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John: *The Beloved Gospel*

Inspiration has left us with four distinct versions of the life of Jesus, those found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, commonly known as the four Gospels.

We might think that one version of the gospel story would be enough, as long as it were inspired by God. But the Holy Spirit provided us with four versions, each with its own unique perspective on the life, ministry, teaching, and sacrifice of Christ. The greatness of Jesus is such that no single inspired writer fully could communicate it; hence, there's more than one account. As Ellen White so succinctly expresses it: The gospel story was given "through different writers, each having his own individuality, though going over the same history."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21. One, simply, wasn't enough to do it justice.

By using different accounts, God meets a variety of readers where they are. Each Gospel writer "has an experience of his own, and this diversity broadens and deepens the knowledge that is brought out to meet the necessities of varied minds."—Page 22. In the past century, some literature has taken up the approach of recounting the same story from different perspectives, a move that was deemed new, innovative, and progressive at the time. How interesting that our Lord did the same thing nineteen centuries earlier.

In film and biography (such as the book *The Desire of Ages*, by Ellen G. White), many have sought to share a combined picture of the life of Jesus, based on all four Gospels. These efforts have been a great blessing. People of varied backgrounds and ways of thinking will gain a richer experience with Jesus as they interact with the variety of emphases provided for us in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Much is to be gained, however, by focusing on the unique perspectives of the individual Gospel writers. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, each writer put his own unique perspective on the life and teachings of Jesus. This quarter we look at John's.

John's often has been called "the beloved Gospel." Its author is repeatedly called "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (*John 13:23-25, 19:26, 20:2, 21:20-24*). His book, therefore, was written by one who was especially intimate with Jesus, in the same way that Jesus was

intimate with His Father (*compare John 1:18 with 13:23*). Out of this deeper understanding came a Gospel that probes the depths of Jesus' character and mission in a way that its other three counterparts do not.

Also, unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Fourth Gospel seems uniquely designed to speak directly to a generation who had no access to anyone in physical contact with Jesus. Every generation since has faced this same problem, so John speaks directly to us in a way the other Gospels do not. His Gospel was designed, therefore, to answer what may be the most crucial question of contemporary Christian faith: How can I have a living relationship with Someone I cannot see, hear, or touch?

John's Gospel answers the question: How can I have a relationship with Someone I cannot see, hear, or touch?

The dual focus of this quarter's Bible Study Guide, therefore, is on the unique picture of Jesus provided in the beloved Gospel and on the steps that the Gospel provides toward a deeper and more genuine relationship with Jesus. John, with his own unique stamp on the Gospel, has provided a powerful source of encouragement, hope, and faith for the millions who have learned to love our Lord through what the inspired disciple has placed in it.

John Paulien, the author of this quarter's Bible Study Guide, is chair of the New Testament Studies department at Andrews University Seminary and a recognized expert in the writings of John. Thus, we are privileged to have his insights this quarter as we—who have never met Jesus in the flesh—study the account of someone who did and who shares his life-changing experience with us.

May it change our experience, as well.

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Jew, Muslim, Christian, Sacred, Secular

Israel, sacred to three of the great world religions, cries out for knowledge of Christ. Up to 12 new churches will be planted in this multi-cultural society. Your contributions will help pioneers to work in unentered communities, prepare and translate literature, and rent meeting space.



MISSION

The
Thirteenth Sabbath Offering
on March 27
supports projects in the
Trans-European
Division.

LESSON 1

*December 27–January 2

The Unique Purpose of John’s Gospel



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Luke 1:1-4, John 15:1-8, 17:20, 20:24-31, 21:20-25.*

Memory Text: “Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’” (*John 20:29, NIV*).

Key Thought: The Gospel of John tells us that the absence of physical contact with Jesus is no disadvantage to those seeking a relationship with Him today. Jesus’ word is as powerful as His touch.

Have you ever wished you could have known Jesus in the flesh, as His disciples did? Have you ever wished He lived at your house? Wouldn’t it be great to take your problems directly to Him, face to face? To go to Him and share what’s on your heart and then see Him go to His knees and pray earnestly to His Father for you? Wouldn’t it be easier to have a relationship with Jesus if He lived, breathed, walked, and talked at your house?

But that privilege has not been ours. Yet, the good news is that the Gospel of John helps assure us that we don’t need physical contact with Jesus in order to have a relationship with Him. We don’t need physical contact to obtain all the blessings He is willing and able to give. John even recalls Jesus telling His disciples “ ‘It is for your good that I am going away’ ” (*John 16:7, NIV*). Through the presence of the Spirit, the work of Jesus is enhanced by His absence (*John 14:12*).

This week we take our first look at this good news.

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

SUNDAY December 28

How the Gospels Were Written *(Luke 1:1-4)*.

Were Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John the only accounts of the life of Jesus ever expressed? Did others, perhaps even in writing, recount the life of Christ? *Luke 1:1*.

Describe the process by which Luke's Gospel (and presumably John's, as well) came into existence. *Luke 1:2, 3*.

From what Luke tells us, "many" individuals had already undertaken to tell the story of Christ. The stories about Jesus and His sayings were remembered and handed down by "eyewitnesses and servants of the word" (*Luke 1:2, NIV*). The word translated "servants" seems to have been a technical term in the ancient world for professional memorizers who would make it a point to record significant sayings in their minds for future use. It should not surprise us that such individuals might be chosen to memorize the sermons, parables, and deeds of Jesus in order to repeat what the Lord said and did.

The stories and sayings of Jesus were passed along by word of mouth for many years after His ascension to heaven. Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, apparently had talked with eyewitnesses and those who had memorized the sayings and stories of Jesus. Guided by the Spirit, he then selected those sayings and stories that enabled him to put together an "orderly account." The final result is the Gospel of Luke as we know it today.

Read John 21:25. What does it tell us about the limits of all the Gospels?

John's point is that most of the Jesus story had to be left out of his Gospel. Each of the four Gospels offers selections of the sayings and deeds of Jesus that fit that particular writer's purpose. "It is seldom that two persons will view and express truth in the very same way. Each dwells on particular points which his constitution and education have fitted him to appreciate."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 22.

Look at the Ellen White quote, particularly in the context of today's study. What does this tell us about the need to give others some flexibility in their understanding of truth?

MONDAY *December 29*

Selecting With a Purpose

Read John 20:30, 31. Why did John say he wrote what he did about the life of Jesus? In what ways does the whole Bible reflect that same purpose?

Jesus' ministry from His baptism to His ascension covered about three and a half years (1,260 days!). Out of all the things Jesus said and did during that time, John records incidents that occurred on a total of only 29 days. And in most cases, even these accounts cover only a small fraction of what Jesus may have said and done on those days. More than 97 percent of Jesus' ministry is left out of John's Gospel. Led by the Holy Spirit, John chose what was needed to achieve his stated purpose: to convince us to believe in order that we may have eternal life.

Notice for whom John wrote his Gospel. It is for "you" (plural in the original). John wrote so that "you" might believe and that "you" might have life. With the word *you*, he clearly had his readers in mind. But which readers? All of them? Or was there a special focus to this "you" group?

What story provides the lead-in for John's statement of purpose?
John 20:24-28.

Thomas clearly feels that his faith depends on a hands-on experience with a physical Jesus. Once he had seen Jesus, he had no problem believing. In John 20:24-31, Thomas represents all the disciples, the first generation, those who had seen and touched Jesus.

Jesus' statement in verse 29, on the other hand, indicates that there is a special blessing reserved for those who believe without seeing. Evidently seeing and contact are not crucial to the development of faith; in fact, they even may hinder it. Verse 29 pronounces a blessing on later generations who have been denied hands-on contact with Jesus and yet believe anyway. We are of those later generations, those who have had no physical contact with Jesus nor with anyone who knew Him in the flesh.

Look up 2 Corinthians 4:18. How does this fit in with today's study? What message is there for us today, who have not seen Jesus in the flesh?

TUESDAY *December 30*

The Occasion of the Gospel (*John 21*).

According to John 21, Jesus employs a threefold sequence of question and response to confront Peter about his three denials in the high priest's courtyard a short while before (*vss. 15-19*). Not only does Peter need to work through his sense of guilt and failure for denying Jesus, but this confrontation probably also gives him the opportunity to regain the confidence of his fellow disciples. Later, as Jesus and Peter walk along the beach, an incident occurs that may have had a large impact on John.

Who does Peter notice is following him and Jesus along the beach?
John 21:20, 24. See also John 13:23-25.

What does Peter ask Jesus about that disciple? *John 21:21.*

Jesus has just explained to Peter the circumstances that would one day surround his death. Peter is curious about whether his experience would be similar to that of the beloved disciple, the one who wrote the Gospel of John (*vs. 24*). Jesus evades the question with a cryptic "If I should prefer that he remain alive until I come, what business is that of yours?" (principal contributor's translation).

Jesus' cryptic comment was misunderstood in the years that followed. People came to believe that the beloved disciple, John, would live to see the second coming of Jesus. As disciple after disciple died, many became excited over the "obvious" nearness of Jesus' return. As John entered old age and began to approach death, a crisis of confidence loomed: Would John's death make Jesus appear to be a false prophet? After all, didn't Jesus say that John would be alive at His return?

Some believe that at this decisive moment, in which the church faced a crisis, the Lord moved upon John to leave the legacy of a written gospel, one that would correct the unfounded rumor regarding the timing of John's death in relationship to the Second Coming. His Gospel would provide what the next generation of Christians needed to survive his passing. His Gospel would teach us all how to have a living relationship with Someone you cannot see, hear, or touch.

Read again what Jesus told Peter in John 21:22. He never says that John would not die, though that meaning is what some have read into the text itself. In what ways are we in danger of doing the same thing; that is, reading into texts what is not there?

Second Generation

In a number of different ways, the Gospel of John expresses an interest in the second generation of Christians.

In the Fourth Gospel, the disciples usually are not gathered directly by Jesus but through the invitation of someone else who knows Jesus. Perhaps this is meant to symbolize how most of the world will come to first know Jesus, not through personal contact with Him but through the witness of another.

Look up the following texts. How do they express the idea that we don't have to see Jesus in the flesh to first learn about Him?

John 1:40-42

John 13:20

Today, of course, people learn about Jesus through the witness of others who first tell them about Jesus and, as in the first example above, "lead" them to Him. How crucial, then, that we as professed followers of Christ, as those whom God has chosen to spread the truth to others, be prepared to do just that.

In John 17 Jesus prays for Himself first of all and then for His disciples (*vss. 1-19*). After this He turns to the second generation, and beyond. His prayer is not for His disciples alone but for "those who will believe in me through their message" (*vs. 20, NIV*). Most people throughout history have gained a relationship with Jesus not through personal contact but through the writings of those who had such contact. Jesus prayed that the Written Word would be the means of uniting all believers, those who had seen Him and those who had not (*vss. 21-23*).

Prayerfully read through Christ's prayer in John 17 (specifically verses 11-19), which He offered in behalf of His disciples. What are the key points He is praying for? On the lines below, write a summary of what Jesus wanted for His followers. What message is in there for us, today, as well?

THURSDAY *January 1*

His Word Is as Good as His Touch

According to Luke 4:40, what does Jesus do whenever He heals people? (See Matt. 9:29, 30; 20:34; Mark 1:29-31; 9:25-27; Luke 7:14, 15; 13:13 for further examples.)

By way of contrast, how does Jesus accomplish His miracles in the Gospel of John? John 4:46-54. (See also 2:1-11, 5:1-15, and 11:1-44 for further examples.)

Jesus uses touch in about half the miracles recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. By way of contrast, in John's Gospel, Jesus is rarely described as using touch in order to accomplish His miracles.

Why the difference?

Perhaps the Spirit moved upon John to select stories in which there is an absence of touching or in which the distance between Jesus and the healed person is emphasized (in John 4:46-54 Jesus is 16 miles away from the individual He heals at the time of the healing), all in order to help express the point that one doesn't need immediate physical contact with the Lord in order to be blessed, or even healed, by Him. These accounts, where there is no touching, are consistent with John's theme that Jesus' word is as good as His touch. This is especially good news for those, such as we, who can have the assurance that although Jesus isn't here in the flesh, He still can be close to us in all our trials and sorrows, whatever they happen to be. Through these accounts John shows us that heaven is, indeed, closer to earth than we might, on sight alone, believe.

Most miracles in the Gospel of John (but not all) came as a result of Jesus' words, as opposed to His touch. List the command phrases used in each of the following accounts: John 2:7, 4:50, 5:8, 9:7, 11:43.

What comes through in these scenes is the power of Jesus' words to overcome barriers of space. Distance is no problem for the Lord, who created the universe. Jesus' word is as powerful close at hand as at a distance. Though now manifested to us through the printed page, Christ's Word still retains the power to save and heal. It is through His Word that He ministers to the needs of later generations.

Instead of Jesus in the flesh, we have His Word, the Bible. Why, then, is study of the Word crucial in forming a close relationship with Him? Without the Bible, what could we know about Jesus?

FRIDAY January 2

Further Study: Note Ellen White's comments on the process of how the Bible was written (*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 15–23).

Regarding faith in Jesus' word versus faith in what we can see and touch, Ellen White comments (*in the context of John 4:46-54*): "The nobleman wanted to see the fulfillment of his prayer before he should believe; but he had to accept the word of Jesus that his request was heard and the blessing granted. This lesson we also have to learn. Not because we see or feel that God hears us are we to believe. We are to trust in His promises."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 200.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 **Read again 2 Corinthians 4:18 along with Hebrews 11:1. Why must our ultimate hope be in things we do not see, at least directly? Is there anything we, now, can see that will last forever, or will everything we now see ultimately, as it now exists, be destroyed?**
- 2 **How could different writers portray Jesus from different perspectives? Do these different perspectives make you more or less likely to accept their accounts as truthful? If all accounts said the same thing, would that not tend to make us think they merely were copying one another as opposed to telling the story of Jesus as they, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, understood or even remembered it? Explain your position.**
- 3 **What does the gist of this week's lesson tell us about the importance of witnessing in the mission of the church?**

Summary: We often struggle with the issue of how to have a living relationship with Someone we cannot see, hear, or touch. We imagine that faith came more easily to those who walked and talked with Jesus back in New Testament times. But the Gospel of John tells us that Jesus' word, as ministered in the Gospel, is as powerful as His touch. Through the Spirit and the Word, we may know Jesus even more intimately than the disciples did.

A Question of Honor

by PAULINE TANOH

Pauline went to work in a factory in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, in western Africa. The factory operated on Saturdays, so Pauline asked for permission to have Sabbaths off. After awhile, her supervisor grew weary of her requests. Pauline decided to speak to the personnel director about her dilemma. Before she went, she fasted and prayed for three days.

She went to his office and explained her problem. He told her, "Life is a choice. You must choose which you wish to keep and which you will toss away, your work or your religion. I attend church, but sometimes I have to work on Sunday. I work first, then I go to confess to my priest."

Pauline explained that no priest or pastor could give permission to break the Sabbath, because God established it. "It is written in the Bible that we are to work six days and rest the seventh day. If we wish to honor God, we must do it His way."

The personnel director slammed his hand down on the desk and shouted, "Are you trying to teach me the Bible? Get out!"

Pauline walked out and closed the door. She stood there and prayed, "Lord, the person who shouts at me is shouting at You. Your will be done."

Later a colleague asked, "Did he give you your Sabbath off?"

Pauline answered simply, "God created the Sabbath; he cannot take it from me."

The next day was the Sabbath. When the personnel director saw that Pauline's position was empty, he asked, "Where is she?"

Her colleagues told him, "Since she was hired, she has not worked on Saturday, for it is her Sabbath."

"OK," the boss said. "On Monday she will lose her job."

But when Pauline came to work on Monday, she learned that the personnel director had been fired. When a colleague asked her what she thought, she responded, "God is sending this man away because he refused to honor God's Sabbath. The Lord had the final say in the matter."

Shortly after the personnel director left, the factory was closed on Sabbaths.



PAULINE TANOH (left) operates her own small business in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire.

LESSON 2

*January 3-9

Jesus Is *the Best*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 1:1-18.*

Memory Text: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (*John 1:14, NIV*).

Key Thought: At the beginning of his Gospel, John describes Jesus as the Word who was God from eternity yet who became flesh. Thus, He alone is worthy of our worship.

Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God. John 1:1-18 functions as a prologue to the story of Jesus in the Gospel. It tells an amazing story. The King of the universe, the eternal Creator, became a human being. The One who walked this earth, who became sweaty, tired, and hungry, was intimate with God before the world began, because He Himself was one with God. Although He became part of the human race and was subject to human limitations, He was the One who created the human race and the world in which it lived. The Creator came to serve the creation, even to the point of death. The prologue to John, therefore, interprets everything that happens in the Gospel in the light of the larger perspective of eternity.

The Creator Himself came down and walked among us, spoke our language, and showed us in human terms what God is like. Through the Fourth Gospel, we escape from a narrow world of limited perception into the vast universe of ultimate reality, a view that revelation alone can offer.

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

SUNDAY *January 4*

The Word as Eternal God *(John 1:1, 2).*

The prologue to the Gospel of John *(John 1:1-18)* is beautifully structured in the style of Hebrew poetry, which often uses parallel words and ideas. The simple, yet majestic, grandeur of the language is a fitting complement to the awesome magnificence of the ideas expressed in this section of the Gospel.

How far back in time does “the Word” go? *John 1:1.* What does the phrase “in the beginning” refer to? Why would John want to link these two concepts? *(See also John 1:3.)*

The concept of “the Word” would have been readily recognizable to the ancient Greeks, whether or not they ever had heard of Jesus. For centuries the Greeks had conceived that a divine figure they called “the Word” (*logos* in Greek) was the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the Source of reason and intelligence, and the Mediator between the great God and the creation. In applying the term *Logos* to Jesus, John was appealing to the Greeks in terms they could understand.

What kind of relationship did the Word have with the Father? *John 1:1, 2, 18.*

Is the Word fully God or in some sort of subordinate position? *John 1:1.*

The first words of the Gospel combine “in the beginning” (*from the Creation story of Gen. 1:1*) with a verb that expresses continuous existence in past time. At the very beginning, at the point when Creation began, the Word was already in continuous existence. He is, therefore, eternal.

But the eternity of the Word is not based on some kind of pre-creation origin in the Father; Jesus was not created by the Father. Instead, from eternity, Jesus, the Word, was distinct from the Father (called “God” in John 1:1 but “Father” in verse 18) but in no sense inferior. “What God was, the Word was” is the brilliantly accurate translation of The New English Bible. The intimate relationship between the Word and the Father was an intimacy of equals. We are not dealing with “Gods” here; there is full unity in the Godhead at the same time that there is intimate relationship among the personalities of the Godhead. (See quotations in Friday’s section.)

MONDAY January 5

Creator and Sustainer (*John 1:3-5*).

How does John make it clear that the preexistent Word was not a created being? *John 1:3*.

This text is so devastatingly clear that one denomination was forced to change the wording of their own Bible translation (adding the word *other*—“all other things were made by him”) in order to maintain their beliefs. The clear intention of this text as it reads is to assert that everyone and everything in all creation was made by “the Word.” He is the Source of everything created. If “not a single thing” was made apart from His action, then He is not the result of an act of creation. As John 1:1 points out, before any creation took place, the Word was already in continuous existence.

This teaching may seem academic or irrelevant, but it is extremely important to Christian faith. It establishes the incredible value that God placed on us at the Cross. The Person who died there was not just another part of God’s creation, such as the sun, the moon, or angels; if He were, the sacrifice would not have the same kind of value it does with Jesus as Creator.

This, then, is no minor sacrifice. At the Cross our value is established in infinite terms: The infinite Son of God died in order to save us; that’s how important we are in the sight of God. This fact is the truest and most stable basis for self-worth.

Read Hebrews 1:2 and Colossians 1:16, 17. In what ways do they say the same thing as what John says regarding the role of Christ as our Creator?

“ ‘His name shall be called Immanuel . . . God with us.’ ‘The light of the knowledge of the glory of God’ is seen ‘in the face of Jesus Christ.’ From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was ‘the image of God,’ the image of His greatness and majesty, ‘the outshining of His glory.’ It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world. To this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God’s love—to be ‘God with us.’ Therefore it was prophesied of Him, ‘His name shall be called Immanuel.’ ”
—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 19.

Meditate on what the full deity of Christ means for us, that God Himself died for our sins. Why does that give us so much hope, as compared to a view of the universe in which there is no God or caring Creator?

TUESDAY *January 6*

Rejection and Reception (*John 1:4-13*).

What other function does the Word perform? *John 1:4, 5.*

In the original Creation, the Word was the Author of physical light. He is the One who uses light (the rays of the sun) as part of the process of plant production that sustains physical life on this earth. But the author of our Gospel has more than physical light and life in mind here. He's talking about light in the spiritual sense, as well.

Read John 1:10. Summarize, in your own words, the gist of what that text means.

Without the Word, there would be no rain, no sunshine, no air, no life. The amazing reality is, however, that when the Creator and Sustainer of the universe appeared on earth, He was unknown and unrecognized as such. Even His "very own" rejected the One who gave them life. In light of these verses, the actions of so many people toward Jesus in the Gospel of John, including His disciples (*John 12:16, 14:6-9*), are foolish and tragic.

Yet, the message of this prologue is not all dark.

On what basis is it possible to become children of God? John 1:12, 13? How much human effort is involved?

In the original language of John 1:12, it is the one who "received" (a point in past time) Him and who "believes" (continuous action) in His name who gains the right to become a child of God. This language points to two aspects of becoming right with God. There is the initial point of reception, and there is the ongoing relationship of believing. There is no "once saved always saved" here. Being a child of God has a beginning, but it is also a process that continues as long as a Christian lives.

This "new birth," however, is not achieved by human effort; it is as much a miracle as the original act of creation. And just as the original act of creation must be sustained by the continual miracle of the Word's watchcare (*vss. 4, 5*), so the relationship of the child of God with Jesus involves ongoing belief resulting in an ongoing miracle of spiritual life (*vss. 12, 13*).

In verse 12, John says that those who receive Him become sons of God. Why do some receive Him and some do not? What role does free choice have in the answer? What role does free choice have in the continuation of our spiritual life, as well?

