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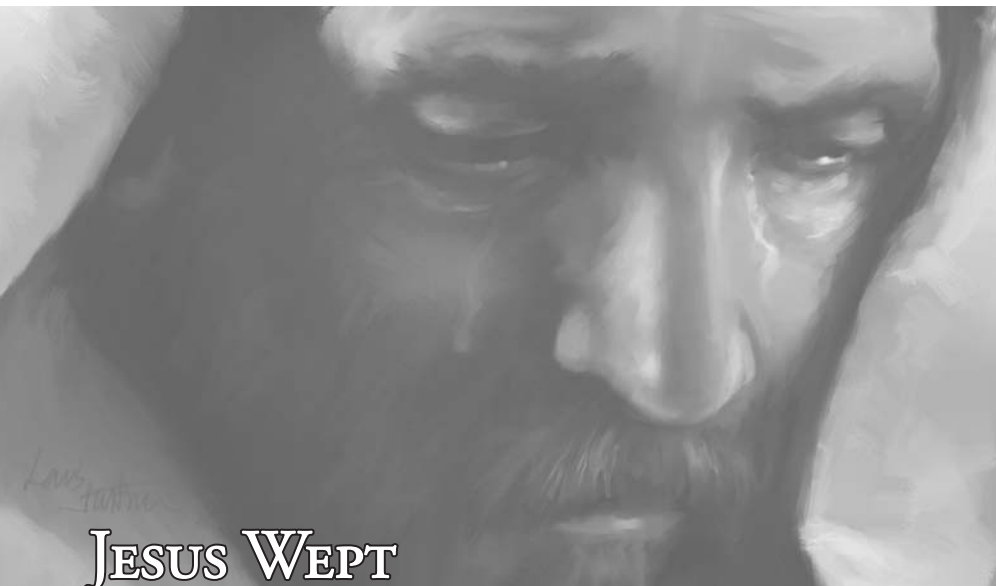
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## JESUS WEPT

**A**s humans, we are the most rational of all the world's created beings. Marvelous as they are, frogs, dogs, caterpillars, and donkeys don't have our capacity to reason. Yet, even with all our powers of logic and rationality, we're also emotional beings. One could argue, justifiably, that emotions rule our lives to a much greater extent than reason does or ever could.

Emotions are good; without them we'd barely be human. (What kind of person doesn't know love, compassion, sympathy, fear, or sorrow?) Robots might be able to function emotionlessly; we never could.

Of course, existing in a world of sin, our emotions often bring us great pain. Sickness, disease, war, poverty, natural disasters, economic uncertainty, family problems—how can these not cause the kinds of fear, sorrow, dread, and sadness that we all are so familiar with?

Look, too, at the emotional reaction our world evoked in Jesus! "Jesus wept" (*John 11:35*). "And when he [Jesus] had looked round about on them with anger" (*Mark 3:5*), Jesus said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death" (*Mark 14:34*). "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled" (*John 11:33*). "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (*Isa. 53:3*).

Well did Hebrews express this incredible truth about our Lord: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but

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was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (*Heb. 4:15*). That’s the feelings of our infirmities, and, as we all know, the feelings of our infirmities can be pretty bad.

Sadness, pain, sorrow . . . these are not wrong, these are not sinful. We don’t show a lack of faith, a lack of trust, when we respond to life’s turmoil with such emotions. After all, Jesus responded with emotions.

We are, today, thousands of years from the “tree of life” (*Gen. 2:9*). The DNA is wearing thin. We’re damaged goods, and, contrary to the myths of evolution, we’re getting only worse.

It’s no wonder, then, that sin has taken its toll on our emotional health, as well. So often, instead of being in control of our emotions, they control us, even to the point of pushing us into radically wrong choices that cause us even more grief and sorrow. Fortunately, that doesn’t always need to be the case. The Lord has something better for us.

This quarter’s lessons look at human emotions and give us biblical principles on how we can understand our emotions and seek the power of the Lord to bring them under His loving sovereignty. We’ll look at Bible characters, focusing on their emotional reactions to whatever befell them, good and bad, and ask ourselves the important question: What can we learn from their experiences that can help us with ours?

Of course, some people—especially those whose emotional problems are caused by a physical problem, such as a chemical imbalance—need professional help when available, though in no situation should we limit the power of God to bring healing to any life.

It’s our prayer that this quarter’s lessons will, in the context of understanding our emotions, help us reach out to the Lord, who has bestowed on us the greatest emotion of all: love. Finally, no matter our emotional ups and downs, may each of us learn to bask in that love, especially in the downs, and then through God’s grace reflect that love to others. Because, in the end, no matter our sorrows, “love never fails” (*1 Cor. 13:8, NIV*).

*Instead of being in control of our emotions, they control us. . . . Fortunately, that doesn’t always need to be the case. The Lord has something better for us.*

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# Got Questions?

## Sabbath School University *has answers!*

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# Emotions



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *2 Samuel 13, Gal. 5:22, Col. 3:12–14, Luke 19:41–44, John 16:20–24.*

**Memory Text:** “I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy” (*John 16:20, NIV*).

Emotions are a vital part of the human personality. They can be powerful motivators, both for good and for evil. And, depending on the emotions, they make us happy, sad, fearful, or joyous.

Positive emotions can bring a feeling of satisfaction and well-being; negative ones tend to cause pain and anguish. Though the first ones can promote mental health, a prolonged exposure to negative emotions may bring about behavioral and relational problems. Thus, emotions can play an important part in our overall well-being.

God wants us to enjoy the effects of positive emotions. However, because of sin, we often face the adverse effects of negative emotional experiences. Bible characters were not immune to emotional ups and downs either. Some succeeded in gaining control over them; others, losing control, allowed negative emotions to lead them into wrong actions.

The relationship between emotions and behavior is not clear and direct. At times painful emotions may drive us to our knees to seek God as the ultimate Source of help and support. At other times struggles may cause people to give up faith entirely.

How crucial, then, that we learn more about our emotions and how they impact our lives.

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

## Negative Emotions

Read 2 Samuel 13, a story packed with adverse emotional experiences. In the midst of this turmoil, people ended up inflicting much physical and emotional pain on one another. The consequences of their behavior touched the entire royal family, impacting even future generations.

