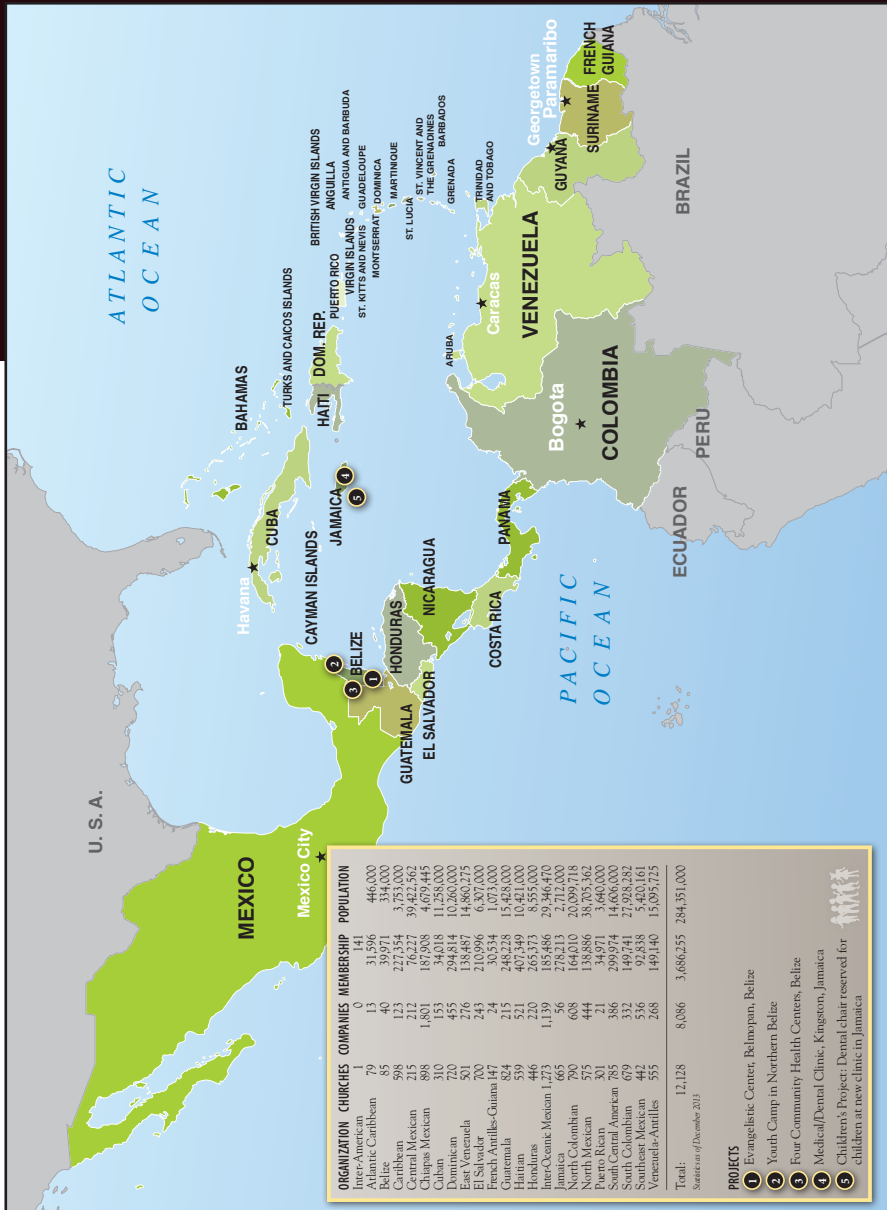


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ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

THE BOOK OF JAMES

Oct • Nov • Dec 2014

Adult  
Sabbath School  
Bible Study Guide

Oct | Nov | Dec 2014

# THE BOOK OF James



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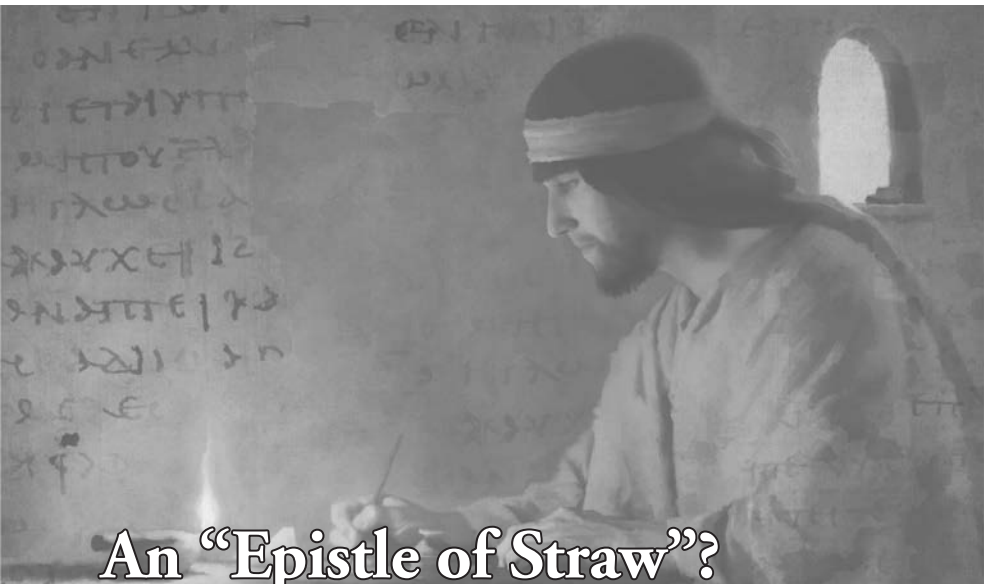
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## An “Epistle of Straw”?

**T**he epistle of James has been one of the most misunderstood books of the Bible. In the Leipzig Debate of 1519, Roman Catholic scholar Johann Eck used it to challenge Martin Luther’s view of justification by faith alone, insisting that works needed to be added to the equation.

Luther, in response, eventually denied the epistle’s inspired authorship, mainly on the mistaken claim that it taught justification by works. In the introduction to his 1522 German translation of the New Testament, Luther indicated his preference for books like John, 1 John, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and 1 Peter, which reveal Christ and teach “everything that is needful and blessed . . . to know.”

His preface to the book of James was even more negative. Luther called it “really an epistle of straw” because it had “nothing of the nature of the gospel about it.” Although Luther never removed it from the canon of Scripture, he separated it from what he considered the core of the canon.

Luther’s emphasis on Paul’s epistles, especially Romans and Galatians, and his rejection of James for anything more than devotional value, has influenced a large segment of Christian thinking through the centuries.

Who was James anyway? Was he a legalist, combating Paul’s idea of justification by faith by teaching that justification is really by works? Or was he simply providing a slightly different perspective on the subject, similar to the several perspectives on the teachings of Jesus that we find in the Gospels? The answer is, clearly, the latter.

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Not all of the Reformers shared Luther's low opinion of James. No less a luminary than Melancthon, Luther's closest associate, believed that the writings of Paul and James were not in conflict.

James had a firsthand knowledge of Jesus. In fact, his epistle, of all the epistles, may very well be the earliest Christian writing in existence, and, of all the epistles, reflects most closely the teachings of Jesus that we find in the Gospels. As in the parables of Jesus, imagery from agriculture and the world of finance is abundant. Other important themes include wisdom, prayer, and above all, faith.

James is unique in other ways, too, thereby opening a window for us into some of the struggles that the earliest Christian congregations faced. With envy, jealousy, and worldliness creeping into the fold, there seems to have been societal and cultural pressures that pitted wealthier Christians against poor ones. We also see the great controversy being played out as James attacks counterfeit forms of wisdom and faith.

Most important for Seventh-day Adventists, the epistle of James exudes confidence in the return of Jesus; it also provides crucial perspectives on the law, the judgment, and the Second Coming. Elijah is even presented as a model for us to emulate. This has special relevance for us, as Seventh-day Adventists, who are entrusted with preparing the way for Christ's second advent.

Thus, in some ways, our journey this quarter spans the entire Christian era, as it includes some of the earliest preaching, as well as special insights for these last days.

*Most important for Seventh-day Adventists, the epistle of James exudes confidence in the return of Jesus; it also provides crucial perspectives on the law, the judgment, and the Second Coming.*

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In Jamaica, the dignity of thousands of street-dwelling men, women, and children has been restored at the Good Samaritan Inn, where they receive a hot meal and have the opportunity to shower, get

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# James, *the* Lord's Brother



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *John 7:2–5; 1 Cor. 15:5–7; James 1:3; 2:5; 1 Pet. 2:9, 10; Matt. 7:24–27.*

**Memory Text:** “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (*John 15:14, NKJV*).

We, today, are a long way from the early days of the Christian church, both time wise and culturally. Thus, we have little idea of what it was like to belong to the fledgling Christian movement at a time when many congregations met in homes, and most believers were Jews persecuted by their fellow Israelites. The letter of James gives us one of the earliest glimpses of Jewish Christianity before it disappeared in the fog of Jewish-Christian controversies and before the marginalization of the Jews by the predominantly Gentile church of the second century and beyond.

Unlike many of the epistles, it does not seem that some crisis or urgent need in a local church impelled James to write this epistle. Rather, it is written to the broader Christian community “scattered abroad” (*James 1:1*).

Before we dive into his letter, however, this week we want to try to learn what we can about the author himself. Some of the questions we'll address are: Who was James? What was his background? What had been his relationship to Jesus? And what position did he hold in the church?

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 4.

## James, the Brother of Jesus

The author of this letter must have been well known in the church because there is no more specific information in this letter as to who he is other than what we find in James 1:1: “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.”

Thus, we can narrow down the options of his identity pretty quickly. Four people in the New Testament are named James: there are two of the twelve disciples (*Mark 3:17, 18*); there is the father of Judas (another of the Twelve but not Judas Iscariot, *Luke 6:16, NKJV*) and one of Jesus’ brothers (*Mark 6:3*). Of these four, only the brother of Jesus lived long enough and was prominent enough in the church to have penned such a letter. Thus, we believe that it was James, the brother of Jesus, who authored this New Testament book.

As a carpenter’s son (*Matt. 13:55*), James would have had more educational opportunities than would a common peasant. His letter is among the best examples of literary Greek in the New Testament. Its rich vocabulary, rhetorical flair, and command of the Old Testament are surpassed only by Hebrews. Because his name appears first in the list of Jesus’ brothers, James was probably the oldest son. However, the fact that Jesus entrusted the care of His mother to John, the beloved disciple (*John 19:26, 27*), suggests that His brothers were not Mary’s own children but the sons of Joseph by a previous marriage.

**In the context of Jesus’ ministry, read this verse: “When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind’ ”** (*Mark 3:21, NIV; see also John 7:2–5*). **What do these texts tell us about how Jesus had been perceived by His own family? What lessons can we draw from them for ourselves, if indeed at times we find ourselves misunderstood by those whom we love?**

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“It was a false conception of the Messiah’s work, and a lack of faith in the divine character of Jesus, that had led His brothers to urge Him to present Himself publicly to the people at the Feast of Tabernacles.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 485, 486.



## James, the Believer

**Read** 1 Corinthians 15:5–7 and Acts 1:14. What do they tell us about the changes that happened to James?

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Jesus appeared to many after His resurrection, including Peter and the Twelve (minus Judas Iscariot). Then he appeared to more than five hundred people at one time. James, apparently, wasn't at this meeting with the five hundred; Jesus appeared to him separately, and that appearance must have been special, because it is specifically noted. Whatever happened at that meeting, the Bible doesn't say. It must have made a big impact on him, though, for James did become a faithful follower of Jesus and an influential leader in the church.

**What else do we know about James?** *Acts 12:16, 17; 15:13, 14, 19; 21:17–19; Gal. 1:18, 19; 2:9.*

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James quickly became a leading figure in the Jerusalem church. After his rescue from prison by the angel (A.D. 44), Peter wanted James to know what had happened to him (*Acts 12:17*). Five years later, James presided at, and announced the decision of, the Jerusalem Council. Paul mentions him first, before Peter and John, in his listing of the “pillars” in Jerusalem (*Gal. 2:9*). Several years after this event (A.D. 58), when Paul brought the collection for the poor in Jerusalem from the various churches, the delegates from each church in turn laid the offerings at the feet of James (see Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, pp. 208, 209).

James appears to have been held in high esteem for many decades after the death of the apostles. In fact, so many legends developed about his piety that he is remembered as “James the Just.” Thus, despite starting out in great doubt about Jesus, James ended up being a spiritual giant in the early church.

## James and the Gospel

Unfortunately, perhaps because of Luther's influence, many Christians have been unable to see the important message James's epistle contains. Without diminishing the contribution Luther made for the church of his day, we must remember that "the Reformation did not . . . end with Luther. It is to be continued to the close of this world's history," because "grave errors" were perpetuated by the Reformers and many "important truths" were still to be revealed.—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 353.

Thus, the need for the Great Awakening with Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield—and the Wesley brothers who gave birth to the Methodist movement and its emphasis on the vital role of holiness in the Christian life. The work of reform continued with the Second Awakening, through which God raised up Seventh-day Adventists to proclaim the "third angel's message." This worldwide proclamation culminates with the Spirit-filled witness of a people who "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (*Rev. 14:12*).

**Read** James 1:3; 2:5, 22, 23; 5:15. How does faith function in these passages? What do they tell us about what it means to live by faith? How do they show us that faith is more than just an intellectual assent to various propositional truths?

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It may come as a surprise to some that James refers to believing and faith 19 times in this short letter, more than his references to works and justification combined! In fact, the importance of faith is stressed right at the beginning of the first chapter in connection with trials and asking for wisdom (*vss. 3, 6*). This shows that James was not only writing to believers but that he expects them to have a certain quality of faith. As we will see, the act of believing, in itself, is of little avail; true faith carries certain recognizable credentials. That is, true faith will be revealed in the life and character of the believer.

**What things do you do on a daily basis that reveal the quality and reality of your faith? How can you show the reality of your faith, even in the "small" things?**

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## To the Twelve Tribes Scattered Abroad

**Read** James 1:1; Acts 11:19–21; and 1 Peter 2:9, 10. Who are these “twelve tribes,” and how did they become so widely scattered?

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As we have seen, James wrote to believers. At first, the gospel work was focused in Jerusalem (*Luke 24:47*); but, as a result of persecution, which intensified after the stoning of Stephen, these believers were scattered, and the seed of the gospel was planted throughout the cities and surrounding regions of the Roman Empire.

According to Acts 11, the gospel spread to the Gentiles quite early, beginning in Antioch; so, “the twelve tribes” probably refers to Christians as a whole. There do not seem to have been different congregations based on ethnicity, which is why the Jerusalem Council soon had to decide whether believing Gentiles should first become Jews by being circumcised (*Acts 15:1–6*) in order to become Christians.

**Read** Acts 15:13–21. How does James address the problem the early church struggled with?

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A scriptural solution preserved a unified church: James cites Amos’s prophecy that Israel’s restoration and ultimate expansion would include Gentiles (*Acts 15:16, 17*), a decree that is based on Mosaic laws for foreign residents themselves (*Leviticus 18–20*). James addresses his readers as “the twelve tribes” to remind them of their identity as fellow heirs of the promise made to Abraham. Peter has a similar idea in mind when he describes Christians as a “holy nation” (*1 Pet. 2:9; compare Exod. 19:5, 6*), addressing also those “scattered” abroad (*1 Pet. 1:1*). The Greek word in both passages is *diaspora*, which normally referred to Jews living outside the geographical boundaries of Israel proper (*see John 7:35*).

*A church scattered abroad? Sounds like us, as Seventh-day Adventists. Despite the vast cultural, ethnic, and social differences among us, what unites Seventh-day Adventists in Christ as a distinctive Protestant movement?*

## James and Jesus

James had the opportunity to observe Jesus when He was a child, a youth, and an adult. Then, at some point, James not only believed in Jesus as the Messiah but became a leader of the Christians in Jerusalem. And yet, James calls himself not a brother but a “bondservant” (*James 1:1, NKJV*) of Jesus. Clearly, James learned humility and true wisdom. Not surprisingly, these are also important themes of this letter (*see James 1:9–11, 21; 3:13–18; 4:6–10*).

**Compare** the following passages and summarize what they have in common:

*James 1:22 with Matt. 7:24–27* \_\_\_\_\_

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*James 3:12 with Matt. 7:16* \_\_\_\_\_

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*James 4:12 with Matt. 7:1* \_\_\_\_\_

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The affinity the letter of James has with the teachings of Jesus and particularly the Sermon on the Mount has been widely recognized. “Jesus’ pervasive influence underlies the whole of James’s teaching.” —Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), p. 50.

From a close comparison of James with the Gospels, it appears that this letter is not dependent on any of them. Rather, James writes from an intimate and personal acquaintance with the teachings of Jesus, who always inspired His listeners to faith and challenged them to exercise it.

As we study the book of James this quarter, we will find a very similar approach. James is not content with a weak, fruitless, or vacillating faith. As we will see next week, faith dominates the early part of the book, and James shows how this crucial quality undergirds a vital relationship with Christ.

**Dwell on the quality and reality of your own faith. How real is it? How deep does it go? How does it enable you to live the Christian life? What things could you do, and what choices could you make, that could help improve the quality and depth of your faith?**

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**Further Study:** “His brothers often brought forward the philosophy of the Pharisees, which was threadbare and hoary with age, and presumed to think that they could teach Him who understood all truth, and comprehended all mysteries. They freely condemned that which they could not understand. Their reproaches probed Him to the quick, and His soul was wearied and distressed. They avowed faith in God, and thought they were vindicating God, when God was with them in the flesh, and they knew Him not.

“These things made His path a thorny one to travel. So pained was Christ by the misapprehension in His own home that it was a relief to Him to go where it did not exist.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 326.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 The letter of James is essentially a handbook on practical Christian living. It may even have been the first New Testament book written (some time between A.D. 44 and 49). That is, besides it being a book on theology, it also tells us how to live out the Christian life. Why is living out what we believe just as, if not more, important than what we believe? Or is what we believe more important than how we live out that belief? For instance, what's better: a sincere Sunday keeper who truly and seriously keeps the first day of the week holy or an insincere Sabbath keeper who “keeps” the seventh-day Sabbath but doesn't really take it all that seriously? Give reasons for your answer.
- 2 As we have seen in Sunday's study, James was the brother of Jesus. In other words, though Jesus was God Himself, the Creator of all that was made, He was also human, one of us, even to the point that He had siblings. How does this amazing concept help us to understand how the vast gap between heaven and a fallen world was bridged? What does it say to us, too, about the lengths that God goes to in order to save fallen humanity? How does the humanity of Christ help us understand how we can have victory over sin? How does the humanity of Christ assure us that God understands the reality of our toils and struggles?
- 3 This week's lesson mentioned that humility was a theme in James's letter. Why is humility so important in the Christian life? That is, in light of the Cross and what happened there, how dare any of us ever assume an attitude of arrogance or self-importance, especially when it comes to spiritual matters?

## God's Guiding Voice

JACQUES CESAIRE

As teens, my friends and I partied and drank, but I was not satisfied. I was searching for meaning but didn't know what it was or where to find it.

Often when we were away from the crowd, our conversation drifted toward religious topics. Frequently we talked about the existence of God. One boy, Felix, seemed to know a lot about God. I didn't know it, but his family was Seventh-day Adventist. Although Felix was not active in the church, his childhood training was having a positive influence on us.

Felix sometimes told us stories from the Bible. I had never heard these stories and thought they were fairy tales. So, Felix brought me a Bible so I could read the stories; then I found some prophecies. I didn't understand them and asked Felix what they meant. He said I wouldn't understand unless I prayed before reading. I laughed, but he insisted. I tried it, and it worked.

As I continued reading, I learned that our bodies are the temple of God and that we should not defile them with unclean foods or impure habits. I told Felix that I had decided to stop going to dances and parties and to stop smoking, drinking, and even eating unclean foods. I thought he would be surprised, but he agreed! He told me that I should go to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He even offered to go with me.

On Saturday morning, the phone rang. Felix had decided to go to work instead of church, but he had been injured in a motorcycle accident. I hurried to the hospital but learned that he had been transferred to another hospital. It was almost 9:00. I prayed, Lord, what should I do? Should I go to the other hospital or go to church? I felt impressed to go to church, and I'm glad I did.

I began attending church regularly. When Felix was released from the hospital, he came to church with me once but never returned. He is still using drugs, smoking, and disregarding God's laws.

My younger brother saw the difference God was making in my life, and he attended church with me. Then my other brothers and a sister began attending church. Eventually we all were baptized. But my parents resisted.

The pastor asked me to lead a small group. I prayed and asked my parents if I could hold the meetings in their home. They agreed to let me use their front porch. When the group began singing, my mother stepped closer to the window. Soon she came out and sat down. The next evening my father joined us.

When evangelistic meetings began, my parents attended all the meetings and decided to be baptized. Knowing how they felt when I began attending church, I found it hard to realize that within four years my entire family had become united in the Adventist Church. We are all actively involved in church ministries today.

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*JACQUES CESAIRE is a house painter by trade and serves his church as a lay pastor and first elder in Morne-Pitault, Martinique.*



# The Perfecting of Our Faith




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *James 1:2, 3; 1 Pet. 1:6, 7; Phil. 3:12–15; James 1:19–21; Luke 17:5, 6; Luke 12:16–21.*

**Memory Text:** “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (*Hebrews 12:2, NIV*).

A dentist explained why his crowns are always flawless. “Unlike some dentists,” he said, “I never have a problem with the crowns that come back from the lab. If I send them perfect work, they send me perfect crowns.” This dentist doesn’t worry about the end result. He focuses on his role in the initial stage of the process.

Likewise, as Christians, we need not get all worked up over whether or not our characters will be good enough in the end. That is God’s work. Our role is to “fight the good fight of faith” (*1 Tim. 6:12*) by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, “the author and perfecter of our faith.” Such faith in Christ enables Him to work in us “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (*Phil. 2:13*) and to finish the good work He has begun (*Phil. 1:6*). Without faith, it is possible to feel defeated, even before we begin, because we focus on ourselves rather than on Him.

As Jesus says, “‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent’” (*John 6:29, NKJV*). James, as we will see, helps us to understand this important spiritual truth.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 11.

## Faith Lasts

**Read** James 1:2, 3; 1 Peter 1:6, 7; 4:12, 13. What is the common attitude of both James and Peter in regard to trials? How are we supposed to relate to this incredible biblical injunction?

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No one likes suffering; we almost always avoid it if we can. The Greek word used in verse 3 for the testing of our faith is *dokimion*. It refers to the process of proving the genuineness of something. Peter likens this testing or trying of our faith to the way fire purifies gold; although such testing may not be pleasant, God expects a successful outcome. Trials should not discourage us; for, if we remain faithful, we will “come forth as gold” (*Job 23:10; compare Prov. 17:3*).