The Humanity of Jesus *(John 1:1, 2, 14).*

Compare John 1:1, 2 with what is said in verse 14. While verses 1-5 focus on the divine preexistence of the Word, verse 14 turns to His nature and status as One who walked on earth as a part of human history. These texts express an incredible paradox. A man of a particular ethnic background, living at a particular time in history, subject to human frailty, turns out to be the divine Word, who created the entire universe.

Eternal <i>(John 1:1)</i>	Earthly <i>(John 1:14)</i>
<p>“was”</p> <p>“was God”</p> <p>“with God”</p>	<p>“among us”</p> <p>“became”</p> <p>“became flesh”</p>

The language here is simple yet profound. In John 1:1 the Word “was.” The Greek tense implies continuous past existence. He always “was.” But verse 14 tells us that at a point in time the Word “became” flesh. The word translated “became” in verse 14 is the same as the one translated “made” in verse 3. When the Word became flesh, it was an act of creation, something added to His ongoing, eternal nature. Though He “was” God, He also “became” flesh. In the process, the Word went from being “with God” to being “with us.” The entire Gospel of John becomes an expression of Jesus’ humanity while He was here on earth. One struggles here to express truth that is simply stated in John 1 yet is so profound that “the whole world would not have room for the books” that could be written about it *(John 21:25, NIV)*. In simple language John has articulated the full range of both the Word’s divine and human natures. He is the God-man. He is from heaven yet of earth. He always was, yet He also became. He was eternal, yet He also has a created existence.

Because He is fully God, Jesus could reveal what God is like in the highest sense. Because He became fully human, that revelation is accessible to us at a level we can grasp and follow. “ ‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father’ ” *(John 14:9, NIV)*. In the Gospel of John, this difficult but glorious truth is revealed in the prologue but also brought home to our hearts by the Spirit *(John 16:13-15)*.

If possible, obtain some facts on the size of the visible universe. After reading those figures, dwell on the texts and the study for today. How does this help you begin to understand the incredible love that God has for us?

THURSDAY January 8

The Greatest Revelation *(John 1:14-18)*

What did the Word do in order that His glory might be seen on earth? *John 1:14*.

The phrase “made his dwelling” translates from the Greek word for “pitch one’s tent” to mean a reminder of the tabernacle in the wilderness (*Exod. 25:8, 9*). The glory of Jesus that the disciples saw recalls the glory of God’s presence in that tabernacle (*Exod. 40:34, 35*). Things become even more interesting when we discover that in Hebrew the word “to dwell” (*shachan*) and the word for God’s glory in the sanctuary (*shechinah*) come from the same root.

The Old Testament sanctuary was a marvelous source of grace and blessing and continues to instruct us today. But when the Word became flesh, the Old Testament sanctuary was eclipsed by an even greater Source of grace and blessing (*John 1:16*). Jesus is a better revelation of God than even the sanctuary, because in Jesus, God dwelt directly in human flesh, and “we” could behold what was before hidden behind curtains.

What did John the Baptist have to say about the Word? *John 1:15*. **What was he referring to when he said that Jesus came “before” him when, in fact, he had been born before Jesus?** *See Luke 1*.

In Jesus’ day the two greatest human figures were John the Baptist and Moses. John was revered by many as a contemporary prophet, Moses as the great deliverer of Israel and giver of the Law.

But the prologue makes clear that Jesus is no ordinary human being. He is greater than the greatest men known to the people of the time. He was the best, because He was God made flesh. In His person it became possible for human beings to know what God was like. He came to reveal a world far beyond the ability of our senses to know and comprehend.

Moses was a man given an incredible revelation of God (*Exod. 33:19-23*), and yet, even he was allowed to see God only briefly and from the back. In contrast, the Word came to earth as One who had been in continual residence “at the Father’s side”—the Greek implies continual close communion with God.

Think of the infinite humiliation the incarnation of Christ required. How does that rebuke, in the most powerful way, human pride and arrogance? In light of the truth about Christ and the Incarnation, why are these such horrendous sins?

FRIDAY *January 9*

Further Study: “Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore.

“The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father.”—Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906.

“In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

“The only way in which the fallen race could be restored was through the gift of His Son, equal with Himself, possessing the attributes of God. Though so highly exalted, Christ consented to assume human nature, that He might work in behalf of man and reconcile to God His disloyal subject.”—Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, November 8, 1892.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why did John begin his Gospel with thoughts about Creation, and even before Creation, when all the other Gospels begin with either the birth of Jesus or His adult ministry? What theological point was he making?
- 2 As we saw this week, John uses sanctuary imagery in referring to Christ (*John 1:14*). And though the earthly-sanctuary service was ended after Christ’s death, what role did the sanctuary have that is so important in helping us understand just what Christ did for us when He was in the flesh and also what He is doing for us now as our High Priest?
- 3 How would you answer someone who rejects the Deity or pre-existence of Christ on scientific or logical grounds?

Summary: John 1:1-18 tells us that the King of the universe, the eternal Creator, chose to become a human being. In simple yet profound terms, John expresses the full contrast between the divine and human natures of Jesus. No being in the universe is more divine than Jesus, nor is any more human. In His person He combines everything we need to become children of God. The rest of the Gospel will unpack how this can take place in our lives today.

The Difference Jesus Makes

by J. H. ZACHARY

Yohana was a farmer living in Rwanda. In the forest near his home live the Twa people, pygmies, who are descendants of the original inhabitants of Rwanda. Today their numbers have dwindled to just a few thousand. These people do not farm, but move from place to place searching for food. When there is not enough food, they steal from the farmers. They earn a small wage making pottery for neighboring tribes.

Yohana learned that there were no Christians among the Twa in his area. He had a burden to reach them for Christ. For days he prayed for these neighbors who live hidden in the dense forests.

One day Yohana met a Twa man. Yohana invited him to church, but the man told him, "I cannot come to church because I do not have clothing." Yohana and another elder gave the man a shirt and trousers, and two weeks later the man appeared in church. The Holy Spirit touched his heart, and he responded to the call to accept Jesus as his personal Savior.

Yohana and a friend visited the new believer in his jungle home. "Why have you come here?" the surprised villagers asked.

Yohana replied, "We have learned that Jesus is coming soon to give people a new life in a wonderful place in the sky. We want you to come with us." The loving friendship of Yohana and his friend touched their hearts. As a result of the testimony of the converted tribesman, 14 Twa visited Yohana's church the next Sabbath.

The Holy Spirit spoke to these searchers, and they began studying the Bible with the Adventist men. As they studied God's eternal truths, they accepted Christ's invitation to "follow Me."

The government moved the Twa to a new location. Yohana helped them find Adventist believers in their new area, and he continues to visit them regularly. He is looking forward to their baptism.

The rest of the Twa are seeing the difference that Christ makes in the lives of the 15 Twa believers. They are changing the way they live. They no longer steal from the farmers; friendships are replacing former hostility. The power of the gospel is changing the entire community. Even Yohana's fellow villagers are amazed at how dramatically this group of Twa has changed.

Seeing how God has changed him and those for whom he has labored, Yohana became a literature evangelist, so he can sell gospel literature and seek for more souls to lead to Christ.

J. H. ZACHARY is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour.

LESSON 3

**January 10-16*

Something Better



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 2:1-22.*

Memory Text: “And Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days’ ” (*John 2:19, NIV*).

Key Thought: No matter where we choose to look in order to find life, Jesus offers something better: better wine, a better temple, even a better birth!

In John 1:1-18 we saw that Jesus was the best revelation of God possible. He was there with God from the beginning (*vss. 1, 2*). He created the whole universe, placed life in it, and keeps it going (*vss. 3-5*). In His flesh He embodied the very glory of God (*vs. 14*). He came to us direct from face-to-face intimacy with God (*vs. 18*).

The passages in this week's lesson are a natural extension of the prologue to John's Gospel. If Jesus is the best, He is naturally better than all substitutes. Thus, it's unfortunate that people have developed many substitutes for Jesus. They seek to find life by accumulating an abundance of possessions. Others seek life in performance and worldly success. Still others seek life in the esteem of the rich, the brilliant, the beautiful, or the famous. Many, despairing in the failure of these, drown life in drugs, alcohol, and addictive games and habits. Some pursue various mystical religions. But no matter which path people may choose, Jesus offers something better than what they possibly could have apart from Him.

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

Living Parables (*John 2:1-22*).

At first glance there seems to be little spiritual food in this section of the Gospel. There is a simple story about a wedding, during which the drink runs out before the end of the feast. Jesus rescues a couple and their caterer from embarrassment. Then Jesus drives some animals and money changers out of the temple. The stories are well known and offer no surprises. There are few “quotable quotes” that cry out for memorization. Are these stories a digression from the spiritual theology of the Gospel, or is there something deeper going on?

Also, an interesting feature of the beloved Gospel is the absence of parables (see Friday’s section). Because parables were a major basis for Jesus’ teaching, their absence is remarkable. Instead, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, John took actual events from Jesus’ ministry and portrayed them as living parables. Beneath the surface of each historical account, the Lord has placed a deeper meaning that teaches us something special about Jesus.

And, as the first miracle in the Gospel, the wedding-of-Cana story is the first of these living parables.

Read through the story of the wedding feast (*vss. 1-11*). **What do you think the importance of this account is?**

How would you characterize the interaction between Jesus and His mother? (*John 2:4, 5*).

While ancient parallels suggest that Jesus was not speaking disrespectfully to His mother, He clearly differed with her on this occasion. “There was danger that Mary would regard her relationship to Jesus as giving her a special claim upon Him, and the right, in some degree, to direct Him in His mission. . . . As Son of the Most High, and Saviour of the world, no earthly ties must hold Him from His mission, or influence His conduct. He must stand free to do the will of God. . . . The claims of God are paramount even to the ties of human relationship.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 147.

As believers, how do we balance out the commandment to honor our parents when it conflicts with our duty to God?

MONDAY *January 12*

From Water to Wine (*John 2:1-11*).

With what activity was the water that Jesus used associated?
John 2:6.

An interesting point lies just below the surface of this brief Bible study. Changing water into wine symbolized something bigger than a mere physical miracle. The water was not just any water; it was water set aside by the Jews for ceremonial washings. The wine was not just any wine, it was “the best.”

John uses this story as a gentle criticism of a major alternative to the faith of Jesus. Religious people of Jesus’ day were obsessed with washing rituals (*see also Matt. 15:1, 2*). Washing is good. On a practical level, it is sanitary. As a religious expression, it can remind you to think about God. Water is necessary for life; without it, we could not exist, just as, without God, we could not exist, either.

But Jesus replaces the water of ceremonial washings with something better, the tasty juice of the grape.

According to these texts, what does wine symbolize? *Matt. 26:27-29, Mark 14:23-25, Luke 22:17-20.*

What do these texts tell us about how important blood is to the whole plan of salvation?

Lev. 17:11

Col. 1:14

Heb. 10:19

The first miracle Jesus does, then, is to turn water into wine, and wine is a symbol of His shed blood, the blood that would be poured out for the sins of the world, the only means of salvation. Though inspiration does not tell us why this was the first miracle recorded, perhaps it was because the Lord wanted right away to present the idea of Christ’s blood. What we see here, then, however faintly, are symbols and an image of what is to come.

If someone were to ask you to explain the meaning of Christ’s shed blood and what it meant to you, what would you say?

TUESDAY January 13

Foretaste of the Cross

When Jesus says “‘My time has not yet come’” (*John 2:4, NIV*), what does He mean by “my time”? *John 7:30, 8:20.*

The Greek word translated “time” in all these texts is actually the word for “hour.” “Mine hour is not yet come.” This hour, of course, was the “hour” of His arrest and crucifixion.

What does Jesus reveal by His first miracle? *John 2:11.*

What is meant by the “glory” of Jesus in the Gospel of John? *John 12:23-25, 32, 33.*

The glory of Jesus and the “hour” of Jesus point to the same thing in the Gospel of John. The hour of His suffering and death is the very occasion in which Jesus is glorified. The Cross is the ultimate manifestation of Jesus’ self-sacrificing divine character. The Cross is the place where the character of God is most clearly revealed. Here we see the glory of God in its fullest manifestation.

The wedding story, therefore, contains a number of indirect references to Jesus’ death and resurrection. The wedding took place “on the third day,” a reference to Jesus’ resurrection (*see Matt. 16:21; Luke 24:7, 21, 46; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor. 15:4*). Jesus turns water into wine, a symbol of His blood (*Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25, 26*). References to both Jesus’ “time” and His “glory” are pointers to the Cross. And the only two times in the Gospel that Jesus is described as speaking to His mother, He calls her “woman”: in the wedding story here (*John 2:4*) and later at the cross (*John 19:25-27*).

In a special way, therefore, this charming wedding story is a “living parable” of the Cross and of the glory of God’s character that would be manifested there. The sign Jesus performs at the wedding feast of Cana is a foretaste of the ultimate sign He performs in submitting to suffering and death. In John 2:11 the disciples’ response to that sign foreshadowed not only their future response to the Cross (*John 20:8, 24-29*) but also the response of all who would come to believe in Jesus through their word (*John 17:20; 20:30, 31*).

How would you explain to a nonbeliever how God’s glory was revealed by the Cross?

WEDNESDAY January 14

Cleansing the Temple *(John 2:13-22)*.

Read over the account of Jesus in the temple as expressed by John in **John 2:13-22**. Then answer these questions:

● **When does Jesus go to the temple? What is the meaning of that special time?** *See Exod. 12:24-27.*

● **How does Jesus respond to those who challenge His authority *(John 2:19)*, and how does that answer fit in with the true meaning of the Passover service?** *See 1 Cor. 5:7.*

● **Read John 2:21. Why is Christ's body compared to the temple?** *See Exod. 25:8, 9; vss. 17-22; John 1:14.*

The animals being sold in the temple courts were available for sacrifices, making the “marketplace” a genuine and needed service to long-distance travelers. The money exchanging was necessary, because the temple did business only in a unique temple currency.

While other sources suggest that there was a lot of deception and corruption involved in the temple-court sales, that doesn't seem to be the issue here in John. The problem here is that the activity, though meeting a legitimate need, was located in a place that should have been devoted exclusively to teaching, worship, and prayer.

Thus, what we see here, in this companion story of the wedding at Cana, is the twin theme of “something better,” as well as a foretaste of the Cross. The temple was good, it was ordained by God; yet, Jesus is here offering something even better than the temple: His body. The meaning of the Cross transcends all other expressions of religion.

Think again about the selling of the animals for sacrifice. Though itself not bad, it was the context in which it was happening that made it bad. In what ways can things in our own life, not bad in and of themselves, nevertheless be harmful because of the context in which they appear?

THURSDAY *January 15*

The Meaning of the Cross (*John 2:21, 22; Gal. 6:14*).

In John's account of the cleansing of the temple, he uses the story, as he did with the wedding of Cana, as a parable of the Cross. Not only is the Cross superior to the waters of religious ritual, it is superior even to the temple in Jerusalem, which, outside of Christ Himself in the flesh, was the greatest manifestation of true religion.

Where does Paul, like John, find “glory”? *Gal. 6:14*. **What is Paul saying in that verse? In what ways should we have the same experience as he did?**

In John 2:1-22, we see good things getting in the way of the best. It is no different today. Everyone seeks meaning and a sense of value out of life, but few seek it in Jesus. Instead, people try to find “life” by accumulating things, by performing in ways, including religious performance, that bring praise, and by developing relationships with admired people.

Possessions, performance, and people are good things. They are part of the spice of life, but they are not life itself. No matter how many possessions you may have, they are never enough. And those you have rust, rot, break, crash, or become hopelessly scratched up. Athletes become broken and frail, beauty queens grow old and wrinkled, and teachers become mindless and forgetful. Loved ones sometimes leave you, disrespect you, divorce you, and/or die when you are least prepared. Life is frightfully insecure if based on such good things as possessions, performance, and relationships with other people.

To those jaded by a desperate search for life, John offers something better: the Cross. The Cross tells us there is a God who knows everything we have ever done yet loves and values us so much that He gave His life for us. “At the foot of the cross, remembering that for one sinner Christ would have laid down His life, you may estimate the value of a soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 196. “The hand that sustains the worlds in space . . . is the hand that was nailed to the cross for me.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 472. This insight is the source for an incomparable sense of personal worth and satisfaction, no matter the circumstances of daily life.

Though, as Christians, we know these truths, why do we still allow ourselves to become caught up in earthly things that cannot ultimately satisfy our needs? See *Rom. 3:10-20*. What is the only way out of that trap? See *Gal. 6:14*.

FRIDAY *January 16*

Further Study: For those who have not made an in-depth study of the Gospel of John, the absence of parables in the Gospel comes as quite a surprise. There are only two sayings of Jesus that even come close to being classified as parables: the account of the Good Shepherd (*John 10:1-21*) and the description of the vine and the branches (*John 15:1-8*). But neither of these sayings is called a parable, and they differ from the pattern of Jesus' parables found in the other three Gospels. Rather than telling a specific story, they are general illustrations of a point. It is interesting to compare these two sayings with the many parables found in Matthew 13 or Mark 4.

“The gift of Christ to the marriage feast was a symbol. The water represented baptism into His death; the wine, the shedding of His blood for the sins of the world. The water to fill the jars was brought by human hands, but the word of Christ alone could impart to it life-giving virtue. So with the rites which point to the Saviour's death. It is only by the power of Christ, working through faith, that they have efficacy to nourish the soul.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 148, 149.

Discussion Question:

No matter who we are, how much money we have, how great our health, how high our status, death is the inevitable end. Anything that doesn't answer the problem of death is, ultimately, unsatisfactory. Why, then, can Christ alone be the only satisfactory answer to this, the greatest of all human problems?

Summary: The beloved disciple tells two stories about Jesus in such a way that they become living parables that teach deep insights about Jesus. The main point is that Jesus is better than all human substitutes for what He offers. Jesus replaces the beautiful rituals of a religiosity that leave people short of the fullness of life that He offers. At the heart of what Jesus offers is the Cross. If I am that valuable to God, then it doesn't matter whether I'm rich or poor, great or small, famous or ordinary, and it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks of me. I am worth the whole universe to Christ.

Behind Every Door— Part 1

TARS MASYUK

While studying at Zaoksky Theological Seminary in Russia, Tars Masyuk discovered the blessings of literature evangelism. He joined other students who spent a summer selling books in a Siberian city.

Alcohol and drugs are major health issues there, and one-third of the residents are addicts. Again and again women cried, “Help me. My son is a drug addict; my husband is an alcoholic.”

Tars was tired and wanted to quit for the day. But a storm raged outside, so he knocked on the next door. A woman opened the door, and Tars introduced himself and his purpose. The woman invited him into the kitchen. Tars learned that she was a nurse in a hospital detox unit. She believed in God but did not attend church.

The woman’s husband came in, and Tars showed them several books on health and the Bible. The set cost \$15, three weeks’ pay, and Tars was sure they could not afford it. But the couple said if he would bring the books in three weeks, they would have the money.

Three weeks later Tars returned with the books. When they finally answered the door, it was apparent the couple had been drinking. His heart fell, thinking that these people had spent on alcohol the money for the books.

“I’ve brought your books,” he said as cheerfully as he could. The couple sat down at the table and scanned the books. Then the wife went to the cupboard and pulled out the money. “We wish you would stay and tell us more about what you believe,” they requested. Tars stayed, and the three talked for a long time.

Later Tars gave the couple’s name to the local elder of the tiny church in that city. The church had only eight members, and the pastor had 10 churches, all 35 to 200 miles (50 to 300 km) from one another. In a follow-up evangelistic series, 21 people were baptized in spite of opposition from the dominant church. Many others are studying with the church members. Tars prays that many will find Christ through the ministry of the students at Zaoksky.



TARS MASYUK (left) has recently completed his studies at Zaoksky Theological Seminary in Russia.

LESSON 4

*January 17-23

Grace Is All-Inclusive



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 2:23–4:42.*

Memory Text: “‘For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’ ” (*John 3:16, NIV*).

Key Thought: The grace of God manifested on the cross plays no favorites. “Whoever believes” will find life in Jesus Christ.

Grace is all-inclusive. In John, chapters 3 and 4, we encounter a pair of living parables in the stories about Nicodemus and about the Samaritan woman. Jesus encounters two individuals who are as opposite as can be. Differing in race, religion, reputation, gender, wealth, location, and behavior, both encounter Jesus away from the crowds. Both find the encounter bewildering and life changing.

In these two stories we see a living parable that unfolds the promise of John 3:16, perhaps the most beloved text in the Bible. God loved the world so much that He gave His beloved Son in order that “whosoever” believes might not perish but have eternal life. In Nicodemus and in the Samaritan woman, we see the opposite extremes of that “whosoever” illustrated. God does not play favorites (*see Acts 10:34, 35*). No matter who you are, no matter what you have done, no matter what your pedigree, no matter how others treat you, Jesus exhibits a glorious lack of prejudice. He is truly the “Savior of the world” (*John 4:42, NIV*).

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 24.*

When Miracles Aren't Enough (John 2:23-25).

On what grounds did many people at the Passover Feast come to have “faith” in Jesus? John 2:23.

Words such as *faith* can be used in more than one way in the Gospel of John. Faith can refer to the saving faith in Jesus that the disciples gained after He turned the water into wine at Cana (John 2:11). The same disciples attained an even deeper and more lasting faith after the Cross (vs. 22) and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (John 7:39).

But there is another type of faith that is in view in John 2:23-25 and other places: inadequate or superficial faith that is based upon miracles but does not result in a saving relationship with Jesus. In John 2:23-25 Jesus sees right through some followers' profession of faith and discerns their real motives.

As a result of His miracles, many people came to believe in Jesus. Are miracles alone, however, enough for someone to have a saving faith in Him? See also Luke 16:31. Explain your answer.

People sometimes think that if they could see miracles, they would have more faith. But miracles are no cure for superficial faith; they even can get in the way of true faith, hindering us from perceiving the deeper aspects of a relationship with Jesus.

