

Southern Asia

DIVISION

ADULT
SABBATH SCHOOL
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE
Oct • Nov • Dec 2007

ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

THE REFINER'S FIRE



Mission Projects
Our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help congregations throughout Southern Asia provide the following:

- 1 Secondary school (boarding academy) in Ongole, eastern India.
- 2 Boys dormitory for Raymond Memorial Higher Secondary School, West Bengal, India.
- 3 Twenty churches for existing congregations in Orissa State, India.
- 4 Twenty churches throughout Southern Asia Division.

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THE REFINER'S FIRE

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The Crucified

At the Cross, He [Jesus, our Creator] bore “our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Isa. 53:4)—all of them.

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

“All things” were made by Him, Jesus, and yet—according to Scripture—“Jesus wept” (*John 11:35*). The Creator wept? Even more so, Jesus was “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (*Isa. 53:3*). The

Creator, a man of sorrows, despised and rejected? And He once cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (*Matt. 27:46*).

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

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

With that background (that of the crucified God looming over us like the desert sky) we will for the next few months seek to better comprehend the incomprehensible—our own suffering, the sufferings of Christians, of those who have committed their lives to Christ. We’re making no claims to have all the answers or even many; we’re claiming only that “God is love” (*1 John 4:8*) and that although these things happen, we can trust God despite them and, indeed, grow in grace through them, no matter how painful the process.

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

Creator

What can their examples teach us?

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

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

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

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

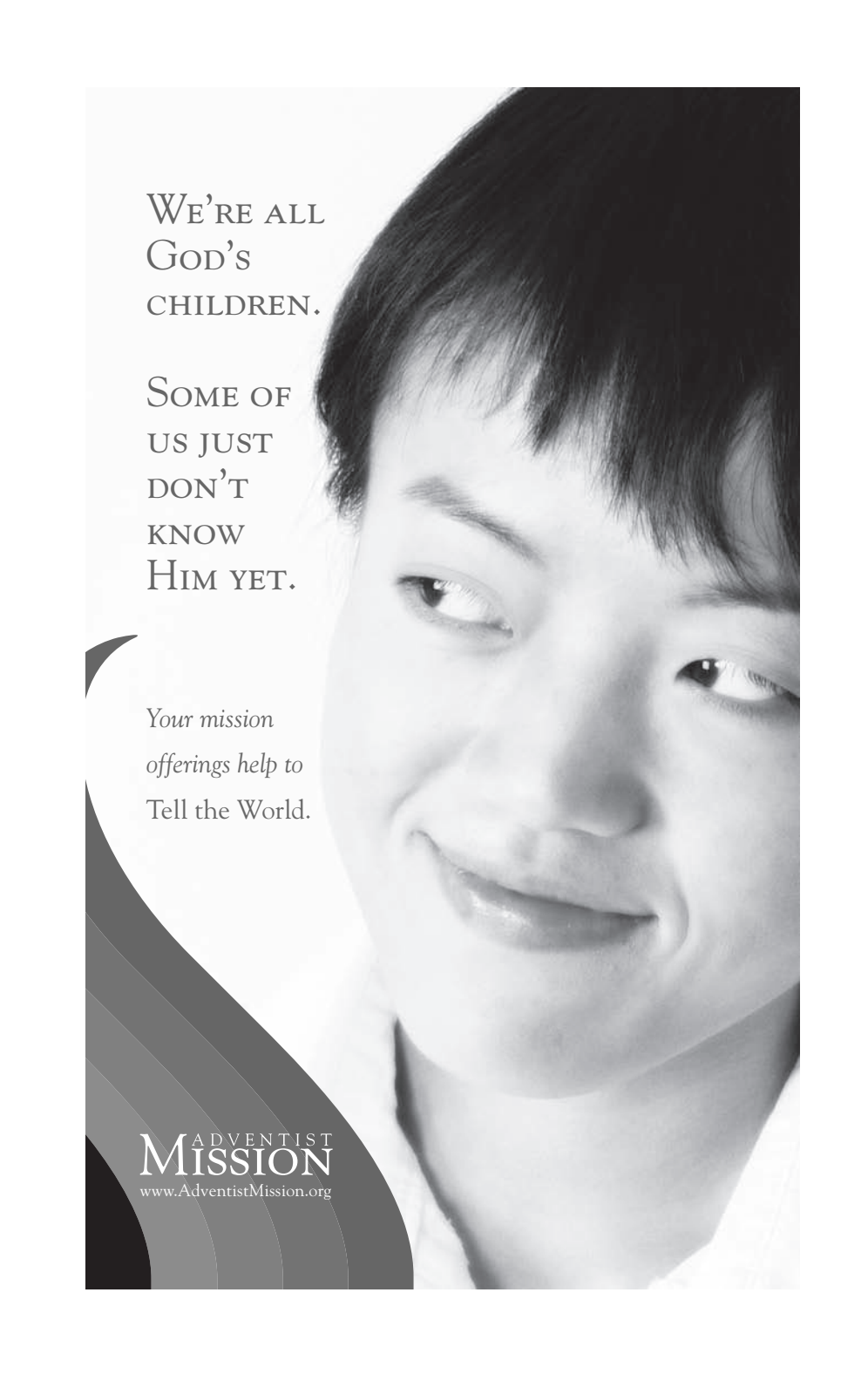
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The Shepherd's Crucible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 6.*

A Guide for the Journey: The Shepherd

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

Some children were asked to draw a picture of God. Each one drew a heart somewhere in it. When asked why, they declared unanimously that God is love.

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

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

What do you learn about the Shepherd from each text?

Isa. 40:11

Jer. 23:3, 4

Ezek. 34:12

John 10:14–16

1 Pet. 2:25

What does the Shepherd do to care for His sheep in Psalm 23:2–6?

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

Locations on the Journey

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unexpected Detour 1: The Valley

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unexpected Detour 2: The Surrounded Table

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Certain Promise for the Journey

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

In the valley or surrounded by enemies, it is sometimes tempting to believe we are alone. It does not always feel as though God has been doing much. But David obviously does not see it like this.

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

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

How do you picture goodness and unfailing love “pursuing” you? What do you think David meant by describing God’s care for us this way?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Discussion Questions:

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

Stubborn Believer

by ISAAC ROBLES

I first learned about Adventists when I was ten years old. My older brother, Felipe, had become an Adventist and shared with me what he was learning. But my father did not like Felipe's new religion and told him to stop teaching me and taking me to church. My father thought Adventists were a strange cult that had brainwashed my brother. Although my brother could no longer take me to church, I had learned enough to know that the Sabbath was special. So I tried to spend Sabbaths in my room. I read the Bible and some Ellen White books my brother gave me.

I continued to keep the Sabbath in my room, but my father forced me to attend church with him on Sunday and take part in certain rituals. I didn't want to, but I was just a kid.

My brother had moved to New York, and when I was 12 I went to visit him there. At last I could go to church, finish Bible studies, and be baptized. I felt great that I could follow God. I thought that when my father knew I had been baptized, he would let me worship according to my faith, but that didn't happen. He still made me go to church with him and forbade me to go to church on Sabbath.

For four years I tried to keep the Sabbath, all while my father, aunts, and uncles tried to talk me out of it. Some of my cousins called me "Bible man," but still I did not give up.

One day my cousin found a tract in the trash. He read it and asked me about it. I told him Adventists printed it, and he read it with interest. But I could not teach him or take him to church.

When I was 17 my brother's father-in-law visited and invited me to go to church. At last my father allowed me to start attending church. I told the church pastor about my cousin and the tract he had found. The pastor and I visited my cousin and his wife, and we gave them Bible studies. He and his wife have decided to be baptized as well.

My father even allowed me to study at the Adventist university in Puerto Rico. I praise God for providing a sponsor and a job to help me pay my fees. My father and I have a better relationship now. I hope that one day he will accept my faith.

I thank God for my brother who shared what he learned with me. Your mission offerings make it possible for thousands to hear God's Word every day.

ISAAC ROBLES *has completed his education and is teaching high school in Puerto Rico.*

The Crucibles That Come



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

Memory Text: “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:12, 13, NIV).

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

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

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

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

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 13.*

Surprises

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Pet. 4:12, NIV).

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

This week we will look at a few specific types of painful situations or crucibles that should not take us by surprise. To begin, let’s go back to the text for today in Peter. The Greek word for “surprised” in 1 Peter 4:12 means to be “alien” or “foreign.” Peter is urging his readers not to fall into the trap of believing that fiery ordeals and trials are alien to Christian experience. Rather, they are to be considered normal—they can and should be expected.