**What** emotional states can be identified in the following participants?

Amnon \_\_\_\_\_

Tamar \_\_\_\_\_

David \_\_\_\_\_

Absalom \_\_\_\_\_

Amnon's "love" for Tamar could not have been true love, but rather a strong sexual drive, because as soon as he achieved his goal he "hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her" (*vs. 15, NIV*). Amnon's experience illustrates emotional extremes: uncontrolled passion (in the context of an incestuous relationship) and hatred. Behaviors performed under such emotional states almost always will be unbalanced and cause serious consequences. Amnon's "love" turned almost instantly into hatred. He disdained his sister's final plea and drove her out of his quarters by force.

Tamar was truly the victim. She did not permit any of Amnon's advances, which frustrated him. She served her brother in obedience to the king. And when Amnon's intentions became clear, she did her best to dissuade him and to outline the devastating consequences of such a wicked act. Being determined to do what he wanted, Amnon was not ready to seek sound advice. So, he proceeded with his plan.

As any woman who has suffered rape or abuse, Tamar must have felt angry, humiliated, and used; she surely suffered with significantly lowered self-esteem. Her brother Absalom did not offer much relief but instead advised her to keep silent. However, Absalom devised a plan to kill Amnon in order to avenge her rape. (Besides, getting rid of Amnon increased his chances to sit on the throne of Israel.) David, father of all involved, experienced anger and grief over these events.

**When have you experienced hatred, sadness, fear, rage, or jealousy? How did you deal with them? What do you wish you had done differently?**

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## Positive Emotions

Negative emotional states, such as hatred, worry, fear, rage, and jealousy, produce immediate physiological responses: a pounding heart, tense muscles, dryness of the mouth, cold sweat, “butterflies” in the stomach, and other physical manifestations. Longtime exposure to these symptoms has been associated with cardiac and digestive complications.

In contrast, positive emotional states, such as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, are associated with a sense of well-being, a positive outlook, and an optimal relationship with others and with God. Positive psychology, a newly developed and widely accepted branch of psychology, aims at the promotion of positive emotions in order to obtain happiness and to prevent mental illness. In fact, there is evidence that harboring certain negative emotions will adversely affect health and longevity; in contrast, the promotion of a positive outlook can promote health and longevity. In other words, the more positive your outlook and emotions, the better overall health you can enjoy.

**Read Galatians 5:22.** How should the fruit of the Spirit make a difference in the way people experience life?

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**Read Colossians 3:12–14.** What is the most outstanding positive emotion according to Paul? What is the meaning of “clothe yourselves” (*NIV*) as expressed in this passage? What consequences follow when someone puts into practice Paul’s words in this passage?

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Though love is more than an emotion, it is still the supreme emotion. God is love, and it is His plan for His children to experience love for others and from others; He wants us to know what it means to love God and to be loved by Him. Love brings about an array of other positive feelings and emotions that can be translated into highly desirable behaviors.

**What has been your own experience with how your emotional state impacts your actions? Why is it wise not to make important decisions amid a flurry of emotions, be they positive or negative?**

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## Jesus' Emotional Manifestations: Part 1

In Mark 8:1–3, “compassion” was the motivator that led Jesus to devise a plan for feeding the multitude. Nobody else had thought of the practical needs of these people, who had eaten little or nothing in three days. Jesus observed that some had traveled far; thus, He knew that they could collapse if sent home without anything to eat.

**Apart from taking care of nourishing the crowds, what other acts of Jesus were performed out of compassion?** *Mark 1:40, 41; 6:34.*

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Lepers often were treated with disdain. There was no other illness or condition that would produce more terror and pity than would leprosy. Individuals with this visible malady were banned from any social interaction and often were forced to live in a designated camp. Whenever others came near, they were obligated to shout “Unclean! Unclean!” in order to warn people to move away and avoid infection. Because Jesus felt compassion for this man, He cured him instantly and then sent him away with instructions not to tell anyone. But the cured man could not keep this wonderful act of love to himself, and he started to share it with everyone.

Jesus felt compassion, not only when people lacked the basic physical necessities but also when they were without leadership, direction, or aims. Thus, before providing food for them, He felt their deep spiritual needs and proceeded to teach them about the kingdom of God.

Christ’s compassion can be seen, too, in Mark 9:36, where Jesus emphasized physical touch. He held children and showed love and affection for them. He also reached out and touched diseased people in order to communicate divine healing power.

In the encounter with the rich young ruler (*Mark 10:21, 22*), Jesus loved him even though the young man did not follow the Master’s directions. In an instant, both men experienced strong emotions—love (Jesus) and sadness (the rich young ruler).

**What are ways that you express compassion? That is, it’s one thing to feel compassion (most people do that), but it’s another to express it by concrete deeds. How might you through words and deeds better reveal the compassion you feel for those who are hurting?**

## Jesus' Emotional Manifestations: Part 2

Read Luke 19:41–44. What led Jesus to shed tears over Jerusalem? No doubt it was over the sorrow He felt as He looked into the future and viewed Jerusalem's fate. But even more so, He felt sorrow for the many city dwellers who had rejected Him. "The tears of Jesus upon the mount, when he overlooked the city of his love and care, while in the midst of the rejoicing and hosannas of thousands, were the last pleadings of rejected love and compassion."—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 20.

The Gospel writers record two occasions on which Jesus wept. People usually cry for themselves, but on these occasions Jesus' sorrow came from a deep feeling for others.

**What** were some of the painful emotions Jesus experienced in the following contexts? *Matt. 26:37, 38; Mark 3:5; 8:12; John 11:32–38; Mark 11:15, 16.* **What** caused the emotions He experienced?

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The first few verses of Isaiah 53 confirm that Jesus was a man of sorrows. Even though He experienced many moments of joy, He also felt severe emotional pain. Much of Jesus' suffering had to do with feelings of frustration when His followers did not grasp His message. In spite of the abounding love of Jesus and His supernatural signs, many did not understand that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus also suffered greatly as He observed the results of sin upon humankind.

The events around Lazarus' death caused Him great sorrow too. John tells us that Jesus groaned in the spirit (*John 11:33*). This is a translation of the Greek word that indicates a very strong display of emotional turmoil, accompanied by an audible sound from the throat and nose. Greek playwright Aeschylus (525–456 B.C.) uses the same word to describe the snorting of horses. The word is used five times in the New Testament, four of them to describe Jesus' emotion.

**Contemplating the emotional experiences of Jesus can help us understand how much He can relate to our own emotional turmoil. Look at this text: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses" (*Heb. 4:15, NIV*). How can the message of this text bring us into a closer bond with Jesus, especially in times of suffering?**

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## God's Plan for Painful Emotions

**Read** John 16:20–24. What is Jesus' promise in regard to pain and grief?

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The passage offers great hope to anyone going through physical or psychological pain. Here are a few things that can be learned from this text:

- *The world seems to be full of joy.* Often the believer looks around and is reminded of the unfairness of life. Wicked people seem to enjoy themselves, while many committed to God are in pain. But Jesus assures us that this will not go on forever. Besides, appearances often are deceiving. We naturally tend to view others as being happier and more successful than we are.