Even with all the miracles Jesus had performed throughout His ministry, many still refused to accept Him, and many turned away when they saw that He wasn't going to do everything they expected Him to do. (See John 6:51-66 and Ellen G. White, “The Crisis in Galilee,” in *The Desire of Ages*.) What this should tell us is that while a personal experience with Jesus is crucial for a saving faith, faith needs to go beyond mere experience; it needs to be rooted and grounded in a living knowledge of who we are, what our condition is, and what Christ has done in order to spare us from the fate that our condition would otherwise bring to us.

Look at your walk with the Lord. On what is it based? Miracles, experience, reason, emotion? Is your faith grounded in a reality deeper than mere emotions or experience alone? Write out a paragraph describing why you believe what you do.

MONDAY January 19

He Came by Night (*John 3:1-21*).

In the Gospel of John, the narratives become living parables of the spiritual realities offered in Jesus. In Nicodemus (“a witness of the scene when Jesus drove out the buyers and the sellers”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 168), we see a living example of a person who, though a highly esteemed religious leader, had inadequate faith.

On what basis does Nicodemus consider Jesus a teacher who has come from God? *John 3:2. See also John 2:23-25.*

When Nicodemus says “We know,” he represents those in the previous passage (*John 2:23-25*) who saw what Jesus did in the temple but came to have inadequate faith as a result. “His [Nicodemus’s] words were designed to express and to invite confidence; but they really expressed unbelief.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 168.

The Greek word for “night” in this verse comes in a form that emphasizes not so much the dark part of the day as the quality of darkness, the darkness in Nicodemus’s soul at the time he comes to Jesus. He has seen what Jesus did in the temple, but he doesn’t perceive the real truth about Jesus, that He is the Word made flesh.

Read John 3:3-10, Christ’s immediate response to Nicodemus. Why does Nicodemus’s response reveal just how little this religious leader knew of crucial spiritual truth?

This story shows Jesus reading the heart of another human being (*see John 2:25*). Nicodemus cannot hide his spiritual ignorance behind the veneer of religiosity, of forms and customs, at least not from Jesus.

In the Nicodemus story, John continues the themes emphasized in chapter 2. Jesus replaces Nicodemus’s religious ideas with the truth about the new birth, with the Cross as the ground for everything that Jesus offers. The kingdom of God is entered not by physical birth but by a personal decision that everyone, even a leader of the Jews, such as Nicodemus, has to make.

We might be very religious, faithful in all the forms and traditions of our faith, but according to today’s study, what is the one thing we must have? Ask yourself which category you fall into. If it is not the right one, what must happen for you to be changed?

TUESDAY *January 20*

The New Birth (*John 3:3-8*).

The name *Nicodemus* means “leader of the people.” He was undoubtedly a pious man, an example of the best that Judaism could offer. As a Pharisee, he took the Scriptures and his faith seriously. He no doubt would have made a good neighbor. Jesus’ response to this good man, this faithful and godly man, is, therefore, somewhat surprising.

What do even “good” and pious people need in order to enter the kingdom of God? *John 3:3, 5*. **What do you understand this to mean?**

If Nicodemus had been part of the delegation of Pharisees who questioned John the Baptist (*John 1:24-28*), he would have been aware of John’s claim that baptism by water heralded the coming of the One greater than John—of the Messiah. As good and pious as Nicodemus was, he needed a new birth that could come only from the Messiah through baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Water and Spirit are closely related in Jesus’ teaching (*John 4:10-14, 23, 24; 7:37-39*). And the concept of being “born from above” is related to the ministry of John in *John 3:22-36*. So Jesus’ statement here suggests the need for a double baptism, an outward one by water and an inward one by the Holy Spirit.

Read again what Jesus says to Nicodemus. **In what ways do His words show us the utter futility of saving ourselves and our entire dependence upon God for salvation?** *See also Isa. 25:9, Titus 3:5, Heb. 9:12.*

Though we saw in Sunday’s section how experience alone (such as witnessing miracles) isn’t enough for a saving faith, Christ’s words to Nicodemus show at the same time just how crucial experience is to the Christian. A new birth is, indeed, nothing if not an experience. Jesus is telling Nicodemus, and us, that a knowledge of forms, customs, even correct doctrine, isn’t enough. We must experience, personally, His saving power in our lives.

If someone asks you, Have you been born again? what would you answer? And if the answer is Yes, what grounds do you have for saying so?

WEDNESDAY *January 21*

She Came by Day (*John 4:1-42*).

Read over the entire account of Jesus with the woman at the well and then answer these questions:

● **How does the woman at the well react to Jesus at first?** *John 4:9, 11, 12.*

● **What makes the woman believe that Jesus is a prophet?** *John 4:17-19, 29.*

Put yourself in the place of this woman: Here is this stranger, someone from a rival religion, in fact, who quickly reveals that He knows some of her darkest, most personal secrets. No wonder she had a change of attitude! Thus, it is not the physical presence of Jesus that convinces the woman that He is the Messiah (His physical appearance apparently meant nothing to her)—it is His word. Here, again, John underlines the theme that Jesus' word is as good as His touch.

Read carefully *John 4:21-24*. **What point is Jesus making to her? What is He seeking to lead her toward?**

John 4:23, 24 recalls the cleansing of the temple in chapter 2. Jesus has come to earth to restore the proper worship of God. A localized temple favors one people over another; worship in spirit, however, is universal. It is not tied to any geographical place or particular people. Jesus brings out that the location of worship is not nearly as important as the attitude of the worshiper. It is not so much where we worship as whom we worship.

In the story of the Samaritan woman, John continues the themes of chapters 2 and 3. For one thing, Jesus knows all about the Samaritan woman. He reads her heart and her history, as He did with Nicodemus. This knowledge gives her the confidence to proclaim Him. In return, Jesus replaces the worship of the Samaritans with a more adequate faith based on Spirit and truth.

Notice something not explicit in this story: Jesus exposes the woman's darkest sins, and yet when she leaves, she tries to get others to come to Jesus. Why did she not keep quiet about this Man who could do her much harm? What does her attitude about Jesus tell us about how Jesus must have treated her, despite her sin? What lessons are here for us in how we deal with sinners?

THURSDAY January 22

The Attraction of Opposites.

As a result of the woman's testimony and of their own encounter with Jesus, what do the Samaritans come to believe about Jesus? *John 4:42*. Also, what was it about Jesus that causes them to believe?

“‘Savior of the world’” means that salvation is no longer bound by ethnic or geographic considerations. In Jesus all peoples, including despised groups such as the Samaritans, can claim the fullness of God's favor. For the scorned and rejected, this kind of salvation comes as a great and welcome surprise. To those who oppress and exclude, this great salvation comes as the shattering of a world in which everyone knows his or her “place.”

What are all these texts telling us? *Acts 10:28, 17:26, Col. 3:11, 1 John 2:2*.

It is said that in relationships opposites attract. The stories about Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman portray these two in stark contrast to each other. Nicodemus is a man, the Samaritan a woman. He is a Jew, a Pharisee no less, she a lowly Samaritan. He comes by night; she comes at noon. He is rich (*John 19:39*); she is poor (or she would not have been fetching her own water in the heat of the day). He is highly educated (“the” teacher of Israel [*John 3:10*]); she is, as a woman in first-century Palestine, probably illiterate. He is pious (a Pharisee), she an adulteress. He is highly respected; she is (probably) despised and rejected, even by her own Samaritan neighbors. He has a great name, known from ancient writings outside the Bible; she is anonymous. He lives in the holy city, Jerusalem; she lives in Sychar, (which means “drunkenness”). He is open to believe yet slow to accept; she is suspicious at first yet quick to embrace Jesus when she realizes who He is.

In these two stories, we see a living parable of John 3:16. God sent His Son so that “whoever believes” might have eternal life. In these two individuals we see the opposite extremes of that “whoever.” No matter who you are, your station in life, or your sinful condition, you are welcome to receive Him. He is truly the “Savior of the world” (*John 4:42 NIV*). See the quotation in Friday's section.

Considering what we have studied today, why is racism so offensive in the sight of God?

Further Study: “Jesus had begun to break down the partition wall between Jew and Gentile, and to preach salvation to the world. Though He was a Jew, He mingled freely with the Samaritans, setting at nought the Pharisaic customs of His nation. In the face of their prejudices He accepted the hospitality of this despised people. He slept under their roofs, ate with them at their tables—partaking of the food prepared and served by their hands—taught in their streets, and treated them with the utmost kindness and courtesy. . . .

“Those who call themselves His followers may despise and shun the outcast ones; but no circumstance of birth or nationality, no condition of life, can turn away His love from the children of men. To every soul, however sinful, Jesus says, If thou hadst asked of Me, I would have given thee living water.

“The gospel invitation is not to be narrowed down, and presented only to a select few, who, we suppose, will do us honor if they accept it. The message is to be given to all.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 193, 194.

Discussion Questions:

- ① How can we gain a clearer insight into the deceitfulness of our own hearts? In what type of setting are you most willing to confess your mistakes to others? How can the church help to create such settings?
- ② To what degree is it possible for Christians today to have the kind of discernment of others’ thoughts, motivations, and feelings that Jesus had? If we can’t, what should that fact tell us about why we need to be very careful not to judge the hearts of others?

Summary: The penetrating gaze of Jesus changes everything. Self-assured people become uncertain. Despised people find new life. Comfortable churches learn to shun business as usual. The Spirit blows where it wills. So it should not be surprising that when Christians become more like Jesus they shake things up too. As was the case also for Jesus, this “shaking” will not be greeted everywhere with joy. Both inside and outside the church, many prefer the comfortable security of a life that is undisturbed by the troublesome wind of the Spirit. These oppose the freedom of the Spirit with every fiber of their being.

Behind Every Door— Part 2

TARS MASYUK

Tars was tired; he had just one more apartment to visit in the building, but one look at the door and he was tempted to skip it. Then he reminded himself of his promise to visit every apartment.

Tars raised his hand to knock on the aging and broken door. Surely the person living here spends their meager earnings on things other than his or her home, he thought.

A man answered the knock and opened the door. He hesitated before he let Tars come in, saying his apartment was untidy. And it was. Plastic bags filled with empty alcohol bottles littered the floor. Tars decided that the man must collect empty vodka bottles to earn money for his own alcohol.

Tars wondered what he should say to the man. “Do you believe in God?” he asked.

The man answered, “Yes, somewhere in my heart I believe in God, but I do not think there is anything that can help me in my situation.”

Tars shared stories of others whose lives God had rescued from drugs, alcohol, and other vices. He assured the man that Christ can change his heart, too. Tars sensed that the man wanted his life to change but was not sure it was possible. Tars showed the man *Steps to Christ* and told him that of all the books he had, this one was the most powerful and could show him how much God wanted him as His child. The man was interested, and when Tars told him the book was \$1, the man began searching for money. He dug into his pockets, into the couch, every place he had ever left money, until he found enough to buy the book.

Tars knew that to buy this book the man would go hungry, but the man wanted the book. “Now I have no money for bread,” he said, handing the money to Tars.

“Take out a few rubles for bread, and I will make up the amount myself,” Tars answered. The man agreed and began asking many questions about religion. Tars hesitated, then showed him *The Great Controversy*, and said it would answer many of his questions.

The man wanted that book too, but had no money. “I know!” he said. “I will collect enough bottles to buy this book, too!” And he did.

The names of everyone who bought literature or showed an interest in religion were given to the local church to visit. Great harvests will be reaped as people turn their hearts to God instead of alcohol.

TARS MASYUK *recently graduated from Zaosky Theological Seminary.*

LESSON 5

*January 24-30

The Struggle to Be Real



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 4:43-54.*

Memory Text: “Jesus replied, ‘You may go. Your son will live.’ The man took Jesus at his word and departed” (*John 4:50, NIV*).

Key Thought: When we encounter Jesus, He challenges us to re-evaluate everything in our lives, even our own self-understanding.

In this lesson we encounter a man whose faith in Jesus is sufficient to propel him to journey 16 miles uphill in order to find Jesus and ask Him to heal his son. If we had observed him, we would have called him a man of faith. Yet, Jesus labels the man's faith as the kind that's merely seeking after miraculous signs and wonders. Jesus exposes his faith as something other than what it seemed to be.

The human heart is deceptive by nature (*Jer. 17:9*). Even at our best we sometimes deceive ourselves and others. But John tells the story of One who not only sees past our image building to the true need of the soul but helps us to a fuller and deeper knowledge of both self and God through His Word.

In this lesson we will examine a living parable of the One whose word is as good as His touch. In the process, we will gain a deeper insight into a more authentic Christian faith.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 31.*

SUNDAY *January 25*

No Honor at Home (*John 4:43-45*).

This passage forms the transition between the story about the woman of Samaria and the story about a royal official in Galilee who approaches Jesus in behalf of his son. It is a startling passage in which, at first glance, two separate assertions seem to contradict each other.

What saying does Jesus have in mind as He approaches His home province? *John 4:43, 44*. What do you think that means?

How do the Galileans react upon Jesus' arrival, and why? *John 4:45*.

As Jesus approaches Galilee, He is mindful that "a prophet has no honor in his own country"; yet, the Galileans welcome Jesus. In the original language, the word *then* occurs at the beginning of verse 45, suggesting that verse 45 is somehow the natural result of verse 44, "A prophet has no honor in his own country. When Jesus arrived in Galilee, therefore, the Galileans welcomed Him!" The welcome of the Galileans is somehow "without honor" to Jesus.

Read carefully *John 4:45*, as well as *John 2:23-25*. How do these verses explain what is happening here?

The welcoming response of the Galileans is just like that of the Judeans, who showed faith in Jesus because they had seen miracles and signs. The Galileans thought they were welcoming Jesus in a positive way. But enthusiasm for Jesus that is based on miracles only is no honor. The Galileans prove to be a people who are awed by miracles and spectacular works but who are slow to believe in Jesus' words. Their excitement about Jesus is based more on selfishness than on faith in who He was.

In probably all of us, there are some selfish motives in our faith (after all, Why do we want salvation, if not to gain something for ourselves?). Must our motives always be pure in our walk with the Lord? Can the Lord still work with those whose motives might not be exactly what they should be?

MONDAY *January 26*

It Is Hard to Be Real (*John 4:46-49*).

As is so often the case in John's Gospel, this new story functions as an acted parable, demonstrating the truth of the earlier statement. The problematic, Galilean welcome of Jesus (*John 4:43-45*) is illustrated with a story about a royal official who believes in Jesus yet struggles in his expression of that faith.

What problem does the royal official bring to Jesus, and what does he want Jesus to do? *John 4:47, 49*.

Where did both Jesus and the royal official live? *John 2:12, 4:46*.

Jesus and the royal official had probably spent some time as neighbors in a very small town (Capernaum was little more than one hundred meters across). The man's combination of faith and doubts well illustrates a prophet's difficulty in finding honor at home.

What does Jesus say in response to the royal official's first request? *John 4:48*. **What did Jesus mean by this statement? Was not part of the problem the fact that they saw signs and wonders and yet still did not have true faith?**

Jesus' initial response indicates that the man, like Nicodemus before him, was an example of inadequate faith. It seems that the Galileans on the whole welcomed Jesus outwardly but did not really believe in Him (*John 4:43-45*). The miracles Jesus performed actually may have become stumbling blocks to the people on their way to a true appreciation of Jesus.

A Galilean himself, the royal official is confronted by the reality of his partial, inadequate faith. He is not relying on the word of Jesus but requires physical evidence before he would believe. He is startled to discover that he could not hide his unbelief from Jesus (remember the theme of *John 2:23-25*: Jesus knows!). Realizing that he might lose all on account of unbelief, he finally throws himself at the feet of Jesus in desperation.

What are some helpful ways of dealing with doubt? Is doubt always a negative thing, or can it sometimes play a positive role in a Christian's experience? Why?

TUESDAY January 27

The Path to Faith (*John 4:50-54*).

What does Jesus say in response to the man's second and more desperate request, and how does the royal official react? *John 4:50*.

“The nobleman left the Saviour's presence with a peace and joy he had never known before. Not only did he believe that his son would be restored, but with strong confidence he trusted in Christ as the Redeemer.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 198, 199.

The shocking word that Jesus speaks to the man is that He does not need to travel to Capernaum; Jesus can heal at a great distance. This is a living parable of the Gospel's message to the second generation of Christians that Jesus' word is as good as His touch. He does not need to be present physically to meet any need.

The second statement of Jesus is the final piece that brings faith to the royal official. He grasps the word of Christ, and he believes. But belief brings with it a test. Would he act on that newfound faith? Would he head home believing that his son will live, or would he continue to beg Jesus to come to his home and heal his son with a touch? His actions demonstrate his newfound faith.

What do these texts say about the relationship between faith and works? *Isa. 58:1-12, John 15:5, James 2:22*.

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon when the royal official encountered Jesus. If he had hurried downhill (Cana is some six hundred meters higher than Capernaum, twenty-five kilometers away), he could have made it back to Capernaum that night (see Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 199). One would think that he would have hurried home to find out whether his son were, in fact, healed. Instead, the fact that the servants were sent out to look for him the day after he met Jesus indicates that he took his time heading home, stopping somewhere for the night. The man not only headed home at Jesus' command; he did so in a manner that indicated he had fully accepted Jesus' word. The evidence of faith is action. If the only reason to hurry was worry about his son, his deliberate journey was the living expression of his confidence in Jesus' word.

Though we are not saved by works, how do works manifest and express our faith? In your own experience, how have works strengthened your faith in the Lord? What is it about good works that strengthens faith? Also, in your experience, how do sinful works weaken faith and add to doubt?

WEDNESDAY January 28

The Solution to Life's Problems *(Rom. 10:17, Hebrews 11).*

According to Paul, how does faith come to a person? *Rom. 10:17.*

Faith came to the royal official by hearing Jesus' word from His own mouth. For the second generation of Christians, faith comes when the word of Christ is grasped in written form or in the oral presentations of those who bring that Written Word to us.

Under the surface of the story in John 4 lies the divine solution to life's problems. The story begins with a point of need. The royal official's son lay dying. When the official heard that Jesus was accessible, he did not linger at home hoping that something good might happen; he brought his problem directly to Jesus. He assumed that if Jesus accompanied him back to Capernaum, His touch would banish the illness that threatened the life of his son.

Instead, Jesus speaks the shocking word that He does not need to travel to Capernaum; He can heal at a great distance. His word is as good as His touch. The man not only takes Jesus at His word; his actions from that time on are a bodily demonstration of his faith in Jesus' word.

Read Hebrews 11. How does this chapter fit in with these issues regarding the exercise of faith?

How can we apply this faith lesson to our problems today? Four steps seem to emerge: (1) Acknowledge the problem. This is not as simple as it sounds but will be discussed further in the next day's lesson. (2) Take your problem to Jesus in prayer. (3) Receive the word that your need has been met. The words of Jesus to us are found in the Bible. If we want to hear those words, we need to know the Word. That is why continual Bible study is important. (4) Speak and act out God's answer. It is not enough simply to hear the Word. The Word becomes real to us when we act on it and when we tell others about our faith. Genuine belief results in corresponding action.

But what if we are like the royal official? What if our belief is mixed with unbelief? What if we have doubts? This story suggests that the doubts need to be confronted with words of faith and action. Take God at His word. Do what the Bible says, and faith will come.

Why is the actual practice and exercise of faith so important for maintaining faith?

THURSDAY January 29

Steps to Authenticity

What is the natural condition of the human heart? *Jer. 17:9*. **What** is Laodicea's fundamental problem? *Rev. 3:17*. **How** do these two factors work together against us?

“Like a flash of light, the Saviour’s words to the nobleman laid bare his heart. He saw that his motives in seeking Jesus were selfish. His vacillating faith appeared to him in its true character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 198.

The royal official did not know the depths of his unbelief until confronted directly by Jesus. We, too, are often unaware of our sinfulness and unbelief. We are like Laodicea, the church in Revelation whose self-concept is not confirmed by reality (*Rev. 3:17*). How can you bring a problem to Jesus when your heart is deceiving you, when you do not even know that you have a problem?

The most effective path to true authenticity before God is a devotional encounter with Him.

1. *Through Bible study* we discover that God works with real people who make mistakes, such as David and Peter and Nicodemus. We do not have to be afraid to confess sins and problems to Him; He already knows them. And we find out that He does not give up on people who make mistakes. So, we gain the courage to get real with God.

2. *Through prayer* we seek to be real with God. God prefers that we be totally honest with Him in prayer. Jesus certainly was. “Why have You forsaken Me?” If Jesus could be that honest with God, it cannot be a sin for us! The Lord wants to hear our deepest needs, our deepest feelings, yes—even our anger.

3. *Through journaling* (a spiritual diary) we can bring both our Bible study and our prayers into sharp focus. The writing process draws out depths of self-understanding that often go untapped without it. The writing process can help us develop a deeper understanding of our need for God in specific areas of life.

4. *Accountability to others* can enhance our accountability to God. Authentic Christians usually can point to specific people who understand and love them yet can share frankly regarding the quality of their behavior.

Through exercises such as the ones above, we can gain a more accurate awareness of the barriers we set up against God in our lives.

If we know our own hearts are corrupt, if we know our own motives are not pure, if we know we are sinners to the core, why must we place our whole hope only in what Christ did for us at the Cross? See *Rom. 5:8, Col. 1:14, 1 Tim. 1:15, 2:6*.

Further Study: Many people are troubled by the idea of accountability. They suggest that we should take everything to God in prayer (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 119). While Ellen White makes statements that support such a concept, she also underlines the importance of being accountable to other Christians.

“It is your duty to counsel with your brethren. This may touch your pride, but the humility of a mind taught by the Holy Spirit will listen to counsel, and will banish all self-confidence.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 315.

“When men’s hearts are softened and subdued by the constraining influence of the Holy Spirit, they will give heed to counsel; but when they turn from admonition until their hearts become hardened, the Lord permits them to be led by other influences.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 425.

“There are souls perplexed with doubt, burdened with infirmities, weak in faith, and unable to grasp the Unseen; but a friend whom they can see, coming to them in Christ’s stead, can be a connecting link to fasten their trembling faith upon Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 297.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read Hebrews 11:6. Why is it impossible, without faith, to please God? What does that mean, to “please God”?
- 2 How does the attitude of the Galileans toward Christ compare with that of the Samaritans in the same chapter? What lessons should that comparison have for us?
- 3 If faith is a gift from God (*Eph. 2:8*), why is the exercise of faith so important? Why does the Lord not just keep renewing the gift, regardless of what we do?