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

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

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

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

Crucibles of Satan

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

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

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

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

What does God promise to do for those who are suffering? *Verse 10.*

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

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

Crucibles of Sin

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Crucibles of Purification

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

“If the Spirit of God brings to your mind a word of the Lord that hurts you, you may be sure that there is something He wants to hurt to death.”—Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour & Company, Inc., 1963), Sept. 27.

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

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

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

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

Crucibles of Maturity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, Nov. 18, 1903; Ellen G. White Comments, p. 1182, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4; “Enduring Trials,” p. 92, in *My Life Today*.

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

Discussion Questions:

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

Running Away to God

by SERGEI VENEVTSEV

I was born into a Russian family that had no use for God. But in high school I had to take a class called History of Religions. The teacher, a Muslim man, taught about most main religions, but he had more enthusiasm for Christianity and read quotations from the Bible and told us Bible stories.

I decided religion might help me make sense out of life, so I began searching different religions. I tried several different religions, but they left my heart empty. It seemed they all were the same, saying I must earn favor with God—whatever His name was—by my deeds. I did not need such a religion; I needed answers to my questions.

Then I saw a TV program produced by Seventh-day Adventists called, *Waiting for the Second Coming*. It caught my interest, and I thought, *It would be good to belong with these believers who live as a family*. But I did not know where to find these Adventists.

I started reading the New Testament, and though I did not understand many things, I kept reading, for I found great peace. I began to pray, and to my surprise, God answered. Then I broke up with my girlfriend. I prayed again, but it seemed that this time God did not answer. Angry, I shook my fist at God and shouted, “I do not need You. I will reach my goals myself!”

The results of my prayer came immediately. I had been a peaceful person, but after I rebelled against God, I became hard and wanted revenge on everyone who hurt me. I started drinking and fighting. Evil spirits entered my life and our home. I began to think life was futile and not worth living.

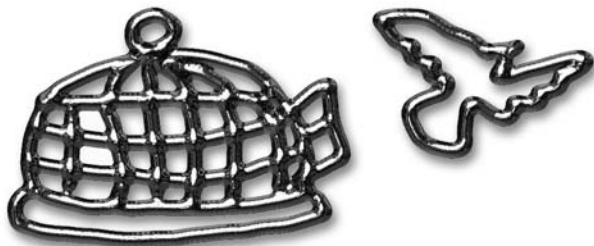
Then a friend invited me to a Christian meeting. At first I refused to go, then I changed my mind. I decided it would be my first and last time at a Christian meeting. But once there, I was touched by the songs, the prayers, and the Bible study. I could hardly wait for the next one. Within a year I had surrendered my life to Christ.

After high school and my term in the army, I returned home to work as a literature evangelist. Then God called me to serve as a Global Mission pioneer in an area where there were no Adventists. The Lord blessed my partner and me and led us to people who were searching for meaning in life. In our first year nine people have been baptized and others are preparing.

I praise God for being patient with me, loving me, saving me, and allowing me to serve Him.

SERGEI VENEVTSEV *lives in Tyrnauz, Russia.*

The Birdcage



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 20.

To the Promised Land Via a Dead End

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bitter Waters

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

We might surely not get from God everything we want, but can't we expect to get all that we need? Not what we think we need but what we truly need?

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

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

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

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

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

The Great Controversy in the Desert

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

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

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

Luke 4 is the beginning of the story of Jesus’ temptation by Satan, and it brings some difficult issues to our attention. At first glance, it appears that the Holy Spirit is leading Jesus into temptation. However, God never tempts us (*James 1:13*). Rather, as we have been seeing, God does lead us to crucibles of testing. What is striking in Luke 4 is that the Holy Spirit can lead us to times of testing that involve our being exposed to Satan’s fierce temptations. At such times when we feel these temptations so strongly, we may misunderstand and think we have not been following God correctly. But this is not necessarily true. “Often when placed in a trying situation we doubt that the Spirit of God has been leading us. But it was the Spirit’s leading that brought Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. When God brings us into trial, He has a purpose to accomplish for our good. Jesus did not presume on God’s promises by going unbidden into temptation, neither did He give up to despondency when temptation came upon Him. Nor should we.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 126, 127.

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

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

An Enduring Legacy

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

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

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

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

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

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

Trial by Fire

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

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

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

Almost all who follow the Lord have had crises during which they've been tempted to doubt the Lord's leading. The important thing in such situations is to cling to the promises, recount God's leading in the past, and pray for faith and endurance. The Lord will never give up on us; it's we who have to fight the temptation to give up on Him.

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

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

Discussion Questions:

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

Peace That Satisfies

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Kozo and Yukari were rock musicians in Japan. In addition Kozo owned a recording studio where many young bands came to make recordings.

Yukari wrote songs, many of which expressed a yearning for peace, love, and freedom. The couple began to realize that the ideals they sang about were missing from their lives, crowded out by counterfeits such as drugs and free sex. They wanted real peace, real love, real freedom. They wanted absolutes on which to build their lives, but they did not know where to find them. They started searching in religion. The couple was sure that a supreme Power, a Divine Person, existed somewhere in the universe. But how could they find Him?

They decided to explore Christianity, to open their hearts to Christ's teachings. Kozo and Yukari heard people talk about their faith and religious ideas, but they seldom talked about Jesus. Surely, they thought, there must be a church that teaches about Jesus, that builds its faith on what the Bible says.

The couple knew of the Adventist hospital in town, but they knew nothing about the people who operated it. Yukari visited her neighbor, a Seventh-day Adventist, and said, "Take me with you to your church." The neighbor gladly agreed.

Yukari found Adventists friendly and sincere. Their religion came straight from the Bible, and their health teachings made sense to her. She began attending the church, but Kozo hesitated. His biggest workdays were Sabbath and Sunday. However, when he had no appointments, he joined Yukari at church. Soon he was scheduling his work on other days when possible.

Within weeks the couple placed their lives at Jesus' feet, convinced that He is God and their Savior. It took Kozo several months to overcome a problem with alcohol, but soon after he did, they were baptized.

Kozo closed his recording studio, giving up the couple's security. For five years the couple lived on faith alone. Then Kozo was offered a job as recording engineer at the Voice of Prophecy studio. Kozo and Yukari have found the peace, love, and freedom they had searched for so long. They found it at the foot of the Cross.

Japan has just 15,000 Adventist believers, only one believer for every 8,460 people in the country. Pray for the work in this great nation. Your mission offerings will help reach the unreached there.

KOZO and YUKARI ABE *share their faith in Yokohama, Japan.* CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN is editor of Mission.

Seeing *the* Goldsmith's Face



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

“In His Image”

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

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

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

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

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

How do you understand what Ellen White says to us in that quote?

See also *Job 1*, *Matt. 5:16*, *1 Cor. 4:9*, *Eph. 3:10*.

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

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

Faith Amid the Refining Fire

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Last Words

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

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

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

Holy Spirit: _____

Character: _____

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

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

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

“The Wise”

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

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

Daniel is told that just before Jesus comes, there will be a time of distress unequalled at any other time of history. In verse 3 and verse 10 we’re given a depiction of the righteous and the wicked during this time. Notice how the wicked “shall do wickedly” (*vs. 10, NKJV*) in contrast to the righteous, who in verse 2 shine brightly, perhaps because they have been “purified, made spotless and refined” (*vs. 10, NIV*) during this “‘time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time’” (*vs. 1, NKJV*). In contrast, too, the wicked do not understand, but the righteous are “wise” and do understand.

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

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

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

Character and Community

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Discussion Questions:

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

Midnight Taxi

by ILIYANA MARINKOVA

My husband and I live in Sofia, the capital city of Bulgaria. We are getting old; I am partially disabled, and my husband isn't too well either. Late one night we received a telephone call to come to my husband's village right away. There was a family problem. We got up and dressed and hurried to catch the last tram that would take us to the edge of Sofia.

It was near midnight when we climbed off the tram and started to walk the two and a half miles (four kilometers) to the village. You can imagine what it looked like—these two old people hobbling along an empty road in the middle of the night.

We got about halfway to the village and felt that we just could not go any farther. We knew it was not safe to stay along the road, but we were tired. We knelt down and asked God to help us get to the village. Then we got up and started walking again. We heard car brakes behind us, and a car rolled to a stop beside us. The driver rolled down his window and asked, "Are you the people who called me to take you to Mirovyane?"