- *Grief, sorrow, and anguish will turn to joy.* This is the core of Jesus' promise. Believers must treasure the idea that sorrow will not only pass away but give way to joy.

- *Past pain will be forgotten.* Memories of the unpleasant past often cause much distress. Many psychotherapists work painstakingly to remove the effects of the past in their client's present life. Jesus assures us that, just as a woman gives birth and forgets about the pains at the sight of the newborn, His followers will one day move beyond the pain of the past.

- *No one will take away our joy.* The type of joy Jesus offered is not the same as we now understand it. Jesus is offering us total happiness, an eternal condition that no enemy can take away from the saved.

- *There will be no needs.* Jesus affirms that the righteous will no longer ask anything. They will not need to make requests and supplications to Jesus, because all their needs will have been met.

**How can you hold fast to the promise that your sorrow will turn to joy? How can this assurance help you pass through the adversities of life? How could you use Jesus' promises to encourage someone in grief?**

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**Further Study:** “As the piercing look of Jesus swept the desecrated court of the temple, all eyes were instinctively turned toward him. The voices of the people and the noise of the cattle were hushed. Priest, ruler, Pharisee and Gentile all looked with mute astonishment and indefinable awe upon the Son of God, who stood before them with the majesty of Heaven’s King, divinity flashing through humanity and investing him with a dignity and glory he had never before displayed. A strange fear fell upon the people. Those nearest Jesus instinctively drew as far from him as the crowd would permit. With the exception of a few of his disciples the Saviour stood alone. All sound was hushed; the deep silence seemed unbearable, and when the firm, compressed lips of Jesus parted, and his voice rang out in clarion tones, there was an involuntary groan or sigh of relief from all present.

“He spoke in clear accents and with a power that caused the people to sway as if moved by a mighty tempest: ‘It is written, My house is the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.’ He descended the steps, and, with greater authority than he had there manifested three years before, with indignation that quenched all opposition, in tones that rang like a trumpet through the whole temple, commanded, ‘Take these things hence.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, pp. 23, 24.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- 1** How would you describe the emotions of Jesus as expressed in the above passage? What lessons can we learn from this about how many emotions, if properly channeled, can be a source of good?
- 2** How can negative emotions be compensated with positive ones? Consider the experience of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, who went to look at Jesus’ tomb, and were “afraid yet filled with joy” (*Matt. 28:8, NIV*).
- 3** Jewish communities celebrate Purim to remember the time that “their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration” (*Esther 9:22, NIV*). Discuss with your class ways to make sure we do not forget the many times our sorrow has turned into joy. Share with the class times you have experienced this emotional change.
- 4** How can we learn to cling to God’s promises when, for now, they seem so distant and unattainable?

## What is it Worth?

What is your faith worth? What would you be willing to give up to follow Christ today?

At a recent evangelistic series held in Kenya, several young people made decisions for Christ that may cost them everything.

Dorcas is 19 and recently graduated from high school. She wants to be a doctor. Her family attends church every Sunday.

She overheard some young people talking about the evangelistic meetings being held in town. They described the singing and the movies being shown.

Dorcas decided to go, even though she had heard that the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which sponsored the meetings, was a cult. She was impressed by the young people who talked about health and family life before each meeting, and the speakers who preached from their open Bibles, explaining each point carefully. Dorcas sensed that these pastors were teaching God's truth, and she wanted to know more about what Adventists believe.

At first her parents didn't mind her attending the meetings. But when they saw her deepening interest, they became worried and demanded that she stop attending the meetings. Her mother and other relatives put pressure on Dorcas to stop attending the meetings, and her father told her that her education was over if she became an Adventist.

But Dorcas had discovered God's truth, and she wasn't willing to give it up. She was determined to follow God, no matter what the cost. "Truth is more important to me than a family or an education," she says. Dorcas continued studying the Bible and was baptized. Her family has told her to leave their home, so she is now staying with an Adventist family in town, where she can continue attending the follow-up meetings.

"I don't think I made a mistake," she says. "I know God has a plan for my life, and I must be patient and let God work that plan out."

Dorcas isn't alone. Several other young people have made similar decisions. But for some, like Brenda, the story ends differently. She rejoiced when her parents began attending the meetings, and today that family looks forward to baptism together.

In many places faith isn't free. Please pray for these youth who are willing to give up so much for God. And thank you for giving your mission offerings, which help make evangelism, especially in difficult places, possible.

# Divine Provision *for* Anxiety



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 3:6–10; 15:1–3; John 14:1, 2; Matt. 6:25–34; 18:3; Phil. 4:11, 12.*

**Memory Text:** “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (*1 Peter 5:7, NIV*).

Scripture is filled with verses containing words such as *afraid*, *anxiety*, *anxious*, *fret*, *frightened*, and *terrified*. Many references have to do with what people are anxious and fearful about; others with the promises of divine reassurance to those who are fearful or anxious. The message “Do not be afraid” runs across Scripture with strength and persistence.

And why not? After all, fear and anxiety have been part of human existence since sin entered this earth. Anxiety, or fear about what *may happen*, is one of the most dangerous emotions for mental and physical health. A medieval legend tells of the traveler who one night met Fear and Plague on their way to London, where they expected to kill 10,000 people. The traveler asked Plague if he would do all the killing. “Oh no,” Plague answered. “I shall kill only a few hundred. My friend Fear will kill the rest.”

This week's lesson is about how, through divine power, we can have some relief from fear and anxiety. Trust in God and contentment are key factors in looking at the future with confidence.

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

## The First Fearful Experience

Read Genesis 3:6–10. It is difficult to relate to Adam and Eve’s first encounter with fear, because none of us can remember the first time we experienced this emotion. Developmental psychologists have confirmed that infants from early life face definite fears, mostly of going hungry and of sharp noises. Growing children and adolescents go through a variety of fears, as well: fear of animals, of darkness, of being alone; fear of school-related situations, separation from parents, fear of not growing up, or of being rejected by peers. Adults also are subject to common apprehensions associated with their particular life circumstances: fear of not finding a suitable life partner, of not finding the right job, of terrorist attacks, of contracting a chronic or fatal disease, of being assaulted, of dying, etc.

