

Adult
Sabbath School
Bible Study Guide
July | Aug | Sept 2021

REST IN CHRIST



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Rest for the Restless



The flight had been uneventful until the moment the captain announced from the flight deck that the plane would have to cross a major storm. “Please tighten your seat belts. We will be in for quite a ride,” the voice from the cockpit said in ending the announcement.

Soon after, the plane began to shake violently as it fought its way through the storm. Overhead bins opened; people sat tense in their seats. After a particularly violent shudder of the plane, someone shrieked in the back. Images of a wing breaking off and the plane careening to the earth flashed through a few minds. All passengers looked tense and fearful—all except a little girl seated in the front row of economy. She was busy drawing a picture on the open tray table before her. Now and again she would look out the small window at a particularly impressive lightning strike, but then she would calmly resume her drawing.

After what seemed half an eternity, the plane finally landed at its destination. Passengers cheered and clapped, so grateful and relieved to be back on the ground. The little girl had packed her bag and was waiting for people to leave the plane when one of the travelers asked her if she hadn’t been afraid. How could she be that calm during such a major storm and with the plane shaking so much?

“I wasn’t scared,” the little girl said to the surprised man. “My dad is the pilot, and I knew he was taking me home.”

Restlessness and fear often go hand in hand. Living in a world that keeps most

people busy almost 24-7 can result in restlessness and fear in our lives. Who doesn't, at times, struggle with fear, with worry, and with dread of what the future holds? The past is done, the present is now; but the future is full of questions, and in this unstable world the answers might not be what we want to hear. We wonder if we will be able to make a looming deadline, to cover the next rent or school payment, or to make our struggling marriages survive another storm. We wonder if God can continue to love us, even though we "disappoint" Him again and again.

In this quarter, we will tackle some of those fears head-on. Rest in Christ is not just a title for a study guide or the captivating logo of an evangelistic campaign or camp meeting. Resting in Christ is the key to the type of life that Jesus promises to His followers: "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10, NKJV).

As the authors worked on this study guide, they suddenly realized the all-pervasiveness of the concept of rest in the texture of biblical theology. Rest connects to salvation, to grace, to Creation, to the Sabbath, to our understanding of the state of the dead, to the soon coming of Jesus—and to so much more.

When Jesus invited us to come and find rest in Him (Matt. 11:28), He not only addressed His disciples or the early Christian church, but He also saw future generations of sin-sick, weary, worn-out, struggling human beings who needed access to the Source of rest. As you study the weekly lessons during this quarter, remember to come and rest in Him. After all, our heavenly Father is in control and is ready to bring us home safely.

Chantal and Gerald Klingbeil enjoy a cross-cultural marriage and working as a team. Chantal, an associate director of the Ellen G. White Estate, hails from South Africa, while Gerald, an associate editor of Adventist Review Ministries and research professor of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at Andrews University, was born and raised in Germany.

Resting in Christ is the key to the type of life that Jesus promises to His followers: "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10, NKJV).

How to Use This Teachers Edition

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

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

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

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

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

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

Living in a 24-7 Society



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 2:1–3, Jer. 45:1–5, Exod. 20:11, 2 Sam. 7:12, Mark 6:30–32, Gen. 4:1–17.*

Memory Text: “My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (*Ps. 84:2, NKJV*).

Tick, tock; tick, tock; tick, tock. The clock ticked steadily and mercilessly. Only two hours before Sabbath would begin, Mary sighed as she surveyed the small apartment. The kids' toys were still lying all around the living room; the kitchen was a mess; Sarah, their youngest, lay in bed with a fever; and tomorrow Mary had agreed to serve as a greeter in their church, which meant that they had to leave home 30 minutes before the normal time. *I wish I could find some quietness tomorrow*, Mary thought wistfully.

At the same time, on the other side of town, Josh, Mary's husband, was standing in line to pay for their weekly groceries. Traffic had again been a nightmare. The checkout lines were long. Everyone seemed to be doing their shopping right at that moment. *I need some rest; I can't go on like this*, Josh groaned inwardly. *There must be more to this life.*

Our lives are governed by rush hours, work hours, medical appointments, virtual conversations, shopping, and school functions. Whether we use public transport, ride a small scooter, or steer a minivan to ferry around our families, the drumbeat of constant engagement with the world around us threatens to drown out what's really important.

How do we find rest amid so much hustle and bustle?

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

Worn and Weary

Read Genesis 2:1–3. Why would God create a rest day before anyone was even tired?

Even before we humans would dash off on our self-imposed stressful lives, God established a marker, a living way to jog our memory. This day would be a time to stop and deliberately enjoy life; a day to be and not to do, a day to especially celebrate the gift of grass, air, wildlife, water, people, and, most of all, the Creator of every good gift.

This was no one-time invitation that expired with the exile from Eden. God wanted to make sure that the invitation could stand the test of time, and so right from the beginning He knit the Sabbath rest into the very fabric of time. There would always be the invitation, again and again, to a restful celebration of Creation every seventh day.

One would think that with all our labor-saving devices that we should be less physically tired than people were two hundred years ago. But, actually, rest seems to be in short supply even today. Even the moments when we aren't working are spent in frantic activity. It always seems that we are somehow behind; no matter how much we manage to get done, there is always more to do.

Research shows, too, that we are getting less sleep, and many people are highly dependent on caffeine to keep going. Though we have faster cell phones, faster computers, faster internet connections, we still never seem to have enough time.

What do the following texts teach about why our having rest is important? (*Mark 6:31, Ps. 4:8, Exod. 23:12, Deut. 5:14, and Matt. 11:28.*)

The God who created us knew that we would need physical rest. He built cycles into time—night, and Sabbath—to offer us a chance for physical rest. Acknowledging Jesus as the Lord of our lives also involves taking seriously our responsibility to make time to rest. After all, the Sabbath commandment isn't merely a suggestion. It is a commandment!

What about your own harried existence? What can you do to better experience, both physically and spiritually, the rest that God wants us to have?

Running on Empty

Lack of sleep and exhaustion because of physical overexertion are real problems. More troubling, however, are the times we feel that we are running on “emotional empty.” And, of course, when lack of sleep is added to emotional trials, we can become painfully discouraged.

Baruch, Jeremiah’s scribe, must have felt like that often during the last turbulent years of Jerusalem, prior to the chaos, suffering, and havoc that would follow the city’s destruction by the Babylonians.

Read Jeremiah 45:1–5. Write a quick diagnosis of Baruch’s emotional health.

Can you imagine what it would feel like if God sent a custom-made message to you personally? Baruch received a message straight from God’s throne room (*Jer. 45:2*). We are told that this happened “in the fourth year of Jehoiakim of Judah,” about 605 or 604 B.C. Jeremiah 45:3 represents a good summary of how people feel when they are running on empty.

From all that we know in Scripture about this period, it’s clear that Baruch’s complaints were not superficial wails. He had good reasons to feel discouraged and emotionally worn out. A lot of bad things were happening, and more were to come.

How does God respond to Baruch’s aches and pains? Read Jeremiah 45:4, 5.

God’s response to Baruch’s real pain reminds us of the fact that God’s despair and pain must have been exponentially so much bigger than Baruch’s. He had built Jerusalem; He was about to tear it down; He had planted Israel as a vineyard (*Isa. 5:1–7*); He was about to uproot it and carry it into exile. This was not what the Lord had wanted for His people, but it had to come because of their rebellion against Him.

But there was light at the end of the tunnel for Baruch. God would preserve Baruch’s life—even in the midst of destruction, exile, and loss.

Read again the words of God directed to Baruch. What general message can we take from them for ourselves? That is, what does it say about God ultimately being there for us, regardless of our situation?

Defining Rest in the Old Testament

Certainly, we all need rest, which is why it's a theme found all through the Bible. Though God created us for activity, that activity is to be punctuated by rest.

The Hebrew Old Testament, for instance, includes a number of terms denoting rest. The description of God's resting on the newly created seventh day in Genesis 2:2, 3 uses the verb *shabbat*, "to cease work, to rest, to take a holiday," which is the verb form of the noun "Sabbath." The same verb is used in Exodus 5:5 in a causative form and translated as "making someone rest" from their work. Angry Pharaoh accuses Moses of "making them rest" from their labor.

The reference to God's resting activity on the seventh-day Sabbath in the fourth commandment is expressed by the Hebrew verb form *nuakh* (*Exod. 20:11, Deut. 5:14*). The verb is translated as "rest" in Job 3:13 or, more figuratively, "settled," referencing the ark of the covenant in Numbers 10:36. Second Kings 2:15 notes that Elijah's spirit "rested" on Elisha.

Another important verb form is *shaqat*, to "be at rest, grant relief, be quiet." It is used in Joshua 11:23, where it describes the rest of the land from war after Joshua's initial conquest. The term often appears to indicate "peace" in the books of Joshua and Judges.

The verb *raga'* also is used to indicate rest. In the warnings against disobedience in Deuteronomy, God tells Israel that they won't find rest in exile (*Deut. 28:65*). The same verb also appears in a causative form in Jeremiah 50:34, describing the inability to rest.

Read Deuteronomy 31:16 and 2 Samuel 7:12. What kind of rest is being talked about here?

Both verses use an idiomatic expression from the verb *shakab*, which literally means "to lie down, sleep." In God's covenant with David, God promises the future king of Israel that "when your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you" (*2 Sam. 7:12, NKJV*).

The long (and here incomplete) list of different Hebrew verbs denoting rest helps us to understand that the theological concept of rest is not connected to one or two particular words. We rest individually and collectively. Rest affects us physically, socially, and emotionally and is not limited to the Sabbath alone.

Death is certainly an enemy and will one day be abolished. And however much we mourn and miss our dead, why is it comforting to know that, at least for now, they are at rest?

Rest in the New Testament

A verb form for *rest* often found in the New Testament is *anapauō*, to “rest, relax, refresh.” It is used in one of Jesus’ most famous statements on rest, Matthew 11:28: “‘Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest’ ” (*NKJV*). It can refer to physical rest (*Matt. 26:45*). In the final greetings to the Corinthians, Paul expresses his joy over the arrival of friends who refreshed his spirit (*1 Cor. 16:18*).

Another verb used to indicate *rest* is *hēsychazō*. It describes the Sabbath rest of the disciples as Jesus rested in the grave (*Luke 23:56*). But it also is used to describe living a quiet life (*1 Thess. 4:11*) and can indicate that someone has no objections and, thus, keeps quiet (*Acts 11:18*).

When the Epistle to the Hebrews, in Hebrews 4:4, describes God’s Creation rest on the seventh day, it uses the Greek verb *katapauō*, to “cause to cease, bring to rest, rest,” echoing the use of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Intriguingly, most of the uses of this verb in the New Testament occur in Hebrews 4.

Read Mark 6:30–32. Why did Jesus tell His disciples to come aside and rest, considering the many mission opportunities they then had? Look at the larger context of Mark 6 as you think about this question.

“ ‘Come aside by yourselves . . . and rest a while’ ” (*Mark 6:31, NKJV*) is not framed as an invitation. It’s expressed in the form of an imperative, which is an order or a command. Jesus is concerned about His disciples and their physical and emotional well-being. They had just returned from an extensive mission trip on which Jesus had sent them two by two (*Mark 6:7*). Mark 6:30 describes their excited return. Their hearts must have been full. They wanted to share their victories and their failures with Jesus; yet, Jesus stops it all by first calling them to rest. Mark includes an explanatory note: “For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat” (*Mark 6:31, NKJV*). Being overwhelmed and too busy in God’s business was a genuine challenge for the disciples, as well. Jesus reminds us that we need to guard our health and emotional well-being by planning in seasons of rest.

What are ways of helping and relieving your local church pastor or elder or anyone you know who could be burned out from doing the Lord’s work? What could you do to express your appreciation and help this person find rest?

A Restless Wanderer

Read Genesis 4:1–12. What made Cain “a restless wanderer” (*Gen. 4:12, NIV*) on the earth?

The biblical text does not explicitly state why God respected Abel and his offering but did not “respect” Cain and his offering (*Gen. 4:4, 5*). But we know why. “Cain came before God with murmuring and infidelity in his heart in regard to the promised sacrifice and the necessity of the sacrificial offerings. His gift expressed no penitence for sin. He felt, as many now feel, that it would be an acknowledgment of weakness to follow the exact plan marked out by God, of trusting his salvation wholly to the atonement of the promised Saviour. He chose the course of self-dependence. He would come in his own merits.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 72.

When God said that Cain would be “a restless wanderer” on the earth, it wasn’t that God made him that way; rather, that is what happened as the *result* of his sinful actions and disobedience. Not finding rest in God, Cain discovered that he couldn’t find it any other way, at least not true rest.

The Hebrew word translated as “respected” (*Gen. 4:4, NKJV*) also could be rendered “looked closely, considered carefully.” The focus of God’s careful and close-up look is not so much the offering but more the attitude of the offerer. God’s rejection of Cain’s fruit offering is not the arbitrary reaction of a capricious god. Rather, it describes the process of carefully considering and weighing the character, attitudes, and motivations of the one bringing the offering. It is a good example of an investigative judgment.

Read Genesis 4:13–17 and describe Cain’s reaction to God’s judgment.

When we try to run away from God’s presence, we become restless. We try to fill the yearning for divine grace with things, human relationships, or overly busy lives. Cain started to build a dynasty and a city. Both are great achievements and speak of determination and energy, but if it’s a godless dynasty and a rebellious city, it will ultimately amount to nothing.

Even if we end up suffering the consequences of our sins as we usually do, how can we learn to accept the forgiveness for them, offered us through the Cross?

Further Thought: “In the estimation of the rabbis it was the sum of religion to be always in a bustle of activity. They depended upon some outward performance to show their superior piety. Thus they separated their souls from God, and built themselves up in self-sufficiency. The same dangers still exist. As activity increases and men become successful in doing any work for God, there is danger of trusting to human plans and methods. There is a tendency to pray less, and to have less faith. Like the disciples, we are in danger of losing sight of our dependence on God, and seeking to make a savior of our activity. We need to look constantly to Jesus, realizing that it is His power which does the work. While we are to labor earnestly for the salvation of the lost, we must also take time for meditation, for prayer, and for the study of the word of God. Only the work accomplished with much prayer, and sanctified by the merit of Christ, will in the end prove to have been efficient for good.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 362.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 The constant pressure of being on top of things, being available (physically or virtually) all the time, and trying to live up to ideals that are neither realistic nor God-given can make people sick—emotionally, physically, and spiritually. How can your church become a welcoming place for worn-out, tired people yearning for rest?
- 2 Is it possible that we are too busy, even doing good things for God? Think about the story of Jesus and His disciples in Mark 6:30–32 and discuss its applications in your Sabbath School group.
- 3 In 1899, a speed record had been broken. Someone had actually gone 39.24 miles per hour in a car—and lived to tell about it! Today, of course, cars go much faster than that. And the speed of the processors in our cell phones are much faster than the fastest large computers of a generation ago. And air travel is faster than it used to be—and is getting even faster. The point is that almost everything we do today is done faster than it was in the past, and yet, what? We still feel hurried and without enough rest. What should that tell us about basic human nature and why God would have made rest so important that it is one of His commandments?
- 4 Dwell more on the idea that even in Eden, before sin, the Sabbath rest had been instituted. Besides the interesting theological implication of this truth, what should this tell us about how rest was needed even in a sinless, perfect world?

Flip-flops and Fights

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Everything seemed strange to six-year-old Danay when he arrived in the United States with his father, mother, and six older siblings. Cars filled the streets of their new hometown. Danay hadn't seen many cars in the refugee camp in Thailand where his family had lived after fleeing violence in their native Myanmar. Before, the family had lived in a bamboo home without air-conditioning and running water, and Danay had bathed in a river. Now everything was in the house. Danay thanked God for the new home.

Danay arrived at public school wearing flip-flops, and the teacher immediately sent him home. The staff member who drove him home told his mother how to find the shoe store. But neither of his parents could drive or speak English, so a relative took him to the store to buy his first pair of shoes.

Danay returned to school the next day, but it was a difficult year. Some children treated refugees unkindly, and one of his brothers got into fights.

Then a Seventh-day Adventist befriended the family and helped Danay transfer to a church school for second grade. Scholarship funds from a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped cover his tuition. Danay was happy to be in the church school with kind and friendly classmates. He had heard about God from his Christian parents at home, but now he was reading the Bible for himself at school. He wanted to learn more, and, as he grew older, he joined various Bible study groups.

His faith came to the test when he was 12. One day, his father collapsed outside the house after working in the garden. No one knew how to call the ambulance, so family members lifted him into a car and rushed him to the hospital. Danay was devastated. That night he tossed and turned. He prayed like never before. "God, please help my Dad to recover," he said. "If he does recover, I will get baptized and devote myself to You."

Three days later, he saw his father in the hospital. The once-strong man looked pale and frail. The physician said he had suffered a stroke. Danay continued to pray. Weeks passed, and his father slowly improved. When he came home, Danay made good on his promise to God. He was baptized.

His father died of cancer five years later, but Danay, 17, is glad that he gave his heart to Jesus. "After getting baptized, I began to read the Bible more, pray more, and talk to God more," he said. "The more I did these things, the happier I felt. God is always watching, and He is always going to be there for me. I always feel thankful."



A 2011 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped refugee children like Danay receive study in Adventist schools in the North American Division. Part of this quarter's offering will again help refugee children obtain an Adventist education in North America. Thank you for planning a generous offering.

Part I: Overview

This quarter begins a series titled “Rest in Christ.” Our twenty-first-century society is filled with restless people. Worry and anxiety combined with uncertainty about the future contribute to this restlessness of the soul. There is a growing concern among mental health professionals with the increasing number of depressed people they are treating. It is estimated that there are more than 300 million depressed people in our world and that depression will surpass heart disease as the leading cause of death in a few decades. Worldwide sales of antidepressants are now expected to be more than six billion dollars, according to Thomson Reuters Pharma projections, based on consensus forecasts from analysts. More than 270 million prescriptions of antidepressants are sold in the United States alone each year. Our lessons this quarter, and especially this week’s lesson, focus on the true Source of rest and provide practical counsel on how to find rest in the busyness of our lives.

This week we will travel back in time to the Creation of our world and discover the eternal reminder of rest in Christ, the Sabbath. We will study an Old Testament scribe’s deep grief and its impact on his physical, mental, and emotional health. Throughout this week’s lesson, we will be constantly reminded of Christ’s invitation to rest throughout the Scriptures. As we learn the meaning of the word “rest” in the Old and New Testaments, we will understand Cain’s restlessness more fully and discover how to rest totally in Christ.

Part II: Commentary

The most comprehensive passage in the Bible on Sabbath rest is found in Genesis 2:1–3. At the end of Creation week, Jesus, our loving Creator, establishes what Jewish author Abraham Heschel calls a “palace in time.” Each Sabbath, Jesus invites us to leave our cares, worries, and anxieties behind us and enter His palace to rest in Him. Earthly palaces are distinct geographical locations. For example, the Palace of Versailles in France contains 700 rooms and has more than 67,000-square meters of floor space. As a World Heritage site, it is listed as one of the greatest achievements of the seventeenth century.

The Sabbath, God’s palace in time, is far more significant and amazing. It dates not to the seventeenth century but to the beginning of time, at Creation. It spans the centuries and graces the earth with sacred time each week. It is a perpetual reminder of where true rest is found. The Sabbath speaks of a God who is intimately acquainted with our

basic human needs. He “rested on the Sabbath and was refreshed,” not because He was tired, but because He knew *we* would be tired. Genesis 2:2 says, “On the seventh day God ended His work” (*NKJV*). Time is not an endless cycle of labor-consuming events. God has graciously given us a divine pause—a time to deepen our relationship with Him, renew our minds, refresh our bodies, and experience positive family relations.

This divine Sabbath rest carries with it the sense of assurance in our Creator’s loving concern for us. In Him, we have peace. The Sabbath is a stress buster. It is the guarantee that the God who created this world has not forgotten it, and He has not forgotten us. As we “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (*Exod. 20:8, NKJV*), our Creator remembers us on that day and pours the abundance of heaven’s blessings into our lives to deliver us from the bondage of fear, the chains of anxiety, and the prison of worry.

God’s Invitation to Rest

Throughout Scripture, God invites us to rest from our busyness. When the busyness of life overwhelms us, three things begin to happen:

- *We begin to lose focus.* The events of the present seem to overwhelm us. The challenges of life seem much larger, and we focus on the problems rather than on God, who can solve them. In our busyness, we focus on human answers to our dilemma rather than on divine solutions.
- *We begin to become physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted.* We say and do things we later regret. Busyness leads to tiredness. Tiredness leads to burnout, and burnout leads to discouragement. Busy people often make quick judgment decisions and fail to see the larger picture because they are so busy. They need to get on to the next problem to solve or the next task on their to-do list to accomplish. Thus, they have little time to reflect on the best solution to the problem they are facing.
- *We begin to neglect prayer and Bible study. As a result, our devotional life suffers.* Busyness produces tiredness, and tiredness produces inefficiency, a lack of discipline, the inability to control one’s feelings, and an erosion of a meaningful devotional life.

Ellen G. White puts it this way: “All who are under the training of God need the quiet hour for communion with their own hearts, with nature, and with God. In them is to be revealed a life that is not in

harmony with the world, its customs, or its practices; and they need to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God. We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. 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.' Psalm 46:10. This is the effectual preparation for all labor for God. Amidst the hurrying throng, and the strain of life's intense activities, he who is thus refreshed will be surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace. He will receive a new endowment of both physical and mental strength. His life will breathe out a fragrance and will reveal a divine power that will reach men's hearts."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 58.

Have you ever felt that you are running from one thing to the next, overwhelmed with the busyness of life? There is one more email to answer, one more text message to respond to, one more phone call to make, one more committee to attend, one more person to see and the list goes on. Your life seems to be governed by "one more." You have just too much to do to accomplish it all, and when you flop into bed at night you think about all you have left undone. Your work is certainly not finished. Your to-do list is half done at best. Your mind is racing. Sleep does not come as you frantically attempt to think about how you can cram more into an already-overloaded schedule tomorrow.

Christ's invitation is especially for busy, worn-out, tired people who are living in a 24-7 world. Jesus' disciples were anxious and confused after the beheading of John the Baptist. Jesus invited them to " 'come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.' For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat" (*Mark 6:31, NKJV*). In their busyness, Jesus offered them rest. He did not encourage them to rush headlong into exhausting labor. His invitation to rest was not a onetime event only for the disciples. To the crowds following Him, He spoke these words of assurance: " 'Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' " (*Matt. 11:28, NKJV*). The rest that Jesus offers is not freedom from trials. It is the internal assurance that in Him we are secure. He will never leave or forsake us. One of the most challenging experiences in life is feeling alone when we experience difficult times. That's exactly the way Jeremiah's scribe Baruch felt.

Baruch's Grief, Cain's Restlessness, and God's Response

Baruch was Jeremiah's scribe. According to Jeremiah 45:3–5, this poor man went through a time of deep emotional pain. The city of Jerusalem

was soon to be attacked by enemy armies. Suffering, heartache, and disaster were swiftly approaching. Life as Baruch knew it would change forever. Fear consumed him. Grief flooded into his life. Worry held him in its debilitating grip. But God spoke and reassured him that “‘I will give your life to you as a prize in all places’ ” (*Jer. 45:5, NKJV*). The promises of God are sure. We can rest, even amid life’s greatest difficulties, because of the assurance that the promises of God give us.

In the Old Testament, there are multiple words translated as “rest.” Their meaning is varied. The words for rest can be translated “relief, quiet, peace, or settled.” In the New Testament, they can be interpreted as “rest, relax, or settled.” These words all have one thing in common. They imply an inner peace, a sense of calm and restfulness. This rest is a gift from God given to His weary children as they come to Him in faith.

The story of Cain demonstrates that there is no rest when human beings rebel against God’s commands and trust their own judgment. Cain disregarded the clear instructions of God. His was a religion of human works. He exalted his own opinion above God’s divine revelation. Abel, on the other hand, had peace even in death, because he placed his trust in the God of life. Today’s lesson provides some practical and crucial lessons for living in our 24-7 world.

Part III: Life Application

This week’s study provides us with at least three practical lessons for daily living.

- When we become too busy to rest in our Creator’s loving care, our lives become filled with stress and anxiety. This stress can lead to physical illness and emotional distress.
- Our Creator has designed us to rest. This rest is more than a physical rest, as important as that is. This rest is a peace of mind that comes from believing His Word, trusting His promises, and entering the blessedness of His Sabbath rest.
- Living life apart from our Creator, as symbolized by Cain’s experience, only frustrates our attempts to have inner peace and lasting joy. Rest comes from having a trusting relationship with the One who made us. In Christ, there is rest. In His promises, there is assurance. In His presence, we are free from anxiety, worry, and care.

Restless *and* Rebellious



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Num. 11:1–33, Num. 12:1–13, Num. 13:27–33, Num. 14:1–23, 1 Cor. 10:1–11, Num. 14:39–45.*

Memory Text: “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (*1 Corinthians 10:11, NKJV*).

Over the centuries, many people have reported strange, restless behavior in dogs and other domestic animals before major earthquakes.

Scientists have now established that animals are able to detect the first of an earthquake’s seismic waves—the pressure wave—that arrives in advance of the secondary shaking wave. This probably explains why animals have been reported as acting confused, or restless, right before the ground starts to shake. Some animals, such as elephants, can perceive low-frequency sound waves and vibrations from foreshocks, which humans can’t detect at all.

A few minutes before the 5.8-magnitude quake that hit the Washington, D.C., area on August 23, 2011, some of the animals at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Zoo started behaving strangely. Among those were the lemurs, who began calling loudly for about 15 minutes before the ground started shaking.

In this week’s study, we look at some examples of strange human restlessness that was brought about, not by impending natural disasters such as earthquakes, but, rather, by the basic sinfulness of fallen human beings who were not resting in what Christ offers all who come to Him in faith and obedience.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 10.

Restless in a Wilderness

Israel must have felt restless and unhappy when they departed Sinai on their way to Canaan. More than a year had passed since they had left Egypt (*Num. 1:1*). They were ready to enter the Promised Land. They had been counted and organized. They had witnessed incredible displays of divine favor and clear signs of God’s presence. Yet, their first stop following their departure from Sinai finds them complaining.

Read Numbers 11:1–15. What are the Israelites complaining about?

The Israelites craved the meat, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic of Egypt. “ ‘Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!’ ” (*Num. 11:4–6, NKJV*). They also must have suffered from severe selective memory when they remembered the food and forgot the slavery and unbelievable hardship (*compare with Exodus 1*).

They had been fed by God’s *manna* for more than a year; yet, they felt restless and wanted something else. Even Moses was affected. Trying to lead a group of restless people is not easy. But Moses knew whom to turn to. “ ‘Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me?’ ” (*Num. 11:11, NKJV*).

How does God respond to the complaints? Read Numbers 11:16–33.

God is not deaf to our needs when we feel restless. In Israel’s case, He gave them quail to satisfy their hunger for meat. But it wasn’t really the meat Israel wanted. When we are unhappy and restless and angry, what we are angry about is often just the detonator—not the cause of the conflict. We fight because there is something deeper amiss, affecting our underlying relationships. Israel rebelled against God’s leading, something that we all have to be careful about, no matter our immediate situation and context, for it’s easier to do than we think.

Why is it so easy to remember the past as better than it really was?

It's Contagious

Read Numbers 12:1–3. What were Miriam and Aaron upset about?

Ostensibly, Miriam and Aaron were unhappy about Moses' Cushite wife. Zipporah was an outsider hailing from Midian (*see Exod. 3:1*). Even among Israel's "elite," the fallenness of their nature was revealed, and not in a very pleasant way, either. (Is it ever?)

The biblical text, however, clearly shows this to be a pretext. The main focus of their complaint is about the prophetic gift. In the previous chapter God had told Moses to appoint 70 of Israel's elders who would help Moses carry the administrative burden of leadership (*Num. 11:16, 17, 24, 25*). Aaron and Miriam had been playing key leadership roles, as well (*Exod. 4:13–15, Micah 6:4*), but now they felt threatened by the new leadership development and said, " 'Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?' " (*Num. 12:2, NKJV*).

How does God respond to this complaint? Read Numbers 12:4–13. Why do you think God responds so decisively?

God's response was immediate and leaves no room for interpretation. The prophetic gift is not a weapon to be used to wield more power. Moses was well suited for leadership because he had learned how extremely dependent he was on God.

The fact that Miriam is mentioned before Aaron in Numbers 12:1 suggests she may have been the instigator of the attack on Moses. At this time, Aaron was serving as Israel's high priest. If he had been struck with leprosy, he would not have been able to enter the tabernacle and minister on the people's behalf. God's punishment of Miriam with temporary leprosy communicates vividly His displeasure with both of them and helps bring about the attitude change that this family needs. Aaron's plea for her affirms that he, too, was involved (*Num. 12:11*), and now instead of criticism and restlessness, we see Aaron pleading for Miriam, and we see Moses interceding on her behalf (*Num. 12:11–13*). This is the attitude that God wants to see in His people. He hears, and He heals Miriam.

Though it's always easy to be critical of church leadership at any level, how much better would our church and our own spiritual life be if, instead of complaining, we would intercede in behalf of our leaders, even when we disagree with them?

Restlessness Leads to Rebellion

This story begins on a positive note. The Israelites have finally reached the borders of Canaan, and 12 spies are sent to explore the land. Their report is extraordinary.

Read the spies' report in Numbers 13:27–33. At which point are the expectations of the Israelites dashed?

In spite of Caleb's intervention, the voices of the doubters and skeptics prevail. The Israelites did not set out to conquer what God had promised them. Restless at heart, they choose weeping and murmuring over marching and shouting for victory.

When we are restless at heart, we struggle to walk by faith. Restlessness, however, does not affect our emotions alone. Scientists tell us that there is a direct line of cause and effect between too little rest (including lack of sleep) and bad choices, resulting in obesity, addictions, and more restlessness and unhappiness.

Read Numbers 14:1–10. What happened next?

Things move from bad to worse. Caleb's desperate plea, “ ‘only do not rebel against the LORD’ ” (*Num. 14:9, NKJV*), goes unheeded, and the entire assembly prepares to stone their leaders. *Restlessness leads to rebellion, and rebellion ultimately leads to death.*

“The unfaithful spies were loud in denunciation of Caleb and Joshua, and the cry was raised to stone them. The insane mob seized missiles with which to slay those faithful men. They rushed forward with yells of madness, when suddenly the stones dropped from their hands, a hush fell upon them, and they shook with fear. God had interposed to check their murderous design. The glory of His presence, like a flaming light, illuminated the tabernacle. All the people beheld the signal of the Lord. A mightier one than they had revealed Himself, and none dared continue their resistance. The spies who brought the evil report crouched terror-stricken, and with bated breath sought their tents.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 390.

Right then, however, the glory of the Lord manifested itself publicly. When we read the story in Numbers 14, it seems as if the entire scene has been frozen, and we are now privy to listen in on God's conversation with Moses. God recognizes that even though the stones are meant for Moses and Caleb and Joshua, ultimately the rebellion is directed against God Himself.

An Intercessor

What opportunity is God offering Moses in the face of this rebellion?
Read Numbers 14:11, 12.

God is offering to destroy the Israelites and make a whole new nation with Moses as the father of them all.

How does Moses respond to this outright rebellion, not simply against himself but against God? (See Num. 14:13–19.)

This is the moment that we can see the true man of God. Moses' answer, frozen into time, anticipates the Intercessor who, more than 1,400 years later, would pray for His disciples in their afflictions (*John 17*). Indeed, in what Moses did here, many theologians and Bible students have seen an example of what Christ does for us. Their guilt, our guilt, is not even questioned. And yet, Moses pleads, saying, “ ‘according to the greatness of Your mercy’ ” (*Num. 14:19, NKJV*), please forgive these people. And just as the Lord did then because of Moses' intercession, thus He does for us because of Jesus, because of His death and resurrection and intercession for us.

Thus, Moses pleads: “ ‘Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now’ ” (*Num. 14:19, NKJV*). Grace combats rebellion and restlessness at its core. Forgiveness offers new beginnings.

Yet, there are costs. Grace can never be cheap. Though forgiven, the people will face the consequences of their rebellions, and that generation will not enter into the Promised Land (*Num. 14:20–23*).

Yes, God will sustain them for another 38 years in the wilderness. He will feed them. He will speak to them from the sanctuary. He will be at their side in the wilderness. But then they will die, and a new generation will have to pick up the baton and find rest in the Promised Land.

It sounded like judgment; yet, it really was grace. How would this generation be able to conquer Canaan's powerful city-states if they had not yet learned to trust Him? How would they be a light to the nations when they themselves were stumbling in the darkness?

What hard lessons have you learned about the consequences of forgiven sin?

Faith Versus Presumption

What similarities do you see in Israel’s wanderings in the wilderness and God’s people living just prior to the second coming of Jesus? (See 1 Cor. 10:1–11.)

Throughout history, God’s people have been roaming in the wilderness as they seek the Promised Land. This wilderness has many faces. Right now, it looks like an endless media barrage, the constant beeps of incoming messages, and the deep roar of interminable entertainment. It tries to sell us pornography as love and materialism as the answer to our problems. If we just could be a bit fitter, a bit younger, a bit more affluent, a bit sexier—that would take care of all our problems.

Like the Israelites, we are restless in our search for peace, and so often we look for it in the wrong places.

How did the Israelites react to God’s judgment in Numbers 14:39–45?

Israel’s reaction to the divine judgment is typical. “We have sinned,” they said. “ ‘We will go up to the place which the LORD has promised’ ” (Num. 14:40, NKJV).

Half-hearted commitment is like a poorly administered vaccination—it doesn’t work. Today, doctors recommend a hepatitis B vaccination right after birth within the first 24 hours of life. That’s a good beginning. However, following that first shot, if there are not two or three booster vaccinations administered at the right times and in the right doses, then there is no protection against hepatitis B whatsoever.

Israel’s rebellious turnaround, reported in the last verses of Numbers 14, results in death and disappointment as the Israelites now refuse to accept God’s new directions and stubbornly launch an attack without the ark of the covenant or Moses’ leadership.

Presumption is costly; presumption leads to death. Very often, presumption is powered by fear. Because we are afraid of something, we make decisions that we later regret.

Think about a time you acted on faith and a time you acted on presumption. What was the crucial difference?

Further Thought: “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. They knew that they had deeply sinned in allowing their rash feelings to control them and in seeking to slay the spies who had urged them to obey God; but they were only terrified to find that they had made a fearful mistake, the consequences of which would prove disastrous to themselves. Their hearts were unchanged, and they only needed an excuse to occasion a similar outbreak. This presented itself when Moses, by the authority of God, commanded them to go back into the wilderness.”—Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 391.

“But faith is in no sense allied to presumption. Only he who has true faith is secure against presumption. For presumption is Satan’s counterfeit of faith. Faith claims God’s promises, and brings forth fruit in obedience. Presumption also claims the promises, but uses them as Satan did, to excuse transgression. Faith would have led our first parents to trust the love of God, and to obey His commands. Presumption led them to transgress His law, believing that His great love would save them from the consequence of their sin. It is not faith that claims the favor of Heaven without complying with the conditions on which mercy is to be granted. Genuine faith has its foundation in the promises and provisions of the Scriptures.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 126.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Discuss the difference between faith and presumption. Why would conquering the land of Canaan first be seen as an act of faith and then later, when the Israelites did attack, be seen as a presumptuous act? How do motive and circumstances play a big role in the difference between faith and presumption?
- 2 Dwell more on the fact that though sin can be forgiven, we often have to live with the consequences of those sins. How can you help those who struggle with knowing that they are forgiven a sin that, nevertheless, still negatively impacts them and, perhaps, even their loved ones?

