and the way to gladden His heart is to help His children—our fellow humans.

"In making the needs of others our responsibility we reflect this same aspect of the divine character. When we reflect the character of Jesus perfectly we will feel as He does toward those in need, and through us He will be able to solace and succor others. The best evidence of love for God is love that leads us to bear 'one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2 . . .)."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 512.

THAT PERSONAL TOUCH (Matt. 25:35).

As you review Matthew 25:31-46, notice that the help given is administered on a one-to-one basis instead of through group effort. Why did Christ emphasize the personal touch in helping others?

Describe some dangers and benefits in utilizing committees and organizations to help others.

The importance of serving others while we await the return of Christ is underscored by the reward we obtain if we do so or the punishment we receive if we do not. (See Matt. 25:34, 41, 46.) This reward or punishment is a natural result. It should never become the motivation that calls us to service. You will remember from yesterday's lesson one of the principles regarding service this parable teaches—the type of help that wins God's approval is that help which is a natural reaction of a loving heart.

When Christ came to this earth the first time, He concealed His glory in order to live among us. The kingdom He established then was His kingdom of grace. But when He comes the second time, He will come in His glory (Matt. 25:31) to set up His eternal kingdom (Rev. 11:15), referred to in Matthew 25:34 as the inheritance.

“Everlasting fire” (Matt. 25:41, KJV) refers to the fires that destroy the wicked in the last days. The Greek word means “lasting for an age” and was often used to describe the Roman emperors—they held office for life. The length of time signified by this Greek word was determined by the character of the object it described. In the case of Tiberius Caesar, the word describes a 23-year period—the time his reign began until the time of his death.

Following the principle that the length of time signified by the Greek word was determined by the nature of the object it described, “we find that the reward of the righteous is life to which there is no end; the reward of the wicked is death to which there is no end (John 3:16; Rom. 6:23; etc.). In John 3:16 ‘everlasting life’ is contrasted with ‘perish.’ In 2 Thess. 1:9 the wicked are said to be ‘punished with everlasting destruction.’ The expression does not signify a *process* that goes on forever, but an act whose *results* are permanent.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 513. (See also Jude 7.)

Review this week's lesson by summarizing what it means to be ready for Christ's return. Include as part of your summary how you can put this meaning to use in your life.

FURTHER STUDY: Meditate upon Isaiah 58.

Read "Doing for Christ," *Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 24-37.

"I have been instructed to refer our people to the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah. Read this chapter carefully and understand the kind of ministry that will bring life into the churches. The work of the gospel is to be carried by means of our liberality as well as by our labors. When you meet suffering souls who need help, give it to them. When you find those who are hungry, feed them. In doing this you will be working in lines of Christ's ministry. The Master's holy work was a benevolent work. Let our people everywhere be encouraged to have a part in it."—*Welfare Ministry*, p. 29.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Part of Isaiah 58 deals with the Sabbath (verses 13, 14). How can the Sabbath help us to "be dressed ready for service"? (Luke 12:35, NIV).
2. Time goes faster when we are occupied with meaningful work. Relate our being occupied in work for the Lord to the discussion that often surfaces regarding the seeming delay of Christ's return.
3. How can meeting people's basic needs help them to help themselves? What other types of assistance can help people to improve their situations?

SUMMARY: We are on our way to see our Saviour. Indeed, to *live* with Him. While we await this reunion, let us encourage others to share such good fortune through our disinterested service in their behalf.



Adriano's Witness, Part 2

Quirino Alencar

Adriano was a teenager whose love for music drew him to the Adventist Church. His family, members of another church, objected to his decision to become an Adventist. They made it difficult for Adriano to remain true to his new beliefs. But Adriano had found something that he could not deny, and he held fast to his faith. He sang in a choir that traveled to other towns to witness for the church. But an accident on the way home from one musical rally took the lives of three Adventist youths. Adriano was one of them.

The day after he died, Adriano was buried. Nearly every member of the local Adventist church attended the funeral, held in driving rain. But members of the family's church had not come, because Adriano had chosen to leave their church and join the Adventists. Even the family's pastor had stayed away. The family was shocked and saddened but asked the Adventist pastor to speak.

The pastor told of Adriano's influence on the church members and encouraged the family to honor Adriano's faith. He assured the family that they would meet Adriano again in heaven. Then Adriano's singing group sang his favorite hymn, which contained the words of Revelation 22:7, "Behold I come quickly."

Later Adriano's father said, "In this time of our need, I have seen that my church does not have the love of Jesus, but the Seventh-day Adventist Church has this love. I want to visit the church that offers love." Adriano's father began to study the Adventist message. He testifies, "I miss my son, but through his death many lives will be saved for eternity."