Summary: Jesus returns to Galilee and finds a people who express faith in Him that is based on His ability to do miracles. Using the example of the royal official, the author of the Gospel both exposes the emptiness of such faith and points the way to true faith. Through the words of Jesus, we gain a more authentic understanding of our own sinfulness and of the barriers we erect to avoid intimacy with God. But when faith is actively expressed in words and actions, it enables us to take hold of the solutions to life’s problems that God offers to us through His Word.

From Disappointment to Discovery

by J. H. ZACHARY

Anna has four daughters. Violeta, the youngest, was engaged to marry a young man, but his parents refused to permit the marriage because the couple were of different faiths. Distressed, and with time on her hands, Violeta decided to study the teachings of different churches. She found a Bible and began to read. Often she stayed up until midnight, and many times her mother heard her weeping.

One day Violeta received an invitation to attend an evangelistic meeting. She did not know what church was conducting the meeting, but she went and was thrilled that the speaker based his message upon the Bible.

Violeta offered to tell her mother what the Bible teachers were saying, but her mother refused to listen, for she wanted to follow only what her own church taught. But one day Anna happened to hear Violeta reading aloud from the Bible. As she listened, Anna felt something tugging at her heart. She realized that she was not following the Bible.

Anna found an old Bible and began reading it. She realized that it was the same as the Bible her daughter was reading. Anna began reading from it every day, searching for God.

Violeta began attending the Seventh-day Adventist church. Anna allowed her to go, thinking that going to any church was better than going to the discos. Violeta often talked to her mother about what she was learning in church. While Anna would not attend the meetings, she did listen as Violeta told her what the pastor had said.

Through Violeta's testimony, Anna heard the truths of the Bible that had been hidden from her for so long. She decided to follow the truth and began attending the Adventist church with her daughter, even though her husband opposed her. Finally he agreed to attend a series of meetings with Anna and Violeta, and he was baptized. Anna's other three daughters are also studying the Bible in preparation for baptism.



ANNA BONDORETZ (left). J. H. ZACHARY is coordinator of international evangelism for *The Quiet Hour*.

LESSON 6

*January 31–February 6

Putting *the* Past Behind You



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 5.*

Memory Text: “Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, ‘See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you’” (*John 5:14, NIV*).

Key Thought: Jesus is not satisfied to heal only physically or spiritually. He wants to restore the entire person. Genuine faith involves every part of life: mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual.

New life in Christ includes “putting the past behind you.” In John 5 we read a story about a man who had sunk as low as a human being could go and still be alive. Paralyzed in body, sin-stricken in mind and heart, he doesn't even appeal to Jesus for healing. Jesus chooses to make the man a Sabbath-day example of His awesome power to bring life to those as good as dead. Not only does He restore the man physically, He challenges the man to cooperate in extending that healing to his whole person.

When confronted by the religious leaders regarding His “desecration” of the Sabbath, Jesus reveals the Godlike nature of His action. In healing the man at the pool on the Sabbath, Jesus offers stunning testimony with regard to His divine origin and mission. He is more than just a man, more than even a Messiah; He is the creative Life-Giver Himself. So, the story of the healing at the Pool of Bethesda becomes another living parable of the divine Creator who became flesh and dwelt among us.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 7.*

SUNDAY *February 1*

The Pool of Bethesda *(John 5:1-4).*

Read the first four verses of John 5. In what ways is this scene symbolic of fallen humanity? What is the condition of these people, and where are they looking for help?

The name *Bethesda* may be interpreted as “House of Mercy,” so Jesus shows mercy at the place where people looked for mercy. The Pool of Bethesda was located just north of the temple complex. The pool was fed by an intermittent stream, which may explain the troubling of the waters from time to time.

What happens at the pool? *John 5:3, 4.*

Your answer to this question may depend on the version of the Bible you use. In English, many older translations, such as the King James Version, state that an angel of the Lord stirred up the healing waters, but the more ancient biblical manuscripts leave out that element of the story (hence, no verse 4 in many translations). Although Ellen White generally used the King James Bible, she apparently rejected the implication that angels were involved in the troubling of the waters.

“At certain seasons the waters of this pool were agitated, and *it was commonly believed that this was the result of supernatural power*, and that whoever first after the troubling of the pool stepped into the waters, would be healed of whatever disease he had.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 201 (emphasis supplied). If the traditional reading were to prove correct, it certainly would be a strange thing for God to arrange a healing mechanism in which the least sick are favored over the truly needy. In direct contrast, Jesus enters a place of merciless mercy and picks out the least-likely candidate to achieve healing along the lines of the popular tradition.

All around us we see vast multitudes such as those at the Pool of Bethesda, sick, damaged, hurt by the warfare of life, and waiting in vain for help from sources that really cannot give it. As Christians, what is the one thing that we, perhaps just as damaged, have been given that they need, as well? See Rom. 8:24, Col. 1:5, Titus 2:13.

MONDAY February 2

Healing the Paralytic *(John 5:5-15)*.

Review the story of Jesus healing the paralytic, as presented in John 5:5-15. Summarize the essence of what happened, dwelling specifically on what this story tells us about the character of God.

Several aspects of this story cry out for attention. First of all, Jesus healed the man arbitrarily. He picked one man out of a whole crowd of people—a man who had not sought Jesus out, a man who did not even know Him, a man who expressed no faith in Him before being healed. His only claim to Jesus’ attention may have been that he was the most pitiful of all the cases present.

How typical of God to act this way! To act in this way at decisive points in our lives, God’s hand often is felt in ways we have not asked for and do not deserve. God does things such as this, not to excuse sin but so we can experience His grace, which reminds us of our total dependence on Him.

A second startling aspect to the story is that Jesus chose to heal the man on the Sabbath. The rabbis allowed for special acts on the Sabbath in emergencies, but this was no emergency. After all, the man had been crippled for 38 years; surely a day’s delay for the sake of the Sabbath would not have made a major difference. Jesus was deliberately making a point here. “ ‘It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath,’ ” Jesus had said in Matthew 12:12 *(NIV)*. What was said there is acted here. “The Sabbath is not intended to be a period of useless inactivity. . . . The work of Christ in healing the sick was in perfect accord with the law.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 207.

The story in John 5 became a living parable illustrating the truth of John 5:21: “ ‘The Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it’ ” *(NIV)*. Jesus can give life to anyone He wishes, because there are no limits to His life-giving power.

After healing the paralytic, Jesus tells him not just to arise and walk but to take up his bed, as well, knowing that this action would arouse the indignation of the religious leaders. What do you think Christ’s motives were in that command, and what message could that have for us, we who take the Sabbath command seriously?

TUESDAY February 3

Dealing With Sin and Its Consequences

(John 5:14).

What does Jesus tell the former invalid when He meets him later in the temple? *John 5:14.*

When Jesus tells the man to “stop sinning” (*NIV*), He implies, first of all, that the man’s illness was caused by sin in some sense. Continued sin might result in a relapse of the paralysis.

There is, however, an even deeper element here. The form of the word translated “sinning” is extremely continuous. Jesus commands the man to stop something that he had been doing continuously, right up to the time of this encounter in the temple. This implies that the man had somehow been continuing in sin, even in a paralyzed state. What kind of sin was Jesus talking about? A paralyzed man cannot rob banks, commit adultery, or kill anyone. Jesus must have been referring to sin of the mind—his thoughts, his attitudes, his imagination.

After extending grace to the paralytic, Jesus tells him to “sin no more.” Look up the following texts: How do they reveal the same principle manifested in Christ’s words to the healed man? *John 8:10, 11; Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 2:16, 17.*

But while the healing of the man’s body was totally an act of grace on Jesus’ part, there was a part for him to play in his recovery, as well. Sin not only separates us from God; it produces ongoing consequences that eventually destroy the quality of all aspects of a person’s life.

The consequences of sin include not only physical injuries and disease; there are emotional, spiritual, and psychological effects, as well. All these can and should be addressed by a relationship with Jesus. All other things being equal, a genuine walk with Jesus brightens the facial expressions, soothes the emotions, warms the heart, and brings renewed energy to the body. This is why Seventh-day Adventist Christianity is so concerned with things such as diet, exercise, and attitude. Genuine faith involves every part of life—mental, physical, and emotional—as well as spiritual.

Nevertheless, most Christians readily acknowledge that their inner lives, particularly the emotional aspect, can be quite unstable even after conversion. This passage tells us we have an active role to play in cooperating with Jesus in our recovery from sin and its effects on our life.

Jesus, the Life-Giver (John 5:16-30).

How does Jesus justify His act of healing on the Sabbath? John 5:16-18.

In response to the persecution He experienced, Jesus says He is simply following the example of His Father, who is “always” at work on the Sabbath. God’s action provides the model for human activity on the Sabbath.

Jewish writers of the time recognized that God’s work on the Sabbath could be detected in births, deaths, sunshine, rain, and the continued flowing of rivers (see William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975], vol. 1, p. 183). The Jews, therefore, recognized that Jesus was claiming the same privileges on the Sabbath that God has claimed. By healing on the Sabbath, Jesus was claiming equality with God.

“Should God forbid the sun to perform its office upon the Sabbath? . . . Must the wheat and corn stop growing, and the ripening cluster defer its purple bloom? . . . In such a case, men would miss the fruits of the earth, and the blessings that make life desirable. . . . He will not be held guiltless who neglects to relieve suffering on the Sabbath. God’s holy rest day was made for man, and acts of mercy are in perfect harmony with its intent. God does not desire His creatures to suffer an hour’s pain that may be relieved upon the Sabbath or any other day.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 206, 207.

List the various ways John 5:16-30 portrays Jesus as equal with the Father.

In John 5:19-30 Jesus demonstrates that He is doing the same work as His Father, the work of giving life (*vss. 20, 21, 26, 28, 29*) and the work of judging (*vss. 22, 27, 30*). By doing what His Father says on this earth, He not only shows that the Father is life but demonstrates the truth of His own claim to divinity (*vss. 19-23*). He does not leave anyone the option of believing in the Father while ignoring His claims about Himself (*vs. 23*).

Here is Jesus, who performs an incredible miracle; however, so caught up in their own religious forms and customs, the leaders focus, instead, on the “minor” things, missing the bigger picture. In what ways could we be focusing on “minors” while missing the important principle unfolding before our eyes?

THURSDAY February 5

The Greatest Witnesses to Jesus *(John 5:31-47)*.

In yesterday's study, we saw that Jesus made some powerful claims about Himself, claims that would ring false in the mouth of every other human being who ever lived. Jesus, obviously, saw the need to justify the kind of testimony He gave about Himself.

List all who offer a testimony in favor of Jesus in John 5:31-47. Which of these witnesses does Jesus seem to consider the most important?

Jesus acknowledges that uncorroborated testimony about oneself is inadequate (5:31). One of the fundamental principles of Judaism is that truth can be established only in the mouths of at least two witnesses (*Deut. 19:15; see also Rev. 11:3-13*). So, Jesus adds to His own testimony the testimony of John the Baptist, His works, His Father, and the Scriptures, thereby doubling the minimum testimony needed to establish truthfulness within Judaism (*John 5:31-40*).

Read John 5:38. What powerful rebuke is Jesus giving to those leaders?

When it is clear the religious leaders are not willing to accept the testimony of these witnesses (*vss. 43, 44; see also 8:13, 14*), Jesus calls forth the ultimate witness within Judaism, Moses. Moses had served as an intercessor with God in behalf of Israel (*Exod. 32:7-14*). But in the mouth of Jesus, Moses is transformed into a judge (*John 5:45-47*). The words of Moses will condemn those who reject Jesus, because Moses wrote about Jesus and prepared the way for Him. Jesus closes with the parting shot, “ ‘Since you do not believe what [Moses] wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?’ ” (*vs. 47, NIV*).

With this encounter, the battle is joined between Jesus and some of the leaders of Israel, a battle that continues in the Gospel until Jesus is arrested, suffers, and dies on the cross. In the hostility of these people, John portrays the hostility of all who reject the gospel, regardless of their background.

How is your perception of Jesus shaped by the attitudes of believers whom you know and admire? How would your life be different if you did not know these people? And what about the people who admire and look up to you? How do your attitudes toward the Lord impact their lives?

Futher Study: As pointed out in Tuesday's section, most Christians readily acknowledge that their inner lives, particularly the emotional aspect, can be quite unstable, even after conversion. Christians, as well as others, struggle with unhappy memories, flashes of anger, and unmentionable thoughts. The story of the paralytic at Bethesda tells us that Jesus cares at least as much about the inner life as He does about the outward circumstances.

Unwelcome thoughts and emotions can revolve around both things we have done and things that have been done to us. Things we have done cause feelings of remorse, regret, and failure. Things others have done to us can cause feelings of anger, grief, and deep resentment. Fullness in Christ involves dealing with issues of the past such as these. For practical suggestions about the process of mental and emotional healing, see chapter 6 in the companion volume by the author of these lessons.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why do many Christians believe that accepting Jesus should put an end to all emotional difficulties? To what degree do you think this idea is true?**
- 2 Forgiveness is a major component in dealing with sin and its consequences. Why, then, do most people find it so hard to forgive?**
- 3 The paralytic evidently suffered as a consequence of his own sinful actions. What do you think Jesus would have told the victim of rape or of abuse? What would He say to one who causes others to suffer?**
- 4 Jesus violated human-made rules about Sabbath keeping to heal a man. To what degree are your personal rules for living God-made or man-made? How can you know the difference?**

Summary: Jesus came to this earth to show how God would act within the human context of this world. By healing the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, Jesus demonstrated that He is not limited by time or by the quality of the material He has to work with. He also showed that He is not satisfied to heal only the physical or spiritual side of a person. He wants to restore the entire person.

The Stolen Book

MARTIAL RAKOTONIAINA

Martial learned about a charismatic church that claimed to be able to heal people and chase out demons. He did not need healing, but he was attracted to the group by their charismatic activities. He began attending the church.

When a church member invited him to study in the seminary to become a pastor, he agreed. While at the seminary he found a book that sounded interesting to him. He took the book home, and when he left the seminary he did not return the book. When he completed his studies he was given a church to pastor.

One day he began to read the book he had taken from the seminary library. It was *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*. As he read it he began to question what he had been taught in the seminary and what he had been teaching his congregation.

He talked to his family about what he had learned from the stolen book. The family agreed that the Adventist Church has the truth, but Martial knew no Adventists or where he could find an Adventist church.

When he stopped attending church for several weeks, members of his congregation asked him what was wrong. He explained what he had learned about the Bible and told them he could no longer pastor a Sunday-keeping church. The church members loved their pastor and wept when he told them he was leaving. He invited his members to join him in honoring the seventh-day Sabbath.

An Adventist believer learned that this charismatic pastor had accepted the Sabbath. He visited the family and told them about a congregation that worshiped a short distance from their home. The former pastor and his family began attending the Adventist church, and, in time, were baptized.



The former pastor returned to hold evangelistic meetings in the area where he had once pastored. Most of his former members came and listened, but none of them followed him.

One day he met a fellow seminarian and shared the stolen book with him. "I hope the stolen book will do for him what it did for me," Martial said.

MARTIAL RAKOTONIAINA (left) is a farmer and lay worker in Madagascar.

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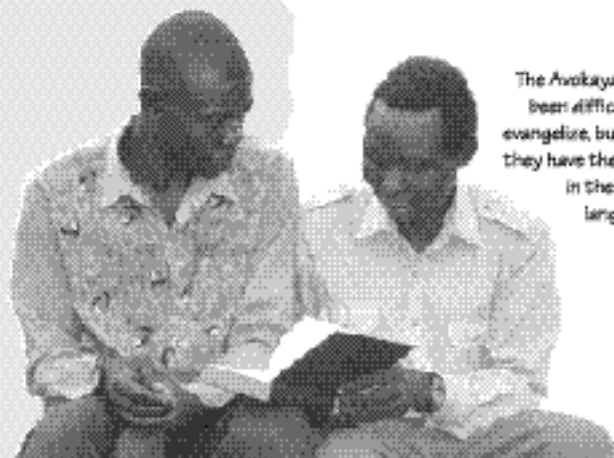
Sudan

Believers in southern Sudan struggle to share their faith without most conveniences you and I take for granted—electricity, telephones, running water. But with your help, they will have the training that will make their work effective.

Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help build a lay training center where they can learn the best ways to lead others to Christ.

MISSION

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on March 27 supports projects in the Trans-European Division.



The Avokaya have been difficult to evangelize, but now they have the Bible in their own language.

LESSON 7

*February 7-13

The Sacred *in the* Common



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 6.*

Memory Text: “**The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life’**”
(John 6:63, NIV).

Key Thought: **In Christ all of life, even the common things, can become an act of worship.**

Throughout John, chapter 6, the people relate to Jesus on a material level. They are not searching for spiritual food; rather, they want their physical needs satisfied. They want to see more miracles such as the feeding of the 5,000. In spite of that awesome event, when the people looked at Jesus, they saw a common everyday human being like themselves, not Someone who came down from heaven. They were unable to see the sacred shining through the common.

In chapter 6, Jesus tries to direct their eyes away from the common toward spiritual things, the food that endures to eternal life. Life is not found in miracles and in the things of this world. Life is found by accepting the claims Jesus makes about Himself. One of the secrets of the devotional life is to learn how to see the presence and the power of Jesus working in the common things of everyday life, to sense that He is there with us, even though we cannot see, hear, or touch Him.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 14.*

The Miracle of the Fish and Loaves

(John 6:1-13).

Read John 6:1-13, the feeding of the 5,000. What lessons can you see in this account? What does this story say to you personally? What's in it that speaks to your needs? What kind of hope does it offer? What does it tell you about God?

Notice, too, the timing of this account: It took place around the time of Passover (*John 6:4*), when the Lord worked a mighty deliverance for His people. Though the feeding of the 5,000 certainly was not as dramatic as the Exodus from Egypt, it was still a powerful manifestation of God's power in behalf of His people, even in their spiritual ignorance. John makes it clear that many of those who had followed Christ did so only because of the miracles they already had seen (*vs. 2*) and not because of any deep, spiritual conviction that this Man was the Messiah or that He could bring them spiritual freedom.

Nevertheless, the Lord still worked in their behalf. In other words, though He knew their hearts were still not right, He ministered to them anyway. How grateful we can be that our God is like that. What does that tell us about how we should act toward those who aren't where they should be spiritually?

Though Christ multiplies the fish and the loaves (the miracle), He does not miraculously deliver them to the crowd. How was the food distributed and gathered? What lesson is in there for us? *John 6:10-12.*

Though Jesus ministers here to their physical needs, is that an end in itself or a means to an end? After all, a few hours later, all those people would be hungry again. What is Jesus doing with that miracle? In what ways are we called to do the same thing?

MONDAY February 9

Miracle at Sea *(John 6:16-21)*.

Read the story in **John 6:16-21** of Jesus walking on the water. Compare it to the miracle of the fish and the loaves. What are the differences?

It is interesting that Christ would perform such a powerful miracle, especially after what just happened on the mountain with the multitude, who did not respond in a positive manner to the miracle He had performed there. (Read John 6:14, 15: They wanted to make Him a king, by force; Christ did not come to allow Himself to be set up as King. Their reaction caused Him to leave the area.)

What reason, then, would Jesus have for doing this miracle? Hint: Who are the ones who witness it?

In the story of the disciples on the sea (*John 6:16-21*), Jesus accomplishes a deed similar to those done by the God of the Exodus (*see Exod. 14:20-22*). To people schooled in the Old Testament, therefore, Jesus' ability to walk on water and to control wind and wave was a powerful affirmation of His divinity, something the disciples needed after their disappointment with Christ's refusal to be made king.

In *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen White writes that the disciples are eager for Christ to be crowned the Davidic King, and when He forbids it, they become upset. "The disciples had long hoped for a popular movement to place Jesus on the throne; they could not endure the thought that all this enthusiasm should come to nothing. . . .

"Unbelief was taking possession of their minds and hearts. Love of honor had blinded them. They knew that Jesus was hated by the Pharisees, and they were eager to see Him exalted as they thought He should be."—Pages 379, 380.

By performing the miracle of walking on the water, Jesus strengthens the faith of His disciples. But do we always need miracles to have our faith strengthened? What are some things that have happened in your life that have helped your faith grow yet would not necessarily be called "miracles"?

TUESDAY February 10

Bread From Heaven (*John 6:22-35*).

After that stormy night (John 6:16-21), the crowd crosses the lake and finds Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum, where all the preaching and the dialogue of the rest of the chapter take place.

How do the ancient Israelites survive in the desert, and what does that have to do with the feeding of the 5,000 earlier in the chapter? *Exod. 16:33-35, John 6:27-31.*

A consistent theme in the background of John 6 is the Exodus from Egypt. The feeding of the 5,000 recalls the original Passover when the Israelites escaped from the immediate grasp of the Egyptians. Then the storm episode (*vss. 16-21*) recalled the perils the Israelites faced at the Red Sea. Now comes a reference to God's guiding of their experience in the desert of Sinai. As with the Israelites in the desert, the hearers of Jesus react to miracles they can see or touch, but their faith remains inadequate. Jesus directs their attention away from the manna the Israelites received in the desert to the spiritual bread He has come to offer them.

Read prayerfully and carefully John 6:32-35. What point is Jesus making here? What is He telling us about Himself? What do these words mean to us? Why does He use the bread analogy?

The clear implication of the sermon is that seeing Jesus and believing in Him is what produces real life in the spiritual sense now and in the fullest sense " 'at the last day' " (*vs. 40; 5:21*). Just as food constantly must be eaten in order to sustain physical life, so it is necessary to invite Jesus into our daily experience in order to sustain spiritual life. "Believing" in the Gospel of John (*see also John 1:12, 6:47*) always has a continuous sense. It must be an ongoing and daily experience.

Read in verse 35 of John 6 where Jesus says that those who come to Him and who believe in Him will never hunger nor thirst. How have these promises been manifested in your life? If they have not, then you need to ask yourself, How can I come to Jesus and believe in Him?