Impact of a Mission School

By DIANA FISH

What kind of impact can a mission school have on a family?

Shima, which means “mother” in the Navajo language, heard about Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School about 40 years ago.

An elderly friend spoke very highly of Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School, located on the Navajo reservation in the U.S. state of Arizona. “The school provides an excellent education to our Navajo children,” he said.

Shima enrolled five of her seven children at Holbrook Indian School.

Her eldest son learned how to weld and do other metal work at Holbrook Indian School. He loved working with metal and became a metalworker.

Shima’s second-eldest child, a girl, decided to go to an Adventist college after graduating from Holbrook. She studied nursing at Pacific Union College in California and works today as a nurse on the Navajo reservation.

Shima did not send her two youngest children to Holbrook. She decided against it because she became unhappy with the school. One of her daughters, Nabaa, had some difficulties at the school, and the school ended up asking her to leave. Shima felt hurt that her daughter was not allowed to stay.

Nabaa not only had difficulties at Holbrook but also at every school she attended. She eventually graduated, went to college, and became a teacher. Nabaa is still teaching and a member of the Adventist Church today.

Nabaa must have forgiven Holbrook for dismissing her because she enrolled all three of her children at the school. Nabaa’s children, who are now young adults, have graduated from Holbrook and are doing well. One is a teacher and another is about to become a teacher. The third child is the wife of an Adventist pastor and is studying to become a teacher too.

What happened to Shima’s two youngest children who never attended Holbrook? The Adventist influence of Holbrook still permeated their family, and both became Adventists. One teaches at an Adventist school today.

What kind of impact can a mission school have on a family? Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School has had a major impact on Shima’s family and many others on the Navajo reservation and beyond.

Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering three years ago that kickstarted plans on a new gym and health center called New Life Center at Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School. Your offering this quarter will help finish the second phase of the center, where the school will address high rates of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, depression, and suicide among Native American children and youth.

Part I: Overview

This week's lesson, "Restless and Rebellious," focuses on the relationship between the sinfulness of our fallen human nature and a lack of inner peace. Restlessness is that nagging discontent with life. Restlessness fights against life's circumstances when they are not going as expected. Restlessness has tragically failed to accept life on any other terms but its own. It is not satisfied with what it has, and it grasps for more.

This discontent is revealed in Israel's attitude of rebellion in the wilderness. God had graciously provided them with manna to satisfy their hunger as they wandered in the wilderness on their way to Canaan. Dissatisfied, they complained to Moses, and pleaded for the "flesh pots" of Egypt (*Exod. 16:3*). Their restlessness and rebellion led them to beg to return to Egypt. Rebellion leads to restlessness, and restlessness leads to further rebellion.

These twins, restlessness and rebellion, are often the result of a lack of faith. In this week's lesson, we will consider the experience of the 10 spies that searched out the Promised Land. They saw the amazing bounties of the land, recognized it as a land flowing with milk and honey, but did not have the faith to believe that God could defeat their enemies who occupied the land. This lack of faith burst forth in open rebellion. Then as God outlined the consequences of their rebellion, they rushed headlong into battle, contrary to God's instructions, and suffered a terrible defeat. In this week's lesson, we also will carefully consider the difference between faith and presumption.

Restlessness and rebellion lead to rash decisions and dire consequences. We also find this in the experience of Aaron and Miriam, who rebelled against God's authority in the leadership of Moses. Rather than letting these two leaders suffer the full impact of the consequences of their rebellion, Moses interceded for them. God heard his prayers. Intercession makes a powerful difference in the controversy between good and evil.

Part II: Commentary

There is a fascinating story about a devout king who was disturbed by the ingratitude of his royal court. He prepared a large banquet for them. When the king and his royal guests were seated, a beggar shuffled into

the hall (by prearrangement), sat down at the king's table, and gorged himself with food. Without saying a word, he then left the room. The guests were furious and asked permission to seize the tramp and tear him limb from limb for his ingratitude. The king replied, "That beggar has done only once to an earthly king what each of you does three times each day to God. You sit there at the table and eat until you are satisfied. Then you walk away without recognizing God or expressing one word of thanks to Him."

This was precisely Israel's problem. Ingratitude is at the very heart of this week's lesson, "Restless and Rebellious." When we forget what God has done for us in the past, is doing for us in the present, and will do for us in the future, the natural result is discontent. In a remarkable statement, Ellen G. White speaks directly to the problem of forgetting the blessings of God in our lives.

"They *forgot* their bitter service in Egypt. They *forgot* the goodness and power of God displayed in their behalf in their deliverance from bondage. They *forgot* how their children had been spared when the destroying angel slew all the firstborn of Egypt. They *forgot* the grand exhibition of divine power at the Red Sea. They *forgot* that while they had crossed safely in the path that had been opened for them, the armies of their enemies, attempting to follow them, had been overwhelmed by the waters of the sea. They saw and felt only their present inconveniences and trials; and instead of saying, 'God has done great things for us; whereas we were slaves, He is making of us a great nation,' they talked of the hardness of the way, and wondered when their weary pilgrimage would end."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 293; emphasis supplied.

Ingratitude denotes spiritual immaturity. Have you ever noticed how babies have very short memories? They want their needs to be met immediately. They don't have a lot of patience. They don't remember how their parents met their needs yesterday or have the confidence that they will meet them tomorrow. They live for the present. The Israelites were in some ways like immature children. They wanted their needs met immediately and forgot what God had done for them in the past.

Wandering in the barren desert, traversing the burning sands, winding through narrow mountain gorges and crossing the rough hilly terrains, the exhausted, weary Israelites thought only of their immediate needs. They forgot the abundance of God's blessings. They lacked spiritual maturity. Ingratitude always leads to restlessness. Discontent rises when we are not grateful and is largely caused by a lack of faith. Because Moses had married Zipporah, who was an outsider from Midian, Miriam

and Aaron were discontent. They failed to trust God's guidance. When God supplied manna in the wilderness, many of the Israelites were discontent and wanted to return to Egypt. We become restless when we lose focus. The psalmist David encourages us to "forget not all His benefits" (*Ps. 103:2*). Keeping God's goodness prominently in mind brings peace to our hearts. Every day for 40 years in their wilderness wanderings, the Israelites had the opportunity to rejoice in God's goodness as the manna fell.

Manna: A Symbol of the Bread of Life

The falling of the manna in the wilderness was a powerful symbol of God's constant care. It also was a reminder of the Messiah who was to come to satisfy the Israelites' spiritual hunger and give them true rest. In the imagery of bread, the Jewish prophets saw a symbol of the coming Messiah who would meet all of Israel's needs. Isaiah the prophet declared, " 'Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. . . . Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance' " (*Isa. 55:1, 2, NKJV*). Here bread is obviously a symbol of spiritual food that satisfies the soul. After feeding the 5,000 seated on a hillside in Galilee, in a miracle reminiscent of Israel's being divinely fed by the manna, Jesus declared, " 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever' " (*John 6:51, NKJV*). The manna falling daily in the wilderness to satisfy the physical needs of God's people had a deeper message. Just as God had satisfied their physical hunger, He would satisfy the hunger of their souls. He longed to give them rest of mind and body as by faith they trusted His provisions to meet their needs. But they failed to appreciate the blessings of heaven, and their restless spirits led them to rebel against God's plans for their lives.

The account of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness is a classic story of ingratitude, discontent, and lack of faith. Restlessness, crippling anxiety, and excessive worry are often signs of a lack of faith. There are exceptions. Sometimes, deep-seated emotional distress stems from a physical or mental condition and requires a medical solution. But most often, as in the case of Israel, it is a lack of faith that leads to our restlessness and anxiety.

Ten Spies: Restlessness and Presumption

This is certainly true of the spies that Moses sent to spy out the land of Canaan. Their investigative analysis was to be thorough. Israel's attacking

armies must be fully informed. A positive report would spur them on to a courageous conquest. They followed Moses' instructions carefully. They were faithful at their assignment. They explored the land for 40 days, then returned home. They gave a glowing report. They excitedly told of a land that was rich and fertile with abundant crops. But then with fearful anxiety they told of what they perceived to be giants in the land, impenetrable fortresses, and massive enemy armies. They were restless and lacked the faith to believe God could deliver them. They became so frustrated that they threatened to stone the two spies, Caleb and Joshua, who brought back a positive report about their chances for conquest. Eventually, in one rash act, after God forbade the people to move forward, they rushed into battle and suffered a crushing defeat.

Faith would have led them forward, trusting God for victory. Presumption led them forward, trusting their own abilities to accomplish the task, and they were utterly defeated. Faith trusts God, takes Him at His word, and moves forward to victory. Presumption trusts human impulse, substitutes human feelings and judgments for faith, and moves forward to defeat.

Moses: Intercession

One of the major emphases in this week's lesson is Moses' intercession for his people. Despite the Israelites' restless rebellion, Moses did not abandon them. He interceded in their behalf until he had the assurance that God would spare His people and ultimately lead them to the Promised Land. Moses is a type of Christ. Jesus leads us from the bondage of the Egypts of this world, through the wilderness, and on to the Promised Land. He will never abandon us. He will not forsake us when we fail Him. This day He is interceding for you. You are in His mind. You are on His heart. If we let Him, our mighty Intercessor will take us home to live with Him forever.

Part III: Life Application

Ellen G. White makes this insightful comment revealing the underlying cause for all discontent and ingratitude: "Do we well to be thus unbelieving? Why should we be ungrateful and distrustful? Jesus is our friend; all heaven is interested in our welfare; and our anxiety and fear grieve the Holy Spirit of God. We should not indulge in a solicitude that only frets and wears us but does not help us to bear trials. No place should be given to that distrust of God which leads us to make a preparation

The Roots of Restlessness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Matt. 10:34–39, Luke 12:13–21, Phil. 2:5–8, Luke 22:14–30, Matt. 23:1–13.*

Memory Text: “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice” (*James 3:16, ESV*).

Aspens are beautiful trees, reaching 45 to 90 feet (15 to 30 meters) in height. They thrive in cold climates with cool summers. Their wood is used in furniture and also for making matches and paper. Deer and other animals often feed on young aspen trees during hard winters, as their bark contains many nutrients. Aspens need lots of sunshine, and they grow all the time—even in winter, making them important winter food sources for different animals.

Aspens, however, are most notorious for the fact that they have one of the largest root systems in the plant world. The roots spread by underground suckers and form a colony that can spread relatively quickly, covering large areas. Individual aspen trees can live up to 150 years, but the larger organism below the ground can live for thousands of years.

In this week’s study, we want to discover some of the roots of our restlessness. There are many things that can prevent us from finding true rest in Jesus. Some of these are obvious and don’t require much attention. Others may be less obvious to us, and, as with the huge aspen organism unseen beneath the ground, we may not always be conscious of the attitudes and actions that separate us from our Savior.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 17.

Jesus Brings Division

Very few people enjoy conflict. We crave harmony and peace. We even teach seminars on peacemaking and conflict resolution in our churches or institutions.

Read Matthew 10:34–39. What does Jesus mean when He says that He did not come to bring peace but to bring a sword? What does this mean, considering that Jesus is “the Prince of Peace” (*Isa. 9:6*)?

Jesus’ statement in Matthew 10:34–39 is shockingly counterintuitive. The Savior, who came as a helpless babe instead of a powerful king surrounded by elite bodyguards, who preached love to both neighbors and enemies, now tells His followers that He brings division and struggles. His disciples and His audience may have wondered, as we are wondering: *How can this be?*

Matthew 10:35–39 is really about allegiances and loyalties. Quoting Micah 7:6, Jesus challenges His audience to make choices for eternity. A son should love and honor his parents. That was a legal requirement of the law that Moses had received on the mountain. It was part of God’s required mode of operation; and yet, if that love would trump the hearer’s commitment to Jesus, it required a tough decision. A father and a mother should love and care for their children. Yet, if that love would top the parents’ commitment to Jesus, it required a difficult decision. First things first, Jesus reminds us in this passage.

Jesus expresses this choice by formulating three sentences, each using the term *worthy*. Worthiness is not based on high moral standards or even overcoming sin. Worthiness is based on one’s relationship with Jesus. We are worthy when we choose Him above everything else—including mother, father, or children. We choose the suffering of the cross and follow Jesus.

“I have no higher wish than to see our youth imbued with that spirit of pure religion which will lead them to take up the cross and follow Jesus. Go forth, young disciples of Christ, controlled by principle, clad in the robes of purity and righteousness. Your Saviour will guide you into the position best suited to your talents and where you can be most useful.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 87.

Sometimes we are forced to bear a cross not of our own choosing, and sometimes we voluntarily bear a cross. Either way, what is the key to bearing that cross faithfully?

Selfishness

As in the case of the aspen and its larger underground system, selfishness is part of the huge underground system called “sin,” which keeps us from finding true rest in Jesus. Of all the expressions of sin in our lives, selfishness seems to be the easiest to manifest, doesn’t it? For most of us, selfishness is as natural as breathing.

Read Luke 12:13–21. Describe the problem highlighted in Jesus’ parable. Is planning for the future selfish and expressing disregard for God’s kingdom? If not, or at least not necessarily, then what is Jesus warning us against?

This parable appears only in the Gospel of Luke and is told in response to an anonymous question from the audience. Asked about a question regarding an inheritance, Jesus responds by rejecting the role of the arbiter between brothers. Instead, He opts to put His finger on the bigger underlying problem, namely, selfishness. He digs deeper to show the root mass underneath our individual actions.

Think about expressions of selfishness in your life. How does selfishness affect our relationships with God, with our spouses and families, with our church families, with our neighbors, and with colleagues at work? What key is found in Philippians 2:5–8?

By focusing solely on his own needs and ambitions, the anonymous rich man of Jesus’ parable forgot to take into consideration unseen heavenly realities. Bigger, better, and more are not the foundational principles of God’s kingdom. Paul offers us a glimpse into what motivated Jesus as He decided to become our Substitute.

Philippians 2:5–8 describes the blueprint of unselfishness, humility, and love. If love for God and others does not drive our choices and priorities, we will continue to build more barns for ourselves here and put less treasure in heaven (*Matt. 6:20*).

Why is it so easy to get caught up in the desire for wealth and material possessions? Though we all need a certain amount of money to survive, why does it seem to be that no matter how much we have, we always want more?

Ambition

Studying the last week of Jesus' ministry on earth prior to His crucifixion is always a source of encouragement and inspiration. It also offers a snapshot of how restlessness and ambition drive people to do and say ill-advised things.

Read Luke 22:14–30 and think about Jesus' emotions as He hears His disciples argue during this solemn meal over who among them should be considered the greatest (Luke 22:24). Why did the disciples get sidetracked from this momentous occasion and focus on human greatness?

We seldom discuss with others who is the greatest in our church, our family, or our workplace. We may think about it a lot, but who, really, openly talks about it?

This was not the first time that this question was raised in the community of Jesus' followers. Matthew 18:1 reports the disciples' bringing the question to Jesus and framing it in a more abstract way: " 'Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' " (NKJV). Jesus' answer involves an object lesson. After calling a child, He sets the child in the center of the group. Eyes are opened wide; eyebrows are raised. Jesus' action requires an explanation, and in Matthew 18:3 the Master offers that, too: " 'Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven' " (NKJV).

Conversion is foundational for finding true rest in Jesus. We recognize that we need outside help. We suddenly realize that we cannot depend on ourselves but need to rely on Jesus. We experience a transformation of our values and ambitions. Jesus tells His disciples: *Trust Me and rely on Me as this child does. True greatness is giving up your rights and embracing kingdom values.*

Unfortunately, it seems that the disciples had not yet learned this lesson by the time Jesus ate the Last Supper with them. Their bickering and infighting ruined a moment of perfect communion that was never to be repeated.

All this, even after years of being with Jesus, ministering with Jesus, and hearing and learning at His feet? What a sad example of just how corrupt the human heart remains! On the more positive side, however, think about the ever-present reality of the Lord's grace, that despite this pathetic discussion among His followers, Jesus didn't give up on them.

Why should keeping our focus on Jesus on the cross be a powerful remedy against the desire for self-exaltation, which, as fallen human beings, all of us are subject to?

Hypocrisy

A hypocrite is somebody who plays acts, who wants to appear to be somebody he or she is not. The term is used seven times in Matthew 23 in a discourse in which Jesus publicly shames the scribes and Pharisees, the very center of Jewish religious leadership (*Matt. 23:13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29*). The Gospels show us Jesus offering grace and forgiveness to adulterers, tax collectors, prostitutes, and even murderers, but He demonstrated little tolerance for hypocrites (*see the many additional references in Matt. 6:2, 5, 16; Matt. 7:5; Matt. 15:7–9; Matt. 22:18*).

Read Matthew 23:1–13 and list four main characteristics of a hypocrite mentioned by Jesus.

Jesus associates four characteristics with the scribes and Pharisees. In the spectrum of Judaism in the first century A.D., the Pharisees represented the conservative religious right. They were interested in the written and oral law and emphasized ritual purity. On the other side of the spectrum were the Sadducees, a group of mostly wealthy leaders, often associated with the elite priestly class. They were highly Hellenized (i.e., they spoke Greek and were at home in Greek philosophy) and did not believe in a judgment or an afterlife. We would describe them as liberals. Both groups were guilty of hypocrisy.

According to Jesus, we are hypocrites if we don't do what we say, when we make religion harder for others without applying the same standards to ourselves, when we want others to applaud our religious fervor, and when we require honor and recognition that belongs only to our heavenly Father.

No matter how sharp and to the point His words, Jesus' engagement with those He called hypocrites was nevertheless full of love and concern, even for these hypocrites.

“Divine pity marked the countenance of the Son of God as He cast one lingering look upon the temple and then upon His hearers. In a voice choked by deep anguish of heart and bitter tears He exclaimed, ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 620.

Why do you not need to be a religious leader to be guilty of the kind of hypocrisy that Jesus so soundly condemns here? How can we learn to see any such hypocrisy in ourselves, if it exists, and how can we get rid of it?

Uprooting Restlessness

Read John 14:1–6. In the midst of our own restlessness, what can we do so that our hearts will not feel troubled? What is the key to overcoming division, selfishness, ambition, hypocrisy, and truly finding rest?

Overcoming restlessness always begins with Jesus. He is *the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life. He knows the right direction when we wander aimlessly in the wilderness of our media-saturated world; as the divine Lawgiver He Himself is the personified Truth, and His Spirit will guide us into *all* truth (*John 16:13*). When we are hurt, tired, worn out, sick, and discouraged, He is *the* life—not just any life. In fact, He has promised us life in abundance (*John 10:10*). This includes our eternal home and eternal life, but it also entails a different quality of life here. The Creator surely is able to give abundantly and beyond measure, even now.

“Let not your heart be troubled” is an invitation to live in anticipation. When we feel low, He is able to put us on a higher plain. When we struggle with darkness and sin, He is the One who not only began but also will finish His good work in us (*Phil. 1:6*).

No matter how bad things get here (and yes, they can get bad), look at the promise we have been given in Jesus. He is preparing a “place” for us, a place where our pain, restlessness, and suffering will forever be banished. That is the hope we have been given in Christ Jesus, and it is offered to all of us, no matter who we are, no matter our background, and no matter how sordid our lives have been or are now.

The key, however, is for us to come to God anyway in our weakness, in our hurt, in our brokenness, and in our general fallen state, knowing that He accepts us despite these things. That is what grace is all about, and why we must believe that we have been given it if we seek for it in faith.

Read Jeremiah 3:22. What does God ask us to do, and then, what will He do for us in response?

Think about Jesus’ words: “ ‘I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also’ ” (*John 14:3, NKJV*). What should this tell us about how central and crucial the promise of the Second Coming is? Especially for us as Adventists (with our understanding of death), why is the promise of the Second Coming so precious?

Further Thought: “There can be no growth or fruitfulness in the life that is centered in self. If you have accepted Christ as a personal Saviour, you are to forget yourself, and try to help others. Talk of the love of Christ, tell of His goodness. Do every duty that presents itself. Carry the burden of souls upon your heart, and by every means in your power seek to save the lost. As you receive the Spirit of Christ—the Spirit of unselfish love and labor for others—you will grow and bring forth fruit. The graces of the Spirit will ripen 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.

In dealing with issues between church members, “conversation has been protracted for hours between the parties concerned, and not only has their time been wasted, but the servants of God are held to listen to them, when the hearts of both parties are unsubdued by grace. If pride and selfishness were laid aside, five minutes would remove most difficulties.”—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 119.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, think about practical ways of overcoming selfishness. How can you keep each other accountable so that these ideas can become a reality?
- 2 Ambitions are not inherently bad. Yet, how can we anticipate and imagine great things from God without falling into the trap of being consumed by ambition?
- 3 Most of us don’t show ambition, hypocrisy, selfishness, or envy on the outside. We are very capable of offering a more benign facade. Like the huge root system of an aspen tree, however, all these negative characteristics lurk below the surface. What does Spirit-guided character transformation look like in practice? How can we overcome the root of restlessness and find true rest in Jesus?
- 4 Dwell more on your answer to Thursday’s final question about the importance of the Second Coming. After all, without it, what hope do we have? Without it, what good would Christ’s first coming have done for us, knowing that the dead sleep until the resurrection, which happens only at the Second Coming?

Mystery Bible

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

A COVID-19 lockdown left Sandile Khumalo on his knees in South Africa's biggest city, Johannesburg. The national lockdown, among the most stringent in the world, shuttered the three churches where Sandile serves as pastor in the city of 5.5 million people. Tough regulations closed parks and banned jogging, dog walking, and even the sale of cigarettes and alcohol.

Like many pastors, Sandile moved his ministry online and livestreamed sermons to members of his three churches: Johannesburg Central, Johannesburg CBD, and Johannesburg Innercity. Sometimes he received encouraging messages from people inspired by his preaching. But he longed to do more. He earnestly prayed to God to send an unbeliever who needed to meet Jesus during the pandemic. What happened next surprised him.

One day, Sandile received a WhatsApp text message from an unfamiliar number. The sender introduced himself as Hilton and sent a photo of a Bible that he had found in a minivan taxi while traveling to work. Minivan taxis, which carry multiple passengers, are a common sight in Johannesburg.

"I picked up your Bible in the taxi," Hilton wrote.

He explained that he had opened the Bible and, finding Sandile's name and contact information inside the cover, decided to write.

Sandile looked at the photo with interest. He owned several Bibles but did not recognize the one in the photo. The Bible looked new, and its burgundy-red leather cover indicated that it was not cheap. Furthermore, Sandile had not ridden in a minivan taxi in years. He checked with his wife and other family members, and they confirmed that he had never owned such a Bible.

Hilton was not bothered that Sandile did not recognize the Bible. He was more interested in finding out what the Bible said. He had never read a Bible, and he was eager to start. He asked Sandile whether he would be willing to help him read it. He wanted Bible studies.

Sandile knew at that moment that God had heard his prayers for an unbeliever who needed to meet Jesus during the pandemic. God had answered his prayers in a miraculous way. "I praise God for this unique opportunity for ministry of which I still cannot make sense," Sandile said. "I hope our interactions will lead to Hilton accepting Jesus Christ as his personal Savior."



This story illustrates a key component of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's I Will Go strategic plan: "Demonstrable increase in total members and congregations in all urban areas of one million people or more" (KPI 2.3). Learn more about the strategic plan at IWillGo2020.org.

Part I: Overview

A pastor tells a fascinating story of visiting an old Native American fort in the northwestern section of New York. It was a remote area, but the fort was still well preserved. This area was populated by Native Americans for centuries. Each year thousands of tourists visited the fort. The pastor asked the guide if any of the visitors had ever found Indian arrowheads. The guide smiled and responded, “Yes, at the front gate of the fort, right where you are standing.” The pastor wondered how that might be. Scores of people walked over that very sight daily. Why hadn’t they found a cherished Indian arrowhead? The guide then explained that the arrowheads were just below the surface. The best time to find them was right after the winter, during the spring thaw. They were there all the time. Under the right conditions, they appeared.

In this week’s lesson, “The Roots of Restlessness,” we will study attitudes that are often hidden from sight and raise their ugly heads from time to time. Attitudes such as pride, selfishness, unhealthy ambition, and hypocrisy too often characterize the lives of Christians and tarnish our witness. The apostle Paul tells us to look diligently, “lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled” (*Heb. 12:15, NKJV*). Roots of evil remain in all our hearts. These roots, if not dealt with, produce shoots, which then produce evil fruits. This week, we will carefully examine a few of these roots and study ways to recognize them—and then, by God’s grace, root them out of our lives.

Part II: Commentary

A casual glance at Jesus’ statements in Matthew 10:34–39 may cause confusion. If Jesus is the Prince of Peace, why did He say that He came not to bring peace to this earth but a sword (*Matt. 10:34*)? Why did He indicate that a “ ‘man’s foes shall be they of his own household’ ” (*Matt. 10:36*)? And why does He say, “ ‘He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me’ ” (*Matt. 10:37, NKJV*)? There are several major issues here. Jesus wanted His followers to recognize the cost of discipleship. When an individual accepts Christ and is committed to follow Him, the devil is angry. We should not be surprised when there is opposition to the gospel. We have declared war on Satan and are engaged in a battle with all the forces of hell. Jesus is pointing out in these passages that peace, true peace, comes from following Him in the middle of the battle. The issues here are loyalty and allegiance. Although Jesus invites each one of

us to respect our families, we have a higher loyalty. Peace floods into our hearts when we place Christ first in our lives and have the assurance of His presence.

Christ's Condescension

The apostle Paul reveals one of the most detailed descriptions of the condescension of Christ in all of Scripture. Some theologians have called this the “cascade of God’s love.” In Philippians 2:5–7, Paul declares, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the *form of God*, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of *no reputation*, taking the *form of a bondservant*, and coming in the likeness of men” (*NKJV, emphasis supplied*). Notice the contrast between these two expressions: the form of God and the form of a bondservant. The Greek word for “form” is *morphe*, which also can be translated as “the essence of” or having the “nature of.” Jesus was equal with the Father in the very essence of His nature. Christ existed with the Father from all eternity as coequal and coeternal. He “made Himself of no reputation,” or, literally translated, He emptied Himself of His privileges and prerogatives as God’s equal and became a man. He not only became a man, but He also became the lowliest of men, a servant. He not only became a servant, but He also became a humble, obedient servant. He not only became a man who was a humble, obedient servant, but He also died the death of the cross, the most horrible of all deaths. Jesus, our eternal Lord, our all-powerful Creator, the One served by all, became the servant of all. Jesus’ life graphically illustrates that a life of self-sacrificial service is a life of restfulness and lasting joy.

Christ’s life of self-sacrificial, loving service stands in direct contrast to the two brothers in Luke 12:13–15. These two self-seeking young men were arguing about the inheritance they were to receive from their father’s estate. One of the brothers came to Jesus and asked Him to mediate their dispute. Jesus refused, clearly pointing out that true peace and joy come from giving, not grasping. We are truly happy when we make others happy, not when we try to manipulate them to make ourselves happy.

Ambition/Pride and the Heart of Christianity

During the Last Supper, at one of the most solemn moments in human history, the disciples were still debating who would be the greatest in the kingdom. On the eve of Christ’s betrayal and trial, they still believed He was going to establish an earthly kingdom, and if He was, they wanted first place in this new kingdom. This was not the first time there was rivalry among them over who would be greatest in His kingdom. There

is a story in Matthew 20:20–28 that reveals the heart of what Christianity really is. It powerfully describes the essence of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

Here is the background of the story. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem for the final time. He has unsuccessfully tried to explain to His disciples that He soon will be rejected, tried, falsely accused, and crucified. For some reason, their presuppositions about the Messiah have kept them from understanding the nature of His mission. They filter what Jesus says through the mistaken ideas of earthly greatness that swirl around in their heads. Their ideas of prominence in a new kingdom and of worldly greatness are the basis for James and John’s mother’s request, found in Matthew 20:20, 21.

“She said to Him, ‘Grant that these two sons of mine sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom’ ” (*Matt. 20:21, NKJV*).

James and John, along with Peter, were part of Christ’s inner circle. They were His closest compatriots. Had not Jesus Himself said shortly before:

“ ‘Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel’ ” (*Matt. 19:28, NKJV*)?

Wasn’t it logical for James and John to think that if Jesus was going to Jerusalem to set up His eternal kingdom, they more than anyone else deserved to be near Him on His throne? They had been nearest to Him throughout His ministry. They were His confidants—His closest followers. They believed that they deserved this position of honor and privilege.

The other disciples were obviously distressed over this attempt by James and John to elbow their way into first place in the kingdom. Jesus’ response is timeless. It speaks to the heart of authentic Christianity. Calling the disciples to Himself, Jesus said, “ ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve’ ” (*Matt. 20:25–28, NKJV*).

The principle of this world is grasping. The principle of Christ’s kingdom is giving. The principle of this world is self-promotion. The principle of Christ’s kingdom is self-sacrifice. The principle of this world is a focus on self. The principle of Christ’s kingdom is a focus on others. Jesus knew what was going on in the disciples’ minds, and He spoke

to the very heart of the Christian life. Out in the world, Jesus said, it is quite true that the great man is the man that controls others. Such a great man is master, whose command others must leap to obey. With simply a word, this man can command service, and his slightest need will be supplied. Out in the world was the Roman governor with his regalia and retinue, the eastern potentate with his slaves, the wealthy merchant with his servants, and the landholder with his estates. The world counts them great, but in Christ's assessment, service alone is the badge of greatness; greatness does not consist of commanding others to do things for us. It consists in our doing things for others. This is the Christian revolution; here is the complete reversal of the world's standards. Here is a new set of values.

"In the kingdoms of the world, position meant self-aggrandizement. The people were supposed to exist for the benefit of the ruling classes. Influence, wealth, and education were so many means of gaining control of the masses for the use of the leaders. The higher classes were to think, decide, enjoy, and rule; the lower were to obey and serve. Religion, like all things else, was a matter of authority. The people were expected to believe and practice as their superiors directed. The right of man as man, to think and act for himself, was wholly unrecognized.

"Christ was establishing a kingdom on different principles. He called men, not to authority but to service, the strong to bear the infirmities of the weak. Power, position, talent, education, placed their possessor under the greater obligation to serve his fellows."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 550.

Part III: Life Application

As we contemplate Jesus' life, our lives are transformed. We become like the One we most admire. We are changed into His likeness as we behold His grace, mercy, compassion, and goodness in His Word. His self-sacrificial life inspires us to look outside of ourselves to the needs of others. Someone has rightly said, "Anyone wrapped up in himself or herself is a very small package." To deepen the impression of this week's lesson, here is a practical assignment for this week:

- Find a quiet place to be alone and ask God to help you see a specific need in someone near you.
- Once the Holy Spirit impresses you with this need in that person's life, ask God what you can do to meet that need. The act might be something as simple as inviting a lonely elderly neighbor over for supper, babysitting for a single mom, comforting a person diagnosed

The Cost of Rest



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 2 Sam. 11:1–27, 2 Sam. 12:1–23, Gen. 3:1–8, 1 John 1:9.

Memory Text: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10, NKJV).

Many people seem desperate to find a little peace and quiet. They are willing to pay for it too. In many big cities there are internet-free rooms, which can be rented by the hour. The rules are strict—no noise, no visitors. People are willing to pay to be able to sit quietly and just think or nap. There are sleep pods that can be rented in airports, and noise-reducing earphones are popular items. There are even canvas hoods, or collapsible privacy shields that you can buy to pull over your head and torso for a quick workplace break.

True rest also has a cost. While the spin doctors of the self-help media would like to make us believe that we can determine our own destiny and that rest is just a matter of choice and planning, yet, at least when we consider this honestly, we realize our inability to bring true rest to our hearts. In the fourth-century, Augustine put it succinctly in his famous *Confessions* (Book 1) as he considered God’s grace: “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.”

This week we look briefly into the life of the man after God’s own heart to find out how he discovered the true cost of God’s rest.

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

Worn and Weary

On a balmy spring evening, restless King David paced the roof of his palace. He should have been with his army on the other side of the Jordan. He should have been leading God’s people to defeat the Ammonites and finally bring peace to the kingdom.

Not being where he should have been opened the door to temptation for David. Read the story in 2 Samuel 11:1–5. What happened, and what great sin did David commit?

David saw a “very beautiful woman” taking a bath on her roof. His sinful impulses got the better of him that evening, and he slept with Bathsheba, the wife of a trusted army officer. Like all ancient kings, David had absolute power. As king, he didn’t have to follow the rules that governed everyone else. And yet, the painful story of David’s family following this story-changing moment reminds us of the fact that, even as the king, he was not above God’s law.

Indeed, the law is there as a protection, a safeguard, and when even the king stepped outside it, he faced terrible consequences. As soon as David transgressed the limits of God’s law, he began to feel its effects on all aspects of his life. David thought that his passionate fling had gone unnoticed; yet, Bathsheba was now pregnant and her husband far away.

Read 2 Samuel 11:6–27. How did David try to cover up his sin?

Even David’s most intricate schemes to get Uriah home to his wife, Bathsheba, failed. Uriah was a man of stellar reputation who responded to David’s subtle hints: “ ‘The ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in tents, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields. Shall I then go to my house to eat and drink, and to lie with my wife?’ ” (2 Sam. 11:11, *NKJV*). Eventually a desperate David reverted to “remote control” assassination to cover his sin.

It is hard to believe that David, to whom God had given so much, could have stooped so low. No matter who we are, what warning should we all take from this story?

Wake-Up Call

In the midst of one of the darkest times of David's life there was good news: *God sent His prophet*. Nathan and David knew each other well. Earlier, Nathan had counseled David on his plans to build a temple (2 Samuel 7). Now, though, the prophet came with a different task to perform for his king.

Why do you think Nathan chooses to tell a story rather than naming and shaming David immediately? Read 2 Samuel 12:1–14.

Nathan knew what to say, and he said it in a way that David could understand. He told a story that David, the former shepherd, could relate to. He knew David's highly developed sense of justice and integrity. Thus, in a sense, one could say that Nathan set a trap and that David walked right into it.

When David unwittingly pronounced his own death sentence, Nathan told him, “‘You are the man’” (2 Sam. 12:7, *NKJV*). There are different ways of saying “You are the man.” One can shout it, one can accuse and stick a finger right into the other person's face, or one can express concern and care. Nathan's words must have been laced with grace. At that moment, David must have felt the pain that God must feel when one of His sons or daughters knowingly steps outside of His will. Something clicked in David's mind. Something tore in his heart.

Why does David respond with: “I have sinned against the LORD” rather than “I have sinned against Bathsheba” or “I am a murderer” (2 Sam. 12:13; see also Ps. 51:4)?

David recognized that sin, which makes our heart restless, is primarily an affront against God, the Creator and Redeemer. We hurt ourselves; we affect others. We bring disgrace to our families or churches. Yet, ultimately, we hurt God and drive another nail into the rough beam pointing heavenward on Golgotha.

“The prophet's rebuke touched the heart of David; conscience was aroused; his guilt appeared in all its enormity. His soul was bowed in penitence before God. With trembling lips he said, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’ All wrong done to others reaches back from the injured one to God. David had committed a grievous sin, toward both Uriah and Bathsheba, and he keenly felt this. But infinitely greater was his sin against God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 722.

Forgiven and Forgotten?

After David had unwittingly pronounced judgment on himself (2 Sam. 12:5, 6), Nathan confronted him with the enormity of his sin. David's heart was broken, and he confessed his sin. Immediately Nathan assured him that "The LORD also has put away your sin" (2 Sam. 12:13, NKJV) and that he was forgiven. There was no waiting period for God's forgiveness. David didn't have to prove that he was really sincere before forgiveness was extended.

However, Nathan, who already had predicted the consequences of David's sin in 2 Samuel 12:10–12, went on to state that the child to be born would die.

What does it mean that God had taken away David's sin? Did He just wipe the slate clean? Does everyone just simply forget about it? Read 2 Samuel 12:10–23 as you contemplate these questions.