Adriano's parents, his brothers, and his grandmother have been baptized into the Adventist Church. His father has witnessed to several members of his former church, and they have become Adventists, as well. Even his butcher shop is a testimony to his changed life. He no longer sells unclean meats. In fact, before his baptism, he sold all his pigs and destroyed the pig sty. He wanted nothing more to do with these animals.

Adriano does not know that his death has brought his family to the Adventist Church. But when Christ comes, Adriano will sing with joy as he sees his family receive the blessing of Jesus in heaven.

Quirino Alencar now pastors in Maranhao State in Brazil. Adriano's family lives in the city of Imperatriz, Brazil.

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When Five Plus Five Equaled Five



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 25:1-13.

MEMORY TEXT: "Abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: Waiting for the Lord's return does not mean that we sit idle. We prepare ourselves for the glorious event by ever strengthening our relationship with Him and serving others on His behalf.

PREPARING FOR A SPECIAL EVENT CAN BE AS EXCITING AS THE EVENT ITSELF. And certainly thoughtful preparations help us to be confident that the event will be a rewarding one.

Around the world, people prepare to celebrate the first coming of Christ in many different ways. In Mexico, families trim their houses with greenery and nativity scenes. These decorations set the stage for the many *posadas* in which they will take part—processions of family and friends that go from house to house by prearranged invitation. These processions symbolize Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem.

Lights play an important role in Canada, where in Esquimalt, British Columbia, the Canadian navy prepares for the holiday by stringing their ships with colored lights. Meanwhile, Ukrainian families in Canada often plan to place a candle on the table during Christmas Eve to symbolize the star of Bethlehem. Three special loaves of bread must be baked to place around the candle. These represent God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

What effort do we need to put into preparing for Christ's second coming? This week's lesson will answer this all-important question.

VIVID PICTURES (Matt. 25:1-13).

Jesus' setting for the parable of the ten maidens portrays a vivid picture of an ancient Near Eastern wedding. Usually held in the evening, the bridal party would await the bridegroom at the bride's home. Upon arrival, the groom would accompany the bride and attendants to his own house, where the guests would partake of a feast. While the maidens linger, their lamps burn as brightly as their expectations. We can imagine them gathered around the door, holding their lamps out into the night as they search for signs of the bridegroom's arrival. But as his delay lengthens, they grow weary with waiting.

Match the following elements of the parable to the items below. (a) the experience being related by the parable; (b) the five wise maidens; (c) the five foolish maidens; (d) the bridegroom; (e) the lamps; (f) the oil; (g) a time of waiting; (h) the arrival of the bridegroom; (i) midnight; (j) light from the oil.

- _____ 1. the Holy Spirit
- _____ 2. the word of God
- _____ 3. those who know the truth and have yielded to the Holy Spirit
- _____ 4. the darkest hour of earth's history
- _____ 5. Christ's second coming
- _____ 6. good deeds; works of service
- _____ 7. the experience of the church just before the second coming
- _____ 8. when our faith is tested
- _____ 9. those who know the truth, but have not yielded to the Holy Spirit
- _____ 10. Christ

We will discuss each of these elements throughout the week. You can check your answers with the material found in each day's lesson.

Jesus knew that the end of His earthly ministry was near, that soon the disciples would be in turmoil as they gazed upon Him dying a criminal's death. With this story, He was telling them that there was hope beyond their Calvary tears. Hope in the coming of their Lord.

When and how has the Lord shown you hope beyond the tears that blinded your eyes? How did these experiences help you to have faith in all of Christ's promises?

BEG, BORROW, OR STEAL (Ps. 119:105; Zech. 4:1-6; Matt. 25:11, 12).

What meaning did Christ give to His parable of the ten maidens? Matt. 25:13.

As we study each element of the parable, we will learn more about what it means to keep watch.

Just as the bridesmaids waited for the groom, so the church waits for Christ to return. What is our "lamp" and "oil"? Ps. 119:105; Zech. 4:1-6.

Zerubbabel and his companions were depressed. They had little resources with which to rebuild the temple. And opposition from their enemies stalled what little they could do. But God showed them that His objectives are achieved not so much through human effort as through the power of His Holy Spirit.

So it is with the church today. Its members know the truth as it is in Scripture. They believe in Christ's return and eagerly look forward to seeing Him. But while they wait, their faith is tested. The resources they have to work with appear small, opposition to their efforts overwhelming. Those who have yielded to the influence of the Holy Spirit will encounter success and will be ready to meet Christ. But those who have not yielded, fall prey to discouragement and will, therefore, be caught off guard when Christ returns.

Such people are acquainted with God's commands and promises. But they have not allowed these to transform their lives. Like the stony-ground hearers in the parable of the sower, they gladly accept the truth, but they do not permit it to become the motivating force in their lives.