We were surprised, for we had no telephone with us to call anyone, but this man knew that we were going to Mirovyane.

"Never mind," he said in a gentle voice. "If you wish, get in and I will take you to your destination."

We climbed into this man's car and rode to the village. The man said nothing as he drove the short distance to the village. He stopped at a bus stop in the village quite near our destination. We thanked the man and climbed out, relieved that we did not have to walk those last two kilometers. We started down the street toward our relatives'. Behind us we heard the car tires squeal as the driver turned around. We turned to wave our thanks, but the street was empty. We saw no taillights, no dust in the road to indicate that a car had been there.

"He's gone," I told my husband. "He just disappeared." I walked back to where the man had let us off, but there was no sign of this man or his car.

We don't know whether this man was an angel or a human sent by God to rescue two tired old people from an isolated road on a dark night.

ILIYANA MARINKOVA and her husband are members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Extreme Heat



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 3.*

Abraham in the Crucible

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wayward Israel

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

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

vss. 2, 3

vss. 5–7

vss. 8, 9

vs. 10

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

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

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

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

Surviving Through Worship

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

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

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

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

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

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

Surviving Through Hope

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Extreme Heat

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

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

Read Isaiah 43:1–7. In verses 2 and 3, God says that His people will pass through waters and through fire. These are figurative of extreme dangers, but perhaps they hint at the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan, both fearful times but times that paved the way to a new life. You may expect that God might say that He would protect His people from these dangers, that He will guide them along an easier route. But like the Shepherd in Psalm 23, He rather says that when the difficult times come, God’s people need not be overwhelmed—for He is with them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class, have someone recount his or her own test of faith such as Abraham had. What can you learn from this person’s experience, from his or her successes or failures?
- ❷ Review the last 24 hours of Christ’s life. What extremes did He face? How did He endure? What principles can we take from His example and apply for ourselves when in the midst of our own crucible?
- ❸ Discuss the idea, touched on this week, about how through our own suffering we can minister to others who are suffering. However true it might be, what are some of the problems we might encounter with this idea?
- ❹ Ellen White wrote above: “Let us trust Him in the darkness as well as in the day.” That’s easier said than done. How can we help each other develop the kind of faith that will enable us to do just that? Why is it important to trust God in the bad times?

God Saved Me Twice

by KIZITO KYAKULAGA

Before I knew God, He knew me and saved me. I was studying in a government secondary boarding school near my town in Uganda. At the end of the year I was preparing for my O-level exams when I became very sick. The nurse put me in a spare room to rest, and I fell asleep.

As I slept, the candle the nurse had left fell over, catching the room on fire. I awoke smelling smoke but was too weak to even stand, but someone rushed in and pulled me from the burning room. Everything in the room was burned, but I was saved.

I was still ill when I took my exams, but when the results came back I had passed. Later I received a letter from Bugema Secondary School, offering me a scholarship to study the A level, the college entrance level. I was so happy, because my parents could not afford to send me on to school.

But when I arrived at Bugema, I discovered that the school was Seventh-day Adventist. Students worshiped on Saturday, but Sunday was a workday. We had worship every morning and even had Bible class every day! This was too much religion for me! I thought about going home, but I decided to stick it out. Soon I realized it wasn't so bad after all. Teachers helped me understand what the Bible meant, and I learned more in a week than I had learned in a year in my home church.

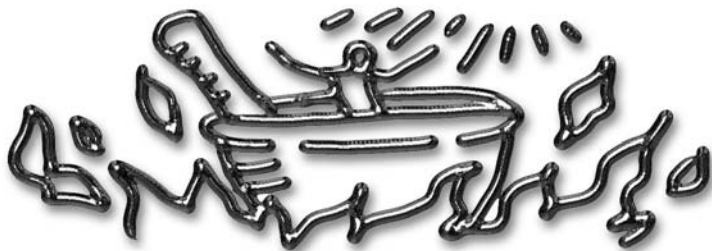
During the Week of Prayer I gave my life to Jesus. I had attended church all my life, but no one had ever invited me to accept Jesus as my Lord. I was baptized later in the year, but I did not tell my parents right away, for I feared they would be angry.

When I did tell my parents, they were not so angry, just disappointed. My father threatened to withhold the small allowance he had been sending me to buy soap and stuff, but Mother saw to it that I still received it. My mother listens when I talk to her about what I believe, and I invite her and my younger sister to attend church with me. I hope someday my little sister can study at Bugema and find there what I found—a relationship with Jesus.

Your mission offerings support schools such as Bugema Secondary School and Bugema University in Uganda. Your faithfulness helped introduce me to Jesus. Thank you.

KIZITO KYAKULAGA *now studies at Bugema University in Uganda.*

Struggling With All Energy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

Memory Text: “To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (*Colossians 1:29, NIV*).

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

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

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

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

The Spirit of Truth

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Divine-Human Combination

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Disciplined Will

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

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

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

Peter understood that the mind is the rudder for the body that we control. Take away the control of the mind, and we will be controlled by whatever feelings blow our way. Imagine walking along a narrow path to the Shepherd’s home. Along the way there are many paths leading in different directions. Some of these paths go to places that we would not want to visit. Others look tempting; they appeal to our feelings, our emotions, our desires. If, though, we take any one of them, we get off the right path and go in a way that might be exceedingly difficult to get off.

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

Radical Commitment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Need to Persevere

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Discussion Questions:

- 1 To what extent do you think that we appreciate that our wills were “at the Fall given into the control of Satan”? How, by focusing on the character of Jesus, can we better appreciate just how fallen we are and how great God’s grace is toward us?
- 2 Read the story of Jesus in Gethsemane (*Matt. 26:36–43*). What were Jesus’ own feelings and desires, as opposed to God’s will? What can we learn from this example?
- 3 As a class, talk about the distinct things in your own culture that can work to break down our defenses and leave us more vulnerable to Satan’s attacks. What can we do to help other church members be aware of these dangers, as well as help those who feel the need for help?
- 4 Do you know someone in your church who hasn’t been there for quite a long time, who might be getting ready to give up or has already given up? What can you do as a group to encourage this person, to help him or her not turn away from Jesus? What practical things can you do to help?

Fighting for Faith

by ELIZABETH MURMU

I live in Bangladesh. I learned early in life that if I wanted something, I had to fight for it. And I wanted an education.

My father did not want me to study. He wanted me to work in people's homes and help the family. But I wanted to learn. Sometimes I hid outside the nearby school to listen to the teacher's lessons.

My elder sister, Sharoni, lived with an uncle who sent her to school. In high school, she studied at Bangladesh Adventist Seminary and College (BASC). There she became a Seventh-day Adventist, which angered my parents. But Sharoni would not budge, and in time my parents allowed her to return home. Sharoni found work as a tutor and helped the family financially.

My parents were set against Sharoni's religion. She challenged them to study the Bible with her and tell her where Adventists were wrong. In time they realized that Sharoni was right, but they refused to change their religion.

Sharoni knew that the local school could not provide the quality of education we children needed and urged my parents to send us to Adventist schools. My father refused, so Sharoni decided to send us to study in an Adventist school herself. When Father still refused, Sharoni told him, "You do not have to pay a single rupee for their education. I will pay it all." Finally Father and Mother allowed my two sisters and me to study at BASC, the Adventist school Sharoni had attended.

I stayed at BASC through eighth grade, when Sharoni transferred us to another Adventist school to study. She became dean of women at this school and could look after us there.

When each child in our family was ready to start school, Sharoni took them to study at the Adventist school. Several more brothers and sisters now study here. Only my youngest brother is still at home with our parents. Soon he will come to study at the Adventist school. Each of us has given our hearts to Jesus, and when we are old enough, we will be baptized.

Thank you for your mission offerings, which help make Adventist education possible in my country. It has made a big difference in my family!



ELIZABETH MURMU (left) is studying at Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist School in Bangladesh.



Where
will
they
go?

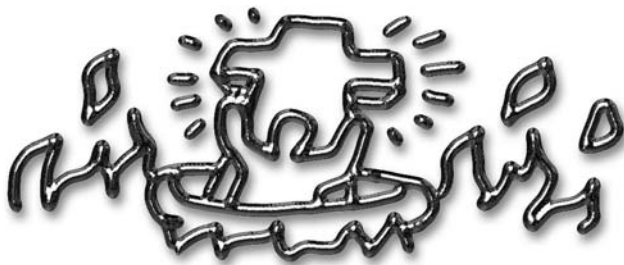
I saw hundreds of people in India flock to evangelistic meetings and step forward to accept Jesus as their Savior. My heart was touched as I thought of the lives forever changed and the joy these people would find as Christians. But they will face difficult times, too, especially those whose families reject their new faith.