David also must have wondered about these questions as he saw his world crumbling—the baby dead, his family in disarray (the stories of Amnon and Absalom are two good examples of real-life family troubles), and his future uncertain. And yet, despite the consequences of his sin, which had affected innocent people such as Uriah and the newborn baby, David also began to understand that God's grace would cover this and that someday all the consequences of sin would be done away with. In the meantime, he could find rest for his troubled conscience in God's grace.

What does David feel he really needs? What does he yearn for? Read Psalm 51:1–6.

With Psalm 51, David went public as he opened his heart and confessed his sins. David's cry for mercy appealed to God's unfailing love and His great compassion. He yearned for renewal.

When we consider the cost of rest in Jesus, we need first to recognize that we need outside help; we are sinners and need a Savior; we recognize our sins and cry out to the only One who can wash us, cleanse us, and renew us. When we do this, we can take courage: here is an adulterer, a manipulator, a murderer, and someone who violated at least five of the Ten Commandments who called for help—and claimed the promise of God's forgiveness.

If God forgave David for what he did, what hope is there, then, for you?

Something New

After David had confessed his sin without trying to excuse it or gloss over it, he went on to petition God. What did he ask God for? Read Psalm 51:7–12.

David's reference to cleansing with hyssop utilized terminology known to every Israelite who had ever visited the sanctuary. As he referred to the ritual acts of cleansing described in the Law of Moses (*Lev. 14:4*), he recognized the power of a sacrifice—the Sacrifice—who would come in the future to take away the sins of the world.

David also went on to ask for “joy” and “gladness.” In the face of the enormity of his sin, wasn't this a little audacious?

Perhaps it may be helpful to listen to this paraphrase: “Tell me I am forgiven so that I may enter the sanctuary again where I can hear the joy and gladness of those worshipping you.”

When Adam and Eve sinned, they hid from God's presence (*Gen. 3:8*). Why do you think David's request, even after his sin, is so different? Read Psalm 51:11, 12.

David did not want to lose the consciousness of living in God's presence. He realized that without the Holy Spirit he was powerless. He knew that as easily as he slipped into sin with Bathsheba, he could slip into sin again. His self-confidence was shattered.

David understood that future victories would not come from him; they would come only from God as he depended totally on God.

The victorious Christian life is not all about us. It is all about Jesus. We yearn for *His* presence; we crave *His* Spirit; we want *His* joy of salvation. We recognize our need for renewal and restoration. We need His rest—a divine act of re-creation. Creation rest is not far from forgiveness. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (*Ps. 51:10, NKJV*) uses Creation terminology. In the Old Testament only God can “create” (*bara'*)—and once we have been re-created, we can rest.

If you haven't experienced the joy and gladness of liberation from a guilty conscience, what is holding you back? If it is guilt, what could you learn from this story that should help you?

Reflectors of God's Light

Probably the most natural thing for us to do after working through an embarrassing failure and experiencing forgiveness is to try to forget that the event ever happened. Memories of failure can be painful.

What does David want to do with his painful experience? Read Psalm 51:13–19.

When a bowl or a precious vase falls and breaks into pieces, we normally sigh and throw the useless broken pieces away. In Japan there is a traditional art called *kintsugi*, which specializes in re-creating broken pottery. A precious metal, such as liquid gold or silver, is used to glue the broken pieces together and to turn the broken item into something of beauty and value.

Every time God forgives our transgressions and re-creates us again, something changes. God's precious forgiveness glues our brokenness together, and the visible breaks can draw attention to His grace. We can become God's loudspeakers. "My tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness" (*Ps. 51:14, NKJV*). We don't attempt to self-repair or auto-improve (even incrementally). Our broken spirits, our contrite hearts, are enough praise for God—and they are beams of light that the world can see surrounding us. Our experience of being forgiven attracts others who are searching for forgiveness.

What relationship is there between Psalm 51 and 1 John 1:9?

First John 1:9 is a short summary of Psalm 51. As David knows that "a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise" (*Ps. 51:17, NKJV*), John assures us that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (*1 John 1:9, NKJV*). We can take God at His word.

Again, David could not repair the tremendous damage that he had done through his acts and example to his family. He suffered the consequences of his decisions and actions. And yet, David knew that he had been forgiven. He knew that he needed to trust by faith that one day the true Lamb of God would come and stand in his place.

How can you learn right now to apply the promises of 1 John 1:9 to your own life? How should you feel after you do so and know that the promise is for you too?

Further Thought: “David’s repentance was sincere and deep. There was no effort to palliate his crime. No desire to escape the judgments threatened, inspired his prayer. . . . He saw the defilement of his soul; he loathed his sin. It was not for pardon only that he prayed, but for purity of heart. . . . In the promises of God to repentant sinners he saw the evidence of his pardon and acceptance. . . . ‘The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.’ Psalm 51:16, 17.

“Though David had fallen, the Lord lifted him up. . . .

“David humbled himself and confessed his sin, while Saul despised reproof and hardened his heart in impenitence.

“This passage in David’s history is . . . one of the most forcible illustrations given us of the struggles and temptations of humanity, and of genuine repentance. . . . Through all the ages . . . thousands of the children of God, who have been betrayed into sin, . . . have remembered . . . David’s sincere repentance and confession . . . and they also have taken courage to repent and try again to walk in the way of God’s commandments.

“Whoever . . . will humble the soul with confession and repentance, as did David, may be sure that there is hope for him. . . . The Lord will never cast away one truly repentant soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 725, 726.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How can we find the balance between recognizing our inherent sinfulness and need for forgiveness and, at the same time, living like the forgiven sons and daughters of the King of the universe that we are?
- 2 Why is all sin, ultimately, sin against God? What does it mean to sin against God?
- 3 What can we say to someone, not a believer, who struggles with the suffering of innocent people, such as Uriah or the newborn son of David and Bathsheba? How do we explain the love and justice of God in such a situation? How does the perspective of the great controversy offer a helpful outlook?
- 4 Why would God devote two full chapters of the Bible to the sordid story of David and Bathsheba? What purpose does the recounting of this story serve?
- 5 Dwell on the idea that sin separates us from God as expressed in Psalm 51:11, 12. What has been your own experience with how this happens? How would you explain to someone what this separation feels like and why it’s so uncomfortable? Why is the promise of grace the only remedy?

Thanking God for Life

By ANDREW McCHESENEY

Fifteen-year-old Giselle didn't feel well when she woke up one morning. She prayed before getting out of bed as she always did.

"Dear God, thank You for everything You have done for me, especially that I am still alive," she prayed.

She thanks God for life every day. She and her family immigrated as refugees to the United States from Rwanda when she was 12. She faced a difficult life in her African homeland, where her parents struggled to find work and the family had little to eat. She often went hungry.

After praying, Giselle slid out of bed in the bedroom on the second floor of the family's small home in the U.S. state of Georgia and carefully walked down the stairs. She felt so weak.

"I don't feel well," she told her mother.

Mother was talking on the cell phone, but she interrupted her conversation.

"Go back upstairs and go back to bed," she said. "Maybe you'll feel better."

Giselle turned around to climb up the stairs and collapsed. She heard Mother call out her name as she fell down the last three stairs and crumpled onto the hard floor below.

"Giselle!" Mother cried. "Are you OK?"

Giselle was unable to reply. She couldn't breathe, so she couldn't speak.

Mother hung up the phone and ran over.

"Giselle! Giselle!" she said.

Giselle still couldn't answer.

Mother touched her forehead to see if she had a fever. No fever.

Mother called Giselle's 19-year-old sister to bring an electric fan to provide some air.

The cool air felt good on Giselle's face. She began to breathe.

"Are you OK?" Mother asked.

"I'm fine now," she said.

Mother wanted to take Giselle to the hospital, but the girl insisted that she was fine. Mother gave her some water to drink. Giselle later learned from the physician that she had collapsed because she wasn't eating properly.

The night after her fall, Giselle prayed before going to sleep. She prays every night before bedtime.

"Dear God," she said, "thank You for this day, and thank You for everything that You have done for us, especially for keeping me alive."

This quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help refugee children like Giselle obtain scholarships to study at Seventh-day Adventist schools in the North American Division. Giselle received financial assistance from a 2011 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering to study at an Adventist school in the U.S. state of Georgia. Through the influence of the school, she gave her heart to Jesus in baptism.

Part I: Overview

This week's lesson focuses on one of the saddest chapters in David's life. The king of Israel abused his God-given authority and led the wife of one of his soldiers into sin. Uriah was a warrior in David's army, fighting in a battle for his king. David took advantage of his absence.

When Bathsheba became pregnant because of David's lustful adultery, the king tried to cover up his sin. He called Uriah back from the fierceness of the battle to spend time with his wife. Uriah revealed his sterling character when he refused to enter his house while his army was fighting the enemy.

When David's initial plan did not work, he urged Joab, the captain of the king's army, to place Uriah in the front line of the battle so he would face certain death. David's lustful look led to a lustful act, which led to a deceptive plot to kill an innocent man. The devil's temptations are designed to meet each one of us at our weakest point. If there is a vulnerable point in our character, the devil will exploit that point to lead us into sin.

David recognized his guilt through a parable that the prophet Nathan told him. Brokenhearted, the king made an agonizing confession. His repentance was deep, genuine, and heartfelt. Psalm 51 is his earnest plea for forgiveness and a changed heart. God answered David's prayer. The king was forgiven, but forgiveness did not result in avoiding the tragic consequences of sin. In one way or another throughout his life, David experienced the terrible consequences of his sinful act. As a forgiven child of God, he entered Heaven's rest—but still experienced the anguish of his sinful act.

Part II: Commentary

One of the questions that immediately comes to mind when we study the experience of David's illicit, adulterous affair with Bathsheba is why God placed such a sordid story in the Bible. Why reveal the intimate details of David's life? Why not just say he sinned and was forgiven and end the story? Let's explore what God is teaching us through this narrative.

There are at least four deeply significant lessons here. Second Samuel 11:1 is a telling verse. In a few short words, Scripture points out a flaw in David's character. It was the spring of the year, and Israel was in a serious conflict with its enemies. Kings lead their armies into battle, but David sent Joab, the general of his army (*1 Chron. 27:34*), to the fight.

The text states, “But David remained at Jerusalem.” Courageous kings fight alongside their armies. They inspire their weary, battle-worn forces to continue fighting. David chose to remain in his palace, enjoying the delights of royalty, while his men suffered and died in a war. Here is the first lesson from David’s fall. When you fail to do your duty, when you indulge in pleasurable desires at the expense of doing what is right, you become vulnerable to Satan’s alluring temptations.

The second lesson follows swiftly on the heels of the first. Satan’s attacks come when they are least expected. David did not expect that when he walked on the roof of his palace that night that he would be captivated by the beauty of another man’s wife. The New Life Translation renders Proverbs 4:23 this way: “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.” Solomon, David’s second son by Bathsheba, wrote these words. As an adult, he must have known about David’s sin. When we let our guard down, Satan attacks. Therefore, Jesus said to His disciples, “ ‘Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak’ ” (*Mark 14:38, NKJV*). This was precisely David’s problem. In an unguarded moment, the weakness of the flesh led him into a sin that would change the entire course of his life.

Sinful Thoughts Lead to Sinful Acts.

Sin begins in the mind. David’s lustful look led to the next step, indulging his lustful fantasy. He ventured onto Satan’s ground when he acted on his thoughts and sent his servants to inquire about Bathsheba. His impulses, uncontrolled by the Holy Spirit, led to an inappropriate inquiry in order to indulge his desires by a sinful act. This leads us to our third lesson. Although David tried to cover up his adulterous affair with Bathsheba, sin can never be covered up for long. The words of Moses to the Israelites centuries before came true in his experience. “ ‘But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out’ ” (*Num. 32:23, NKJV*). Sinful acts done under the cover of darkness will one day come out in the blazing light of the day. For “all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (*Heb. 4:13, NKJV*).

David’s sinful act would not be concealed for long. Bathsheba was pregnant. Uriah was dead. Nathan the prophet confronted David with the sinful course of his actions. Sin done in darkness one day will come out in the open. Echoing and reechoing down the centuries are Moses’ words: “Your sin will find you out” (*Num. 32:23, NKJV*). The fourth lesson that we discover from this first part of the story is that although David wept, confessed his sin, repented of his evil deed, and was forgiven by God, the consequences of sin would remain.

Sin Is a Cancer Destroying Everything It Touches.

“Edwin Cooper was famous across America, yet almost no one knew his real name. Coming from a family of circus clowns, Cooper began performing before audiences when he was just nine years old. After a stint with the Barnum and Bailey Circus, he became a fixture on television in the 1950s as Bozo the Clown. In addition to entertaining both young and old, Cooper had a message for his ‘buddies and partners’ every week: get checked for cancer. Yet Cooper was so busy working that he neglected to follow his own advice. By the time his cancer was discovered, it was too late for it to be treated. Edwin Cooper died at just forty-one years of age from a disease that he had warned many others to watch out for. Sin is far more deadly than the most aggressive, malignant cancer. Sin kills and destroys everything it touches. From the Fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden until now, sin takes no prisoners. This is the purpose behind everything Satan does. Jesus said, ‘ “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy” ’ (John 10:10)” (“No Laughing Matter,” in *Reading Eagle*, July 5, 1961, accessed February 4, 2020, <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/no-laughing-matter>).

David’s Sin Had Deadly Consequences.

The results of David’s sin are seen throughout his life and in his own family. The child he bore with Bathsheba, as the result of his adultery, became ill and died. His son Amnon forced himself on his half sister Tamar and defiled her. In rage, two years later, Absalom, Tamar’s brother, had Amnon murdered. David’s life was filled with grief, sorrow, and disappointment. Absalom, David’s third son, whose mother was Maacah, was a great favorite of his father. Handsome, outgoing, adventuresome, and charming, he captured the heart of Israel. Eventually he rebelled against David’s leadership and was killed in battle. David’s heart was broken. Sin, like a cancer, had plagued his life. Although he was forgiven by God, the consequences of sin rested heavy upon him. One of the great lessons of this story is that sin has tragic consequences. Yet, despite sin’s consequences, God is always ready to forgive and rebuild our lives.

Analyzing David’s Pleas for Forgiveness: Psalm 51

One of the most powerful prayers in all the Bible is found in Psalm 51, which is David’s heartfelt appeal for forgiveness after his sin against Bathsheba. As we read the prayer, we are immediately struck with the genuineness of David’s confession. He is painfully honest. He makes no excuse for his sin. He appeals to God for mercy, forgiveness, and restoration into God’s favor. Notice the verbs in the prayer. They are powerful

indicators of David's motives. He prays, "Have mercy upon me, . . . blot out my transgressions" (*Ps. 51:1, NKJV*). "Wash me . . . cleanse me" (*Ps. 51:2, NKJV*). "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me" (*Ps. 51:3, NKJV*). "Purge me," "Wash me" (*Ps. 51:7, NKJV*). "Make me hear joy and gladness" (*Ps. 51:8, NKJV*). "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (*Ps. 51:10, NKJV*). "Do not cast me away from Your presence" (*Ps. 51:11, NKJV*). "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation" (*Ps. 51:12, NKJV*). Reading David's prayer, we can almost hear his heartfelt plea. Our own hearts are touched by his sincere confession. The incredibly good news is that God honors a "broken and contrite heart" (*Ps. 51:17*). As Ellen G. White says: "Jesus loves to have us come to Him just as we are, sinful, helpless, dependent. We may come with all our weakness, our folly, our sinfulness, and fall at His feet in penitence. It is His glory to encircle us in the arms of His love and to bind up our wounds, to cleanse us from all impurity."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 50. David experienced the cleansing power of Christ's forgiveness. His relationship with God was restored. His spirit was renewed. He once again entered a life of service for the Christ that loved him, forgave him, cleansed him, and transformed him.

Part III: Life Application

Sin is a double-edged sword. It brings not only guilt, shame, and condemnation but also hopelessness and discouragement. Once the devil leads us into temptation and we fall into his trap, his next step is to make us feel as though there is no hope. Discouragement is one of his most powerful weapons. Here are three facts to remember when you have fallen into temptation:

- Christ longs for you to come to Him just as you are. If, as David, you come with an honest heart, not making excuses for your sin, you, too, will experience God's forgiveness.
- Christ has never, ever cast out or rejected anyone who has sincerely come seeking His grace. In fact, He assures us that " 'the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out' " (*John 6:37, NKJV*).
- Christ's promises of forgiveness and restoration are as certain as His eternal throne. Your feelings are not the criteria of whether you are forgiven. You may not feel forgiven. You may still have feelings of guiltiness, but you can still have the assurance based on the Word of God that your sins are forgiven and that you are a child of God.

“ ‘Come to Me . . . ’ ”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Matt. 11:20–30, Matt. 5:5, Deut. 18:15, Gal. 5:1, Exod. 18:13–22, Gal. 6:2.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest’ ” (*Matt. 11:28, NKJV*).

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ ”

What a wonderful promise we have been given here by Jesus. After all, who among us at times hasn’t felt heavy-laden, if not so much with work itself (though that can often be the case) but with the labor and heavy-ladenness that life itself brings? And Jesus here is telling us that, yes, He knows what we are going through, and, yes, He can help us—that is, if we let Him.

And then, after telling us to bear His yoke, Jesus says, “ ‘For My yoke is easy and My burden is light’ ” (*Matt. 11:30, NKJV*). In other words, *Get rid of the yokes and burdens that you are carrying (give them to Me) and take Mine upon yourself instead, for Mine are easier to bear.*

How can we experience the rest that Jesus is talking about? After all, we live in a world where, after sin, the Lord said to Adam, “ ‘In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread’ ” (*Gen. 3:19, NKJV*). Thus, we have known what it is like to labor and to be carrying burdens that can seem way too hard to bear, at least by ourselves.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 31.

“ ‘I Will Give You Rest’ ”

Read Matthew 11:20–28, where Jesus says: “ ‘Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest’ ” (*NKJV*). What is the context of this statement? How does Jesus give us this rest?

As all of us, Jesus never spoke without a context. In order to understand Him, we need to grasp the specific context surrounding a particular statement, especially if we want to avoid misinterpreting Jesus.

Matthew 11 marks a turning point in Matthew’s Gospel. The statements denouncing important Galilean cities are the harshest heard so far in the Gospel. Jesus does not curry favors; He puts the finger where it hurts; He associates with the “wrong” people (*Matt. 9:9–13*); His claim to be able to forgive sins is scandalous in the eyes of the religious leaders (*Matt. 9:1–8*).

Indeed, Jesus speaks some powerfully condemning words to the people, even comparing them, unfavorably, to Sodom, viewed then (as today) as a place of implacable wickedness. “ ‘But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you’ ” (*Matt. 11:24, NKJV*).

Tensions are rising—and yet, in the midst of all of this, Jesus changes gear and offers true rest. He can do so because “ ‘all things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father’ ” (*Matt. 11:27, NKJV*). Jesus’ ability to give rest is based on His divinity and His oneness with the Father.

Before we can come to unload our burdens, we need to understand that we cannot carry them alone. In fact, most of us will not come unless we have recognized our true condition. Jesus’ invitation is need based.

His statement in Matthew 11:28 begins with an imperative in the Greek original. “ ‘Come’ ” is not optional; “come” represents the precondition of finding rest. “Come” means that we need to surrender control. In a time when we can conveniently control many things in our lives via our smartphones, coming to Jesus is not a natural direction. In fact, for most people, surrender is the toughest part of the Christian life.

We love to talk, and rightly so, about all that God does for us in Christ and how we cannot save ourselves and the like. All that is true. But in the end, we still have to make the conscious choice to “come” to Jesus, which means surrender to Him. Here is where the reality of free will becomes front and center in the Christian life.

What burdens are you carrying? How can you learn to give them to Jesus and experience the rest He offers at so great a cost to Himself?

“ ‘Take My Yoke Upon You’ ”

Read Matthew 11:29, 30. Why does Jesus command us to take His yoke right after He has invited us to give Him our burdens and find true rest?

After the first imperative “ ‘come’ ” in Matthew 11:28, two more imperatives follow in Matthew 11:29. “ ‘Take’ ” and “ ‘learn’ ” focus the attention of the audience (and the reader) on Jesus. We are to take His yoke and learn from Him.

The intimate relationship in the Godhead between the Father and the Son (*already intimated in Matt. 11:25–27*) offers a powerful illustration that may explain the yoke metaphor in these verses. Both the Father and the Son are working unitedly to save humanity. While the yoke is a symbol of submission (*see Jeremiah 27*), it also is a metaphor illustrating united purpose. We submit to His yoke and accept the task He gives us to bless those around us. We are not carrying His yoke; we are just yoked to Him because His yoke “ ‘is easy’ ” and His burden “ ‘is light’ ” (*Matt. 11:30*).

The second imperative, “ ‘learn from Me,’ ” reiterates this concept. In Greek the verb “learn” is connected to the term “disciple.” When we learn from Jesus, we are truly His disciples. Obedience and commitment are characteristics of discipleship.

What is the difference between being “heavy laden” (*Matt. 11:28*) and taking up His yoke (*Matt. 11:29*)?

The yoke was a common metaphor in Judaism for the law. Acts 15:10 uses it in reference to the law of circumcision. Galatians 5:1 contrasts the liberty Jesus offers with the yoke of bondage, which is a reference to the law as a means of salvation. Being yoked to Jesus emphasizes obedience and commitment to follow in His footsteps and to participate in His mission. While we cannot hope to add anything to the salvation that Jesus won for us on the cross, we can become His ambassadors and share the good news with those around us. Jesus’ interpretation of the law, as demonstrated in the Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew 5–7*) is even more radical than the Pharisees’ take on it. It requires heart surgery and transforms our motives—and, His yoke is easy and His burden is light (*Matt. 11:30*).

What a wonderful promise! Rest for your souls. How have you experienced that rest? What is it like? By focusing on Jesus and on what He offers us, how can we begin to know that rest?

“ ‘I Am Gentle and Lowly in Heart’ ”

Gentleness is an underrated quality today. Humility is laughed at. Social media has taught us to pay attention to the loud, the noisy, the weird and wild, and the flamboyant. Truly so many of the world’s standards are the opposite of what God deems important and valuable.

“A knowledge of the truth depends not so much upon strength of intellect as upon pureness of purpose, the simplicity of an earnest, dependent faith. To those who in humility of heart seek for divine guidance, angels of God draw near. The Holy Spirit is given to open to them the rich treasures of the truth.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 59.

Read Matthew 5:5, 1 Peter 3:4, and Isaiah 57:15. How would you define meekness and humility based on these texts?

Paul refers to “the meekness and gentleness of Christ” in 2 Corinthians 10:1. Meekness and humility are not descriptions of pushovers, of people who cannot stand their own ground. Jesus Himself did not seek confrontation and often avoided it because His mission had not yet been fulfilled (*John 4:1–3*). When confrontation came to Him, however, He responded boldly. Yet, at the same time, He spoke kindly. His laments over Jerusalem just prior to the cross, for example, were not shouted curses but tear-filled word pictures of a devastating future (*Luke 19:41–44*).

In the New Testament, Jesus is often portrayed as the Second Moses. He speaks from a mountain when He lays out the principles of His kingdom (*Matt. 5:1*). He provides large crowds with miracle food (*Matt. 14:13–21*). Numbers 12:3 describes Moses as “meek,” which is echoed in Matthew 11:29. People witnessing the feeding of the 5,000 exclaim in wonder, “ ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world’ ” (*John 6:14, NKJV*)—a reference to Deuteronomy 18:15 and Moses’ role as a prophet.

Jesus’ humility and meekness clearly supersede Moses’. After all, He is our divine Savior. While Moses offered to give himself to save his people (*Exod. 32:32*), his death would not have accomplished anything, for Moses was a sinner himself and in need of a Savior, a Sin Bearer to pay for his sins. Though we can learn from Moses and the story of his life, we cannot find salvation in him.

Instead, we need a Savior who can stand in our stead, not just as an Intercessor but as our Substitute. Intercession is important, but it is only God hanging on the cross as our Sin Bearer, as the One who paid in Himself the penalty for our sin, who can save us from the legal consequences that our sins would, justly, bring on us. This is why, however great the example Jesus was for us, it would all be for nothing without the Cross and the Resurrection.

“ ‘For My Yoke Is Easy’ ”

We already noticed that Matthew’s use of “yoke” in this section echoes Judaism’s use of the term and those of other New Testament texts referring to a wrong understanding of the law.

The Greek term translated as “ ‘easy’ ” in Matthew 11:30 in the New King James Version also can be translated as “good, pleasant, useful, and benevolent.” Many people around us consider God’s law heavy-handed; difficult to comply with; and, at times, irrelevant. How can we help them to discover the beauty of the law and inspire love for the Lawgiver?

Parents always remember the moment their child took that first step. A wobbly first step is followed by a tentative second step, then a third—and by then it’s most likely that the child will stumble and fall. There may be some tears and perhaps even a bruise, but once the child has felt the freedom of movement, he or she will get up and try again. Walk, fall, get up, walk, fall, get up. The sequence repeats itself many times before the child can walk securely. And yet, amid stumbles and falls, there is a proud little face triumphantly declaring: *Papa, Mama, I can walk!*

Walking with Jesus may not always be easy, but it’s always good and the right thing to do. We may stumble; we may even fall; yet, we can get up and continue to walk with Him at our side.

In Galatians 5:1, Paul wrote: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (NKJV). What does that mean? How has Christ made us free? What is the difference between the yoke He asks us to carry and the “yoke of bondage” that Paul warns us against?

We can be sure that whatever exactly Paul meant by the “yoke of bondage,” he was not referring to obedience to God’s law, the Ten Commandments. On the contrary, it’s through obedience, by faith, understanding that our salvation is secure, not based on the law but on Christ’s righteousness covering us, that we can have true rest and freedom.

Why is living a life of obedience to God’s law one of more restfulness than one in which we disobey that law?

“ ‘My Burden Is Light’ ”

Jesus’ final statement in Matthew 11:30 uses the imagery of bearing a burden: “ ‘For My yoke is easy and My burden is light’ ” (NKJV).

Moses was delighted to see his father-in-law, Jethro, after Israel had left Egypt and crossed the sea. Read Exodus 18:13–22. What does bearing another person’s burden look like in this story?

Exodus 18:13 tells us that people came to Moses for judgments from morning to evening. When Moses’ father-in-law saw this, he earnestly pleaded with his son-in-law to establish a structure that would allow him to focus on the big things while trusting others to take care of the more mundane things. Scripture tells us that Moses listened to Jethro’s voice and implemented these life-giving changes.

When Jesus told us that His burden is light, He wanted to remind us that we can rely on Him, the ultimate Burden Bearer. Like Moses, we must learn that we need others to share our burdens. In 1 Corinthians 12:12–26, Paul’s imagery of the body of Christ offers a good illustration of what shared burdens may look like. We need a functioning body to be able to carry any weight. We need legs, arms, shoulders, muscles, and sinews to carry anything.

Read Galatians 6:2. How does bearing one another’s burdens help us fulfill the law of Christ?

The immediate context of this passage may offer some help. In Galatians 6:1, Paul states that if a brother or sister falls into temptation, we are to restore that person in a spirit of gentleness (remember Jesus’ claim in Matthew 11:29 that He is gentle). Burden bearing means restoring someone who has gone off the track in order to help that person see divine grace. But it also means helping one another when we, or they, suffer hardship. The Greek term for “burden” can refer to a heavy weight or stone. It’s a reminder that we all carry burdens and that we all need those who can help us carry the burdens. Burden sharing is a divinely ordained church activity requiring gentleness and producing compassion.

Think about the last time someone helped you carry a burden that you were struggling under. Why did that mean so much to you? Whose burden can you help carry now?

Further Thought: “When you find your work hard, when you complain of difficulties and trials, when you say that you have no strength to withstand temptation, that you cannot overcome impatience, and that the Christian life is uphill work, be sure that you are not bearing the yoke of Christ; you are bearing the yoke of another master.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 267.

“There is need of constant watchfulness and of earnest, loving devotion, but these will come naturally when the soul is kept by the power of God through faith. We can do nothing, absolutely nothing, to commend ourselves to divine favor. We must not trust at all to ourselves or to our good works; but when as erring, sinful beings we come to Christ, we may find rest in His love. God will accept every one that comes to Him trusting wholly in the merits of a crucified Saviour. Love springs up in the heart. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there is an abiding, peaceful trust. Every burden is light; for the yoke which Christ imposes is easy. Duty becomes a delight, and sacrifice a pleasure. The path that before seemed shrouded in darkness becomes bright with beams from the Sun of Righteousness. This is walking in the light as Christ is in the light.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, pp. 38, 39.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Do you remember the moment in your walk with Jesus when you finally surrendered? Share this moment in your class and focus particularly on the reason you surrendered.
- 2 Study Jesus’ prayer in Matthew 11:25–27 and discuss in your class how we gain knowledge of grace. Why does God hide the plan of salvation (“these things”) from the wise and prudent and reveal them to babes?
- 3 In a practical way, how can we help those around us struggling with their burdens to come to Jesus and find rest?
- 4 Dwell more on this idea of being “meek and lowly in heart.” Isn’t that bad for a person’s self-esteem? Shouldn’t we feel good about ourselves, especially people who struggle with self-doubts anyway? How should the cross, and what the cross represents, help us to understand what Jesus means about being “meek and lowly”? That is, in the presence of the Cross, why are meekness and lowliness the only real appropriate attitudes to have?

Praying Without Ceasing

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Ning Cing's two daughters wanted to go to a Seventh-day Adventist school when they arrived in the United States as refugees from Myanmar.

Eight-year-old Lun made it a matter of prayer during morning and evening family worship. "Please, God, help us," she prayed. "We want to go to an Adventist school. If You want, You can help us."

Nuam was only four and not ready for school, but that didn't deter her. "Please, God, help us," she prayed.

Their single mother, Ning, wished she had a choice other than public school in their new hometown in the state of Georgia. But she didn't have money to send Lun to the Adventist school. She had other problems as well. She couldn't speak English. She didn't know how to drive. She had no job.

Then the headaches started. The pain spread to her left arm and left side. She lost sight in her left eye.

Ning wept. How would she care for her daughters, much less send them to Adventist school? As she cried, she read the Bible and prayed. "God, please answer my prayer," she said. "Give me a miracle."

Slowly the pain disappeared, and her sight returned. A warehouse offered her work, and an Adventist pastor drove her to the job interview. When she was hired, coworkers picked her up at the house and took her back. Then she learned how to drive. Her salary, however, was small.

The first school year ended, and Nuam was old enough to start first grade in the fall. Both daughters kept praying. When the new school year started, both girls entered public school. Still they kept praying.

"God, please help us," Lun prayed. "Send kind, rich people to pay the school fees. We want to learn the Bible in school. We want to know You."

Three weeks into the school year, an Adventist friend called. Funds from a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering would help cover the girls' tuition at the Adventist school. "Your girls can start next week," the friend said.

Lun was ecstatic. "Thank You, God!" she exclaimed. "You are able to do everything. You heard our prayers. We love You, God. We praise You."

Nuam began to cry. "Oh, really?" she said. "God really answered our prayers?"

The sisters woke up early, at 5:30 A.M., for their first day of school. They eagerly watched and waited at the window for the school bus to arrive.

"God is very great to my family and me," Ning said. "He cares for us and loves us so much."



Thank you for your 2011 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering that helped Ning's daughters go to an Adventist school. This quarter's offering will again help refugee children get an Adventist education in the North American Division. Thank you for planning a generous offering.

Part I: Overview

Have you ever felt that the burdens you are carrying are just too heavy? Have you ever felt that your stress level is at its limit and you just cannot cope any longer? This week's lesson provides practical help when we come to the breaking point. In fact, whether our burdens are extremely heavy or relatively light, Jesus invites us to come to Him to find relief.

Our principal Bible passage this week is Matthew 11:28–30: “ ‘Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light’ ” (*NKJV*). Did you notice the three specific, triple-word commands in Christ's statement? First, He says, “ ‘Come unto Me.’ ” He is the Source of our peace. He is the Wellspring of our strength. He alone can lift our burdens. He is really the only One who can truly relieve the overwhelming stress we, at times, experience. The second triple-word command is “ ‘Take My yoke.’ ” Oxen that are yoked are united together for service. When we are united with Christ in service to others, our burdens become lighter. We will study more in-depth about what it means to be “yoked” with Christ in this week's lesson. The third triple-word command is “ ‘Learn from Me.’ ” Jesus carried the weight of this world upon His shoulders, yet He lived in an atmosphere of divine peace. He was not stressed out with the challenges He faced. In this week's lesson, we will explore this passage in considerable detail, especially emphasizing Jesus' longing for us to rest in Him and find peace of heart and mind.

Part II: Commentary

The story is told of an aged farmer trudging down a narrow, old-country, dirt road, carrying a sack of potatoes on his back. His shoulders slumped; his gait was labored and slow. It was an extremely hot summer day, and sweat poured off the old man's forehead. His spirits picked up a bit when a neighbor approached in his horse-drawn wagon and asked the old man if he wanted a ride. Happily, he climbed into the back of the wagon. As they rode along, his neighbor observed that the man still had the sack of potatoes on his back. He turned and said to the farmer, “Friend, get some relief. Just set your sack down.”

As the story goes, the old man simply responded, “You have been so

kind as to give me a ride; the least I can do is carry my load.” No doubt this story is fictional, but it illustrates the point of this week’s lesson well. It is possible for us to still carry our own heavy burdens even after we have come to Jesus. Our Savior longs to relieve us from the stress of carrying these burdens. He desires to carry our load. Let’s study how we can be free of the burdens that often crush our joy.

Come to Jesus.

Jesus invites us to come to Him. In a practical sense, what does this mean? Coming is a decision of the will. Coming implies our personal choice. Jesus has given to each one of us freedom of choice. He will not coerce the will. He will not pressure us to come. He graciously invites us. He impresses us with His Spirit to come. But coming is our choice. To come is to place our trust and confidence in His ability to lift the burden. We come in faith, believing that He is greater than the problem, larger than the difficulty, and bigger than the challenge. Ellen G. White shares this encouraging insight: “ ‘Come unto Me,’ is His invitation. Whatever your anxieties and trials, spread out your case before the Lord. Your spirit will be braced for endurance. The way will be opened for you to disentangle yourself from embarrassment and difficulty. The weaker and more helpless you know yourself to be, the stronger will you become in His strength. The heavier your burdens, the more blessed the rest in casting them upon the Burden Bearer.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 329.

Yoked With Jesus

When we come to Jesus, He invites us to take up His yoke. These words that were common to His first-century hearers seem strange to our ears. William Barclay, in his Bible commentary on Matthew 11:28–30, explains Jesus’ words regarding the yoke this way: “It is Jesus’ invitation to take His yoke upon our shoulders. The Jews used the phrase *the yoke* for *entering into submission to*. They spoke of the yoke of the Law, the yoke of the commandments, the yoke of the Kingdom, the yoke of God.” To take Christ’s yoke is to submit to His will. When the yoke was placed around the neck of the ox, the animal then submitted to the direction of its master.

According to Barclay, there may be a deeper meaning to Christ’s words: “It may well be that Jesus took the words of His invitation from something much nearer home than that. He says, ‘My yoke is *easy*.’ The word *easy* is in Greek *chrēstos*, which can mean *well-fitting*. In Palestine ox-yokes were made of wood; the ox was brought, and the measurements were taken. The yoke was then roughed out, and the ox was brought back to have the yoke tried on. The yoke was then care-

fully adjusted, so that it would fit well, and would not gall the neck of the patient beast. The yoke was tailor-made to fit the ox.”