Ellen G. White says that after Adam ate the forbidden fruit, “the thought of his sin filled him with terror” and that the mild temperature of Eden chilled the guilty couple. They were left with “a sense of sin, a dread of the future, a nakedness of soul.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 57.

**Consider** the following sample of promises against fear and anxiety. Identify the distinctive component of each of them.

*Ps. 23:4* \_\_\_\_\_

*Prov. 1:33* \_\_\_\_\_

*Hag. 2:5* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 Pet. 3:14* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 4:18, 19* \_\_\_\_\_

Fear and anxiety are very common. They also are frequent, destructive, and painful. Common anxiety symptoms include apprehension, worry, insomnia, jitters, tension, headaches, fatigue, dizziness, palpitations, breathlessness, sweating, difficulty in concentrating, and hypervigilance. Anxiety also may come with panic attacks. God is interested in freeing us from such undesirable experiences and invites us to trust in Him.

**What things make you especially afraid, and why? How rational is your fear? What practical steps can you take either to remove the thing that makes you afraid or to alleviate the fear itself?**

## Do Not Be Afraid

**Read** Genesis 15:1–3. What was Abram’s source of fear? What valid reasons did he have to fear?

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God called Abram and promised to make him into a great nation. Seeing that years passed by and he had no heir, Abram dwelt on this issue, and it became his favorite worry. Verses 2 and 3 (*NIV*) reveal the core of Abram’s fear: “ ‘Who will inherit my estate? . . . A servant in my household will be my heir!’ ” The attitude seems a generalized reaction inherent to human nature, which is to perpetuate something of ourselves, something to carry on our influence even after we die.

God’s response to Abram’s concerns was, “ ‘Do not be afraid. . . . I am your shield, your very great reward’ ” (*Gen. 15:1, NIV*). The future of our lives, and our future, even after our death, is in the hands of our heavenly Father. He knows that freedom from anxiety is one of our greatest needs, and He wants us to be content today and confident about tomorrow.

**Look** up the following texts. What were the circumstances into which the Lord’s reassuring message “ ‘Do not be afraid’ ” (*NIV*) is introduced?

*Deut. 31:8* \_\_\_\_\_

2 *Chron. 20:17* \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 21:9* \_\_\_\_\_

*John 14:27* \_\_\_\_\_

Anxiety is manifested through distress about uncertainties. Such uncertainties may be near or far in the future, and they may not even happen; for the time being, they exist only in the mind. Yet, the symptoms of anxiety are quite real, both emotionally and physically, and can be painful. No wonder the Lord wishes to free us from them.

**How can you best use God’s assurance—“Do not fear”—in whatever situation you are in? How can you remember that no matter what you are facing, God is stronger and bigger than that challenge and that He loves you with a love greater than the fears you have?**



## Trust Against Anxiety

**Reflect** on the comforting words of Jesus to His disciples in John 14:1, 2. What happened immediately before? Where does He direct their thoughts?

These loving words encourage trust. Trust in the Father, trust in Jesus, because this is a trust that can free the troubled heart from gazing at the future in distress. Jesus immediately takes the disciples' attention to the kingdom that He is preparing for them. In other words, no matter what happens to you here, no matter how bad things are, this is what you have waiting for you. Thus, trust in Me and My promises. This is what Jesus said to them then and is saying to us now.

In some counseling sessions clients act out roles relevant to real-life situations that lead to increased self-confidence and enhanced self-esteem. In addition, they learn how to manage their thoughts when anxiety is near, so that the mind may be focused on safe themes. They also are taught relaxation and breathing techniques to be used in critical situations.

Although those strategies enjoy a relatively high level of success, they focus on gaining trust in oneself in order to reduce the chances of feeling anxious. This is acceptable but incomplete, because trust in ourselves is but a small step. We need, in the end, to learn to trust in God.

**How** does the psalmist compare trust in God with trust in humanity?  
*Ps. 118:8, 9.*

**What** is Jesus saying to us in Matthew 18:3?

The first task of infants is to develop trust in their mother or caregiver. Once this has been accomplished, little ones will feel content and confident about the world and the future that awaits them. This is the beginning of trust. Jesus asked us to relate to Him as a child relates to his or her mother, allowing ourselves to be soothed and comforted by His tender care. We, though, have to make a conscious choice to do just that.

**Spend a few moments remembering the times when God has answered your prayers or provided the best for you. How can previous experiences such as these help you to enhance your trust in your heavenly Father today for whatever difficult situation you are facing and for whatever is making you feel anxious and worried?**

## Of Birds and Lilies

**Aside** from Jesus' kind advice to avoid worry, what lessons can we obtain from this segment of the Sermon on the Mount? *Matt. 6:25–33.*

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Through this powerful text Jesus teaches a number of principles that, if seriously followed, can protect the believer from much distress.

*Keep things in perspective (vs. 25).* A hectic schedule may make us lose sight of the truly important things. Daily routines may distract us from what we believe to be fundamental. God gave us life. God created our bodies. If He has the power and the willingness to do that, will He not provide food to maintain His creation? Will He not arrange for the necessary garments to dress our bodies?

*Become inspired by simple things from nature (vss. 26, 28–30).* Sparrows and lilies are among the most common things in nature. Jesus chose them as a contrast to the immense complexity of human beings. It is obvious that sparrows do not worry about tomorrow and that lilies do not toil to obtain the latest fashion; yet, they are well taken care of. “‘Will he not much more clothe you?’ ” (vs. 30, *NIV*).

*Worry is useless and pointless (vs. 27).* Examining problems in order to find possible solutions may be productive, but worrying for the sake of worrying not only does nothing to solve the issue but magnifies the negative side of things.

*Straighten out your priorities (vs. 33).* Christians sometimes may be caught in the whirl of materialism or other things that can distract them from what really matters in life. Thus, Jesus reminds them: “‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you’ ” (*NKJV*).

Winston Churchill said: “I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened.”—[http://www.saidwhat.co.uk/quotes/political/winston\\_churchill](http://www.saidwhat.co.uk/quotes/political/winston_churchill).

**Take a look at the things that worry you, and then kneel down and pray, asking God to take charge of all your worries. What are the concerns that you can have a part in fixing? What things are absolutely beyond your control? Do what you can to fix what you can, and then ask the Lord to help you learn to trust in Him for the rest.**

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## One Day at a Time

**Read** Matthew 6:34. What is Jesus telling us here? How can we learn to do what He says? Why is it so important?

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Putting into practice the message of Matthew 6:34 would bring so much peace to people today. Jesus is not asking us to ignore planning or to be careless. He simply is telling us not to worry about what may happen, not to use the typical “What if” thoughts: “What if I get sick?” “What if I lose my job?” “What if I have an accident?” “What if my child dies?” “What if someone attacks me?”