Thus, we are to rejoice when trials come, especially over our faith, for Jesus says, “Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven” (*Matt. 5:12*). Also, trials deepen our appreciation for what Christ endured for us. As 1 Peter 4:13 points out, they enable us to share in Christ’s sufferings.

In short, we need to look through and beyond each trial and visualize the result God intends. That is where faith comes in. We need to believe in a loving Father, rely on His wisdom, and act on the basis of His Word. We can safely entrust our future to Him (*see Rom. 8:28*). In fact, only through faith, through knowing for ourselves God’s love, and living by faith in light of that love, could we ever possibly rejoice in our trials.

In James 1:3, the ultimate goal of the testing of our faith is “patience” (*NKJV*). The Greek word (*hypomonē*) can also be translated “endurance” (*NASB*) or “perseverance” (*NIV*). *Hypomonē* refers to that which outlasts everything else because it rests confidently in the assurance of God’s final deliverance (*as in Luke 21:19*).

**It’s one thing to stay faithful to God during trials; that is, to not lose your faith but to cling to the Lord, even in the worst times. But we are told to “rejoice” in our trials. Isn’t that asking too much? After all, at times it can be hard enough just to stay faithful in trials but to rejoice in them? Yet, that’s what we are told. How, then, can we learn to rejoice, when rejoicing is the last thing we feel like doing?**

## Perfection

Read James 1:2–4. Notice the progression: faith, testing, patience, perfection. James begins with faith because that is the foundation of all true Christian experience. He then says we need trials to test the genuineness of our faith. Lastly, James states that trials can teach us perseverance, so that eventually we will not be caught by surprise and be overcome by them. God’s goal for us is that we “may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (*James 1:4, NKJV*). The language could not be loftier. The word *perfect* (*teleios*) means spiritual maturity, while *complete* (*holokleros*) refers to wholeness in every way. Truly, we can become so much more in the Lord if we would die to self and allow Him to work in us “to will and to do of his good pleasure” (*Phil. 2:13*).

**Read Ephesians 4:13 and Philippians 3:12–15. What attitude toward “perfection” are Christians encouraged to have?**

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Like Paul, followers of Christ will never be satisfied with anything short of patterning their lives after the unselfish, sacrificial love of their Master. But we will never feel as though we have “already attained” or were “already perfected” (*NJKV*).

Notice, too, in the passages, the emphasis on the future. Paul is pointing toward what he has been promised in God through faith in Jesus. There’s never a time in the Christian walk where we can say, “I have arrived,” at least as far as character goes. (Have you ever noticed, too, that those who say that they have “arrived” are generally obnoxious and self-righteous?) We are like a work of art; we can always be improved upon, and God promises to do just that as long as we press on in faith, seeking to surrender to Him daily in trust and obedience.

**If you died right now, would you be good enough to be saved? Or if you had died two weeks after you had accepted Jesus, would you have been good enough to be saved? Do you think in six months you will be good enough? What does your answer tell you about your need for the perfect robe of Christ’s righteousness, regardless of whatever level of “perfection” you attain?**

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## Asking in Faith

**Read** James 1:5, 6. How is wisdom different from knowledge? What connection does James make between wisdom and faith?

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It may seem a bit odd that James says, “If any of you lacks wisdom.” Who thinks he or she has enough wisdom to begin with? Solomon, for instance, recognizing his need, humbly asked for “an understanding heart to . . . discern between good and bad” (*1 Kings 3:9*). Later, he wrote: “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (*Prov. 9:10*).

**We** tend to think of wisdom as that which we know. How do the following texts, however, show us what another side of true wisdom is? *James 1:19–21; 2:15, 16; 3:13.*

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Both Proverbs and James describe wisdom as something very practical: not *what we know* but *how we live*. For example, being “quick to listen, slow to speak” (*James 1:19, NIV*). Plato said, “Wise men talk because they have something to say; fools, because they would like to say something.” In other words, we can have all the knowledge the world offers but lack true wisdom.

Of course, because God is the Source of all true wisdom, we gain wisdom most by *listening* to Him—reading His Word and spending thoughtful time contemplating the life of Christ, “who became for us wisdom from God” (*1 Cor. 1:30, NKJV*). By learning to reflect the character of Christ in our own lives, we live out the truth as it is in Jesus. That is true wisdom.

**Read James 1:6 again. We must ask in faith, not doubting. Isn’t that sometimes hard? Who doesn’t, at times, struggle with doubt? When that happens, what’s crucial is to pray and to start dwelling on all the reasons we have for faith: the story of Jesus, the prophecies in the Bible, and our own personal experiences. How could doing this help us work through whatever doubt might occasionally arise?**

## The Flip Side of Faith

**Read** James 1:6–8. What is he saying to us here?

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The word for “doubt” refers to one being inwardly divided; this helps us to understand its connection to double-mindedness. We see a clear example of this at Kadesh-Barnea. Israel faced a choice there: move forward in faith or rebel against the Lord. Amazingly, they chose rebellion and wanted to return to the bondage of Egypt. When God intervened and announced through Moses that they would die in the wilderness, suddenly the people “believed”! They said, “ ‘We will go up to the place which the LORD has promised, for we have sinned’ ” (*Num. 14:40, NKJV*).

“Now they seemed sincerely to repent of their sinful conduct; but they sorrowed because of the result of their evil course rather than from a sense of their ingratitude and disobedience. When they found that the Lord did not relent in His decree, their self-will again arose, and they declared that they would not return into the wilderness. In commanding them to retire from the land of their enemies, God tested their apparent submission and proved that it was not real.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 391.

**Read** Luke 17:5, 6. What is Jesus telling us here about faith?

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When the disciples asked for more faith, Jesus said mustard seed-sized faith was plenty. What counts is whether our faith is alive and growing, and this can and will happen only as we continue to exercise that faith by reaching out and trusting in God in all situations.

But doubt sometimes gets in the way. Our world bombards us with doubt and skepticism; no one is immune. All we can do is pray our way through it, remembering God’s faithfulness in the past and trusting Him for our future.

**What are all the reasons you have for trusting in God and His promises and living by faith? Think through them, dwell on them, and your faith will only increase.**

## The Rich and the Poor

In this short letter, James shows great concern for poor people; some even consider it his major theme. But to modern ears, his diatribes against the rich and in favor of the poor seem extreme, even shocking. At the same time, however, James isn't saying anything much different from what Jesus has said.

**Compare** James 1:9–11 with Luke 8:14; compare James 1:27 with Matthew 25:37–40; compare James 2:15, 16 with Luke 10:29–37; and compare James 5:1–4 with Luke 12:16–21. What's the common message there to us? What warnings and admonitions can we all take away from what's so clearly expressed here?

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James, of course, does not shut the doors of the kingdom on all rich people. But, like Jesus, he recognizes the insidious temptations that come with wealth. Rich or poor, we need to keep our eyes on the real prize. The problem with money is that it tends to deceive us into focusing on the temporal instead of the eternal (*2 Cor: 4:18*).

No question, the acquisition of wealth, higher education, or social influence tends to separate people from the “less fortunate.” But the early church kept the two classes together by turning worldly values upside down. The one who takes the lowest place, the role of humility, is the one who can glory in exaltation.

“As long as there are hungry ones in God's world to be fed, naked ones to be clothed, souls perishing for the bread and water of salvation, every unnecessary indulgence, every overplus of capital, pleads for the poor and the naked.”—Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 269.

**What about yourself? Whether rich or poor, it doesn't matter; what matters is how you relate to money. What is it about money that makes it so potentially dangerous to our souls?**

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**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, “The Sermon on the Mount,” pp. 298–314, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“God would have his servants become acquainted with their own hearts. In order to bring to them a true knowledge of their condition, he permits the fire of affliction to assail them, so that they may be purified. The trials of life are God’s workmen to remove the impurities, infirmities, and roughness from our characters, and fit them for the society of pure, heavenly angels in glory. Then as we pass through trial, as the fire of affliction kindles upon us, shall we not keep our eyes fixed upon the things that are unseen, on the eternal inheritance, the immortal life, the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory? [A]nd while we do this, the fire will not consume us, but only remove the dross, and we shall come forth seven times purified, bearing the impress of the Divine.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 10, 1894.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 What Bible characters do you find most encouraging in times of suffering? Have you learned to find joy in trials? If so, share with the class what has helped you do this. At the same time, if you haven’t been able to rejoice in your sufferings, talk about that in class, as well (if you feel comfortable doing it).
- 2 Dwell more on this idea that true wisdom is not so much head knowledge but what we do in faith through Christ. At the same time, why does this not mean that head knowledge isn’t important? How can having, for instance, wrong doctrine, be very detrimental to one’s walk with the Lord?
- 3 A young man had a friend who went through severe trials. Although the young man found the trials painful to watch, he did notice that his friend was growing in grace. When the trials were over, his friend really had changed—and for the better! What things have you learned from your trials that have been spiritually beneficial to you? Ask yourself, Could I have learned them any other way?
- 4 What can you say to someone who appears sincere in faith and yet admits to being, at times, overcome with doubt? How can you help?

# Heidy's Hope: Part 1

JUAN CAICEDO SOLIS

When 13-year-old Heidy Moreno and her cousin, Mirella, began questioning their mothers' rules, Heidy's mother decided to stop their rebelliousness before it got out of hand. She took Heidy to a spirit medium—a witch.

The medium claimed that Heidy had a bad spirit. "I see a gold feather over your head," the medium told Heidy. "The spirit that possesses you is powerful." The medium performed a ritual to remove Heidy's rebelliousness. Suddenly Heidy felt as if her body was not hers. She became dizzy, then fainted.

Soon after Heidy and her mother returned home to their farm outside Cali, Colombia, Heidy began acting strangely. She crawled on the floor like a snake and spoke with strange voices. The voices promised great riches but threatened the family members if they tried to stop Heidy's strange behavior. Sometimes family members felt an invisible hand slap them when they tried to touch Heidy. The invisible hands began destroying the furniture and punching holes in the walls.

The spirits came and went unexpectedly, leaving family members shaken and afraid. The family did not want to anger the spirits, for they still hoped to gain the riches that the spirits had promised.

Then one day the spirits spoke through Heidy's cousin, Mirella. She described the spirit that entered her as a strong man. No one else could see them, but they often felt their evil presence. The spirits entered the girls' bodies and forced them to gorge themselves with food. Then after the spirits left, the girls were hungry again.

After months of living in fear and confusion, Heidy's family decided to try to escape the spirits by moving to the city of Cali. But the spirits became angry and beat Heidy and Mirella with whips and sticks until their bodies were bloody and bruised. They gave the girls so much strength that four men could not hold them. The frightened families decided they must get help to free their daughters from these spirits.

Heidy's mother took her to one church after another in hope of finding release from the spirits. But the spirits remained as strong as ever. Then a neighbor told her about the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The spirits had warned Heidy that something terrible would happen if she went to this church, so Heidy resisted her family's attempts to take her there. It took several strong men to overpower the devil in Heidy and get her inside the church. Once inside, Heidy suddenly felt at peace. *God has set me free!* she thought. That day Heidy worshiped God with all her heart.

Heidy knew now that only God could free Mirella from the devil's power. She urged Mirella to go to the church and seek God. The spirits in Mirella threatened her, but she agreed to go, hoping for deliverance from the spirits' torment.

*(continued)*

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# Enduring Temptation



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *James 1:12–21, Ps. 119:11, Gen. 3:1–6, Titus 3:5–7, Rom. 13:12, Eph. 4:22.*

**Memory Text:** “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (*James 1:12*).

We all have experienced it. We resolve not to give in to temptation, but in the heat of the battle, our resolve melts and—much to our own sense of shame and self-loathing—we fall into sin. Sometimes it seems that the more we focus on not sinning, the more powerless against temptation we feel, and the more hopeless our condition appears. We wonder if indeed we are saved at all. It's hard to imagine any serious Christian who hasn't wondered about his or her own salvation, especially after having just fallen into sin.

Fortunately, we can have victory over the temptations that so easily ensnare us. None of us, no matter how enveloped in sin, is hopeless, for our “Father of lights” (*James 1:17*) is greater than our propensity to evil, and only in Him and through His Word can we have victory.

That's the message from the verses we will study this week. Sure, temptations are real, sin is real, and the battle against self is very real. But God is real, too, and through Him we can more than overcome the temptations that brew inside us, just waiting to take us down.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 18.

## The Root of Temptation

**Read** James 1:13, 14. Why is it important that God does not tempt anyone? Where does temptation originate, and how can this knowledge be helpful in our own struggle with sin?

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James is emphatic. Not only is God not the author of evil, He is not the source of temptation either. Evil itself is the source of temptation. According to this passage, the problem lies within us, which is the main reason it's so hard to resist.

Thus, the battle against sin begins in the mind. As much as many might not want to hear it, the truth is that we choose to sin. No one can force us (*Rom. 6:16–18*). Sinful desires, inclinations, and propensities do constantly capture our attention. By using common hunting and fishing terms, James 1:14 describes these inward promptings. Our own desires lure and entice us, and when we give in to them, they finally hook and entrap us.

**Read** Ephesians 6:17, Psalm 119:11, and Luke 4:8. What common theme is seen in all, and how does that relate to the question of victory over temptation?

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In the passages in James, he clearly separates temptation from sin. Being tempted from within is not sin. Even Jesus was tempted. The problem is not temptation itself but how we respond to it. Having a sinful nature is not, in and of itself, sin; however, allowing that sinful nature to control our thoughts and dictate our choices is. Thus, we have the promises, found in God's Word, that offer us the assurances of victory if we claim them for ourselves and cling to them in faith.

**Dwell on the idea that sin is always our own choice. (After all, if it weren't our own choice, how could we be condemned for doing it?) What things can we do on a daily, practical level that could help to keep us from making the wrong choices?**

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## When Lust Conceives

**Read** James 1:13–15 again. When does temptation become sin?

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Several Greek words are used in this passage to describe how sin begins, and all of them are connected with giving birth. When a wrong desire is nurtured, sin is “conceived,” like a baby in the womb. “Sin, when it is completely grown, gives birth to death” (*James 1:15, author’s literal translation*).

The picture is paradoxical. The process that is supposed to give life results only in death (*compare Rom. 7:10–13*). Sin, like cancer, takes over and consumes its host. We all know this, for we have all been ruined by sin. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them.

**Read** Genesis 3:1–6. Eve’s experience vividly illustrates the conflict with sin. What steps led her into sin?

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At its root, sin begins with distrusting God. Satan, using the same successful method by which he deceived a third of the angels (*Rev. 12:4,7–9*), raised doubts in Eve’s mind about God’s character (*Gen. 3:1–5*). Approaching the forbidden tree was not sin, but taking and eating the fruit was. Even so, wrong thoughts seem to have preceded her sinful act (*Gen. 3:6*). She adopted Satan’s suggestions as her own.

Sin always begins in the mind. Like Eve, we may think about the supposed “benefits” of wrongdoing. Then our imagination and feelings begin to take over. Soon we seize the bait and fall into sin.

Often we wonder how it could happen. The answer is easy: we let it happen. Nobody forced us into sin.

“By earnest prayer and living faith we can resist the assaults of Satan, and keep our hearts unspotted from pollution.

“The strongest temptation is no excuse for sin. However great the pressure brought to bear upon the soul, transgression is our own act. It is not in the power of earth or hell to compel any one to sin. The will must consent, the heart must yield, or passion cannot overbear reason, nor iniquity triumph over righteousness.”—Ellen G. White, “Christian Privileges and Duties,” *Signs of the Times*<sup>®</sup>, October 4, 1883.

## Every Good and Perfect Gift

**“Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”** (*James 1:16, 17*).

Although sin gives birth to death, God is the Source of life. He is the “Father of lights” (*James 1:17*), a reference to the Creation (*Gen. 1:14–18*). God gives us birth to a new life, which is the greatest gift we can get “from above” (*compare James 1:17 with John 3:3*).

Like Paul, who speaks of salvation as the result of God’s grace (*Rom. 3:23, 24; Eph. 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:9*), *James 1:17* calls salvation a “gift.” More so, in the next verse, James makes it clear that salvation, this new birth, is the result of God’s purpose and will for us: “In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth” (*James 1:18, NRSV*). That is, God wants us to be saved. It was His will, from even before we existed, that we should have salvation and a new life in Him now and for all eternity.

**How** does James’s depiction compare with the description by Paul and Peter of the new birth? See *Titus 3:5–7, 1 Pet. 1:23*.

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Jesus, Paul, Peter, and James all connect salvation with the new birth. God’s whole purpose in the plan of redemption is to reconnect sin-battered and broken human beings with heaven. The rift was so big and so wide that nothing humans could do could have ever bridged it. Only God’s Word in human form, Jesus, could reconnect heaven to earth. The inspired Word (*2 Tim. 3:16*) is uniquely able to breathe spiritual life into those whose hearts are open to receive the gift.

In short, our “Father of lights” so loves us that, even as underserving as we are, He gives us “every good gift and every perfect gift” (*James 1:17, NKJV*), the best of all gifts being Jesus and the new birth that He offers.

**What are the gifts you’ve been given “from above”? Why is it so important to dwell on them? What happens when we don’t?**

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## Slow to Speak

**Read** James 1:19, 20. What important point is he making there?

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God's Word is powerful. But so are human words. How often have we spoken words that later we wish we could take back? Unfortunately, just being aware of how hurtful wrong words can be, and how destructive anger is, does little to help us get ourselves under control. Left to our own devices, we can never really change. That is why we need to listen more to God and let Him work in us.

“When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 58.

By contrast, problems arise when we stop listening to God and to each other. Whether in the home, at work, or in the church, arguments ensue when listening stops. When that happens, talking begins to accelerate and anger builds. This slippery slope of sinful communication, like the uncontrolled inward desires of James 1:14, 15, can never produce the righteousness of God.

That is why James juxtaposes God's righteousness with human wrath. As long as we rely on what bubbles up naturally from our sinful nature, the creative power of God's Word is blocked, and our own unhelpful or even hurtful words arise instead. No wonder that right after talking about all that our “Father of lights” does for us by the gift of a new life, James tells us to be careful with what we say.

**What** do the following passages teach about words? *Prov. 15:1, Isa. 50:4, Eph. 4:29, 5:4, Col. 4:6.*

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**Think about the last time someone devastated you with his or her words. The depth of emotion you felt should show you just how powerful words can be, either for good or bad. What can you do to help keep your words under control? Why is it so important to think before you speak?**

## Saved by Receiving

**Read** James 1:21. What role does the “word” have in what James is saying?

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This verse concludes all that has been said so far about faith and salvation. It is an appeal to put away all impurity and separate ourselves from wickedness. The command “put away” (*RSV*) is used seven out of nine times in the New Testament for detaching oneself from the evil habits that have no place in a life submitted to Christ (*Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:22, 25; Col. 3:8; Heb. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:1*). It can also refer to the taking off of clothing (*Acts 7:58*), so that the taking off of our “filthy rags” of sin (*compare Isa. 64:6*) may also be implied. Indeed, the word *filthiness* (*RSV*) occurs in James for the “filthy clothes” of the poor in contrast to the sparkling clean clothing of the rich (*James 2:2, NKJV*). Like Jesus, James decries the human tendency to be so concerned with outward appearance, because God is concerned above all with the condition of our hearts.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word *filthy* (*ryp-aros*) is used in only one passage: Zechariah 3:3, 4, where Joshua, the high priest, represents sinful Israel. God takes away the high priest’s filthy garments and clothes him with a clean robe, symbolizing Israel’s forgiveness and cleansing.

This scene is very different from the popular Christian image we sometimes see of Jesus putting a clean white robe over the sinner’s dingy, soiled garments. Who would do this in real life? Nobody puts clean clothes over dirty ones. Likewise in Zechariah, the filthy garments are removed before the clean robe is put on. This doesn’t mean that we must be without sin before we can be clothed in Christ’s righteousness. If that were true, who could be saved? It also doesn’t mean that we cannot be saved or return to Jesus if we fall back into sin. Instead, it means that we must completely surrender to Him, choosing to die daily to our old sinful ways, and allow Him to create us into His image. Christ’s perfect robe of righteousness will then cover us.

**Read again James 1:21. How deeply are you seeking to apply what it says here to your life? What does it mean to “engraft” the Word into your heart, and how can you do it?**

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**Further Study:** Read about sin and the power to change in Ellen G. White, “Repentance,” *Steps to Christ*, pp. 23–36, and summarize the key points.

“The plan of redemption contemplates our complete recovery from the power of Satan. Christ always separates the contrite soul from sin. He came to destroy the works of the devil, and He has made provision that the Holy Spirit shall be imparted to every repentant soul, to keep him from sinning.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 311.

“If you have accepted Christ as a personal Saviour, you are to forget yourself, and try to help others. Talk of the love of Christ, tell of His goodness. Do every duty that presents itself. Carry the burden of souls upon your heart, and by every means in your power seek to save the lost. As you receive the Spirit of Christ—the Spirit of unselfish love and labor for others—you will grow and bring forth fruit. The graces of the Spirit will ripen in your character. Your faith will increase, your convictions deepen, your love be made perfect. More and more you will reflect the likeness of Christ in all that is pure, noble, and lovely.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 67, 68.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think more about the reality of the power of words. Why are they so powerful? How can language be easily manipulated? How often is *how* we say or write something just as important, or even more important, than *what* we say or write?
- 2 Of all the gifts that you have been given “from above,” which is the greatest one, and why?
- 3 Read over James 1:12–21. What is the essential message there? What hope and promises are there for us?
- 4 Lust brings forth sin, and sin brings forth death. Why, with such high stakes before us, do we not have the victories that should be ours? What are the ways in which we rationalize sin, and why is that always a dangerous mind game to play?
- 5 Read the last Ellen G. White statement found above. What crucial counsel is found there, especially for those who might be wavering in faith?

## Heidy's Hope: Part 2

JUAN CAICEDO SOLIS

The demons in Mirella struggled against the family members who took her to the Seventh-day Adventist church. During the struggle Mirella fainted. When the family tried to carry her limp body through the church door, they could feel a powerful force pushing them away. Inside the church the congregation prayed while deacons tried to pull the family into the church. Finally, they managed to enter the church. They laid Mirella on the floor in the pastor's office.

The pastor told Mirella's family, "I do not have any powers to fight against the devil and his spirits. But I can call on the One who has defeated sin and the devil, Christ Jesus our Lord." He urged the family to confess their sins and call on the power of God to overrule. Then the pastor knelt beside Mirella's still form and prayed. He invited the holy angels of heaven to join in the battle for her soul. Then with a strong voice he commanded, "With the angel host beside me, and with Christ already the victor, I command you, Satan, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to get out of her!"