Do you think that Jesus made yokes in the carpenter shop of Nazareth? Barclay talks about a legend that Jesus “made the best ox-yokes in all Galilee and that from all over the country men came to Him . . . to buy the best yokes that skill could make.” Can you imagine a sign above the door of Jesus’ carpenter shop that read something like this: “The best yokes in all of Galilee made here”?

The yoke that Jesus places around our neck to unite us to Him fits well. He becomes our Partner in service and is yoked with us. What He means is: “The life I give you is not a burden to you; your task is made to measure in order to fit you.” Whatever God sends us is made to fit our needs and our abilities exactly. As the apostle Paul states: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (*1 Cor. 10:13, NKJV*). Yoked with Jesus, we have the absolute assurance that He will strengthen us to bear any temptation, trial, or tribulation that confronts us. The rest that Christ gives us is the assurance that He is by our side to enable us to thrive in every one of life’s challenges.

Ellen G. White adds: “ ‘Take My yoke upon you,’ Jesus says. The yoke is an instrument of service. Cattle are yoked for labor, and the yoke is essential that they may labor effectually. By this illustration Christ teaches us that we are called to service as long as life shall last. We are to take upon us His yoke, that we may be co-workers with Him. The yoke that binds to service is the law of God. The great law of love revealed in Eden, proclaimed upon Sinai, and in the new covenant written in the heart, is that which binds the human worker to the will of God. If we were left to follow our own inclinations, to go just where our will would lead us, we should fall into Satan’s ranks and become possessors of his attributes. Therefore God confines us to His will, which is high, and noble, and elevating. He desires that we shall patiently and wisely take up the duties of service.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 329. To take His yoke is to submit to His will, and in submitting to His will, we have the highest sense of freedom and the greatest sense of peace.

Learn From Jesus.

The last of the three commands of Christ in Matthew 11:29 is “ ‘Learn of Me’ ” (*NKJV*). As we study the life of Christ, one predominant theme

comes through. Christ was totally committed to doing the Father's will. In John 8:29, Jesus says, " 'I always do those things that please Him' " (*NKJV*). In His final intercessory prayer in John 17, Jesus prays, " 'that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You' " (*John 17:21, NKJV*). There was an unbroken oneness between Jesus and His Father. Never once in His earthly life did Jesus decide to act or think contrary to the Father's will. Even in the most difficult time of His life, Jesus surrendered His own will to the Father's will. In Gethsemane, when the fate of the world trembled in the balance and Satan wrung the heart of Jesus with his fiercest temptations, Jesus prayed, " 'Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will' " (*Matt. 26:39, NKJV*). Perfect peace comes when our hearts and minds are one with Christ's mind. When, as the old song says, there is "nothing between my soul and the Savior," we are at peace. Sin disturbs our peace. A broken relationship between us and Jesus upsets our peace. When we come to Him desiring to do His will, yoked with Him in service, He promises, " 'You will find rest for your souls' " (*Matt. 11:29, NKJV*).

Part III: Life Application

Can you think of anything in your life that would keep you from a full surrender to Jesus? Is there anything that would keep you from coming to Him? There are many people who think they cannot come to Christ unless they first repent of their sins and give up their bad habits. The truth is that we come to Jesus just as we are with all our faults, tormented by guilt and plagued with the weakness of our flesh. When we come, He accepts us with open arms. He gives us the gift of repentance. He accepts our confession. He receives us as His sons and daughters. He empowers us to overcome. Yoked with Him, we become new creatures in Christ. This week, consider beginning your day with these two statements:

- Jesus, today I come to You. I acknowledge that You are the Source of my peace, purpose, and joy in life. I submit my will to You today and lay all my plans at Your feet.
- Jesus, reveal to me anything in my life that is not in harmony with Your will. Where I have attitudes, feelings, desires, and habits that are contrary to Your will, please reveal them to me. Today, my chief desire is to please You.

Notes



TOTAL MEMBER INVOLVEMENT TIME

What is Total Member Involvement?

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

HOW TO IMPLEMENT TMI TIME IN SABBATH SCHOOL

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

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

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

**Adjust times as necessary.*

UNITED BY MISSION



Mariah



Jaira



Katelyn and Kallie

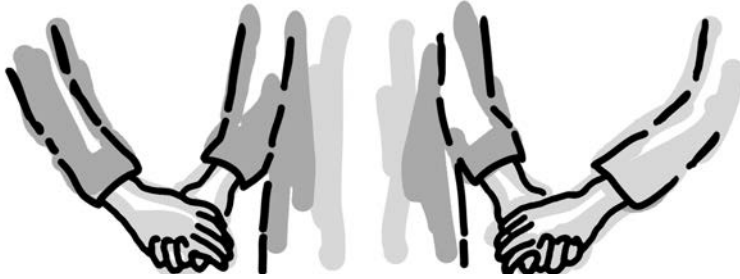
A 9-year-old girl invites classmates to family worship in the Canadian Arctic. A 9-year-old girl writes thank you letters in the Marshall Islands. Two sisters sing on the walk to church in the U.S. state of Arizona. What do they have in common? They are united by the Seventh-day Adventist Church's mission in the North American Division, which will receive this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.

Read more in the youth and adult Mission magazine (bit.ly/adultmission) and the Children's Mission magazine (bit.ly/childrensmision).

Thank you for supporting Adventist Mission with your prayers and Sabbath School mission offerings.

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Finding Rest *in* Family Ties



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Genesis 34; Heb. 11:17–22; Deut. 4:29; 1 John 3:1, 2; Genesis 39; Eph. 6:1–13.*

Memory Text: “You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen” (2 Peter 3:17, 18, NKJV).

The young man carefully scanned the horizon. Then, finally, he saw them. He had been looking for his brothers for days. As he approached, waving and calling to the grim-faced group, he got anything but a warm welcome. *His own brothers actually wanted to kill him.* If it hadn’t been for Reuben, there may have been no story to tell. Reuben convinced the rest just to rough him up a bit and throw him into a dry well. Later, Judah came up with the grand scheme to get rid of him and make a bit of money, too, by selling him to some passing slave traders.

What an example of family dysfunction!

We get to choose many things in life—but not our family. No one is perfect, and none of us have perfect families and perfect family relationships. Some of us are blessed by parents, siblings, and other family members that reflect God’s love, but many have to settle for less than the ideal. Family relationships often are complicated and painful, leaving us restless, hurt, and carrying loads of emotional baggage that we, in turn, off-load on others.

How can we find God’s rest in this area of our lives? This week we turn to the story of Joseph and his family ties in order to watch God at work bringing healing and emotional rest despite dysfunctional family relationships.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 7.

Dysfunction at Home

Joseph knew about dysfunctional families. It had started with his great-grandparents, Abraham and Sarah. When Sarah realized that she was barren, she had convinced Abraham to go in to her servant Hagar. As soon as Hagar was pregnant, the rivalry began. Growing up in this atmosphere, Ishmael and Isaac took the tension into their own families. Isaac made a point of favoring Esau, and Jacob spent his life trying to earn his father's love and respect. Later on, Jacob was tricked into marrying two sisters who did not get along and competed with each other through a childbearing race, even enlisting their maids to bear Jacob's children.

Review the incident detailed in Genesis 34. What kind of emotional and relational impact would this incident have had on the family as a whole and on young Joseph as well?

The rivalry between the mothers obviously spilled over to the children, who grew up ready to pick a fight. As young adults, Joseph's older brothers already had massacred all the males in the town of Shechem. The oldest brother, Reuben, displayed dominance and defiance to his aging father by sleeping with Bilhah, Rachel's maid and the mother of several of Jacob's children (*Gen. 35:22*). Meanwhile, Joseph's brother Judah mistook his widowed daughter-in-law for a prostitute and ended up having twins with her (*Genesis 38*).

Jacob added fuel to the fire of all this family tension by his obvious favoritism toward Joseph in giving him an expensive colorful coat (*Gen. 37:3*). If ever there was a dysfunctional family, the patriarch's family could have competed with it.

Why do you think that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all listed as faith heroes in Hebrews 11:17–22 when you consider their messy family relationships?

God's faith champions often fall short of their own and God's expectations. These men are listed in Hebrews 11 not because of their messy family relationships but in spite of them. They learned—often the hard way—about faith, love, and trust in God as they wrestled with these family issues.

What family dysfunction have you inherited? How can surrendering yourself to the Lord and His ways help break that pattern, at least for the future?

Choosing a New Direction

Joseph takes pain, complicated relationships, and anxiety with him as he travels to Egypt, where he is to be sold as a slave. This was not a restful trip as he fought back the tears.

“Meanwhile, Joseph with his captors was on the way to Egypt. As the caravan journeyed southward toward the borders of Canaan, the boy could discern in the distance the hills among which lay his father’s tents. Bitterly he wept at the thought of that loving father in his loneliness and affliction. Again the scene at Dothan came up before him. He saw his angry brothers and felt their fierce glances bent upon him. The stinging, insulting words that had met his agonized entreaties were ringing in his ears. With a trembling heart he looked forward to the future. What a change in situation—from the tenderly cherished son to the despised and helpless slave! Alone and friendless, what would be his lot in the strange land to which he was going? For a time Joseph gave himself up to uncontrolled grief and terror. . . .

“Then his thoughts turned to his father’s God. In his childhood he had been taught to love and fear Him. Often in his father’s tent he had listened to the story of the vision that Jacob saw as he fled from his home an exile and a fugitive. . . . Now all these precious lessons came vividly before him. Joseph believed that the God of his fathers would be his God. *He then and there gave himself fully to the Lord, and he prayed that the Keeper of Israel would be with him in the land of his exile.*”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 213, 214; italics supplied.

Some cultures emphasize the role of the community over the individual while other cultures are inclined to emphasize the role of the individual over the community. While we find a balance between these two in Scripture, there is clearly a call to personal as well as corporate commitment to God. Joseph begins to find rest in his relationships by making a personal decision to follow God.

What do the following verses teach us about personal commitment? (See Deut. 4:29, Josh. 24:15, 1 Chron. 16:11, Ps. 14:2, Prov. 8:10, Isa. 55:6.)

To find rest, we each must make a personal decision to follow God. Even if our ancestors were spiritual giants, this faith and spirituality aren’t transmitted genetically. Remember, God has only children, no grandchildren.

Why is it important every day, even every moment of every day, to choose to commit yourself to God? What happens when you don’t?

Finding True Self-Worth

If Joseph had entertained any hopes of escaping and finding his way back home, they were dashed on reaching Egypt, where Joseph was resold into a prominent household. Genesis 39:1 tells us that “Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites” (NKJV). Suddenly the young man was thrust into a strange, new language and culture.

Our families and close relationships are pivotal in the development of our self-esteem. Joseph had grown up believing that he was something special—the oldest son of the most beloved wife (*Gen. 29:18*). He was definitely his father’s favorite—and the only one with a beautiful coat of many colors (*Gen. 37:3, 4*).

But who was he now? A slave, someone who could be bought or sold at will. Look at how quickly his whole situation changed. Look at how quickly life seemed to have turned on him.

Indeed, Joseph learns the lesson that we all have to learn. If we are dependent on others to tell us what we are worth, then we will be in for a rough ride and be horribly confused, because not everyone is going to appreciate who we are or what we are like. Instead, we need to find our self-worth in what God thinks of us—how God sees us—and not in the roles that we currently have.

How does God see each of us? (See *Isa. 43:1; Mal. 3:17; John 1:12; John 15:15; Rom. 8:14; 1 John 3:1, 2*.)

God looks at each of us with glasses tinted with grace. He sees a potential, beauty, and talent that we can’t even imagine. Ultimately, He was prepared to die for us so that we could have the opportunity to become all we were created to be. Though showing us our sinfulness and the great price it cost to redeem us from it, the Cross also shows us our great worth and value to God. Regardless of what others think of us or even what we think about ourselves, God loves us and seeks to redeem us from not only the power of sins now but also from the eternal death that they bring.

The key question, then, is always the same: How do we respond to the reality of God’s love, as revealed in Jesus Christ?

There are many groups and individuals telling us to love ourselves as we are and accept ourselves uncritically. Why is this really self-deception? Why is it important that our worth come from outside of ourselves, from the One who made us and knows our true potential?

Doing Relationships God's Way

Initially Joseph's story in Egypt takes a positive turn. Joseph has entrusted himself to God, and God blesses Joseph, who rises to heights he would not have imagined in Potiphar's household.

In what practical ways could God's blessings be seen in Joseph's life? What are Joseph's interpersonal relationships like? Read Genesis 39:1–6.

Although Joseph seems to be getting along very well with Potiphar, and his relationships with the staff in the house and the field seem to be smooth—trouble is brewing. Someone at home is restless.

What relationship problem is Joseph facing? How does he choose to manage it? Read Genesis 39:7–10.

Joseph has a problem with Potiphar's wife. Perhaps we should reformulate that: *Potiphar's wife has a problem*. She looks at others as “things” that can be manipulated and used. She wants to “use” Joseph. Joseph is described as “handsome in form and appearance” (*Gen. 39:6, NKJV*). The Bible seldom mentions people's physical traits, because God “ ‘does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart’ ” (*1 Sam. 16:7, NKJV*). In this case, Joseph's good looks seem to be more of a hindrance than a help in his pursuit of purity and faithfulness to God's principles.

Despite this wicked woman's insistence, Joseph did something seemingly counterproductive. He applied biblical principles to all relationships—in this case Potiphar's wife. Biblical principles for relationships are not old-fashioned, as anyone (which is everyone) who has suffered the consequences of sin can attest.

The biblical narrative points out that this was not a one-off temptation. Potiphar's wife pursued him again and again (*Gen. 39:10*). Joseph tried explaining his motivation for his decision (*Gen. 39:8, 9*), but this did not seem to work.

Joseph realized that he could not control the choices of others. He decided, however, to live, love, and treat those around him in a way that would honor God. Joseph had learned to live in God's presence. This knowledge helped him resist temptation.

Have you tried to apply biblical principles to all your relationships, even those where the other person is not “playing fair”? How did it work out? Read Matthew 5:43–48. Why is it important to live like this?

The Great Controversy, Up Close and Personal

As we know from reading the story (*Gen. 39:11–20*), Joseph suffered because of his principled decision. Joseph was thrown into prison. As Potiphar's property, Joseph could have been killed on the spot, no questions asked. Potiphar obviously didn't believe his wife but had to guard his reputation by taking action. And yet, despite the horrific circumstances, Scripture says, "The LORD was with Joseph" (*Gen. 39:21*).

Life on planet Earth isn't fair. Good is not always rewarded, and evil is not always immediately punished. There is some good news, though: Joseph could find rest, even in prison, because God was with him. In prison he could have meditated on the unfairness of his situation, withdrawn, and even given up on God.

What did Joseph do while in prison? How did he relate to those around him? Read *Genesis 39:21–40:22*.

In prison, Joseph worked with the real, not the ideal. He networked; he helped others, even though relationships in prison were far from the ideal that he must have wished for. And Joseph was not above asking for help and making himself vulnerable. He asked for help from the cupbearer when he interpreted his dream.

What is the big-picture perspective on relationships that Paul presents in *Ephesians 6:1–13*?

Our relationships are miniature reflections of the great controversy between God and Satan that is raging through the ages. This means, then, that *there are no perfect relationships*. Every relationship must have growth dynamics, and Satan has a vested interest in using all our relationships—especially those closest to us—to his advantage in order to hurt and frustrate God's will for our lives. We can be thankful that we are not left to fight these battles on our own. God's Word sets out principles for our relationships. His promise to give us wisdom (*James 1:5*) also extends to our relationships. And as He was with Joseph, He promises to be with us when our relationships prove complex.

Think about God's promise in James 1:5, and take a moment to pray for wisdom in your relationships. How can you seek to be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as you relate to these people?

Further Thought: In the context of what happened to Joseph with Potiphar’s wife, Ellen White wrote: “Here is an example to all generations who should live upon the earth. . . . God will be a present help, and his Spirit a shield. Although surrounded with the severest temptations, there is a source of strength to which they can apply and resist them. How fierce was the assault upon Joseph’s morals. It came from one of influence, the most likely to lead astray. Yet how promptly and firmly was it resisted. . . . He had placed his reputation and interest in the hands of God. And although he was suffered to be afflicted for a time, to prepare him to fill an important position, yet God safely guarded that reputation that was blackened by a wicked accuser, and afterward, in his own good time, caused it to shine. God made even the prison the way to his elevation. Virtue will in time bring its own reward. The shield which covered Joseph’s heart, was the fear of God, which caused him to be faithful and just to his master, and true to God. He despised that ingratitude which would lead him to abuse his master’s confidence, although his master might never learn the fact.”—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 132.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Being nominal Christians or cultural Adventists will not help us to find rest in our relationships. What are the differences between “cultural” Adventists and true believers?
- 2 Sister X has just joined the church. She is married to a non-believer. She loves her husband, but he doesn’t love the changes he sees in her. What would be your counsel, based on biblical principles, to your new church member?
- 3 Russian author Leo Tolstoy wrote: “All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” All families, to one degree or another, suffer dysfunction, because all are made of sinners, each one bringing their own dysfunction into the family relationship. How can each one of us, by God’s grace, seek to follow biblical principles of love, forgiveness, burden bearing, and so forth to bring some healing to our family relationships?
- 4 So many people have had the experience of things going well for them and their family when, suddenly, unexpectedly, tragedy strikes. At times like this, why is clinging to faith, clinging to the promises in the Word of God, so crucial? Especially when times are good, why is it important to be prepared, spiritually, for bad times?

Asking God for 100 Dollars

By ANDREW McCHESENEY

Eighteen-year-old college student Roman Cardwell prayed a simple prayer before leaving home in Salem, a city in the U.S. state of Oregon.

“God, if you give me \$100, I will buy stuff for the homeless,” he prayed.

As a full-time welding student, Roman didn’t have much money of his own. He didn’t tell anyone about his morning prayer.

Later that day, he drove to the supermarket, grabbed an empty shopping cart, and began pushing it down an aisle. Finding a bag of bagels, he placed it in the cart. After that, he picked up a container of cream cheese to go with the bagels.

Then he looked down. His eyes widened in surprise. Lying in the cart was a crisp \$100 bill. He blinked and picked up the money. The word “Benny” was written across it.

“Benny” is somewhat of a celebrity in Salem. For years, somebody named “Benny” has been going into local stores and sneaking \$100 bills into shopping carts and purses or placing the money behind goods on the shelves. The unknown benefactor always writes the name “Benny” on the money, and it is believed that “Benny” has given away \$50,000.

As soon as Roman stepped out of the supermarket, he called his father to tell him about his secret prayer and the unexpected answer.

“What do the homeless need most?” Roman asked. “I want to go shopping for them now.”

His father, Dale Cardwell, couldn’t have been happier. He is the pastor of Inside Out Ministries, a Seventh-day Adventist church in Salem that has more homeless members than members who have homes.

“We see miracles everyday as we minister to the gangs, homeless, and severely broken,” he said in an interview.

He has many questions for God about the remarkable answer to his son’s prayer: Who placed the money in the cart? Why was Roman’s cart chosen? Did God tell “Benny” about the prayer? What if Roman had asked for \$1,000? What if we all made selfless requests to God?

James 4:2, 3 says, “You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures” (NIV).



While Roman and his father assist the marginalized in Salem, part of this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering with help a marginalized group—refugees—across the North American Division. You can be a “Benny” and plan a generous contribution.

Part I: Overview

For many people, the title of this week's lesson may seem a little strange. How can you find rest in family ties if your family is dysfunctional? What if you have an authoritative, overbearing father? Perhaps you have little or no relationship with your mother? Or what if there are intense sibling rivalries? Of course, there are many families with close bonds of affection. The home is a supportive place where love is openly expressed. But this is not always the case.

We can take courage from Joseph's experience. Rejected by his jealous brothers, sold into slavery, separated from his family, unjustly condemned and imprisoned, Joseph still maintained his faith. The trials he experienced did not make him bitter; they led him to trust God more fully. Through these trials, God was shaping his character and preparing him for a position of honor in the Egyptian kingdom. One day, he would sit with the Pharaoh on the throne of Egypt as a trusted advisor and overseer of vast resources.

This week's lesson focuses on two eternal truths. First, though we may go through trials and face difficulties, this does not in any way mean that God has forsaken us or loves us any less. God's love reaches us where we are, no matter what life throws at us. Second, the challenges we face are often preparing us for something far greater than we can imagine. God has a plan through it all and is working to accomplish His ultimate purpose in our lives. The story of Joseph is the story of a young man who was faithful to God amid a dysfunctional family relationship, but God eventually used him to save his family and restore the relationship he had lost.

Part II: Commentary

The groundbreaking study titled *Cradles of Eminence* analyzes the childhood experiences of more than 400 individuals deemed "eminent" by the psychologist authors, Victor and Mildred George Goertzel. *Eminent* is defined as superior or achieving excellence in their field, as opposed to having natural talents. These people are scientists, politicians, movie stars, entrepreneurs, authors, playwrights, and

sports heroes. The question that the Goertzels raised was, What early childhood experiences shaped the future lives of these outstanding individuals?

What they discovered surprised them. Many of these people experienced childhood trauma. Some were sickly. Others were brought up in dysfunctional families, and still others experienced significant childhood injuries. A number of these children who achieved excellence were raised in loving supportive families. The shocking truth of *Cradles of Eminence* is that our fundamental choices and the discovery of our real purpose in life are more important than our environment or genetics in determining the heights that we reach and the contributions to society that we make.

This was certainly true in the story of Joseph. Think about his genetic background for a moment. He came from the sin-stained line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There were liars and thieves in his family tree. His paternal home was punctuated with dysfunction. His father's favoritism angered his brothers. They exhibited jealousy, greed, and bitterness. Their solution: get rid of Joseph. Think of Joseph's journey and remember his genetics and his dysfunctional family environment.

Joseph's Challenges

Joseph was sold into slavery when he was 17 years old (*Gen. 37:2*). In Egypt, after faithfully serving in Potiphar's household, Joseph was unjustly condemned and wrongfully imprisoned. Even after successfully interpreting the dreams of the baker and the butler (as Joseph predicted, the butler was freed and reassumed his position in Pharaoh's service after three days), Joseph was left to languish in prison for two more years. When Pharaoh had his dreams about the seven fat cows and seven lean cows, and the seven full ears of corn and the seven lean ears, the butler remembered Joseph. According to Genesis 41:46, Joseph was now 30 years old. Thirteen difficult years had passed. All during this time Joseph had remained faithful to God. His unwavering faith, sterling integrity, and farseeing wisdom placed him in a position of favor with Pharaoh, and he became the second-in-command in the Egyptian empire.

Joseph's Faithfulness/God's Blessings

The experiences of the past 13 years had prepared Joseph for the present moment. Thirteen years before in Potiphar's house, the Scripture declares, "And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did prosper in his hand" (*Gen. 39:3, NKJV*). Joseph's past did not determine his present. He was faithful to God and received God's favor, even in the most challenging circumstances. When Potiphar's wife made unwanted advances toward Joseph continually, he

fled. His words to her are classic: “ ‘How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?’ ” (*Gen. 39:9, NKJV*). When he was unjustly imprisoned, his leadership ability and unsullied character impressed the jailer. Once again, Joseph rose to a leadership position. God favored him. The narrative states, “But the LORD was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison” (*Gen. 39:21, NKJV*). After interpreting the butler’s and baker’s dreams, Joseph did not become overanxious about his imprisonment. He determined to trust God and do his best at the task that lay nearest. When eventually called to interpret the pharaoh’s dream, he took no credit for himself. He simply said, “ ‘It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace’ ” (*Gen. 41:16, NKJV*). When Pharaoh understood the dream and its significance, he chose Joseph to build the storehouses to preserve the grain during the seven years of plenty because the “ ‘Spirit of God’ ” was in him and Joseph was “ ‘discerning’ ” and “ ‘wise’ ” (*Gen. 41:38, 39, NKJV*).

Joseph’s genetics or environment did not determine his future; his choice to trust in God did. His faith transcended his environment. This quote attributed to Aristotle speaks to the value of positive choices no matter what our situation or environment is: “Excellence is never an accident. It is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, and intelligent execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives—choice, not chance, determines your destiny” (“113 Aristotle Quotes That Changed Western History,” KeepInspiring.me, accessed February 6, 2020, <https://www.keepinspiring.me/Aristotle-quotes/>).

Joseph’s Trials Prepared Him for Success.

The most important factor in Joseph’s fidelity to God was his recognition that the circumstances of his life did not determine his relationship to God. God cared for him, loved him, and strengthened him in every circumstance of life. His difficult circumstances were not indicative of God’s concern for him. In fact, the opposite was true. As Ellen G. White so powerfully states: “Trials and obstacles are the Lord’s chosen methods of discipline and His appointed conditions of success. He who reads the hearts of men knows their characters better than they themselves know them. . . .

“The fact that we are called upon to endure trial shows that the Lord Jesus sees in us something precious which He desires to develop. If He saw in us nothing whereby He might glorify His name, He would not spend time in refining us. He does not cast worthless stones into His furnace. It is valuable ore that He refines. The blacksmith puts the iron and steel into the fire that he may know what manner of metal they are. The Lord allows His chosen ones to be placed in the furnace of affliction

to prove what temper they are of and whether they can be fashioned for His work.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 471.

It took 13 very challenging years, but God was preparing Joseph for something much greater. Joseph had no idea what God’s plans were. He could hardly imagine that he would go from the pit to the prison to the palace. In His farseeing wisdom, God was working for Joseph’s best good. Through this one man, God would save a nation. Joseph’s sojourn in Egypt not only preserved Egypt in a time of famine—but it also saved Israel from starvation.

Joseph never forgot that God had an eternal plan for his life. As Isaiah would write centuries later: “But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you’ ” (*Isa. 43:1, 2, NKJV*). God’s eternal promise to Joseph and each of His followers is that we are “‘precious . . . honored . . . loved’ ” (*Isa. 43:4, NKJV*). He will never leave us or forsake us (*Heb. 13:5*). Whatever our background, whatever our environment, whatever our family situation, By His grace, the Lord is there to encourage and support us. He is there to lift our vision from what is to what will be. He is there to inspire us with His larger plans for our lives.

Part III: Life Application

Some of us in our Sabbath School class come from wonderful, supportive, godly homes. Others come from broken homes or homes where the conditions were, or are, less than ideal. No matter what our home life is (or was) like, every one of us will (as did Joseph) go through some difficult experiences in life. This week’s Sabbath School lesson really has one central thought: God has not forsaken us when we face life’s challenges. If, as Joseph, we choose to be faithful to God in the tough times, He will prepare us for something much greater than we can ever imagine.

- Read Psalm 139:17, 18 together in class and ask your class to share what difference this passage makes when you are going through difficult times.
- Ephesians 2:19, 20 describes an accepting family that in Christ we are a part of. Spend a moment in class personally reading this passage and considering what it means to you. Reflect on the idea that, through Christ, you are a member of the “household of God.” What does that mean to you in practical terms?

As you go through this week, remember Joseph’s experience. He was faithful to God for 13 long, difficult years. All during this time, God’s blessing was upon his life. Faithfulness in the present and trusting God today will prepare you and open the doors for a future beyond your imagination.

Notes

Rest, Relationships, *and* Healing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Gen. 42:7–20, Matt. 25:41–46, Gen. 42:21–24, Gen. 45:1–15, Luke 23:34, Gen. 50:15–21.*

Memory Text: “‘But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life’ ” (*Gen. 45:5, NKJV*).

A man had been accused of sexually assaulting a woman. She positively identified him in a police lineup. Though evidence made his guilt questionable, the woman was adamant that “Johnny” was the guilty party.

And so Johnny went to prison, where he rotted for 14 years for a crime that he did not commit. Only when DNA evidence exonerated him did the woman, “Joan,” realize her terrible mistake.

She wanted to meet Johnny after he had been released. What would this man, who had suffered so much, do when he came face-to-face with the woman who had ruined his life for so many years?

She was in a room, waiting for him to come. When he did, and they looked each other in the eyes, Joan burst into tears.

“Johnny just leaned down and took my hands, and he looked at me and said, ‘I forgive you.’ I couldn’t believe it. Here was this man whom I had hated and whom I wanted only to die. And yet, now, here he was, telling me, who had done him so much wrong, that he forgave me? Only then did I begin to understand what grace was really about. And only then did I begin to heal and have true rest.”

This week we will look at forgiveness and what it can do for restless human hearts.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 14.

Facing the Past

Eventually, things moved in the right direction for Joseph, big time. He not only got out of prison, but he also was made prime minister of Egypt after interpreting Pharaoh's dreams (*Genesis 41*). He was married and had two children of his own (*Gen. 41:50–52*). The storehouses of Egypt were full, and the predicted famine had begun. And then, one day, Joseph's brothers turned up in Egypt.

Read about the first encounter between Joseph and his brothers since they sold him into slavery in *Genesis 42:7–20*. Why the elaborate plot? What was Joseph trying to do with this first meeting?

Joseph had the power and could have taken his revenge on his brothers without having to justify himself. But, rather than revenge, Joseph was concerned about the members of his family at home. He was worried about his father. Was he still alive, or had a dysfunctional family become a family without a patriarch? And what about his brother Benjamin? As his father's delight and joy, Benjamin was now in the same position that Joseph had been. Had the brothers transferred their dangerous jealousy to Benjamin? Joseph was now in a position to look out for these vulnerable people in his family, and he did just that.

Practicing biblical principles in our relationships will not mean that we ever can or should accept abuse. Each one of us is precious in God's sight. Jesus paid the ultimate price on the cross for each one of us.

Why does Jesus take abuse or neglect of others so personally? Read *Matthew 25:41–46*.

We have all been bought through Jesus' blood, and legally we are all His. Anyone who is abusive is attacking Jesus' property.

Sexual abuse and emotional or physical violence are never to be a part of family dynamics. This is not just private family business to be resolved internally. This will require outside help and intervention. If you or someone in your family is being abused, please get help from a trusted professional.

What are some biblical principles that you need to apply to whatever difficult family relationships you are now experiencing?

Setting the Stage

Joseph had forgiven his brothers. We don't know exactly when Joseph forgave them, but it was obviously long before they showed up. Joseph probably would never have thrived in Egypt if he had not forgiven because, most likely, the anger and bitterness would have eaten away at his soul and damaged his relations with the Lord.

Several studies of survivors of tragedy inflicted on them by others have highlighted the fact that for victims of the most horrible suffering, forgiveness was a key factor to find healing and to get their lives together again. Without forgiveness, we remain victims. Forgiveness has more to do with ourselves than with the person or persons who have wronged us.

Even though Joseph had forgiven his brothers, he was not willing to let the family relationships pick up where he had left them—that is, at the dry pit at Dothan. He had to see if anything had changed.

What did Joseph overhear? Read Genesis 42:21–24. What did he learn about his brothers?

All communication had been taking place through an interpreter, and so Joseph's brothers were unaware that he could understand them. Joseph heard his brothers' confession. The brothers had thought that by getting rid of Joseph, they would be free from his reporting to their father. They thought that they would not have to put up with his dreams or watch him revel in the role of being their father's favorite. But instead of finding rest, they had been plagued by a guilty conscience all those years. Their deed had led to restlessness and a paralyzing fear of God's retribution. Joseph actually felt sorry for their suffering. He wept for them.

Joseph knew that the famine would still last several more years, and so he insisted that they bring Benjamin back with them the next time they came to buy grain (*Gen. 42:20*). He also kept Simeon hostage (*Gen. 42:24*).

After seeing that Benjamin was still alive, he organized a feast in which he obviously showed favoritism to Benjamin (*Gen. 43:34*) to see if the old patterns of jealousy were still there. The brothers didn't show any signs of being jealous, but Joseph knew how cunning they could be. After all, they did deceive a whole town (*Gen. 34:13*), and he surely figured that they must have lied to their own father about his fate (*Gen. 37:31–34*). So, he devised one more major test. (*See Genesis 44.*)

Read Genesis 45:1–15. What does this tell us about how Joseph felt about his brothers and the forgiveness he had given them? What lessons should we take away from this story for ourselves?

Forgive and Forget?

Forgiveness has been defined as the willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, condemnation, and revenge toward an offender or group who acts unjustly. Dr. Marilyn Armour, a family therapist who worked with Holocaust survivors in order to find out what these survivors had done to make sense of what had happened to them, writes: "The whole idea of forgiveness is an intentional act by the victim. It's not something that just happens."

Forgiveness doesn't mean that there will be no consequences. Forgiveness doesn't mean letting an abuser continue abusive patterns. Forgiveness means, instead, that we turn our resentment and our desire for revenge over to God. If not, the anger, the bitterness, the resentment, and the hatred will make whatever that person or persons did to us even worse.

What does forgiving others do for us? Consider Matthew 18:21–35.

No question, one of the keys in learning to forgive is to understand what we have been forgiven in Christ. We have all sinned, not just against other people but against God as well.

Every sin is, indeed, a sin against our Lord and Maker; and yet, in Jesus, we can claim total forgiveness for all those sins, not because we deserve it—we don't—but only because of God's grace toward us. Once we can grasp that sacred truth, once we can make this forgiveness our own, once we can experience for ourselves the reality of God's forgiveness, we can begin to let go and forgive others. We forgive not because others deserve it but because it's what we have received from God and what we need ourselves. And besides, how often do we deserve forgiveness as well?

As we saw, too, Joseph offered a second chance for the family relations. No grudges here; no falling back to things that happened in the past.

It is almost impossible to begin again in a family when we have each become experts at learning how best to hurt each other. But that's not how Joseph reacts. It seems that he wants to put the past behind them and to move ahead with love and acceptance. Had Joseph had a different attitude, this story would have had a different ending, one not so happy.

“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin” (Rom. 4:7, 8, NKJV). What is Paul telling us about what we have been given in Jesus and how this wonderful promise should impact how we relate to those who have hurt us?

Making It Practical

In order to forgive, I must admit that I have been hurt. This can be hard to do, as we are sometimes more inclined to try to bury our feelings rather than work through them. Acknowledging un-Christian feelings of resentment and even anger before God is fine. We see this often expressed in the Psalms. I can feel free to tell God that I didn't like what happened or how I was treated and that it makes me sad or angry or both.

In Joseph's story, we see him crying as he sees his brothers again and relives some of the feelings of his past.

What does Jesus' declaration on the cross tell us about the timing of forgiveness? Read Luke 23:34.

Jesus didn't wait for us to ask for forgiveness first. We do not have to wait for our offender to ask for forgiveness. We can forgive others without having them accept our forgiveness.

What do Luke 6:28 and Matthew 5:44 teach about how we relate to those who hurt us?

Forgiveness, like love, begins with a choice rather than a feeling. We can make the choice to forgive, even if our emotions may not agree with this decision. God knows that in our own strength this choice is impossible, but "with God all things are possible" (*Mark 10:27*). This is why we are told to pray for those who have hurt us. In some cases, this person may already have died, but we can still pray for the ability to forgive him or her.

No question, forgiveness isn't always easy. The pain and the damage done to us can be devastating, leaving us hurt, crippled, and broken. Healing will come, if we allow it, but holding on to bitterness and anger and resentment will make healing much harder, if possible at all.

The Cross is the best example of what it cost God Himself to forgive us. If the Lord can go through that for us, even though He knew that so many would, nevertheless, reject Him, then we certainly can learn to forgive as well.

Whom do you need to forgive—if not for that person's sake, then for your own?

Finding Rest After Forgiveness

Joseph's family finally arrived in Egypt. There were no more dark secrets in the family. His brothers must have admitted to having sold Joseph when they explained to their father that the son he thought had been killed was now prime minister of Egypt.

While it may not always be possible or wise to restore relationships, this does not mean that we cannot forgive. We may not be able to hug and weep with our offender, but we may want to voice our forgiveness either vocally or through a letter. And then it is time to let go of pain to the utmost degree we can. Perhaps some pain will always remain, but at least we can be on the path to healing.