And most of these new believers have no church to welcome them. They are the church! In many places we have no schools where these new believers can send their children to receive a Christian education.

Membership growth is wonderful, but it's up to us to see that they have the tools they need to grow, such as a simple chapel, a school for their children, a pastor or teacher. I'm glad our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help provide for some of the fastest growing areas of this division. For me it's personal.

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Indestructible Hope



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

Memory Text: “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (*Romans 5:5, NIV*).

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

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

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

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

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 17.*

The Big Picture

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Who Our Father Is

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

What do you think Chambers means by this idea?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our Father's Presence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our Father's Plans for Us

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our Father's Discipline

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

In Hebrews 12:5–13, the author describes trials in the context of discipline. In the NIV Bible translation, the word *discipline* appears nearly ten times. In the Greek world, this word was the most basic word for *education*. So to understand *discipline* is to understand how God educates us in the school of faith that the author has been describing before in Hebrews 11.

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

Read through the “glasses” of Hebrews 12:1–13. Now concentrate on verses 5–13. What is

the source of discipline?

our response to discipline?

the goal of discipline?

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

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

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

Discussion Questions:

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

The Lost Bank Card

by SHARON BRUNTON AND YUAMB

It was Friday afternoon, and Yuamb, a literature evangelist, stood in line at the bank in Papua New Guinea, waiting to withdraw money for bus fare to return home. She reached into her bag to take out her bank card, but it was not there. She found a Bible promise card instead. Worried, she removed everything from her purse, but her bank card was not there.

Frustrated, she complained to God. "Lord, how can You let this happen to me on Friday afternoon? I have no money to get home, and there is no time to sell books to earn some money for bus fare." She read the promise card she held in her hand. "A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all" (*Ps. 34:19, NIV*).

Yuamb bowed her head again and asked God what He wanted her to do. Then she began walking. She passed several shops and turned down a side street. She stopped before a nightclub, then stepped in, not sure who she would meet there or what she would say.

A young girl named Joyce greeted Yuamb as she entered. Yuamb introduced herself as a literature evangelist, and the woman invited her to sit down. Soon Yuamb was showing Joyce the books she had with her. "Are you an Adventist?" Joyce asked. Surprised, Yuamb answered that she was.

Joyce explained that she had once been an Adventist. She bought a book, which provided Yuamb's bus fare. "Please come back on Monday," Joyce asked, "and bring *The Desire of Ages* and *The Great Controversy*."

Yuamb left that nightclub rejoicing that God had led her to this hungry soul in a place she might never have entered. Yuamb returned on Monday with the books Joyce had asked for. Joyce introduced Yuamb to Roslyn, who also bought several books, and several other young women in the club who enrolled in Bible studies.

When Yuamb returned to visit her new friends several weeks later, one girl complained that her copy of *The Desire of Ages* had been stolen. She ordered two more copies. Three months later the owner of the nightclub turned the club into a restaurant, and is giving the girls Sabbaths off to worship. Joyce and Roslyn and another friend are attending the Adventist church in their area.

Yuamb praises God for her lost bank card that led her to lost souls searching for truth.

SHARON BRUNTON is a missionary in Papua New Guinea. YUAMB is a literature evangelist living in Lae, Papua New Guinea.

Seeing *the* Invisible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 24.*

Our Father's Extravagance

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the Name of Jesus

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Power of the Resurrection

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To Carry All Our Worry

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

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

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

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

Anxiety is caused by all sorts of reasons. It could be pressure from work. Unexpected criticism. Feeling that we are unwanted or unloved. Health or financial worries. Feeling that we are not good enough for God. Believing that we are not forgiven.

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

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

Still Faithful When God Cannot Be Seen

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, talk about the kinds of things we believe in that we do not see, things that we know are real yet are beyond our sight. How can this help us understand what it means to see “Him who is invisible”?
- ❷ Discuss the final question found at the end of Wednesday’s lesson. How often do we find ourselves in that situation? What can we do that will better enable us to trust that the Lord’s way is the best, even if it’s not what we want?
- ❸ If “faith grows strong by coming in conflict with doubts and opposing influences” and this leads to something extremely valuable—“of more value than the most costly jewels”—how should this shape the way we look at such conflicts?

Faithful Above All

by JEAN RÉNÉ SI SI

It is difficult being the only Adventist in my family, but God has gently showed me how to honor His holy commandments, especially the Sabbath.

I am studying in a technical school in Cameroon, and some of the tests fell on Sabbaths. The teachers gave me a zero for missed exams. Then one of our final exams was scheduled for Sabbath. I knew if I missed that exam I would have to take the entire year over. But I was determined to honor God's Sabbath.

I did not tell my parents about the Sabbath exam, but my classmates knew. And when I did not come for the exam, they went to my house to find out where I was. When my parents learned that I had skipped an exam and would have to take the year over, they were upset.

I repeated the entire year of school, and exams again fell on Sabbath. My teachers and principal asked me if I would sit for the exam that year, and I told them that I would not take any exam on Sabbath. I would trust in God to help me, and if I failed again, so be it. One teacher rescheduled his exams for another day, but other teachers asked, "How can religion be so important as to jeopardize your future?" I told them I trusted that God would work out the details so that I could pass the course.

The second year one of the final exams was scheduled for Sabbath. I felt pressure to take the exam, so on Sabbath morning I hurried out of town so that I would not be tempted to take the exam.

When the exam results were posted, I did not want to look at the results, for surely I had failed. But the school called me in for another reason, and I heard that I had passed. I was amazed! Even the teacher was amazed and asked how I could have passed when I had not taken two of the exams. I told the teacher that God had done it.

"Your God is very powerful," the teacher confided. "In all my years of teaching I have never seen such a thing happen."

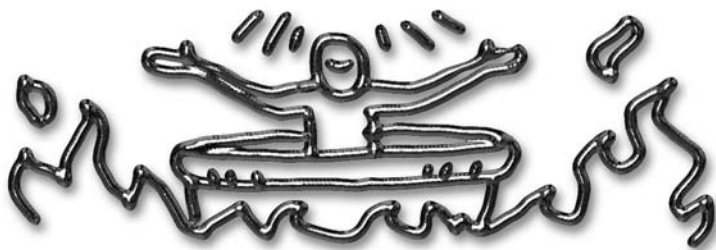
My parents are not yet interested in how God is blessing me, but my brother and sisters are. My brother has taken his stand for God, and two of my sisters are studying the Bible with me.

I praise God for helping me remain faithful in difficult times.

Your mission offerings teach young people how to remain faithful to God in difficult times. Thank you for your faithfulness.

JEAN RÉNÉ SI SI lives in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

A Life of Praise



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

Memory Text: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (*Philippians 4:4, NIV*).

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

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

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

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

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 1.*

Framework for Praise

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Praying Down Walls

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Life of Praise

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Witness Who Convicts

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Weapon That Conquers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Discussion Questions:

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

When God Calls

by SAROJINI CHEDALAWADA

Seetharathnam once sang chants to idols in a temple in India. She was a medicine woman, treating people with sicknesses to devil possession by tying strings on their arms and chanting healing mantras.

One day she received a New Testament. She was curious about this Christian God named Jesus. So one night she locked the doors and closed the windows of her home and started to read the New Testament. She laid the New Testament next to her pillow and went to sleep.

Suddenly she was awakened by a bright light flooding her room. She did not know where the light came from. Then she saw a man dressed in bright white Indian garb standing in the light. He said, "Seetharathnam, will you believe in Me completely?"

She asked, "Who are You that I should believe in You?" As the Man stood before her, she realized that this was Jesus. "Yes, Lord, I will believe in You," she said.

The next day Seetharathnam visited her niece, who was a Christian. "I saw Jesus in a dream last night. I would like to talk to your pastor." Seetharathnam began attending her niece's church.

One day Pastor Prasada Rao, an Adventist pastor, visited Seetharathnam. She did not want to speak with another pastor, so Pastor Rao gave her some Bible texts to read and invited her to contact him if she had any questions. Soon Seetharathnam contacted the pastor to ask about the Sabbath. Pastor Prasada Rao explained the Sabbath and other Bible truths.