Mirella screamed loudly and began to speak, but the pastor repeated the command, "In the name of the Lord, get out of her!" The girl became quiet and lay on the floor, still unconscious. When Mirella opened her eyes, she stood up and rushed into the arms of a family member, clinging to his neck in fear. Heidy placed her hand on Mirella's shoulder. "You are safe," Heidy said. "Christ has freed you from the claws of Satan!"

The girls rejoiced in their newfound peace and made preparations for baptism. But the day before their baptism, Mirella began speaking in a strange voice, saying, "I hate Pastor Juan! I hate him!" The evil spirit had returned to try one last time to control Mirella. Someone asked the spirit why it hated Pastor Juan, and the spirit answered, "Tomorrow he will force me to leave this body, and I have no place to go!" With increasing anger, the spirit said, "I will kill Heidy and Mirella before they are baptized!"

Then the spirit forced Mirella to grab a knife and try to cut her own wrists. Several people wrestled the knife away from Mirella while the others prayed. In the name of Jesus, the devil left her.

The next day at their baptism, Mirella testified that horrible monsters had held her so tightly that she could not break free. But when the people prayed in the name of Jesus, a stronger hand broke Satan's grip and set her free. It was the hand of Jesus, the only one more powerful than the demons.

"Never leave the safety of Jesus," Heidy told the congregation. "Jesus is the only One who can free you from the bonds of Satan."

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*HEIDY MORENO lives in Cali, Colombia, where she was a student at the time of this writing. JUAN CAICEDO SOLIS is a district pastor in Cali, Colombia.*

# Being *and* Doing




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *James 1:23, 24; Matt. 19:16–22; Luke 6:27–38; Rom. 8:2–4; 12:9–18; 2 Pet. 1:4.*

**Memory Text:** “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (*James 1:22*).

Jean Francois Gravelet, better known as “The Great Blondin,” became famous for walking across Niagara Falls on a tightrope. In September of 1860, the Prince of Wales had witnessed Blondin’s crossing of the falls with an assistant on his back. After the walk, Blondin turned to the British prince and offered to carry him across the falls too. Although the prince had heard of the man’s skills, and had even just seen them in action, he was still not ready to place his life in Blondin’s hands.

The point is, of course, that hearing and seeing are not enough when it comes to a relationship with God. We may be intellectually convinced about the existence of God, the truth of the gospel, and the Second Coming. We may have even seen for ourselves the reality of God’s love and care. Yet, even with all that, we may not really be ready to commit ourselves fully into His hands, an action that would be revealed by our works. This is precisely why James emphasizes the importance of being doers, not just hearers, of the Word.

This week we’ll look at what being a doer of the Word means for those saved by grace.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 25.

## Knowing Your Enemy

Someone once said this about his enemy: “I see him every day—when I’m shaving.” This is exactly what James wants us to recognize: our greatest enemy is ourselves. Salvation begins by seeing who we really are, not who we imagine ourselves to be.

**Read** James 1:23, 24. Who is described here, and what is the basic problem?

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While there is nothing wrong with looking our best, many people spend a great deal of time and money to improve their appearance. But we need to make sure that we don’t deceive ourselves. James says we need to get a better view of ourselves, no matter how much we might not like what we see.

**Read** Matthew 19:16–22 and 26:33–35, 69–75. How does the self-image of each of these two men compare with the reality? What do their two different reactions to Jesus’ words say about them?

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The rich young man thought he had been keeping the commandments. Suddenly he was challenged to adhere to a different kind of obedience, one that he had never anticipated, one that went much deeper than mere outward compliance to rules and regulations. (*See Rom. 7:7.*)

Peter, like this young man, also had a distorted picture of himself. Self-confidently, he predicted that even if everyone else should stumble and fall away, he would remain faithful—even if it cost him his life. But neither realized how tightly sin held him in its grasp. Both were self-deceived about their true spiritual state. Peter, however, eventually was converted. As far as we know, the rich young ruler wasn’t.

**It’s always so easy to see the faults in others but not in ourselves, right? Deep down, though, we probably are more aware of our faults than we want to admit. Look deep into your own soul. What does this view tell you about why you must have a Savior?**



## Being a Doer

**Read** James 1:22 again. The Greek says “to be” doers of the Word. How might the message have been different had James simply said, “Do the Word”?

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James combines *being* and *doing*. He does not separate them, nor does he make one more important than the other. They are like two sides of the same coin, inseparable. We are to *be* doers. Furthermore, the tense of the Greek word for *be* here refers to an ongoing lifestyle of obedience, one that is expected of us now rather than at some indefinite time in the future.

The point is, we are to become new people in the Lord, and as a result of what *we become*, *we do* the things that God commands us to. This is something quite different from merely following rules (which seems to have been the problem with the rich young ruler, as we saw in yesterday’s daily study).

**Read** Luke 6:27–38. What are some of the actions that we should be taking?

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“Love your enemies.” “Give to everyone who asks of you.” “Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:27, 30, 36, NKJV). Sounds impossible, doesn’t it? And it is, on our own. Love like this does not come naturally to sinful human beings. That is why Jesus goes on to talk about two different kinds of trees and the fruit each produces (Luke 6:43–45).

Similarly, in Galatians 5 Paul contrasts the *works* of the flesh (Gal. 5:19–21) with the *fruit* of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). It is almost as if the more we focus on *doing*, the worse we become; whereas, when we are *being led by the Spirit*, it yields a totally different outcome—the fruit of love and obedience.

**Think about a time you did something simply because it was required of you or because it was a rule you had to obey. Contrast that to the time you did something similar because it was something you wanted to do, something that flowed naturally out of you because of Christ living in you. How does this contrast help us to understand the point of today’s study?**

## The Law of Freedom

**Read** James 1:25. What does he say about the role of the law?

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James echoes the Psalms in calling God's law "perfect" (*Ps. 19:7*) and a way of freedom (*Ps. 119:45*). But notice that the law in James cannot save us and certainly cannot cleanse us. It shows us God's ideal, but it cannot make us follow that ideal any more than seeing a world-class athlete perform amazing feats could enable us to do the same. To follow that ideal, we need the power of Christ in our lives.

**Read** Romans 8:2, 4 and 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18. What makes the difference between the law as an instrument of death or as something that shows the way to freedom and life?

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Even Paul affirms that "not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified" (*Rom. 2:13, NKJV*). As he says, we can become doers only through the work of the Spirit writing the law on our hearts. Only when we obey it from the heart can the law be a law of freedom.

Thus, the problem is not with the law but with us. We forget who we really are: sinners in constant need of a Savior. Outside of Christ, we hear only the law's condemnation. But in Christ, we become new men and women (*2 Cor. 5:17*) who are set free in Jesus (*John 8:36*). We hear Him speaking the law to us, that we should " 'love one another, as I have loved you' " (*John 15:12, NKJV*). Through Christ, we experience the freedom of God's sons and daughters who are saved by grace and who will not want to slip back into the condemnation and bondage we had as transgressors. In Christ, not only are we forgiven our sins, we now have a new life, one in which we are able to render obedience to the law. We do so, however, not in order to be saved but out of the freedom that comes from knowing that we already are saved and, therefore, no longer stand condemned by the law.

**Think about what it would be like, having the natures we do, to try to keep the law well enough to be saved by it. How would this make the law a means of bondage? How has Jesus freed us from that bondage while, at the same time, commanding us to keep the law?**

## Useful or Useless?

**Read** James 1:26, 27 and compare it to Matthew 25:35, 36, 40 and Romans 12:9–18. In light of these passages, how would you define true Christianity?

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If Jesus, James, and Paul emphasize anything, it is the importance of being a useful Christian. By loving “the least of these” (*Matt. 25:40*), by taking the time to visit those most easily overlooked, by showing hospitality—in all these practical ways and more—we reveal Jesus’ love and become the channel by which Jesus loves through us.

“The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470. Of course, as she goes on to explain, “to live such a life, to exert such an influence, costs at every step effort, self-sacrifice, discipline.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470. It does not come naturally or automatically. If our religion consists only in affirmations of belief and listening to sermons, it is largely useless.

James describes “religion” or “religious” in verses 26, 27 with a word that suggests being *unusually devout*. Such an attitude has immediate, visible consequences, and people will notice the difference.

One obvious change will be our choice of words. Instead of using uninhibited remarks and harsh tones and gestures, we will become more sensitive to the effect our communication exerts on others. We will “bridle” our tongue so that it does not dash off ahead of us with all the violence and energy of an untamed horse.

James also singles out orphans and widows as those most needing our love and care. From a worldly standpoint, it does not make sense to focus our resources on those who can give nothing back to society. But from God’s viewpoint, it is precisely how we treat those who have been cast off and rejected by the world that reveals which of us are Christ’s true followers: either by lending money to those who cannot pay us back; inviting to dinner those who cannot reciprocate; or blessing and praying for those who mistreat us (*Luke 6:35, 14:12–14, Matt. 5:44*). As Paul points out, we are re-created in Christ Jesus for good works (*Eph. 2:10*).

**How much of your own time and energy do you spend helping those in need? What does your answer say to you about how “useful” your faith really is?**

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## Unlike the World

**What** does it mean to keep oneself “unspotted from the world”? *James 1:27, NKJV*. How could that even be possible? See also *1 John 2:15, 16; 2 Pet. 1:4*.

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Some people seem to think that if only they could move far enough away from the world, they could avoid most of its temptations. Though there's some truth to that, and we should try to avoid temptation as much as possible (especially those temptations we find hardest to resist), our problems and weaknesses do tend to follow us wherever we go. The problem with sin isn't so much what is *out there*, though that certainly plays a role, as much as it is what's *in us*, and in our hearts. That's where the true battle is, and we will have to fight that battle no matter where we live.

It is also an interesting phenomenon that solving some problems makes those that remain seem more obvious. For example, cleaning one area of a room makes any dirt nearby stand out even more. So also with the spiritual life: “the closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 64.

Let's not have Ellen G. White say here what she isn't saying. She isn't saying that the closer we get to Jesus the faultier we actually become. She continues: “The more our sense of need drives us to Him and to the word of God, the more exalted views we shall have of His character, and the more fully we shall reflect His image.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 65.

Real religion leads a person to “hunger and thirst” for a deeper experience (*Matt. 5:6*). Jesus spent adequate time alone with His heavenly Father in order to know His will. Yet, He never shut Himself off from people. He went to where the people were. His “food” was reaching out to the needy, breaking down barriers of prejudice, and sharing the good news of eternal life (*John 4:28–35*).

Despite the fact that Jesus and the earliest Christians had a diet and lifestyle quite different from the Gentile world around them, these practices never kept them from sharing their faith. They went everywhere, and the gospel spread throughout the empire and became firmly planted, even in such centers of corruption and wickedness as Rome.

**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, “The Test of Discipleship,” pp. 59–63, in *Steps to Christ*.

“The law is God’s great moral looking glass. Man is to compare his words, his spirit, his actions with the Word of God.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 935.

“Instead of releasing man from obedience, it is faith, and faith only, that makes us partakers of the grace of Christ, which enables us to render obedience.

“As Jesus was in human nature, so God means His followers to be. In His strength we are to live the life of purity and nobility which the Saviour lived.”—Ellen G. White, *Our Father Cares*, p. 69.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Though we have been told it would be to our advantage to move away (if possible) from worldly places, why is that not the ultimate answer to the problems of sin and temptation? How far would we have to go in order to be away from any kind of temptation at all? What is the only answer for sin and temptation, regardless of where we live?
- 2 Police were trying to place electronic eavesdropping devices in an office where they suspected criminals were working. The only problem: vicious Dobermans surrounded the compound. So, the police, each night, would feed the dogs hamburgers. At first they would toss about five or six between the bars. Before long, the dogs were not only eating the burgers out of the officers’ hands, but they were licking the officers’ hands when done. Thus, with the guard dogs tamed, the police were able to infiltrate and plant the devices. What lesson can we take from this story about how we, if we are not careful, can let our own guards down?
- 3 Think more about this idea of being a doer of the Word as opposed to just believing the Word. What is, in the end, the real difference between the two?
- 4 What do you say to those who claim that because of the grace of Christ, they are free from the law? What do they often really mean by that, and how would you answer them?

# Angels on Main Street: Part 1

ISMAEL SERRANO

Medellín is a large city in the heart of Colombia. While the city has a reputation as the drug capital of the world, it is also known for its beauty, and its citizens are known for their hard work and love of learning.

Colombia Adventist University (Corporacion Universitaria Adventista, UNAC) is located in Medellín. Founded in 1937 as Industrial College Coloveno, it became Colombo-Venezuelan Institute in 1950 and Colombia Adventist University in 1981. UNAC offers undergraduate through doctoral level degrees.

For many years UNAC students have worked in the neighborhoods of Medellín searching for people who want to learn about God. One neighborhood, known for its violence and poverty, was an especially difficult area, but after knocking on many doors, the young people found several residents who wanted to study the Bible. They arranged to hold meetings in the home of a church member who lived in the area.

Each Sabbath the students met with the people and studied the Bible together. Within a few months several people in the Bible study group requested baptism. What joy the young people felt as they saw the fruits of their labors.

Often, after attending the evening meetings, the students had to walk several blocks to catch a bus back to school. If it was late, the students had to walk all the way back to school. The streets, which seemed safe during daylight hours, were full of dangers at night.

One night Mery and Rocio came to the evening worship service. After the meeting they found that they did not have a ride back to the school. They would have to walk several blocks through the dangerous, poorly lit streets. Some people from the church offered to walk with them partway, and the girls gratefully accepted their offer.

As the group walked along, they passed open doors of dimly lit taverns. In the smoky light that filtered out, they could see unshaven men drinking and playing tavern games. Their coarse language and crude laughter sent chills down Rocio's spine. She shivered as she recalled reports of girls her age who had been attacked or murdered in dark alleys such as those she and her friends were passing.

The little group walked faster, hoping to escape the sounds and smells of this part of town, hardly speaking as they walked quickly through the dim light. They passed men and women standing in the shadows of tall buildings. Sometimes the only hint that a person was there was the smell of a cigarette or alcohol.

Soon they reached the street where their companions lived. Rocio and Mery thanked them for walking with them. The girls tried to smile, hoping that their fear would not show. Then they turned and quickly continued their journey.

*(continued)*

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# Love *and the* Law




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *James 2:1–13; Mark 2:16; Lev. 19:17, 18; Rom. 13:8–10; John 12:48.*

**Memory Text:** “For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment” (*James 2:13, NASB*).

**W**e know the story well; the question is, *How well has it sunk in?* First a priest, then a Levite, going from Jerusalem to Jericho, encountered a man lying half dead in the road. Though both just finished their religious duties, neither was, apparently, able to link those duties with any sense of obligation to the injured soul, and so each kept walking. Finally, a Samaritan, a half-pagan, happened by, took pity on the man, bandaged his wounds, and paid for his stay at an inn where he could recover. He also promised to pay the innkeeper for anything else the man might need (*see Luke 10:30–37*).

Jesus told that story in response to a question by a lawyer about eternal life. Rather than tell the lawyer, “Try harder!” or “Do more!” Jesus painted a picture of love in action. That is, we are to love even in potentially dangerous or unpleasant circumstances, and we are to love even those we don’t like.

Though it’s not easy, and often goes against our nature, true love involves a substantial amount of risk and calls us to tear down barriers that separate us as people, both outside and (especially) inside the church. This week we’ll see what James has to say about this crucial truth.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 1.

## The Man in Gold

Read James 2:1–4. It is, among other things, a study in contrasts. One person is rich, well dressed, and, apparently, important, while the other is poor, shabbily dressed, and, apparently, a nobody. One receives the utmost courtesy, the other disdain. One is offered a comfortable, prominent seat; the other is told to stand off to the side or find a place on the floor.

The description is not a very pretty one, especially because it is depicted (potentially, at least) as happening in a worship service! The Greek word for “gathering” or “assembly” in verse 2 is *synagōgē*, probably an early reference to a Jewish-Christian Sabbath service, many of which would have taken place in private homes (see *Acts 18:7, 8*).

In the Greco-Roman culture of the first century, one’s public image and position were all important. Those with wealth, education, or political influence were expected to use these assets to enhance their reputation and benefit their personal interests. Any large gift to public or religious projects obligated the receiver to reciprocate to the giver in some way. Kindness was repaid with loyalty and generosity with public appreciation. The few upper-class people who attended Christian services expected privileged treatment. To ignore these expectations would have brought disgrace on the church. A failure to be “politically correct” or to reject societal values was a recipe for offense and a cause for division.

**Read** Mark 2:16 and Luke 11:43. What societal expectations are involved? How do they conflict with the principles of the gospel?

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It is not a sin to be poor or rich, but one barometer of our Christian experience is how we treat people who are different from us in age, wealth, education, and even religious convictions. We tend to give more respect to those we perceive as “above” us on the social ladder and less respect to those “below.” We must remember that it is easy to get pulled into convention even though God calls us to be different (see *Rom. 12:2*).

**Let’s face it: we might not be as open and as crass about it as James depicted, but are we not all easily susceptible to playing favorites? How can we learn to recognize this problem in ourselves and, ultimately, deal with it?**



## Class Struggle

As every literature evangelist knows, very often those who have the least are willing to sacrifice the most to buy Christian books. Well-to-do neighborhoods tend to be tough territory to sell books in, because the people who live there may be content with what they have and so very often do not feel their need of God as much as those who have less. The same phenomenon is also detectable on a much larger scale: the church often has grown the fastest in places and periods of economic and social stress. After all, aren't even those individuals who are struggling with big issues often more open to the hope presented in the story of Jesus than are those who think that things are going great for them?

**Read James 2:5, 6. How does James expand here on what he wrote in the four previous verses?**

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Judging from this passage, it would seem that there were major issues in the church among the rich and the poor. God chose the poor who, though rejected by the world, were “rich in faith,” while the rich used their wealth to “oppress” the poor. This problem, that of the rich exploiting the poor, was an ever-present reality at that time. Even worse, Roman law codified discrimination against the poor and in favor of the rich.

“Persons of lower class, who were thought to act from economic self-interest, could not bring accusations against persons of higher class, and the laws prescribed harsher penalties for lower-class persons convicted of offenses than for offenders from the higher class.”—Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 694.

**Read James 2:7. What important point does James make here about the impact of this bad behavior?**

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Their bad behavior is really blasphemy against “the good name” of Jesus. Bad actions are bad enough in and of themselves; what makes them worse is when those who profess the name of Jesus do them. And even worse would be those who, in the name of Jesus, use their wealth or power to gain advantage over others in the churches, which often leads to divisions and quarrels. Hence, how careful we should be that our words and actions match the “good name” we associate ourselves with.

## Loving Our Neighbors

**Read** James 2:8, 9, along with Leviticus 19:17, 18 and Matthew 5:43–45. What crucial message are we being given here?

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James calls God’s law “the royal law” (*James 2:8*) because it is the law of the “KING OF KINGS” (*Rev. 19:16*). The law of His kingdom is given in detail in the Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew 5–7*), which includes the first of nine references in the New Testament to loving our neighbor.

Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:43 suggest the way Leviticus 19:18 was understood at the time. For example, the immediately preceding commands in Leviticus use apparent synonyms for one’s neighbor: they prohibit hating one’s “brother” (*Lev. 19:17*) and holding a grudge against one’s fellow Israelite (*Lev. 19:18*).

Most likely, some interpreted these commands to mean it would be fine to be angry with or hate someone who was not an Israelite, because he or she is not specifically mentioned in these Levitical texts. After all, people who were not Israelites were also generally considered to be enemies. We now know that such an attitude existed in the Qumran community, a group of devout Jews who had separated themselves from the rest of the nation. They were taught to hate “the children of darkness” and “the men of perdition” (*The Community Rule 1QS 1:10; 9:21, 22*), labels which apparently included not only foreigners but even Israelites who had rejected the community’s teachings.

“Sin is the greatest of all evils, and it is ours to pity and help the sinner. There are many who err, and who feel their shame and their folly. They are hungry for words of encouragement. They look upon their mistakes and errors, until they are driven almost to desperation. These souls we are not to neglect. If we are Christians, we shall not pass by on the other side, keeping as far as possible from the very ones who most need our help. When we see human beings in distress, whether through affliction or through sin, we shall never say, This does not concern me.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 504.

**Jesus’ life is the greatest example we’ll ever have of selfless love for the undeserving and those who didn’t love back. How can we learn to express such love for those whom we deem undeserving or who don’t love us back? Why, in the end, is complete self-surrender and death to self the only answer?**

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## The Whole Law

**Read** James 2:10, 11. Now read the passages listed in the table below and classify them as either emphasizing the “whole law,” the “law of love,” or both.

|                       | Whole Law | Law of Love |
|-----------------------|-----------|-------------|
| <i>Matt. 5:18, 19</i> |           |             |
| <i>Matt. 22:36–40</i> |           |             |
| <i>Rom. 13:8–10</i>   |           |             |
| <i>Gal. 3:10</i>      |           |             |
| <i>Gal. 5:3</i>       |           |             |
| <i>Gal. 5:14</i>      |           |             |

It is hard for us to grasp how radical Jesus’ teaching on the law was. For devout Jews then (and for many today), one cannot really claim to keep the law without a commitment to keeping all the laws found in the books of Moses. Eventually, 613 separate laws were identified (248 positive laws and 365 negative ones).

The question put to Jesus about which law was *most important* (*Matt. 22:36*) was probably meant to trap Him. But although Jesus seems to have affirmed every “jot” (the smallest Hebrew letter, *Matt. 5:18*) as important, He also taught that love to God and love to our neighbor were the most important commandments because they sum up all the others.

Jesus’ teaching also shows that obedience cannot be done in a vacuum. It is always *relational*, or it is meaningless. In other words, if I tithe because I am afraid of being lost if I don’t, it is not relational. On the other hand, if I tithe out of gratitude for how much *God* has given *me*, then my actions are based on my relationship with God.

Jesus also spoke about the “weightier matters” of the law as being “judgment, mercy, and faith” (*Matt. 23:23*). All of these revolve around relationships too—with God and with other people. James is, therefore, not saying anything different than did Jesus or Paul: any transgression of God’s law damages to some extent our relationship to God and to others. So, it is not a question of having enough good deeds to outweigh our bad deeds. That is obedience in a vacuum, acting as if it all revolves around us. Instead, by knowing Jesus, we begin to direct our attention away from ourselves and toward devotion to God and service to others.

**How much of your obedience comes from your love for God and others and how much from a sense of obligation? Is working from obligation always wrong though? Perhaps you don’t feel love for a person but help him or her only because you know you are supposed to. What, if anything, is wrong with that?**

## Judged by the Law

**Read James 2:12, 13.** See also John 12:48; Rom. 2:12, 13; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12, 13. **What do these verses teach about judgment?**

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Nothing is clearer than the teaching that we will be judged by the law based on what we have done, whether for good or for evil. At the same time, too, the Bible is also clear that through faith in Jesus, we are covered by His righteousness.