Read Genesis 50:15–21. What are Joseph's brothers worried about, and why would they be worried about it? What does this fear say about them?

Joseph's brothers had been living in Egypt for 17 years (*Gen. 47:28*), and yet, when Jacob died, they were afraid that Joseph would take his revenge. They realized again how much they had hurt Joseph. Joseph reassured them of his forgiveness again, now after their father's death. This refresher was probably good for Joseph, as well as his brothers.

If the wound is deep, we will probably have to forgive many times. When memories of the wrong come to mind, we will need to go to God immediately in prayer and make the choice to forgive again.

Read Genesis 50:20. How does this verse help explain, at least partially, Joseph's willingness to forgive his brothers' sin against him?

Joseph firmly believed that his life was part of God's big plan to help save the then-known world from famine—and then to help his family fulfill God's promise to become a great nation. Knowing that God had overruled the evil plans of his brothers to bring about good helped Joseph to forgive.

Joseph's story had a happy ending. How do we respond when the ending to a story isn't so happy? Or could one argue (long term, that is) that with the end of sin and the end of the great controversy, when all issues are solved—it will be a happy ending? How might this hope help us deal with less-than-ideal endings?

Further Thought: “As Joseph was sold to the heathen by his own brothers, so Christ was sold to His bitterest enemies by one of His disciples. Joseph was falsely accused and thrust into prison because of his virtue; so Christ was despised and rejected because His righteous, self-denying life was a rebuke to sin; and though guilty of no wrong, He was condemned upon the testimony of false witnesses. And Joseph’s patience and meekness under injustice and oppression, his ready forgiveness and noble benevolence toward his unnatural brothers, represent the Saviour’s uncomplaining endurance of the malice and abuse of wicked men, and His forgiveness, not only of His murderers, but of all who have come to Him confessing their sins and seeking pardon.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 239, 240.

“Nothing can justify an unforgiving spirit. He who is unmerciful toward others shows that he himself is not a partaker of God’s pardoning grace. In God’s forgiveness the heart of the erring one is drawn close to the great heart of Infinite Love. The tide of divine compassion flows into the sinner’s soul, and from him to the souls of others. The tenderness and mercy that Christ has revealed in His own precious life will be seen in those who become sharers of His grace.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 251.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Someone once said, “Not forgiving is like drinking poison while hoping that the other person will die.” What does this statement mean?
- ② What was the purpose of all the elaborate plans Joseph went through prior to the disclosure of his identity? What did this do for him and for his brothers?
- ③ Joseph’s steward must have been in on some of the plots regarding Joseph’s brothers (e.g., *Gen. 44:1–12*). How does the experience of forgiveness affect those who are just observers?
- ④ “God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 224, 225. Think of your own life as you contemplate this statement. How could understanding this help us work through many of the trials and struggles that we face?

“Prepare to Meet Thy God”

By JESSICA CEBUHAR ATWELL

My six-year-old son, Asher, approached me at home in Bangkok, Thailand. “Mom, I want to hand out flyers to people,” he said.

After some questioning, I figured out that he wanted to distribute a small Thai-language tract called “A Love Letter From Jesus.” My heart skipped a joyful beat as I realized that my little boy wanted to share his love for Jesus. But Friday didn’t seem like a good day. The COVID-19 pandemic was keeping people indoors. In addition, I was preparing for the Sabbath.

During my devotions on Sabbath morning, I remembered Asher’s request and felt impressed to take him out with the tracts. But I didn’t.

That afternoon and evening, I watched Sabbath sermons with a friend. One preacher ended his sermon with an appeal from Ellen White: “As a people who believe in Christ’s soon coming, we have a message to bear, ‘Prepare to meet thy God’ (*Amos 4:12*).” The passage came from *Gospel Workers*, page 52. *That’s exactly what I want to tell Thai people!* I thought.

On Sunday morning, I opened the EGW Writings app to read that day’s scheduled devotional message. Guess what I read? A passage that included Amos 4:12: “Prepare to meet thy God.” I was cut to the heart.

At breakfast, Asher gazed at me longingly. I promised that he would hand out flyers no matter what. After he memorized Amos 4:12 in Thai, we left.

My husband, Brian, and I had to make a delivery of fresh bread from a bakery at an urban center of influence that we helped establish after arriving from the U.S. state of Washington in 2014. Usually Asher rides around on his bicycle during deliveries, but he announced that he would be too busy. “I’ll walk and hand all these out,” Asher said, referring to the tracts.

We began the one-mile (1.6-kilometer) walk to the neighbor who had ordered the bread. Asher chased down everyone he saw. “Prepare to meet thy God!” he exclaimed in Thai, extending tracts to passersby. Despite COVID-19 worries, no one could refuse the earnest boy.

He was ecstatic when we returned home two hours later. He had distributed 100 tracts. “I want to do this every day!” he declared, smiling.

God truly wants the great city of Bangkok—and the people of the other big cities of the world—to be ready. “As a people who believe in Christ’s soon coming, we have a message to bear: ‘Prepare to meet thy God.’ ”



This story illustrates a key component of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s I Will Go strategic plan: “Increased number of church members participating in both personal and public evangelistic outreach initiatives with a goal of Total Member Involvement.” Learn more about the strategic plan at IWillGo2020.org.

Part I: Overview

In this week's lesson, we will study the power of forgiveness. The idea of forgiveness raises questions for many people. What is forgiveness? If we forgive someone who has deeply wronged us before he or she repents of the wrong, are we justifying his or her behavior? If we forgive an individual, does that mean that we need to establish or reestablish a close relationship with that person? Does forgiveness always rebuild relationships?

Joseph's life illustrates the power of forgiveness. Throughout his life he could easily have cherished anger toward his brothers, bitterness toward his slave traders, and resentment toward Potiphar. Yet, there is not even a hint of any of these negative qualities in Joseph's life. He is a sterling example of the grace of forgiveness.

Throughout this week's lesson, we will see how forgiveness releases us from the poison of bitterness. Forgiveness changes us. It frees us from the bondage of resentment. Joseph's heart was filled with forgiveness before his brothers ever asked, because he sensed that God had an overriding purpose for his life. His brothers suffered from the guilt of their actions for years. They were tormented by the memory of that last lingering look on their brother's face as he was led away into slavery. Just as Joseph needed to forgive, they needed forgiveness. Forgiveness facilitates healing in broken relationships.

Both Jesus and Joseph share some striking similarities. Both were betrayed by those closest to them. Both were unjustly condemned. Both were falsely accused and suffered the consequences. Both forgave and were exalted by God. Hanging on the cross with nails through His hands and feet, and blood flowing freely from each of His limbs, Jesus cried out, " 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know not what they do' " (*Luke 23:34, NKJV*). We can forgive others because Jesus forgave us, and that's the theme of this week's lesson.

Part II: Commentary

Forgiveness is an attitude of grace for those who have wronged us. It does not justify their sinful behavior. It releases them from our condemnation and treats them with kindness despite what they have done to us. Genuine forgiveness does not wait until the person who has wronged you asks you to forgive him or her. Genuine forgiveness chooses to forgive others when

they do not deserve it, because God's love reaches out to us when we do not deserve it.

When Joseph met his brothers after about twenty years of separation, his attitude toward them was one of forgiveness before they ever asked for it. Jacob had sent them to Egypt because of the severe famine in the land. He had heard that there were food supplies available in Egypt. Because Joseph oversaw the food supplies, they had to report to him to purchase grain. Given that Joseph spoke to them through an interpreter, had significantly aged since they saw him last, and dressed as an Egyptian, they did not recognize him. He immediately recognized them. After testing them with a series of questions about their background and family, he sensed that their sorrow for their past was genuine.

Eventually convinced of their sincerity, Joseph broke down and wept uncontrollably in their presence. Genesis 45:2 declares: "And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it" (*NKJV*). His love for them overcame any resentment over what they had done to him decades before. Forgiveness was in his heart all the time, for love forgives. Once Joseph revealed who he was, his brothers were afraid that he might seek revenge now that he was in a position of considerable power. Joseph saw the bigger picture. He understood God's larger purpose. He responded to their concerns this way: " 'But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life' " (*Gen. 45:5, NKJV*). The devil had hoped to destroy God's purpose for Joseph's life, but God miraculously intervened. Even through the sinful and treacherous actions of Joseph's brothers, God was able to accomplish His purposes. After Jacob's death, Joseph again reassured his family that he held no malice against them. "Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive'" (*Gen. 50:19, 20, NKJV*). The amazing thing about God's grace is that where sin abounds, God's grace abounds much more. Evil may wound us, but God is the Great Healer. God binds up our wounds, heals our hearts, and restores His image within us. The devil cannot destroy God's purpose for a life consecrated to Him.

This does not in any way justify abusive behavior. Abusive behavior is awful in the sight of God. You will recall that in Matthew 25:40–45, Jesus talks about the marginalized, the disadvantaged, and the poor. Abuse of any of God's children is abuse of Christ. Therefore, Jesus said, " 'Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me' " (*Matt. 25:40, NKJV*). The inability to forgive those who have wronged us limits God's ability to heal us. Had Joseph not forgiven his brothers, a spirit of bitterness would have carried over in his relationships with others and kept him from fulfilling God's purpose for his life. You

will recall the question that Peter asked Jesus: “ ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?’ ” (*Matt. 18:21, NKJV*).

One school of rabbinical thought taught that you should have mercy and forgive six times. After the sixth offense, justice was due. Thinking he would please the Master, Peter asked if forgiving someone up to seven times was enough. With a classic answer, Jesus said, “ ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven’ ” (*Matt. 18:22, NKJV*). Seventy times seven is 490. What Jesus was saying is simply this: I bore long with Israel even in their apostasy and rebellion for 490 years. Peter, My mercy is limitless. My forgiveness is ever present. My love can never be exhausted.

Forgive Because We Are Forgiven

Ephesians 4:32 is the basis of all genuine forgiveness: “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (*NKJV*). We forgive others because Christ has forgiven us. His forgiveness is the basis of all our forgiveness. Remember His prayer from Golgotha’s hill: “ ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’ ” (*Luke 23:34, NKJV*). If Christ could forgive His enemies when they did not deserve it, we can forgive others when they do not deserve it. If He could forgive those who brought Him such pain, by His grace we can forgive those who bring us pain.

Here are three wonderful, real-life stories of forgiveness:

Forgiving Adventist Prodigals

Our first story is about an Adventist family active in the church and well known in the community. Their daughter left home because she thought religion was boring. To fulfill her thirst for pleasure, she partied with her boyfriend, became addicted to tobacco, drank heavily, and spent much of her time in the cities’ nightclubs. Unable to fill the emptiness inside, she finally came to her senses. She called her parents. “Mom and Dad, I want to come home.” She had embarrassed them so much. Could they accept her, forgive her, welcome her back? In the light of the Cross, they welcomed her home. Today she is growing in grace.

He was a pastor’s son but got involved in drugs as a teenager. Eventually he dropped out of school and lived a purposeless life. His parents never stopped praying for him, loving him, forgiving him, and in the light of the Cross, they welcomed him home. Today he is a pastor.

She was a young person that had a moral fall at youth campout weekend. She felt guilty and ashamed. Would she be ostracized or forgiven? The church leadership reached out in loving forgiveness. Forgiveness

very often, but not always, restores relationships. There are times that a relationship is so shattered that although forgiveness is healing for the one who has been hurt, it cannot heal the relationship.

Forgiveness Is Basic in All Human Relationships.

Forgiveness is an attribute of Christ that flows from Calvary and is basic in all our relationships. It is fundamental for positive relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, church members, and work associates. If you cannot forgive, you will have continual conflict in human relationships because, someday, somebody is going to offend you. If you hold a grudge, if you are resentful, if you harbor bitterness, your relationships will sour. Resentful, unforgiving people spew out their venom to the people around them. Forgiven, forgiving people are a positive influence wherever they go. The atmosphere around them is one of peace, so people feel peaceful in their presence. They have experienced a love beyond measure at the cross, so they can love those around them.

Forgiveness flowed from Calvary's mountain that Friday that Jesus hung on the cross, dying. There is compassion at the cross. There is grace at Golgotha. At the cross, forgiveness triumphs over fear, love triumphs over hate, reconciliation triumphs over resentment, and grace defeats guilt.

Part III: Life Application

There are two kinds of guilt: moral guilt and psychological guilt. Moral guilt is the guilt we experience because we have sinned against God and hurt others. When we confess our sinfulness to God, we are forgiven. His Word declares, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (*1 John 1:9, NKJV*). Forgiveness is ours instantly when we confess our sins. Pardon is written after our names in heaven's eternal record books. Why is it that sometimes we feel guilty after we have confessed our sins? One reason, of course, is that often Satan does not want us to experience the joy of forgiveness.

But there may be another reason. Our moral guilt is gone when we confess our sins, but psychological guilt may remain. The apostle Paul prayed for a conscience "without offense toward God and men" (*Acts 24:16, NKJV*). When God forgives us and we experience His grace, we long to do everything we can, if possible, to restore broken relationships. Sometimes this means reaching out to those we have hurt and asking for their forgiveness. It may mean a phone call, a letter, or a text message to get the conversation started.

Is there someone you have offended recently? Is there a broken relationship

that needs to be repaired? Is there someone who has hurt you whom you need to forgive? If you have offended or hurt someone, why not ask God to help you know how to repair that relationship? Pray about doing something very specific to restore the relationship. If someone has hurt you deeply, ask God to give you the grace to forgive that person. Whether you need to ask for forgiveness or you need to forgive, you will find God's grace sufficient for you.

Notes

Free to Rest



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 2:1–12, 1 Kings 18, 1 Kings 19:1–8, Matt. 5:1–3, Isa. 53:4–6, 2 Kings 2:11.*

Memory Text: “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (*Ps. 27:1, NKJV*).

Many of the people Jesus encountered in His earthly ministry were sick, sometimes even unto death. They thronged to Jesus for healing and for rest from their sufferings. And they always received it too.

Sometimes He just spoke a word, and they were fully recovered. Sometimes He touched the sick, and, miraculously, they were healed. Sometimes He sent them off, and healing took place as they went on their way. Jesus healed men, women, children, Jews, non-Jews, rich people, and poor, unassuming people. The worst cases of leprosy and blindness were not beyond His reach. Indeed, He even healed those with the worst “sickness” of all—death.

This week, we look at two very different examples of healing. In the one, the sufferer was so ill that he could not even come to Jesus on his own. His symptoms were clearly visible to everyone. In the other case, there were no obvious visible symptoms. In both cases, healing came in God's time and way.

As we explore the topic of rest from pain and suffering, we also will contemplate the question that all of us, at some point or another in our Christian walk, have experienced. What happens when our prayers for healing aren't answered?

How do we find rest then?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 21.

Healing Rest

If ever there is a time that we need rest, it is when we are sick. We need physical rest so that our bodies can rally our immune systems.

Often we need mental rest too. Sometimes the sickness is just something non-life-threatening, such as a cold or a migraine. We lie there and try not to think about all that we should be doing but simply can't.

Sometimes, when it is something potentially life-threatening, we lie awake and worry about what the medical test results will be. And then often we start to wonder why. Has that unhealthy lifestyle finally caught up with us? Was it the drugs we took 20 years ago? Was it the extra weight we have been carrying for the past few years? Is God punishing us for that secret sin that no one else knows about?

Read Mark 2:1–4. What was happening here?

For the paralytic in this story, it was an obvious case. In *The Desire of Ages* (pp. 267–271), we get the background. The paralytic had done some things that he was not very proud of. His sinful life caused this sickness, and the spiritual experts drew a straight line from cause to effect. He had brought this disease upon himself by his sins, and there was no cure.

This attitude can be very typical. We often seem to be obsessed with *who did it*. If some crime has been committed, someone must pay for it. If there is an accident somewhere, someone should be sued. But assigning blame does not bring healing or wholeness to the one who is sick.

God's original design did not include pain, disease, and suffering. Sickness came to this planet only with the entrance of sin. That's why God gives us health guidelines—so that we can enjoy a better quality of life now. But as long as we are in this sin-sick world, there will be no guarantees of health, no matter how diligently we follow healthful principles.

The good news is that God can give us rest whether we are sick or healthy, whether our sickness is our own doing or a result of someone else's neglect, our genes, or just a by-product of living in this sinful world. God knows how to give us rest.

When someone gets sick, it's not good to start assigning blame. At the same time, why can understanding the cause of a sickness be, in some cases, a crucial step toward healing and recovery?

Root Treatment

The paralytic had been lowered into Jesus' presence, and all eyes were on Jesus. Would He choose to heal an obvious sinner? Would He speak a word to rebuke the illness?

How did Jesus go about healing the paralytic? What was the first thing Jesus did for him? Read Mark 2:5–12.

Because we are often unaware of a disease until we notice the symptoms, we often think of the disease as merely the symptoms. We think that getting rid of the symptoms means healing. Jesus approaches disease differently. He knows the root of all suffering and disease and wants to treat this first.

In the case of the paralytic, instead of immediately treating the obvious effects of his disease, Jesus went straight to the root of what was bothering the man the most. The paralytic felt the weight of his guilt and separation from God more severely than he felt his disease. A person resting in God is able to endure whatever physical suffering may befall him in this sin-sick world. And so, Jesus goes straight to the root and offers forgiveness first.

The religious leaders were shocked when they heard Jesus pronounce forgiveness. In answer to their unspoken accusations, Jesus posed a question.

Read Mark 2:8, 9. What challenge was Jesus giving to the scribes there? What issue was He really dealing with?

Talk is generally cheap—but not when God speaks. By God's powerful word, all things came into being (*Genesis 1*). Although forgiveness is not something that we can see, it is costly. Forgiveness cost the life of the Son of God on the cross. Everything else is secondary. To demonstrate the power and reality of forgiveness, Jesus then chose to heal the paralytic.

God wants to cure us on the inside first. And then sometimes He chooses to bring us immediate physical healing, as with the paralytic, or sometimes we will have to wait for resurrection morning to experience physical healing. Either way, our Savior wants us to be able to rest in the assurance of His love and grace and forgiveness even now, even amid our suffering.

How can we find rest and peace, even when our prayers for healing are not answered, at least for now?

Running Away

Based on data from the World Health Organization (WHO), the most common illness worldwide, affecting more than three hundred million people each year, does not always have obvious visible symptoms. Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide and is a major contributor to the global burden of disease.

Unfortunately, often depression is not spoken about in Christianity because it can be seen as a sign of a lack of faith. After all, aren't Christians always supposed to be filled with joy and happiness and the like? So, isn't depression a sign that something is wrong with our relationship with God?

Most people know that this isn't true. Even Christians, faithful Christians, can at times struggle with depression, especially after a traumatic event, and it is not a sign of lack of faith or trust in God. Again, one can read the Psalms and see the pain, suffering, and anguish that God's faithful people suffered.

Sometimes a depression slowly and quietly takes hold of us, and we recognize it only when it tightens its grip. Sometimes it strikes quickly, after a particularly draining emotional or physical event. For example, God's faithful prophet Elijah was completely drained, emotionally and physically, after Mount Carmel.

In 1 Kings 18, Elijah had just seen God's miracle of fire coming down from heaven. In answer to his prayer, he had seen rain come and end a three-year drought. Why did Elijah react to Jezebel's threat by running? Read 1 Kings 19:1-5.

Elijah had a very grueling 24 hours. This experience, coupled with a rude awakening and a death threat, served as a depression trigger for Elijah. Also, Elijah was there when the prophets of Baal were slaughtered, perhaps even some of them by his own hand (*1 Kings 18:40*). Such an event, even for a righteous cause, can easily lead to traumatic stress in those who either watch or, even worse, take part.

So Elijah began to run, to try to get away. Sometimes we run to the refrigerator and try to eat ourselves happy again. Sometimes we try to sleep our emotional exhaustion away. Sometimes we look for a new relationship, job, or location in our quest to run away. And sometimes we bury ourselves in more work, more deadlines, and appointments, as we try harder to run away from the nameless something that is draining our joy and rest. And of course, many people use "medications" of some sort or another, all in an attempt to dull the pain. In the end, though, these things only mask the symptoms; they don't solve the problem, and often they can only make it worse.

Too Tired to Run

Elijah was too tired to run anymore. And so, he prayed again. This prayer was very different from the faith-filled prayer that God answered on Mount Carmel (*1 Kings 18:36, 37*) in front of the priests and prophets of Baal, the members of the court, and the common people. This was a simple, short prayer of desperation.

In 1 Kings 19:4, Elijah stated that he was no better than his fathers. What was he talking about?

When Elijah finally was still, guilt came crushing in on him. He realized that his quick exit had hijacked what could have been a great opportunity for reformation in Israel. He realized that he had disappointed those who needed him. And he was powerless to do anything about it. Thus, in a painful moment of self-reflection, knowing full well the history of his people, he saw himself for what he really was.

That can be a painful revelation for anyone of us, can't it—that is, seeing ourselves for what we really are? How grateful we should be for the promise that, sinful as our lives have been, in Christ, God will see us as He sees Jesus. What more hope can we have than that, by faith, we can claim for ourselves the righteousness of Christ? (*See Phil. 3:9.*)

Nevertheless, depression has a way of sucking us into a dark whirlpool of self-loathing. And sometimes we begin to think that death is the only way out.

This seemed to be the case for Elijah. It was all too much for him. He said, “ ‘It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!’ ” (*1 Kings 19:4, NKJV*).

The good news is that the great Healer didn't condemn Elijah. God understands better than we do what we are up against as we fight depression.

“We may have no remarkable evidence at the time that the face of our Redeemer is bending over us in compassion and love, but this is even so. We may not feel His visible touch, but His hand is upon us in love and pitying tenderness.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 97.

God knows and understands that “the journey is too much” (*1 Kings 19:7, NIV*) for us, but sometimes He has to wait until we stop running. Then He can intervene.

Sometimes people who are drowning become so confused that they will fight a lifeguard off. The lifeguard then has to back off and wait to perform a rescue until the victim actually becomes unconscious.

What hopes and comfort can you find from the following texts: Psalm 34:18, Matthew 5:1–3, Psalm 73:26, Isaiah 53:4–6?

Rest and More

God knew that all the running had made Elijah tired. God knew that more than being physically tired, Elijah was emotionally tired and carrying a tremendous load of guilt. As Jesus would do for the paralytic so many years later, God wiped the slate clean and provided rest for Elijah. Finally, he could really sleep and be refreshed.

We would expect this to be the end of the story, but it isn't. God's rest is not a one-time event. Entering into God's rest has to do with healing—with slowly unlearning negative thought patterns and destructive habits. God does not rush healing.

Read 1 Kings 19:5–8. Where was Elijah going now, and why?

After rest, Elijah was running again. But this time God reoriented his running. God understands that life in this sinful world can and will cause depression. He understands our impulse to run, but He wants to redirect our running. Instead of all the self-destructive coping mechanisms we try, He wants us to run to Him. And once we start running to Him, He wants to teach us to listen for the “still small voice” (*1 Kings 19:12, NKJV*) that will give us rest.

Elijah had no energy to lift himself up and make the journey to meet God. God provided the energy for the meeting, and God promised a better tomorrow.

As Elijah lay under his broom tree and wished to die, he believed that his best days were over.

Read 1 Kings 19:15, 16 and 2 Kings 2:11. What was still in store for Elijah?

God knew that better days lay ahead for Elijah. Healing would come for the prophet as he would learn to regulate his life by God's rhythms and accept His rest. There were still kings to be anointed and a successor to be chosen. God already knew about Elisha, who would become as close as a son to Elijah. God knew that in faith Elijah would again call down fire from heaven (*2 Kings 1:10*). For Elijah, there would be no desperate death under a broom tree, but rather a fiery chariot ride to heavenly rest.

What can we learn from the story of Elijah about why, no matter how bad we feel, in God's strength we must still seek not to give up?

Further Thought: “With the continual change of circumstances, changes come in our experience; and by these changes we are either elated or depressed. But the change of circumstances has no power to change God’s relation to us. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever; and He asks us to have unquestioning confidence in His love.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 120.

“Keep looking unto Jesus, offering up silent prayers in faith, taking hold of His strength, whether you have any manifest feeling or not. Go right forward as if every prayer offered was lodged in the throne of God and responded to by the One whose promises never fail. Go right along, singing and making melody to God in your hearts, even when depressed by a sense of weight and sadness. I tell you as one who knows, light will come, joy will be ours, and the mists and clouds will be rolled back. And we pass from the oppressive power of the shadow and darkness into the clear sunshine of His presence.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 242, 243.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 It is often very difficult to help someone suffering from mental disorders or depression. What would be a good strategy for your church to learn how to minister more effectively to those affected by depression?
- 2 We often struggle to be open and honest before God. Scan through some psalms and see how open and honest the biblical authors were before God. How can we foster an atmosphere of openness and honesty in our local congregation?
- 3 Prayer is often difficult when we face depression. Discuss the power of intercessory prayer for those who cannot pray for themselves.
- 4 Why is it so important that we remember that faith is not feeling? Just because we are depressed, discouraged, fearful, and worried doesn’t mean we lack faith or trust in God. It means only that, for the moment, we are depressed, discouraged, fearful, and worried, as all of us have been at some point or another. How can we learn that, at times like this, reaching out in faith is so crucial, no matter how difficult it may seem?
- 5 What great hope can you take from the story of the paralytic, especially if a sinful lifestyle has brought disease and sickness upon you?

Better Than Toys

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Several friends gathered around Mariah at school on Monday.

“What are you doing after school?” one asked.

“Can we come over to your house to play?” said another.

Mariah shook her head. “I have so much to do today,” she said.

Nine-year-old Mariah was a busy girl in Pond Inlet, a small town located on an isolated island in the Canadian Arctic. Every weekday she went to school and did her homework. She also helped her parents around the house. On Sabbath, her family read the Bible and watched online sermons at home.

But Mariah’s friends really wanted to play with her. On Tuesday, the children gathered around her again, and on Thursday and Friday.

“But when can we come over to your house to play?” a friend asked.

“How about Saturday?” said another. “You must have time on Saturday.”

Mariah’s eyes lit up. She did have free time on Saturday. “You can come over to my house and join our Bible study on Saturday,” she said.

Her friends looked confused. They had never read the Bible. But they wanted to spend time with Mariah, so they agreed to come over on Saturday.

On Sabbath, a few friends showed up at Mariah’s house. As Mariah read from the Bible, they looked confused. They had never heard about the God of the Bible. They again looked confused when Father turned on an online sermon. They had never heard a sermon, and they did not understand the Adventist preacher. Afterward, they asked Mariah to explain.

“What did he mean when he said that?” one asked.

“Or what about when he spoke about that?” said another.

Mariah tried to explain the sermon and to simplify it. When she finished, her friends seemed to understand what she was attempting to say.

At school on Monday, several classmates asked Mariah’s friends what they had done at Mariah’s house on Saturday. “We read about God in the Bible,” answered one.

“And we watched an interesting sermon,” said another.

The classmates had never read the Bible or watched a sermon, and they wanted to know more. Mariah’s friends explained what they learned. Mariah smiled as she listened. She felt good. This was better than playing with toys. She would welcome her classmates into her home every Sabbath.



Part of this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open a church and community services center to share God in the Canadian territory of Nunavut, where Mariah lives. Thank you for planning a generous offering.

Part I: Overview

Have you ever wondered why we do not see miraculous healings more often today? In this week's lesson, "Free to Rest," we will discover the answer to this and many other questions about healing.

Our two primary studies will be: the New Testament story of the healing of the paralytic and the Old Testament story of Elijah. Although these stories took place in vastly different times and places and under different circumstances, they complement each other. They give us a more complete picture of divine healing than if either story were studied alone.

In the healing of the paralytic, Jesus creates a controversy by declaring that the man's sins are forgiven before healing his physical disease. This is an intentional act by Christ. This man's sickness of soul was greater than the affliction of his body. He was suffering under a load of guilt and shame because of his past sinful lifestyle. If Christ had healed only his body, the healing would have been incomplete.

Elijah, on the other hand, was a committed servant of God. He had faithfully witnessed for his Lord during a time of Israel's deep apostasy. After slaying the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, he was exhausted, and under the threats from Jezebel to take his life, he became discouraged. God met him where he was and ministered to his needs. We will study more about the lasting spiritual lessons in these two stories in this week's lesson.

Part II: Commentary

The story of the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2:1–12 answers some of our deepest questions about miraculous healing and teaches us valuable insights regarding our growth in Christ. One of the first things we notice is that the paralytic does not come to Christ on his own. His friends bring him to Jesus. Four men carried him on a stretcher. Evidently, they had heard of the healing power of Christ and believed that He could heal their friend. These friends were persistent. When they could not get near Jesus because of the crowd, Mark's Gospel says, "they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven you' " (*Mark 2:4, 5, NKJV*). There are deep spiritual lessons in these few words. This man's friends were concerned about him. They were so determined that they lifted him up to the

roof, broke a hole through it, and lowered him into the presence of Jesus.

The New Testament contains approximately 30 separate instances of Jesus' healing miracles. In two thirds of these stories, somebody brings somebody else to Jesus. Often physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual healing takes place in the life of another individual because someone cares enough to minister to that person's needs in Jesus' name. Did you notice the words "When Jesus saw their faith" in Mark 2:5? This is fascinating. Faith is something you see. It is not something that is intangible. It is always revealed in action. In this instance, Jesus honored the faith of this man's friends. Of course, the man himself must have had a measure of faith by expressing his willingness to have his friends bring him. We can be Jesus' agents of healing as we lead others to Jesus.

Jesus Is Never Too Busy.

The other significant thing about this story is that Jesus had time for this man. He did not consider his presence an interruption. There is never a time that Jesus is too busy to meet our needs. As He looked at this poor sufferer, Jesus immediately recognized the deeper issues. As a result, He did not begin by healing the man physically. He knew that the suffering man's deeper need was spiritual healing. In this instance, the man had brought disease upon himself by his sinful lifestyle. He was filled with guilt that was destroying his immune system and ruining his health. This reality is true of scores of people whose bodies suffer under a load of guilt.

Ellen G. White makes this insightful comment: "The paralytic found in Christ healing for both the soul and the body. The spiritual healing was followed by physical restoration. This lesson should not be overlooked. There are today thousands suffering from physical disease, who, like the paralytic, are longing for the message, 'Thy sins are forgiven.' The burden of sin, with its unrest and unsatisfied desires, is the foundation of their maladies. They can find no relief until they come to the Healer of the soul. The peace which He alone can give would impart vigor to the mind and health to the body."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 270.

Healing From the Inside Out

Jesus knew that unless He dealt with the underlying cause of disease instead of healing only the paralytic's body, the man would soon be sick again. "Grief, anxiety, discontent, remorse, guilt, distrust, all tend to break down the life forces and to invite decay and death."—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 241. Biblically, healing always includes the whole person and involves restoration into the image of God. Sin destroys. It impacts the entire person in every dimension of life. Jesus healed this man from the inside out. The inner healing prepared the way for the outer healing. This man had brought sickness upon himself, and if Christ had merely

healed his body, he would have more than likely gone back to a life of sin. Evidently, he must have felt the conviction of sin and the desire to come to Christ for some time. The Holy Spirit had been drawing him to the Savior. Now in the presence of Christ, he rose from his bed of illness to new life.

The Root Cause of Sickness

We live in a broken world. Therefore, sickness and disease are common. The root cause of all sickness is sin. This does not mean that everyone who gets sick has brought it on by sinning. It simply means that the underlying cause of sickness and disease in the light of the great controversy between good and evil is Lucifer's rebellion in heaven and the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. To state it another way, Jesus is a health Restorer, and Satan is a health destroyer.

The issue of sickness is complex. A good deal of sickness is caused by our personal lifestyle choices. This is precisely why God has given the Seventh-day Adventist Church the health message. These divinely inspired health principles help us reduce the risk of disease, but they do not eliminate the possibility of disease. The cause of sickness is varied. Our genetics and environment play a role in determining our health outcomes. At times, the choices of others seriously impact our own health. Accidents are often things we cannot control, but we can control our own choices. The more positive choices we make, the more likely it will be that we will be in health and live the abundant life Christ offers. Understanding the cause of disease also allows us to cooperate with Christ in the healing process.

Jesus' Medical Ministry to Elijah

Consider the case of Elijah. Here is a man of sterling character with implicit faith in the power of God. Throughout the three and a half years of famine, he trusted God for sustenance. Never once did God let him down. Elijah was guided by God to water at the Brook Cherith, fed by ravens, and sustained by a humble widow at Zarephath. His faith was strong. By faith he challenged the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. It was there that he experienced the miracle-working power of God. He proposed a test to demonstrate the might of the true God. Baal's prophets bellowed, shouted, and cried out to their pagan gods, but absolutely nothing happened. Elijah poured water over the altar, earnestly sought God, and fire came down from heaven and consumed the altar. Soon after the three and a half years of drought, the rains fell. At God's command, Elijah participated in the slaying of the prophets of Baal. What a man of

faith, courage, and steadfastness! You would think nothing could shake his faith. But something did.

When Ahab told Jezebel about the events of the day, she threatened Elijah's life (*1 Kings 19:1, 2*). Courageous Elijah, who had stood on Mount Carmel before the prophets of Baal, rapidly fled at the threat of a wicked queen. Tired, worn out, and exhausted, he wished he could die. He found repose, lying discouraged beneath a broom tree. A broom tree is more like a large bush that was prevalent in the deserts in the Middle East and offered shade to weary travelers. There, discouraged and alone, Elijah slept until an angel woke him up, prepared a meal for him, gave him some water to drink, and encouraged him to sleep again. This happened twice, and in the strength of that food, drink, and rest, Elijah traveled for 40 days.

There are some vital lessons here. Even God's people become discouraged at times. Elijah was soon to be translated without seeing death, yet he, too, had his difficult moments. Notice how God dealt with Elijah's disappointment. He did not preach a sermon to him. He did not urge him to have more faith or pray more. Our caring Lord provided Elijah with a good healthful meal, refreshing water, and a good night's rest. Sometimes the best thing we can do for our friends who are discouraged is to be there to encourage them and provide for their needs.

Part III: Life Application

It is extremely important that we do not become judgmental when people are sick. Although sickness may be the result of poor lifestyle choices, it is not always so. Even if disease and illness are the result of an individual's personal choices, Jesus' example reveals how to treat suffering people. It made no difference to Jesus that the paralytic had lived a life of sin. The Savior was called to minister to all people, and so are we. Friends bring friends to Jesus. As we pray in faith for those who are sick, Jesus will work miracles. Sometimes there will be miracles of instant healing; at other times the healing will be gradual; and, at times, those for whom we pray will die and rest in Jesus until the glorious resurrection at the second coming of Jesus. Christ's Word gives us the assurance that we can rest in His love because, by His grace, healing is certain. The only question is the timing. Will it be instant, gradual, or at the resurrection?

There are times, as in the case of Elijah, that the best thing we can do for someone suffering from discouragement or depression is to be there to meet his or her needs. This loving concern can make all the difference. In your private prayers this week, ask God to impress you to lift up, in intercession,

someone whom you know is suffering with a specific illness. If possible, visit that person and see if he or she has any definite needs you can meet. You will be greatly blessed as you minister as Jesus did, and so will the person you help.

Notes

The Rhythms of Rest



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 1, Exod. 20:8–11, Exod. 16:14–31, Deut. 5:12–15, Psalm 92, Isa. 58:13.*

Memory Text: “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (*Gen. 2:3, NKJV*).

Who can imagine what the acts of Creation—light amid darkness, oceans brimming with life, birds suddenly taking flight—must have been like? And the supernatural creation of Adam and Eve? We can't even begin to grasp how God did it.

But then, after all of this active creating, God turned His attention to something else. At first glance, it did not seem as spectacular as leaping whales or dazzling feather displays. God simply made a day, the seventh day, and then He made it special. Even before humanity would dash off to our self-imposed stressful lives, God set a marker as a living memory aid. God wanted this day to be a time for us to stop and deliberately enjoy life—a day to be and not do, to celebrate the gift of grass; air; wildlife; water; people; and, most of all, the Creator of every good gift.