Listen to the cries of the five foolish maidens at the door of the groom's house, for they teach us well. First, there are certain items we cannot obtain at the last minute. A relationship with Christ is one such thing. We cannot expect to be ready for Him if we have not prepared for Him. And second, there are certain things we cannot borrow. Just as the foolish maidens could not borrow oil from their companions, so we cannot borrow a relationship with God. We must have our own.

How would you rate your relationship with God? Do you depend too much on those around you for your spiritual well-being? Always remember, someone else's account is not a bank from which you can withdraw blessings.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE (Matt. 25:7; Joel 2:28, 29).

All ten virgins were surprised by the bridegroom's arrival. But only five were prepared to make the trip to his house. What was it that made the difference? Matt. 25:7, 8. What about the Christian life does this symbolize?

“The wise virgins of the parable represent those Christians who understand, appreciate, and avail themselves of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. ‘Wise’ indeed are Christians today who welcome the Holy Spirit into their lives and cooperate with Him in His appointed task.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 508.

Describe the various tasks of the Holy Spirit. John 3:5, 6; 16:7-15; Gal. 5:16-26; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Joel 2:28, 29.

The Holy Spirit gives spiritual fruit to all believers and special gifts based on our individual abilities and the needs that exist in each of our personal experiences. The motivating factor in the distribution of these gifts is to prepare us to meet Christ at His second coming. (See *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 772.)

Ephesians 4:12 further states that we receive these gifts for yet another reason: “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (NIV). In Ephesians, chapter 5, Paul urges us to live as children of light. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)” (Eph. 5:8, 9, NIV). When our lights shine as a result of the Holy Spirit transforming our lives and living in us, the good deeds and works of service He enables us to perform will illuminate all the little corners of the world in which we live.

Joel 2:28, 29 speaks of more than just the reception of the Spirit that accompanies conversion and changes the life. This prophecy met partial fulfillment at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). It will reach its fullness “in the manifestation of divine grace which will attend the closing work of the gospel.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. ix.

How is it a source of encouragement to you that the Holy Spirit distributes His gifts according to our individual abilities and needs? Why should you not feel slighted if someone has a greater number of gifts, or more visible gifts, than you have?

NEVER GIVE UP THE SHIP! (Matt. 25:5; Gen. 7:7-10).

In the parable of the ten virgins, there is a period of waiting symbolizing the wait for Christ's return that we are now experiencing. During this time, our faith is often tried, and we are inclined to grow weary.

As you read the following texts, note who was involved, what they were waiting for, what they did while waiting, and the final outcome.

	Gen. 7:7-10	Exod. 32:1-4, 25-35	Acts 1:4, 5; 2:1-4, 14, 41
Who waited and what were they waiting for?			
What did they do while waiting?			
What was the final outcome?			

What do these examples teach us about the importance of what we do while we wait for Christ to return?

It has been nearly 2,000 years since Christ promised to return. Why do you think His coming has been delayed so long? What negative effects has this had on you? What can you do to overcome these effects and take Christ's promise more seriously?

WHAT TIME IS IT? (Matt. 24:30, 31; 25:6).

In the parable we are studying this week, when did the bridegroom finally arrive? Matt. 25:6.

The time when the bridegroom arrives symbolizes the point in earth's history when Christ will return. What will the world be like just before the second coming?

Matt. 24:5 _____

Matt. 24:6 _____

Matt. 24:12 _____

Matt. 24:37, 38 _____

Luke 21:11 _____

Despite the ark's testament to the coming flood, people continued with their daily rounds of labor and desire, totally disregarding the event soon to come upon them. Such will be the attitude of many people just before Christ returns.

But God calls upon His people to broadcast "a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known. Into the darkness of the world is to be shed the light of His glory, the light of His goodness, mercy, and truth. . . .

"Those who wait for the Bridegroom's coming are to say to the people, 'Behold your God.' The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 415, 416. (See Isa. 60:2; 40:9, 10.)

We have listened to the appeals of the foolish maidens and considered what their cries teach us. Look now upon the Light shining from the lamps of the five wise maidens. Are you on the pathway made visible by that Light? Outline for yourself all that is involved in being one of the believers represented by the wise maidens.

FURTHER STUDY: Review this week's memory text, 1 John 2:28. Then read John 15:1-17. What does it mean to abide in Christ? How do these verses help us understand what it means to prepare for His return?

Also read any or all of the following: *Christ's Object Lessons*, "To Meet the Bridegroom," pp. 405-421; *The Great Controversy*, "Prophecies Fulfilled," pp. 393, 394; "In the Holy of Holies," pp. 426, 427; *The Story of Redemption*, "The Second Angel's Message," "The Midnight Cry," pp. 367-374.