The following list shows the various things that make up an average person’s anxiety. Anxious individuals focus on:

1. Fifty percent of events that will never happen
2. Twenty-five percent of occurrences of the past that cannot be changed
3. Ten percent about unconfirmed criticism by others
4. Ten percent about health (much of it apprehensive)
5. Five percent about real problems that will be faced

**How** can you gain inspiration from Paul’s experience of contentment? *Phil. 4:11, 12.*

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One of the keys for living one day at a time is contentment, an effective antidote for worry. Contentment is not an inheritable attitude but an acquired characteristic. Paul said that “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation” (*vs. 12, NIV*). In this day and age, in which we face so many problems, there is a need to develop a sense of contentment for what we presently have and not to worry about what might come tomorrow.

**Jesus said: “ ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid’ ” (*John 14:27, NIV*). In practical terms, how do you benefit from Jesus’ assurance of peace of mind? Share your answer in class on Sabbath. What can you learn from each other?**

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**Further Study:** “It is not work that kills; it is worry. The only way to avoid worry is to take every trouble to Christ. Let us not look on the dark side. Let us cultivate cheerfulness of spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, p. 466.

“If we educated our souls to have more faith, more love, greater patience, a more perfect trust in our heavenly Father, we would have more peace and happiness as we pass through the conflicts of this life. The Lord is not pleased to have us fret and worry ourselves out of the arms of Jesus. He is the only source of every grace, the fulfillment of every promise, the realization of every blessing. . . . Our pilgrimage would indeed be lonely were it not for Jesus. ‘I will not leave you comfortless’ (John 14:18), He says to us. Let us cherish His words, believe His promises, repeat them by day and meditate upon them in the night season, and be happy.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, p. 468.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, go over your answer to Thursday’s final question.
- 2 Some, without any real immediate reason for concern, are afraid to suffer and die; others actually are experiencing a debilitating or terminal disease that will likely kill them. Others perhaps truly are facing another life-threatening situation. How can people in those circumstances be comforted?
- 3 Jacob showed “great fear and distress” (*Gen. 32:7, NIV*) in preparing to meet Esau. Joseph’s brothers were “terrified” (*Gen. 45:3, NIV*) when Joseph revealed his true identity. Discuss acceptable ways to deal with fears that come from our own wrongdoing. Is there a difference in dealing with fears that we have brought upon ourselves through our own wrong actions? If so, what is the difference?
- 4 Job affirmed: “What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me” (*Job 3:25, NIV*). Can our fears become real by the “self-fulfilling prophecy” effect? In other words, can a constant worry about something happening actually help bring about the thing feared? Discuss.
- 5 Think about all the things you have worried about that never came to pass. What lessons can you learn from these experiences that should, ideally, help you worry less about the future now?

## A Simple Invitation

by NEDYALKA ANGELOVA

Nedy listened patiently as her neighbor talked about a Bible study class she attended. Nedy is a science teacher in Bulgaria. She had tried several times to read the Bible, but even though she had a keen analytical mind, she couldn't understand it. So when her friend invited her to attend the Bible study class, she accepted. "I wanted to broaden my knowledge," she said. "I wasn't looking for God."

Nedy went to the Bible class prepared to take notes. But as the speaker lectured, she was struck by the profound lessons this man drew from the Bible. She continued attending the class and soaked up God's love. She told her husband, Nikolai, a retired military officer, what she was learning. But he responded, "You may go if you want, but don't bother me with religion."

Nedy knew that Nikolai wanted nothing to do with religion, but she continued to share with him what she was learning. Nedy's interest in the Bible grew, and she accepted her friend's invitation to attend the Sabbath worship services.

When the church organized a health expo, Nedy invited Nikolai to go with her, but he made no promises. So she was surprised to see him there. She learned that a friend also had invited him to attend, and he had agreed to go. The expo and the church members who sponsored it impressed Nikolai, and the following week he surprised Nedy by saying, "I want to go to church with you this week."

Nikolai stopped drinking and smoking and started attending church regularly. As their faith in God grew, they decided to be baptized together. "I never dreamed that a simple invitation to a Bible study class would change our lives so completely," Nedy says. "We're so much happier now than we were before we met Christ. I thank God for the faithful Adventists who invited us and who introduced us to God."



Our mission offerings help fund health expos and many other outreach programs that reach people for Christ around the world. Thank you for giving.

NEDYALKA and NIKOLAI ANGELOV (left) live in Yambol, Bulgaria.

# Stress

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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *1 Kings 17:2–4, 15, 16; 19:1, 2; Mark 6:31–34; Gal. 6:2; John 15:13.*

**Memory Text:** “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (*Matthew 11:28, NIV*).

Stress touches everyone. Demands at work, family crises, guilt, uncertainty about the future, dissatisfaction with the past—these all are hard enough. All this, along with the general events of life, can put enough pressure on people that it affects their physical and mental health. Researchers Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe developed the social readjustment rating scale, which lists life events with corresponding stress values for each: the death of spouse—100; personal injury or illness—53; change in residence—20; etc. A person accumulating 200 or more points at any given time runs a 50 percent chance of becoming ill; someone accruing 300 or more will reach a point of crisis. Moderate amounts of stress are necessary to increase performance, but beyond a point, stress becomes a health hazard.

Jesus shows by precept and example that seeking God at a quiet time and place is the best remedy for life's stresses (*Mark 6:31*). If we will allow Him to, the Lord will help us deal with the pressures that are such an inevitable part of life here.

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

## Exciting Life Events

**How** did God provide for Elijah's survival during the long drought in Israel? *1 Kings 17:2–6, 15, 16.*

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In the midst of a long famine, Elijah must have felt very close to the Lord, who took such personal care of him. First, he had the opportunity to witness ravens (normally nasty birds) come twice a day to feed him. Talk about a miracle! Then he saw endless rations of bread coming from a little oil and meal—enough food to feed three persons for two years. How much more evidence of God's providential care would anyone need?

Ellen G. White applied the lessons of this story to God's faithful people in the last days: "I saw that our bread and water will be sure at that time, and that we shall not lack or suffer hunger; for God is able to spread a table for us in the wilderness. If necessary He would send ravens to feed us, as He did to feed Elijah."—*Early Writings*, p. 56.