This covering entails two aspects: forgiveness (justification) and obedience (sanctification). “*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him*” (Col. 2:6, NKJV); and “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Gal. 3:27, NKJV).

It is often said that we will be judged based not only on what we have done but also on what we have not done. While this is true, many have a wrong idea of what this means. It is not about doing more *things*. That is a recipe for discouragement and self-defeat. Notice how James describes it in the first half of verse 13: “judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy” (NKJV). Again, it is a *relational* definition of “doing.”

If we thought about it long enough, we could become so paranoid about the judgment that we would give up in despair. But that is not what it means to “fear God . . . for the hour of His judgment has come” (Rev. 14:7, NKJV)! Instead, we must always trust in the righteousness of Jesus, whose merits alone are our only hope in the judgment. It’s our love for God, who has saved us by His righteousness, that should spur us on to do all the things that He has called us to do.

At the same time, the warnings in the Bible about the judgment are there for our good, so that we do not lull ourselves into a false sense of security. James says, “Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13, NKJV). We must remember his words, especially when we deal with those who have fallen into the worst of sins.

**Have you ever messed up really bad, and when you expected only condemnation and judgment, you were given mercy, grace, and forgiveness instead? How did you feel? How can you make sure that you don’t forget that the next time someone else messes up bad?**

**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, “Facing Life’s Record,” *The Great Controversy*, pp. 479–491.

“God has acknowledged you before men and angels as His child; pray that you may do no dishonor to the ‘worthy name by which ye are called.’ James 2:7. God sends you into the world as His representative. In every act of life you are to make manifest the name of God. . . . This you can do only through the acceptance of the grace and righteousness of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 107.

“Through Christ, Justice is enabled to forgive without sacrificing one jot of its exalted holiness.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 936.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Gandhi summed up the thinking of many when he said, “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” Why, unfortunately, is it not hard to understand why he said that? And though, of course, it’s so easy to look at what others have done in the name of Christ, why must we instead look at ourselves and at what we have done in the name of Jesus? How well do we reveal Him to the world around us?
- 2 Is your local church a place where people feel valued and respected regardless of their background, social standing, idiosyncrasies, and so on? If not, what can you do to make a difference?
- 3 What are some of the traditions and social norms in your country that are contrary to the principles of the biblical faith? What are some overt ones, and what are some of the more subtle ones? After identifying what they are, how can you learn to transcend them so that you are able to live out and reveal the principles of the gospel in a way that could show others that Jesus offers us all a better way of life?
- 4 It’s one thing to love your neighbor, but what does it mean to love God? In class, discuss what it means to love God, why we love Him, and how we express that love.
- 5 “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” What does that mean on a practical level, such as when we have to deal with those who do wrong? What kind of balance is needed there?

## Angels on Main Street: Part 2

ISMAEL SERRANO

As the girls hurried on through the night, they passed three young men. They didn't look up when the boys pointed fingers at them and made crude remarks but kept walking as quickly as they could. Then they became aware that someone was following them. *It must be one of the three boys*, Rocio thought. The girls did not look back but kept walking toward their destination. Rocio squeezed Mery's hand and whispered a prayer, "Dear God, please help us!"

Suddenly the girls heard a noise. Was it a shout? A cry of surprise? Out of the corner of her eye, Rocio could see that the boys who had been following them had turned and were running the other way. They seemed to be fleeing something—or someone—as if they were being chased.

The girls hurried on their way, stopping for nothing until they had reached the safety of the university. Again they thanked God for guiding them safely back home.

The next morning Rocio dressed and hurried to the bus stop to wait for the bus that would take her to work. As she stood waiting, she overheard a conversation between two young men. "Last night we tried to take two girls that we saw walking alone. We followed them for a little ways, looking for the best chance to grab them. Then suddenly we saw two men walking with them. I don't know where they came from, but they were strong and looked threatening. They frightened us, so we ran the other way!"

As Rocio listened to the boy's conversation, she felt as if she had touched electricity! *Two strong men? I saw no men, only the troublemakers*. When the boys had stopped talking, she turned and looked into the eyes of the boy who had told his friend what had happened the night before. "Do you know who I am?" she asked. The boy shook his head no. "Those two young girls you are talking about are my sister and me. We were coming home from church when you began to follow us. But we believe in Jesus, and we asked Him to take care of us. Those two men you saw with us last night were God's holy angels."

The boys stood speechless as they listened to this girl talk openly about God. "If you like, I can help you get to know God. I invite you to visit my church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church." The Holy Spirit moved the heart of that young person, and the next Sabbath he visited the church. He continued attending the little church in the ghetto and soon began Bible studies. In time, he was baptized.

That little neighborhood church has grown rapidly, and today a large congregation meets to worship the all-powerful God of heaven. And the young people of Medellín continue to visit neighborhoods in search of those honest-hearted people who are seeking God.

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# Faith That Works



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *James 2:14–26; Rom. 3:27, 28; Titus 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:2; Rom. 4:1–5; Josh. 2:1–21.*

**Memory Text:** “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (*James 2:26, NKJV*).

He was a successful doctor and an elder in a high-profile church of several hundred members. He was a major giver to the church's big projects, and his generosity encouraged others to be more sacrificial. The doctor was also a great preacher. When the pastor was gone, he spoke, and everyone looked forward to his messages, which were theologically deep, heartfelt, and spiritual.

Then one day the truth came out. The doctor's absence at church the previous Sabbath had not been because he was on vacation, as many had thought. No, he was found dead in his beachfront condo from an overdose of recreational narcotics.

Worse was the shocking revelation that in his bedroom were dozens of pornographic videos and magazines. The church was devastated, especially the young people, who had looked up to him as a role model. Though we must leave all judgment in God's hands, the doctor's actions certainly call into question the reality of his faith.

The point? Though we are saved by faith, we cannot separate faith and works in the life of a Christian, a crucial but often misunderstood truth expounded upon in the book of James.

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

## Dead Faith

**“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?”** (*James 2:14, NKJV*). **How do we understand this verse in the context of salvation by faith alone?** *Read James 2:15–17; compare Rom. 3:27, 28; Eph. 2:8, 9.*

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Faith without works. James 2:15, 16 gives a vivid illustration of this kind of phony faith. As we have already seen, obedience in the book of James is relational. So, how do we relate to a brother or sister in the church who is in need? Words are not enough. We cannot simply say, “Go in peace. God will provide,” when God has provided us the means to help that brother or sister.

Of course, needs can be endless, and we cannot meet them all. But there is a principle called “the power of one.” We are the hands and feet of Jesus, and we can help others one person at a time. In fact, that is how Jesus usually worked. In Mark 5:22–34, a man whose daughter was dying appealed to Him for help. On the way, a woman approached from behind and touched Jesus’ garment. After the healing, Jesus could have gone on and the woman would have left rejoicing. But Jesus knew that she needed more than physical healing. So, He stopped and took the time so that she could learn to be a witness for Jesus, to share as well as to receive. Then He said the same words we have in James 2:16, NIV: “Go in peace” (*Mark 5:34, NIV*). But, unlike the words in James, in this case, they actually meant something!

When we recognize a need but do nothing about it, we have missed an opportunity of exercising faith. By doing so, our faith gets a little weaker and a little deader. This is because faith without works dies. James describes it even more starkly: faith is dead already. If it were alive, the works would be there. If they are not, what good is it? At the end of verse 14, James asks a question about this kind of workless and worthless faith. It comes across far more strongly in Greek than it does in most translations: “That faith cannot save him, can it?” The answer James expects us to give is clearly “No.”

**How can we learn to better express our faith through our works while protecting ourselves from the deception that our works save us?**

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## Saving Faith

**Read** James 2:18. What is the main point James is making? How do we show our faith by our works?

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James uses a common rhetorical technique whereby a potential objector comes forward. In this case, the objector tries to drive a wedge between faith and works by suggesting that as long as a person has one or the other, he or she is fine. But the whole point James is trying to make is that Christians cannot hope to be saved by faith if there are no corresponding works: “Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (*vs. 18, NKJV*).

The key point is that not just any faith will save. Genuine faith, *sav-**ing* faith, is characterized by good works. Likewise, works are only good works if they spring from faith. Faith and works are inseparable. Like two sides of a coin, one cannot exist without the other. Also like a coin, one side is the head and the other the tail. Faith comes first and then leads the way to corresponding works.

**Consider** Paul’s attitude toward works in Ephesians 2:10, 1 Thesalonians 1:3, 1 Timothy 5:25, and Titus 2:14. Why are good works so important?

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Paul was not against good works per se. He was against works as a means of salvation (*see Gal. 2:16*). In fact, Paul said that those who rely on works of the law to be saved are under a curse, because no one who tries to be saved by keeping the law actually succeeds in keeping it (*Gal. 3:10*). Obedience is possible only through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

“If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 20.

**Why should the great news that we cannot work our way to heaven motivate us, out of a love for God, to do all the good works that we can?**

## The “Faith” of Demons

If works are absent, there is only one other way to “prove” the genuineness of one’s faith: by orthodoxy. If I believe the right things, then I must have faith, right?

**Read** 2 Corinthians 4:2; 1 Timothy 2:4; James 5:19, 20; 1 Peter 1:22; and 1 John 3:18, 19. What do these verses tell us about how important knowing truth is?

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There is no question that an intellectual knowledge of truth has its place, a very important place. Yet, that knowledge, in and of itself, is not sufficient to prove that a person has saving faith.

**What** warning is given to us in James 2:19 about a false concept of what true faith is?

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The most fundamental statement of faith in the Old Testament is Deuteronomy 6:4: “ ‘Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!’ ” (*NASB*). Known as the *Shema* (because this is the Hebrew word it begins with), this verse neatly summarizes belief in one God. Every other biblical teaching flows from this cardinal truth.

But even the demons believe this truth. In fact, they know it! And yet, what good does it do them? They tremble in God’s presence, as they did also when confronted by Jesus and commanded by Him to come out of their victims (*Mark 3:11, 5:7*).

An intellectual faith that has no effect on how we act is useless; in fact, it is the same faith that demons have, demons who are actively at work to deceive us with false doctrines and lies. As with Israel at the time of Jesus, demons will encourage people to believe their deceptions based on their victims’ desires to hold on to impure and unrighteous behavior: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (*1 Tim. 4:1*).

Faith must be manifested in our lives or else it is not saving faith; it is, instead, “the faith of demons,” and such a faith won’t save us any more than it will save them.

## Abraham's Faith

**Read** James 2:21–24 and compare it with Romans 4:1–5, 22–24. How is the faith of Abraham described in these texts, and on what is justification based?

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Interestingly, both James and Paul quote Genesis 15:6, but they seem to arrive at opposite conclusions. According to James, Abraham was justified by works, but Paul seems, in Romans 4:2, to deny this possibility explicitly (*compare vs. 24*).

However, the immediate context of Romans 4 has to do with whether circumcision is necessary for justification; that is, whether Gentiles had to become Jews in order to be saved (*Rom. 3:28–30*). Paul shows that Abraham's faith, not his "work" of being circumcised, was the basis of justification, because Abraham believed even before he was circumcised. Abraham was circumcised later as an outward sign of his inward faith (*Rom. 4:9–11*). But works alone, even circumcision, are not sufficient for justification, because only those "who also walk in the steps of that faith [of] our father Abraham" (*Rom. 4:12, NKJV*) will be justified.

Is this emphasis really so different from that of James? Paul even goes on to use the same "proof" of Abraham's faith that James does (*see Rom. 4:17–21*). Abraham believed God could resurrect Isaac because He "gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist" (*vs. 17, NASB; compare Heb. 11:17–19*). Paul also defines saving faith as "being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform" (*Rom. 4:21, NKJV*). In short, faith that trusts God to keep His promises and obediently relies on His word is saving faith. These works are not "works of law" but "works of faith." Or, as James puts it: "Do you see that *faith was working* together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?" (*2:22, NKJV; emphasis added*).

Many stress the importance of faith and works, but even this separates the two, at least to some extent. True faith is "faith working through love" (*Gal. 5:6, NKJV*). Good works are not just the outward sign of faith; they are the *outworking* of faith. Abraham's faith in the God who created all life motivated him to obey God in offering up his only son, Isaac. According to James, it is by obedience that faith is made perfect.

**What is your own experience with how works (or the lack thereof) impact your faith?**

## The Faith of Rahab

“Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?” (*James 2:25, NKJV*). Read *Joshua 2:1–21*. How do we understand this example, again in the context of salvation by faith alone?

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According to Hebrews 11:31, the inhabitants of Jericho did not believe. Most modern translations describe them as being “disobedient.” The inhabitants of Jericho knew about Israel’s signal victories over the Midianites and the Amorites, so they were well aware of the power of Israel’s God. God’s judgment on Israel at Baalpeor taught the people in Jericho of His holiness as well as His abhorrence of idolatry and immorality: “All these events were known to the inhabitants of Jericho, and there were many who shared Rahab’s conviction, though they refused to obey it.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 492.

Rahab was not saved because of her dishonesty but in spite of it. She believed in the true God, and she acted on that faith by protecting the spies that Joshua sent out. There were also conditions: she obeyed the messengers’ direction to hang the scarlet cord out her window, which was reminiscent of the blood sprinkled around the doorposts of the Israelite homes at the time of their Passover deliverance (*see Exod. 12:21–24*). While far from perfect, Rahab’s life is a model of faith that shows the reality of God’s forgiveness and grace for everyone willing to step out in faith and to trust God with the results.

**Read James 2:26.** How does this text summarize the relationship between faith and works?

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Just as the body is only a corpse without the breath of life, so faith without works is dead. In addition, without real faith any “obedience” we might try to render would only amount to “dead works” (*Heb. 6:1, 9:14*), which are meaningless in the sight of God.

**A harlot saved by faith? If that were the only example of salvation by faith we had, what false conclusions could we draw from it? Nevertheless, what hope can you take from her story for yourself?**

**Further Study:** “When self is put entirely away, then you can obtain a new and rich experience, you will discern your own imperfections as you lie low at the foot of the cross, and as you view the perfections of Christ, self will sink into insignificance.

“Christ will appear to the discerning eye the perfection of attractive loveliness; then His mould will be upon mind and heart, and will be revealed in the character. The impress of the divine mind should be made upon the heart, and manifested in the life. Come to Jesus in your need, pray in living faith, hold fast to the hand of divine power, believe, only believe, and you will see the salvation of God. If you will be taught, God will teach you; if you will be led, He will lead you to fountains of living waters.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Southern Africa*, p. 26.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read over James 2 in one quick sitting. What is the essential message there for those who trust only in the merits of Christ’s righteousness for their salvation?
- 2 Some argue that James talks about faith and works without reference to Paul, and that we should interpret James on his own terms. What’s wrong with that kind of thinking? Why, especially in this case, is it important to keep in mind what other texts say about faith and works? In fact, in the heat of the Protestant Reformation, Catholic apologists often ran to the book of James to defend the Roman Church against the Protestants. Why does this show us how important it is to build our doctrines on all the texts we have at our disposal?
- 3 It is often said that faith and works should be kept in “balance.” In light of this lesson, do you agree with that statement? Discuss your answer with others in the class.
- 4 Why do we find no mention in James (or the rest of the New Testament) of Abraham’s failure of faith in connection with Ishmael or about Rahab’s lying? What does this fact teach us about what it means to be covered by Christ’s righteousness?

## By Faith I See

Told to ENOCH IGLESIAS by VICTOR VERGARA

I was born into a poor family in a town north of Medellín, Colombia. Our poverty carved out a hard life for us. Our town has no adequate water supply, no electricity, no telephone. Our houses are made of mud pressed over bamboo poles, because we have no other building materials.

When travelers pass by, they wonder how we stay alive. Everyone looks hungry. Even the dogs are skin and bones. My village knows only hunger, hard work, sickness, and disease.

When I was little, I played in the hills around our home. When I was 11, I began to help and work with the family. We harvested sweet potatoes and plantains, a type of banana. I also herded cows.

One year a sickness spread throughout our village. It was so contagious that doctors wouldn't come to treat us. I became sick but recovered. However, I noticed a change in my vision—everything looked yellow, then became blurry. Finally, I lost my sight completely.

Sounds became my way of “seeing.” I listened to my uncle's battery-powered television and learned that life wasn't so hard in other places. That reality made me even more miserable. I hated my life of trouble and pain.

Fortunately, my mother was a Seventh-day Adventist, and her faith was strong. As I gradually lost my vision, her faith became my strength. She taught me to trust God. At age 15, two years after I became blind, I was baptized.

I enrolled in a school for blind students for six months, and then returned to my regular school. It took me longer to finish my studies, but I kept at it.

During the summer I worked as a literature evangelist. My cousin guided me from door to door, and I talked to the people about the hope they could find in Jesus. I chose to work in the poor neighborhoods, because I thought there would be many people who needed God and hope. They did want my books, and they were glad to know that they were helping me too.

When I was younger, I was angry and bitter because of my family's poverty. Then when I became blind I became more angry and bitter, and wondered why all of these bad things were happening to me. Several doctors examined my eyes, and I have even had surgery; but they could not restore my eyesight.

Now I see by faith. When I learned to trust God, I realized that He does not guarantee an easy life. But He does promise to walk with us during our earthly life, and if we are faithful, He will guarantee an eternal life.

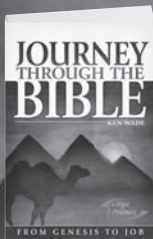
Several people have asked to study the Bible with me. They want to get to know Jesus and share His power just as I have. If it takes my blindness to win others to Jesus, then I want to be a good example so that others may see Jesus through my faith.

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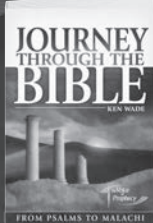
*VICTOR VERGARA was in his second year of studying theology at Colombia Adventist University in Medellín at the time of this writing.*

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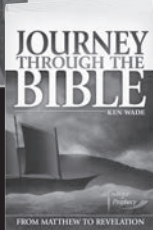
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# Taming *the* Tongue



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *James 3:1–12; Deut. 6:6, 7; Luke 9:51–56; Prov. 16:27; Matt. 7:16–18.*

**Memory Text:** “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (*Matt. 12:37, NKJV*).

Words hold tremendous power. “A word fitly spoken” (*Prov. 25:11*)—praise, poetry, stories—can shape lives in profound ways. What we say may linger for days or even years. Children, for example, absorb words like sponges. That’s why they soon speak fluently whatever language they grow up hearing. It’s also why the messages they hear about themselves may foreshadow their future success or failure. For better or worse, the communication style of parents is replicated and amplified in their children.

The written word is powerful, too, and even more lasting. Most powerful of all is God’s Word. Consider: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (*Ps. 119:105*); and “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (*vs. 11*). Jesus directed the attention of the disciples away from temporal blessings to something much more vital: “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (*John 6:63*).

Words can soothe and reassure or poison and contaminate. How often have you said something you wished you could take back?

This week, as we will see, James has some important words about, well, words.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 15.

## Accountability

**Read** James 3:1. What important point is he making here about accountability?

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Teachers in the church and in Christian schools have an especially heavy responsibility because they shape minds and hearts in ways that will last for years. This effect includes the rippling impact they will have on many others beyond their immediate sphere of influence. The more we know, the more responsible we become for utilizing and imparting that knowledge.

At the entrance to the Tyndale House library in Cambridge, England, is a plaque reminding every scholar who enters there: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (*Prov. 9:10*). Man is not the measure of all things; God is, and all true education begins and ends with Him. Unfortunately, as knowledge increases, dependence on God tends to diminish. It is too often practiced and taught, for example, that science functions independently from God. Some teachers of theology, in striving for credibility, also may utilize methods that leave little or no room for faith. As a result, faith can gradually get squeezed out of the minds and hearts of both teachers and students. But as long as educating for eternity, not just for this world, is uppermost for teachers and students alike, learning will be a precious, even inspirational, endeavor.

Paul understood this responsibility, for he trained and ordained leaders in the churches he raised up (*Acts 14:23; compare Titus 1:5*). He even gave instructions to Timothy to guard God’s flock from inexperienced and unwise shepherds (*see 1 Tim. 1:3–7; 3:2–6; 6:2–5; 2 Tim. 2:14, 15*), warning that some are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (*2 Tim. 3:7, NKJV*).

Parents carry a weighty responsibility in teaching their children, who in turn influence others. All of us, in fact, by the example we set, can have a profound influence on those around us. How important then that we seek God’s wisdom, which He has promised us (*James 1:5*), that we might model His ways and exert a godly influence. For we all, for good or for bad, do exert influence over others.

**Think about those who have influenced you in a positive way. What did they do? How did they impact you? And, most important, how can you do the same for others?**

## Word Power

“For we all stumble in many ways” (*James 3:2, ESV*). What a refreshing admission, especially considering James’s emphasis on behavior! Still, our acknowledgment of the “real” need not dim our belief in God’s ideal for us as His representatives on earth.

“If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body” (*vs. 2, ESV*). The form of the condition in Greek implies that not stumbling in word is a real possibility. The importance of words can scarcely be overestimated. Thoughts lead to words, which in turn lead to actions. Words also reinforce what we think. Thus, they influence not only what we do but also what others do. We are interconnected through language.

This week’s passage contains several illustrations of the power of the tongue. The first three emphasize how something small can have huge consequences: a bit and bridle can turn a horse, a rudder can steer a ship, and a spark can engulf a forest in flames.

**What positive kinds of “word power” do we find in Scripture?** *See Deut. 6:6, 7; 23:23; Ps. 40:3; Prov. 10:20, 21; 12:25; Mal. 2:6, 7; Luke 4:22; Rom. 10:6–8.*

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Young children are impressionable, but, like trees that grow stiffer and more fixed, children resist change more as they age. In one sense, we are all teachers, whether in the home or in the church. Because our words have so much power, it’s important to bathe our thoughts in God’s Word early in the day. After all, what feeds our thoughts and words, God’s Spirit or another source? We must not underestimate the enormous changes that are possible through God’s Word (*Ps. 33:6; compare 2 Cor. 4:6*), as opposed to other sources.

Words are so potentially powerful that, with just a few sentences, you can devastate a person, perhaps for the rest of his or her life. On the other hand, positive words can uplift someone, perhaps for just as long.

**If you had dynamite in your hands, how careful would you be with it? What should your answer tell you about how you should deal with something even more powerful than dynamite?**

## “Little” Things *Are* the Big Things

**Read** James 3:3–5. What do the two illustrations have in common, and how do they relate to the tongue?

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Both the bit in a horse’s mouth and the rudder of a ship are very small compared to what they control. Yet, with a slight movement of the hand, the horse’s or the ship’s direction can be completely changed. By the same token, “even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things” (*vs. 5, NKJV*). In other words, a word or even a look or a gesture might seem small, but each can change a friend into an enemy or transform a bad situation into something good. “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (*Prov. 15:1*). Imagine a horse galloping at full speed and a ship slicing through the water at full throttle but both headed in the wrong direction. The faster something goes, the farther away it gets from its destination. The best course then is to stop and turn around as soon as possible. The same is true of our words. If a conversation is going from bad to worse, the sooner we stop, the better.