"All who wait for the heavenly Bridegroom are represented in the parable as slumbering because their Lord delayed His coming; but the wise roused themselves at the message of His approach, and responded to the message, and their spiritual discernment was not all gone, and they sprang into line. As they took hold of the grace of Christ, their religious experience became vigorous and abundant, and their affections were set upon things above. They discerned where was the source of their supply, and appreciated the love that God had for them. They opened their hearts to receive the Holy Spirit, by which the love of God was shed abroad in their hearts. Their lights were trimmed and burning, and sent forth steady rays into the moral darkness of the world. They glorified God, because they had the oil of grace in their hearts, and did the very work that their Master did before them—went forth to seek and to save those who were lost. . . .

"The very best credentials we can carry is love for one another. All strife, all dissension, is to cease. God will not accept the talents of the smartest, the most eloquent man if the inner lamp of the soul is not trimmed and burning. There must be a consecrated heart, and consecrated surrender of the soul."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 1099, 1100.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. According to the parable we have studied this week, what is wisdom?
2. In a paragraph of four or five sentences, write what it means to keep watch for the Lord's return.
3. What customs or events in your part of the world could you use to illustrate the meaning of the parable of the ten maidens?

SUMMARY: The story in Matthew 25:1-13 is every bit a call to service as is the gospel commission of Matthew 28:19, 20. Let us trim our lamps, replenish our oil, and be on our way.



More Powerful Than Magic, Part 1

Peter Tambala and Beverly H. Koester

Peter Tambala spent his school vacation canvassing near his home village in a remote area of Malawi. The 18-year-old student often walked six to twelve miles a day, carrying Bibles and literature to sell. Church leaders welcomed the youth as a fellow worker and often invited him to eat at the ministers' table. Sometimes they asked him to present a sermon or help with other church work besides his canvassing.

But Peter's acceptance by the ministers presented a problem for the older members. Traditionally, youth were not to take part in the divine service. This privilege was reserved for senior elected church officers only. In some areas, to go against tradition sometimes brought retaliation by use of magic.

Since Peter had become a Christian, he had decided that magic was simply a superstition in people's mind. But when a student at his school suddenly died, his friends said some others had put a curse on the boy because they were jealous that he was doing better than they. "Magic is real," Peter said. "And it is scary."

One day Peter visited an older man in his village. The man warned Peter that he no longer seemed to be a "village boy," that he acted as if he had bettered himself, and that he could quickly become the victim of a spell cast on him if he appeared better than the other villagers. Peter listened to the man out of respect but did not believe that someone from his own village would hurt him. But later Peter began to think, *What if magic is real.* The thought frightened him.

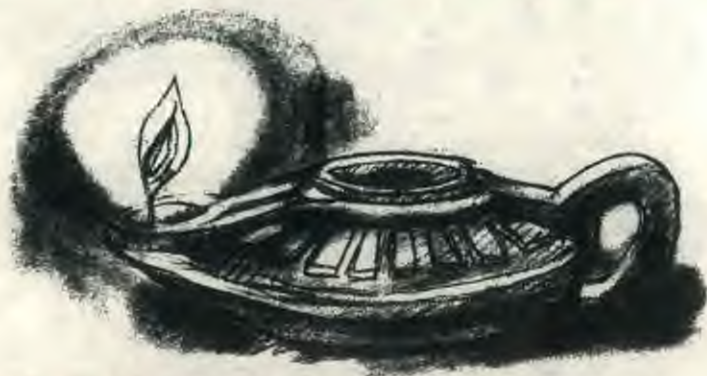
Peter talked to a trusted friend about how a Christian deals with magic. "I know that the devil is real," he said, "and he does whatever he can to keep people on his side." But his friend reminded him that Christians serve a God who is more powerful than the devil and his magic. If we trust God for our strength, then the devil's magic cannot touch us. But if we fear magic, we are saying magic is more powerful than God.

Peter affirmed his belief in God's power and thanked his friend for helping him remember that God is bigger than the devil. Soon afterward, Peter returned to his canvassing work near his hometown. Neither he nor his friend knew that their conversation that day was a preparation for a test Peter would soon face.

(Continued next week)

Beverly H. Koester is sponsorship coordinator in the Malawi Union in Eastern Africa. Peter is a student in Blantyre, Malawi.

The Last Invitation



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 22:1-14.

MEMORY TEXT: "He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: The Christian journey has two beginnings. The first occurs on this earth when we accept Christ's call to follow Him. This beginning carries us down the path to the second one, which takes place in heaven at the marriage supper of the Lamb. This event will inaugurate our freedom from the pain and tears of sin.