WEDNESDAY *February 11*

Talking to Deaf Ears (*John 6:36-50*).

Why do many people in the following text have a hard time accepting Jesus' claims? *John 6:41, 42*. **How** do the words of the people here reflect the words of Nicodemus in *John 3:4*?

How do many of Jesus' own disciples react to His teachings in this chapter? *John 6:60, 66*. **Why** would they react this way?

Throughout this chapter the crowds relate to Jesus on a material and physical level. They want to see more miracles such as the feeding of the 5,000. When Jesus refuses to accommodate them, they all too quickly conclude that Jesus is a common everyday human being like themselves, not Someone who came down from heaven. The common keeps them from seeing the sacred. The very physical presence of Jesus becomes a stumbling block to them.

Like the second generation of Christians, we think that we would be better off knowing Jesus in the flesh instead of struggling to have a relationship with Someone we can't see, hear, or touch. But the physical presence of Jesus caused the first generation not to take Him as seriously as they certainly should have.

Who really was Jesus? He was much more than just a good man who grew up in Nazareth with Joseph and Mary. But what kind of man would claim to be the Son of God who came down from heaven? To make such a claim, he would have to be either crazy, a deceiver (in neither case would people designate him a "good man"), or exactly what he claims to be. There is no middle ground; we must either accept Him and all that He stands for or reject Him as insane, or even worse, the perpetrator of the greatest scam of all time. The foolishness of the people in this story is that they insist on seeing Jesus as just a good man. This is not really an option as far as Jesus is concerned.

It is crucial, therefore, that people recognize exactly who Jesus is. He brings from heaven a revelation of God and about God that is of life-and-death importance to the human race. To partake of Jesus as bread, flesh, and blood is a graphic way of expressing that only through an intimate relationship with Jesus—as close as food that has been eaten is to the body—can one gain the eternal life that He promises.

In what ways might we be in danger of doing the same thing as the crowds in John 6; that is, not seeing the sacred in the common? For example, do our attitudes toward the church, its leaders, or our message reflect this same spiritual principle?

The Sacred in the Common *(John 6:51-71).*

Read John 6:51-58. What does Jesus mean by saying we must eat His flesh and drink His blood? Summarize in your own words the essence of what you believe He says to us with these startling words.

Time and again in the Gospel of John symbols are drawn from everyday experiences, symbols such as bread, water, and light. These symbols help us to connect Jesus' words with things in the context of our everyday lives. No matter how ordinary our lives may be, our relationship with Jesus will deepen and grow as we learn to remember Him in the course of everything we do. As the Bread of Life, Jesus brings us a foretaste of eternal life, which makes physical food and drink seem insignificant by comparison.

As the body craves food and drink and sunlight, so the soul craves the presence of Jesus (whether or not one is aware of that), and if Jesus is not allowed to be present, human beings will go to all kinds of ridiculous lengths to fill the gap with something else.

What are some of the things people resort to in order to fill their innate spiritual needs?

When we sit down at a table to eat, we can remember that rain, life, and sunshine, and the food production that they make possible, would all have ceased with sin were it not for the Cross of Jesus. When we lift up a glass to drink, we can remember the Water of Life. When we get dressed in the morning, we can think about the robe of Christ's righteousness. One of the keys to a living relationship with Jesus is finding the sacred in the common, to make all the ordinary events of our lives reminders of the words and actions of Jesus.

Read again the text for today. Time and again Jesus talks about life and living. What, ultimately, has Jesus promised those who eat His flesh and drink His blood, and why is this promise so important to us?

Further Study: Carefully compare the accounts in John 6:16-21 with Matthew 14:22-27 and Mark 6:45-52. Note all the parallels and contrasts between John's account and the other two, including omissions. How does this comparison illuminate the point the Holy Spirit was making with the story? In what ways do Matthew and Mark, moved by the Holy Spirit, use the story?

For additional spiritual insights into this marvelous chapter, see Ellen White's comments in *The Desire of Ages*. John 6:1-21 is covered on pages 364–382, and pages 383–394 are devoted almost exclusively to John 6:22-71.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "It is only because He became like us that we can become like Him" (*The Cost of Discipleship* [New York: Collier Books, 1963], p. 344). What do you think that means? Do you agree or disagree, and why?
- 2** Why was Jesus' teaching in John 6 so hard for the listeners to accept? Could it be because they had preconceptions about what they expected from a divine Deliverer? If so, what does that tell us about the danger, as Christians, of having certain ideas about what God should or should not do? What happens when those expectations are not met?

Summary: In John, chapter 6, Jesus struggles to communicate His mission in the face of continual misunderstanding. He feeds the 5,000 in order to demonstrate that He is the One who can bring them the bread of divine spiritual life. They, instead, see someone worthy to run the national economy (*vs. 14*). In stilling the storm, Jesus sought to show His disciples that He is as capable as the God of the Exodus to supply their needs and free them from fear. But they seem at the same time too fearful and too self-confident to seek His help.

At Capernaum He uses bread, flesh, and blood as analogies to illustrate the need for the spiritual life He offers. Most of those who hear Him there, however, react with disgust and abandon Him. Taken together, the three events chronicled in this chapter teach us the need to discern the sacred in the common, to learn how to have a living relationship with One who makes Himself real to us in the course of everyday life.

The Little Missionary

by ARNIE ROA

The village of Ulo't Langilan is located deep in the mountains of southern Philippines. The people in these mountains are known as fierce warriors.

Recently two students from Mountain View College answered a call to go to this village to open a school. They expected to encounter primitive conditions among a tribe who knew nothing of God. But when they arrived in their target village, they heard singing. They recognized the tune of a familiar Christian chorus.

That evening one of the children announced, "Let's have worship!" In moments the air was filled with the beautiful sound of children's voices. A young girl led the children in song after song as one by one the parents joined the children. The two missionaries were shocked and delighted.

The singing stopped, and the young song leader led the children in reciting several Bible texts. The two student missionaries watched this miracle of light flood a dark corner of God's vineyard.

A young boy stood and offered a beautiful and heartfelt prayer. "Lord God, thank you for sending our long-awaited teachers. Now we can learn how to read and write, sing and pray."

After worship the student missionaries asked the young girl, "Who taught you these songs and memory verses?"

"I attended the mission school in another village," she said. "When we moved back here to my father's village, I missed the worships and the singing, so I taught the children here the songs and Bible verses I had learned. The chief asked me to teach the children to read and write, but I do not know how to teach. I suggested that the village elders request a teacher from Mountain View College. I told them that if they would build a cottage for the teacher, one would come. We built the cottage, and we prayed every day that you would come. It has taken three years, but at last you are here! You are an answer to our prayers!"

The student missionaries were thrilled to learn that before they ever arrived, God used a young child to bring the light of faith to a village that once had been in darkness.

Dozens of villages in the mountains of southern Philippines remain in darkness. Pray that God will provide so that more young people from Mountain View College can be sent out as missionaries to reach these uttermost parts of God's vineyard.

ARNIE ROA is a student missionary teaching in the Ulo't Langilan Mission School in Mindanao, southern Philippines.

LESSON 8

*February 14-20

The Good Shepherd



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 7:1–10:21.*

Memory Text: “‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep’” (*John 10:11, NIV*).

Key Thought: As the Good Shepherd, Jesus offers everything we need for an abundant life.

Our life springs from His death. At the direction of His Father, Jesus belatedly attends the Feast of Tabernacles at the temple in Jerusalem. He comes as the living presence of the great I AM. He offers Himself as the embodiment of the water and light that the feast celebrated (*John 7:37-39, 8:12, 9:5*), but He is largely rejected by those in attendance. Having failed to make a positive impact at the heart of the religious system, He reaches out to a blind man, an outcast of that system, and creates a living parable of the Good Shepherd, who cares for even the outcasts. In reaching out to the blind man, Jesus “showed the contrast between His own character and that of the leaders in Israel.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 477.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus offers life to those who have struggled to find it elsewhere. He promises that His sheep will “‘know his voice’” (*John 10:4, NIV*). Those who commit everything to Jesus receive the privilege of a deep and intimate relationship with Him. He is the caring Friend who will never leave us nor forsake us. He will guide us in our thoughts and impressions. And He will provide life to the full, an abundance of meaning, joy, and fulfillment.

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

SUNDAY *February 15*

The Feast of Tabernacles *(John 7 and 8).*

In John 7–10 Jesus participates in the Feast of Tabernacles at the temple in Jerusalem. His presence at the feast draws Him into repeated confrontations with the religious leadership. These confrontations are recorded in the Gospel of John, because they offer the opportunity for Jesus to clarify His mission.

In Palestine there are two basic seasons of the year, an extremely dry summer of four to five months (virtually no rain) and a rainy season of equal length spanning the winter. The Feast of Tabernacles comes at that time of year when the summer drought is usually ending (our months of September and October). The winter grains are planted and the harvest of summer fruits is celebrated.

The Feast of Tabernacles commemorated the Exodus and the time of Israel's wandering in the wilderness (*Lev. 23:43*), when God provided Israel with water and light (*Exod. 13:21, 22; 17:1-7*). So two major themes of the feast were water (a water ceremony was a major feature of each day's festivities) and light (torchlight processions at night). People lived outside in temporary structures, tents made from palm branches, reminding them of God's watchcare in the wilderness. They were to remember that just as God provided water, light, and food to Israel in the wilderness, so He can provide for the needs of the present, as well.

What does Jesus offer in place of the water ceremonies of the feast?
John 7:37-39.

According to Jesus, what did the theme of light at the feast represent? *John 8:12.*

By His announcements at the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus made it clear that He is what the feast was all about. The mighty acts of God celebrated at the Feast of Tabernacles become present realities in the person and teachings of Jesus. God is willing to do so much more for us than merely provide food, water, and natural light. In Christ the mighty power of the Exodus becomes real in our lives through the divine presence of the Holy Spirit. More than this, Spirit-filled Christians are enabled to pass the Spirit on to others.

Christ made statements concerning Himself *(John 7:37-39 and 8:12)*. **If someone asked you what it means to do the things Jesus said here, what would you answer? How have you experienced these statements and promises in your own life? How has your life been changed by them?**

MONDAY February 16

The Great “I AM” (*John 8:24, 28, 58*).

In John 7 and 8 Jesus engages in a number of debates with His brothers, with the religious leadership, and with various segments of the crowd. One of the major features of this section is the presence of a number of special “I AM” statements on the part of Jesus.

How important does Jesus consider the “I AM” concept? What promise is found in those words? What is Jesus telling us with that claim? *John 8:24, 28, 58.*

The words “ ‘the one I claim to be’ ” in the NIV represent a helpful interpretation supplied by the translators; the original simply says “I AM.”

In the Old Testament, “I AM” statements are applied to God. In the Gospel of John, Jesus applies the “I AM” statements of the Old Testament to Himself. The future salvation that was promised in the books of the Old Testament prophets has become a present reality in Him. He is the Good Shepherd revealed in Ezekiel 34 (*John 10:11*). He is the divine One (*John 8:24, 28, 58*) who knows the future (*Isa. 46:9, 10; John 13:19*).

In Jesus’ “I AM” statements we see an assertion of His divinity. He is the Yahweh of the Old Testament, come down to shepherd His people just as He promised through the prophets. He is fully and truly God in the highest sense, even while walking on earth clothed in human flesh. He has preexisted throughout eternity (*John 8:58*).

In Christ’s “I AM” statements is the assertion that the future has become present in Christ. He can deliver the promised glories of the Old Testament future kingdom to those who believe in Him now. To be in relationship with Jesus is to have the abundance of the future kingdom now by faith. In a real sense, we are already living in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (*Eph. 2:6*). In Old Testament times God did mighty things on earth from time to time. But on account of the Cross and through the work of the Spirit, God’s mighty acts are now available everywhere to everyone who is in Christ.

Look up each of the following texts. What are they telling us about Christ? *Isa. 9:6; Mic. 5:2; John 3:13, 31, 32; Col. 1:16.* What does this truth mean to us? What does it tell us about our God?

TUESDAY February 17

An Amusing Blind Man (*John 9:1-41*).

John 9:1 through 10:21 continues John's description of events during Jesus' visit to the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. Jesus heals a blind man and then uses the experience as a living parable to illustrate His life and teachings.

Describe the healing and its investigation by the Pharisees in John 9:1-34. What are a few spiritual lessons we can learn from this story? In what ways can we see ourselves in the Pharisees?

By healing the man, Jesus offered a living parable to illustrate His earlier statement, "I am the light of the world" (*John 8:12, NIV; 9:5*). As the Light of the world, Jesus brings physical sight to a man who was born blind. But there is a deeper meaning behind this story.

The healing creates a serious dilemma for the Pharisees. On the one hand, the healing points to the work of a man approved by God. But by a nonemergency healing on the Sabbath, Jesus appears to be acting like a false prophet (*Deut. 13:1-5*). The humor of the story lies in its biting irony. The man who was blind sees more and more clearly that Jesus represents the true God of Israel. On the other hand, the Pharisees, who see clearly in the physical sense, and who are supposed to be the guardians of the faith of Israel, become more and more blinded to the truth about Jesus.

How does Jesus apply the living parable of the blind man's experience to the Pharisees? *John 9:39-41*.

The Pharisees' rejection of the healing symbolizes their rejection of the truth about God, which Jesus brought into the world. Their rejection was rooted in their willful blindness with regard to the claims of Jesus.

Even today, few people reject Jesus out of a lack of evidence. Usually they reject Him out of an unwillingness to let Him "tamper" with their lifestyle. It is easy to find excuses not to believe when we are protecting some cherished sin or attitude (*John 3:20, 21*). The root reality of the unbeliever is unconfessed and unforsaken sin. These things "blind" one to the truths about Jesus. How do you help someone who seems to be in this spiritual trap?

Jesus, the Good Shepherd *(John 10:1-21)*

Read John 10:1-21; in your own words, describe what Jesus is telling us here. As you read, ask yourself the following questions: (1) How many ways of salvation does Jesus present? (2) How is the great controversy illustrated here? (3) What distinguishes the shepherd from the hireling?

Verses 35-41 of chapter 9 set the stage for the Good Shepherd discourse of John 10. Jesus cares for the outcasts. When the leaders of a religious system cast people out on the basis of the leaders' enmity for Jesus, they demonstrate their own blindness (*John 9:39-41*) and give Jesus the opportunity to collect these outcasts for Himself.

John 10:1-21 is made up of two parts. First, there is the story of shepherds and their sheep (*vss. 1-5*), the closest thing to a parable in the Gospel of John. Then, Jesus reflects on the meaning of the story in verses 7-21.

What is John 10:17, 18 referring to? Does that act qualify Him as the Good Shepherd, or will this happen because He already is the Good Shepherd? Explain your answer.

Sheep pens in ancient Palestine were usually natural caves. The sheep would be led into the cave in the evening, and the shepherd would take his position at the entrance to the cave and sleep there. Any robber or wild animal that physically sought access to the sheep would have to get past the shepherd to do it. Where caves were not available, a fieldstone enclosure would be built with an opening at one end just big enough for the shepherd to block with his body as he slept. So, when Jesus described Himself as the Good Shepherd and as the gate for the sheep, listeners would have recognized that these concepts were two different ways of describing the same activity.

When Jesus describes Himself as the Gate through which the sheep must pass in order to be saved, He is replacing all other methods of salvation. There is no other way into the sheepfold, except by the Gate.

Read John 10:1-5. How do the sheep know the voice of the shepherd? How do you know the voice of your Shepherd, as opposed to the voice of a stranger, a hireling, or a wolf?

THURSDAY *February 19*

Hired Hands and Thieves *(John 10:1, 5, 10-13).*

What do the thieves and robbers do to the sheep? What do the hirelings do to the sheep? Contrast this to what Jesus promises to do to the sheep.

Jesus contrasts the Good Shepherd with two other types of people who relate to sheep. One type is the thieves and robbers. These invest nothing in the sheep; they are interested only in what they can gain for themselves. Jesus probably had in mind the chief priests of the temple who put on a show of piety in order to receive the offerings and fees the worshipers brought to the temple with them.

The other contrasting type is the hired hand, who does not own the sheep, and, therefore, has no personal concern for them. He watches them only to make a living. When a wild animal comes, he protects the only thing that really matters to him, which is himself. Jesus probably had in mind the Pharisees of chapter 9. Although more involved in the needs and concerns of the people than the chief priests were, they did not truly care for the sheep. They did not know them intimately nor were they willing to lay down their lives, nor even their reputations, for the sheep.

Do we see these types of people manifested in the Christian church today? If so, how are these characteristics manifested?

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus claimed the outcasts of the religious leaders for Himself (*John 9:34-38*). The Good Shepherd story was a rebuke to those who, in their rough handling of the man born blind, betrayed their true character as hired hands (*John 9:40*).

Jesus invites us to have the same kind of caring concern for others as the Good Shepherd has for His sheep. The one who truly cares about family, neighbors, and friends will never be pushy and abusive (as the Pharisees were in John 9) but will seek to act out of caring concern for the benefit of others. The world is full of sorrow, crying, pain, and dying. There is a bottomless need for people who, out of the strength they have received in Christ, will reach out to build up and encourage others. Such undershepherds will find, in this work, abundant life for themselves, as well.

Maybe we are not pastors, but in what ways can we act the part of a shepherd? How can we guard against, even unwittingly, becoming either a thief or a hireling?

Further Study: “The Pharisees had just driven one from the fold, because he dared to bear witness to the power of Christ. . . . In this they had shown themselves ignorant of the work committed to them, and unworthy of their trust as shepherds of the flock. Jesus now set before them the contrast between them and the Good Shepherd, and He pointed to Himself as the real keeper of the Lord’s flock.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 477.

Compare John 10:1-21 with two other sheep-and-shepherd stories in the Gospels (*Matt. 18:10-14 and Luke 15:3-7*). Note both the similarities between all three passages and the unique features of each. Who plays the role of shepherd in each of these other accounts, and how do the lessons of Matthew and Luke compare with the lesson of John 10?

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How do we get the kind of discernment needed to be able to tell the difference between the true Shepherd and hirelings or even thieves?
- 2 Compare what happens to the sheep when the hireling or the thief gets hold of them. What’s the difference?
- 3 In what ways are sheep like or unlike human beings? Which aspect of sheep behavior is most likely to have caused Jesus to draw the analogy He did?
- 4 Is your church a friendly place for “outcasts”? Are some types of people in your church more “acceptable” than others? Why is that so?

Summary: “Many of those who heard Jesus [at the Feast of Tabernacles in the temple] were mourners over disappointed hopes, many were nourishing a secret grief, many were seeking to satisfy their restless longing with the things of the world and the praise of men; but when all was gained, they found that they had toiled only to reach a broken cistern, from which they could not quench their thirst.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 454.

To those who have been bruised and battered by the world, the Gospel offers Jesus as the key to an abundant life (*John 10:10*). He is the Water and the Light, the Gate, and the Good Shepherd.

Out of the Muck

by JOEL SANDOVAL

For Joel and his family, life in Honduras was difficult. His father drank and often did not come home for weeks at a time. When he did, he often beat Joel, the eldest son. Joel's classmates at school took drugs and offered Joel drugs, just to try them. But Joel refused. He was not a Christian, but he knew drugs and alcohol messed up people's minds and lives, and he wanted nothing to do with them.

When Joel's father beat his mother, she often took Joel to the local church to pray. Joel sensed that religion was key to a more stable life. He began going on his own and made friends at the church. Joel wanted to know more about Jesus and God's plan for his life.

Then his father had an accident that nearly killed him. As he recovered in the hospital, he began to realize that he needed to change his life. And when Christians offered him Bible studies, he accepted.

An Adventist man visited the family and prayed with them. Joel wanted to know more about what this man's church taught. The family studied the Bible together and grew in their knowledge of God and their faith in Jesus. His father gave up his alcohol, and the family began attending the Adventist church. Soon they were baptized.

Joel was thirsty to know more about God. He studied his Bible and grew in faith and in knowledge. He became a deacon at age 14 and began to preach when the pastor was away. He became the youth leader while still a youth himself. Joel's pastor saw potential in Joel and urged the boy to consider preparing for the ministry. Joel felt unworthy of the calling, but he agreed to pray about it. Joel accepted God's call, but how could he afford university? His family was very poor.

Joel prayed that God would provide the tuition for his studies. A man who was visiting Joel's area took an interest in Joel, and told him, "If you decide to become a minister, let me know." When Joel wrote him to ask for help, the man responded that his tuition had already been paid.

Tears come to Joel's eyes when he recounts how God has changed his life. "Jesus picked me out of the pit and placed my feet on solid ground. How can I ever repay him?"



JOEL SANDOVAL, 19, is preparing for the ministry in Costa Rica.

LESSON 9

*February 21-27

A Devoted Soul *and an* Impending Cross



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 11:1–12:50.*

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

Key Thoughts: In the death and resurrection of Lazarus, John provides a foretaste of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is the impending Cross that draws out of Mary the full measure of devotion.

We love Him because He first loved us. In John 11 and 12 the author of the Gospel begins a transition from the earthly ministry of Jesus to the events associated with the Cross. The two main incidents in these chapters occur in Bethany, just across the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem. In Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead and His anointing with perfume by Mary, John prepares the reader for the tragic but necessary events to follow shortly in Jerusalem.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead provokes contradictory reactions. For the Sanhedrin, it is seen as a threat to their own self-interest. As a result, they begin plotting the death of Jesus. In contrast stands Mary's glorious act of devotion. Her devotion was well timed. “As [Jesus] went down into the darkness of His great trial, He carried with Him the memory of that deed, an earnest of the love that would be His from His redeemed ones forever.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 560.

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

SUNDAY February 22

The Raising of Lazarus (11:1-44).

Read John 11:1-44 and then answer these questions:

1. Why does Jesus wait so long before going to Bethany? See verses 15-17, 37, and 39. How did the delay make what He does even more miraculous?

2. Read what Jesus says in verses 25, 26. How does the act of raising Lazarus help prove the truth of those words?

3. Read what Jesus says in verses 41, 42. What do they reveal about the source of Christ's power? See also verse 22.

4. Read verse 27. What is so important about this confession of faith, particularly in regard to the time in which it was expressed?