**What** were some of the other things that happened to Elijah, and what lessons can we draw from them for ourselves? *1 Kings 17:17–22; 18:23–39, 45.*

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God used Elijah to resurrect the widow's son. What a test of faith, and what a vindication of God's power over life and death! Next, the test at Mount Carmel was an irrefutable and spectacular demonstration of God's power. Finally, heavy rain after a three-year drought was another manifestation of God's involvement in human affairs. Elijah's life was full of direct and divine intervention. It's hard to imagine how anyone, after all that, could not fully trust in the Lord; yet, not long after all that, Elijah was swept up in the symptoms of stress and discouragement (see tomorrow's lesson).

Thus, there's an important lesson here. Regardless of the miracles in our lives, we always will face obstacles. No one, not even a prophet like Elijah, is immune to the troubles that life brings.

**Are success and achievement bringing you stress? A long series of exhilarating events (even positive ones) may add much weight to your load. At the same time, why must we be careful not to be too self-satisfied during good times?**

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## Bitter Life Events

Read 1 Kings 18:40. Whether or not Elijah took part himself in the killing of hundreds of people, he was clearly in charge of the operation, and that must have been an emotionally devastating experience. This act was permitted by God as the only way to eradicate the idolatry, which included the sacrifice of children (*Jer. 19:5*). Nevertheless, it surely must have taken an emotional toll on the prophet.

**On top of the stress of that ordeal, what else did Elijah face?** *1 Kings 19:1, 2.*

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From the beginning of Ahab's reign, the wicked queen had been adamant that her husband should "serve Baal and worship him" (*1 Kings 16:31, NIV*). As a result, all of Israel had fallen into idolatrous practices. Jezebel was instrumental in restoring the worship of Ashtoreth, one of the vilest and most degrading forms of Canaanite idolatry. Now, with the death of all the priests, Jezebel felt impatient and enraged.

**How did Elijah react to the message brought from Jezebel?** *1 Kings 19:3, 4.*

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How could this man of God, after having witnessed a series of wonderful miracles, be in such a state of despair? How did he reach the point of asking God to take his life? After all, look at the miracles he had seen and even had been involved in!

"Satan has taken advantage of the weakness of humanity. And he will still work in the same way. Whenever one is encompassed with clouds, perplexed by circumstances, or afflicted by poverty or distress, Satan is at hand to tempt and annoy. He attacks our weak points of character. He seeks to shake our confidence in God, who suffers such a condition of things to exist."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 120.

**How often have you done the same thing: forgetting the incredible way the Lord has worked for you in the past? Why is it so important, especially during times of despair and stress, to cling to the memories of how God has worked in your life in the past? Why do we so easily forget what the Lord has done for us? How can praise and worship help you through difficult times?**



## God's Therapy

**Read** 1 Kings 19:5–9. What were the simple remedies provided for Elijah during this stressful time in his life? What can we take from this for ourselves? How are our physical actions impacting, either for good or for bad, our mental attitude?

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Sleep. Eat. Sleep again. Eat again. And then engage in intense physical exercise—forty days and forty nights; from Mount Carmel to Mount Horeb. How interesting that proper sleep, exercise, and a healthy diet often are prescribed to combat psychological stress.

A common treatment for mood disorders is called activity scheduling. It consists of developing a rigid timetable that contains pleasant and purposeful activities that will force a depressed person to organize, anticipate, and carry out events. Such a regimen helps the person fill time positively and avoid self-pity. Physical exercise often is included in the activities, because it helps produce endorphins, morphine-like natural chemicals that enhance mood and temporarily relieve depression.

With heavenly guidance Elijah was led into the steps that would restore his normal mental health. As with Elijah, we need to be open to divine leading. As soon as Elijah sat down under the broom tree, he prayed. Yes, it was the wrong kind of prayer (asking God to take his life), but at least it was a prayer, a desire for God to take charge.

Over time Elijah overcame his terrible discouragement, and God still was able to use him (*see 1 Kings 19:15, 16; 2 Kings 2:7–11*). Before being taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah was given the great privilege of anointing his successor, and of witnessing the separation of the waters of the Jordan River, thus permitting him and Elisha to cross the river on dry ground.

Finally, Elijah was taken to heaven, without ever having to die himself. Kind of an ironic “end” for a man who, not too much earlier, was asking God to take his life!

**What are we missing out on if we pray only in times of discouragement and despair? Contrast the benefits of a life of constant prayer as opposed to prayer only in emergency situations. How can you learn to live more consistently in an attitude of constant prayer?**

## Jesus' Method to Manage Stress

With the blossoming of cell phones in the mid-1990s, a veteran Adventist minister said, "I will never have one! As I visit churches and listen to people's problems, I get weary and distressed. But when I return to my car, I find refuge. If I had a cell phone, I wouldn't find rest even in my car." Every follower of Christ needs a quiet hiding place to find calm, to pray, and to listen to God through His Written Word.

**Read** Mark 6:31. What lesson can we take from this for ourselves? How often do you do this for yourself, or do you always have an excuse?

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Speaking of Jesus, Ellen G. White wrote: "His hours of happiness were found when alone with nature and with God. Whenever it was His privilege, He turned aside from the scene of His labor, to go into the fields, to meditate in the green valleys, to hold communion with God on the mountainside or amid the trees of the forest. The early morning often found Him in some secluded place, meditating, searching the Scriptures, or in prayer. From these quiet hours He would return to His home to take up His duties again, and to give an example of patient toil."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 90.

**What** other sanctuary did Jesus have? *Matt. 21:17, Mark 11:11.*

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People may be a source either of distress or of peace. Jesus found peace with friends who brought comfort and affection to His life. This He found at the house of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. "His heart was knit by a strong bond of affection to the family at Bethany. . . . Often, when weary, thirsting for human fellowship, He had been glad to escape to this peaceful household. . . . Our Saviour appreciated a quiet home and interested listeners. He longed for human tenderness, courtesy, and affection."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 524.

**How can you apply Jesus' stress management method to your life? What advice would you give to a city dweller who needs to travel for hours to find nature? Or to someone who lives in an extended family with a large number of people under the same roof? Whom would you go to, among your family/friends, if you found yourself disoriented and in need of emotional support?**

## Bringing Relief to Others

**What** are the specific features about Jesus' behavior that Peter used to describe his Master? *Acts 10:38.*

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Jesus' style was fundamentally selfless. He utilized all His energy to serve others, to bring them relief through His kind words and healing power. Jesus never used His divine powers to benefit Himself. This must have made such an impression on Peter that his description of the Savior was of someone who “ ‘went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil’ ” (*vs. 38, NIV*).