BOUQUETS AND GARLANDS AS BRILLIANT AS A SUNRISE. Guests bedecked in their finest, laughing, smiling, delighted to be included; a storybook bride and groom; tables laden with food that entices the taste buds. Or indifferent people, totally preoccupied with personal affairs; proceedings put on hold; bloodshed and ruin; and finally the banishment of a tacky guest.

Which of the above wedding festivities would you rather attend? The choice seems obvious. Yet the latter version is the one Christ chose to portray in Matthew 22.

But despite this parable's twists and turns, suspense and dramatic action, there is a happy outcome implied by the text. As you study this parable, you will learn why Christ made the choice He did, what the happy outcome involves, and how you can attend the most joyous wedding banquet of all.

THE MASTER TEACHER (Matt. 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-23).

Upon first reading the parable of the marriage feast (Matt. 22: 1-13), you might think it is the same as the parable of the great supper (Luke 14:16-24) which we studied in Lesson 3. Many scholars focus on the similarities of these two passages and assume that one was originally a repetition of the other. "Their conclusion denies Christ the privilege of relating the same story on different occasions and varying its details to suit the needs of the truth He designed to teach on each occasion."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 478.

Read the following texts to determine what major differences exist between the two parables.

	The wedding feast	The great supper
Who gave each banquet? Matt. 22:1, 2; Luke 14:16.		
Why was each banquet given? Matt. 22:2; Luke 14:16, 17.		
How did the invitees treat the messengers? Matt. 22:5, 6; Luke 14:18.		

Furthermore, (a) Matthew 22 emphasizes the preparation needed to attend, while Luke 14 focuses on the excuses given by the guests; and (b) in Matthew 22, those who declined the invitation were banned from the feast, while in Luke 14, those who declined were destroyed!

What do these differences tell us about the lesson Christ wanted each parable to teach?

By modifying a few details, Christ could change the meaning of a parable to fit the lesson He desired to teach to a particular audience. What techniques has He used to help you learn about His kingdom and with what effect?

A UNIQUE HOPE (Matt. 22:1-3).

Yesterday we studied the differences that exist between the parables of the wedding feast and the great supper. Today and the rest of the week we will study these differences as they relate to the wedding feast.

As is the case with so many of Jesus' parables, the parable of the wedding banquet had a particular meaning for the people who heard it, as well as a special message for those who would come after. Most likely told in the temple courts with the chief priests and elders present (Matt. 21:23), the parable of the wedding banquet was packed with meaning specific to their particular situation.

To discover a portion of the meaning this parable had for the Jews of Jesus' time, match the following parts of the parable to the items below: (a) the Messiah; (b) the Incarnation; (c) the provisions of the gospel made possible by the Incarnation; (d) God; (e) the Jews; (f) John the Baptist, Jesus' disciples (the 12 and the 70), and Jesus Himself.

_____ 1. the king

_____ 4. the invited guest

_____ 2. the son

_____ 5. the banquet

_____ 3. the marriage

_____ 6. the messengers

"The union of the divine and human natures in one Person, Jesus Christ, makes possible the wedding banquet. The Incarnation is the cornerstone for the whole edifice of salvation. 'Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness,' exclaims the apostle Paul. 'God was manifest in the flesh' (1 Tim. 3:16).

"The invited guests are the Jews, subjects of the king (Matt. 22:3). The ancient promise of a coming Redeemer (Gen. 3:15) Israel treasured as her unique hope. Jesus declared, 'Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad' (John 8:56). The awed patriarch, replacing Isaac on the altar with the ram found in a nearby thicket, realized as never before how the Messiah would redeem all sinners by His substitutionary death. And he was glad! . . .

"Jesus' emphasis is upon the banquet—the provisions of the gospel made possible by the Incarnation."—Frank B. Holbrook, "Requested—the Honor of Your Presence," *Adventist Review*, Oct. 22, 1992, p. 10.

Think about how the promise of salvation provides unique hope for you personally.

SCORNFUL WAYS (Matt. 22:2-10).

How many invitations did the king issue before anyone would come to the wedding feast? Matt. 22:2-10. Why was it necessary for so many invitations?

“To call those who were invited” (verse 3, NKJV). It is still the custom in oriental countries to send messengers to remind guests of an invitation they have already accepted.

The Old Testament prophets were the ones who gave the Jews this original invitation. John the Baptist, Jesus, and His disciples gave the first call in the parable, which was the second call to Israel given before the crucifixion.

Israel received the second invitation of the parable (verse 4) after the crucifixion. In what two ways did the people generally react to this invitation? Matt. 22:5, 6.