Seetharathnam wanted to know more, so the pastor arranged to hold meetings in her village. Following the meetings Seetharathnam was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Filled with the Spirit of God, Seetharathnam is a powerful witness for the Lord, ministering to the poor and sick, praying for them and nursing the sick back to health. She has raised up a church of more than thirty believers. Fearlessly she tells others about her Jesus, who called her out of idol worship.

Now when people come to Seetharathnam for healing, she tells them that she is a Christian and does not chant the mantras anymore. "But I will pray for you," she says.

Many people in Seetharathnam's village have found the joy that Jesus brings. Their transformation shows on their faces as they worship God each Sabbath.

Mission offerings make it possible for thousands in India and around the world to hear the gospel and come to Christ.

SAROJINI CHEDALAWADA lives near Seattle, Washington. She and her husband actively support ministry in India.

Meekness in the Crucible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

Memory Text: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (*Matthew 5:5, NIV*).

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

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

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

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 8.*

Broken Bread and Poured-Out Wine

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

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

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

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

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

Interceding for Grace

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

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

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

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

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

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

Loving Those Who Hurt Us

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Closed Mouth

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our Rock and Refuge

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

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

“Without cause men will become our enemies. The motives of the people of God will be misinterpreted, not only by the world, but by their own brethren. The Lord’s servants will be put in hard places. A mountain will be made of a molehill to justify men in pursuing a selfish, unrighteous course. . . . By misrepresentation these men will be clothed in the dark vestments of dishonesty because circumstances beyond their control made their work perplexing. They will be pointed to as men that cannot be trusted. And this will be done by the members of the church. God’s servants must arm themselves with the mind of Christ. They must not expect to escape insult and misjudgment. They will be called enthusiasts and fanatics. But let them not become discouraged. God’s hands are on the wheel of His providence, guiding His work to the glory of His name.”—Ellen G. White, in *Spalding and Magan Collection*, p. 370.

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

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

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

Discussion Questions:

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

A Teen With a Mission

Ariane de Melo Felipe is a 14-year-old Brazilian girl with dreams—two very big dreams. They are not the dreams of most teenage girls. Ariane dreams of building a church in the Novo Barrio (neighborhood) of the city of São José do Mipibu, near her home. Her second dream is to study theology. To Ariane her dreams are concrete, for already she has led hundreds of people to Christ.

When Ariane was still quite young, her parents, Romário and Lourdes, noticed that Ariane had a heart for God that few others of any age possess. She joined her church's Pathfinder Club, began to study the Bible in depth, and took part in lay training sessions sponsored by her local mission. Then she organized her own Bible class. As a result of her efforts, six people gave their lives to Jesus.

Her pastor recommended that Ariane take part in an intensive union-wide lay training session with adults three or four times her age. After returning home, she organized a series of meetings and preached 13 times. As a result, eight people decided to follow Jesus.

Ariane focused on an area four miles (seven kilometers) from her home. She had to walk along a busy highway to reach the neighborhood, but she was not afraid. She visited people, gave Bible studies, and organized a Bible class with 15 participants. And eight more precious souls came to the Master. When her local mission learned of her continuing dedication to evangelism, they bought her a bicycle, so she could make the trip more quickly and safely. Ariane uses her new bicycle to hold more meetings, organize more Bible study groups, and lead more people to Jesus.

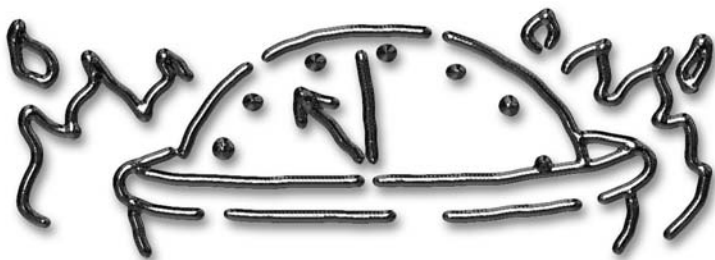
Because of Ariane's dedication to evangelism, more than one hundred people in the state of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil, have been baptized.

Evangelism takes many forms. Some, such as Ariane, have the gift of evangelism. But we all can have a part when we give our mission offerings every week.



ARIANE DE MELO FELIPE (*left*) shares her faith in Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil.

Waiting *in the Crucible*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 15.*

The God of Patience

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

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

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

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

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

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

In God's Time

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

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

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

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

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

David: An Object Lesson in Waiting

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

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

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

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

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

Think how easily David could have justified killing Saul. (“After all, wasn’t I told I’d have the throne? And Saul is so evil anyway.”) Yet, his actions speak of true faith in God. What might you be able to draw from this example for yourself in whatever you might be waiting for?

Elijah: The Problem of Rushing

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

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

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

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

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

Learning to Delight in the Lord

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

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

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

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

vs. 1

vs. 5

vs. 7

vs. 8

Read verse 4 again. In the context of the verses you have just made comments on, what does it mean “to delight in the Lord”?

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

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

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

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Anointing of David,” pp. 637–642; “David and Goliath,” pp. 643–648; “David a Fugitive,” pp. 649–659; “The Magnanimity of David,” pp. 660–674; “The Death of Saul,” pp. 675–682, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

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

“Every trial is weighed and measured by the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is not beyond man’s ability to endure through the grace given unto him.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 12, p. 81.

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

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

Discussion Questions:

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

Mickey's Mission

by HOMER TRECARTIN

My wife and I were visiting a small country church in rural Virginia, U.S.A. The little church looked sleepy, but we soon learned that it was alive and active in mission.

Mickey greeted us at the door with a memorable phrase, "If ya really want ta find somethin', ya will!" Seeing our interest in his statement, he continued. "Some folk think Ah was vaccinated with a phonograph needle, but really, Ah just want ta find people Ah can tell 'bout Jesus," Mickey said in his country drawl. "Even out here in the country, if ya want ta find people ta tell 'bout Jesus, just look for 'em. They're all around ya. Why, a few days ago Ah met a man who had read the book 'bout Desmond T. Doss, and now he wants ta find the book so his girl can read it. Ah went home and ordered one fer him and sent it direct ta his house. Later Ah'll go see him with other literature."

Mickey related that two days earlier he had met an Amish man. When Mickey started talking to the man about Jesus, the man said he didn't have time to talk. Mickey's smile dimmed as he said softly, "I reckon I won't ever have no time ta talk 'bout Jesus."

The man stopped working, looked at Mickey, and said, "I'm sorry. I didn't really mean that. It's just, well, somethin's been botherin me lately."

"What's that?" Mickey asked, the sparkle returning to his eyes as he relived the story.

"Well, someone gave me a book on the Ten Commandments," the man said, "and I've been reading it. But I just don't know what to think. Do you think I will be lost if I don't keep Saturday as the Sabbath?"

Mickey rubbed his chin and answered slowly, "I reckon I'm not the judge of those things. But I do remember Jesus said once, 'If ya love Me, keep My commandments.'"

The service was about to start, but just as I stood to join the elders on the platform, Mickey whispered, "I'm a goin' back ta see him this week."

Later I learned that Mickey has a barrel half full of arrowheads at his house. When people ask where he found them all, he smiles and tells them, "Same way Ah find people to tell 'bout Jesus. Ah look for 'em wherever Ah is! If ya really want ta find somethin', ya will!"

HOMER TRECARTIN is director for planning in the Office of Adventist Mission at the General Conference. Mickey shares his faith in Carter, Virginia.

Dying Like a Seed



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Sam. 2:12–3:18; 13:1–14; Zech. 4:1–14; Rom. 12:1, 2; Phil. 2:5–9.*

Memory Text: “I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (*John 12:24, NIV*).

Jesus' picture of a kernel of wheat dying is a fascinating analogy of our submission to God's will.

First, there is the falling. The kernel that falls from the wheat stalk has no control over where or how it falls to the ground. It has no control over the ground that surrounds and then presses over it.

Second, there is the waiting. As the kernel lies in the earth, it does not know what the future holds. It cannot “imagine” what life will be like in the future, for it is only a kernel of wheat.

Third, there is the dying. The kernel cannot possibly become a wheat stalk unless it gives up the safe, comfortable situation as a kernel. It must “die”; that is, it must give up what it has always been before it may be transformed from a seed into a fruit-bearing plant.