**Read** Luke 9:51–56. What was Jesus’ response to the suggestion of the disciples? What was the result, and what lessons might this story have for us?

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Although the disciples had a biblical precedent for their suggestion (*2 Kings 1:10, 12*), Jesus rejected the suggestion. His rebuke dramatically altered the situation. The story ends simply by indicating that “they went to another village” (*Luke 9:56*). Jesus turned His rejection by a Samaritan village into a learning experience for His followers. In the heat of the moment, when feelings rise up and clamor for us to defend ourselves, we can remember the example of Jesus and, figuratively speaking, move on “to another village.”

“As drops of water make the river, so little things make up life. Life is a river, peaceful, calm, and enjoyable, or it is a troubled river, always casting up mire and dirt.”—Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 209.

**What are some “little” things in your life that, as you dwell further on them, might not be so “little” after all?**

## Damage Control

We've all experienced it. Something we said gets magnified, perhaps even exaggerated, to the point that we don't even recognize it anymore. As James says, "See how great a forest a little fire kindles" (3:5, *NKJV*).

**Read** prayerfully and carefully James 3:6. What is he saying about the power of our tongue, of our words, to "defile" everything about us? Why should this verse make us tremble before we speak?

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While fire, when used symbolically, can signify cleansing (*Isa. 4:4, Zech. 13:9*), it more frequently refers to destruction (*see, for example, Josh. 6:24; 11:9, 11; 1 Sam. 30:3; Matt. 7:19*), including the destructiveness of ill-advised words (*Prov. 16:27, 26:21*).

Not only can a large fire start from a spark, it can also ravage and destroy with amazing speed. In the same way, words can destroy friendships, marriages, and reputations. They can sink into a child's psyche and mar his or her self-concept and future development.

Sin originated on earth with a seemingly innocent question (*see Gen. 3:1*). It began in heaven in a similar way. Lucifer "began to insinuate doubts concerning the laws that governed heavenly beings."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 37. So, it is no exaggeration to say that the tongue is "set on fire by hell" (*James 3:6, NKJV*).

While it is true that words once spoken are gone forever and that we cannot fully undo what we have said, we should do all we can to lessen the damage and correct what we can. Taking steps to make things right will also help us not to repeat the same mistake. For example, after a further revelation from God, Nathan the prophet returned to David immediately to correct something he had said (*see 2 Sam. 7:1–17*). Peter wept bitterly over his denial of Christ and later demonstrated more openly the genuineness of his repentance (*John 21:15–17*).

Though "no man can tame the tongue" (*James 3:8, NKJV*), we are admonished to "keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies" (*Ps. 34:13, NIV*). Only the Spirit of God can help us keep our words in check (*see Eph. 4:29–32*).

**Read James 3:6–8.** Why should the thoughts in these verses make us be so careful with what we say? How can we learn to appreciate the power for good, or evil, contained in our mouths?

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## Blessing and Cursing

**Read** James 3:9–12. What truth does James illustrate using the fountain, the fig tree, and the grapevine?

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The idea of both blessing and cursing coming out of the mouth of a Christian is disturbing, to say the least. What about watching profanity-laced television programs or movies during the week and attending church on Sabbath to hear the Word of God? What about someone who speaks the truth and wonderful words about Jesus, only to later be heard telling an off-color joke? These images should be spiritually disturbing because they are contrary to what we know to be right. The same mouth that praises God later tells a dirty joke? What's wrong with this contrast?

James uses the image of a spring. Water quality depends on its source, and the root determines the fruit (*compare Matt. 7:16–18*). Similarly, if God's Word is implanted in us, its working will be evident in our lives. Understanding this truth frees us from the burden to "prove" our faith. Pure religion is rooted in faith, which is self-authenticating, just as a pure water spring needs no proof other than the water that flows naturally from it.

At the same time, though, one could ask, "If we were to take a 'snapshot' of certain devoted followers of God at low points in their experience (Moses murdering the Egyptian, David with Bathsheba, and so on), might we not legitimately question their profession?"

God's will, of course, is that we do not sin (*1 John 2:1*). However, since the fall of Adam and Eve, God has made provision for our forgiveness if we do sin, based on faith in the promised Sacrifice (*compare Ps. 32:1, 2*). Nevertheless, the fact remains that sin brings sadness while obedience brings blessing. Moses spent 40 years tending sheep to unlearn the training that led him to kill, and David suffered the death of the child Bathsheba bore, as well as a divided household that threatened his kingdom to the end of his life. Sure, we can be forgiven our sins after we do them; the problem, however, is that so often the consequences of those sins can remain, often with devastating results not just for ourselves but for others too. How much better to be on our knees asking for the power of victory than having to ask for forgiveness afterward and then plead for the damage to be brought under control.

**Further Study:** Read about the power of speech in “Talents,” from the book *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 335–339, by Ellen G. White, and share the points that impressed you with your Sabbath School class.

“When in the company of those who indulge in foolish talk, it is our duty to change the subject of conversation if possible. By the help of the grace of God we should quietly drop words or introduce a subject that will turn the conversation into a profitable channel. . . .

“Far more than we do, we need to speak of the precious chapters in our experience. We should speak of the mercy and loving-kindness of God, of the matchless depths of the Saviour’s love. Our words should be words of praise and thanksgiving. If the mind and heart are full of the love of God, this will be revealed in the conversation. It will not be a difficult matter to impart that which enters into our spiritual life. Great thoughts, noble aspirations, clear perceptions of truth, unselfish purposes, yearnings for piety and holiness, will bear fruit in words that reveal the character of the heart treasure. When Christ is thus revealed in our speech, it will have power in winning souls to Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 337, 338.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 The problem with words is that, for most of us, they come out so easily. So often, too, they come out almost before we even have a chance to think about what we are saying. Because this is true, how can we learn to think carefully before we open our mouths?
- 2 Think about the power of your words even upon your own self. Do this experiment: consciously talk to others as much as you can about what God has done in your life, how He has blessed you, how He has gotten you through trials, and so on. Do this even for only a day or so, and then ask yourself, How has this impacted my faith?
- 3 What do you think your words reveal to others about what goes on in your heart? Might they be revealing more than you would like to think? If you recorded all your spoken words in a single day and then played them back to yourself, what would they reveal about you?

# The Disobedient Son: Part 1

VITALIANO MARRERO

Vitaliano had it made. As an officer in the Cuban military, he had a steady job that carried with it a certain amount of respect. He and his wife, Migdalia, had two small children and lived in a modest home. Things were going well, and he had no interest in God or religion.

One day Vitaliano returned from work early and greeted his wife. But his five-year-old son, Alexey, did not come running to greet him. “Where is Alexey?” he asked.

“He’s at Rosabel’s,” Migdalia answered.

Rosabel was a teenage girl who lived next door. She was a good girl who loved all the children. She sponsored a children’s Bible club every week, and when she invited Alexey to attend, Migdalia agreed to let him go, but she warned Alexey not to tell his father, for he would be angry.

Alexey attended the Bible club whenever his father wasn’t home. He loved the songs and Bible videos, which taught him so much about Jesus.

“What is Alexey doing at Rosabel’s?” Vitaliano asked. Migdalia hoped that he wouldn’t ask. Now she had to tell him that Alexey was attending the children’s Bible club.

Vitaliano’s face turned red with anger. “You know I don’t want anything to do with religion!” he exploded. “Why did you let him go?”

“Rosabel invited him,” Migdalia said. “Please, let him stay. He is learning such good things, and this is his only chance to be with other children.”

A few minutes later, Alexey arrived home. But when he saw his father’s face, he knew that he was in trouble.

“Alexey,” his father said firmly. “I do not want you to go to that Bible club meeting again! I do not want God in this house!”

Alexey didn’t want to disobey his father, so for several weeks he did not attend the Bible club. But when he heard the children singing, he longed to go. One evening he asked his mother if he could return to the Bible club. She agreed, and he happily ran to join the other children.

Alexey attended the Bible club regularly after that. Then one evening his father again came home early and found Alexey gone. “Where is he?” he asked. When Migdalia did not answer promptly, he guessed. “Is he at that house church next door?” he stormed. Migdalia nodded. “Go get him, right now!” he demanded.

“Please, Vitaliano,” she pleaded. “Let him go. It is better for him to be there than running in the streets. At least let him stay until the meeting is over.”

A few minutes later, Alexey bounded into the house. But when he saw his father’s angry look, Alexey began to cry. “Please don’t spank me, Papa!” he pleaded. But Vitaliano was not going to let his son disobey him. As he spanked him, he ordered, “You will not go back to that house church again!”

*(continued)*



# The Humility of Heavenly Wisdom



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *James 3:13–4:10; Deut. 4:6; Gal. 5:17; Jer. 3:6–10, 20; Acts 19:13–16; Ps. 24:3–6.*

**Memory Text:** “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you” (*James 4:10, NASB*).

In many midsize and larger companies, a “middle-manager mentality” exists. This attitude happens when workers feel entitled to something they do not yet have: more respect, a higher salary, a more advanced position, and so on. This unhealthy attitude develops over time as the person strives to get ahead. Symptoms may include flattering remarks served up to decision makers and uncomplimentary revelations made about coworkers, all seasoned with a spirit of selfish rivalry. When one major television news anchor advanced to the top without destroying others to get there, a colleague admiringly observed: “There were no dead bodies.”

It would be nice to think that selfish rivalry is confined to secular organizations and that the church operates quite differently. Unfortunately, Scripture indicates that all too often worldly “wisdom” also operates among believers.

This week, let's see what the Word of God has to say about this unfortunate reality.

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

## The Meekness of Wisdom

**“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom”** (*James 3:13, ESV*). **“The meekness of wisdom”?** What might that mean?

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Some commentators think that the entire third chapter of James has to do with what qualifies (or disqualifies) people to be teachers. Naturally, the “wise and understanding” would seem to be good candidates, but the scope seems to be broader, encompassing the whole congregation. The wisdom James describes here and throughout the epistle is not primarily the intellectual variety so esteemed by the ancient Greeks and many Western countries today. Rather, wisdom is seen in one’s conduct and lifestyle, as indicated by the Greek word for it, *anastrophe*, translated “conduct” (*used also in 1 Tim. 4:12, Heb. 13:7, 1 Pet. 1:15, 2:12*). Our actions and conduct testify as to how wise we are. Jesus taught the same, saying that “‘wisdom is justified by her children’” (*Matt. 11:19, NKJV*).

Interestingly, the only place in the Old Testament where the phrase translated “wise and understanding” is found is in Moses’ admonition to Israel to observe all the laws that God had commanded: “Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a *wise and understanding people*’” (*Deut. 4:6, ESV; emphasis added*).

In contrast, the “bitter” water spring referred to in James 3:11 produces “envy and selfish ambition” (*v. 14, NIV*) in the church. The latter translates from the Greek word *eritheia*, which refers to “the exclusive pursuit of one’s own interests.”—Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers), vol. 2, p. 70. That’s an attitude that sounds more like Satan in heaven than like what Christians should be on earth. Unless we make a conscious choice to die to self and surrender our wills to the Lord, all of us could be in danger of displaying precisely the attitudes here that James warns about.

**Dwell more on the phrase “the meekness of wisdom.” What are some of the situations in which, right now, some of this wisdom on your part would be very helpful?**

## Two Kinds of Wisdom

**Read** James 3:15, 16. What is his description of worldly wisdom? What are the common ways we see this “wisdom” manifested in the world, or even in the church?

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The wisdom that we have naturally is “earthly,” even “demonic” or “devilish,” and devoid of the Spirit. This should not be too surprising. Long ago Solomon spoke about the “way that seems right” as being “the way of death” (*Prov. 14:12, NKJV; 16:25, NKJV*). This wisdom is destructive to its core. If jealousy and selfish ambition are cultivated and expressed, the natural result will be disorder and dissension, similar to the situation in Corinth (*see 2 Cor. 12:20, where several of the same words are used*).

**Read** James 3:17, 18; John 3:3–7; Colossians 3:1, 2. Together, what are these texts telling us about “heavenly” wisdom?

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While James never refers to the Holy Spirit directly, the idea of the new birth is clearly present. The apostle seems to prefer, instead, the agricultural metaphor of sowing and bearing fruit, perhaps based on Jesus’ parables that refer to the Word being “sown” in people’s hearts as they hear the gospel message (*see Matt. 13:3–9, 18–23*). Heavenly wisdom is “full of mercy,” as well as “good fruits.” As we have seen, despite the emphasis in James on obedience and good works as the fruit of faith, mercy triumphs even in the judgment (*James 2:13*). In other words, the truly wise will not only be meek and humble like Jesus but also peaceable, gentle, merciful, and forgiving, willing to overlook the faults of others, not critical or judgmental of them.

**It’s so easy to fall into the ways of the world, isn’t it? Examine yourself: how much does worldly wisdom, in contrast to wisdom from heaven, influence how you live?**

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## Cause of Conflict and Quarrels

“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?” (*James 4:1, NKJV; compare Gal. 5:17*). What basic conflict do both of these passages describe?

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The opening verses of James 4 describe believers torn asunder by internal, bitter strife. There is an inward cause of the outward quarrels in the church: the cravings for pleasure (the word in Greek gives us our word *hedonism*). These sinful desires, which Paul metaphorically refers to as “the flesh,” are actively making war against our higher, spiritual motivations. The Christian life involves a protracted battle which, if not governed by the “wisdom from above” (*James 3:17*), spills out to the church itself and causes spiritual trauma among believers.

**Read** James 4:2, 3. What specific sinful desires are mentioned, and how are they affecting the church?

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These verses contain direct references to the Ten Commandments: “You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain” (*James 4:2, NKJV*). The repeated references to the problem of envy, coveting, and cravings or passions (*compare James 3:14, 16*) reflect a perspective similar to the one expressed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, in which the inner motivations, not just outward actions, are in view. Therefore, the reference to murder is probably meant, in this broader sense, to include anger. The earliest congregations probably did not have members killing one another. On the other hand, as we learn from the book of Acts, there were times, particularly in Jerusalem where James was based, when betrayal could easily have led to the arrest and putting to death of church members.

“It is the love of self that brings unrest. When we are born from above, the same mind will be in us that was in Jesus, the mind that led Him to humble Himself that we might be saved. Then we shall not be seeking the highest place. We shall desire to sit at the feet of Jesus, and learn of Him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 330, 331.

## Friendship With the World

**Read** James 4:2–4. Why does James call his readers “adulterers and adulteresses”? See Jer. 3:6–10, 20; Isa. 54:5; Jer. 2:2; Luke 16:13.

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Alluding to the biblical concept of Israel as God’s bride, James likens believers’ going along with worldly customs and being influenced by worldly attitudes to spiritual adultery. In reality, they are choosing a different master and lord.

The next verse, James 4:5, is not easy to understand. Some have called it the most difficult verse in the New Testament. The ambiguity of the Greek text is reflected in the major translations. Some consider the “spirit” to be the Holy Spirit (“the Spirit . . . in us yearns jealously,” *NKJV*; *HCSB*; “He jealously desires the Spirit . . .,” *NASB*). Others consider it to be the human spirit (“God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us,” *NRSV*; “he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us,” *NIV*). The latter rendering by the NIV fits the grammar and context best, but regardless of the translation, the meaning of the verse is not very clear. Based on a careful study of the verse’s syntax and the immediate context, verses 5 and 6 could be translated as follows: “Or do you think that the Scripture speaks in vain against envy? The spirit which He has caused to dwell in us yearns, but He gives more grace. Therefore He says, ‘God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble’” (*James 4:5, 6, author’s translation*).

As verses 1–4 make clear, the human spirit (or “heart”) is permeated with desires that, while not originally or in themselves evil, have been twisted by sin into wicked pathways. Grace is the only real solution to our plight. The proud, however, have placed themselves in a position where they can’t easily receive that grace. Someone wrote that we get grace as do beggars holding out a tin cup before a waterfall. Only a person humble, meek, and aware of his or her utter need and dependency is open to grace, to the unmerited favor bestowed upon those who are, in every way, unworthy. As Ellen G. White wrote, “Our great need is our only claim on God’s mercy.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 317.

**Look at yourself. What in you makes you worthy of salvation? How does your answer help you realize the great need of grace in your own life? How does the Cross, and the Cross alone, answer that need?**

## Submission to God

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (*James 4:7, NRSV*). Notice the order of the commands here. If we try to resist the devil in our own strength, what chance of success do we have? When seven Jewish exorcists tried to get a demon out of a possessed man by using the names of Jesus and Paul as a kind of magic formula, the demon-possessed man so overpowered the exorcists that they ran away naked and bleeding (*Acts 19:13–16*). Thus, we need to submit to God and His will in order to resist the devil. In fact, by taking that very step, we are resisting the devil.

At the same time, we should not suppose that the first readers of James’s letter had never submitted themselves to God before. James is clearly writing to professed believers. So, perhaps we need to think more in terms of submitting ourselves to God daily and resisting the devil whenever his temptations assert themselves.

**Read James 4:8–10. What commands does James give, and how are they interrelated? How are they connected with submission to God, as well?**

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The appeal to change in these verses is the culmination of all that James has been saying since 3:13. In the passage we have been studying this week, there are contrasts between heavenly wisdom and devilish wisdom, and between the proud who exalt themselves as the devil did (*see Isa. 14:12–14*) and the lowly who submit to God and humble themselves. There is also a charge of infidelity to the covenant with God (*James 4:4*), and the charge of being double-minded is repeated (*vs. 8; compare 1:8*). Therefore, the call to submit to God goes beyond moralistic admonition; it is calling sinners to repentance, as Jesus did (*Luke 5:32*).

How should one repent? James supplies the steps (based on Psalm 24:3–6): (1) draw near to God, and He will draw near to you; (2) cleanse your hands and purify your hearts (that is, actions as well as thoughts); (3) lament, mourn, and weep for your shortcomings, realizing again that your need is your only claim to God’s grace.

**“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (*James 4:10, NKJV*). What does that mean? How do you learn to humble yourself? How can we learn to emulate the humility that Jesus revealed?**

**Further Study:** “There are many whose hearts are aching under a load of care because they seek to reach the world’s standard. They have chosen its service, accepted its perplexities, adopted its customs. Thus their character is marred, and their life made a weariness. In order to gratify ambition and worldly desires, they wound the conscience, and bring upon themselves an additional burden of remorse. The continual worry is wearing out the life forces. Our Lord desires them to lay aside this yoke of bondage. . . . He bids them seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and His promise is that all things needful to them for this life shall be added.” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 330.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think more about the two kinds of wisdom discussed in Monday’s lesson and make a list of the thoughts associated with each. Now think about times during this week where you made important decisions or took important actions. Which kind of wisdom was involved?
- 2 As we saw on Sunday, God promised Israel that, as a result of their observing His laws, surrounding nations would come to admire them as “a wise and understanding people.” But did this not lead Israel to become proud? This is, of course, contrary to heavenly wisdom, which leads to humility. What happened to them, and how can we learn to avoid their mistakes? How could a proper understanding of the true meaning of the sanctuary service have been their best defense against pride? How should the Cross, for us today, be the ultimate defense against pride?
- 3 Read again the Ellen G. White statement above. How many of the world’s standards do we strive for? Are those standards always, of necessity, wrong? So often, too, we can read of people who, by the world’s standards, seem to have everything; and yet, their lives turn out to be wrecks. What should that tell us about just how deceptive so much of what the world offers really is? Most important, though, how can we learn to resist the world and help our young people, who can be easily caught up by the false promises of the world, not to fall into this trap?
- 4 Dwell more on this idea of humility. Why is that so important in the life of a Christian? Why is pride so deadly for anyone who wants to follow Jesus?

## The Disobedient Son: Part 2

VITALIANO MARRERO

Vitaliano hated having a house church next door. He decided to turn his radio up to full volume to rock music when the group met. He thought: *If I disturb their meetings, they'll find another place to meet, and I won't have to deal with them in my neighborhood!* He played loud music for months, but the group continued meeting. No one complained. In fact, the few members of the church who knew Vitaliano were kinder than ever to him.

Alexey's attendance at the club awakened in Migdalia's heart a desire to know God. She began reading the Bible and accepted Bible studies from Rosabel. Sometimes Migdalia read the Bible and ignored her housework. When Vitaliano returned home and found the house a mess, he asked his mother what happened. "Your wife spends all day reading the Bible and doesn't have time to clean the house." Another time Vitaliano's mother told him, "I think Migdalia is going to the house church on Saturday mornings."

Vitaliano confronted his wife. "Are you going to become a Christian?" he asked. "I do not want you to go to that church anymore!"

One day Vitaliano found Migdalia studying the Bible. Grabbing the Bible, he threatened to throw it into the fire but fear gripped him. *Will God punish me for burning the Bible?* he wondered. He closed the door and threw the Bible into the bedroom.

A few days later, he saw the Bible on a shelf. Opening it, his eyes fell on Malachi 3:17: " 'They will be mine,' says the LORD Almighty, 'in the day when I make up my treasured possession' " (NIV). Vitaliano closed the Bible. He knew that God was telling him that his wife and son belonged to God. He became afraid to forbid them to attend the church.

A few days later, the pastor's son came to visit Vitaliano. The two had been friends for many years. "My friend," the man said, "we are having a program this evening, and I'd like you to come."

"Look, I'm wearing work clothes, I'm dirty," Vitaliano responded. But his friend offered to go with him, and Vitaliano reluctantly agreed.

The program had a lot of music, and Vitaliano enjoyed it. When his friend invited him again, Vitaliano went. Little by little, Vitaliano's heart softened.

A few weeks later, his friend invited him to study the Bible. Vitaliano agreed. He began attending worship services in the house church.

Soon Vitaliano's mother began attending the church too. Now the whole family was attending church and studying the Bible together. A few months later Vitaliano, Migdalia, and Vitaliano's mother were baptized.

At his baptism, Vitaliano testified, "It was my son whose example brought our family to the feet of Jesus."

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VITALIANO MARRERO and his wife, MIGDALIA, are active lay workers in their home church in Holguín, Cuba.



# One Lawgiver *and* Judge




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *James 4:11–17; Acts 17:11; Heb. 4:15, 16; Luke 12:13–21; Eccles. 2:15–19; Titus 2:14.*

**Memory Text:** “There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?” (*James 4:12*).

Our attitude toward law, whether God's law or humans', affects how we relate to others and even how we relate to God Himself. Have you noticed that sometimes the rich and famous act as if they are above the law? Even some who make the laws, or enforce them, may look for ways to write those laws for their own personal gain. Disrespect for a society's laws, then, can involve disrespect for other people, because laws govern how we relate to each other.