The bottom line of Christian faith is that there is real power in the gospel. The power that raised Lazarus from the dead is real, and it is still available today. While tragedies always are not reversed in this life, the resurrection power of God will bring meaning and comfort to our souls if we allow it to.

We will all have the John 11 experience at one time or another; that is, death, betrayal, and destruction leave behind a real sense of loss that cannot be explained away. We are troubled by the sense that Jesus could have intervened to prevent them but did not. We struggle to understand what "glory to God" might possibly come out of tragedy. At low points such as these, we can remember that the God who raised Jesus from the dead is still able to create something out of nothing. Even when all seems hopeless, we still can place our trust in Him. We have to, for what else is there? Fortunately for us, we have accounts such as this in the book of John that can give us even more reasons to trust in God.

Read verse 37. Who has not found himself or herself thinking a similar thing in the face of personal tragedy? What is the only answer we can give?

MONDAY February 23

Mary and Martha.

What is the first thing that both Martha and Mary say to Jesus when they first approach Him? How do those words reveal both faith and doubt at the same time? See *John 11:21, 32*.

For Mary and Martha, the death of Lazarus itself was not the worst thing. The worst part about the situation was the delay of Jesus! The two sisters seem to have had a very different reaction to Jesus. When news of Jesus' arrival outside of town comes, Martha goes out to meet Him, but Mary stays at home until Martha comes and gets her. While both sisters are upset and distressed, Martha combines her statement of frustration (*vs. 21*) with strong statements of continued faith in Jesus (*vss. 22, 24, 27*). In response to her expressed faith, Jesus offers one of the most magnificent descriptions of His life and mission: "I am the resurrection and the life" (*vss. 25, 26, NIV*).

What do you understand the statement of Christ's in verses 25 and 26 to mean? What hope is implicit in those words for us?

When Mary finally goes out to meet Jesus, she repeats Martha's complaint but without any affirmation of continued faith. She receives no revelation from Jesus, and He draws no expression of faith from her (*compare verses 32, 33 with verses 22-27*). Jesus has come to invite them to behold the Resurrection and the Life, but their minds are fixed on their loss instead.

Beneath the surface of this story, it is not hard to catch a glimpse of the inner life of these sisters. Their hearts were a raging sea of turbulent emotions. The pain of sudden loss has all but crushed them. The actions of Jesus have piled doubts on top of their sorrows. While Martha seems to have been more successful at maintaining a semblance of emotional stability, even she did not grasp in advance what Jesus had come to do (*vs. 39*).

This story has a happy ending, of course. What hope do you find in this account for deaths that do not, at least for now, end as this one does?

TUESDAY February 24

The Plot to Kill Jesus *(John 11:45-57)*.

Read John 11:45-57 and then answer the following questions:

1. Did the leaders believe that Jesus had really performed this miracle, or did they think it was a trick? Explain the importance of the answer.

2. What justification did they give for having to stop Jesus? Does that argument not make sense?

In these texts we see the reactions of the religious leaders to the resurrection of Lazarus. Instead of the unlimited possibilities the resurrection of Lazarus would seem to open to the human race, the religious leaders can focus only on the threat to their own position and interests.

With delicious irony, John uses the leaders' own words against them. They plot to kill Jesus, because they fear that if they allow Him to continue His ministry, " 'everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation' " (*vs. 48, NIV*). To the first readers of the Gospel, the foolishness of this statement would have been plain. The very thing the religious leaders sought to prevent, the death of Jesus brought about: worldwide belief in the teachings of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Even their leader, Caiaphas, prophesies that they " 'know nothing at all' " (*vss. 49-52, NIV*). The council determines that, although Jesus has done nothing to deserve death, His death is the only way to maintain their position and the security of their nation.

However dramatic their example, the religious leaders here symbolize the danger we all face: rationalizing our actions, even those that fly in the face of what we know is right, for personal expediency. How have you done the same thing in your own life? What can we do to stop ourselves from falling into this common, but deadly, trap? Some verses that might help are Matthew 16:24, Philippians 2:4, and 1 Peter 4:1.

WEDNESDAY *February 25*

Mary of Bethany (*John 12:1-8*).

The anointing at Bethany probably took place on Saturday night, the week before the Crucifixion (*John 12:1*). Bethany was located about two miles east of Jerusalem, on the other side of the Mount of Olives.

Read John 12:8. Imagine yourself in the position of someone there who, not knowing about the impending death of Christ, witnessed the reaction of Jesus and Judas to Mary's act. What reasons would they have for, perhaps, thinking Judas was right? What lesson exists here regarding how we can not always judge actions by what we see?

The heart of the narrative at the beginning of John 12 lies in the deliberate contrast between Mary's wholehearted faith in, and love for, Jesus and the coldhearted calculations of Caiaphas (at the end of chapter 11) and Judas. Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet is motivated by unselfish love and sacrifice. The opponents of Jesus, on the other hand, are motivated by greed and self-interest.

In this scene we see Mary's total devotion of soul. Whatever doubts she may have had before the resurrection of Lazarus are gone now. Every emotion trembles with gratitude to the One who raised her brother and who is about to die for her. The perfume she pours on Jesus cost her a year of hard work, but it represents her whole life, gratefully offered to Jesus. Such total devotion is rarely popular, as Judas's reaction makes clear. "What a waste," people say. "You could have done great things with your life, but you chose to waste it on Jesus!"

Judas's reaction is normal and human. Mary's action does seem a waste. What church board would approve such an expenditure? To human reasoning, Mary seems emotionally disturbed. But notice again how Jesus feels about it, this time as recorded in Mark 14:6-9: "She has done a beautiful thing to me. . . . She did what she could. . . . I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her" (*NIV*).

Look at the reaction of Judas to Mary's anointing of Christ. In what ways can we be guilty of doing the same thing; that is, hiding our own spiritual weaknesses and defects behind a veneer of piety and self-sacrifice?

THURSDAY February 26

The Impending Cross *(John 12:9-27)*.

John portrays three main reactions to the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead.

- The religious leaders want to kill Jesus and even Lazarus for fear of what will happen to them if they do not *(John 11:47-53)*.
- Mary, on the other hand, responds with gratitude and devoted, self-sacrificing love *(John 12:1-9)*.

At the same time, a third reaction occurs. What is it? See *John 12:9-11, 17-19*.

Of the three reactions, Mary's is clearly the one the author of the Gospel wishes the reader to see as the great model of response to Jesus and His miraculous signs.

What is Jesus' answer to the request of the Greeks? *John 12:20-27*. What is He specifically telling us there about what it means to follow Him? How did Mary's act in anointing Christ's feet manifest what Jesus is telling us here?

John 12:26 shows that to follow Jesus is to disown self-centeredness. When our lives are filled with striving for advantage, security, and pleasure, we do not experience the fullness of life Jesus offers. In fact, what Jesus seems to be saying in verse 25 is that the only way we can truly follow Christ is to disown ourselves; this has to be a full, complete death to self. This, of course, is something only the Lord can do for us, if we allow Him, if we make the choice to follow Him; and to do that we must, like the kernel of wheat, first die. There is no other way. Judas, the leaders of Israel, and the crowd that came to Jesus as He entered Jerusalem all represent, to one degree or another, those who (at least at that point) did not make the full surrender.

Of those whom we have looked at in today's study, only Mary seems to have understood this, an understanding clearly made manifest by her works.

How would you explain to a non-Christian that what Jesus is saying in John 12:25 is to our immense advantage? How could you express it in a way to help him or her understand this in a positive manner?

Further Study: “Had Christ been in the sickroom, Lazarus would not have died; for Satan would have had no power over him. . . . Christ knew that as [the suffering sisters] looked on the dead face of their brother their faith in their Redeemer would be severely tried. But He knew that because of the struggle through which they were now passing their faith would shine forth with far greater power.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 528.

“The Saviour understood the plotting of the priests. He knew that they longed to remove Him, and that their purpose would soon be accomplished. But it was not His place to hasten the crisis, and He withdraws from that region, taking the disciples with Him. Thus by His own example Jesus again enforced the instruction He had given to the disciples, ‘When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another.’ Matt. 10:23. There was a wide field in which to work for the salvation of souls; and unless loyalty to Him required it, the Lord’s servants were not to imperil their lives.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 541.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 If you had a year’s worth of salary or a year of time to use to honor Jesus, how would you use it? How would your friends be likely to react?
- 2 Read John 12:26. How do those words debunk the notion that Jesus wants us only as friends, not as servants? Why must we be both?
- 3 Look up these texts: Matthew 19:29, Mark 8:36, Galatians 6:14, Philippians 3:8. How do they express the same idea that we see revealed in Mary’s actions? What must happen in our own lives so we can have that kind of devotion?

Summary: In this lesson we have seen how the kindness of Jesus provokes contradictory reactions. His kindness in raising Lazarus from the dead and in showing acceptance to Mary draws out the full depth of her devotion to Him. On the other hand, the same actions lead to the murderous plots of the religious leaders, the greedy complaint of Judas, and the misguided praise of the crowd. The author of the Gospel would have us ponder our own reactions to the greatest kindness of all, Jesus’ sacrifice for us on the cross.

Muslims Find an Easier Way to Heaven

by J. H. ZACHARY

I have learned to have a profound respect for true Muslims. The main goal of their life is total surrender in obedience to the living God. Their lives are filled with godly activities. Hours each week are spent in prayer and memorizing verses from the Holy Qur'an. They faithfully give alms to the poor and live in strict obedience to the laws of health. It takes a lot of work to be a faithful Muslim. Assurance of salvation depends on much moment-by-moment effort.

Shah-jahan comes from this kind of family. He is a devoted follower of the living God, a son of Abraham. One day someone showed him the passage in the Qur'an that encourages believers to study the Tawrat (Pentateuch), the Zabur (Psalms), and the Injil (Gospels). The Qur'an often refers to Jesus as the Son of Mary. Shah-jahan was interested in learning more about Jesus.

He began to study the Bible, and his life began to change. A peace filled his heart. He experienced new power from reading the Bible. His wife noticed that he was becoming a better person. His daily prayer life became more precious. He began to understand more of the amazing love that Allah has for sinners. Shah-jahan was amazed to learn from the prophet Zechariah that God not only forgives sin, but He gives the repentant sinner a robe of righteousness.

As Shah-jahan began to accept this gift of salvation, joy flooded his heart. He eagerly shared his joy with relatives and neighbors. "I have found an easier way to heaven!" he exclaimed. What a precious assurance has come to Shah-jahan since he began following the instructions of the Qur'an to read the Bible.

In the Western world, church leaders and pastors spend considerable time making plans and developing materials to use to spread the good news of Christ. Shah-jahan and his friends found the good news simply by reading the Bible. They now are compelled to share the wonderful news of salvation with others.

Hundreds of Muslims throughout the world are rejoicing in this precious experience with the living God. Pray that others will open their hearts to receive the good news that Jesus saves.

J. H. ZACHARY is coordinator of international evangelism for *The Quiet Hour*.

LESSON 10

*February 28–March 5

True Greatness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 13:1-30, chapter 17.*

Memory Text: “‘I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you’” (*John 13:15, NIV*).

Key Thought: Instead of becoming self-absorbed as He approaches His great humiliation, Jesus, in John 13–17, expresses His loving concern for His disciples.

True greatness is to follow Jesus in the path of service and humility. For many, greatness consists in the accumulation of wealth, fame, and power. To such, the opportunity to “wash feet” represents the ultimate humiliation. Jesus here does the opposite of what seems natural to human experience.

With chapter 13 the entire tone of the Gospel of John is transformed. Instead of public ministry, Jesus retires to an unspecified place to quietly instruct His disciples at great length.

This lesson and the next cover John 13–17, the portion of the Gospel that deals with the “upper-room experience.” Because of space limitations, we will deviate from the order of the Gospel here. In this lesson we highlight the common elements of chapters 13 and 17, where Jesus’ concern for His disciples is expressed in the foot washing (*John 13*) and in a marvelous prayer (*John 17*). In the next lesson, we cover chapters 14–16, where Jesus’ concern for His disciples is expressed in the gracious provision of the Comforter.

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

SUNDAY February 29

The Foot Washing *(John 13:1-11).*

Read John 13:1-11 and then in your own words write down what you think this account means and why the Holy Spirit directs John to include it in his Gospel. Focus on what you believe is the key message to us here.

It was the custom in New Testament times for people to bathe themselves before attending a feast. Upon arrival, they would not need to bathe again; they needed to have only their feet washed. The washing of the feet, then, was like a ceremony that preceded entry into the house where they were to be guests. In this case, however, something so much greater was going on.

Read John 13:10-12. What does the text reveal? Why does Jesus, nevertheless, wash the feet of Judas? How does that act, in its own way, symbolize what foot washing is all about?

The full-body bath represents the complete cleansing that a person receives at the beginning of the Christian life (baptism). Foot washing, on the other hand, represents the Christian's ongoing need to deal with the soiling that comes from daily contact with the sinful world and its contamination. The foot is the part of the body that in ancient times came in regular contact with the earth and, therefore, needed continual cleansing.

The beautiful lesson that comes through in Jesus' action is that our daily shortcomings as Christians do not call our original cleansing into question. It is not necessary to be rebaptized or to start all over every time we make a mistake. One who has bathed needs only to wash the feet again! We are secure as long as we do not choose to turn away (*see also John 10:27-29*).

The image of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples represents His forgiveness of sins committed after baptism. The image of the disciples washing one another's feet signifies our willingness to forgive those daily irritations and transgressions that threaten the unity in love that Jesus purposed for His disciples (*see also 13:34, 35*).

What does it mean to “wash feet” in the context of everyday life? How can we be willing to “wash” one another’s feet? What does it take to be able to do that?

MONDAY *March 1*

True Greatness *(John 13:12-17).*

What is Jesus' further purpose in washing the feet of the disciples?
John 13:12-17.

True greatness is the King of the universe walking over to the corner of a room, picking up a towel and a basin of water, and stooping down to wash the feet of an unstable disciple such as Peter and a traitor such as Judas. True greatness does not need to brag or assert itself. It takes true greatness to exercise self-control or to act the role of a slave. It takes true greatness to do the right thing when everyone laughs at you or despises you in his or her heart.

True greatness is to have the same attitude as Jesus (*Phil. 2:5*), who was "in very nature God" (*vs. 6, NIV*) yet took "the very nature of a servant" (*vs. 7*) and "humbled himself" (*vs. 8*). True greatness is to "consider others better than yourselves" (*vs. 3*). True greatness is to follow Jesus in the path of service and humility.

In contrast, if our first thought in any situation is of our own advantage and self-interest, we are pursuing a false greatness. If our first reaction to any situation is to nag, belittle, criticize, and complain, we are exhibiting the opposite of humility and true greatness. Putting other people down says "I am better than you." Considering others as better than yourself causes you to uplift, encourage, and praise.

How can we develop true greatness? **How** can we learn to love a life of service? *John 13:12-17, 15:4-8, 2 Cor. 3:18.*

Does the way your local church practices foot washing capture the spirit of Jesus' command? If not, how can you change that situation? Does your local church carry out Jesus' example in its relationships with people inside and outside the church body? How can the foot-washing service become a more meaningful part of our Christian experience?

TUESDAY *March 2*

Judas: The Other Path to “Greatness”

(John 13:18-30).

What purpose does Jesus have in predicting His betrayal? In what way does the principle shown here work all through prophecy? *John 13:18, 19.*

How does the knowledge of His coming betrayal affect Jesus? *John 13:21-26.* Why should it have hurt Him so much? What do these texts tell us about God’s feeling toward even the worst sinners?

“The disciples knew nothing of the purpose of Judas. Jesus alone could read his secret. Yet He did not expose him. Jesus hungered for his soul. He felt for him such a burden as for Jerusalem when he wept over the doomed city. His heart was crying, How can I give thee up?”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 645.

But Judas chose to follow a different path to “greatness” than that exhibited by Christ in the foot-washing service. On this particular point he considered himself wiser than Christ. Surely it was obvious to anyone that greatness came from power, wealth, and the esteem of others! But his logical course of action led only to personal destruction.

“The prospect of having a high place in the new kingdom had led Judas to espouse the cause of Christ. . . .

“It was he who set on foot the project to take Christ by force and make Him king. . . .

“[He hoped to secure] the first position, next to Christ, in the new kingdom.”—Pages 718–721.

Judas failed to realize that anybody can act great or demand to be treated as great. Anybody can spend money or command others, given the opportunity. It takes true greatness to act the part of a servant and do tasks that others should have done. It takes true greatness to put others first, to treat others as better than yourself.

Is the typical view of greatness in today’s world more like that of Jesus or Judas? How can one best present the message of Jesus to people who are used to a different kind of greatness?

WEDNESDAY *March 3*

Jesus Prays for His Disciples *(John 17:1-19).*

Read carefully **John 17:1-19**, focusing on the question: **For whom does Jesus pray here, and why?**

The farewell gathering of Jesus and His disciples (*John 13–17*) draws to a close with an intercessory prayer in three parts. In *John 17:1-5* Jesus prays for Himself. In verses 6 to 19 His attention turns to His disciples and to their need for support in the absence of His physical presence (the third part we'll look at tomorrow).

The initial goal of Jesus' prayer is for help in completing the task of glorifying the Father on earth (*vss. 1-5*). This task will be accomplished on the cross. There never has been a clearer picture of the character of God than that exhibited by Jesus in His humiliation and death. But Jesus prays for strength to complete this task, not to benefit Himself or His Father only but for the sake of all who will believe in Him. When Jesus and His Father are glorified on the cross, eternal life becomes available to those in relationship with Jesus (*vss. 2, 3*). So, even in His prayers for Himself, Jesus' ultimate goal is the glory of His Father and the benefit of others.

Jesus then focuses His prayer directly in behalf of His disciples, who soon will have to learn how to live without His physical presence among them. He does not pray for the world but only for those who have renounced the world (*vs. 9*). He prays for His disciples, because they will have to remain in the world when He goes away, and they will become the object of the world's evil attention. As in chapter 13, Jesus' coming humiliation does not draw out concern for Himself; rather, it directs His attention to the consequences of His "going away" for His disciples.

Read verse 14. What does it mean to be "not of this world"? In what ways should we, as Christians who are in this world, be "not of this world"? How could we know whether we are or are not?

THURSDAY *March 4*

“But for Them Also Which Shall Believe” *(John 17:20-26).*

Whom else does Jesus pray for in John 17? *John 17:20.*

What does He pray will be the common experience of both the disciples and the second generation of Christians? *John 17:21-24.*

In the last part of Jesus' prayer, He turns to the second generation of Christians. In the fullest sense, this second generation includes all Christians who have never had an encounter with Jesus in the flesh.

When the love that Jesus prays for produces unity in the church, the world will come to know that Jesus is truly the One who represents the character of the Father on earth (*see also John 13:34, 35*). On the other hand, the world never will be seriously attracted to Christ through the instrumentality of a church that is bitterly divided.

In Jesus' prayer we catch a glimpse of one reason prayers do not get answered. Every provision has been made for the church's unity. But the evident disunity of the church in general shows that even Jesus' prayers can be frustrated by the stubborn and self-serving human spirit. There are many things God would long to do for the church if only His people were willing to allow Him to do them.

Another remarkable thing about this chapter is the idea of Jesus praying for His disciples and for us. With all the power Jesus displayed in the course of His ministry on earth, He still saw great value in praying for others. Prayer for others accomplishes things in this world that never would happen otherwise.

For most Christians, however, prayer for others can be an up-and-down experience. So, it helps to have a regular time set aside for prayer. It also can be helpful to make a prayer list, as long as the list is not so long that it becomes unmanageable. But most important of all, it helps to have some kind of accountability in the prayer life, a prayer partner or a prayer group that encourages one to keep on when the going gets tough.

Look carefully at John 17:26. Jesus prayed that the love the Father had for Him would be in us, we who claim to follow Jesus. What is that love? Would it not be the most perfect love possible? How, then, can we manifest that love in our lives? Is perhaps the lack of unity among Christians one manifestation of this lack of love?

Further Study: Read some of the great “farewell speeches” of the Bible outside the Gospel of John (*Gen. 47:29–49:33; the whole book of Deuteronomy; Joshua 23, 24; 1 Chronicles 28, 29; Acts 20:17–38; 2 Tim. 3:1–4:8*). What are the common elements in all these discourses? To what degree does Jesus in John 13–17 conform to a common literary pattern? In what ways does He deviate from earlier examples? If you were to give a farewell discourse to your family and friends that was based on the biblical model, what would you say?

In John 17 Jesus talks about “glorifying” His Father and being glorified Himself (*vss. 1, 4, 5*). This concept of glory is a central theme in the Gospel of John (*John 1:14; 2:11; 7:18; 8:50; 12:23, 24; 14:13; 15:8; 17:10; 21:19; in some texts translators may substitute words such as honor*). It is also a significant component of the first angel’s message in Revelation (*Rev. 14:6, 7*). What do these texts imply about the word *glory*? How does the reading of these texts impact your life? How can we “glorify God” in our lives today?

Discussion Questions:

- 1** What kind of unity was Jesus praying for? Is it possible to have unity of faith without unity of doctrine or belief? How wide a difference in belief can there be before disunity appears?
- 2** Why is knowing Jesus the key to eternal life? When Jesus talks about eternal life in John 17:3, is He thinking in terms of quality of life now, or is He thinking only of heaven?
- 3** Read carefully John 17:17. What is Jesus saying there that shows how crucial the Bible is to our spiritual life?

Summary: The key point of this lesson is that true greatness is not found in power, wealth, or fame; it is found in following Jesus along the path of service and humility. Jesus demonstrated this path when, in full awareness of the Cross He was about to experience, He nevertheless was more concerned for the impact of the coming events on His disciples than He was for Himself. In washing the feet of His disciples and in praying for them, as well as for us, Jesus did the opposite of what comes naturally to the human spirit. In so doing, He set for us an example of true greatness.