The Week at a Glance: If we know that God's will is best for us, why do we have such a hard time accepting it? What example of submission has Christ left for us? How do you see the analogy of the kernel of wheat applying to your own life?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 22.*

Submission for Service

Read Philippians 2:5–9. What important message is there for us in these verses?

Contemporary culture urges us all to demand and assert our rights. And all this is good and is often the way it should be. But, as with Jesus, the will of God may ask us to freely give up our rights in order to serve the Father in ways that will make an eternal impact for God's kingdom. This process of giving them up may be difficult and uncomfortable, creating the conditions of a crucible. Look at how Jesus did this (*Phil. 2:5–8*). These verses describe three steps that Jesus took in submitting Himself to the Father's will. And at the beginning, Paul alarmingly reminds us: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (*vs. 5, NIV*).

In order to be in a position to save us, Jesus gave up His equality with the Father and moved to earth in the form and limitations of a human being (*vss. 6, 7, NIV*). Jesus did not come as a great and glorious human being but as a servant of other human beings (*vs. 7, NIV*).

As a human servant, Jesus did not live a peaceful and long life but "became obedient to death." But He did not even die in a noble and glorious manner. No, He was "obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (*vs. 8, NIV*).

In what areas of life is this example of Jesus a model for us? If rights and equality are good and should be protected, how would you explain the logic of sometimes needing to give them up? Now read verse 9. In what way does this verse help us to understand the logic of submission to the Father's will?

Pray for wisdom from the Holy Spirit, asking, What rights am I holding on to right now that actually might be a barrier to submitting to Jesus' will in serving my family, my church, and those around me? To what extent am I willing to endure discomfort to serve others more effectively?

Dying Comes Before Knowing God's Will

Many Christians sincerely seek to know God's will for their lives. "If only I could know God's will for my life, I would sacrifice everything for Him." But even after promising God this, we still may be confused about that will. The reason for this confusion may be found in Romans 12:1, 2. Paul is describing how we can know God's will, and he makes an important point: If you want to know what God's will is, you have to sacrifice first!

Read Romans 12:1, 2. Paul writes that we will be able to "test and approve what God's will is" (*vs. 2, NIV*) when:

1. We have a true understanding of "God's mercy" for us (*vs. 1, NIV*).
2. We offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God (*vs. 1*).
3. Our minds are renewed (*vs. 2*).

It is only the renewed mind that truly can understand God's will. But this renewal hinges on our death to self first. It was not enough that Christ simply suffered for us—He had to die. It is the same with us.

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you any areas in which you are not completely "dead." What things does the Holy Spirit need you to give up in order to become a "living sacrifice" for God?

When areas of our lives are not completely dead to self, God permits crucibles to bring them to our attention. However, our suffering not only helps us confront our sin, it also gives us an insight into Jesus' giving Himself up for us. Elisabeth Elliot writes, "The surrender of our heart's deepest longing is perhaps as close as we come to an understanding of the cross. . . . Our own experience of crucifixion, though immeasurably less than our Savior's, nonetheless furnishes us with a chance to begin to know Him in the fellowship of His sufferings. In every form of our own suffering, He calls us to that fellowship."—*Quest for Love* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Fleming H. Revell, 1966), p. 182.

Read and pray over Romans 12:1, 2. Think about the things you need to give up in order for you to become a sacrifice. How does this help you to understand the sufferings Jesus faced for you on the cross? How can this knowledge help you enter into fellowship with Jesus and His sufferings?

Willingness to Listen

“The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ Then Samuel said, ‘Speak, for your servant is listening.’” (1 Sam. 3:10, NIV).

Have you ever heard that still, small voice of the Holy Spirit but ignored it? Consequently, everything went wrong, and you thought to yourself later, *Oh no, why didn't I listen?*

First Samuel describes a story of an old man and two wicked sons who didn't listen to the Lord and a little boy who did. Though there were strong warnings from God, those who needed to change their course didn't.

Read their story in 1 Samuel 2:12–3:18. What contrast is made apparent here between those who listen to God and those who don't?

Eli's sons had other things on their minds than the things of God. And even when Eli, after hearing what God wanted, spoke to his sons, he didn't seem to do anything else. And his sons were obviously not ready to submit the details of their lives to God's will. What a contrast to the young Samuel!

Preacher Charles Stanley describes how essential it is to cultivate openness to God's voice in what he calls “shifting into neutral.” He says: “The Holy Spirit . . . does not speak for the sake of passing along information. He speaks to get a response. And He knows when our agenda has such a large slice of our attention that it is a waste of time to suggest anything to the contrary. When that is the case, He is often silent. He waits for us to become neutral enough to hear and eventually obey.”—*The Wonderful Spirit-Filled Life* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers, 1992), pp. 179, 180.

What do you think Stanley means by becoming “neutral enough”? When you think about your openness to God, what things often prevent you from being “neutral enough to hear and eventually obey”? What do you need to do in your life to cultivate openness to God's voice and a decisiveness to be obedient to His direction?

Self-Reliance

When Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, it wasn't simply because she doubted God's word. At the heart of the problem was her belief that she had enough wisdom to decide what was good and right for herself. She trusted her own judgment. When we rely on our own judgment as opposed to trusting God's Word, we open ourselves up to all sorts of problems.

The story of Saul describes the steps to self-reliance and the tragedy that so quickly follows. Samuel anointed Saul as God's king (*1 Sam. 10:1*). Then he gave Saul specific instructions (*vs. 8*), but Saul disobeyed.

Read the next part of the story in 1 Samuel 13:1–14. What did Saul do that led to his own downfall?

There are three steps that led Saul down the road to self-reliance so soon after having been made king. The problem is that none of the steps were that bad in themselves. Yet, they contained the seeds of tragedy because they were each taken independently of God. Notice the order in which Saul's fall occurred.

1. Saul said, "I saw" (*NIV*)—the scattering of his troops and Samuel's absence (*vs. 11*). Saul was under pressure, and he evaluated with his own eyes what was happening.

2. Saul moved from "I saw" to "I said"—that the Philistines would conquer them (*vs. 12, NKJV*). What he saw with his own eyes shaped what he said, or surmised, about the situation.

3. Saul moved from "I said" to "I felt"—compelled to offer sacrifice (*vs. 12, NKJV*). What Saul thought now shaped his feelings.

All of us have done this: We rely on our own human eyesight, which leads us to rely on our own human thinking, which leads us to rely on our own human feelings. And then we act on these feelings.

Why do you think it was so easy for Saul to follow his own judgment, even though he had God's clear instructions still ringing in his ears? If we know that we are so fragile and have such imperfect knowledge, why do we still try to rely on ourselves? What can we do to learn more to trust in the Lord's commands than upon ourselves?

Substitutes

As we saw yesterday, submission to God's will can be undermined as we rely on our own strength. It also is possible to rely on other substitutes for God. When some people feel depressed, they go shopping for something to make them happy. When some feel inadequate, they pursue fame. When others have difficulties with their spouse, they look for someone else to give them intimacy and excitement.

Many of the things we use can relieve the pressure, but they do not necessarily solve the problem nor teach us how to handle the situation better the next time. Only supernatural help from God can do that. The problem is that many times we try to depend on substitutes for God rather than on God Himself.

Here are three substitutes that we may use instead of God:

1. Using human logic or past experience when we need fresh divine revelation.
2. Blocking problems from our minds when we need divine solutions.
3. Escaping reality and avoiding God when we need communion with God for divine power.

Zechariah helps us to focus on what really matters when we are tempted to use substitutes. After many years away, the exiles had finally returned from Babylon and immediately began to rebuild the temple. But there was an incredible amount of opposition to this (some background can be found in Ezra 4–6). So Zechariah came with this message of encouragement to Zerubbabel, who was leading the work.

Read this message in Zechariah 4:1–14. What does God mean in verse 6? How could the completion of a building project be affected by the Holy Spirit? What does this teach us about the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the practical things that we do?

God did not prevent the opposition to the temple nor spare Zerubbabel from the stress of dealing with it. And God will not always protect us from opposition. But when opposition comes, God may use it as a crucible to teach us to depend on Him.

When stress comes, what's your first reaction? Food? Television? Prayer? Submission to God? What does your answer tell you about yourself and the things you need to learn or to change?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Eli and His Sons,” pp. 575–580; “The Presumption of Saul,” pp. 616–626, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

Submission to God’s will comes as we die to our own desires and ambitions. This opens the way for true service to others. We cannot live for God without becoming a sacrifice and living in continual openness to God’s voice. For us to truly submit our wills to our Father’s will, we must recognize the dangers of relying on ourselves and on substitutes for God’s Word and power. As submission to God’s will is at the heart of a Christlike life, God may allow crucibles to teach us dependence on Him.