At the same time, those whose attitude toward law is rigid and unbending may also have difficulty in their interpersonal relationships. At a deeper level, our view of the law depends on the degree of respect we have for the wisdom of the lawgivers and the fairness of their laws.

This week's lesson begins with a look at the law but then leads into some important words about a form of arrogance and self-dependence that we might not be aware of but which we are warned about as being sin, a violation of God's law. In fact, we're given here, in James, another way of looking at sin.

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

## Judgment or Discernment?

“Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it” (*James 4:11, NIV*). How does judging others amount to sitting in judgment of the law?

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The initial phrase in verse 11 that is literally translated “speak against” could include several sins of speech, including slander, bearing false witness, and angry words (*see Lev. 19:15–18*). On the one hand, it seems that James uses milder language here than in chapter 3; yet, the implications of speaking against one’s brother or sister seem more serious in that doing so calls into question the law itself. By placing ourselves on the judgment seat, we ignore our own weaknesses (*see Matt. 7:1–3*) and focus instead on another’s wrongdoing, as if we were somehow outside of or above the law. Such a focus also fails to love our neighbor as ourselves (*Lev. 19:18*). Thus, we are not keeping the law.

At the same time, however, while we should not be judging others, we must learn to have spiritual discernment.

**Identify** in the following passages the areas in which spiritual discernment is called for: *Acts 17:11, 1 Cor. 6:1–5, 2 Cor. 13:5, Phil. 1:9, 1 John 4:1, Gal. 6:1.*

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We are to compare what people teach and preach with the Word of God. We should also, as far as possible, encourage church members to settle their differences among themselves rather than in courts, where the judges may or may not be guided by God’s Word. Most important, we should examine ourselves as to the health of our faith relationship and whether what we dwell on is uplifting and excellent or detrimental to our Christian experience.

**It’s so easy to criticize and judge others, especially when they do things we don’t like. How can we learn to know if we have crossed the line from being spiritually discerning to being judgmental toward God’s law?**

## The Lawgiver Is Judge

All the laws of the Old Testament are from Jesus. They are sometimes called the laws of Moses because they were given through him (*2 Chron. 33:8, Neh. 10:29*), but it was Jesus who led the Israelites through the wilderness and spoke the Ten Commandments to them at Mount Sinai (*see 1 Cor. 10:1–4*). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus clarified and amplified the law. He is the “Word . . . made flesh” (*John 1:14*), and it is by His Word that we will be judged (*John 12:48*).

**“There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?”** (*James 4:12, ESV*). **What do the following verses tell us about Jesus as our Judge?** *Isa. 33:22; 11:1–5; Heb. 4:15, 16; Rev. 19:11–16.*

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Only someone who knows the law very well is qualified to judge whether or not it has been broken. Lawyers study for many years before taking bar exams, which test their readiness to begin their practice. The scribes in the time of Jesus (many of whom were Pharisees) diligently studied also, and not only the Mosaic laws but also the accumulated legal traditions. The fact that Jesus did not agree with many of these traditions resulted in serious conflict with the leaders. But as the One who gave these laws, He was and is uniquely qualified to explain what they mean and to assess whether or not they have been transgressed. So when He comes again, His reward is with Him to give to all according to their works (*Rev. 22:12*). Furthermore, by taking on human nature, living a sinless life, dying in our place, and being raised victorious over sin and death, Jesus is able to save us from sin.

“God has committed all judgment unto the Son, for without controversy He is God manifest in the flesh.

“God designed that the Prince of sufferers in humanity should be judge of the whole world. He who came from the heavenly courts to save man from eternal death; . . . He who submitted to be arraigned before an earthly tribunal, and who suffered the ignominious death of the cross—He alone is to pronounce the sentence of reward or of punishment.”—Ellen G. White, *Maranatha*, p. 341. As both Lawgiver and Savior, Christ is uniquely qualified to be our Judge.

**Either reward or punishment, we will face only one or the other. What’s your only hope of reward?**

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## Planning Ahead

**Read James 4:13.** (Compare Luke 12:13–21.) How do we balance prudent planning for the future with our need to live each day in expectation of Christ’s imminent coming? How can we avoid the trap of merely building bigger “barns”?

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It may seem very reasonable to plan a year in advance or even more. Businesses commonly have short-, medium-, and long-range plans. Individuals and families need to save for the future and to make provision for unexpected expenses. On the other hand, we also believe that Jesus is coming soon and that, someday, all of our earthly possessions will be consumed by flames (see 2 Pet. 3:10–12).

These two approaches to life are not necessarily in conflict. Someone has said, “Plan as if Christ were not coming for years but live each day as if Christ were coming tomorrow.” This is good as far as it goes, though long-term planning can make it difficult to take one day at a time. Many of Jesus’ hearers (and no doubt many Christians today) would consider that the rich man who decided to build bigger barns was prosperous because God was blessing him. But Jesus reveals to us the man’s inner thoughts: “ ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry’ ” (Luke 12:19, NKJV). In short, his overarching concern was to lay up treasure for himself.

Most important, rather than making our plans too definite, “Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that’ ” (James 4:15, NKJV). This means more than simply appending “d.v.” (*Deo volente*, Latin for “God willing”) to the end of a sentence about our future plans. It means we should submit all our plans to God. We can pray, “God, I want to know Your will. If You are not pleased with these plans, please show me.” Then, if our plans are not good, God will show us that—as long as we remain attentive and willing to correct our plans or even change them entirely.

**Read again James 4:13.** Though on the surface nothing really seems wrong with what is being said, obviously there’s a problem—not in what the people want to do but in their attitude about it. How can we be careful not to get caught up in that same attitude, even subconsciously?

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## A Mist

**Read** James 4:14. What crucial point is being made here?

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Life is uncertain. Every breath is a gift. James 4:14 uses a very rare Greek word (*atmis*), which is translated as “vapor” or “mist.” Like the Hebrew word *hebel* (“breath, vapor”), which occurs 38 times in Ecclesiastes and is often translated as “vanity,” it emphasizes the transitory nature of life. Who hasn’t, especially as we get older, experienced just how fast and fleeting life is? Well into his old age, well-known evangelist Billy Graham said, “I never knew that life went by so quickly.”

In other words, there’s always the imminence of death. We are all just a heartbeat away from it. Any of us, at any moment, for any number of reasons, could die in an instant. How rightly James says, “yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring” (4:14, *ESV*), including death.

“I will not here dwell upon the shortness and uncertainty of life; but there is a terrible danger—a danger not sufficiently understood—in delaying to yield to the pleading voice of God’s Holy Spirit, in choosing to live in sin; for such this delay really is.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 32.

Plus, not only is life so short but, in and of itself, it can also be so unsatisfying.

**Read** Ecclesiastes 2:15–19; 4:4; 5:10; 9:11, 12. How does the message of Solomon here only add to the point that James has made?

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We see so much injustice, so much unfairness, so much that doesn’t make sense in this life. No wonder we all long for the promise of eternal life made to us through Jesus. Without that, we are just a mist that will be gone and forever forgotten.

**Take stock: How much of this world holds you in its grip? How can you always keep in mind just how fleeting it all is?**

## Knowing *and* Doing What Is Good

**Read** James 4:15–17 in the context of the verses that come before it. What crucial point is he making here?

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James here is dealing with the attitude of self-dependence. In fact, he calls that attitude “arrogance” and the words spoken as “boasting”; he says it is “evil.” That’s how important the right attitude is for the Christian.

Read verse 17. The Bible defines sin in two ways: (1) doing wrong; (2) not doing right. The first definition is given by John: “sin is the transgression of the law” (*1 John 3:4*). Many modern versions render it “sin is lawlessness,” but the Greek word *anomia* refers to specific violations of the law rather than to habitual lawless behavior (*see its use in Rom. 4:7, Titus 2:14, Heb. 10:17*). The second definition is given in James 4:17: “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” We must therefore go beyond simply resisting temptation to do wrong. We are called to be “children of light” (*Eph. 5:8*) and to “let [our] light shine before others, so that they may see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father who is in heaven” (*Matt. 5:16, ESV; emphasis added*).

Of course, one could get easily discouraged because, after all, who constantly does all the good they could possibly do every single day? But that’s not the issue. Even Jesus’ life was not a continual round of ceaseless activity. There were times when He withdrew to pray or simply to rest (*Luke 5:16, Mark 6:31*). Most important, He sought God’s will in everything He did (*John 5:30*). Jesus even compared doing God’s will to eating: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (*John 4:34, NKJV*). Just as there are limits to how much we can eat at one sitting, so there are limits to how much we can do. That is why Jesus goes on to say that some sow while others reap but both “rejoice together” (*vss. 36–38*). As we work for the Lord, we will be encouraged to do more and will pray for a greater willingness to be used in every possible way.

**How does prayer help us die to self and thus maintain an attitude of surrender to the will of God? Whatever your plans are, how can you learn to surrender them to the Lord?**

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**Further Study:** Read about the value of time in Ellen G. White, “Talents,” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 342–346, and share with your Sabbath School class the points that impressed you.

“Let no one among you glory any longer against the truth by declaring that this spirit [of discerning the evil motives of others] is a necessary consequence of dealing faithfully with wrongdoers and of standing in defense of the truth. Such wisdom has many admirers, but it is very deceptive and harmful. It does not come from above, but is the fruit of an unregenerated heart. Its originator is Satan himself. Let no accuser of others credit himself with discernment; for in so doing he clothes the attributes of Satan with the garments of righteousness.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 936, 937.

“He who is guilty of wrong is the first to suspect wrong. By condemning another he is trying to conceal or excuse the evil of his own heart. It was through sin that men gained the knowledge of evil; no sooner had the first pair sinned than they began to accuse each other; and this is what human nature will inevitably do when uncontrolled by the grace of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 126.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Look at the last Ellen G. White statement above. How can we protect ourselves against doing the same thing: judging and accusing others so that we try to feel better about ourselves and our own shortcomings?
- 2 Dwell on the fact of just how fast life goes by. What should that tell us about what our priorities should be? Though we’re told by the special theory of relativity that time itself varies depending upon how fast we are moving in a frame of reference, one thing is certain: no matter how fast, or slowly, time goes by, once a moment is gone, it is gone forever. How should this sobering thought impact what we do with our time?
- 3 How do we deal with those whose sins need to be dealt with and yet not fall into the trap that James has warned us about?

# Not-So-Smart Solomon Wises Up

DENNIS RODRIGUES

As a teenager, Solomon was not so smart. He let his peers influence his decisions and began smoking and taking drugs. He experimented with every drug he could get, and often he grew weak because he was not eating. Drugs were all he cared for.

Solomon and his friends were always together, smoking and taking drugs. They formed a gang and often fought with other teens. Once when he was high on drugs he picked up a machete, ready to strike his father. But a voice shouted to him, “Stop!” and he dropped the machete as if it were on fire.

“Help me, please!” he cried. His family took him to a mental hospital for treatment. But the hospital kept him for only a few days.

Solomon’s grandmother prayed for him constantly and encouraged him to attend church with her and let God heal him. Solomon went, and there he felt God’s love calling him. But he continued taking drugs for ten more years. Then Solomon’s grandmother and father died. The two people who had tried to help him were gone. Finally Solomon could run away from God no longer. He gave up and gave his life to God. It had taken him years to heed the voice of God.

Solomon did not know which church to attend. He tried several before he visited a Seventh-day Adventist church. There he watched the pastor baptize someone, and instantly he knew what he must do. He went to the pastor and asked for baptism. The pastor reviewed the doctrines with him and baptized Solomon.

Solomon’s repentance was real. He serves his church and his God with joy and faithfulness as a deacon and an elder. Several members of his family have given their hearts to Christ because of his witness.

Recently, he held his own evangelistic series and led seven people to Jesus.

He is trained as an accountant, but he has chosen simpler work that puts him in touch with people he can talk to about God. Solomon shares his faith on the bus, with strangers in the street. “For years I was compelled to take drugs; today I am by God compelled to preach,” he says. He is eager to redeem the time he has left for God.

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DENNIS RODRIGUES *is a pastor living in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.*



# Weep *and* Howl!



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *James 5:1–6, Ps. 73:3–19, 1 Sam. 25:2–11, Lev. 19:13, Luke 16:19–31, Matt. 5:39.*

**Memory Text:** “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (*Matthew 6:21*).

The worldwide popularity of the television show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* suggests that many people vicariously enjoy the rags-to-riches fantasy and probably hope it could happen to them someday.

But wealth isn't all that many believe it to be. Studies suggest that increasing income follows the law of diminishing returns: beyond allowing people to live comfortably, more possessions do not buy more happiness. Meaningful relationships, job satisfaction, and a purposeful life usually make a greater contribution to one's happiness than does wealth. The best things are freely given, such as loving words, a smile, a listening ear, simple kindnesses, acceptance, respect, a sympathetic touch, and genuine friendship.

Even more precious are the gifts given by God: faith, hope, wisdom, patience, love, contentment, and many other blessings that come through His Spirit's presence in our lives. The irony is that, while many Christians would agree with these sentiments, their daily living suggests that selfishness often has the upper hand. As we'll see this week, greed is a big mistake, one fraught with horrendous consequences.

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

## Justice Will Be Done!

Chapter 5 of James begins with a bang: “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!” (*James 5:1, NKJV*). No doubt, that would have gotten his readers’ attention.

In James 1:10, 11, he reminded the rich of the impermanence of wealth. Here, in chapter 5, he urges those who stubbornly hold on to it to “weep and howl.” It is as if their impending judgment is even now being poured out. The vivid description continues throughout our passage for this week, bringing to mind the divine retribution for the wicked excess that characterizes the period just prior to Christ’s return (*see Luke 17:27–29; 2 Tim. 3:1, 2; Rev. 18:3, 7*). A similar attitude permeates God’s last-day church (*Rev. 3:17*). Interestingly, the Greek word translated as “miseries” in James 5:1 comes from the same root used to describe Laodicea as “wretched” in Revelation 3:17.

**There is so much injustice in the world, especially economic injustice. Sometimes it is so hard to understand why some people get rich exploiting the poor and, worse, why they seem to get away with it! Read Psalm 73:3–19. What hope is found in these verses regarding this perennial problem?**

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Throughout the books of the Old Testament prophets, we find a concern for justice and the promise that God will act to set things right. But this persistent and settled sense of hope did not seem to make the uncomfortable and perplexing period of waiting for God’s intervention any easier. For instance, writing at a time of widespread apostasy among God’s people, when Babylon, swelling with pride, celebrated its power and prosperity, the prophet Habakkuk peppered God with pointed questions (*see Hab. 1:2–4, 13, 14*). God’s short answer was to trust in Him and wait a little longer (*Hab. 2:2–4*). And the prophet did just that (*see Hab. 3:17, 18*).

**What injustices cause you to simmer and burn inside with anger and outrage? (And there is so much more going on that you don’t even know about!) Though, of course, we should do what we can to alleviate injustice, how can we learn to rest in the promise that, somehow, when it’s all over, God’s justice will be done?**

## When Wealth Becomes Worthless

**Read** James 5:2, 3. What warning is James giving here? Though his words are quite strong, what kind of wealth is he talking about? What’s the basic message?

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Rotting wealth, moth-eaten clothing, and even silver and gold rusting—these are images for us to consider soberly as our planet spins blissfully on, faster and faster toward its demise.

The world’s economic situation always seems to be going from one crisis to another; even the “good” times, when they come, rarely last and are always followed by a downturn. Any semblance of economic stability and tranquility that the global marketplace might offer is fleeting and largely imaginary. Discontent and instability grows as the disparity between rich and poor widens. Such was the situation when James wrote that the poor were growing increasingly desperate and the rich more intolerant of the plight of the destitute.

**Consider** the following individuals and describe the effect wealth (or the lack of it) had on them:

1. **Nabal** (*1 Sam. 25:2–11*) \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Hezekiah** (*2 Kings 20:12–19*) \_\_\_\_\_

3. **Peter** (*Acts 3:1–10*) \_\_\_\_\_

Sooner or later, worldly wealth loses its luster for all of us. We learn its limitations and maybe even its dark side. Money has its place; the problem is when people put it in the wrong place.

James says money will be “a witness against” those who misuse it (*James 5:3*). Though he gives this warning in an end-time context, the point should be clear: how we use our money matters. The image of flesh-consuming fire is meant to wake us up to the seriousness of the choices we are making with our money. Are we heaping up treasure that will ultimately be burned up, or are we saving for eternity? (*See Luke 12:33, 34.*)

**Think carefully about your attitude toward money and how it affects your relationships. What does this say about how you are using it?**

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## Cries of the Poor

Reading through James, we may notice that several different categories of wealthy people are mentioned, including rich merchants who will be cut down in the midst of their pursuits (*James 1:11*), business people who sue to protect their investments (*James 2:6*), and agricultural landholders who have withheld wages from their laborers (*James 5:4*). These verses describe the rich negatively based on their past behavior, present attitude, and future punishment. These people have essentially “heaped up treasure” (*vs. 3, NKJV*) at the expense of the poor.

**“Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out”** (*vs. 4, NASB*). Compare *Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:14, 15; Jer. 22:13*. **What important principle is seen here, not just in the immediate contexts but in general in regard to how we deal with others?**

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In Israel in Bible times, as soon as wages were paid, many, if not most, of the workers used these earnings to buy food to feed their families. Withholding wages often meant the family had to go hungry. Thus, it was a serious matter that James was addressing here.

No wonder, then, that James spoke so strongly against those who held back wages from those who worked for them. It’s bad enough to defraud anyone of anything, but for someone already rich to hoard wealth by stealing from the poor is a sin, not just against the poor but a sin against heaven itself. And, as James writes, it will be dealt with in due time!

“Riches bring with them great responsibilities. To obtain wealth by unjust dealing, by overreaching in trade, by oppressing the widow and the fatherless, or by hoarding up riches and neglecting the wants of the needy, will eventually bring the just retribution described by the inspired apostle: ‘Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.’”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 682.

**What are your dealings with others when it comes to money? What do those dealings say about your Christianity and about how much you reflect the character of Christ?**

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## Fat and Happy (for Now)

**“You have lived on the earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter”** (*James 5:5, ESV; compare Ezek. 16:49, Amos 4:1*). **What do these passages link to luxurious indulgence?**

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In the ancient world, the notion prevailed that there was a fixed amount of wealth, meaning that if the wealth of some people increased, the wealth of others had to decrease. In other words, the rich can get richer only by making the poor poorer. “Creating” wealth without adversely affecting the wealth of others, however, seems to be a relatively modern idea. Some even argue that, as the rich get richer, they can help make the poor richer too. On the other hand, considering the competition among developed and developing nations for increasingly scarcer resources, the limitations of wealth creation can seem more pressing. Hence, the issue of wealth inequality still rages today.

One of the most famous stories of Jesus dealing with issues of inequality is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (*see Luke 16:19–31*). At the time of Jesus, most people were lucky to have two garments instead of just one and happy if they feasted once a year. By contrast, the rich man in the story “was clothed in purple and fine linen” (the most expensive kind of garments) “and who feasted sumptuously every day” (*vs. 19, ESV*). Poor Lazarus, despite being carried to the gate of the rich man’s house, had to beg for the few crumbs he received.

Contrary to popular opinion, the real focus of the parable is this life, not the afterlife. In fact, the original Greek makes no mention of “heaven” and “hell” at all. Both the rich man and Lazarus are depicted in the same place (*vs. 23*)—the grave (*hadēs*). The chasm separating them symbolizes the fact that after a person dies, his or her eternal destiny is fixed. Therefore, how we treat people in this life (as described in “Moses and the prophets,” *vss. 29, 31, NKJV*) is extremely important. There is no future life in which we can make up for what we failed to do in this one: “He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (*1 John 4:20, NKJV*).

**What regretful things have you done that, though you might be able to “make up” for now, you won’t be able to make up for them later?**

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## Blame the Victim

When someone has done wrong, the natural tendency is to try to escape responsibility. Often people try to do this by transferring the responsibility to someone else—including the person who has been wronged. Murderers excuse themselves by pleading self-defense or blaming their upbringing. By saying they were enticed, sexual abusers blame the victim. Husbands and wives who get divorced typically blame the other for the failed marriage. Those guilty of killing the martyrs of the Christian faith blamed the martyrs by accusing them of heresy. Indeed, Jesus warned His disciples that “ ‘the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service’ ” (*John 16:2, NKJV*). In fact, we believe that James, too, was killed for his faith.

In light of this, the words in James 5:6 carry even more weight:

**“Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.” How many times have you condemned others only to realize later that you were really the one who was wrong? Think especially about the last phrase of this verse. Does this mean that we should just let people walk all over us? On the other hand, how many quarrels have you had that would never have happened if you had put up no resistance? What does Jesus mean by “turning the other cheek” (*Matt. 5:39*)? How are we on a practical level to do this (or is the problem that we want to be “practical” about something that, in and of itself, isn’t really supposed to be practical)?**

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As we have seen, James has quite a bit to say about the rich and the poor. It should be kept in mind, though, that James never condemns the rich simply because they are rich. It is their *attitudes and actions* that matter to God. Similarly, the bare fact of being economically poor does not in itself endear a person to God. It is the “poor *in spirit*” and “rich *in faith*” who will be “heirs of the kingdom” (*Matt. 5:3, James 2:5, NKJV*). These inner qualities may have no relation to our particular economic circumstances. But then again, they may. Those who are “rich, and increased with goods” (*Rev. 3:17*) may be more needy spiritually than they think. God warned Israel to beware lest after they entered the land and became prosperous they should forget that all the good things they enjoyed came from Him, including the “power to get wealth” (*Deut. 8:11–18*).

**Further Study:** “Money has great value, because it can do great good. In the hands of God’s children it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, and clothing for the naked. It is a defense for the oppressed, and a means of help to the sick. But money is of no more value than sand, only as it is put to use in providing for the necessities of life, in blessing others, and advancing the cause of Christ.

“Hoarded wealth is not merely useless, it is a curse. In this life it is a snare to the soul, drawing the affections away from the heavenly treasure. . . .

“He who realizes that his money is a talent from God will use it economically, and will feel it a duty to save that he may give.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 351, 352.

### Discussion Questions:

❶ Consider the following statements: “The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender” (*Prov. 22:7, ESV*). “Many poor families are poor because they spend their money as soon as they receive it. . . .

“When one becomes involved in debt, he is in one of Satan’s nets, which he sets for souls.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 392. Is helping people to get out of debt or to avoid getting into debt a part of “preach[ing] the gospel to the poor”? (*Luke 4:18*). Why, or why not?

❷ How do we really know whether money serves us or we serve it? See *Luke 16:10–13*.

❸ Economic disparity is everywhere. Some people have two, three, even four or more luxurious homes while others are happy to scrounge up a few pieces of wood and cobble them into a shelter. And what about those who have become obese by stuffing themselves while there are children all over the world going to bed hungry? Some argue that by taking from the rich we can give more to the poor. Others argue that as the rich get richer, they can help lift the poor out of poverty. How do we work, as *Christians*, to help alleviate the problem of extreme poverty? What things should we do to help, and what things *shouldn’t* we do?