1. _____
2. _____

“The nation that claimed to be God’s peculiar people rejected the gospel brought to them in the power of the Holy Spirit. Many did this in the most scornful manner. Others were so exasperated by the offer of salvation, the offer of pardon for rejecting the Lord of glory, that they turned upon the bearers of the message. There was ‘a great persecution.’ Acts 8:1. Many both of men and women were thrust into prison, and some of the Lord’s messengers, as Stephen and James, were put to death.

“Thus the Jewish people sealed their rejection of God’s mercy. The result was foretold by Christ in the parable. The king ‘sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.’ The judgment pronounced came upon the Jews in the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of the nation.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 308, 309.

After they received the second invitation of the parable, some of the people rudely returned to their farms and businesses—ordinary, daily occupations that in themselves were not bad, but that became an affront to royalty and stood in the way of the guests receiving the king’s favor. What daily activities, good in themselves, prevent you from partaking of the banquet of blessings salvation has to offer? Are there aspects of the advent message that your way of life prevents you from accepting?

THE THIRD AND FINAL CALL (Matt. 22:8-10).

Yesterday we began discussing the various invitations that occur in the parable of the wedding banquet. Today we will concentrate on the final one that appears in Matthew 22:8-10.

To whom did the king issue the last invitation?

The obvious rejection of the King's first two invitations resulted in Israel's destruction and the loss of their status as God's chosen agency to spread the gospel. The Lord gave the task to another—the Christian church, spiritual Israel. (Read Matt. 21:43; 1 Peter 2:9, 10.)

Thus the servants took the third invitation into the highways and byways, gathering anyone who would respond. The chief priests and elders who were listening to Jesus heard that they would lose their privileges to sinners and Gentiles—people they considered unworthy of their King's favor.

"The wedding banquet is ready" (Matt. 22:8, NIV). Some people have difficulty with the statement that the wedding feast is still ready after the king eliminated his enemies (verse 7). But oriental feasts often last several days. And because no one had come to receive the king's generosity, the feast was still ready, even though the scheduled time for it had passed.

Of what is the third and final invitation in this parable a symbol? Matt. 28:18-20.

"In the original language the tense suggests that the intent of the king's command was 'Go, again and again,' until the banquet hall is filled (Matt. 22:9). In that brief order, Jesus covered the whole Christian Era. The banquet hall, filled with guests, represents the church, the fellowship of believers. Until human probation closes, the order of the King to His servants is (in modern terms): 'Evangelize!' " —Holbrook, "Requested—the Honor of Your Presence," p. 11.

Think of what it means to evangelize. Is it more than holding meetings, preaching, and giving Bible studies? If so, how much more? What have you been doing lately to extend the King's invitation to participate in the bounties of salvation? How do you believe your spiritual gifts can be used in attracting others to the Lord's banquet?

“HOW DID YOU GET IN HERE?” (Matt. 22:10-14).

The success the king's servants had in issuing the third invitation was tainted by the fact that the wedding hall was filled with both good and bad (verse 10). How does this describe the nature of the church?

The varied dispositions of the 12 disciples reflect the nature of the church. Christ suffered long with each disciple's temperament, giving them all an equal chance to be transformed. But, as seen in the life of Judas and in the parable we are studying this week, the good will be separated from the bad. (See also Matt. 13:41, 42, 47-50.)

Beginning with verse 11, the parable changes its emphasis from a correct *response* to the king's invitations to the correct *preparation* for the feast. This included provision that the guests be suitably clothed with wedding attire.

What does the wedding garment symbolize? Isa. 61:10; Rev. 19:7, 8.

“There is a two-way process in getting ready for the king's banquet. There is a disrobing of ‘the old man,’ or ‘the old nature with its deeds,’ and the clothing of oneself with ‘the new man’—the new converted nature (cf. Eph. 4:22-24; Rom. 13:13, 14; Col. 3:5-11).

“When the sinner comes to God, repenting and confessing his sins, and by faith accepts Christ as his Saviour and Lord, he is graciously forgiven and clothed in Christ—His righteousness. And in that ‘robe,’ the bond of union, he continues in the transforming process of grace.” —Holbrook, “Requested—the Honor of Your Presence,” p. 11.

“Put on the garments that suit God's chosen people, his own, his beloved: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience” (Col. 3:12, NEB).

“When the king came in to see the guests” (Matt. 22: 11, NIV). This suggests inspection and evaluation, and thus represents the pre-advent, investigative judgment. Judgment symbolism is present also in: (a) how the unsuitably dressed guest is evicted, and (b) the phrases “outer darkness” and “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (verse 13). We find each of these phrases in other texts about the condemnation of the wicked (Matt. 8:11, 12).