“The neglect of Eli is brought plainly before every father and mother in the land. As the result of his unsanctified affection or his unwillingness to do a disagreeable duty, he reaped a harvest of iniquity in his perverse sons. Both the parent who permitted the wickedness and the children who practiced it were guilty before God, and He would accept no sacrifice or offering for their transgression.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 276.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, talk about the incredible condescension of the Son of God in coming to earth as a human being in order to die for our sins. What does it tell each of us about what self-sacrifice and self-denial for the good of others means? Though we certainly can’t do anything like that, the principle is there and should always be before us. What ways can we, in our own spheres, emulate the kind of submission and self-sacrifice shown to us by Jesus at the Cross?
- 2 For many people, submitting to God without knowing what will happen next can be a terrifying thing. How would you counsel someone who is relying on themselves rather than God? What would you say to help remove their fears of not knowing—or being able to control—the future?
- 3 As a class, spend some time praying for people you know who have difficulty in submitting to God’s will, that they may see that trusting God’s will is the only route to a lasting peace. At the same time, what practical things can you do for these people to help them see that they can surrender to God and that His way is the best? In other words, how can God use you to help others know of His love and willingness to provide?

Invited by an Angel

by BENJAMIN D. SCHOUN

In the Muslim country of Azerbaijan, one family of new believers is convinced that an angel guided them to the Adventist Church.

A young woman named Gunel and her family had just lost their grandfather. Her mother cried quietly as she rode the city bus to the family's grave site. A woman came to comfort her, saying that God is good, that Jesus will come again, and that there is hope for the future. Then the woman told Gunel's mother about a church where she could go to learn more about these things.

A month later Gunel's mother again saw the woman on the bus. The woman again encouraged her and gave her the address of the church. Gunel's mother asked Gunel to go with her one Saturday morning to this church. They had never been inside a Christian church before and hesitated to enter. Then one of the church greeters saw them and invited them in, where they were welcomed with hugs and kisses.

Gunel and her mother enjoyed the worship. After the service Gunel's mother asked about the woman she had met on the bus. She described the woman in detail, but no one recognized the description. The pastor, who knew every Adventist in the city, listened carefully. He did not recognize the woman's description and suggested that Gunel's mother had met an angel.

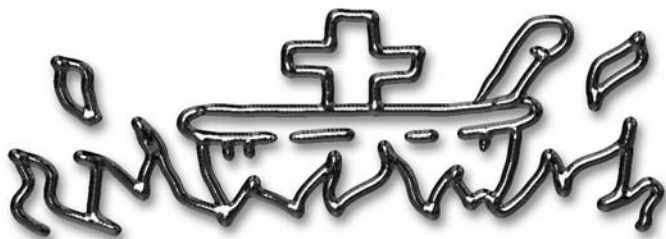
Gunel and her mother continued attending church and studied the Bible diligently. First Gunel's mother was baptized, then Gunel and her brother and sister followed. Now they host a small group meeting in their home. Gunel's father, still a Muslim, is favorable to Adventists.

Gunel's Muslim friends harass her because she has become a Christian. But Gunel is not deterred. Recently she took an Adventist World Radio seminar to learn how to produce radio programs. Perhaps Gunel will be part of AWR's outreach into her homeland, where today just a handful of believers live.



GUNEL (*left*). BENJAMIN D. SCHOUN is president of Adventist World Radio.

Christ *in the* Crucible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 2:1–18; 27:51, 52; Luke 2:7, 22–24; 22:41–44; John 8:58, 59; Rom. 6:23; Titus 1:2.*

Memory Text: “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” (*Matthew 27:46*).

Whenever we look at the issue of suffering, the question comes: How did sin and suffering first arise? Through divine revelation we have good answers: They arose because free beings abused the freedom God had given them. This leads to another question: Did God know beforehand that these beings would fall? Yes, but obviously He thought it was, as C. S. Lewis wrote, “worth the risk.”

Worth the risk? For whom? For us, while God sits in heaven on His throne? Not exactly. The freedom of all His intelligent creatures was so sacred that, rather than deny us freedom, God agreed to bear in Himself the brunt of the suffering caused by our abuse of that freedom. And we see that suffering in the life and death of Jesus, who, through suffering in our flesh, has created bonds between heaven and earth that will last throughout eternity.

The Week at a Glance: What did Christ suffer in our behalf? What can we learn from His suffering?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 29.*

The Early Days

Scripture gives us little information about the early years of Jesus. A few verses, however, tell us something about those conditions and the kind of world the Savior entered.

Read Luke 2:7, 22–24 (see also Lev. 12:6–8) and Matthew 2:1–18. What do we see in these texts that gives us an indication of the kind of life Jesus faced from the start?

Of course, Jesus was not the first person to live in poverty or to face those who wanted to kill Him, even from an early age. There is, however, another element that helps us understand the uniqueness of what Christ suffered from the earliest times.

Read John 1:46. What element does this add to help us understand what sufferings the young Jesus had faced?

With the exception of Adam and Eve before the Fall, Jesus was the only sinless Person who ever lived on the earth. In His purity, in His sinlessness, He was immersed in a world of sin. What a torture it must have been, even as a child, for His pure soul constantly to be in contact with sin. Even in our hardness because of sin, we ourselves often shrink away at sins and evil that we find repulsive. Imagine what it must have been like for Christ, whose soul was pure, who wasn't the least bit tainted by sin. Think of the sharp contrast between Christ and others around Him in that regard. It must have been exceedingly painful for Him.

Ask yourself, "How sensitive am I to the sins that exist all around us? Does it bother me, or am I hardened to it?" If you are hardened to it, could it be because of the things you read, watch, or even do? Think about it.

Despised and Rejected of Men

Read the following texts, keeping in mind the whole time the fact that Jesus was divine, the Creator of heaven and earth and that He came to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (*Matt. 12:22–24; Luke 4:21–30; John 8:58, 59*). **How do these texts help us understand the sufferings that Jesus faced here on earth?**

Whether by leaders, or even by the common people, Jesus' life, acts, and teaching were constantly misunderstood, leading to rejection and hatred by people He came to save. In a certain sense it must be like a parent who sees a wayward child in need of help, and though the parent is willing to give everything for that child, the child spurns the parent, heaping scorn and rejection upon perhaps the only person who can spare that child from utter ruin. That's what Jesus faced while here on earth. How painful it must have been for Him.

Read Matthew 23:37. **What does that tell us about how Christ felt about the rejection? As you read, ask yourself, too, "Was He feeling bad for Himself [as we often do when facing rejection], or was it for another reason?" If for another reason, what was it?**

We've all felt the sting of rejection, and maybe our pain was similar to Christ's in that it was unselfish: We were pained not because we were rejected but because of what the rejection would mean for the one who was rejecting you (perhaps someone you care about who refuses to accept salvation in Christ). Imagine, though, what it must have felt to Jesus, who was fully aware of what He was to face in order to save them, and at the same time fully aware of what the consequences of their rejection would be. "It was because of His innocence that He [Christ] felt so keenly the assaults of Satan."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 129.

What can you learn from Christ that can help you better cope with the pain of rejection? What does His example show you? How can you apply it to your own life?

Jesus in Gethsemane

“And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch” (*Mark 14:34*).

Whatever Jesus suffered through His 33 years here on earth, nothing compared to what He started to face in the last hours before the Cross. From the eternal ages (*Eph. 1:1–4; 2 Tim. 1:8, 9; Titus 1:1, 2*) the sacrifice of Jesus as the offering for the world’s sin was planned, and now it was all coming to pass.

What do the following texts tell us about Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane? *Matt. 26:39, Mark 14:33–36, Luke 22:41–44.*

“He went a little distance from them—not so far but that they could both see and hear Him—and fell prostrate upon the ground. He felt that by sin He was being separated from His Father. The gulf was so broad, so black, so deep, that His spirit shuddered before it. This agony He must not exert His divine power to escape. As man He must suffer the consequences of man’s sin. As man He must endure the wrath of God against transgression.

“Christ was now standing in a different attitude from that in which He had ever stood before. His suffering can best be described in the words of the prophet, ‘Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts.’ *Zech. 13:7*. As the substitute and surety for sinful man, Christ was suffering under divine justice. He saw what justice meant. Hitherto He had been as an intercessor for others; now He longed to have an intercessor for Himself.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 686.