## Trail of Death: Part 1

JOEL SANDOVAL

Joel Sandoval grew up in a Seventh-day Adventist home, but his life was not transformed by God's grace. As a teen, he resented the restrictions that the church represented. At age 15 he dropped out of church and joined a gang. He quickly became involved in organized crime, drugs, and spiritism. He had his body tattooed with symbols of the devil and began smoking marijuana. Soon he moved to hard drugs, such as cocaine.

Joel's parents allowed him to live at home, hoping that he would see the error of his ways. But when he was high on drugs, he often destroyed things in the house and terrified his mother. When the drugs wore off, Joel became depressed. One time he even tried to commit suicide. In spite of his parents' constant prayers and offers of help, Joel was convinced that no one loved him.

He made fun of his parents and others who invited him to church. Joel hated them for what they stood for; he hated the church; he hated God. In spite of his abuse, his parents and church members continued to pray for him and remind him of God's unfailing love. His mother was convinced that someday he would return to God and the church.

One night Joel was supposed to join his gang in a battle with another gang. A voice seemed to warn him not to go out that night. He remained home. Later he learned that his best friend had been killed during the fight. Joel realized that the warning voice he had heard was the voice of God. It had saved his life.

As he thought about the past few months, Joel realized that God had been speaking to him, telling him that the life he was leading was wrong. He began to cry, for he saw no way out of his drug-infested life. He began attending church again, but when members welcomed him, he thought they were staring at him. He felt like an outsider and stopped attending.

Joel decided to leave the country. When he told his mother, she cried. Before he left she pressed a small book into his hand. "Please, take this," she begged. It was a New Testament. And in spite of his feelings about religion, Joel asked her to pray for him.

Joel and five other young men left Honduras, heading for Mexico. They passed through Guatemala and crossed into Mexico. But early one morning they found themselves surrounded by an angry mob who were brandishing knives and guns. The youths realized that these men intended to kill them. The previous day someone had stolen merchandise from a local business, and the mob was convinced that the six youths were the thieves. Spewing death threats, the locals locked the youths in a house, then circled the house with their guns and knives in hand.

Frightened, the boys watched as the locals prepared a noose to hang them. Some swore; others sobbed. Joel thought about how he had disappointed his family and God. He pulled out the New Testament that his mother had given him and began reading.

*(continued)*



# Getting Ready for the Harvest



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *James 5:7–12, Rom. 13:11, 1 Cor. 3:13, Luke 7:39–50, Col. 4:6.*

**Memory Text:** “You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand” (*James 5:8, NKJV*).

In Greco-Roman times (as in some places still today), a flurry of activity preceded the coming of a visiting dignitary. Streets were cleared, shop windows cleaned, flowers planted, and crime prevention increased. Every effort was directed at making sure the place looked perfect when the official arrived.

The Greek word *parousia*, which is used throughout the New Testament for Christ's “coming,” as well as in James 5:7, 8, is a technical expression for the arrival of a king or dignitary. If such preparations preceded the arrival of earthly rulers, should we not make every effort to make our hearts ready for the coming of our Lord and Savior?

But how do we make such a preparation when we do not know “of that day or hour” (*Matt. 24:36*)? What does it mean to be “patient” and to “establish” our hearts? How does this relate to the idea of the “early and latter rain” (*James 5:7*)? Though in the texts for this week the context appears to be the end of time, the basic message is so relevant to believers at any time. Throughout our history and even in our own lives now, we face trials and suffering that call for us to stand firm in the faith, as did the prophets of old.

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

## Waiting for “Rain”

Farmers are directly dependent on the weather for their livelihood. If the weather is too dry or too wet, too cold or too hot, their produce will be adversely affected. In drier countries, such as Israel, the margin of safety is even less, and the importance of plentiful rain at the proper times is significantly greater. Whether grown on a small family farm or a large estate, the crop and its subsequent value are directly dependent on rain.

The early rain, which generally falls in October and November, moistens the ground and prepares it for planting and germination. The latter rain, around March or April, ripens the crops for harvest.

**Read James 5:7.** Compare Deut. 11:14, Jer. 5:24, 14:22, Joel 2:23. What point do the Old Testament passages make about the rain? Why do you think James uses this image in connection with the coming of the Lord? See also Hos. 6:1–3; Joel 2:28, 29.

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“Under the figure of the early and the latter rain, that falls in Eastern lands at seedtime and harvest, the Hebrew prophets foretold the bestowal of spiritual grace in extraordinary measure upon God’s church. The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles was the beginning of the early, or former rain, and glorious was the result. . . . But near the close of earth’s harvest, a special bestowal of spiritual grace is promised to prepare the church for the coming of the Son of man. This outpouring of the Spirit is likened to the falling of the latter rain; and it is for this added power that Christians are to send their petitions to the Lord of the harvest ‘in the time of the latter rain.’”  
—Ellen G. White, *Our Father Cares*, p. 212.

Jesus refers to the “harvest” at “the end of the world” (*Matt. 13:39*). Mark 4:26–29 presents a very similar picture to that of James 5:7. The farmer waits for the grain to ripen: “ ‘first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come’ ” (*Mark 4:28, 29, ESV*). Only at harvesttime is it possible to distinguish the wheat from the tares (*Matt. 13:28–30; compare Mal. 3:17, 18*).

**What should the fact that we can distinguish the wheat from the tares only at harvesttime tell us about how we must live out our faith now, before the harvest?**

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## How Near Is “Near”?

James 5:8 affirms that Christ’s coming is “at hand” or “near.” But, after nearly two thousand years, how are we to understand this promise?

Jesus described the coming kingdom (*Matt. 4:17, 10:7, 24:33*) by means of parables to teach the unfamiliar “heavenly things” in terms that are understandable. A close study of these parables reveals that the kingdom has two aspects: a present, spiritual reality and a glorious reality still to come. All the apostles fixed their hope in the imminent coming of Jesus (*Rom. 13:11, Heb. 10:25, James 5:9*), but they never identify exactly when that would be. Like us, they wanted to know when, but Jesus explained that this information was not best for them to know (*Acts 1:6, 7*). After all, how zealous would they be in sharing the gospel with the world had they known that the work would not be finished for almost two thousand years—and counting?

**What** does James mean when he says “establish your hearts” (*James 5:8, NKJV*), and why do you think the awaited fruit is called “precious” (*timios*; vs. 7)? See *1 Thess. 3:13, 2 Thess. 3:3, 1 Pet. 1:19, 1 Cor. 3:12*.

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The word *establish* (*stērizō*) means to “fix firmly” or “strengthen.” Our hearts are to be so wedded to the Lord that they cannot be moved despite the pressures brought against them. Becoming settled in the truth (*2 Pet. 1:12*), withstanding temptation, and enduring trials and suffering for our faith (*Acts 14:22*) all contribute to this work.

Spiritual growth is a process that is not always easy but that bears “precious fruit.” Believers, redeemed by “the precious [*timios*] blood of Christ” (*1 Pet. 1:19, NKJV*), are of infinite value to the heavenly “Farmer.” The word *timios* is also used to describe the “precious stones” that symbolize believers who are “built” on Christ, the “foundation” stone of God’s spiritual temple, the church (*1 Cor. 3:11, 12*). Paul likens unstable believers, on the other hand, to wood, hay, and straw that will not last and will ultimately be consumed by fire when Christ comes (*1 Cor. 3:12–15*). It is important, therefore, to ask ourselves on a regular basis whether our energies are really directed toward what we value most, toward what and who is most precious to us!

**“Each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is” (*1 Cor. 3:13, NKJV*). Look at your life. What sort of work is it?**

## Grumbling, Groaning, and Growing

When is the Second Coming? Why are we still here? It's not surprising that now, in the twenty-first century, we have doubters and scoffers. In the history of the church, this is nothing new. The most dangerous threats to Israel throughout its history came not from their enemies but from within their own ranks and from within their own hearts. Likewise, as the coming of the Lord approaches, "we have far more to fear from within than from without. . . . The unbelief indulged, the doubts expressed, the darkness cherished, encourage the presence of evil angels, and open the way for the accomplishment of Satan's devices."—Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, p. 156.

**Therefore** James 5:9 warns us, "Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door." What grudges or grumbles against others, or even against the church, have you had (and maybe at times with good cause too)? The question is, How have you handled them? With meekness, humility, and forgiveness, as you have been forgiven by God (see Luke 7:39–50), or by worldly standards? Be honest with yourself!

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From what we have read earlier in this epistle, it seems that there were serious challenges among the believers, including favoritism (*James 2:1, 9*), evil surmising (*vs. 4*), evil speaking toward one another (*3:10, 4:11*), envy (*3:14*), quarrels (*4:1*), and worldliness (*vss. 4, 13, 14*). Consistently, James directs us to deep solutions to these problems: faith (*James 1:3, 6*), "the implanted word" (*vs. 21, NKJV*), beholding "the law of liberty" (*James 1:25, 2:12, NKJV*), single-mindedness and godly wisdom (*James 3:13, 17*), grace (*James 4:6*), and clean hands and a pure heart (*vs. 8*). He also insists that there be outward expressions of God's inward workings (*James 2:14–26*), including visiting the afflicted and forgotten (*James 1:27*), showing mercy (*James 2:13*), and sowing peace rather than discord (*James 3:18*).

Ultimately, we are accountable to God; the One to whom we must give account is the Lord who is the Judge and who will give to everyone according to his or her work.

**As we wait for the Lord's return, what are positive ways you can encourage and uplift others? Why is it important that you do so?**

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## Models of Patient Endurance

**Read** James 5:10, 11. What do Job and the prophets have in common? Why do you think these examples are highlighted? What personal lessons can we take away from these stories for ourselves amid our own trials?

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The prophets of Israel were faithful in preaching the Word of the Lord without altering or compromising it. Hebrews, in extolling the prophets' fidelity to God, paints a clear picture: they "stopped the mouths of lions [Daniel], quenched the violence of fire [Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego], escaped the edge of the sword [Elijah and Elisha], . . . had . . . imprisonment [Jeremiah and Micaiah], . . . stoned [Zechariah, son of Jehoiada], . . . sawn asunder [Isaiah], . . . [and] slain with the sword [see 1 Kings 19:10]" (*Heb. 11:33–37*). Of course, Job's sufferings are also proverbial, as is the patience he exemplified despite derision by his own wife and the censure of those who came to commiserate with him. What set these heroes of faith and many others apart from the normal or average follower of God? James mentions several qualities: patience, endurance, and, above all, hope and trust in God.

One of the attributes is "patience" (*makrothymias*), also translated as "longsuffering" or "forbearance." It refers to the capacity to stand up under difficult circumstances and trials, to weather whatever life (or the devil!) throws at us. The prophets endured all their suffering for the Word of God *patiently* (*James 5:10*). This word is used frequently in the New Testament, including in a reference to Abraham waiting "patiently" during his many years of sojourning for God to fulfill His promise to give him a son (*Heb. 6:12, 15*). It also describes Jesus bearing up patiently through all His sufferings and death on the cross (*2 Pet. 3:15*).

Endurance (*hypomonē*), on the other hand, focuses on the end goal of this process, looking forward to the finish line. Job is put forward as the epitome of this quality. Despite all he suffered, Job looked steadfastly toward the final vindication he expected to receive (*Job 14:13–15, 19:23–27*).

**What are you struggling with now? What have you prayed for that has not yet come? How often have you even felt a sense of hopelessness? Think through the trials of some of the Bible characters listed above (or others); imagine how helpless they must have felt at times. What can you draw from their suffering that could help you work through your own?**

## Transparent as the Sunlight

Read James 5:12. Commentators have puzzled over why James seems to make such a major issue out of swearing solemn oaths. Even if the intent were to prohibit all speech of this kind, why would it seem to be urged as important “above all” that he has spoken about in this chapter or perhaps in the entire letter? Is it really that big of an issue? We need to keep in mind what we have seen throughout our study of this epistle: that James is not content with a superficial faith or form of religion, despite the caricatures of him that we sometimes hear. James is thoroughly gospel-oriented, so much so that he sets standards too high for us to reach without God’s forgiving and empowering grace. Our words reveal what is in our hearts: “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (*Matt. 12:34, NKJV*). The theology of James is permeated with the thinking of Jesus, who commanded us: “Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth; for it is his footstool; neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King” (*Matt. 5:34, 35*). Some people apparently even placed the hairs of their head in pledge to guarantee their words (*vs. 36*). But Jesus said all of this was evil: “Let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No” ’” (*Matt. 5:37, NKJV*).

Everything belongs to God, including every hair on our heads (even if, in some cases, there aren’t many!), so “there is nothing that we have a right to pledge, as if it were our own, for the fulfillment of our word. . . .

“Everything that Christians do should be as transparent as the sunlight. Truth is of God; deception, in every one of its myriad forms, is of Satan.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 66, 68. Clearly, Christ was not prohibiting judicial oaths because He Himself, when placed under oath by the high priest, did not refuse to answer, nor did He even condemn the process despite numerous deviations from sound jurisprudence (*Matt. 26:63, 64*).

Several things need to be kept in mind when speaking the truth, first and foremost being that we seldom even know all the truth, even about ourselves, and so we must be humble. Second, when we do speak the truth, it should always be spoken in love and for the edification of those who hear.

**Read Ephesians 4:15, 29 and Colossians 4:6. Dwell prayerfully on the powerful message of these texts. Think how different (and better!) your life would be were you, through God’s grace, to strictly follow these admonitions.**

**Further Study:** Read about the experiences of Elijah and Job in times of testing and their significance for us in the last days in Ellen G. White, “From Jezreel to Horeb,” pp. 155–166; “‘What Doest Thou Here?’” pp. 167–176; “‘In the Spirit and Power of Elias,’” pp. 177–189, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“To wait patiently, to trust when everything looks dark, is the lesson that the leaders in God’s work need to learn. Heaven will not fail them in their day of adversity. Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on God. . . .

“Trials will come, but go forward. This will strengthen your faith and fit you for service. The records of sacred history are written, not merely that we may read and wonder, but that the same faith which wrought in God’s servants of old may work in us.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 174, 175.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 We all know the parable about the wheat and the tares growing together until the harvest (*Matthew 13*). But what does that mean in terms of church discipline? What does that mean in terms of dealing with outright rebellion or apostasy in our ranks? Are we just to sit by and do nothing, saying that it will all be taken care of when the Lord returns? Obviously not. How—in light of this parable, but also in light of examples in which discipline was needed in the early church, such as in *Corinthians* and *Galatians*—are we to deal with the tares, especially those whose sole purpose seems to be choking the wheat and nothing else?
- 2 Temptations and trials come to all of us. What promises from the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White have been comforting to you and have helped you to persevere in your faith? What Bible characters have been most meaningful to you in difficulties and/or in view of what lies ahead?
- 3 James tells us to “grudge not one against another” (5:9). Yet, people, even other Christians, can do things that bother and annoy us. How can we learn to love, to forgive, to endure, and to rise above many of the “petty” things in life that can make us moody, irritable, and, really, bad witnesses?

## Trail of Death: Part 2

JOEL SANDOVAL

Joel realized it was Sabbath. His parents would be in church, praying for him. In the midst of the chaos in the house and outside, Joel knelt in a corner and prayed. He was sure that death was near. He opened the New Testament to the book of Psalms and began reading. Joel again prayed, “Lord, You rescued David from his enemies. If you get me out of this situation alive, I will give my life to You and tell others what You have done for me. Please save me, God!”

One of the locals saw Joel praying and reading his book. He thought Joel was performing some sort of witchcraft and became frightened. Meanwhile, the youth searched for a way to convince their captors that they were not guilty. One of them remembered the name of the man on whose property they had slept the night before. He told the guard at the door the man’s name. “Please find him! He will tell you where we were last night!” Soon the men returned with the man who verified their story. The youths were set free.

One man told Joel, “We would have killed you hours ago, but when we saw you kneeling in the corner doing magic, we became afraid.” Joel was confused. Then he realized that God had used his tears of repentance and his Bible reading to strike fear in the men’s hearts and eventually set them free.

The youths left the village, but they were later caught by Mexican authorities and returned to the border of Guatemala. When Joel arrived home, he told his parents what had happened. On the day he was captured, his mother said she sensed a special need and had prayed in earnest for him.

That night Joel lay awake. He couldn’t believe he had survived. He remembered other times he should have died but had been rescued. He knew God had been by his side, even when he rejected God’s influence.

Joel kept his promise to God and returned to church. He shared his testimony with the church and asked for forgiveness. He soon was baptized.

Although he didn’t go back to his gang, he did meet some gang members from time to time. When they commented on how he had changed, Joel shared how Christ had saved his life and set him free from drugs, hatred, and Satan’s hold. Now he leads a small group in his church and serves as a deacon. He loves to give Bible studies and to share his testimony.

“One thing I wish I could change,” Joel says. “I wish I could take off the tattoos that mark my body. But when Jesus comes, He will make my body new and pure and clean. I regret the years I wasted honoring Satan instead of Christ. I want to spend the rest of my life redeeming that time and influencing others to turn to Jesus, who saved my life more than once. He turned my life around, totally around.”

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*JOEL SANDOVAL lives with his parents in northern Honduras. He works in a clothing factory and spends his free time sharing his faith with others.*



# Prayer, Healing, and Restoration



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *James 5:13–20; 1 John 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:54; Heb. 12:12, 13; John 8:43–45; Prov. 10:12.*

**Memory Text:** “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (*James 5:16, NASB*).

People are fascinated by the miraculous and the magical. They often are drawn to such things as spectacles or matters of curiosity and nothing more. So, when Jesus was asked to perform a miracle merely for entertainment (*Luke 23:8, 9*) or as a sign of His Messiahship (*Matt. 12:38–41*) or even to satisfy a legitimate need of His own (*Matt. 4:2–4*), He refused. The Spirit, by which Jesus taught authoritatively and effected miraculous healings, is not simply a power to be used; we are to be instruments in His hands. God would gladly heal everyone who is sick, but He is interested in a more substantial, lasting healing.

Thus, in this context, we will look at some crucial questions: How do we understand the words in James about the healing of the sick? Is there a relationship between healing and forgiveness in answer to prayer? Elijah is presented as an important model of prayer in a time of widespread apostasy. What can we learn from his life of prayer and his work of calling Israel back to God and true worship?

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

## The Essential Christian Toolkit

**Read** James 5:13. What interesting contrast is he presenting here? How do we apply these admonitions to our own experiences?

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Though dealing with two different things (suffering, cheerfulness), James links them with prayer and praise: pray when you are suffering, praise when you are cheerful. The two practices are not that different from each other, however, because many biblical psalms of praise are also prayers, and James begins the epistle urging readers to “consider it all joy” when falling into various trials, “knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (*James 1:2, 3, NASB*). The time to pray and the time to praise might be more intertwined than we generally think.

The word for “suffering” in James 5:13 (*NASB*) is from the same root as the word used earlier to refer to the suffering of the prophets (*vs. 10*). It refers to both physical and mental suffering—“first and foremost for the danger and toil of war” (Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 239), but also to exhausting manual labor and costly effort. It is used in 2 Timothy 2:9 and 4:5, too, to describe “the hard apostolic labor that is not deterred by any difficulty or suffering.”—*Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 240. As Christians, we instinctively turn to God when trouble comes. Prayer is especially essential in facing difficulties, but singing or playing sacred music (the word used, *psalletō*, can mean either) is also helpful.

“Singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer. Indeed, many a song is prayer.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 168. How many of us have been depressed or lonely, only to have the words of a hymn come to mind and lift our spirits? There are many among us who are suffering or need encouragement and would be cheered by a visit filled with prayer and song. “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (*Rom. 12:15, NKJV*). It may lift our spirits, too, as nothing else can.

The book of Psalms especially is a treasure house of prayers and songs that can provide inspiration, encouragement, and direction when we do not know where to turn for help.

**We all know how suffering can draw us closer to the Lord and how it can drive us to prayer. What, though, are the spiritual dangers that come when things are going well for us? Why, especially in those times, is praise so important? What does it help us never to forget?**

## Prayer for the Sick

**Read** James 5:14, 15. What are the essential elements James prescribes for anointing the sick, and what important spiritual components are found in these texts?

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The fact that the sick person calls for the elders of the church to come and anoint him or her “with oil in the name of the Lord” and pray expresses the spiritual desire of the individual and the collective conviction that divine intervention is needed for healing (*Mark 6:13*). The reference to the forgiveness of sins shows that God will not, by means of a ritual, restore a person physically who does not also desire spiritual healing. “To those who desire prayer for their restoration to health, it should be made plain that the violation of God’s law, either natural or spiritual, is sin, and that in order for them to receive His blessing, sin must be confessed and forsaken.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 228.

The request for divine intervention and the summoning of the elders of the church suggest that the illness is incapacitating and, perhaps, also too urgent to be done in connection with a regular church gathering. Two different Greek words are used for the sick here: the first (*astheneō* in verse 14) is also used of Dorcas who “became sick and died” (*Acts 9:37, NKJV*); the second (*kamnō* in verse 15) refers generally to the patient, but it is also used of those who are dying and, in this context, seems to mean someone physically worn out or wasting away. Miraculous healing may happen in answer to “the prayer of faith.” The desire for healing requires full surrender to God’s will, whatever it is (*1 John 5:14*). However, the references to “sav[ing]” and “rais[ing]” the sick (compare “shall save . . . from death” in James 5:20) point unmistakably to the resurrection as representing the only complete healing, the time “when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality” (*1 Cor. 15:54*).

**Many of us have known about anointing services, or have even been involved in them, in which the sick are not healed but in fact die. Why, then, is the hope of the resurrection, implied in these texts, our only surety?**

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## Healing for the Soul

More important than the healing of the body is the healing of the soul. Our purpose is not, after all, to make people healthier sinners but to point them to the eternal life found in Jesus. Perhaps that is why the only clear reference to healing in the passage for this week is our memory text in verse 16, which moves away from the hypothetical situations dealt with in verses 13–15. The word for healing in this verse (*iaomai*) can refer to healing that goes beyond the cure of physical illness (see, for example, *Matt. 13:15*). Having already in verse 15 hinted at a broader understanding of healing (the resurrection), James makes the connection between illness and sin, the latter being the root cause of all our problems—not that every illness can be traced back to a particular sin but that sickness and death are the results of us all being sinners.