In the majority of cases, the pressure brought about by work, relationships, money, etc., is self-centered. Focusing on others (rather than on oneself) is a good way to remove personal pressure. People who engage in voluntary work, community projects, etc., report greater feelings of well-being and satisfaction than people who do not.

**Read** Galatians 6:2, Philippians 2:4, and John 15:13. What message is in there for us?

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John D. Rockefeller (1839–1937) provided an example of how to survive stress by moving the focus from oneself to others. By 1879 his company, Standard Oil, handled about 90 percent of the refining in the United States. By the age of 50, he was the richest man alive. But in 1891, he had a nervous breakdown and was near death. However, he recovered from his illness in just a few months.

How?

Apart from a simple diet, rest, and exercise, he decided to give away his fortune and spent the remaining 40 years of his life as a philanthropist. Early in the twentieth century, his personal fortune peaked at nearly \$900 million. At the time of his death, his estate was valued at \$26 million. His donations did a lot of good in the world. And as for himself, he extended his life by nearly another fifty years, living in contentment to the age of 97.

**What has been your own experience with the blessings that come from serving others? Why not make a concentrated and prayerful effort to do more?**

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**Further Study:** “Utterly wearied, he [Elijah] sat down to rest under a juniper tree. And sitting there, he requested for himself that he might die. . . . A fugitive, far from the dwelling places of men, his spirits crushed by bitter disappointment, he desired never again to look upon the face of man. . . . Into the experience of all there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement—days when sorrow is the portion, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind benefactor of His earthborn children; days when troubles harass the soul, till death seems preferable to life. It is then that many lose their hold on God and are brought into the slavery of doubt, the bondage of unbelief. Could we at such times discern with spiritual insight the meaning of God’s providences we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, striving to plant our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills, and new faith, new life, would spring into being.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 162.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Have you ever had times during which you clearly saw the hand of God working in your life, and your faith was strong, only to sink low right after and find yourself filled with doubts about God and His leading in your life? What have you learned from that kind of experience that could help others who might be facing the same thing?
- 2 What is it about helping others that makes us feel better? Why is that so often the case? At the same time, why is it so hard to give of ourselves to others? How can we learn to be more willing to die to self in order to serve the needs of those around us better?
- 3 Take a good look at your own health habits. What are you eating and drinking? What kind of exercise program are you on? How much leisure time do you have? What changes can you make that could help you feel better emotionally, as well as physically? Though in some cases, people have very serious psychological needs that must be professionally addressed, many times a change in lifestyle habits can make a big difference in how we feel.
- 4 How much “spare” time do you have? What do you do with that time? How could you better utilize that time to enhance your relationship with God?

# The Prodigal

by ALBERTO VILLANUEVA

As a youth growing up in Mexico, I found no reason to live. I was deeply into alcoholism and was having problems with my family.

Then I met a Seventh-day Adventist man who gave me an old, well-marked Bible. I read the Bible, especially the marked verses, and was amazed that God's Word was so alive, so vital! I began attending church with the man and continued reading the Bible. God rescued me from my hopeless life and gave me a ministry to help people who are living as I once lived.

I met a family who was distant relatives of my wife. The husband and I became friends, but when I asked him for permission to study the Bible with his family, he said no, explaining that they were members of another faith. As we talked, I prayed that God would open this man's heart. As I prepared to leave, he said, "Come back soon and share the Bible with us!"

When I returned to study with this family, Jorge, one of the sons, stomped angrily from the room. Whenever I went to visit the family, Jorge would leave the room. But we continued studying together, and the family members accepted the Bible truths they discovered. Then one evening Jorge joined the Bible studies. And when seven members of the family asked to join the church, Jorge was among them. Only later did I learn that Jorge had been so angry about the Bible studies that he had plotted to kill me.

I shared the gospel with people in a mountain village some distance from my home. One day I noticed that some men were following me to the home of an interested family. The man I was visiting saw the men and warned me to be careful, that these men were dangerous.

Then he told the men who had followed me, "Leave him alone. He's a missionary who has come to share God's love with us." The thieves didn't bother me again. Eventually, seven people in this village joined God's church.

I love sharing the gospel with others as someone shared it with me. I praise God that He has led me to some 50 people who have committed their hearts to Christ.

Please pray for those who still live without hope. And remember that your mission offerings help make a difference in the lives of those who need to know about God's love.

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ALBERTO VILLANUEVA *shares his faith in Morelos, Mexico.*

# Relationships



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *1 Samuel 25; Eph. 4:1–3; 1 Pet. 3:9–12; Luke 17:3, 4; 23:34; James 5:16.*

**Memory Text:** “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets’ ” (*Matthew 7:12, NIV*).

An experienced urban evangelist used to organize stress management seminars as an introduction to evangelistic meetings in cities. He had devised a simple survey in which he asked the audience to list four or five things that caused them the most stress. Workers grouped the answers in general categories (health, money, work, relationships, etc.). Before the count was completed, one worker saw that the speaker already had a prepared set of transparencies to discuss “relationships” as the number one source. When questioned, the pastor explained that the results had always been the same: bad relationships always came up as the primary cause of stress.

Whether problems with spouse, children, boss, work associate, neighbor, friend, or enemy, people tend to be the principal stressor. In contrast, when relationships are positive, they are a powerful source of satisfaction. This seems consistent across geography and culture. People make us happy, or people make us miserable.

That’s why this week we’ll spend some time focusing on the important topic of relationships and what the Bible teaches us about them.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 22.*

## Completely Humble and Gentle

**Read** Ephesians 4:1–3. Why do you think Paul connects humility, gentleness, and patience with good relationships and unity? Recall examples of your own experience in which the above attitudes have made a positive impact on relationships.

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**Read** 1 Samuel 25. What can we learn from the actions of Abigail and David regarding proper behavior in difficult and tense situations?

The story of David, Nabal, and Abigail provides an excellent example of successful social interaction. Results vary significantly depending on how individuals present themselves—as superiors, as equals, or as humble friends or associates.

David sent his soldiers to Nabal with a fair request. “We have protected your men and your property; give us whatever you can find” (*1 Sam. 25:7, 8, author’s paraphrase*). But Nabal didn’t know about kindness or diplomacy. We are told that he was a harsh and evil man. Other translations use terms such as *surlly, mean, brutish, rough, dishonest, churlish, and rude*. And he surely displayed these traits before David’s warriors.

In contrast, notice David’s initial attitude. Even though he held the military power, his message was full of care and humility, wishing Nabal and his household long life and good health, introducing himself as “your son David” (*vs. 8, NIV*).