This invitation would continue even after the first couple was exiled from Eden. God wanted to make sure that the invitation could stand the test of time, and so, right from the beginning, He knit it into the very fabric of time itself.

During this week, we will study God's wonderful invitation to enter into a dynamic rest, again and again, with every seventh day.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 28.

Prelude to Rest

God was there at the beginning. The Lord God spoke, and it was. Light divided day from night; firmament, sky, and seas were spoken into existence on the second day; dry land and vegetation followed on the third. God formed the basic framework of time and geography, and then He filled it during the next three days. Lights governed the sky by day and by night. Different from the stories of most ancient cultures, the biblical Creation account makes it abundantly clear that the sun, the moon, and the stars are not deities. They entered into the picture only on the fourth day and are subject to the Creator's word.

Moses' description of days five and six (*Gen. 1:20–31*) is full of life and beauty. Birds, fish, land animals—they all fill the space prepared by God.

What did God's evaluation indicate about Creation? Read Genesis 1:1–31.

This was not just any space that God had created; *it was a perfect place*. Teeming creatures filled the earth. Like the refrain of a catchy tune, God kept saying that it was “good” after each day.

What was different about the creation of humanity from the rest of the world? Read Genesis 1:26, 27 and Genesis 2:7, 21–24.

God stooped and began to shape mud. Humanity's creation in God's image and likeness was an object lesson in intimacy and closeness. God bent down and breathed life into Adam's nostrils, and there was a living being. Eve's special creation from Adam's rib added another important element to Creation week. Marriage was part of God's design for humanity—a sacred trust of partnership between 'ish and 'ishshah, “man” and “woman.”

This time, when God looked at everything He had made on day six, the refrain sounded different: “Then God saw everything that He had made, and *indeed it was very good*” (*Gen. 1:31, NKJV; italics supplied*).

Think about how radically different the biblical Creation story is from what humanity, without the guidance of God's Word, teaches. What should this tell us about how much we need to depend on God's Word for understanding truth?

The Command to Rest

Creation may have been “very good,” but it was not yet complete. Creation ended with God’s rest and a special blessing of the seventh day, the Sabbath. “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (*Gen. 2:3, NKJV*).

The Sabbath is part and parcel of God’s creation. In fact, it is the culmination of Creation. God made rest and created a space for community where humanity (in those days the core family of Adam and Eve) could stop their day-to-day activities and rest side by side with their Creator.

Unfortunately, sin entered this world and changed everything. There was no more direct communion with God. Instead, there were painful births, hard work, fragile and dysfunctional relationships, and on and on—the litany of woes that we all know so well as life on this fallen world. And still, even amid all this, God’s Sabbath remains, an enduring symbol of our creation and also the hope and promise of our re-creation. If humanity needed the Sabbath rest before sin, how much more so after?

Many years later, when God freed His children from slavery in Egypt, He reminded them again of this special day.

Read Exodus 20:8–11. What does this teach us about the importance of the Sabbath as it relates to Creation?

With this command, God calls us to remember our origins. Contrary to what so many believe, we are not the chance products of cold, uncaring, and blind forces. On the contrary, we are beings who are created in the image of God. We were created to share fellowship with God. It did not matter that the Israelites had been treated as slaves with little worth. With each Sabbath, in a special way they were called to remember who they really were, beings made in the image of God Himself.

“And since the Sabbath is a memorial of the work of creation, it is a token of the love and power of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 281.

Think about how important the doctrine of a six-day Creation is. After all, what other teaching is so important that God commands that we devote one-seventh of our lives, every week, and without exception, to remembering it? What should this fact alone teach us about how crucial it is that we remember our true origins, as depicted in the book of Genesis?

New Circumstances

After 40 years of wandering in the desert, a new generation with vague, if any, memories of Egypt had grown up. They had a very different life experience from that of their parents. This new generation had witnessed their parents' continued lack of faith, and as a consequence, they, too, had to wander in the wilderness as their parents' generation died off.

They were privileged to have the sanctuary in the center of their camp and could see the cloud indicating God's presence hovering over the tabernacle. When it moved, they knew that it was time to pack and follow. This cloud that provided shade during the day and light and heat at night was a constant reminder of God's love and care for them.

What personalized reminder of the Sabbath rest did they have? Read Exodus 16:14–31.

Contrary to popular theology, these verses prove that the seventh-day Sabbath predated the giving of the law at Sinai.

What happened here?

The special food that God supplied was a daily reminder of the fact that the Creator sustained His creation. In a very tangible way, God was supplying their needs. Every day was a miracle with the food appearing and disappearing with the sun. Any time that anyone tried to hoard for the next day, it would rot and stink; and yet, every Friday there was enough for a double portion, and the leftover to be eaten on Sabbath remained miraculously fresh.

Israel now had the sanctuary service and all the laws and regulations recorded in Leviticus and Numbers. Still, the aged Moses summoned everyone and repeated their history and revisited the laws that God had given (*see Deut. 5:6–22*).

This new generation finally was poised to enter the Promised Land. Israel was about to undergo a change of leadership, and an aged Moses wanted to ensure that this generation would remember who they were and what their mission was. He did not want them repeating the mistakes of their parents. And so he repeated God's laws. The Ten Commandments were repeated so that this generation, poised on the brink of conquering Canaan, would not forget.

In our personal experience, the second coming of Jesus never will be more than a few moments after we die. Hence, His return is always near, perhaps even nearer than we might imagine. How does keeping the Sabbath remind us not only of what God has done for us but also of what He will do for us when He returns?

Another Reason to Rest

Israel was camped on the eastern side of the Jordan. They had taken possession of the lands of the king of Bashan and two kings of the Amorites. Once again, at this crucial moment, Moses called Israel together and reminded them that the covenant made at Sinai was not just for their parents but for them too. He then went on to repeat the Ten Commandments, again for their benefit.

Compare Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15. What is the difference in the way the Sabbath commandment was expressed in them?

In Exodus 20:8, the commandment began with the word “remember.” Deuteronomy 5:12 began with the word “observe” (*NKJV*). The word “remember” came a bit later in the commandment itself (*Deut. 5:15*). In this verse, Israel was told to remember that they were slaves. Although this generation had grown up free, they would all have been born into slavery were it not for the miraculous rescue. The Sabbath commandment was to remind them that the same God who was active in the Creation story also was active in their deliverance: “the LORD, your God, brought you out from there with a strong hand and outstretched arm” (*Deut. 5:15, NABRE*).

This truth fit the then-current circumstances of the Israelites, standing for a second time at the border of the Promised Land, some forty years after the first generation failed so miserably. They were as helpless in conquering this land as their forefathers were in escaping from Egypt. They needed this God who acted with a “strong hand” and an “outstretched arm.”

The Sabbath was about to take on an added dimension. Because God was the God of liberation, Israel was to keep the Sabbath day (*Deut. 5:15*).

Of course, Creation is never far from the Sabbath commandment, even in Deuteronomy 5, despite the added reason to keep it: the liberation of Israel. In a sense, the liberation of Israel out of the land of Egypt is the starting point of a new creation, similar to the Creation story in Genesis. Israel, as a liberated people, is God’s new creation (*see also, for example, Isa. 43:15*).

And because the Exodus is seen as a symbol of freedom from sin—that is, Redemption, we can find in the Sabbath a symbol of both Creation and Redemption. Hence, in a very real way, the Sabbath points us to Jesus, our Creator and our Redeemer.

Read John 1:1–13. What do these verses teach us about Jesus as our Creator and Redeemer?

Keeping the Sabbath

God commands His people to keep the Sabbath day. Right along with not murdering and not stealing is the command to remember the Sabbath, even though the Bible doesn't give us specifics on exactly how we are to keep it.

What should be the atmosphere we create and promote on Sabbath? See Psalm 92 and Isaiah 58:13.

Because Sabbath keeping means celebrating Creation and Redemption, its atmosphere should be one of joy and delight in the Lord and not one of gloom.

Remembering the Sabbath does not begin on the seventh day. As the first Sabbath was the culmination of the Creation week, so we should “remember the Sabbath day” all week and plan ahead so that we can set aside our weekly work and thus “keep it holy” when the Sabbath comes. Intentionally preparing during the week and especially on the preparation day (*Mark 15:42*), or Friday, is key and adds to the delight as anticipation builds for this very special day.

What important aspect of Sabbath keeping does Leviticus 19:3 highlight?

Sabbath keeping also means nurturing our relationships with family and friends. God provides time for focused fellowship with the whole family, and it includes rest for even the servants and the family animals (*see Exod. 20:8–11*). Sabbath and family go together.

While rest and family time are important principles, Sabbath keeping also means participating in corporate, focused worship of God with our church family. Jesus attended and led out in worship services while on earth. (*See Lev. 23:3, Luke 4:16, and Heb. 10:25.*)

Even though our weekly routines and rhythms may be rushed, yet, deep in our hearts, there is a yearning for true Sabbath rest, true communion with our Maker. Remembering to stop all our business and planning to spend time with God and nurture our relationships, we can enter into the rhythm and rest of Sabbath.

What has been your own experience with the Sabbath and the blessings that can come from keeping the Sabbath? In what ways could you do more to make it the sacred time it is supposed to be?

Further Thought: “God gave to men the memorial of His creative power, that they might discern Him in the works of His hand. The Sabbath bids us behold in His created works the glory of the Creator. . . . On the holy rest day, above all other days, we should study the messages that God has written for us in nature. . . . As we come close to the heart of nature, Christ makes His presence real to us, and speaks to our hearts of His peace and love.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 25, 26.

“One of the important reasons why the Lord delivered Israel from slavery to Egypt was that they might keep His holy Sabbath. . . . Evidently Moses and Aaron renewed the teaching about the holiness of the Sabbath, because Pharaoh complained to them, ‘Ye make [the people] rest from their burdens.’ Exodus 5:5. This would indicate that Moses and Aaron began a Sabbath reform in Egypt.

“The observance of the Sabbath was not to be a *commemoration* of their slavery in Egypt, however. Its observance in remembrance of creation was to *include* a joyful remembrance of deliverance from religious oppression in Egypt that made Sabbath observance difficult. In the same way, their deliverance from slavery was forever to kindle in their hearts a tender regard for the poor and oppressed, the fatherless and widows.”—Appendix note in Ellen G. White, *From Eternity Past*, p. 549.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Some Christians, including even some Adventists, consider theistic evolution a viable explanation of Creation. How does the Sabbath show theistic evolution and Seventh-day Adventism to be incompatible? What purpose is there in keeping the seventh day holy in commemoration of billions of years, especially when the Word of God is explicit about its being made holy after the first six days of Creation?
- 2 What do you say to the argument that the day doesn’t matter, just as long as we have one day of rest a week? Or, on the other hand, how do we respond to the claim that Jesus is our Sabbath rest, and, therefore, there is no need to keep any day as a day of rest?
- 3 How can keeping the Sabbath holy be a reminder of freedom and liberation? How can we avoid making it restrictive and legalistic?
- 4 Some claim that keeping the seventh-day Sabbath is an attempt to work our way to heaven. What is the logic, however, in claiming that by resting on the seventh day, we are trying to work our way to heaven?

Power of a Smile

By DALE WOLCOTT

The Chinle Seventh-day Adventist Church isn't exactly located in the best neighborhood on the Navajo Reservation in the U.S. state of Arizona.

As the pastor, I live in a trailer beside the church building. Several well-respected neighbors, including a Navajo Nation police officer, live in nearby trailers. But one house is looked down on as the local "drug house." Its unkempt yard and constant stream of random foot and vehicle traffic lend credibility to its reputation as a supplier of illegal liquor and more.

The church board has discussed how to best relate to those neighbors. We have prayed for them and even visited, praying with them and sharing literature and invitations to church events. The family's children have occasionally attended children's programs. But we have not seen any breakthroughs.

Then along came the COVID-19 pandemic. The church was closed, and our public meetings moved onto the telephone. Although the church has access to the internet, many families here don't have internet at home.

One day, Catherine walked across the church yard with a big smile. She wanted to apologize for missing our call-in midweek prayer meeting because she had joined her husband and their two daughters, Katelyn, 11, and Kallie, 9, in organizing their own evening worship by a creek.

"Oh, and we took the neighbor kids with us," Catherine said.

"Which ones?" I wondered aloud.

"The ones right next door here," she replied, gesturing toward the infamous "drug house."

Surprised, I asked Catherine how she had managed to invite the children.

Catherine smiled proudly. "Their big sister noticed how happy our girls seem to be every day when they walk by their house on the way to the church to do their schoolwork," she said.

The girls usually live at Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School, located about 90 minutes away by car, but were sent home because of COVID-19. Since the family did not have internet, the girls were studying at church.

"The big sister wanted to know why Katelyn and Kallie smile instead of looking mostly sad like her own little sisters. She also wanted to know why

Katelyn and Kallie are always singing. So we invited them to evening worship," Catherine said.

"How did it go?" I asked.

"When we finished, they asked if we could do it again the next day," she said. "My children have been touched by the Lord, and they can see it."



Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help Holbrook Indian School. Thank you for planning a generous offering.

Part I: Overview

The climax of all God's creation is the Bible Sabbath. During the first three days of Creation week, God created light, formed the heavens and earth, and created water and land and all kinds of plants. On the fourth day, He made the sun, moon, and stars. The next two days, God made fish and fowl and land animals and human beings. On the seventh day, God hallowed, or set apart as holy, the Sabbath as a day for human beings to reverence God for the wonders of creation, enjoy loving relationships, and enter into fellowship with their Maker. In this week's lesson, "The Rhythms of Rest," we will discover how the Sabbath is knit into the fabric of time as a memorial to our Creator for His gift to us of life, both temporal and eternal.

This lesson reveals that throughout the centuries, the Sabbath has been a memory aid for God's people, constantly reminding them of their Creator. If the Sabbath were faithfully kept in each generation, there would be no atheists, agnostics, or secular humanists. The Sabbath speaks of a God who created us, is concerned for us, and cares for our daily needs. It also is a reminder of the power of God to deliver. The all-powerful Creator delivered Israel from the bondage of Egypt and can deliver us from the bondage of the sinful habits that enslave us.

On Sabbath, we rest in the blessing of the One who created us, the One who redeemed us, the One who is sanctifying us, and the One who is coming again for us. The Sabbath is heaven's oasis of rest in the parched desert of our frenzied, secular world.

Part II: Commentary

The awesome wonder of space speaks of an all-powerful God who is the Creator of the universe. Frank Borman was commander of the first space crew to travel beyond the Earth's orbit. Looking down on the earth from 250,000 miles away, Borman radioed back a message, quoting Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." As he later explained: "I had an enormous feeling that there had to be a power greater than any of us—that there was a God, that there was indeed a beginning." Many of this world's greatest thinkers have been so moved by the incredible design, complexity, order, and vastness of the universe that they have developed a bedrock faith in God. Let me give you some examples.

Some people think science is antagonistic to faith. Yet, most of the great figures who shaped the scientific enterprise from the beginning have been devout believers—such people as Copernicus, who discovered that the sun, not the earth, is the center of our solar system; Isaac Newton, who revealed the law of gravity; Blaise Pascal, who invented the first calculator; and James Maxwell, who formulated the laws of electromagnetism. All were Christians who felt that the study of nature did not challenge their faith but rather strengthened it.

Genesis 1:1 is the foundation for all of Scripture. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (*NKJV*). The Hebrew word for “create” in this passage is *bara*’. It refers to something God did. This Hebrew verb is always linked to God’s creative activity. God has the ability, the awesome power, to create something out of nothing. God speaks, and the earth comes into existence. He speaks, and the earth is carpeted with living green. He speaks, and trees and flowers flourish. He speaks, and the sun, moon, and stars instantly exist.

God’s Unlimited Power

To get just a small idea of how unlimited God’s power is, let’s consider just one object in the heavens: the sun. Did God create the sun? Certainly. Genesis 1:14–16 tells the story of God’s creating two lights to rule the heavens: the sun to rule the day and the moon to rule the night. We exist on one of the planets that revolve around the sun. The sun produces more energy in one second than humans have produced in all their history. Take all the electrical power and all the energy produced by solar or coal or gas since the beginning of time, and the sun produces more in one second.

The sun has a diameter of approximately 860,000 miles and could hold a million planets the size of earth. But the sun is just one of at least 100 billion stars in our galaxy, the Milky Way. One star called the Pistol Star gives off ten million times the power generated by our sun. One million stars the size of our sun can easily fit within the sphere of the Pistol Star. Some scientists estimate that there are ten billion trillion stars in the universe. Someone has said that there are about the same number of stars as there are grains of sand on the seashore.

The prophet Isaiah beckons us to meditate on God’s creative power in these words, “Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; not one is missing” (*Isa. 40:26, NKJV*). The seventh-day Sabbath is an eternal memorial, an everlasting sign, a perpetual reminder of God’s incredible creative power.

At the conclusion of Creation week, Genesis 2:1–3 declares, “Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And

on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (*NKJV*). God rested, but not because He was tired. He rested refreshed in the beauty and majesty of the world He had made. He rested as an example to us. The Sabbath is a weekly pause to praise the One who made us. As we worship on the Sabbath, we open our hearts to receive the special blessing He placed in this day that was placed in no other day.

A Creator Who Cares

The Sabbath reminds us that we are not cosmic orphans on some spinning globe of rock. It points us to a Creator who created us with a purpose and loved us too much to abandon us when we drifted from that purpose. The Sabbath reminds us of the One who has provided all the good things of life for us. God’s care is illustrated in the triple Sabbath miracle of the falling manna. Twice as much manna fell on Friday. None fell on the Sabbath. If the Israelites gathered more than they could eat on any single day of the week except Friday, it would spoil. On Friday, the manna that was kept over to be eaten on the Sabbath did not spoil. Sabbath worship during those 40 years of wilderness wandering reminded the Israelites of a Creator God who cared for them. It is important to notice carefully that the Israelites kept the Sabbath before the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. The Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8–11 begins with the word “remember.” It points back to a God who created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. If, as some people believe, God set this world in motion and it evolved over millions of years, there would be absolutely no need for the Sabbath and nothing to remember.

Sabbath is an eternal symbol of our rest in God. It is a special sign of loyalty to the Creator (*Ezek. 20:12, 20*). Rather than being an arbitrary, legalistic requirement, it reveals that true rest from righteousness by works is found in Him. The Sabbath speaks of a God who has achieved so that we can rest in His achievements. True Sabbath rest is the rest of grace in the loving arms of the One who created us, the One who redeemed us, and the One who is coming again for us.

The Deliverer

There is another important aspect of the Sabbath command.

Deuteronomy 5 restates the Sabbath command to a new generation about to enter the Promised Land. This passage reminds the people that they were slaves in Egypt, and their almighty Creator delivered them.

He is the only One who can deliver us from the bondage of sin. He is the only One who can break the chains that bind us. He is the only One who can deliver us from sin's clutches. This is the message of the Sabbath—an almighty Creator wants to re-create our hearts.

Part III: Life Application

As you consider the practical application of the Sabbath to your own life, consider the following questions:

- When you think of Sabbath rest, what do you think of? How is the concept of Sabbath rest meaningful to you?

- Why is the Bible truth about Creation important in your life? What practical difference does it make if we were created or we evolved over millions of years? How does your belief in either of these two views impact your life today?

- Have you thought of the Sabbath as a sign of deliverance before? Why is this biblical truth important?

- The Sabbath speaks of resting in a God who provides for all our needs. The falling of the manna illustrates His daily provisions. How does this idea of the Sabbath make a difference in your life?

- Considering this week’s lesson, what do you think Ellen G. White means in the following statement: “At the commencement of the time of trouble, we were filled with the Holy Ghost as we went forth and proclaimed the Sabbath more fully.”—*Early Writings*, p. 33. She further explains that by the commencement of the time of trouble, she is speaking about a time just before the close of probation when probation is still open.

Notes

Sabbath Rest



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:26, 27; Gen. 9:6; 2 Pet. 2:19; Rom. 6:1–7; Exod. 19:6; John 5:7–16.*

Memory Text: “Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings” (*Lev. 23:3, NKJV*).

We hear all sorts of arguments against keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, don't we? We hear that Jesus changed the Sabbath to Sunday or that Jesus abolished the Sabbath or that Paul did or that the apostles replaced the seventh-day Sabbath with Sunday in honor of the Resurrection and so forth. In recent years, some of the arguments have become more sophisticated, claiming, for instance, that Jesus is our Sabbath rest, and therefore we don't need to keep that day or any day holy. And, of course, there will always be the argument, strange as it is, that by resting on the seventh day we are somehow seeking to work our way to heaven.

On the other hand, some Christians have become more interested in the idea of rest, of a day of rest, and though they argue that the day is Sunday or that it doesn't matter, they have picked up on the biblical notion of rest and why it is important.

Of course, as Seventh-day Adventists we understand the perpetuity of God's moral law and that obedience to the fourth commandment, as it reads, is no more working our way to heaven than would be obedience to the fifth, sixth, first, or any other commandment.

This week we will look more at the rest God has given us in the Sabbath commandment and why it's important.

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

Sabbath and Creation

Of all the Ten Commandments, only the fourth begins with the verb “remember.” It’s not “Remember, you shall not steal,” or “Remember, you shall not covet.” There is only “Remember the Sabbath day . . .”

The idea of “remembering” presupposes history, presupposes that something happened in the past that we need to, well, remember. When we remember, we make connections with the past, and “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” marks a straight line back to the Creation week itself.

Read Genesis 1:26, 27 and Genesis 9:6. What do these verses teach us about how special we as human beings are—and how radically different we are from the rest of God’s earthly creation? And, too, why is it so important that we understand this distinction?

When we remember Creation, we remember that we are created in God’s image, something that is not said about anything else depicted in the Creation account. It’s obvious that, as human beings, we are radically different from any other creature on the planet, regardless of how much DNA we share in common with some other animals. And, contrary to popular mythology, we are not mere advanced apes or more highly evolved versions of some primeval primate. As humans, made in the image of God, we are unique among all that God created on this world.

How does the Creation story remind us of our relationship to creation? Genesis 2:15, 19.

Realizing that God also created our world reminds us of our responsibility to creation. We are to “have dominion” over creation. Having dominion does not mean exploiting it. We are to rule as God’s regents. We are to interact with the natural world as God would.

Yes, sin has marred and messed up everything, but this earth is still God’s creation, and nothing gives us the right to exploit it, especially to the detriment of other human beings, which is so often the case.

Besides honoring a memorial of God as the Creator, in what ways can Sabbath keeping help us to be more conscious of our need to be good environmental stewards?

Celebrating Freedom

As we saw earlier, the Sabbath points to more than just the days of Creation. The second time we hear the Ten Commandments, Moses was reviewing Israel's 40 years in the wilderness. This time, the sentence introducing the reason for keeping the Sabbath holy is not about Creation but, rather, about liberation from slavery and bondage in Egypt (*Deut. 5:12–15*).

And though, today, we are not slaves in Egypt, we can all face another kind of slavery, one that, in some ways, can be just as oppressive.

What other forms of slavery do we face today? Read Genesis 4:7, Hebrews 12:1, and 2 Peter 2:19.

Sabbath is a celebration of freedom from all the things that keep us in bondage. On Sabbath, we are reminded that there is freedom from sin, not in our own power but in the power of God, which is offered to us by faith. We also are reminded that this is a freedom we did not earn. The firstborn Israelite children were saved by the blood of the lamb smeared on the doorposts the evening before their exodus from Egypt (*Exodus 12*). We, too, have been saved by the blood of the Lamb, and are now to walk in the freedom that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Read Romans 6:1–7. What is Paul saying here that can be linked to what we have been given in the Sabbath?

In the very wording of Deuteronomy 5:15—“And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm” (*NKJV*)—the people were reminded, again, that it was the work and power of God in their behalf that saved them. How much more should we, as Christians, realize that it's only the work and power of Christ in our behalf that has saved us from sin?

This command tells us to rest in the salvation that God has earned for us by His mighty arm. We are set free from our own attempts at righteousness as we remember that God is Creator and that we can trust Him to re-create us, too, and to free us, even right now, from the bondage of sin if we are willing to let Him work in us.

What has been your own experience with the slavery of sin? How can we learn to appropriate for ourselves the promises that we have been given in Jesus of freedom from that slavery?

The Stranger in Your Gates

Read Exodus 19:6. What does this text tell us about the status of ancient Israel? (See also 1 Pet. 2:9.)

Israel had been called out of Egypt to be God's covenant people, the nation through whom, had they stayed faithful, the gospel would have been spread to the world. No question, they were the object of God's special care and concern; given special privileges; and, at the same time, given special responsibilities.

Read Exodus 23:12. What else is going on here? What does this text teach us about how God viewed others besides the Israelites themselves?

The universality of the Sabbath is something that many people miss. Of course, the most common error is that it was only for the Jews, an error exposed in the first two chapters of Genesis. After all, God created all people; so, all people should remember the Sabbath day.

Though we should always keep in mind what the Sabbath represents to us, we should remember, too, what it should tell us about others, as well. In a sense, our resting and relating to our Creator and Redeemer will drive us automatically to look at others with new eyes, to see them as beings created by the same God as we were, loved by the same God who loves us and who died for them as well as for us. As we have seen (*Exod. 20:10, Deut. 5:14*), the servants, the strangers, and even the animals should be given a Sabbath rest.

That even the strangers within their gates; that is, even those not (yet) partaking of the covenantal promises given to Israel—that even they should enjoy the Sabbath rest says a lot. Human beings, even animals, should never be exploited, abused, or taken advantage of. Every week, the Hebrew people—and we, too—should be reminded in a powerful way of just how much in common we have with other people; and even if we do enjoy blessings and privileges that others don't, we must remember that we are still part of the same human family, and thus, we are to treat others with respect and dignity.

How could your own Sabbath keeping, perhaps, become a blessing to those who don't keep the Sabbath? That is, how can you use the Sabbath as a witness to others?

Serving Others Honors God's Sabbath

In the New Testament world, the religious leaders had Sabbath keeping down to a fine art. There were dozens of prohibitions and rules established to help keep the Sabbath holy.

This included a prohibition against tying or untying anything, separating two threads, extinguishing a fire, transporting an object between a private domain and the public domain, or transporting something for more than a specific distance in the public domain.

What charge was brought against Jesus in John 5:7–16?

Completely ignoring the wonderful miracle that Jesus had performed and the freedom from disease that He had given this man, the leaders were obsessed that the healed man was carrying his bed in public on Sabbath. Instead of seeing how the “‘Lord of the Sabbath’ ” (*Mark 2:28, NKJV*) utilized this special day, the leaders were intent on maintaining their own rules and regulations. We need to be careful that in our own way and in our own context we don't make similar mistakes.

How does Isaiah 58:12–14 outline God's agenda for Sabbath keeping?

God does not want empty worship or pious silence. He wants to see His people engaged with other people, especially the downtrodden and marginalized.

Isaiah makes this very plain in Isaiah 58:13, 14: “ ‘If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken’ ” (*Isa. 58:13, 14, NKJV*).

Pursuing our “pleasure” (*Isa. 58:13, NKJV*, or our “own interests,” as the *NRSV* translates here) is equivalent to “trampling the Sabbath” (*NRSV*). Human agendas are not part of God's Sabbath ideal. Rather, we are invited to look out for those who struggle, who are captives, who are hungry and naked and walk in darkness, and whose names no one seems to remember. More than any other day of the week, Sabbath should take us out of ourselves and our own selfishness and cause us to think more about others and others' needs than about ourselves and our needs.

The Sign That We Belong to God

During World War II, England was expecting an imminent invasion by the German army. Preparations were made to defend the island home as much as possible. Extra fortifications were installed along the beaches. Roads, of course, would offer the enemy the fastest routes to their objectives, and consequently, blockades were installed at strategic points. English authorities then did something strange. In order to slow down and confuse the enemy, railway signs were removed and road signs were taken down. Engraved markers on stone or on buildings couldn't be taken down, but they were covered with cement.

Signs are significant. They serve as markers and guides. In the pre-GPS era, we all had maps and watched for signs.

What is the Sabbath a sign of? Read Exodus 31:13, 16, 17. In what ways can we apply what is said here to ourselves, today, people who believe in the perpetuity of God's law?

Though these words were spoken specifically for ancient Israel, we who are Christ's are "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (*Gal. 3:29*), and the Sabbath today remains a sign between God and His people. Exodus 31 points out that the Sabbath is a sign of God's perpetual (or eternal) covenant (*Exod. 31:16, 17*). This sign helps us to "know" our Creator, our Redeemer, and our Sanctifier. It's like a flag that gets raised every seven days and functions as something to help us remember, since we tend to forget.

God's Sabbath is a constant reminder of our origins, our liberation, our destiny, and our responsibility to the outcasts and the marginalized. In fact, the Sabbath is so important that instead of our coming to it, it comes to us, every week and without exception, a perpetual reminder of who we are, who made us, what He is doing for us, and what He will ultimately do for us when He makes new heavens and a new earth.

A holy God invites His human covenant partners to consider the rhythm that governs what really counts—the saving relationship between the Creator and Redeemer and His wayward creation. Every week, and with the force and authority that comes from God, we are commanded to enter into the rest that we have been freely given in Christ Jesus, "the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross" (*Heb. 12:2, NKJV*).

How can you learn to have a deeper experience with God during the Sabbath?

Further Thought: “All through the week we are to have the Sabbath in mind and be making preparation to keep it according to the commandment. We are not merely to observe the Sabbath as a legal matter.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 353.

“All heaven is keeping the Sabbath, but not in a listless, do-nothing way. On this day every energy of the soul should be awake, for are we not to meet with God and with Christ our Saviour? We may behold Him by faith. He is longing to refresh and bless every soul.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 362.

“The demands upon God are even greater upon the Sabbath than upon other days. His people then leave their usual employment, and spend the time in meditation and worship. They ask more favors of Him on the Sabbath than upon other days. They demand His special attention. They crave His choicest blessings. God does not wait for the Sabbath to pass before He grants these requests. Heaven’s work never ceases, and men should never rest from doing good. The Sabbath is not intended to be a period of useless inactivity. The law forbids secular labor on the rest day of the Lord; the toil that gains a livelihood must cease; no labor for worldly pleasure or profit is lawful upon that day; but as God ceased His labor of creating, and rested upon the Sabbath and blessed it, so man is to leave the occupations of his daily life, and devote those sacred hours to healthful rest, to worship, and to holy deeds. The work of Christ in healing the sick was in perfect accord with the law. It honored the Sabbath.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 207.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Environmental care has become a highly charged political debate in many countries. How can we as Adventists be good stewards of nature without taking on political agendas?
- 2 Service begins in the mind. How can we foster the mindset of serving those around us (in our families, churches, and communities) more passionately? How does the Sabbath offer us more opportunity to be able to do just that?
- 3 Every Sabbath we are reminded that all humanity was created by God. It helps us see people through God’s eyes. How should the Sabbath help us remember that racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender differences are irrelevant when it comes to being made in God’s image and being the objects of His love?

Angel at the Gas Station

By TERRI SAELEE

Lamphai Sihavong stared in bewilderment at the confusing maze of highways around and above her in the U.S. city of Chicago. She had no idea how to find her husband. She looked at the four children seated in the car and wondered what to do next.

The couple had arrived in the United States as refugees from the Southeast Asian country of Laos, and they were driving with their six children across the country to find work. Leaving Sacramento, California, the family first traveled 1,400 miles to Grand Island, Nebraska, where they had heard about work at a factory. But when they arrived, they learned the jobs were filled. Then they heard about a possible job in Holland, Michigan, another 750 miles away. The family started out on the 12-hour journey to Michigan. Lamphai's husband led the way, driving the moving truck with two children and all their belongings. She followed with the other four children in the car.

All went well until Chicago. Lamphai tried to follow her husband closely, but she got stuck in heavy traffic and lost sight of his truck. Overwhelmed by the maze of roads, she stopped at a gas station. Neither she nor her husband had cell phones. She had no way to contact him, and she had no idea how to find their destination. Her only hope was God. She was glad that missionaries had visited their refugee camp in Thailand to tell them about God. Together, she and the four children prayed earnestly to God for help.

As they opened their eyes, they saw a pleasant-looking man walking toward them.

"Let me guess," he said. "Are you looking for your husband, Veuy?"

"Yes!" Lamphai acknowledged with surprise.

She wondered how the stranger knew her husband's name.

"Get in your car and follow me," the man said. "I'll help you find him."

Lamphai followed him back onto the road and through a maze of highways until suddenly she saw her husband's moving truck. Gratefully, she and the children turned to wave their thanks, but the stranger was gone.

The family arrived safely in Michigan, and Veuy and Lamphai found work and began attending the Holland Seventh-day Adventist Church. Soon they invited new Lao friends to join them, and the church gave the small group a room to worship in their own language. Today the group has its own church where Lamphai introduces people to the God who sent an angel to the gas station.



Several Lao congregations have sprouted up across the North American Division as a result of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 2011. With this quarter's offering, you will help provide pastors and resources to groups like Lamphai's.

Part I: Overview

Have you ever lost something, but it was in plain sight and you did not see it? Let's suppose you lost your car keys. You searched all over the house but could not find them. Suddenly you remember. You left them in your jacket pocket hanging in the closet or in your purse on a chair in the kitchen.

God has given us the gift of remembering. What if we did not have that gift? What if the only thing we knew was the present? Life would be terribly complicated. In this week's lesson, we will return to the subject of the Sabbath and look at it from a different perspective. You will recall that the fourth commandment begins with the word "remember." None of the other commandments begin that way. Remembering presupposes you have known something before. The Sabbath commandment is a perpetual reminder to the entire world of God's creative authority. Wherever we are in the world, whether we recognize it or not, the Sabbath comes to all humanity offering its blessings each seventh day.

Throughout Scripture the Sabbath reminds us that Christ made us, redeemed us, delivers us, re-creates us, and is coming again for us. Our lesson this week underscores the fact that in God's eternal plan, Sabbath is a day of blessing, delight, worship, and service. Especially on Sabbath, as we linger in His presence, participate in corporate worship, and seek Him anew, He re-creates us in His image.

Part II: Commentary

In 2008, there was a fascinating article published, titled "Neurotheology: Are We Hardwired for God?" The article quotes Dean Hamer, a PhD behavioral geneticist. The author of the article, René J. Muller, PhD, states, "In 2004 Hamer published *The God Gene: How Faith Is Hardwired Into Our Genes*, which was showcased in a *Time* cover story on neurotheology. Hamer made it clear that he had approached his work with the tools of natural science: 'The first task for any scientist attempting to link genetics to spirituality is to show that spirituality can be defined and quantified.' " "Hamer's work is not about demonstrating the existence of God, which is the domain of religion, but about showing that spirituality is a real phenomenon that can be described and measured. . . . Religion, he believes, is rooted in nurture and spirituality in nature." —"Neurotheology: Are We Hardwired for God?" *Psychiatric Times*, May 1, 2008, <http://psychiatrictimes.com/view/neurotheology-are-we-hardwired>

-god. Hamer joins a growing number of scientists who believe that we are “hardwired for God.”

In Genesis 1:26, the biblical narrative recounts the creation of human beings. “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’ ” (*NKJV*). Genesis 1:27 continues: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (*NKJV*).

What does it mean that human beings were created in the image of God? Certainly, it means more than a mere physical resemblance. Both animals and humans procreate. The image of God has to do with the totality of who we are physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. We have been given conscience, reason, and judgment to make moral and ethical decisions. But most of all, written into our genetic code, in our DNA, at the deepest level, we are beings who worship. The Sabbath fills that aching void in our hearts to reconnect with our Creator. The Sabbath is not some legalistic requirement or an exclusively Jewish institution. The Sabbath is a celebration of the life that Christ has given us. It is a reminder to care for the environment around us that also is the object of our Creator’s care.