**Read** Mark 2:1–12 (compare *Heb. 12:12, 13; 1 Pet. 2:24, 25*). **What kind of healing do these passages describe, and what is the basis of this healing?**

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Faith in Jesus brings healing from spiritual weakness and sin. In a sense, every healing Jesus performed was a parable meant to draw people's attention to their deeper need of salvation. In the case of the paralyzed man in Mark 2, spiritual healing was actually the man's uppermost concern, which is why Jesus immediately assured him that his sins were forgiven. Yet, "it was not physical restoration he desired so much as relief from the burden of sin. If he could see Jesus, and receive the assurance of forgiveness and peace with Heaven, he would be content to live or die, according to God's will."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 267. While God's healers today should employ all available medical means to cure disease, efforts should be made also to heal the whole person, not just for this life but in view of eternity.

Healing includes the healing of relationships, which is why we are exhorted, "confess your sins to one another" (*James 5:16, NRSV*), meaning those we have wronged (*Matt. 18:15, 21, 22*). That is, if you have wronged or offended others, confess to them. Then the blessing of the Lord will rest upon you because the process of confession involves a dying to self, and only through that death to self can Christ be formed within you.

## Models of Prayer

**Read** James 5:17, 18. What do we learn about prayer from Elijah's example? How is it connected with healing, forgiveness, and restoration?

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These verses illustrate the assurance given at the end of James 5:16: "the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (*NASB*). Elijah was a "righteous" man and even translated to heaven, but he was not superhuman. He had the same passions and feelings that we have. The fact that God heard his prayer should encourage us that our prayers will be heard too. James says Elijah "prayed earnestly" that it might not rain (a detail not mentioned in the Old Testament), petitioning, apparently, for the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 11:13–17 (alluded to in James 5:18).

Israel's worship of Baal, the god of storm and lightning, could not go unchallenged on the basis of this prophecy in Deuteronomy. Though we do not know how long Elijah prayed before his prayers were answered, his petitions were based on careful study of, and reflection upon, God's Word in light of his present circumstances. It may be that he quoted Deuteronomy's prophecy as part of his prayer, just as Daniel's prayer for Jerusalem is based on his study of Jeremiah's prophecy (*see Dan. 9:2, 3*). Our prayers, too, will be more effective when they spring from thoughtful consideration of our circumstances in light of God's Word.

The period of no rain lasting three and a half years (also mentioned in Luke 4:25) is a significant time of probation in Scripture (like the prophetic period of "half a week," or three and a half years of Jesus' ministry in Daniel 9:27, and the "three and a half times" of apostasy in Christianity in Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 12:14). At the end of this period, God used Elijah to begin a work of revival and reformation to wake up Israel so that the people would recognize the depths of their apostasy. It was a work that typified both the work John the Baptist would do for first-century Israel in order to prepare the way for Christ's first advent and the work that God has entrusted to His remnant church today to prepare people for the Second Advent (*see Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 11:13, 14*).

**As a church, we are seeking revival and reformation. But it must begin in our own lives, with our own selves, on a personal and daily basis. What choices can only you, yourself, make that will determine the direction and, ultimately, the destiny of your life?**

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## Restoration and Forgiveness

God's Spirit worked through Elijah to restore the relationship between Israel and Himself. But most of Elijah's work was not on Mount Carmel. That was just the beginning! He carried it forward in small villages and homes and in training future spiritual leaders through the schools of the prophets to multiply his work of revival and reform.

**Read James 5:19, 20.** How does the work described here compare with the work done by Elijah, John the Baptist, and others? See Luke 1:16, 17; Acts 3:19.

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Often, we forget the tender and patient work done by Elijah year after year. John the Baptist's work, too, focused on leading people back to the truth, inspiring repentance and baptism one person at a time. Jesus described His work in very similar terms: leading people out of error and back to the truth (*see John 8:43–45*).

This hypothetical situation described in James 5:19, 20 uses a conditional construction in Greek, making clear that apostasy is not definitely assumed to exist but is probable. Departure from the truth refers to apostasy not only in doctrine but in lifestyle, for very often the first leads to the second. Doubts begin to form about our beliefs, leading to double-minded behavior, and finally to outright apostasy. Turning back a "sinner from the wandering of his way will save his soul from death" (*James 5:20, literally translated*). Summing up all that has gone before, James appeals for his brothers in the church to do a work similar to that of Elijah in leading people back to God.

This work requires much patience, sympathy, tenderness, and humility: "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted" (*Gal. 6:1, NIV*). The work of Elijah is to turn hearts toward God and His people, not to turn them away. Often the person is well aware of his or her sin and does not need it pointed out. What is needed more is forgiveness modeled by Jesus and provided by His death. Saving souls from death is possible only through the "covering" of sins, by applying the gospel to our lives, and becoming instruments of mercy (*Prov. 10:12*).

**Think of someone who has really done wrong and knows it too. What can you do, what can you say, to help draw this person back toward the Lord?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Prayer for the Sick,” pp. 225–233, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Snares of Satan,” pp. 518–523, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Christ . . . asks us to become one with Him for the saving of humanity. ‘Freely ye have received,’ He says, ‘freely give.’ Matt. 10:8. Sin is the greatest of all evils, and it is ours to pity and help the sinner. There are many who err, and who feel their shame and their folly. They are hungry for words of encouragement. They look upon their mistakes and errors, until they are driven almost to desperation. These souls we are not to neglect. . . .

“Speak words of faith and courage that will be as a healing balsam to the bruised and wounded one.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 504.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think of a time when you really made a mess of things, hurting yourself, others, and the Lord by your sin. How much did it mean to you to have people who, although not condoning your actions (and who might have generally and rightly been appalled by them), nevertheless sought to encourage and uplift you? What do you remember most about those experiences, and how can those remembrances help you do the same for someone else who has made big mistakes, as well?
- 2 Read James 5:16 prayerfully and carefully. What important spiritual lessons are here for us? What does this tell us about the power of prayer and how important it is for our spiritual lives? Though prayer can and should be a very private matter, in class talk about what prayer does for you, how you have seen prayers answered, and how you have learned to trust the Lord when prayers aren’t answered as you wish. In the end, what would you say is the most important practical benefit that comes from “effectual fervent prayer”?

## Under Arrest! Part 1

GIOVANNI ZALDIVAR

My pastor was planning to hold evangelistic meetings. He printed some invitation cards for members to give to their friends to remind them of the meetings. He urged everyone to invite their families, friends, and neighbors, and we young people of the church wanted to be included.

At that time Cuba's government was more strict about religion than it is now. People could attend church and worship God, but the government didn't want churches trying to convert people to their faith.

On Sabbath afternoon, while our parents were in choir practice, four girls and I decided to give out invitations to the meetings. We walked a few blocks down a side street, giving invitation cards to the people we passed or to those who sat on their tiny porches. Encouraged when the people accepted the cards, we decided to give out cards in the children's park a few blocks farther away.

One man sitting on a bench watched us talking to people and giving them cards. The man called us over to where he was sitting and asked what we were giving out. I gave him an invitation card and invited him to come to the meetings. He looked at the card for a minute, then told us, "It's against the law to give out religious literature in Cuba. Where are your parents?"

"They are in church, a few blocks from here," I answered.

"I am going to have to arrest you," the man said as he stood up. Then I noticed that he was wearing a military uniform.

"You can't arrest us," I told him. "President Castro said that we have religious freedom in Cuba."

"Let's go to the police office over there," the man said, pointing toward a small building on the edge of the park. So we followed the officer to a small building, where the man made a telephone call. "We'll wait here for the police to come and take you to jail," he told us.

We asked the officer several times to let us talk with our parents, but the officer didn't respond. To bolster our courage, we began singing "Side by side we stand." As our courage grew, we sang louder, so the people walking by could hear us.

Then I saw a woman from the church walking by, and I called out to her. I explained that the officer had arrested us for giving out invitation cards and asked her to please tell our parents back at church what had happened. The woman returned to the church to tell our parents. Soon a police officer arrived and took us to a youth detention center. We began to wonder what would happen to us. Would our parents find us?

*(continued)*



# The Everlasting Gospel



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Heb. 4:2; Ps. 130:3, 4; Luke 15:11–32; Rom. 3:24–26; Heb. 10:1–4; Rev. 14:12.*

**Memory Text:** “The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you’” (*Jeremiah 31:3, NKJV*).

In our study of James, we have looked at a number of issues connected with the gospel and made some comparisons with other biblical authors. It is not always easy to understand clearly how what James says fits with other parts of Scripture, especially when it comes to something as central as the gospel itself, but as we saw, it does. And this is very important, too, because the gospel is the foundation of our last-day commission to preach “the everlasting gospel . . . to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6*).

In this our final week, we will focus on basic questions regarding “the everlasting gospel,” which is salvation by faith, a belief taught all through the Bible, including in the book of James.

The crucial point to remember is that the Bible does not contradict itself, especially on something as basic as salvation. By finishing the quarter with a look at how the gospel appears in the Bible, we can better see how James fits this larger picture of God’s plan of redemption.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 27.

## The Gospel in the Old Testament

**“For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith” (Heb. 4:2, NIV).**

This verse is startling in its implications. Foremost is that the gospel, not simply “good news” but *the* good news, was preached in the Old Testament. Second, it was preached then just as in New Testament times. There is no hint that there was any difference in the message itself. The problem, therefore, was not with the message but with the way it was heard. Today, too, different people can hear the same gospel message very differently. How crucial, then, that we surrender ourselves in utter faith to the teaching of the Word so that when the gospel is preached we hear it correctly.

**Look** at the following verses and summarize the gospel message in each:

*Gen. 3:15* \_\_\_\_\_

*Exod. 19:4–6* \_\_\_\_\_

*Pss. 130:3, 4; 32:1–5* \_\_\_\_\_

*Isa. 53:4–11* \_\_\_\_\_

*Jer. 31:31–34* \_\_\_\_\_

Did you notice a common refrain? God intervenes to save us; He forgives our sins and puts “enmity” in us toward sin so that we can be “willing and obedient” (*Isa. 1:19*). One (Jesus) died for the many, bore their (our) iniquities, and justifies the undeserving. The new covenant is different from the old covenant because the law is written in the heart, and sins are “remember[ed] no more” (*Heb. 8:12*). In short, forgiveness and the new birth are a package: justification and sanctification represent God’s solution to the sin problem. These passages could be multiplied, for the message is the same throughout the Bible: despite our sin, God loves us and has done all that is possible to save us from it.

**How can we, as people who believe in the importance of keeping the law, protect ourselves from the error of believing that law-keeping is what justifies us? Why is that not always so easy to do?**

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## The Gospel Made Flesh

Some have a very hard time finding the gospel in the Gospels! The teachings of Jesus can seem legalistic but only if we fail to hear the rest of the story. Most people in Israel at the time of Jesus considered themselves to be in a good position before God. They supported the temple by paying the required tax and offering the appropriate sacrifices. They abstained from unclean food, circumcised their sons, kept the festival days and the Sabbaths, and generally tried to keep the law as taught by their religious leaders. Then John came and cried “Repent,” and he baptized. Furthermore, Jesus said a new birth was needed (*John 3:3, 5*) and that “except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (*Matt. 5:20*). In other words, Jesus was saying, “You need what you do not have. Your works are not good enough.”

**Read** Luke 15:11–32, 18:9–17. How do these parables illustrate the gospel?

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In the parable of the prodigal son, the son is lost and does not know it. Eventually, he begins to see his father’s love in a new way and longs to return. His pride is gone. Hoping for acceptance as a servant, he is astonished to be lavished with honor by his father. The relationship is not just restored. It is transformed. A similar reversal of expectations appears in the second parable. The “righteous” Pharisee is ignored by God, while the “sinful” tax collector is not only accepted but leaves justified, forgiven, and free from guilt.

Both stories help us to see God more clearly, as a Father and as a Justifier of the ungodly. When He describes the cup of crushed grapes as “My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins,” Jesus suffers as the real Passover Lamb, the death that should have been ours (*Matt. 26:28, NASB; compare Mark 10:45*). Thus, salvation is free to us because He, Jesus, paid the full price for it.

**What hope can you take from each of these parables for yourself? In what ways can you relate to some of the people in them, and what should your answer tell you about what you might need to change in your spiritual life?**

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## The Gospel in Paul

Like many of his countrymen, Paul thought he was in good spiritual standing. But then he saw Jesus as “the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me” (*Gal. 2:20, NASB*). Suddenly, he saw himself not saved but lost; not God’s servant but God’s enemy; not righteous but the chief of sinners. The scales fell from his eyes, in other words, in his reading of the Old Testament. God’s revelation, to him personally and through the Scriptures, transformed his heart and changed his life forever. We will not understand Paul’s epistles until we recognize these basic facts, which produced them.

**Read 2 Corinthians 3:14–16 in this light and then verses 2–6. What does Paul identify here as the crucial step?**

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The meaning of the old covenant becomes clear only “when one turns to the Lord” (*vs. 16, ESV*). Jesus is the way to salvation. It all begins and ends in Him. Israel—by trusting in their own obedience, as Paul did before his conversion—experienced the old covenant as a minister of death. Why? Because “all have sinned” (*Rom. 3:23*), including the people of Israel, and so the commandments could only condemn them (*2 Cor. 3:7*). By contrast, believers in Corinth were “a letter of Christ . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (*vs. 3, NASB*).

**Read Romans 1:16, 17; 3:24–26. How does Paul define the gospel? What do we receive through Christ by faith?**

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The gospel is the power of God to save all who believe. Righteousness is based not on what we do but on what Christ has done for us, which we claim by faith. It is a belief that grows “from faith to faith” (*Rom. 1:17*). What Paul means by this is unpacked in the rest of Romans, the heart of which is found at the end of chapter 3. Through Christ we have *redemption* (God has bought us back by paying for our sins), *justification* (we are cleared of guilt and cleansed by grace), and *forgiveness* (God accepts us back and “forgets” our past sins). Amazingly, God, through the sacrifice of Christ, proves Himself to be just in justifying the ungodly who have put their faith in Jesus.

## The “New” Covenant

The book of Hebrews describes the new covenant as “better” than the old covenant (*Heb. 8:1, 2, 6, NRSV*). The obvious question, then, is Why did God establish the old covenant if it was faulty? The problem, however, was not with the covenant but with the response of the people to it.

**Read** Hebrews 7:19, 8:9, 10:1–4. What problems with the old covenant are mentioned?

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The people “did not remain faithful” to the covenant (*Heb. 8:9, NIV*) but were disobedient and rebellious. This, together with the fact that the animal sacrifices of the old covenant could never take away sins (*Heb. 10:4*), meant that the sin problem remained. Only “the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” could atone for sins, including those committed under the old covenant (*Heb. 10:10, NKJV; 9:15*). And that was because “the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God” (*Heb. 7:19*) through the promise of the new covenant.

In one sense, the new covenant is not new at all because—since the promise in Eden of the Seed who would bruise the serpent’s head—the plan of salvation has always been predicated on the death of Christ, “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (*Rev. 13:8; see also Jer. 32:40; Heb. 13:20, 21; John 13:34*).

“The covenant of grace is not a new truth, for it existed in the mind of God from all eternity. This is why it is called the everlasting covenant.”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 77.

On the other hand, as we saw with Paul, something special happens when we turn to the Lord. God promised, in connection with the everlasting covenant, “I will put into their hearts reverence for Me, so that they do not turn away from Me” (*Jer. 32:40, NJPS*). Without faith, bringing animal sacrifices was almost like making payment for sins. Gazing at Jesus instead, who “endured the cross, despising the shame,” and “who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself” (*Heb. 12:2, 3, NKJV*), reveals the immeasurable cost of sin and the good news that the cost has been paid by Someone else “through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (*13:20, NKJV*). This “new” covenant transforms how we look at everything, such as the commandment to love one another. It’s not really new (*Lev. 19:18*), except in that we are not just to love our neighbor as ourselves, but “as I [Jesus] have loved you” (*John 13:34*).

**How can we ever learn to love others as Jesus has loved us?**

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## The Climax of the Gospel

**“But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets” (Rev. 10:7, NASB).**

Significantly, Revelation 10:7 is the only other verse in Revelation (besides Revelation 14:6) that specifically refers to preaching the gospel (the Greek word translated “preached” is *euangelizō*, “to proclaim good news”). These two chapters are special for Seventh-day Adventists, because we find our calling and commission described in them. In other words, God has specifically commissioned us, in a way He has no other group, to proclaim the “everlasting gospel.”

As we have seen, the gospel is the same from Genesis to Revelation. The law is the same. The covenant is the same. Jesus, Paul, and James all affirm that the gospel is the same one believed by Abraham (*John 8:56, Rom. 4:13, James 2:21–23*). Some have difficulty with this assertion only because they define the gospel more narrowly than Scripture. Abraham’s obedient faith, however, originated through his foreseeing Jesus’ sacrifice. We do not need to balance faith with works in order to be saved. Faith alone is sufficient, but it must not be an intellectual faith as the devils have, nor a presumptuous faith that claims the promises of God without complying with the conditions of salvation; rather, it must be a faith that works.

**Why are the references in Revelation 12:17 and Revelation 14:12 to keeping the commandments, and to the testimony and faith of Jesus, significant in the context of the everlasting gospel?**

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The decisive issue at the end of time is: Whom will we worship and obey? The God who “made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (*Rev. 14:7*)? Or the beast and his image? Obedience to the commandments (including the Sabbath) through the faith of Jesus signifies those who remain faithful to the end. True religion demands both faith and obedience.

“Though often in the midst of reproach and persecution, a constant testimony has been borne to the perpetuity of the law of God and the sacred obligation of the creation Sabbath.

“These truths, as presented in Revelation 14 in connection with ‘the everlasting gospel,’ will distinguish the church of Christ at the time of His appearing. For as the result of the threefold message it is announced: ‘Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 453, 454.

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Loud Cry,” pp. 198–202, in *Last Day Events*.

“We need to come up to a higher standard, to go forward and claim our exalted privileges. We should walk humbly with God, make no proud boasts of perfection of character, but in simple faith claim every promise in the word of God; for they are for the obedient, not for the transgressors of God’s law. We are simply to believe the testimony of God, and have entire dependence on him, and all possibility of self-glory or pride will be removed. We are indeed saved by faith, not by a passive faith, but by the faith which works by love, and purifies the soul. The hand of Christ can reach the veriest sinner, and bring him back from transgression to obedience; but no Christianity is so lofty that it can soar above the requirements of God’s holy law. This would be beyond Christ’s power to help, it would be outside of his teachings and his example; for he says, ‘I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love,’ and all who follow Christ will render obedience to God’s holy law.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*<sup>®</sup>, March 31, 1890.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Discuss the various gospel emphases in the teachings of Jesus, James, and Paul, including similarities and differences between them. How, by placing them together and seeing the whole picture, can we protect ourselves from falling into either legalism or a cheap grace?
- 2 When feeling discouraged about your spiritual state, what gospel promises can you claim to help keep you from discouragement? Why, even in the darkest times, must you never give up, and why is the promise of Christ’s righteousness as a gift to undeserving sinners the key to protecting you from giving up?
- 3 The three angels’ messages connect Creation very closely to Redemption and salvation. So does John 1:1–14. Why are these two topics so closely related? How does this close connection help explain why the Sabbath is such a central component of God’s law? How does this close tie help us understand the centrality of the Sabbath in the final conflict of the last days?

## Under Arrest! Part 2

GIOVANNI ZALDIVAR

At the detention center, we were searched, and police took our remaining invitations. Then the police officer took our names and addresses, and the names of the schools we attended. He hinted that our arrest would be reported to our school and could end our chances to attend college one day.

Meanwhile, the woman returned to the church and told the members what had happened. The choir practice immediately became a prayer meeting as the believers sought God's protection for us.

My mother and the pastor went to the park and tried to find us, but no one knew where we had been taken. Then they went to the central police station and demanded to know where we were. At first, the police said they didn't know, but the pastor insisted that the police find us immediately. After a few phone calls, the officer told them that we were in the juvenile center a mile away.

Inside the room at the juvenile center some of the girls began to cry. We had been kept locked up for several hours without food or water. It was almost sunset, and so we started singing, and our courage grew. Then, from down the hall, I heard my mother's voice arguing with the officer who had arrested us.

After several minutes, another police officer came in and told us we were free to go. But when we asked for the invitation cards, the police said we couldn't have them.

As we started walking toward the church, I stopped and pulled some invitation cards out of my sock, where I had quickly hidden them. I explained to my mother and friends that when the police weren't looking, I put invitations on the desks at the police station.

Everyone laughed, and on the way back to the church we gave out the remaining cards.

When we arrived back at the church, we were surprised at how many members had gathered to pray for us. Everyone listened as we told them what had happened. Then the group prayed once more, thanking God for keeping us safe. We especially prayed for the officer who arrested us and the police who guarded us, that God would direct them to come to the church and hear His message of freedom in Christ.

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*GIOVANNI ZALDIVAR was a senior in high school at the time of this writing. He would like to study engineering and help build churches in Cuba.*



While many books of the Bible are filled with deep spiritual and theological truths, the book of Proverbs is filled with practical advice for daily living. Brief, well balanced, poetic, and often humorous, the Proverbs are universal, easy to memorize, and make their points well, sometimes even more efficiently than do eloquent speeches and rigorous argumentation.

From our first quarter 2015 study guide entitled *Proverbs*, by Jacques Doukhan, we will learn how to be wise in practical ways. Proverbs answers questions such as, What should I teach my children, and how? How can I be happy and successful? Why do I have money problems? How can I get a promotion in my job? How can I resist sexual temptations? How should I cope with my anger or my tongue?

Proverbs is deep and rich, and it deals with many topics. However, given the limitations of space, we have had to pick and choose which material we could cover. We can't cover it all, but all that we have is, indeed, worthy of our prayerful study.

## Lesson 1—The Call of Wisdom

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Beginning of Wisdom** (*Prov. 1:7*)

MONDAY: **True Education** (*Prov. 1:8–19*)

TUESDAY: **The Call of Wisdom** (*Prov. 1:20, 21*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Benefit of Wisdom** (*Prov. 2:6–9*)

THURSDAY: **Do Not Forget** (*Prov. 3:13–18*)

**Memory Text**—*Proverbs 1:7, NKJV*

**Sabbath Gem:** Proverbs is all about helping us to make right choices, to choose the way of God and not that of the deceiver.

## Lesson 2—From Ears to Feet

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Hear!** (*Proverbs 4*)

MONDAY: **Protect Your Family** (*Proverbs 5*)

TUESDAY: **Protect Your Friendship** (*Prov. 6:1–5*)

WEDNESDAY: **Protect Your Work** (*Prov. 6:6–8*)

THURSDAY: **Protect Yourself** (*Prov. 6:12–15, 6:16–19*)

**Memory Text**—*Proverbs 4:26, 27*

**Sabbath Gem:** It's not enough just to know about right and wrong; we need to know how to choose right and not wrong. Training in wisdom consists in hearing proper instruction and in following and obeying what we have learned so that we don't end up walking in the wrong direction.

**Lessons for the Visually Impaired** The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audio CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; e-mail: info@christianrecord.org; Web site: www.christianrecord.org.