Despite the fact that the guest was improperly attired, the king still called him “friend” (Matt. 22:12). What does this tell us about God's feelings toward the man. How does the approach to the man relate to John 15:14?

FURTHER STUDY: Despite the one guest's being expelled from the banquet hall, the parable does have a happy ending. There are still guests inside who were wearing the king's garments. Read about them in Revelation 19:6-9. This is the happy ending to the parable we alluded to in Sabbath afternoon's lesson.

Also read "Without a Wedding Garment," *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 307-319.

"The spiritual banquet has been set before us in rich abundance. We have had presented to us by the messengers of God the richest feast—the righteousness of Christ, justification by faith, the exceeding great and precious promises of God in His Word, free access to the Father by Jesus Christ, the comforts of the Holy Spirit, and the well-grounded assurance of eternal life in the kingdom of God. We ask, What could God do for us that He has not done in preparing the great supper, the heavenly banquet?"—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1097.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Considering what the various elements of the parable of the marriage feast symbolize, what does the "outer darkness" represent? (Matt. 22:13).
2. Explain what Christ meant by His closing statement of the parable, "For many are invited, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14, NIV). These texts may help you: Rev. 22:17; John 3:16; Matt. 5:6; 7:13, 14.
3. The expulsion of the man without a wedding garment represents God's rejection of some professed believers before the second coming of Jesus. Hence, we know that the story is designed to teach that God examines His professed people in a pre-advent judgment. (Compare Dan. 7:9-14.) What does this indicate regarding God's way of preparing us to meet Jesus when He returns?

SUMMARY: Jesus invites us all to the marriage feast of the Lamb. Will you accept His invitation and agree to wear His special wedding garment?



More Powerful Than Magic, Part 2

Peter Tambala and Beverly H. Koester

Peter thought Christians should not believe in magic. But recent events had made him wonder. The pastor where he canvassed invited him to offer prayer for the church service. Peter agreed. But people began to tell him, "You are just a boy; you should not pray in the divine service. Go and sit where you belong." Others called his willingness to pray in public a sign of pride and disrespect to his elders. Peter worried about these charges, but he offered the prayer, as the pastor had requested.

The following day Peter rode a bicycle four miles to the pastor's home to pick up some materials. To reach the pastor's house he had to pass through a village notorious for its powerful magic. As he rode down a hillside past a certain spot on the road, suddenly his eyes became so blurred that he could not see. Instantly he prayed that God would help him stop the bicycle without injury to himself or the other people walking along the path. He managed to stop the bicycle and climb off. Trembling, he pushed the bicycle the rest of the way to the pastor's home, still able to see only dimly.

To his dismay, the pastor was not home. Peter, his eyes still blurry, turned and began pushing the bicycle toward home, squinting and struggling to see the path. Peter suspected that magic had caused his near-blindness. As he neared the spot where his eyesight had become blurry, he stopped and called out loud, "God, You are more powerful than magic. Send the devil away!" At that instant, his eyesight was restored. Then, instead of hurrying away from the place where Satan had attacked him, Peter stepped into the bushes and prayed for several minutes, thanking God for the faith to trust in Him rather than to fear magic. Then Peter mounted the bicycle and continued on his journey.

Peter did not tell others about his encounter with the powers of evil. He knew that people in this area believed strongly in the powers of the devil, which they call magic. His brush with blindness would only convince them of the devil's powers, and they would try to fill him with fear of the devil. But when Peter returned to school, he shared his story with his close friend. Peter admitted that now he knows magic is real, that it is the devil's power. "But", he added with a smile, "God really is more powerful than magic!"

Beverly H. Koester is sponsorship coordinator in the Malawi Union in Eastern Africa. Peter is a student in Blantyre, Malawi.

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Lessons for Fourth Quarter, 1997

The fourth quarter Sabbath School lessons, entitled "*Healing and Restoration*," focus on Jesus' healing ministry while He was here on earth.

Lesson 1: Creator and Healer.

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Mark 2:1-13; Luke 10:1-9

MEMORY TEXT: Luke 6:19

KEY THOUGHT: The One who has the power to create has the power and the desire to recreate, and thereby to heal.

OUTLINE:

- "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26)
- Restoration begins (Gen. 3:9, 10)
- The results of the broken relationship (Gen. 3:8, 19)
- The Creator hoins His creation (John 1:14)
- Christ restores both body and spirit (Mark 2:1-12)

Lesson 2: Moved Through Compassion.

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Luke 5:12-16; 9:12-17; Matt. 8:1-17; 9:4-6, 36-38

MEMORY TEXT: Lam. 3:22, 23

KEY THOUGHT: Christ's great love constrained Him to heal. His heart went out to the sick, the broken hearted, and the bereaved.