The Sabbath and the Environment

When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden, He instructed them to “tend and keep it” (*Gen. 2:15, NKJV*). Adam also was given the privilege of naming all the animals (*Gen. 2:19, 20*). Our first parents were close to nature in their garden home and were instructed by God to preserve their natural surroundings. The Sabbath was a weekly reminder both of their relationship to God and their environment. Worshiping the Creator also includes caring for His creation. Currently, industrial pollution is destroying our planet. “Toxic pollution affects more than 200 million people worldwide, according to Pure Earth, a nonprofit environmental organization. . . . Americans generate 30 billion foam cups, 220 million tires, and 1.8 billion disposable diapers every year, according to the Green Schools Alliance. . . . Pollution in China can change weather patterns in the United States. It takes just five days for the jet stream to carry heavy air pollution from China to the United States, where it stops clouds from producing rain and snow. About 7 million premature deaths annually are linked to air pollution, according to [the World Health Organization]. That is one in eight deaths worldwide.”—Alina Bradford, “Pollution Facts and Types of Pollution,” Live Science, February 28, 2018, <http://livescience.com/22728-pollution-facts.html>. The Sabbath is a clarion call to care for God’s creation.

The Sabbath and Deliverance

When Moses restates the Sabbath command to a new generation just about

ready to enter the Promised Land, he begins, “ ‘ “Observe the Sabbath day” ’ ” and concludes with “ ‘ “and remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” ’ ” (*Deut. 5:12, 15, NKJV*). The Sabbath is a sign of deliverance. The Israelites were held in bondage to the Egyptians for centuries. Miraculously, God delivered them. They did not deliver themselves. God delivered them by His “mighty hand.” The Sabbath is a reminder of the power of God to deliver us out of any situation.

At Creation, God spoke, and our world came into existence. God’s Word is an all-powerful, creative, life-changing Word. The Sabbath is a weekly reminder that there is nothing impossible for God. Since He created the world with His Word, He can re-create our hearts. Since He brought light out of darkness, He can lighten our darkened minds. Since He spoke, and fruit trees appeared with their ripe, delicious fruits, He can produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Since He breathed life into Adam, He can breathe new life into our lives. Romans 6:1–7 speaks of the new life that Christ gives us as we voluntarily die to the old life as manifested in the ceremony of baptism. There is a direct linkage between the original life God created in Eden and the newness of life that occurs when God re-creates our hearts. In the beginning, God created life, and once again He makes our lives new. The Sabbath is a symbol of Creation and God’s new creation.

The Sabbath as a Symbol of Refreshing and Blessing

God designed the Sabbath for all humanity. Its refreshing blessing, according to Scripture, is for each one of us (*Exod. 23:12*). The blessings of the Sabbath are not exclusively for the Jews. According to the Old Testament, they are for every person. The Sabbath not only is a day of worship but also a day to bless others. Jesus performed more healing miracles on the Sabbath day than on any other day. For Jesus, the Sabbath was a day to touch others with His healing grace.

Consider the case of the invalid at the Pool of Bethesda, located in Jerusalem, just inside the Sheep Gate. Bethesda means “house of mercy,” or “house of grace.” Evidently, Jesus was on His way to Sabbath worship when He saw a man who had been in a horrible condition for 38 years. Recounting this experience, Ellen G. White describes Jesus as “walking alone in apparent meditation and prayer” when He saw “one case of supreme wretchedness.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 201, 202. It was the Sabbath, and Jesus knew that this act of healing would generate significant controversy among the Pharisees. The priests had 39 different

regulations governing acceptable work on the Sabbath. These “meaningless requirements” and “senseless restrictions” were an “intolerable burden.” —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 204. We are told that Jesus “by His words and by His works of mercy . . . was breaking the oppressive power of the old traditions and man-made commandments, and presenting the love of God in its exhaustless fullness”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 205.

Seeing his hopelessness, Jesus asked the poor sufferer, “ ‘Wilt thou be made whole?’ ” (*John 5:6*). It was impossible for the man to make himself whole. By faith he responded to the Savior’s command, “ ‘Rise, take up thy bed, and walk’ ” (*John 5:8*). New life flowed into every nerve and tissue of his body. Miraculously he was made whole. By faith he accepted Christ’s word and acted upon it. This Sabbath miracle, as each of Jesus’ Sabbath healings, is intimately tied to a deeper spiritual truth. Accepting the Word of God by faith and acting upon it, we are made whole. The point of this Sabbath miracle is that Jesus is both our Creator and our Redeemer. The One who made us can re-create us and make us whole again. He meets us where we are, sees our needs, redeems us by His grace, and turns our despair into hope.

Part III: Life Application

God urged the people of Israel, through the prophet Isaiah, to make a decided reform in their Sabbath-keeping practices. In Isaiah 58:13, 14, He urges, “If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high places of the earth” (*NKJV*). In biblical times, placing your feet on a piece of property was a symbol of ownership. The Sabbath belongs to God. We do not own it. It is His, so He graciously invites us to find our deepest delight and highest pleasure in worshiping Him and blessing others on the Sabbath.

- How can the Sabbath become even more meaningful for you?

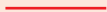
- Are there any aspects of your Sabbath keeping that you would like to change?

- In your range of priorities, how important is Sabbath worship to you?

- List at least three specific things you can do to bless others on the Sabbath.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Notes



Longing *for* More



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Cor. 10:1–11, Lev. 4:32–35, John 1:29, Heb. 4:1–11, Ps. 95:8–11.*

Memory Text: “Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did” (*1 Cor. 10:6, ESV*).

The Queens Museum of Art in New York, United States, houses the world's largest architectural model of a city, depicting all of the buildings of New York. On a scale of 1:1,200 (where 2.5 centimeters or 1 inch corresponds to 33 meters or 100 feet) it covers nearly 870 square meters (9,335 square feet). It was originally completed in 1964 by 100 craftsmen who had worked for more than three years to complete the project. It has been updated to the 1990s and does not reflect the 2021 cityscape. It is an amazingly intricate and detailed copy of the original.

In the end, though, it is still just that: a copy, a model, a representation of something grander, bigger, deeper, and much more intricate than the model itself.

That's how all models are, actually. They are not the original but function only as symbols of the originals. A model helps us grasp the essence of the original, but it can never replace it. Rather, it is there to help people better understand what the original is all about.

Scripture itself is full of miniature models of activities and institutions that all point to larger, heavenly realities. Hebrews 4 helps us discover one of these realities as it relates to the biblical question of rest.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 11.

Baptized Into Moses

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1–11. What did Paul want to communicate to his readers in Corinth when he referred to “examples”?

The Greek term used in 1 Corinthians 10:6 (and also adapted in a similar form in 1 Corinthians 10:11), translated as “example” in most English translations, is *typos*. In English, the word *type* is based on this Greek noun. A type (or example) is never the original but some kind of symbol or representation of it. It is a model of something else.

Hebrews 8:5 offers a good example of this kind of relationship: “They [the priests of the Old Testament temple service] serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, ‘See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain’ ” (*ESV*).

This passage in Hebrews highlights the direct link between heavenly and earthly realities, and then it quotes Exodus 25:9, where God told Moses to build the wilderness sanctuary “according to . . . the pattern” that he had seen on the mountain. The point is that the earthly sanctuary, with all its rituals and procedures, were “examples,” symbols, and models of what is going on in heaven, with Jesus as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

With this in mind, we can better understand what Paul was talking about in 1 Corinthians 10. In these verses Paul revisits some of the key experiences of God’s people in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. “Our fathers” refers to their Jewish ancestors who left Egypt, were under the cloud, passed through the sea, and, thus, were all baptized into a new life of freedom from slavery.

Paul considers these important stations of the wilderness journey a type, or an example, of individual baptism. In the footsteps of Paul’s logic, the reference to “spiritual food” must refer to manna (*compare with Exod. 16:31–35*). Israel drank from the rock, which Paul identifies as Christ (*1 Cor. 10:4*). Think of Jesus, for example, as the “bread of life” (*John 6:48*) and as the “living water” (*John 4:10*), and this all makes perfect sense. Thus, what we see here is Paul’s use of Old Testament history as an example of revealing spiritual truths that can be applied to individual Christians today.

Think back on the experience of the Israelites in the Exodus. What spiritual lessons can we learn from their “examples,” both the good and the bad that they left us?

Ritual and Sacrifices

The Old Testament system of ritual and sacrifices, such as found in Leviticus, offers more examples of what we saw yesterday—Old Testament symbols pointing to New Testament truths. Though modern readers of the Bible often pass over these rituals, they do contain many important spiritual truths that can be of great value to those who study them.

Read the instructions for the sin offering for a regular Israelite in **Leviticus 4:32–35**. What can we learn from this ritual, even though we don't have a sanctuary or temple with an altar where we can offer sacrifices for our sins? Connect this ritual with **John 1:29** and **1 Peter 1:18–21**.

A ritual is an excellent communicator of important values and information, and it needs to be understood in its context. It usually requires a specific time, a particular location, and a predetermined sequence of actions to be efficacious. Indeed, when we read through the biblical injunctions in the Old Testament regarding sacrifice, it becomes clear that God gave very specific details about what could be sacrificed—and about when, where, and what ritual and procedure to follow.

Central to many of the rituals, of course, was blood and the spilling and the sprinkling of blood. This was not pretty, nor was it supposed to be, because it was dealing with the ugliest thing in the universe, and that is sin.

What exact role did the blood play, and why did it have to be put on the horns of the altar? While most of the rituals associated with the sanctuary appear in prescriptive forms (i.e., they give instructions on how to do it), they do not always include all the explanations. Perhaps that's because the people already understood what it all meant. After all, people in Israel understood the significance of blood (*Lev. 17:11*).

The example taken from Leviticus 4:32–35, however, contains an important explanation in Leviticus 4:35: “So the priest shall make atonement for his sin that he has committed, and it shall be forgiven him” (*NKJV*). Thus, blood was key to the whole process of atonement, the means by which we sinners can be made right with a Holy God. What we see with these sacrifices, then, is a type, a model, of Christ's death and ministry in our behalf.

Think about how bad sin must really be that it took the sacrifice, the self-sacrifice, of one Member of the Godhead, Jesus, in order to atone for it. What should this teach us about why we must rely only on grace and never works? After all, what could we add to what Christ already has done for us?

The “Example” of Rest

Besides the examples we already have looked at, this idea of types and symbols can apply to the biblical concept of rest as well. To see this, we go to the New Testament book of Hebrews.

Read Hebrews 4:1–11. What is the remaining promise of entering His rest referring to? How does Israel’s experience during the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings offer additional insights into the idea of entering into God’s rest?

The theme of perseverance and faithfulness is very important here. Though talking about the seventh-day Sabbath, the main focus of these verses (and what came before; see Hebrews 3:7–19) is really a call for God’s people to be persevering in faith; that is, to remain faithful to the Lord and the gospel.

These passages remind the reader to take the lessons learned from God’s leading in the past seriously, “so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience” (*Heb. 4:11, ESV*). Pay attention, this is an opportunity! Israel did hear the gospel, the text continues, but the Word did not profit them. Instead of having their faith strengthened by trust and obedience, they chose rebellion (*compare with Heb. 3:7–15*), and thus, they never experienced the rest that God wanted for them.

Hebrews 4:3 points to the close relationship between faith and rest. We can enter into His rest only when we believe and trust the One who promised rest and who can deliver on this promise, and that is, of course, Jesus Christ.

Read Hebrews 4:3 again. What was the main problem with the people referred to? What lesson can we take from this for ourselves, we who have had the “gospel . . . preached to us as well as to them” (*Heb. 4:2, NKJV*)?

The early Christian community accepted God’s prior revelation (what we call the “Old Testament”) and believed that Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God, the Sacrifice for their sins. And by faith in the Sacrifice, they could experience salvation in Jesus and the rest that we are offered in Him.

How can an understanding of what it means to be saved by the blood of Jesus help us enter into the kind of rest that we can have in Jesus, knowing that we are saved by grace and not by works?

“Harden Not Your Hearts”

Read Hebrews 4:4–7 and Psalm 95:8–11. What warning is given there, both in Psalms and in Hebrews, and what should it say to us today?

Hebrews 4:4–7 quotes both the Creation account and Psalm 95:11 in the context of talking about the unfaithfulness of the Israelites and, hence, their failure to enter into the rest that God wanted for them.

Indeed, Psalm 95:8–11 connects Israel’s wilderness experience with God’s rest and includes the divine oath that faithless Israel would not enter into His rest, originally associated with the Promised Land.

Of course, Israel did enter the Promised Land. A new generation crossed the border and, with God’s help, took the strongholds of the land and settled there.

They did not, however, enter into God’s rest, the idea being that many did not experience the reality of salvation in Jesus because their lack of faith was manifested by flagrant disobedience. Even though rest was associated with the land, it included more than just where the people lived.

Hebrews 4:6 suggests that those who had heard the divine promise of true rest did not enter because of disobedience. What’s the link between disobedience and not entering God’s rest?

“Today” expresses urgency. “Today” means that there is no more time to diddle around. “Today” requires a response and decision now.

Paul grabs hold of the word *sēmeron*, “today,” and really emphasizes how important it is in the context of rest. Psalm 95:7, 8, meanwhile, is a warning and a plea to God’s people not to repeat the mistakes of their ancestors and fail to enter into the true rest that is found only in the salvation God offers us.

What should it mean to us, now, when we hear the words “Today, if you will hear His voice: ‘do not harden your hearts’ ” (NKJV)? What is so important about the word “today”? After all, Psalms used it thousands of years ago. Nevertheless, why should it still be just as important for our “today” as it was for those who heard it thousands of years ago?

Conquering a Heavenly City

The logical development of the key ideas in Hebrews 4 becomes particularly evident when reading Hebrews 4:8–11. Joshua did not give Israel rest. Consequently, since God is no liar, there must be another “rest” that remains for the people of God. This group is not made up exclusively of Jewish believers. It includes all those who have accepted Jesus as their personal Savior.

Read Galatians 3:26–29 and note the characteristics of God’s post-Cross covenant people. What does it mean that there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free man, neither male nor female in the context in which Paul is writing?

At times, Hebrews 4 has been used to emphasize the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, while others have used it to challenge the validity of this Sabbath rest, in light of the fact that there is another (end-time) rest. Neither position reflects the biblical text well. Instead, the text suggests that the end-time focus on God’s special rest has been present since Creation and that the celebration of Sabbath rest offers a small, weekly taste of that end-time rest. Indeed, for the Jews the Sabbath has been understood to be a small precursor of the “*olam haba*” (“the world to come”).

The Sabbath-like rest that remains for the people of God, echoing God’s rest on the first Sabbath in earth’s history, means that we can cease from our own works and trust Him to fulfill His promise of salvation for us.

Contrary to arguments of some interpreters, the context does not support the suggestion that the Sabbath commandment had been fulfilled in the rest of salvation that Christ brought, making it unnecessary for Christians to obey it. The ultimate rest we are promised through what Christ has done for us does not replace the biblical seventh-day Sabbath; on the contrary, it enhances it.

In a world that highly values self-made people, hard work, and getters, resting in Jesus and trusting that His grace is sufficient to save and transform us is truly countercultural.

How can you help others find rest in Jesus when they think that their sins have been too grievous, that their hearts cannot be changed, and that their cases are truly hopeless? What biblical reference would you share with them?

Further Thought: “We are not always willing to come to Jesus with our trials and difficulties. Sometimes we pour our troubles into human ears, and tell our afflictions to those who cannot help us, and neglect to confide all to Jesus, who is able to change the sorrowful way to paths of joy and peace. Self-denying, self-sacrificing gives glory and victory to the cross. The promises of God are very precious. We must study his word if we would know his will. The words of inspiration, carefully studied and practically obeyed, will lead our feet in a plain path, where we may walk without stumbling. Oh, that all, ministers and people, would take their burdens and perplexities to Jesus, who is waiting to receive them, and to give them peace and rest! He will never forsake those who put their trust in him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, March 17, 1887, p. 161.

“Can you, dear youth, look forward with joyful hope and expectation to the time when the Lord, your righteous Judge, shall confess your name before the Father and before the holy angels? The very best preparation you can have for Christ’s second appearing is to rest with firm faith in the great salvation brought to us at His first coming. You must believe in Christ as a personal Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 368.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What’s so special about the seventh-day Sabbath that it prefigures God’s heavenly rest for His people? That is, how does the Sabbath rest give us a foretaste of eternity?
- 2 *Atonement* means reconciliation and indicates the way back to God. Think about this important statement found in Romans 5:11: “And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (NKJV). If someone were to ask you, “What does it mean to be reconciled to God, and what difference has this reconciliation made in your life,” what would you answer?
- 3 How can we avoid majoring in minors in our Christian life? What keeps us focused on the big picture offered in God’s Word?
- 4 Think again about all the mistakes made and the lack of faith the children of Israel manifested in the wilderness. Though the details of their challenges are different from ours (we’re not wandering through a vast desert), what common principles are there? That is, how in our own Christian walk might we be confronted with the same challenges they were, and how can we learn from their mistakes?

Stepping Out in Faith

By TERRI SAELEE

In Iraq, someone told Father about Jesus. Father fell in love with Jesus and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Mother, however, decided to remain with her traditional religion. After some time, life became difficult for the family in Iraq. Father, fearing for the safety of Mother and their two young daughters, moved the family to live as refugees in the United States.

In California, Father and Mother sent their daughters to public school. But Father prayed that the girls would be able to study at an Adventist school. He did not have the money to pay for church school, and even if he did, he did not know any Adventists who could tell him where to find one.

One day, Father visited a food bank that distributed supplies to needy families. While waiting to receive food, Father began talking with a volunteer and discovered that the food bank was organized and run by a Seventh-day Adventist church that happened to own a church school. Father and Mother had been carefully saving money so that they could return to school and get better jobs. They decided to pay for their daughters' tuition.

A short time later, Father arrived at the church school with Mother and their 9-year-old and 11-year-old girls. They sat in the principal's office, their faces shining, as they waited for information about what to do next.

The principal and church pastor, who sat across from them, glanced at each other. The eagerness on the faces of the parents and the girls tugged at their hearts. But the money that Father and Mother had saved up was not enough. "We very much want the girls to study here," the principal said. "But unfortunately, there is not enough money to cover the tuition."

The principal paused and glanced at the pastor again. She saw compassion in his eyes and felt encouraged to continue.

"We will enroll the girls in the school," she said. "Let's step out in faith."

The four adults and two girls knelt on the floor and bowed their heads.

"Dear God, we need Your help," the pastor prayed. "Please provide money for the education of these two precious girls."

Shortly after the family left, the principal received a phone call. It was from the coordinator of the Adventist Refugee and Immigrant Ministries for the Seventh-day Adventist Church's North American Division. She was calling to announce that she had money to help pay for the tuition of refugee children. The money, she said, came from a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 2011.

The principal could hardly believe her ears. Quickly, she called Father to announce that money had been found for his daughters' tuition.

"I knew God would answer our prayers!" Father exclaimed.

Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help refugees in the North American Division again. May God use your gifts to answer more prayers like Father's. Imagine meeting someone in heaven who learned more about God and decided to serve Him because you gave.

Part I: Overview

The Old Testament is filled with types, shadows, and rituals that, although often neglected by twenty-first-century Christians, have deep spiritual significance. The lessons taught in these types are rich with meaning. Understood correctly, they enhance our spiritual lives immensely.

The entire history of Israel is an example of our Christian walk with God. As the Israelites were miraculously delivered from Egyptian bondage, passed through the Red Sea, ate manna in the wilderness, and drank from the rock on their journey, we, too, are on a spiritual journey. Christ providentially delivers us from sin's slavery, leads us through the waters of baptism, nourishes us by the manna of His Word, and quenches our raging thirst in the desert of this world through His own life.

God instructed Israel to construct a sanctuary in the wilderness that He might “ ‘dwell among them’ ” (*Exod. 25:8*). This sanctuary was to be built according to the “pattern” of the heavenly reality (*Exod. 25:40*). Everything about its construction and services reveals eternal truths about the living Christ. Jesus is represented in every offering. The entire priesthood, every article of furniture, and every service point forward to Christ. The sacrificial system of the shedding of blood foreshadows the shed blood of Christ.

The goal of Israel's deliverance and journey out of Egypt was arrival in Canaan. The Promised Land would provide them Heaven's rest. The Sabbath rest foreshadowed this larger rest in Christ and was a precursor of the rest God intended for them in the Promised Land (*Heb. 4:1–11*).

Part II: Commentary

The apostle Paul often referred to the experience of the Israelites in their journey to the Promised Land as an example for Christian believers. In 1 Corinthians 10:11, he states, “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (*NKJV*). The examples of the Old Testament provide valuable insights for Christian living.

In our imagination, let's visit the sanctuary. We watch a man with a

lamb approach the altar and place his hand upon the lamb. Leviticus 4:33 makes the meaning clear: “Then he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering” (*NKJV*). The laying of his hand upon the lamb implies confession—and genuine confession is specific. Leviticus 5:5, in its description of the trespass offering, points this out: “He shall confess that he has sinned in that thing” (*NKJV*).

In symbol his sin has been transferred from himself to the lamb. And so, the lamb must die. Why must the lamb die? What has the lamb done wrong? Nothing, absolutely nothing. But here is a central message of the sanctuary. When we confess our sins, they are, in fact, transferred to Jesus, the Lamb of God. Who slays the sacrifice? The repentant sinner who has transferred his sin to the substitute. “And he shall . . . slay it for a sin offering in the place where they kill the burnt offering” (*Lev. 4:33*). Notice the steps involved.

The book *The Great Controversy* describes the scene this way: “Day by day the repentant sinner brought his offering to the door of the tabernacle and, placing his hand upon the victim’s head, confessed his sins, thus in figure transferring them from himself to the innocent sacrifice. The animal was then slain.”—Page 418.

The priest then took the blood from the slain animal and sprinkled it before the veil in the Holy Place of the Sanctuary. In some special instances, the priest ate the flesh and then entered the sanctuary. The sin was then transferred in the body of the priest who had eaten the flesh. The common person, of course, was unable to enter the sanctuary. When that individual’s sins were transferred to the sanctuary, they were hidden from human view. No one could see them. They were covered by the blood of Christ.

Therefore, David exclaims in Psalm 32:1, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” The word “blessed” means “happy, contented, fulfilled, at peace, or at rest.” When we come to Jesus and confess specific sins, our hearts are at peace. Our sins are transferred in fact to the heavenly sanctuary. So, the psalmist can joyfully exclaim, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (*Ps. 103:12, NKJV*). We no longer bear the burden, the guilt, the shame, the condemnation of sin. It has been transferred to our dying Lamb. Our Living Priest bears it through the blood to heaven’s sanctuary.

Lessons From the Lamb

In the typical service when the contrite sinner transferred his sin to the innocent lamb, it became a sin bearer. So, concerning Christ the Scriptures state, that He is the One “who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (*1 Pet. 2:24*). As the repentant sinner brought a substitute that died in that person’s place, so every penitent person can

come to Calvary and, looking at the crucified Son of God, say, He “loved me, and gave himself for me” (*Gal. 2:20*).

Christ’s grace is unmerited, undeserved, unearned. Jesus died the agonizing, painful death that lost sinners will die. He experienced the fullness of the Father’s wrath, or judgment, against sin. He was rejected so that we could be accepted. He died the death that was ours so that we could live the life that was His. He wore the crown of thorns so that we could wear a crown of glory. He was nailed upright in torturous pain upon a cross so that we could reign on a throne with the redeemed of all ages, wearing the robes of royalty forever. In our shame and guilt, Jesus did not reject us; He reached out in love to accept us. The dying lamb represents the bruised, battered, bloodied body of our Savior. It speaks of a love so marvelous, so amazing, so divine, that it would rather take the condemnation, guilt, and penalty of sin upon itself than to lose even one of its children eternally.

Ellen G. White explains the significance of the Cross in *The Desire of Ages*, page 753: “Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law.” This is the story of grace. This is the story of a Savior’s love beyond measure.

Sabbath Rest in Christ

True Sabbath rest is the rest of grace in the loving arms of the One who created us, the One who redeemed us, and the One who is coming again for us. Do you remember that unique phrase in Genesis 2:3: “in it [the Sabbath] He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (*NKJV*)? The Sabbath is God’s rest. He rested on the seventh day as a divine acknowledgment that His work was completed.

Hebrews 4:9, 10 likens God’s rest at the end of Creation week, when He ceased from His works, to our ceasing from our human works, entering Christ’s salvation rest. Hebrews puts it this way: “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His” (*Heb. 4:9, 10, NKJV*). According to Scripture, our Sabbath rest is an act of supreme worship in which we rest totally in Jesus for our salvation. Commenting on Hebrews 4:4, *The SDA Bible Commentary* makes this insightful statement: “As God’s original purpose for this world—His ‘rest’—remains unchanged, the seventh-day Sabbath, the day of ‘rest’ He established to be a memorial of creation and thus a reminder of His purpose in the creation of the world, likewise remains unchanged. The observance of the seventh-day Sabbath thus testifies not only to faith in God as the Creator of all things, but also to faith in His power to transform the life and qualify men and

women for entering into that eternal ‘rest’ He originally intended for the inhabitants of the earth.”—Volume 7, p. 420.

There is a richness in the concept of divine rest. The book of Hebrews expands the concept quite dramatically. For the author of Hebrews, divine rest involves a faith relationship with Jesus that leads to resting in the One that created us, knowing that He will never leave us nor forsake us. It also includes resting in His finished work on the cross. Resting in Christ is trusting His grace for our salvation; but the rest in Hebrews 4 includes much more. Christ’s goal for the Israelites was to get them into the Promised Land. His purpose was not for them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. Their hearts would always be restless until they arrived safely in their homeland. When the covenant promise was fulfilled, they would find lasting peace and heavenly rest. Whatever challenges we face on this earth, the rest that Christ offers is not temporary. Sabbath rest foreshadows the eternal rest that Jesus desires for us in heaven’s Promised Land. Then, and only then, our hearts will be in permanent peace. Our rest in Christ today is preliminary to the glorious day in which we will be at rest with Him in eternity.

Part III: Life Application

Have someone read the following anonymous poem aloud in class. Take into consideration what we studied in this week’s lesson, and answer the questions following the poem.

Just let me rest in Thee, O Lord,
 Nor strive, nor fret, nor strain
 Against the burden of the days
 That bring me tears and pain.
 Let me remember that Thy Hand
 Can lighten every load.
 And in Thy presence, I shall be
 Safe on life’s darkest road.
 For Thou hast said that Thou art near
 To all who need Thine aid.
 Then, foolish mortal that I am,
 Why should I be afraid?

Discuss the questions below in the context of today's lesson:

- What does it mean to enter Christ's rest?

- How does the ancient sanctuary service contribute to our understanding of rest in Christ?

- Reflect on these three events in salvation history—Creation, the Cross, and the second coming of Christ. How does a deeper understanding of each of these events provide the basis for peace and rest in Christ?

- What reason do Hebrews 3:9 and Hebrews 4:13 give for Israel's not entering God's rest, and how can we enter His rest?

The Restless Prophet



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Jonah 1–4, Jer. 25:5, Ezek. 14:6, Rev. 2:5, Luke 9:51–56, Jude 1–25.*

Memory Text: “ ‘And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?’ ” (*Jonah 4:11, NKJV*).

One of the most interesting stories in Scripture has to be that of Jonah. Here he was, a prophet of God, someone called of God, and yet—what? He ran away from God's call. Then, after being persuaded in a dramatic way to change his mind and obey the Lord, he did so—but then only to do what? To complain that the people to whom he was called to witness actually repented and were spared the destruction that, otherwise, would have been theirs!

What an example of someone not at rest, not at peace—even to the point where he cried out, “ ‘Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!’ ” (*Jon. 4:3, NKJV*).

Jesus Himself referred to the story of Jonah, saying: “ ‘The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here’ ” (*Matt. 12:41, NKJV*). Greater than Jonah, indeed! If not, He couldn't be our Savior.

This week, let's look at Jonah and what we can learn from his restlessness and lack of peace.

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

Running Away

Jonah was an amazingly successful missionary. At the same time, he also was a very reluctant one, at least at first. Whatever Jonah was doing, God's call interrupted his life in a big way. Instead of taking God's yoke upon his shoulders and discovering for himself that His yoke is easy and His burden light (*Matt. 11:30*), Jonah decided to find his own "rest," and that was by running in the opposite direction from where God was calling him to go.

Where was Jonah hoping to find peace and rest from God's call? How well did it work for him? Read *Jonah 1*.

Jonah set off in the opposite direction from where God called him. He didn't even stop to reason with God, as had many of the other Bible prophets when called to be God's messengers (*see, for example, Exod. 4:13*).

Interestingly enough, this was not the first time that Jonah had been called to speak for God, as suggested by *2 Kings 14:25*. In that case, however, Jonah appears to have done what the Lord had asked him to. Not this time, however.

Why?

Historical and archaeological records document the cruelty of the Neo-Assyrian overlords who dominated the ancient Near East during the eighth century B.C., the time that Jonah ministered in Israel. About seventy-five years later, the Neo-Assyrian king Sennacherib attacked Judah. Israel and Samaria already had fallen about twenty years earlier, and King Hezekiah apparently had joined a local anti-Assyrian coalition.

Now the time had come for the Assyrians to settle accounts. The Bible (*2 Kings 18, Isaiah 36*), historical Assyrian documents, and the wall reliefs of Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh all tell us the cruel story about the fall of Lachish, one of the most important and well-fortified southern-border fortresses of Hezekiah. In one inscription, Sennacherib claimed to have taken more than two hundred thousand prisoners from 46 fortified cities that he claimed to have destroyed. When the Assyrian king took Lachish, hundreds or thousands of prisoners were impaled; hard-core supporters of King Hezekiah were flayed alive, while the rest were sent to Assyria as cheap slave labor.

The Assyrians could be incredibly cruel, even by the standards of the world at that time. And God was sending Jonah into the very heart of that empire?

Is it any wonder that Jonah didn't want to go?

Fleeing from God? Have you ever done that before? If so, how well did it work out for you? What lessons should you have learned from that mistake?

A Three-Day Rest

Jonah's flight from God was not without problems. His short-lived "rest" was disturbed when God miraculously intervened with the storm. Jonah was saved from a watery grave by God, who ordered a fish to save Jonah.

However, it was only when Jonah found himself in a forced three-day rest in the stomach of the big fish that he realized how very dependent he was on God. Sometimes we have to be brought to the place where we don't have anything that this world offers to lean on in order to realize that Jesus is who we really need.

Read Jonah's prayer in the belly of the fish (see *Jon. 2:1–9*). **What did he pray about?**

Though he was there in the deep, in a very dangerous situation, Jonah, in his prayer, prayed about the sanctuary. He would look toward "Your holy temple."

What is going on here?

The temple forms a focal point of this prayer, and it should be the central point of prayer in general. There is primarily only one place in the Old Testament where God can be found. He is in the sanctuary (see *Exod. 15:17, Exod. 25:8*). The sanctuary is the central point of prayer and communion with God.

Yet, Jonah was not referencing the Jerusalem temple. Rather, he was talking about the heavenly sanctuary (*Jon. 2:7*). That's where his hope existed, because that's where God and the salvation He offers truly come from.

Jonah finally understood this important truth. He had experienced God's grace. He had been saved. As the big fish spit him out, he understood firsthand about God's love for him, a runaway prophet. He certainly had learned (even if not without some detours along the way) that the only safe course for any believer is to seek to be within God's will.

So, now he decided to do his duty and obey God's orders, finally heading for Nineveh, no doubt on faith, as he was heading toward an exceedingly wicked city whose citizens might not like this foreign prophet telling them just how bad they were.

Sometimes we might just need to get away from it all in order to get a fresh perspective on things. Though the story of Jonah, who miraculously survived in the belly of a fish, is a rather extreme case, how might stepping out of your normal environment allow you to look at it from a new and, perhaps, needed perspective?

Mission Accomplished

Compared to any city or town in Israel, Nineveh was a huge city. It was an “exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent” (*Jon. 3:3, NKJV*).

Read *Jonah 3:1–10*. What is the response of this wicked place? What lessons can we take from this story for ourselves in our attempts to witness to others?

While walking the city, Jonah proclaimed God’s message: “ ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ ” (*Jon. 3:4, NKJV*). The message was right to the point. Though the details are not given, it becomes clear that the message fell on receptive ears, and the people of Nineveh (collectively!) believed Jonah’s words of warning.

In a typical Near Eastern manner, a decree was declared by the king of Nineveh in order to demonstrate a change of heart. Everyone—including animals—had to fast and mourn (how animals mourn, the text doesn’t say). The king stepped down from his throne and sat in the dust of the ground, a very important symbolic act.

Read *Jonah 3:6–9*. Compare it with *Jeremiah 25:5*, *Ezekiel 14:6*, and *Revelation 2:5*. What elements were involved in the king’s speech that show he understands what true repentance is all about?

The sermon was short, to the point, but filled with correct theology regarding true repentance. While Jonah had been preaching, the Holy Spirit must have been hard at work in the hearts of the Ninevites.

The Ninevites did not have the benefit of all the stories of God’s tender leading that the Israelites had, and yet, they still responded to Him in a positive manner. They were saying in effect, “Let’s throw ourselves on God’s mercy, not on our own accomplishments! Let’s rely completely on His goodness and grace.”

Strangely, Jonah, who had experienced God’s grace for himself personally, firsthand, seemed to think that God’s grace was something so exclusive that only some might have opportunity to rest in it.

Why is repentance such a crucial part of the Christian experience? What does it mean truly to repent of our sins, especially the sins that we commit again and again?

An Angry, Restless Missionary

Unfortunately, the story of Jonah doesn't end with chapter 3.

Read **Jonah 4:1–11.** What is Jonah's problem? What lesson can we learn from his rather faulty character?

Jonah 4 begins with Jonah's anger toward God because his mission outreach was so successful. Jonah was worried about looking foolish. We find God taking the time to talk to and reason with His prophet, who behaved like a toddler having a temper tantrum.

Here is evidence that true followers of God—even prophets—may have some growing and overcoming yet to do.

“When Jonah learned of God's purpose to spare the city that, notwithstanding its wickedness, had been led to repent in sackcloth and ashes, he should have been the first to rejoice because of God's amazing grace; but instead he allowed his mind to dwell upon the possibility of his being regarded as a false prophet. Jealous of his reputation, he lost sight of the infinitely greater value of the souls in that wretched city.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 271.

God's patience with His prophet was astounding. He seemed intent on using Jonah, and when Jonah ran away, God sent the storm and the fish to bring the runaway back. And even now, again, when Jonah was being contrary, God sought to reason with Jonah and his bad attitude, saying to him: “ ‘Is it right for you to be angry?’ ” (*Jon. 4:4, NKJV*).

Read **Luke 9:51–56.** How does this account somewhat parallel what happened in the story of Jonah?

“ ‘God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life’ ” (*John 3:16, NKJV*) or, as God puts it in *Jonah 4:11*: “ ‘Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and also much livestock?’ ” (*NKJV*). How grateful we should be that, in the end, God—and not we ourselves—is the ultimate Judge of hearts and minds and motives.

How can we learn to have the kind of compassion and patience for others that God has, or at least to learn to reflect that compassion and patience?

A Two-Way Street

Jonah seemed to be more trouble than he was worth. Nineveh was dangerous, but in the story of Jonah the Ninevites didn't seem to be the problem. They understood the message and quickly repented. Jonah, the missionary, seems to be the weak link in this mission story.

In this account, God pursued a reluctant prophet because He knew that Jonah needed the missionary trip to Nineveh as much as the Ninevites needed to hear the missionary's message.