Dwell upon what was happening to Jesus in Gethsemane. Already the sins of the world were starting to fall upon Him. Try to imagine what that must have been like. No human being has ever been called to go through anything like this before. What does this tell us about God’s love for us? What hope can you draw from this for yourself?

The Crucified God

Death by crucifixion was one of the harshest punishments the Romans meted out to anyone. It was considered the worst way to die. Thus, how horrific for anyone to be killed that way, much less the Son of God! Jesus, we must always remember, came in human flesh like ours. Between the beatings, the scourgings, the nails hammered into His hands and feet, the harrowing weight of His own body tearing at the wounds, and the physical pain must have been unbearable. This was harsh, even for the worst of criminals; how unfair, then, that Jesus, innocent of everything, should face such a fate.

Yet, as we know, Christ's physical sufferings were mild in contrast to what was really happening. This was more than just the killing of an innocent man.

What events surrounding the death of Jesus showed that more was going on than most people there understood at the time? What significance can we find in each of these events that can help reveal what happened there?

Matt. 27:45

Matt. 27:51, 52

Mark 15:38

Clearly, something much more was happening here than just the death, however unfairly, of an innocent man. According to Scripture, God's wrath against sin, our sin, was poured out upon Jesus. Jesus on the cross suffered not sinful humanity's unjust wrath but a righteous God's righteous indignation against sin, the sins of the whole world. As such, Jesus suffered something deeper, darker, and more painful than any human being could ever know or experience.

As you go through whatever struggles you are facing, what hope and comfort can you draw from the reality of Christ suffering for you on the cross?

The Suffering God

We might as well get used to it: As long as we are here, in this world, we are going to suffer. It is, as fallen creatures, our fate. Nothing in the Bible promises us anything differently. On the contrary . . .

What do the following texts have to tell us about the topic at hand? *Acts 14:22, Phil. 1:29, 2 Tim. 3:12.*

Yet, in the midst of our suffering, two things we should keep in mind.

First, Christ, our Lord, has suffered worse than any of us ever could. At the Cross, He “has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (*Isa. 53:4, NKJV*); what we know only as individuals, He suffered corporately, for us all. He, who was sinless, became “sin for us” (*2 Cor. 5:21*), suffering in a way that we, as sinful creatures, couldn’t begin to imagine.

But second, as we suffer, we should remember the results of Christ’s suffering; that is, what we have been promised through what Christ has done for us.

Read *John 10:28, Romans 6:23, Titus 1:2, and 1 John 2:25.* What are we promised?

Whatever our sufferings here, thanks to Jesus, thanks to His bearing in Himself the punishment of our sin, thanks to the great provision of the gospel—that through faith we can stand perfect in Jesus right now—we have the promise of eternal life. We have the promise that because of what Christ has done, because of the fullness and completeness of His perfect life and perfect sacrifice, our existence here, full of pain, disappointment, and loss, is no more than an instant, a flash, here and gone. In contrast to this, there is the eternity that awaits us, an eternity in a new heavens and a new earth, one without sin, suffering, and death. And all this is promised to us and made certain for us only because of Christ and the crucible He went into so that one day, coming soon, He would see “the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (*Isa. 53:11*).

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Gethsemane,” pp. 685–697; “Calvary,” pp. 741–757, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Three times has He uttered that prayer. Three times has humanity shrunk from the last, crowning sacrifice. But now the history of the human race comes up before the world’s Redeemer. He sees that the transgressors of the law, if left to themselves, must perish. He sees the helplessness of man. He sees the power of sin. The woes and lamentations of a doomed world rise before Him. He beholds its impending fate, and His decision is made. He will save man at any cost to Himself. He accepts His baptism of blood, that through Him perishing millions may gain everlasting life. He has left the courts of heaven, where all is purity, happiness, and glory, to save the one lost sheep, the one world that has fallen by transgression. And He will not turn from His mission. He will become the propitiation of a race that has willed to sin. His prayer now breathes only submission: ‘If this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 690, 693.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How does it help us in our own sufferings, this knowledge that God Himself, in the person of Christ, suffered worse than any of us ever could? What should the sufferings of Christ in our behalf mean to us? What comfort can we draw from this amazing truth? As you think about your answer, keep in mind the following statement from Ellen White: “All the suffering which is the result of sin was poured into the bosom of the sinless Son of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 129.
- 2 As a class, go over the sufferings of Christ looked at in this week’s lesson. What were the crucibles that Christ faced? In what ways are they like our own; in what ways are they different? What can we learn from how He handled these challenges that can help us amid our own crucibles?
- 3 What are some of your favorite Bible promises, promises that you can cling to amid sorrow and pain? Write them out, claim them for yourself, and share them in class.
- 4 Write out a summary paragraph, highlighting whatever few main points you got from this quarter’s lesson. What questions were resolved for you? What issues still remain unanswered? How can we help each other work through those things that still greatly perplex and trouble us?

Surprised by the Spirit

by GILBERT CANGY

A couple of years ago, God showed up in a mysterious way while I was ministering to young people. I had been invited to be the evening devotional speaker for a regional youth congress on Ambrym, a remote island belonging to Vanuatu, an island republic in the South Pacific.

Although Ambrym is halfway between Australia and the island nation of Fiji, it is still entrenched in its traditional village life. When we arrived, we were greeted by the village chief, who offered us a giant yam, a baby chick, and beautiful coconut juice—traditional welcoming gifts for visitors, as he gave us permission to enter his territory.

Soon the evening meetings began. I was surprised to find a large number of older village folk coming to the meetings. I knew most of them did not speak English, but Bislama, their traditional language. Because the young people attending the youth congress all speak English, no translation had been provided. I decided that these older folks had come to hear the music and to support the youth in attendance.

The week of meetings went well, and toward the end of the week, I invited the youth to give their hearts to the Lord. Again I was surprised—this time at the number of older people who responded to the call. Later I expressed my appreciation for the support of the older folks, in spite of the fact that they could hardly understand what was being said.

“Oh, no,” the man responded. “They have understood every word. Perhaps we should have told you that after your first night’s message, some of the local elders came to ask us where you had learned Bislama. They were pleased that you were preaching in their language.”

I paused in humility and praise as I realized that I was seeing God working as He had during Pentecost. God knew that these older people needed to hear His message of love and salvation, just as their youth needed to hear.

Mission is not dead. In some places it is as new as it was 2,000 years ago when everyone heard God’s message in their own tongue. Your mission offerings make outreach to the farthest corners of the world possible.



GILBERT CANGY is the youth director in the South Pacific Division, headquartered in Australia.

Next quarter's Bible study guide will look at discipleship as the experience between Jesus and those He called to apprenticeship with Him. *Discipleship* by Bertram Melbourne will explore the process of becoming a disciple, and what the major characteristics of discipleship are.

Lesson 1—An Overview of Discipleship

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Discipleship, Historical and Personal (*Matt. 4:18–22, John 1:40–42, Acts 11:26*)

MONDAY: Who Is a Disciple? (*Luke 14:25, 26*)

TUESDAY: How Does One Become a Disciple? (*Matt. 4:18, 19; Mark 1:19, 20; 2:13, 14*)

WEDNESDAY: Requirements of Discipleship (*Matt. 16:24, 25; Mark 8:34, 35; Luke 9:23*)

THURSDAY: The Essence of Discipleship (*Matt. 10:32, 33; 22:37–40*)

Memory Text—*Matthew 4:18, 19*

Sabbath Gem: Those who accept Christ and commit to the task of discipleship are called to live under complete surrender to His lordship in their lives. There is no room for retreat. It is a call to move “Forward ever, backward never.”

Lesson 2—Discipleship Then and Now

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Discipleship Among the Greeks (*John 12:20, 21*)

MONDAY: Discipleship Among the Jews (*Acts 5:34–39, 22:3*)

TUESDAY: Discipleship With John the Baptist (*John 3:21–30*)

WEDNESDAY: Discipleship With Jesus (*Matt. 4:18–20*)

THURSDAY: Contemporary Discipleship (*Matt. 24:14; 28:19, 20; Rev. 14:6–12*)

Memory Text—*Mark 16:20*

Sabbath Gem: Discipleship goes back to before the time of Jesus' earthly ministry in Greek, Jewish, and other ancient cultures. There are great lessons that can be found there and from the life of the Great Teacher that can help us to live more fully for Christ today.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired: The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.