OUTLINE:

- "Be merciful, even as you Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36)
- He lived among us (Isa. 7:14)
- Jesus' compassion—healing stories (Matt. 14:14)
- Jesus' compassion—the good news for today (Matt. 9:4-6)
- Jesus' compassion—loving choices (Matt. 4:23-25)

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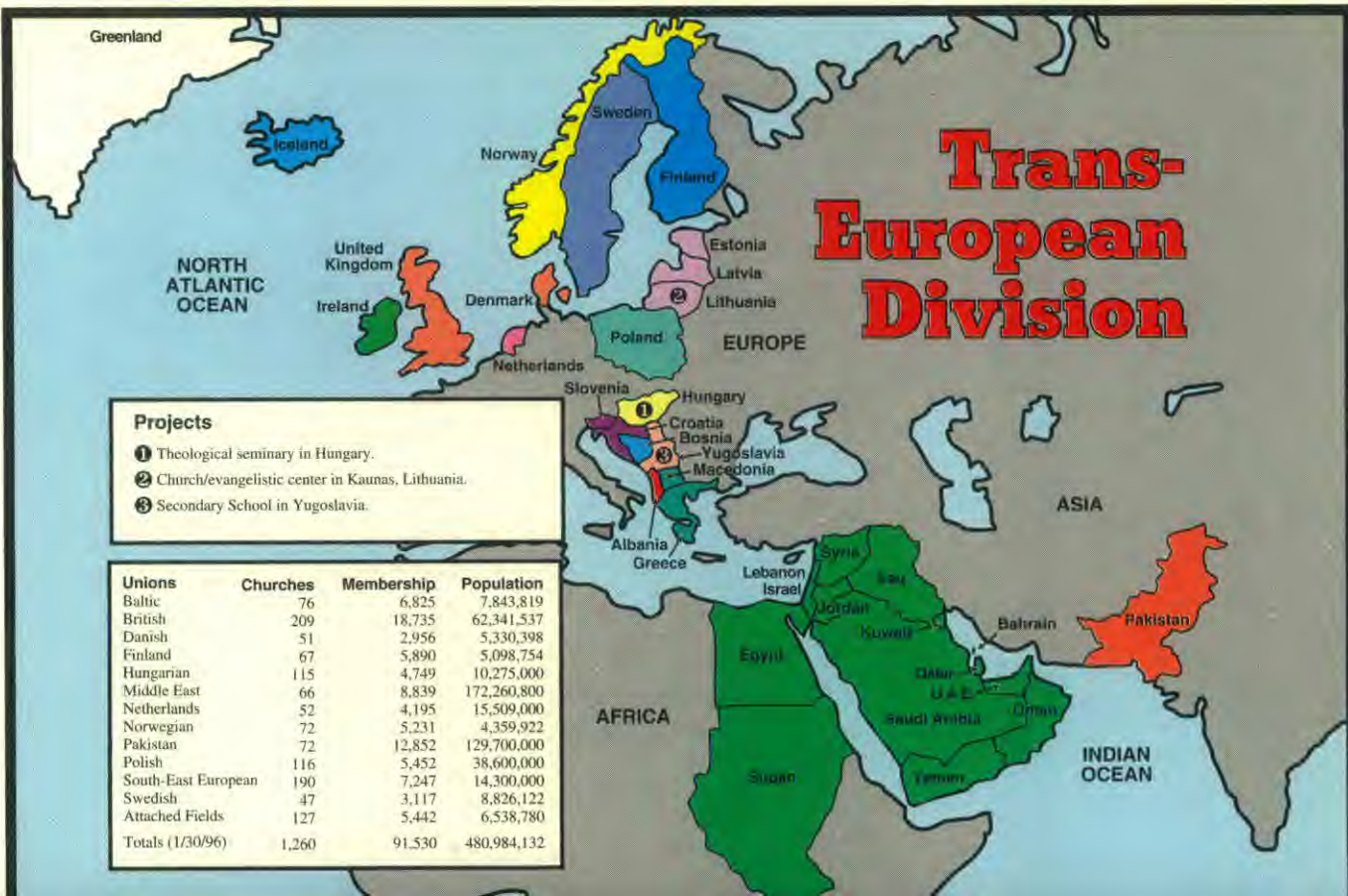
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Hungarian	115	4,749	10,275,000
Middle East	66	8,839	172,260,800
Netherlands	52	4,195	15,509,000
Norwegian	72	5,231	4,359,922
Pakistan	72	12,852	129,700,000
Polish	116	5,452	38,600,000
South-East European	190	7,247	14,300,000
Swedish	47	3,117	8,826,122
Attached Fields	127	5,442	6,538,780
Totals (1/30/96)	1,260	91,530	480,984,132