Life-Saving Change

by NARANTSETSEG and RAVDANDORG

Ravdan: Like most of the people in Mongolia, we had no meaningful religion. We felt hopeless and did not know where to turn for help in our lives. We thought that education, money, possessions, and a good name were all there were in life. Nothing seemed to bring us happiness.

Nara: One day while on a train to another city, I met two young women, Jolly and Orna. We talked, and the women invited me to visit their little church in Darhan. I had not been to a Christian church before and was not even sure there was a God. But I decided to go, just to see. After all, it couldn't hurt to try God. Besides, I hoped that they would help us with food and other things, as some churches do.

I visited the church a few times and felt God's presence there. Ravdan did not mind that I went and took the children, but he warned me to be careful of strange new religions.

Ravdan: Then the church leader came to visit us and talk to me about God. He did not tell me what they thought, just what the Bible says. His visit helped me understand what my wife and children were learning in church. But I did not attend the church until months later.

Then Nara invited me to evangelistic meetings the church was holding. I wanted a better life; I was not happy with the way we were living. So when I saw that the church was helping my wife and children, I decided to try it, too. God opened our eyes, and I learned the truth. We all went together, and by the end of the meetings, we decided to let God be the head of our home. We were baptized.

God has taken our sad, hopeless life and given us a peaceful life, full of love for others. We never dreamed that God would change our lives so dramatically,



and would share our new faith with others. It is not easy to get people to listen to what God has to tell us, but we can let them see the change God has made in our lives, and we pray that they will want a better life too. Now we have our own small group that meets in a room we rent.

NARANTSETSEG and RAVDANDORG live in Darhan, Mongolia.

LESSON 11

*March 6-12

The Spirit “Replaces” Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 13:31–16:33.*

Memory Text: “**But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you’**” (*John 16:7, NIV*).

Key Thought: **Life without a sense of Jesus' presence is empty. When He left earth, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to fill the place that He had held in the lives of His disciples. As hard as it was for His disciples to grasp, this arrangement was better for them than His physical presence had been.**

The Spirit was sent to continue and enhance Jesus' work on earth. After the foot washing, the shadow of the Cross began to hang over the room where Jesus and His disciples were reclining. Christ's last moments with them had come. They began to realize that Jesus was about to leave them. In John 13 to 16 Jesus delivers a farewell speech to His disciples in which He teaches them how to live without His physical presence, just as the second generation of Christians would have to live without the physical presence of the disciples.

How important for us, many generations removed from the time of Christ, to realize that the physical absence of Jesus is no handicap to us or to our walk with Him. We can be all He wants us to be, here and now, even while He is not among us as He was among the disciples. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' word is still as good as His touch.

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

SUNDAY *March 7*

Going Away (*John 13:31–14:31*).

Jesus waited until the departure of Judas (*John 13:28-30*) to begin His farewell speech to His disciples. What followed was spoken for their encouragement—and ours.

What problems are Jesus and His disciples facing at this time? *John 13:33, 36.*

What impact does Jesus sense this would have on His disciples? *John 14:18.*

Jesus is going away, and the disciples are feeling abandoned. How can they possibly continue without Him? But Jesus makes it clear that His going away to the Father will benefit them.

What is one way in which the disciples are better off when Jesus goes to the Father? *See John 14:12-14. What is Jesus saying here?*

A key to understanding how the departure of Jesus would benefit the disciples is found in the statement that the disciples would do greater works than Jesus did (*John 14:12*). At first glance this statement seems preposterous. How could anyone do greater works than Jesus did? Yet, the earthly Jesus was subject to human limitations. He could be only in one place at a time. When He was with the disciples, the Father could be seen only in His person (*vs. 9*). But when He went to the Father, those specific limitations were left behind. Through the Spirit (*vss. 16, 17*), His disciples could represent the character of God throughout the world.

Because Jesus went to the Father and sent the Spirit, millions of disciples have extended Jesus' work. And through the works and the writings of the disciples, Jesus has become real to millions around the globe. In a sense, the disciples of Jesus took His place in the world. The words and actions of believers may be the only picture of Jesus some people will ever see.

Think of those with whom you have been in personal contact in the past 24 hours. Was your influence on them such that they would have been more interested in knowing the God whom you profess to serve, or would you have turned them off? Be honest with yourself.

MONDAY March 8

Remaining Connected to Jesus *(John 15:1–16:33)*.

In John 15:1-8, Jesus gives the beautiful analogy of the vine and the branches. How does one “remain in the vine”? *John 15:6, 7, 9, 10.*

The relationship of Jesus with the Father is the model for the disciples' relationship with Jesus. Jesus loves the disciples the way the Father loves Him (*John 15:9*). On the other hand, the disciples are to obey His commands just as He obeys the commands of His Father (*vs. 10*).

How are the disciples to cope with the loss of Jesus' personal presence? *John 15:26, 27; 16:7.*

The relationship of Jesus with the world is paralleled in the relationship of the disciples with unbelievers (*John 15:18*). The world's hatred of the disciples is rooted in its hatred of Jesus (*vss. 22-25*). The values of the world are often the opposite of God's values; at times, they are in direct conflict. Thus, the disciples need to be ready to face the hostility of the world.

For the disciples, the negative experience of hatred and persecution (*vss. 18-25, 16:1-4*) is counterbalanced by the benefits that will come because Jesus has gone to the Father and has sent His Spirit (*John 15:26, 27; 16:7-15*).

Why was it better that Jesus was going away? (1) He would send the Holy Spirit, who would not be subject to human limitations. (2) Through the efforts of the disciples, the work of Jesus would be spread throughout the world and would impact every people and place. (3) The love they would have through the Spirit (*John 15:12-15*) would have convincing power in the world (*John 13:34, 35*). (4) Coping with the absence of Jesus would enable the disciples to provide a solid foundation for those who followed their generation (*John 15:1-8*).

Read John 14:21, 23 and 15:10-14. What link does the Lord show between love and the commandments? In your own experience, how have you seen the inseparable link between love and the commandments? How are these linked with “remaining in the vine”?



TUESDAY *March 9*

Seeds of the Spirit (*John 1:32, 33; 3:5-8; 4:23, 24; 6:63; 7:37-39*).

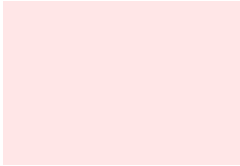
There are eleven passages in the Gospel of John that refer either directly or indirectly to the nature and work of the Holy Spirit. Five of these passages are located in the narrative section of the first half of the book. These passages mention the Spirit only in passing. It is as though John were using these passages to plant seeds in the reader’s mind that would sprout only in the fertile soil of Jesus’ farewell speech (*John 13–16*).

What can we learn about the work of the Spirit from **John 1:32, 33; 3:5-8; 4:23, 24; and 7:37-39?**

Although the Spirit makes several appearances in the first half of this Gospel, there is little information about Him. The Spirit makes it possible for the Baptist to identify Jesus at the Jordan (*John 1:32, 33*). He is an essential part of human participation in the kingdom of God (*John 3:5, 6*). Although His work cannot be controlled by human beings, His effect on people can be seen (*vs. 8*). Worship is no longer tied down to specific locations or temples, nor is it limited to any particular people (*John 4:23, 24*). He is available in every place and to anyone of any background through the words of Jesus (*John 6:63*).

The exact nature of the Spirit’s work would become manifest only in the context of the Cross (*John 7:39*). So, *John 7:37-39* is a transitional passage, preparing the reader for the clearer, more-detailed information about the Spirit’s work that comes in the farewell discourse of *John 13–16*. *John 20:22* (“And . . . he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ ” [NIV]) shows that the promise of *John 7:39* in fact began to be fulfilled right after Jesus’ “glorification” on the cross.

In *John 14–16*, the title given to the Spirit is a Greek noun that can be translated as “Comforter” or “Counselor.” The root meaning of *paraclete* is a person who is called alongside to help someone. So the word can be used in the legal sense of a defense attorney at a trial who appeals in behalf of another or as one who comes to comfort someone who is overwhelmed with grief at a time of loss. Both meanings fit well into the context of *John 14–16*.



Just Like Jesus (*John 14:16, 17, 26, 27*).

Read carefully **John 14:15-21**, focusing specifically on verses **15 and 21**. **What are they saying? How do they relate the Spirit to the commandments? Why would these two truths be so closely connected? What does one have to do with the other?**

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit “ ‘another Counselor’ ” (*John 14:16, NIV*). This means the Holy Spirit is not the only Counselor (or Comforter); He is another Counselor. The original language emphasizes the similarity between Jesus and the Spirit. The Spirit is another Counselor just as Jesus is. Jesus is also the Counselor.

The disciples are feeling depressed. Jesus has said that He is going away, and they are distressed (*John 13:33, 36; 14:2-5*). So, Jesus assures them they will not be left as “orphans” (*John 14:18, NIV*). Through the Spirit, He will continue to be with them. The Spirit will do for them the same things Jesus did when He was physically on earth. The ultimate targets of this message, of course, are those who have come after, those who have come to believe through the words of the written Gospels, not through physical contact with Jesus or with anyone who knew Jesus in the flesh.

“Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally. Therefore it was for their interest that He should go to the Father, and send the Spirit to be His successor on earth. No one could then have any advantage because of his location or his personal contact with Christ. By the Spirit the Saviour would be accessible to all. In this sense He would be nearer to them than if He had not ascended on high.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 669.

Jesus also calls the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of truth” (*John 14:17*). The person and work of the Spirit are authentic and real; they can be trusted. The Spirit will not guide us contrary to the truth about Jesus nor about ourselves. Truth can be painful to hear but is necessary to spiritual growth. Only those who are committed to truth, as manifested in obedience to the truth they already know, will receive the Spirit (*vss. 15, 16, 21*). And how can we understand obedience apart from the commandments?

Look again at John 14:21. Jesus says that those who keep His commandments are those who love Him and that to these He will manifest Himself. How have you experienced this manifestation of Christ in your own life?

THURSDAY *March 11*

The Ultimate Guide *(John 15:26, 27; 16:7-15).*

What task of the Spirit is recorded in John 15:26?

In what three areas does the Holy Spirit bring conviction? *John 16:8-11*. **What two features of the Spirit's work are highlighted in John 16:13? Also, how do the commandments, as seen in the text for yesterday, fit in here? How are they all related?**

Jesus does not need the Holy Spirit to glorify Him in His person; the Father did that when He exalted Jesus to His right hand at the Ascension. The role of the Spirit is rather to exalt and glorify Jesus in the estimation of humanity here on earth. There are no revelations from the Spirit except those that exalt and glorify Jesus. As valuable as the work of the Spirit is, therefore, attention to the Spirit is not healthful if it directs our attention away from Jesus.

The Spirit is Christ's Successor and Representative with the disciples and to the world. It is in this sense that the Holy Spirit can be said to "replace" Jesus. The Spirit extends the presence of Jesus to the new generation that never knew His physical touch. The instruction that Jesus no longer could give in the flesh, the Spirit would do everywhere in His behalf. The witness that He would no longer bear, the Spirit would bear in His behalf. Through the Spirit, Jesus would continue to be glorified.

On the other hand, as Jesus brought judgment and conviction to all who were exposed to His light, so the Holy Spirit has a ministry also to the world, to bring conviction of sin, the offer of righteousness, and a warning of judgment to come. The world rejected Jesus and still does so today. But in spite of the world's continued rejection, the Spirit continues to convict, and people hear Jesus' voice through the voice of the Spirit.

Above all else, therefore, it is through the Spirit that the presence of Jesus is made real in our lives, even though we cannot see Him or touch Him. Although others may not share our experience, the Spirit changes the lives of those who enter into relationship with Jesus and yield themselves to the guidance and comfort of the Holy Spirit.

If someone were to ask you how the Holy Spirit has touched your life, what would you answer? What does your answer say to you about the state of your walk with the Lord? What changes might you need to make?

Further Study: “As the works of God are studied, the Holy Spirit flashes conviction into the mind. It is not the conviction that logical reasoning produces; but unless the mind has become too dark to know God, the eye too dim to see Him, the ear too dull to hear His voice, a deeper meaning is grasped, and the sublime, spiritual truths of the written word are impressed on the heart.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 24.

“It is one thing to assent in a general way to the agency of the Holy Spirit, and another thing to accept His work as a reprover calling to repentance. Many feel a sense of estrangement from God, a realization of their bondage to self and sin; they make efforts for reform; but they do not crucify self. They do not give themselves entirely into the hands of Christ, seeking for divine power to do His will. They are not willing to be molded after the divine similitude. In a general way they acknowledge their imperfections, but they do not give up their particular sins. With each wrong act the old selfish nature is gaining strength.”—Page 48.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 When Jesus said “I will do whatever you ask in my name” (*John 14:13, NIV*), how do you think He defined “whatever”? How would you interpret *John 15:7* in this regard?
- 2 What happens to Christians when they lose a major spiritual leader or mentor? What can one do to find new sources of spiritual strength? How much weight should we put upon anyone, no matter how much of a spiritual encouragement he or she has been?

Summary: In *John 13* to *16* Jesus taught His disciples how to live without His physical presence, just as the second generation of Christians would have to live without the physical presence of the disciples. As followers of Jesus manifest their desire for the truth through prayerful obedience to Jesus’ commands, the Spirit of truth comes to them. That Spirit reminds us of Jesus’ words and teachings (*John 14:26*), guides us into all truth, tells us what we need to know about the future (*John 16:13*), and glorifies Jesus on this earth (*vs. 15*). But to those who have rejected or ignored Jesus’ commands, the Spirit brings conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment (*vs. 8-11*).

Love Without Limits— Part 1

by RUTH SCHNEIDER TESCHE

God took me from being a complacent, pew-sitting Christian to becoming active in prison ministries. I had fought this change in my life all the way, but when I finally allowed God to work His will in my life, I found great happiness and joy in ministering to people in prison.

I had been involved in prison ministries for only a short time when I read a newspaper story about a terrible crime that was committed in the area of South Brazil where I live. I shuddered as I read the story and silently asked God to protect me from having to meet the monster who had committed that crime.

The warden and I had become friends. He often asks me to provide needed clothing and toiletries for prisoners whose families were too far away or too poor to provide these items for them. One day he mentioned that a new prisoner needed some things and asked me whether I could get him a change of clothes, shoes, and some toiletries. I agreed to go buy the needed items, and I asked for the man's name and sizes. I wrote the information down in my memo book beside the man's name, Luis.

When I returned to the prison with the items the warden had asked for, he told me, "You have no idea of the good you have just done for Jamir."

"Jamir?" I said, shocked. "I thought these things were for a prisoner named Luis." Jamir was the name of the man who had committed that terrible crime, the man I never wanted to meet or even think about. I struggled with myself for several moments, realizing that God had allowed me to hear the man's name wrong because I might have refused to help this Jamir if I had known the supplies were for him.

I have argued with God a lot about various issues in the past, and I sensed what He had in mind for me next. All the way home I argued with God about helping Jamir. But God gave me no peace until I agreed to pray for this man. And as I prayed for him, my attitude began to change.

(Continued next week)



RUTH SCHNEIDER TESCHE (left) lives with her family in Maringá, Paraná, Brazil, where she is active in prison ministries.

LESSON 12 *March 13-19

Jesus Lays Down His Life for His Friends



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 18:1–19:42.*

Memory Text: “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends’ ” (*John 15:13, NIV*).

Key Thought: It is by contemplating the Cross of Jesus that we experience both His glory and our own value as human beings.

The Cross forever establishes the value of the human soul. Human beings have experimented with a variety of ways to establish a sense of worth and meaning in their lives. But, ultimately, there is only one place on earth where human value and meaning are forever established. And that place was on a hill called Calvary (Golgotha).

Here, in a way unseen or even unimagined (except within the Godhead), the worth of human beings before God was forever revealed to human beings, angels, and the onlooking universe. Here, more than anywhere else in the universe, the true nature and character of our Creator are revealed.

The story of Jesus' crucifixion in the Gospel of John begins and ends in a garden (*John 18:1, 19:41*). The story itself falls into three parts. First, there is a section describing the betrayal, arrest, and indictment of Jesus (*John 18:1-27*). The central section of the story is concerned with the trial before Pilate (*John 18:29 to 19:16*). Finally, the Crucifixion itself and then burial of Jesus are described in *John 19:16-42*.

Let us take a look at the greatest event in all cosmic history.

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

Betrayed and Denied *(John 18:1-11, 15-18, 25-27).*

Read John 18:1-11. What does John say that shows how Christ was fully in control of events that happened there? What does Jesus do to show that He allowed Himself to be taken prisoner?

In John 18:1-11, the main point seems to be that Jesus is in full control of the situation, in fulfillment of John 10:18: “ ‘No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord’ ” *(NIV)*. Although about to be murdered, Jesus is not a victim; all this had to happen. See *John 3:14*. If Jesus had wanted to avoid arrest, He could have simply gone somewhere else other than the Garden where Judas would look for Him. He leads His disciples to the Garden, even though He knows what is coming. He does not wait for the mob to come to Him; He moves forward and addresses them, capable of intimidating them fully should that have served His purpose. His death is voluntary. They could not have arrested Him had He not allowed it.

How does Peter react to the situation? Why is that so typically a human reaction?

Under these circumstances, the reaction of Peter is almost comical. Although Jesus is fully in control of the situation, to Peter things look totally out of control. He whips out his sword and tries to protect Jesus, but Jesus tells him to put the sword away. Jesus must go to the cross, or God’s plan of salvation would fail. The very actions by which Peter sought to gain control of the situation only would have moved things truly out of control. In fact, Peter’s rash action in the Garden jeopardizes the validity of Jesus’ appeal to Pilate later in the chapter *(John 18:36)*.

Jesus knew the future, knew what was going to happen before it did. He does today, as well. What kind of comfort does that give you, knowing that nothing that happens, even in your own life, takes God by surprise? At the same time, what kind of troubling questions does it raise?

MONDAY *March 15*

Before Annas and Pilate (*John 18:12-40*).

Only in the Gospel of John does more than one disciple follow Jesus into the high priest's courtyard (*John 18:15, 16*). Presumably, the girl at the door knew that John (the "other disciple") was a disciple of Jesus but didn't challenge him because he had privileged access.

Why does Jesus get slapped in the face in front of Annas? *John 18:19-23*.

Jesus is quite assertive in His encounter with Annas (*John 18:20-23, NIV*). He challenges both the secretiveness of His arrest ("I said nothing in secret") and the legal procedures being followed ("Why question me?"). He even tosses in a dash of ironic humor ("If I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?"). In this instance Jesus does not follow an extreme interpretation of "turning the other cheek" (*Matt. 5:39*). He protests His opponent's abuse of authority (*John 18:23*). There is sometimes a fine line between being humble and being abused.

After being taken to Caiaphas, Jesus is brought before Pilate, the central figure of this part of the narrative. At the time, Pilate was in a position of considerable political weakness. A series of blunders had repeatedly offended the Jews. He was unpopular, therefore, and his fitness to rule even had come under suspicion in Rome. One more major conflict with the religious leaders, and he probably would be out of office. This made him extremely vulnerable to blackmail.

In approaching Pilate, the priests first formulate their charge against Jesus in the political terms that a Roman governor could appreciate. Jesus must be executed, because His kingship is a threat to Caesar. But Jesus' statement "My kingdom is not of this world" and the supporting evidence (*vs. 36, NIV*) make it clear to Pilate that Jesus' claim to kingship is no political or military threat to Rome. He determines to free Jesus and at the same time provide the Jewish leaders a face-saving way out, offering to release Jesus on the basis of a traditional prisoner release rather than a judgment of innocence.

Read what Jesus says to Pilate in John 18:36. How do you understand what Jesus means when He says that His kingdom is not of this world? What implications do His words have for you, if you claim to be part of His kingdom? Write out your answer in a short paragraph. Be prepared, if willing, to share it with your Sabbath School class.

TUESDAY *March 16*

Political Expediency *(John 19:1-16).*

Read John 19:1-16. What irony exists in the actions of the soldiers (vss. 2-4)?

Things get complicated for Pilate when the Jewish leaders reject his offer to release Jesus on terms favorable to them. They want Jesus dead at any cost. That means Pilate either must persuade them against their set opinion or release Jesus in the face of their wrath, which would cost him his job. Pilate was caught in a dilemma between justice and self-interest.

Pilate seeks, therefore, to engage his opponents' sympathy by flogging Jesus and presenting Him before them. But they refuse to be moved. Sensing that Pilate's self-interest has weakened him, the religious leaders start playing dirty; they argue that Jesus should die because He has broken their religious law. They know that Pilate cannot afford to be seen as acting against their religious interests.

Read verses 7 and 8. Why was Pilate made even "more afraid" (NIV)? What does Pilate ask Jesus (vs. 9), and why would he ask Jesus such a question? What does that question reveal?

Pilate seems to realize at this point that indecision has been his weakness. He cannot save both himself and Jesus. He determines finally to save himself at Jesus' expense. He will consent to the religious leaders' request, but they will pay dearly for it. He condemns Jesus in exchange for a public confession of their obligation to serve Caesar: "We have no king but Caesar."

Earlier Caiaphas had insisted that one Man had to be sacrificed so the nation might not be destroyed (*John 11:48-52*). Now Pilate is ready to sacrifice the nation in order to destroy one Man. The religious leaders reject Jesus' kingship with such passion that they now rejoice in a king whom they always have hated. Pilate intends to hold them to that pledge in the future. They will have no more power over him. From this point on in the Gospel story, Pilate is unmovable. In one of the Gospel's fascinating ironies, the death of Jesus makes Pilate strong!

Look at Pilate, doing what he knows is wrong, all for personal gain. What can we learn from his example in order to spare us from making a similar mistake when confronted with a similar dilemma, that of being pressured to compromise on a moral issue?

WEDNESDAY *March 17*

Humiliation, Death, and Burial *(John*

19:16-42).

Crucifixion was used by the Romans to intimidate potential opponents. In order to breathe, victims had to push up with their feet to raise their bodies. Death came by suffocation when they were too weary to raise themselves anymore. Death was, therefore, slow and agonizing. Breaking the legs would hasten the process, when that was for the executioner's convenience. An additional element of torture was shame and exposure, being hung naked in front of family and friends.