Read the book of Jude. How can we “keep [our]selves in the love of God” (*Jude 21, NKJV*)? What does that mean?

In his short book in the New Testament, Jude tells us in Jude 21 to “keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life” (*NIV*).

Experiencing God's love and grace personally is not a one-time event. One sure way to “keep yourselves in God's love” is to reach out to others. In the next verses Jude tells us to “be merciful,” and “save” others by “snatching them from the fire” (*NIV*).

Read Jude 20–23. What is it saying here that relates to the story of Jonah, and what does this say to us as well?

God called Jonah to go to Nineveh because Jonah probably hadn't spent much time thinking about his relationship to the Assyrians before this particular call. He probably knew that he didn't like them, but he had no idea of how much he hated them or the extremes to which he would go in order to avoid them, even after he got the call. Jonah wasn't ready to have a Ninevite as a next-door neighbor in heaven. Jonah hadn't learned to love as God loves. God called Jonah to go to Nineveh because God loved the Ninevites and wanted them in His kingdom. But God also called Jonah because God loved Jonah. He wanted Jonah to grow and become more like Him as they worked together. God wanted Jonah to find the true rest that comes only by being in a saving relationship with Him and by doing God's will, which includes reaching out to others and pointing them to the faith and hope that we have.

How much time do you spend working for the salvation of others? In a spiritual sense, how does this kind of work lead us to find true rest in Jesus?

Further Thought: “In the charge given him, Jonah had been entrusted with a heavy responsibility; yet He who had bidden him go was able to sustain His servant and grant him success. Had the prophet obeyed unquestioningly, he would have been spared many bitter experiences, and would have been blessed abundantly. Yet in the hour of Jonah’s despair the Lord did not desert him. Through a series of trials and strange providences, the prophet’s confidence in God and in His infinite power to save was to be revived.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 266.

“Thousands can be reached in the most simple and humble way. The most intellectual, those who are looked upon as the world’s most gifted men and women, are often refreshed by the simple words of one who loves God, and who can speak of that love as naturally as the worldling speaks of the things that interest him most deeply.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 232.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 A “prophet of God” who was upset that the people God called him to witness to accepted salvation? How are we to understand this attitude on the part of Jonah? What a powerful example of God’s patience with His people, even when they act contrary to the light they have!
- 2 Jonah’s story seems to suggest that God not only is in the business of saving wayward people but also is very interested in transforming His followers. How can we get a “new heart” and a “new spirit,” even if we already know the Lord and the truth for this time? What is the difference between knowing truth and being transformed by it?
- 3 Read the book of Jude again. What is the essential message of the book, and why is that message relevant to us as a church today?
- 4 How does the experience of working for the salvation of others do us so much spiritual good as well?
- 5 Whatever good reasons Jonah had, or thought he had, for not wanting to go to Nineveh, God showed him how wrong he actually was. What attitude might we have toward others that could reflect the same wrong attitude that Jonah displayed?

No More Resentment

By TERRI SAELEE

Imagine being seven years old and fleeing for your life in a jungle. This was Jimmy Shwe's life in the Southeast Asian country of Myanmar.

Young Jimmy developed a deep resentment toward the authorities because of his experiences. At one point, lost in the jungle, he thought he would die. He decided that if he survived, he would take up arms to get revenge.

After two years of separation, Jimmy found his father in a refugee camp in Thailand. But his father did not agree with Jimmy's plan, saying it would not help to fight. Instead, he urged Jimmy to become a pastor.

It was not easy for Jimmy to give up his anger and deep resentment. But he saw his father's peace and joy as they attended a Seventh-day Adventist church in the refugee camp. He read about the conflict between Christ and Satan in the Bible. He realized his father was right and decided to forgive.

Jimmy became a pastor and later resettled in the United States. He soon discovered that many Adventist refugee families whom he had known in refugee camps in Thailand were now scattered across North America. They were trying to find churches but did not know enough English to understand the messages or participate in the services. Many were discouraged. Jimmy longed to visit and encourage them in their faith. He wanted to help them to organize small groups so they could worship in their own language.

With much prayer, Jimmy planted three churches. But working full time to support his family, he did not have time or funds to travel to help anymore of the 2,000 Karen Adventist refugees scattered across the continent.

"But God knew my heart and my needs," said Jimmy, now a pastor in the Carolina Conference and a Karen church-planting consultant for the North American Division's Adventist Refugee and Immigrant Ministries. "God had been leading all the time, and He already had a plan."

A Thirteenth Sabbath Offering that was collected in 2011 provided funds to reach out to refugees in North America. The funds allowed Jimmy to visit refugees scattered throughout the United States and Canada, helping them to organize congregations in their own language and to serve their communities.

Through his work, 55 Karen churches have been planted across the continent over the past decade.

All this was possible because church members gave, and Jimmy and others like him allowed God to replace their resentment with love.



This quarter, your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will again help share the gospel with refugees in the North American Division. Thank you for planning a generous offering.

Part I: Overview

God's strategy to save lost humanity sometimes appears strange. Nineveh, a city of 120,000 people, was the capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. The Assyrian armies were some of the most vicious in the Near East. Their cruelty was well known throughout the Mediterranean basin. They not only attacked enemy strongholds, but they also destroyed them. They brutally murdered the opposition and took thousands of young people as their slaves.

Imagine Jonah's reaction when God instructed him to travel from Israel to Nineveh to preach a message of repentance in this wicked city. Rather than trusting God's power to accomplish God's command, he was overwhelmed with anxiety. He had no rest or peace of mind, so he fled in the opposite direction. One of the remarkable things about this story is God's heartfelt desire to save the inhabitants of Nineveh. God is passionate about saving lost people. He will do whatever it takes to redeem them. The story of Jonah not only is about saving Nineveh; but it also is about saving Jonah, the reluctant prophet.

Jonah probably did not realize the depth of his animosity toward the Ninevites. Running from God, he ended up in the belly of a huge fish and had three days to contemplate his relationship with God. In an act of sheer desperation, Jonah cried out to God. When the huge fish spat him up on the shore, the reluctant runaway became the agreeable missionary. But the story does not end there. Jonah preached to the people of Nineveh, and when they repented, he was angry. He thought more of his reputation than of God's honor and His love for the people of Nineveh. In this week's lesson, we discover this wonderful truth: Jonah needed the gospel as much as the people of Nineveh did, and so do we.

Part II: Commentary

Jonah was a resident of a small city called Gath-hepher, located a short distance from the seaport city of Joppa (*2 Kings 14:25*). Filled with fear because of the cruelty of the inhabitants in Nineveh, he ran from God's call to witness to them. Boarding a sailing vessel headed for Tarshish, he desired to get as far away from Nineveh as possible. Although we cannot be certain, Tarshish is thought by many Bible commentators to be

Tartessus in southern Spain near Gibraltar. The westward journey by sea from Joppa to Tartessus was approximately 2,200 miles. Nineveh, on the other hand, was located about 700 miles northeast of Joppa.

The thought of being ridiculed, rejected, or even worse, persecuted overwhelmed the prophet. The difficulties before him appeared so great that he could not face them. Commenting on Jonah's lack of faith, Ellen G. White describes Jonah's mindset: "As the prophet thought of the difficulties and seeming impossibilities of this commission, he was tempted to question the wisdom of the call. From a human viewpoint it seemed as if nothing could be gained by proclaiming such a message in that proud city. He forgot for the moment that the God whom he served was all-wise and all-powerful. While he hesitated, still doubting, Satan overwhelmed him with discouragement. The prophet was seized with a great dread, and he 'rose up to flee unto Tarshish.' Going to Joppa, and finding there a ship ready to sail, 'he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them' [*Jon. 1:3*].

"In the charge given him, Jonah had been entrusted with a heavy responsibility; yet He who had bidden him go was able to sustain His servant and grant him success. Had the prophet obeyed unquestioningly, he would have been spared many bitter experiences, and would have been blessed abundantly."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 266.

Jonah did not solve his problem by running away from it. Running only plunged him into more difficulty. The God who commissioned him to preach repentance in Nineveh was fully capable of sustaining, supporting, and strengthening him. God never gives us a task without giving us the ability to accomplish that task. "As the will of man cooperates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 333. Jonah thought more of his weakness than he did of God's strength. But God was not through with him yet.

Jonah was on his way to Tarshish, but God was on His way to Jonah. As the prophet ran from God's call, God called out to the prophet. Scripture says, "The Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up" (*Jon. 1:4, NKJV*). The storm was so fierce that it threatened to break the ship to pieces. When it appeared that the cargo and the whole crew would be lost, in his absolute despair, Jonah begged them to throw him overboard. As he sank beneath the waves, he was swallowed by a large fish. The Bible says, "Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (*Jon. 1:17, NKJV*).

There are those who believe the story of Jonah is too fanciful to be true. They think it is a mythical tale of fiction rather than a historical narrative. The evidence of Scripture, history, and archaeology is against

that view, however. Among other reasons for believing that Jonah's story is a real-life event is that, according to 2 Kings 14:25, Jonah was a historical character. The Jews regarded the book of Jonah as historical. Archaeological finds at Nineveh confirm the size of the city as described in the Bible. Jesus Himself refers to Nineveh and the story of Jonah (*Matt. 12:39, 40; Luke 11:29, 30*). One of the major issues revolves around whether a fish could ever swallow someone and if that person could survive.

John D. Morris, PhD, a scientist with the Institute for Creation Research, explains the possibility of Jonah's being swallowed by a large fish this way: "There are several species of whale and of sharks alive today with gullets large enough to swallow a man whole. Among extinct animals like the plesiosaurs, the same could be said, and perhaps this was a heretofore unknown fish of large size. The point is, the story is not impossible. However, most important, the Bible says that 'the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah' (*Jon. 1:17*). Clearly this event was miraculous and not a naturalistic phenomenon. Thus, we don't have to give it an explanation limited by modern experience or knowledge.

"Could a man survive in a fish's belly? The Hebrew idiom 'three days and three nights' has been clearly shown both from Scripture and other sources to mean a period beginning on one day and ending on the day after the one following. It doesn't necessarily mean three full days and nights. Furthermore, there have been several reported cases of modern sailors or other individuals swallowed by such an animal, only to be recovered many hours later" (John D. Morris, "Did Jonah Really Get Swallowed by a Whale?" Institute for Creation Research, December 1, 1993, <http://icr.org/article/did-jonah-really-get-swallowed-by-whale>). Morris goes on to say that as Christians, we believe in the miraculous, so we accept the Word of God as the story reads in the book of Jonah.

There, in the belly of that large fish, Jonah was able to do some serious thinking. Filled with hopeless despair, he cried out to God. " 'When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer went up to You, into Your holy temple' " (*Jon. 2:7, NKJV*). Jonah looked beyond the darkness to the bright light shining from heaven's sanctuary. He focused his attention on the eternal. The psalmist Asaph declares, "Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary. . . . You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples. You have with Your arm redeemed Your people" (*Ps. 77:13-15, NKJV*). Jonah discovered the God who does wonders. Whatever circumstance we find ourselves in, as we look to the sanctuary and behold the glory of God, like Jonah, our confidence in God and His infinite power will increase. Commenting on Jonah's experience, Ellen G.

White states: “Yet in the hour of Jonah’s despair the Lord did not desert him. Through a series of trials and strange providences, the prophet’s confidence in God and in His infinite power to save was to be revived.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 266.

When Jonah’s faith revived, God worked a miracle, and the large fish spat Jonah out onto the shore. Jonah traveled to Nineveh and preached that God was going to destroy the wicked city. To his surprise, the people repented. There was a great spiritual revival. The king issued a decree in harmony with Eastern custom, and the entire nation fasted, confessed their sin, and repented. Amazingly enough, Jonah was incredibly disappointed. He had fulfilled God’s command, but the terrible consequences did not follow.

In prophecy, there is a category known as conditional prophecy. This concept is expressed well in Jonah 3:10: “Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it” (*NKJV*). The fulfillment of the prophecy was based on their response. When they repented, God “relented.” Jonah’s preaching had been a success, but the reluctant prophet did not recognize it. He felt like a failure, but centuries later, Jesus cited Jonah as an example of faithfulness for his preaching to Nineveh. Here is incredibly good news: God does not give up on us easily. Jonah needed the gospel as much as the Ninevites did. God pursued him, would not let him go, and held on to him until Jonah recognized His mighty hand.

Part III: Life Application

Have you ever sensed that God was leading you to do something, but you were reluctant to do it? Have you ever felt the Holy Spirit’s working on your heart, convicting you to make a decision, and you have been hesitant because of the perceived consequences? Maybe like Jonah, you have been a reluctant missionary. You have heard God’s call to take an office in the church, witness to a neighbor or work colleague, or share the gospel with an unbelieving family member. At the same time, you are worried that you may not be qualified to do it. Or in your witness, you are afraid you might say the wrong thing. You are fearful that they might not accept what you have to say. Even worse, you are afraid they might reject you. Here are a couple things to remember. First, God does not call the qualified; He qualifies those whom He calls. Second, when God impresses you to do something and you accept His assignment, He takes upon Himself the responsibility for the results. God does not call us to “success.” He calls us to faithfulness. If we are faithful to the task He assigns us to do, one

day He will say, “ ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. . . . Enter into the joy of your lord’ ” (*Matt. 25:21, NKJV*).

Notes

The Ultimate Rest



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 1:9–19; Matt. 24:4–8, 23–31; Rev. 14:6–12; Heb. 11:13–16; Phil. 4:4–6.*

Memory Text: “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him’ ” (1 Cor. 2:9, NKJV).

Have you ever felt that you were in the midst of a great battle, a kind of struggle between good and evil? Many, even secular people, have sensed this reality. And we feel that way because, well, it's true. We are in a great battle between good and evil, between Christ (the good) and Satan (the bad).

Life, then, is really being played out on two levels. The great controversy between Christ and Satan is taking place on a global scale—in fact, even a cosmic level, for in heaven is where it first began (*Rev. 12:7*). Yet, in the confusion of events, we can easily lose the big picture of God's escape plan for this world. Wars, political unrest, and natural disasters can hold us in helpless terror. But God's prophetic guidance can help us keep in mind the big picture of where we are going and how we will get there.

The great controversy also is being played out on a much more personal level. All of us individually face faith challenges in our everyday life, and if we die before the second coming of Jesus, we will face death too. This week, we look at how we can rest in Jesus in the face of global unrest and our own unknown future, at least in the short term. In the long term, things look very promising, indeed!

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 25.

A Vision of the End

The oldest surviving disciple actually to have been with Jesus sat on a rocky prison island far from everything that was near and dear to him. What must have been going on in John’s mind as he found himself stranded on this desolate island? How did he wind up there, and like this too? After all, he had seen Jesus leave, and he had seen the two angels standing there, saying: “ ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’ ” (*Acts 1:11, NKJV*).

That, however, had been years and years ago, and Jesus had not yet returned. Meanwhile, the other apostles present on that day already had died, most of them martyred for their witness about Jesus. The young church had undergone a generational change and was now facing horrible persecution from the outside and strange heretical movements from within. John must have felt alone, tired, and restless. And then, suddenly, he was given a vision.

What comfort can you imagine that John got from this vision? Read Revelation 1:9–19.

Jesus had told His followers, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (*Matt. 28:20, NKJV*), words that, no doubt, must have encouraged John as he faced his lonely exile. Surely this vision, this “revelation” of Jesus, must have been a great comfort to him, knowing that Jesus, “the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,” was now manifesting Himself in a special way to the exiled apostle.

What followed from these verses were visions about the future of this world. An awesome panoramic view of history would be portrayed before him, basically what’s to us the history of the Christian church but was to him its future. And yet, amid the trials and tribulations that would come, John was shown how it would all end. “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (*Rev. 21:1, 2, NKJV*).

The great apocalyptic vision John has recorded in Revelation helped John confidently to rest in God’s provisions and promises.

Life now can be hard, even fearful at times. How, though, does knowing that God knows the future and that the future, long term, is good, give us comfort now?

The Countdown

On the Mount of Olives, Jesus painted history in broad strokes as He responded to the questions of the disciples: “ ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’ ” (*Matt. 24:3, NKJV*).

Jesus’ famous sermon, recorded in Matthew 24, covers the uninterrupted, historical time line from His days until the Second Coming and beyond.

Jesus wanted to give His people throughout the ages a rough sketch of the divine schedule for end-time prophecies so that those living at the end of time could be prepared for the *ultimate* event. He wanted us to be able to rest confidently in His love, even when everything around us is falling apart.

Adventists know well Daniel’s description of “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation” (*Dan. 12:1*). Jesus wants us to be prepared for this event, which precedes His second coming.

What will His coming be like? How can we avoid being deceived? Read Matthew 24:4–8, 23–31.

Jesus’ coming will be a literal event at the end of time. Considering the space given in prophecy to His return, and even in Jesus’ sermons, *this is a big deal*.

The last time there was a worldwide climactic event only eight people in all the world were ready for it. Jesus compares the unexpectedness of the Second Coming to that event—the Flood (*Matt. 24:37–39*). But although no one knows the day or hour of the Second Coming (*Matt. 24:36*), God has given us a prophetic countdown that we can watch happening in the world around us.

We have been given a role to fill in this prophetic drama. What is our part? Focus on Matthew 24:9–14.

In this cosmic conflict, we are more than just observers. We are to be active participants in spreading the gospel to the ends of the world, which means that we, too, will face persecution.

What does it mean to “endure to the end”? How do we do that? What choices do we need to make every day in order not to fall away, as many have done and as many will do?

Marching Orders

The prophetic big picture of history doesn't just allow us to sit back and do nothing as events unfold, events that we really can't control. So often the attitude can be "Well, final events are going to happen as predicted, so what can we do about it other than just simply go along with them? After all, what can I alone do?"

But that's not how Christians are to relate to the world around them and, especially, to final events. Revelation 14 tells us that our purpose at this time in history is to tell others about God's judgment and help them prepare for the second coming of Jesus.

Read Revelation 14:6–12. What is being taught here, and what are we to proclaim to the world? Why is this message of such urgency?

As Adventists, we believe that "present truth" (*2 Pet. 1:12*) is found, specifically, in these verses that we refer to as "the three angels' messages." Here we find the essence of what our calling is at this time in earth's history.

Notice, it starts out with the "everlasting gospel," the wonderful news of Christ's death and resurrection, upon which our only hope of salvation rests. There also is the message that "the hour of His judgment has come" (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*), a powerful waymark that points to the end of time. Then, too, there is the call to worship the one "who made heaven and earth," in contrast to the fearful warning about those who, staying in Babylon, worship "the beast and his image." Finally there is the depiction of God's end-time people: "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (*NKJV*).

Read Revelation 14:11. What does it say about the lack of rest for those who worship the beast and his image?

No rest, day or night, for those who worship the beast and his image? Though various ideas exist regarding what this exactly means, all would agree that these people do not experience the kind of rest that God offers those who are faithful to Him.

Why do you think the first part of the three angels' messages is the "everlasting gospel"? Why must we keep this wonderful truth always before us as we proclaim these messages to the world? How is understanding the gospel so central to the concept of rest?

Rest in Peace

For long centuries now, Christians have been awaiting Christ's return. It is, truly, the culmination of all our hopes—and not just ours but the hopes of all God's faithful throughout all history.

Read Hebrews 11:13–16. What great promise is there, not just for the people of old but for ourselves as well?

In many ways, these verses make no sense if the common and popular version of death were true. What is the passage talking about, these people “not having received the promises”? They're dead, supposedly now up in heaven with Jesus enjoying their great reward. When, for example, Billy Graham died, again and again we heard how he was now in heaven with Jesus.

There's an irony, too, in this view, because often when someone dies, we hear, “May he [she] rest in peace.” But what is going on here? Are such people resting in peace, or are they up in heaven doing whatever they are supposed to be doing (such as watching all the “fun” down here)?

How does Jesus describe death? Read John 11:11.

In fact, the idea of their resting “in peace” is, of course, the truth about what happens at death, isn't it? The dead, truly, are at rest. “To the believer, death is but a small matter. Christ speaks of it as if it were of little moment. ‘If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death,’ ‘he shall never taste of death.’ To the Christian, death is but a sleep, a moment of silence and darkness. The life is hid with Christ in God, and ‘when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.’ John 8:51, 52; Col. 3:4.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 787.

Jesus compares a person's condition between death and resurrection morning to an unconscious sleep (*John 11:11, 14*), but He also emphasizes that both the saved and the lost will receive their reward *after* the resurrection (*John 5:28, 29*). He highlights the necessity of being prepared for death, whenever it comes.

What comfort do you get from knowing that your deceased loved ones are, indeed, now at rest?

Rejoice in the Lord Always

One of the most-used apps on our smartphones is Google Maps. Most of us cannot remember what we did before GPS-based maps existed on our phones. We may be nervous heading toward a place that we have never been to before, but with Google Maps on our phones, we can confidently venture out and find our way in any foreign city. Could this confidence be an illustration of the kind of rest God wants to give us with His prophetic timetable?

Sometimes, however, we may enter the wrong address into our apps, or we may just decide not to follow the directions because we think we know a shortcut. In either case, we may end up somewhere we didn't want to be—and most definitely not in a restful frame of mind, either.

Read Philippians 4:4–6. What is Paul saying here to us about the way to have true rest, true peace, even amid a harried and painful world?

In this passage, Paul is not saying to rejoice always, in all the trials that you are facing. Instead he is saying, “Rejoice *in the Lord* always.” No matter our present situation, no matter what trials we are facing, if we dwell on God, on His goodness, His love, and on His sacrifice on the cross for us, we can rejoice in Him and have peace for our weary souls.

Just the very tone of the texts implies rest, peace, and a transcendent hope of something beyond this world.

Imagine, too, the kind of rest for our souls that we would have if, indeed, we could be “anxious for nothing.” This hardly seems realistic for anyone in this world (even Paul had plenty of worries), but again, knowing that a loving God is ultimately in control and will save us into His kingdom can, surely, help us put the things that we are anxious about into proper perspective.

The “Lord is at hand”? That is, He is always close to us, and as soon as we close our eyes and rest in the sleep of death, the next thing we know is the return of Christ.

No question, life is full of tensions, trials, and struggles. None of us escape them; certainly the apostle Paul didn't either (*see 2 Corinthians 11*). Nevertheless, his point is to tell us that even with all that we endure now, we can rejoice in what we have been given in Christ, and, indeed, we can find rest for souls, even now.

Read Philippians 4:4–6 again. In what ways can you apply these wonderful words to your experience right now in whatever trials and tribulations you are facing?

Further Thought: “We all desire immediate and direct answers to our prayers, and are tempted to become discouraged when the answer is delayed or comes in an unlooked-for form. But God is too wise and good to answer our prayers always at just the time and in just the manner we desire. He will do more and better for us than to accomplish all our wishes. And because we can trust His wisdom and love, we should not ask Him to concede to our will, but should seek to enter into and accomplish His purpose. Our desires and interests should be lost in His will.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 219.

“It will only be a little while before Jesus will come to save His children and to give them the finishing touch of immortality. . . . The graves will be opened, and the dead will come forth victorious, crying, ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’ Our loved ones who sleep in Jesus will come forth clothed with immortality.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 350.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think about the reality of the great controversy. How do you see it being played out in the world? How about in your own personal life? It’s very real, isn’t it? In fact, it’s more real than many people think, because many don’t believe in a literal devil. Why is understanding the reality of the great controversy so important in helping us to understand the state of our world? Also, why is our understanding of how this great controversy will end so comforting?
- 2 Prophecy can be a distraction if we try to go beyond what is clearly revealed. How often have church members gotten in trouble, making predictions about events that didn’t come to pass or believing in others’ predictions that didn’t come to pass? How can we protect ourselves from falling into that kind of trap?
- 3 In class, go over Revelation 14:9–11 and the question about those who worship the beast and his image not having rest. What might that mean?
- 4 A controversial topic in the church has to do with what role we do or do not have in the timing of Christ’s return. Whatever position one takes on this, why is it still very important that we take an active role in spreading the message of His return to the world?

Tough First Day of School

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The first day of school was hard for Niang Muang. Really, really hard.

The nine-year-old girl had arrived in the United States only a month earlier from Myanmar. Her parents were refugees. She didn't know English, and she didn't have any friends.

"Hello, what's your name?" a girl asked her.

Niang shook her head.

"No," she said.

"Oh," said the girl, confused. "Where are you from?"

Niang shook her head again.

"No," she said.

Niang was not trying to be rude. She just didn't understand.

Because she didn't know English, she sat quietly all morning in class. At lunchtime, she followed the other children to the cafeteria and looked at the food being served. Nacho cheese and shredded beef. Mini-pizzas. Chicken nuggets. The food was very strange to her. She was used to eating mustard leaves, potatoes leaves, watercress, brown beans, and red lentils.

After tasting the food, she returned to the classroom and sat quietly until school ended for the day. At home, she prayed for help. "Dear God, please help me survive another day of school," she said.

Fourth grade was tough, but fifth grade was better. She began to speak English and to make friends.

"What's your name?" a girl asked.

"My name is Niang," she replied with a shy smile.

"Oh, where are you from?" the girl said.

"I am from Burma, which is also called Myanmar," Niang said.

The girl nodded her head. She had heard of the country. Several other refugee children from Myanmar also studied at their school.

"Oh, OK," she said. "Do you want to play?"

Niang felt happy. She was beginning to fit in. She felt even happier in seventh grade. She was able to transfer from the public school to a Seventh-day Adventist school thanks to money from a 2011 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering to help refugees in the North American Division.



She thanked God in her daily prayers. "Dear God, thank You so much for helping me learn this new language and for taking care of me," she prayed.

Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help more child refugees like Niang study at Adventist schools.

Niang is now 21 and studying to become a mission doctor.

Part I: Overview

The title of this week’s lesson, “The Ultimate Rest,” implies that our rest here is only temporary. We rest in Christ today, but our rest is always in the context of a world of suffering, sorrow, and sickness. There is a day coming when we will enter eternal rest. All the heart-aches of life will be over. Disease, disaster, and death will be gone forever.

Jesus gave the aged apostle John, exiled on the Isle of Patmos, a vision of Himself. This vision from Christ gave John encouragement and hope. In prophetic revelations, John saw the history of the Christian church and the climactic events at the close of this earth’s history. The book of Revelation ends with a new heaven and a new earth, ushering in God’s ultimate rest.

Before that ultimate rest, there will be specific signs pointing forward to Jesus’ return. In Matthew 24, Jesus outlines these end-time events that will occur with increasing frequency before His glorious second coming. Throughout the ages, the patriarchs and prophets looked forward to the Lord’s return without experiencing the “ultimate rest” that Christ promised. They died in anticipation of an event that would come, but they died in hope. In Revelation 14:6–12, the three angels’ messages, heaven’s last-day messages to prepare the world for the return of Christ, are proclaimed.

As the battle between good and evil rages on a global scale, Christ invites us to “watch” and “be ready” for His soon return and to be ready to enter His eternal rest.

Part II: Commentary

John informs us that he was on the island of Patmos when he received the visions that make up the book of Revelation. Patmos is a little island in the Aegean Sea between the coasts of Turkey and Greece. It’s about nine miles long. In John’s time, it was a rocky, barren Roman penal colony where prisoners were exiled. There was a small mining community there as well—and little else.

John was an old man, in his nineties, when he received the visions of Revelation. He had lived a long life in the service of his beloved Master. He probably had been living in Ephesus before being exiled to Patmos. Now he was separated from friends and family. He was frail, and it was doubtful he would ever get off this small, isolated island. But then in a blaze of glory, Jesus revealed divine truth to John that would enlighten

and encourage God's people for millennia. These last-day truths reveal the events that are soon to take place in this world to prepare God's people for what is coming. Sometimes it's in the greatest trials of our lives that God speaks to us most clearly. When we're feeling lonely and discouraged, Jesus visits us just as He did John and fills us with the warmth of His presence.

The book of Revelation is a book about the Jesus who intervenes. He does not merely sit on His throne in heaven; He enters the affairs of life here on earth. He ministers to us in the trauma, the heartache, and the disappointments we face. When Jesus came down to speak with His beloved disciple, He illuminated rocky, barren Patmos with His glory. There is no place we can find ourselves that is beyond the reach of God. He will meet you with His presence wherever you are. Revelation is filled with hope. The One who is with us through His Holy Spirit now is soon coming in glory to take us home. John joyfully states, "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him" (*Rev. 1:7, NKJV*).

Signs of Jesus' Return

Jesus told His disciples about a time when Jerusalem would be surrounded by an attacking army and destroyed (*Luke 21:20*). This happened in A.D. 70 when the Roman general Titus invaded Israel and laid siege to the city. The Jewish historian Josephus describes the devastating effects of the siege. He says that the starving people "would often come to blows over a small piece of bread; children would often rip food from their parents' mouths. Neither brother nor sister had mercy upon the other. A bushel of corn was more precious than gold."—"The Destruction of Jerusalem," trans. D. J. Muehlenbruch (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1922). There were instances during the siege in which parents boiled their children who had died and ate them. Josephus goes on: "Driven by hunger, some ate manure; some, the cinches of their saddles; some, the leather stripped from their shields; some still had hay in their mouths when their bodies were found." The effects of the attack on Jerusalem by the Romans were gruesome and devastating. Before it was over, fire broke out, and thousands more died in the flames.

In the 1970s, archaeologists uncovered the home of an aristocratic family that was burned to the ground in the flames during the siege in A.D. 70. This home is a remarkable testimony to the intensity of the flames and to the total devastation and absolute destruction.

The Disciples' Questions

When Jesus told His disciples about this coming disaster, they thought

that something so destructive could happen only at the end of the world. For this reason, they asked Him, “ ‘When will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’ ” (*Matt. 24:3, NKJV*).

The disciples were actually asking two different questions. Their first question, “ ‘When will these things be?’ ” refers to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Their second question was: “ ‘What will be the sign of Your coming, and the end of the age?’ ” In His reply, as recorded in Matthew 24, Jesus blended the two events. He told about events that would lead up to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. These events would serve as a preview of what would happen just before His second coming. In Matthew 24, Jesus mentioned the signs that would precede His return. These signs reveal the nearness of His coming.

The Savior did not give us a date for His coming, but He did tell us about signs that would allow us to know when it was near. Jesus’ sermon on last-day signs focuses on four specific areas: (1) signs in the realm of religion, (2) international affairs, (3) nature, and (4) society. These signs include false spiritual revivals, global conflicts, wars, famines, natural disasters, pestilences, pandemics, rising crime, increased violence, waning morality, and finally the rapid spread of the gospel to the whole world.

Matthew 24 outlines the signs of Christ’s return; Revelation 14 is an urgent appeal to be ready for His coming.

Revelation’s Last-day Message

In Revelation 14, the three angels’ messages are rapidly proclaimed to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people to prepare the world for His soon return. It is the message of the “everlasting gospel” of God’s amazing grace for an entire planet. It is a call in the light of the gospel to live obedient lives, glorifying God in all we do in the judgment hour. It is an appeal in an age of evolution to worship Him as the Creator. It is an end-time message of hope.

Jesus will stand for us in the judgment and present His righteous life in the place of our unrighteous life. The apostle John gives us this encouragement: “And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (*1 John 2:1, NKJV*). God’s final judgment is just. He can represent only those who surrender their lives to Him and by faith accept His life and death in their behalf.

Rejoice in the Lord Always.

Imprisoned in Rome, the apostle Paul wrote an encouraging letter to the

believers in Philippi. Some Bible commentators have labeled the book of Philippians “the epistle of joy.” In this short, four-chapter letter, Paul uses the word “joy” or “rejoicing” repeatedly. The theme of chapter 1 is “Joy in Trials.” Chapter 2’s theme is “Joy in Humility,” chapter 3’s theme is “Joy in Surrender,” and the theme of Chapter 4 is “Joy in Gratitude.”

Paul learned to live in the joy of Christ because he discovered how to rest in Christ. He believed that Christ would strengthen him in every situation and supply his needs (*Phil. 4:13, 19*). His confidence was fixed on the divine reality that his “citizenship is in heaven” and that, one day, Christ would “transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (*NKJV*). He eagerly awaited the coming of the Savior Jesus Christ (*Phil. 3:20, 21, NKJV*). He could “rejoice in the Lord always” (*Phil. 4:4*) because he had absolute confidence of Christ’s care in the present and the fulfillment of Christ’s eternal plan in the future. His statement, “The Lord is at hand,” gave him the “peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (*Phil. 4:5, 7, NKJV*). Along with the apostle Paul, we can rejoice that there is never a situation we face in which Christ does not provide immediate help for us today, hope for tomorrow, and the promise of ultimate rest in Christ for all eternity.

Part III: Life Application

Some time ago a friend shared this heart-wrenching story. Her eight-year-old son was dying of a rare blood disease. People around the country earnestly prayed for the boy’s recovery. They sought God for a miraculous healing. The child became progressively worse. The last few days of his life, his mom sat at his bedside constantly holding his hand and gently stroking his hair. When it became apparent that he only had hours left to live, she took him in her arms and sat in a rocking chair, softly singing the songs of heaven. Sometime after his death, we were talking, and she made this remarkable statement: “Although there is a deep throbbing pain in my heart, God has given me ‘a peace that passes understanding.’” When asked what a peace that passes understanding was, she simply responded, “When you do not understand, you can still rest in Christ’s love and care.”

As this series of Bible study lessons comes to its conclusion, whatever is personally going on in your life, Jesus longs to give you a “peace that passes all understanding.” He is there for you, today, tomorrow, and forever. His plans are greater than you can ever imagine. Remember Jesus’ words: “ ‘He who endures to the end shall be saved’ ” (*Mark 13:13, NKJV*). Trust His strength to see you through life’s challenges and be at peace.

Deuteronomy, our study for next quarter, could have been entitled “Present Truth in the Book of Deuteronomy” because we’re going to look at present truth in God’s Word to His covenant people. We will study the book topically and cover such themes as the everlasting covenant, what it means to love God and your neighbor, and how the book reveals God’s love. The book could be summarized as follows: having left Egypt and entering into the covenant at Sinai with the Lord, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. When they were about to cross into the Promised Land, Moses urged them not to forget what the Lord had done for them or what He required of them—to love Him with all their heart and soul and to reveal that love by obedience to all His commandments, according to the covenant. To stress the importance of the covenant, Moses repeated to them the Ten Commandments, the legal foundation of their obligations in the covenant that the Lord had first made with their fathers and was about to make with them now on the borders of Canaan. Are there parallels between what the Israelites faced on the borders of the Promised Land and what we face, today, right on the border of heaven? Yes, there are, as we will see.

Lesson 1—Preamble to Deuteronomy

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Love, to Be Loved** (*Deut. 6:5*)

MONDAY: **The Fall and the Flood** (*Gen. 3:1–7*)

TUESDAY: **The Call of Abram** (*Gen. 12:1–3*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Covenant at Sinai** (*Exodus 20*)

THURSDAY: **Apostasy and Punishment** (*Exod. 19:4, 5*)

Memory Text—*1 John 4:8, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Deuteronomy is rich with present truth. By focusing on its highlights, we can see the context needed to understand it.

Lesson 2—Moses’ History Lesson

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Ministry of Moses** (*Exod. 32:29–32*)

MONDAY: **Fulfilled Prophecy** (*Deut. 1:1–6*)

TUESDAY: **A Thousand Times More Numerous** (*Deut. 1:9–11*)

WEDNESDAY: **Kadesh Barnea** (*Numbers 14*)

THURSDAY: **The Iniquity of the Amorite . . .** (*Deut. 2:33, 34*)

Memory Text—*1 Corinthians 10:3, 4, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Deuteronomy reveals how God continues to create, sustain, and redeem His people at this crucial time in salvation history.

Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free in braille, on audio CD, and via online download to people who are legally blind or physically disabled. 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; email: info@christianrecord.org; website: www.christianrecord.org.