What significance is found in the words of the sign that Pilate had written and placed over the cross? *John 19:19*. **Why do you think he had them placed there? Guilt? Arrogance? Fear? A mixture of all three?**

In these verses we see a stronger, bolder version of Pilate, energized by the sacrifice of Jesus. The wording he chose for the inscription placed on the cross made the crucifixion of Jesus symbolic of Rome's dominance over Palestine and its native religion. With the inscription he turned the Crucifixion into a blow against the prestige of the Jews and their religious leaders.

What major theme of this passage occurs four times? *John 19:24, 28, 36, 37*.

Although Pilate now feels in control of matters, there are repeated reminders in this part of the text that everything is happening according to the predictions placed in the Scriptures. God is in control, even when human beings feel they are. Jesus' death is voluntary, purposeful, and according to the Scriptures.

In John 19:30, Jesus says, "It is finished." But what exactly was finished at the Cross? The particular emphasis in chapter 19 seems to be that the Cross is the fulfillment of the Bible prophecies pointing toward the Messiah. Prophecy was fulfilled down to the minutest detail of just what type of garment was divided, what type was wagered for (*vss. 23, 24*), and just how the body of Jesus was handled after His death (*vss. 35-37*). The Cross makes it clear that even when bad things happen in our lives things are not out of God's control. Followers of Jesus do not need to live in fear of what they cannot control.

What did Christ finish, in your behalf, at the Cross? *See also Mark 10:45, Heb. 9:26, 1 John 2:2.*

THURSDAY *March 18*

In Search of the Cross *(John 12:20-32).*

John offers additional interpretations of the Cross in other parts of the Gospel.

How does John turn the words of Caiaphas into a theology of the Cross? *John 11:49-52.*

What is so special about the Cross that Paul refused to glory in anything else (*Gal. 6:14*)? Through the words of Caiaphas, John expresses that in some sense the death of Jesus stands in place of every other human being.

According to Paul, at the Cross the wages of sin (*Rom. 6:23*) were placed upon Jesus as the Representative of the sinful human race. If the law of God could have been changed, humanity could have been saved without a cross; thus, in the truest, most dramatic sense, the Cross affirms the perpetuity of the law. The Cross condemned human sin in the person of Christ (*Rom. 8:3, 1 Pet. 2:24*); the resurrection of Christ paves the way for our resurrection at the end of the world (*1 Cor. 15:12-23*).

How does Jesus Himself express the significance of the Cross? *John 12:24, 31-33.*

Jesus expresses the “one in place of many” theme in terms of seeds. Then in verses 31-33 He shows that the Cross results in the condemnation of Satan and of sin in a mighty act of judgment. The Cross also becomes a wonderful magnet of attraction that draws “all men” (*vs. 32, NIV—in the original, the implication may include the entire universe!*) to Jesus.

What is so attractive about the Cross? Above all else, the Cross affirms the incredible value of the human person. “One soul is of infinite value; Calvary speaks its worth.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 184. God so loves every human being that Jesus would have died for even one (*John 3:16*).

As Creator of the entire universe, Jesus possesses in His Person infinite value. In dying for you and for me, Jesus testified to the infinite value He places on every one of us. And the value we have in the Cross is a value that does not change, no matter what we do or whom we become. If we should, in the end, choose to reject the Cross, our value in eternity will be measured by the pain of our absence that is felt in the heart of God.

What should the Cross do to our pride, self-sufficiency, and arrogance—and why?

Further Study: Read *The Desire of Ages*, pages 758–764, where Ellen G. White offers a powerful theology of the Cross, without any direct reference to the Gospel of John, except for the words of 19:30, “‘It is finished.’” List the main themes of her presentation in that chapter. Then list the main ideas of John’s theology of the Cross as expressed in the lesson and in any other passages of the Gospel that may address the issue in some way (such as *John 2:1-11, 6:50-59, and 16:7-11*). Compare and contrast the respective emphases of Ellen White and John. In what ways does she deepen and broaden the concept of “One in place of many”?

“Without the cross, man could have no union with the Father. On it depends our every hope. From it shines the light of the Saviour’s love, and when at the foot of the cross the sinner looks up to the One who died to save him, he may rejoice with fullness of joy, for his sins are pardoned. Kneeling in faith at the cross, he has reached the highest place to which man can attain.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 209, 210.

“Paul saw that the character of Christ must be understood before men could love Him or view the cross with the eye of faith. Here must begin that study which shall be the science and the song of the redeemed through all eternity. In the light of the cross alone can the true value of the human soul be estimated.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 273.

Discussion Question:

In the first Ellen White quote above, why does all our hope rest on the Cross? What happened there that gives us such hope?

Summary: The Cross is the place where human value and meaning are established. “Christ paid an infinite price for us, and according to the price paid He desires us to value ourselves.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 498.

When we gain a sense of our value in the Cross, we can begin to avoid the ups and downs that come when our self-worth is based on performance or on the fickle opinions of others. When we see ourselves in the light of the Cross, we develop the strength to overcome sin, the confidence to defeat Satan, and the joy that comes from knowing who we are. No wonder Paul said, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Gal. 6:14, NIV*).

Love Without Limits— Part 2

by RUTH SCHNEIDER TESCHE

God called me to minister to prisoners and lead them to the Savior, but often God used the prisoners to lead me closer to His will, as well. When the warden asked me to help a new prisoner, I was willing, until I realized it was a man who had committed a terribly cruel crime in our town. Then God worked with me until I was willing to pray for Jamir.

Soon God told me to go visit Jamir. It took awhile to pray through my prejudices, but finally I asked the warden whether I could visit him. I trembled as I entered the prison's visitation room. A prisoner I did not recognize walked toward me. Our conversation was awkward, and he did not want to hear about God. But before I left, I told him I was praying for him.

For weeks I resisted visiting Jamir again. Every time I thought of him I still saw the terrible crime of which he was accused. Then one Sabbath I visited another couple with whom I was working in the same prison. During our conversation the couple told me, "There is a prisoner here who wants to talk to you." Of course I agreed. The guard brought in the prisoner. When I heard Jamir's name announced, I stiffened. I could not refuse to see him, and I could not leave for I was locked inside a prison.

A few minutes later Jamir appeared, greeted us, and kissed me on the cheek. *That monster kissed me!* I thought to myself. I stumbled through the visit.

At home I ranted at God. "How can you ask me to work with this man? I can't handle it!" For weeks I fought God about Jamir until finally, exhausted and weary of arguing, I gave in. "OK, God, if it's Your will, use me." Finally I had peace.

I began spending time with Jamir. I spent more time and money for Jamir than most prisoners. Then he was moved to another prison farther away. But God told me to go visit him. I went, and I met other prisoners there who needed help. Soon my husband and I were making regular trips to that prison, filling the car with clothing and supplies the prisoners needed.

I watched in amazement as Jamir's life changed dramatically. He found Jesus as his Savior and is leading other prisoners to Christ. He wants nothing more than to share God's love, which knows no boundaries, with those who need it most. What a change God has wrought in this monster of a man! What a change He has wrought in me!

RUTH SCHNEIDER TESCHE lives in Maringá, Paraná, Brazil.

LESSON 13 *March 20-26

The Power of the Resurrection



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 20:1–21:25.*

Memory Text: “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (*John 20:31, NIV*).

Key Thought: The resurrection of Jesus provides both the assurance that the claims of Jesus are true and a living parable of God's mighty power in our lives today.

The power of the Resurrection is real. John 20 brings us to a crucial point in the Gospel of John. There is a sense in which the story is “finished” with Jesus' death on the cross (*see John 19:30*).

But there is also a sense in which it is unfinished. There would be no Christian church if Jesus had remained in the tomb. The resurrection of Jesus turns apparent defeat into victory. The Resurrection is a mighty act of God on the level of the Creation and of the Exodus.

The New Testament records eleven separate post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus, four of which are recorded in chapters 20 and 21 of the Gospel of John, three of them in chapter 20 (*John 20:10-18, 19-23, 24-29*). And, perhaps, the most important message here is one that's been seen all through the book: A true Christian experience comes not by seeing and touching but by believing in the words of Jesus, whether spoken in the flesh or in the written testimonies of His disciples.

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

At the Tomb *(John 20:1-18).*

The many witnesses to the Resurrection help assure us the accounts of the Resurrection were not made up by the disciples in order to save face. As long as these witnesses lived, their stories could be compared and checked out (*Luke 1:1-4*).

For the second generation, however, the greatest evidence of Jesus' resurrection was the empty tomb. The empty tomb is a central feature of this Gospel. Indeed, given the circumstances, the emptiness of the tomb is extremely hard to understand unless Jesus was, in fact, raised from the dead. Did the enemies of Jesus come and remove His body from the tomb? Did the disciples steal His body in order to create the illusion of a resurrection? We will see in tomorrow's study that none of these scenarios makes sense. The best explanation for the empty tomb (unless one is predisposed to deny the possibility of resurrection) is that Jesus was, in fact, raised from the dead.

Read John 20:3-10, the account of the first two disciples at the tomb. Focus specifically on verse 9. How could they not understand that, especially after all that Jesus had told them about His resurrection? See Matt. 12:40, 27:63, Mark 9:30-32, 10:32-34, John 2:19.

How does Mary Magdalene understand the empty tomb at first, and how does she come to realize that Jesus was alive? *John 20:10-16.*

To the next generation of Christians, the message in the little scene between Jesus and Mary was powerful. Although Mary was in the personal presence of Jesus, her eyes were so blinded by tears that she had no idea with whom she was talking. His physical presence was of no use to her until she gave attention to His word. We, too, have that word, through the Gospel of John.

Look at the initial reaction of those who found the empty tomb. Despite everything that Jesus had taught them, all thought there was a natural explanation: Someone took away His body. With all the supernatural things they had seen with Jesus, their first reaction was toward doubt and skepticism. What lessons can we learn from this for ourselves?

MONDAY *March 22*

In the Upper Room (*John 20:19-29*).

How do the rest of the disciples come to know that Jesus was raised from the dead? *John 20:19, 20*. **How does Thomas?** *John 20:24-29*. **What do their reactions reveal about their faith? Did they really have “faith” before seeing Him, as we understand faith? How much faith does it take to believe in what you see, hear, tell, and touch?**

The first generation of Christians was very slow to believe, despite the evidence of the empty tomb and the witness of Mary. All needed to see Jesus for themselves before they could forsake other explanations for the empty tomb. Only the beloved disciple believed without seeing Jesus first (*John 20:8*), representing the kind of faith the second generation would have to exercise and Jesus would bless.

Read John 20:29. What is Jesus saying here, and what does that mean to us, today? Is Jesus asking us to have “blind” faith? Explain your answer.

How did the tomb become empty? Certainly the enemies of Jesus had no motive for removing His body from the tomb, and if they had done so, why did they not produce the body to prove He had not risen?

It is equally clear that the disciples had neither the ability nor the intention of stealing Jesus' body. The fact is that the disciples did not believe that Jesus would allow Himself to die, in spite of His repeated assertions of what lay ahead. On top of this, if the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus, their later behavior is totally unexplainable. Who would suffer ridicule, torture, and death over an event that never took place?

Thus, the Lord has given us, besides the clear testimony of the Bible, rational and historical evidence to help us believe in the resurrection of Christ. And if Jesus rose from the dead, no other miracle is impossible. Anything we possibly could ask of Him can be done when it is according to His will. Our own resurrection also is guaranteed by the certainty of His. The same divine power that raised Jesus from the dead can bring life and healing into even the most hopeless human situations.

Who has not, in his or her walk with the Lord, at some time experienced some struggle with faith? How, by our focusing on the Cross and the Resurrection, can our faith be strengthened?

TUESDAY *March 23*

The Power of His Resurrection (*John 2:22; 7:37-39; 12:16*).

What are some other things that happened to the disciples as a result of the resurrection of Jesus? *John 2:22, 7:37-39, 12:16.*

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection,” Paul writes to the Philippians (*Phil. 3:10, NIV*). The resurrection of Jesus was the most awesome event of all time. With all our science and technology, we still have no clue how to bring life back from the dead. Anyone who has the power to raise the dead would (one would think) have the power to accomplish anything else the human race might need.

At the heart of Christian faith is the testimony of the New Testament that Jesus rose from the dead. The power of Jesus’ resurrection became the basis for the mighty acts of God in the lives of Christians ever since (*2 Cor. 5:14-17*). The power of the Resurrection is the basis for limitless power in the lives of Christians today. Why, then, are these “limitless powers” so invisible in many churches today?

One of the major themes of the Old Testament has to do with remembering and forgetting. Whenever the Israelites forgot the mighty things God had done for them, they lost the sense of His power and presence. When they remembered what He had done for them in the past, the power of the original action was reactivated in their lives. In fact, the very essence of Old Testament spiritual life was recounting the mighty acts of God in their past history.

Read Deuteronomy 26:1-12. How do these verses reveal the importance of remembering how God has acted in the past? *See also Pss. 66:1-6, 78:1-55.*

Indeed, when the Israelites told of the mighty acts of God in their past history, the power of the original act was unleashed again in their experience (*2 Chron. 20:1-30*).

What was true in Old Testament times is also true of the New Testament. The greatest mighty act of God is the action He did at the Cross and the resurrection of Jesus. There is power in the constant retelling of the Christ event. That is why sharing our faith is such an essential part of the Christian experience. Where there is no retelling of the mighty acts of God, there is no power. But telling what God has done brings revival and reformation. The power of the Resurrection turns a formal religion into a living and powerful one!

How, in your own walk with the Lord, has recounting the Lord’s actions in your past helped strengthen your faith?

WEDNESDAY March 24

Gone Fishing (*John 21:1-14*).

Read John 21:1-11. What makes this event so appropriate, so symbolic, of what Jesus would have them do after He's gone (see particularly vs. 11)? Compare this account to Luke 5:1-10, particularly verse 10.

John 21 is often described as the epilogue to the Fourth Gospel, because it comes after a passage that reads like the concluding words of the Gospel (*John 20:30, 31*). John 21 tells the story of how the disciples encountered Jesus in Galilee after His resurrection. Jesus provides a huge catch of fish (*vss. 1-6*), fixes breakfast (*vss. 7-14*), and then holds a serious conversation on the beach with Peter (*vss. 15-23*).

The impression one gets, particularly in the Gospel of John, is that Jesus' postresurrection appearances were occasional and rather unexpected. Mary, the ten, Thomas, and now seven disciples are all startled at the suddenness of Jesus' appearances. In a real sense, the ministry of Jesus to His disciples was completed in the upper room (*John 13-17*). He says very little to them after the Resurrection, at least, that is recorded. The purpose of His appearances, perhaps, is not so much to teach as to validate the reality of His resurrection.

What has Jesus been doing on the shore? John 21:9-13. What spiritual meaning can you find in Jesus inviting them to dine with Him?

It appears that breakfast that morning was pretty silent (see also Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 810). The disciples didn't seem to know what to make of Jesus' behavior since they had been with Him in the upper room. On that day they experienced the same uncertainties the second generation Christians would experience over the death of the beloved disciple. The disciples were in the presence of Jesus in the flesh, yet His physical presence seems to have offered no advantage to them. Only the coming of the Spirit would provide solid assurance, and the coming of the Spirit proved to be equally effective for both the first and the second generation.

Imagine being in the presence of Jesus and it giving you no advantage! That could happen if someone were to allow formal religion alone—creeds, rules, doctrines—without a living experience with the Lord, to dominate his or her religious life. What lesson is here for us?

Getting Peter Back on Track *(John 21:15-23).*

Read the exchange between Jesus and Peter in John 21:15-17. Compare it with what happened in Luke 22:55-62. What was Jesus doing here with Peter?

Verses 15-17 describe a threefold repetition of question, reply, and response. This approach could seem rude on the part of Jesus. Its effect is to probe Peter to the depths of his being, at the cost of considerable pain. Peter's self-confidence is gradually chipped away, until he is left with nothing but the certainty that Jesus knows his heart and will be fair in His judgments.

There is something about pain, loss, poverty, and emotional anguish that brings people to the place where major gains in spiritual development are possible. And sometimes, as in the case of Peter, the author of that pain is Jesus who, like a loving surgeon, wounds so that He might heal. Jesus does not settle for quick, superficial answers. He insists on getting down to the true feelings and motives of those He loves.

The experience of Peter shows that any relationship with Jesus will tend to have its ups and downs. What would Jesus have us do when we fall? How can we know we are accepted in spite of what we have said, thought, or done?

1. Know what kind of God you are dealing with. God loves sinners! This is not to say that sin does not matter but that no matter what we have done in the past, we can start over today. It is at those very times when you feel the worst that you have the greatest claim on His mercy!

2. Tell the truth about yourself. The Bible calls this confession. Confession simply is facing reality and being honest with God about it. Confession can be difficult, because our natures will rebel against it, but if we are grounded in the value that we have at the Cross, it will be less painful than the consequences of not confessing!

3. Ask for forgiveness. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (*1 John 1:9, NIV*). God does not require a whole list of conditions before He becomes willing to forgive. The conditions were already met in Jesus Christ.

4. Plan to forsake sin forever. How can you do this when many sins seem attractive? Total up in advance some of the consequences of continuing in sin. Read the list to yourself every time you are tempted.

Take a spiritual inventory of yourself, based on those four steps listed above. How have you done? Better with some steps than with others? What changes must you make in your own life?

Further Study: “Jesus had several times attempted to open the future to His disciples, but they had not cared to think about what He said. Because of this His death had come to them as a surprise; and afterward, as they reviewed the past and saw the result of their unbelief, they were filled with sorrow. When Christ was crucified, they did not believe that He would rise. He had stated plainly that He was to rise on the third day, but they were perplexed to know what He meant. This lack of comprehension left them at the time of His death in utter hopelessness. They were bitterly disappointed. Their faith did not penetrate beyond the shadow that Satan had cast athwart their horizon. All seemed vague and mysterious to them. If they had believed the Saviour’s words, how much sorrow they might have been spared!”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 25, 26.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Are there times when it is good to be as skeptical as Thomas was? How do we know when it is appropriate to doubt something?**
- 2 How do we know whether the pain in our lives is something God is allowing to happen in order to teach us something? Or do we need to know? Is it not enough simply to ask the Lord, If the pain, whatever its source, does not go, could You at least allow me to learn from it?**
- 3 If someone asked you to give evidence of the resurrection of Christ, what would you say?**

Summary: The power of the Resurrection not only convinces us that the story of Jesus is true; it convicts us of sin and provides the basis for a living and vibrant relationship with Jesus. There is nothing like the peace that comes from being totally committed to His will. There is nothing like the joy that comes when your conscience is clean. Christianity has lasted about two thousand years, because nothing can compare with the kind of life that comes when you have a living relationship with Jesus Christ. It is possible to go through the motions and call it Christianity. But the real thing is the greatest. Why settle for less?

Determined to Succeed

by J. H. ZACHARY

Dorina Mardare of Romania had decided when she was 14 that she would become a leader in her town one day. Through hard work she eventually became mayor.

When two of her sisters became Seventh-day Adventists, Dorina opposed them and accused them of joining a cult. Then Dorina became ill with chest pains. She grew weaker, and her family feared she would die. Anna, one of her Adventist sisters, urged her to give her life to God before it was too late. Anna said, "If you do not place your life in the hands of Jesus, you are lost."

Dorina was impressed by her sister's concern. "What do I have to do to place myself in the hands of the Savior?" she asked.

Anna shared the steps with her sister, and Dorina promised she would pray—alone. But it took several days before Dorina could open her heart to God. As she prayed she felt the presence of God with her. Joy filled her heart, but she regretted the years she had spent away from God.

Dorina returned home to care for her husband and daughter, both of whom were not well.

The next day two young people came to her home and invited her to attend evangelistic meetings at Anna's church. Dorina decided to attend the meetings and was impressed with the sound biblical positions to support the speaker's statements. She continued attending the meetings and accepted the speaker's invitation to get to know Jesus better. She began attending the Adventist church and joined a Bible class, but she was afraid to tell her husband of her decision to become an Adventist.

When Dorina decided to surrender completely to Christ, the chest pains that had plagued her for years disappeared. This miracle impressed her husband, who encouraged her to follow her convictions.

Dorina and her parents were baptized together. But when her younger sister was diagnosed with cancer, friends blamed the illness on the family's decision to become Adventists. Dorina and her family prayed for her sister, who gave her heart to Christ and was baptized shortly before her death.

Dorina testifies that God has helped her through many difficulties and has answered her prayers and stood beside her when troubles threatened to overwhelm the family. She prays that soon God will bring her husband to the Lord.

J. H. ZACHARY is coordinator of international evangelism for *The Quiet Hour*.

This quarter, we take a look at Isaiah, at his words, his times, his predicaments, but mostly at His God, the God who back then, as well as today, cries out to us, “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by name; thou art mine” (*Isa. 43:1*). Roy E. Gane, author of this quarter’s Bible Study Guide, called *Isaiah: “Comfort My People,”* leads us in our exploration of the message of a prophet who still speaks so powerfully to us today.

Lesson 1—Crisis of Identity—March 27–April 2

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Hear, O Heavens! (*Isa. 1:1-9*).

MONDAY: Rotten Ritualism (*Isa. 1:10-17*).

TUESDAY: The Argument of Forgiveness (*Isa. 1:18*).

WEDNESDAY: To Eat or Be Eaten (*Isa. 1:19-31*).

THURSDAY: Ominous Love Song (*Isa. 5:1-7*).

Memory Text—*Isaiah 1:18, NRSV*.

Sabbath Gem: Sadly, the Judeans forgot they belonged to the Lord and thus lost their true identity as the covenant people. This week we’ll look at God’s work to restore His people to Himself.

Lesson 2—Crisis of Leadership—April 3-9

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: The King Is Dead. Long Live the King!

MONDAY: “Holy, Holy, Holy” (*Isa. 6:1-4*).

TUESDAY: New Personality (*Isa. 6:5-7*).

WEDNESDAY: Royal Commission (*Isa. 6:8*).

THURSDAY: Appalling Appeal (*Isa. 6:9-13*).

Memory Text—*Isaiah 6:1, NRSV*.

Sabbath Gem: This week we’ll look at Judah’s crisis of leadership and the unfortunate results that followed.

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