As for Abigail, the Bible tells us that she was intelligent and beautiful. Notice her behavior: she provided an abundant amount of choice food; she ran to appease David, bowed down before him, addressed herself as “your servant” and David as “my master,” and asked for forgiveness. She also reminded David that as a man of God, he needed to avoid needless bloodshed.

The result of Abigail’s tactful and humble action brought about a complete turn in David’s intentions. He praised the Lord for sending her and praised her for her good judgment. This effective mediation, full of godly spirit, saved the lives of many innocent men. As for Nabal, David did not need to shed blood, because the man died—probably of heart failure—a victim of his own fear.

**It’s easy (usually) to be kind to those we like. But what about those we don’t? Think of those you find very disagreeable. How would they react if you displayed a humble and gentle attitude toward them? Through God’s grace, give it a try (remembering, too, that you might not always be the most likable and lovable soul either).**

## Repaying Evil With Blessings

**What** is the true intent of 1 Peter 3:8–12? What are some of the immediate ways you can apply these principles to your own life?

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Jesus upgraded the “eye for an eye” approach to turning the other cheek (*Matt. 5:38, 39*). This was a revolutionary concept then and still is today for many cultures and traditions. Unfortunately, even Christians rarely return good for evil. But Jesus keeps saying: “Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart” (*Matt. 11:29, NIV*).

A couple with small children was experiencing serious problems with their neighbors. On several occasions, and in nasty tones, these neighbors told the young parents how disagreeable it was to see play equipment installed in the yard and to hear the children playing on it. They complained about certain sections of the young family’s yard and how they were bothered by this and that. The young couple did not appreciate being talked to in such a harsh and unkind tone. After all, they were not doing anything against the neighborhood rules. One day, when the family was harvesting apples from the backyard apple trees, the mother decided to give the neighbors two freshly baked apple pies. The neighbors accepted the pies gladly. That simple act made a difference in their relationship, probably because they never would have expected anything like that from people whom they had been constantly harassing.

**How** did David pay back Saul’s constant attacks on his life? *1 Sam. 24:4–6*. What does this tell us about David’s character? How might we need to apply the same attitude in our own experience, especially when we might be having problems with someone who, in his or her own way, also could be “anointed of the Lord”?

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First Samuel records four times when David expressed the immorality of lifting his hand against “the Lord’s anointed.” Even though he had opportunities to take revenge, he repeatedly tried to approach and forgive the king. David chose a humble and godly manner in his dealings with someone who wasn’t kind to him.

Shouldn’t we all, in whatever situation we are facing, seek to do the same?



## Forgiveness

It is possible to appear to live a rich and meaningful religious life, yet have serious relational problems. It's a fact of life that as human beings we often cross each other and cause each other pain, even—and sometimes especially—in the church. Hence, how important we learn the art of forgiveness.

**Read** Ephesians 4:32. How well have you been applying this biblical truth in your life? Whom do you need to forgive, and why is it important for your own good to forgive them?

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Only in recent years has the counseling profession started to look more positively at the importance of spiritual principles for mental health. For decades religion and spirituality were seen by many psychologists and counselors as an underlying source of guilt and fear. Not so much anymore. Today many utilize the protective effects of a committed Christian viewpoint. “Therapies” such as prayer, spiritual journaling, memorization of key biblical texts, and forgiveness protocols are now recognized as helping many people overcome a variety of emotional disturbances. Forgiveness counts among the most soothing strategies, even if the ability to truly forgive and be forgiven comes only from God through a God-transformed heart (*Ezek. 36:26*).

**Read** Matthew 5:23–25; Luke 17:3, 4; 23:34. What do they teach us about forgiveness, as well?

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Sometimes one may think that forgiveness virtually is impossible to grant. But no human being will ever reach the extent of what Jesus bore in the way of pain and humiliation: the King and Creator of the universe was unjustly degraded and crucified by His creatures. Yet Jesus, in complete humility, cared for them enough to implore the Father for their forgiveness.

**At times people wrong others without a full understanding of the pain they are causing. Other times people offend because they are insecure or have personal problems, and so they try to obtain relief by hurting others. How can the awareness of others' problems help you offer forgiveness? How can you learn to forgive those who are purposely trying to hurt you?**

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## Confess Your Sins to Each Other

**How** do you interpret James's recommendation to confess sins to one another? *James 5:16*. Dwell on this verse and ask yourself how you need to apply its teaching to your own situation.

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Sins against my neighbor require my confession to him or her in order to secure forgiveness and to restore the relationship. It also shows that I am willing to take the responsibility for what I have done and that I trust and hope for acceptance and forgiveness. By God's grace, a noble soul will grant forgiveness, regardless of the size of the offense.

There is an additional interpretation of James's text, which offers great healing possibilities. Confessing sins, errors, and transgressions to someone you trust brings about emotional healing. Opening up one's own imperfection to a godly Christian friend will help alleviate the burden of sin. In addition, mutual confession deepens interpersonal relationships. Trusting and being trusted provide the bonding that will make a friendship genuine and lasting.

In fact, the entire counseling profession is founded upon the principle that talking is good for the soul. Although there are mental disorders that necessitate professional treatment, many feelings of distress can be relieved at the church and community levels. And this is especially true for problems created by the deterioration of interpersonal relationships—misunderstandings, slander, jealousy, etc. Following James's advice not only will alleviate psychological burden but also bring renewed strength to change destructive behaviors.

A word of caution though. Although disclosure of committed sins to a close friend may bring much relief, it makes the person vulnerable. There is always the risk that our friend will reveal the confidence to others, and this is destructive to those involved.

Most important, we always can confess our trespasses to the Lord in full confidence and with the assured certainty of forgiveness. Read 1 Peter 5:7. Defective relationships may bring uncertainty and even fear and anxiety. Others may be able to help, but the surest aid comes from God, who is willing to take all our cares at any time, leaving us with a genuine sense of relief for having left our burdens in His hands.

## Building Others Up

**Read** the following texts, and ask yourself how you can apply the teaching to your own life. Why is this so important, not only for yourself but for others? *Eph. 4:29, 1 Thess. 5:11, Rom. 14:19.*

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Paul admonishes the early church communities to avoid the deterioration of personal relationships in the “body of Christ.” Many interpersonal difficulties come from tearing each other down and, in the process, hurting the entire community. People who engage in gossip and backbiting tend to have problems themselves—feelings of inferiority, the need to be noticed, a desire for control or power, and other insecurities. These people need help to abandon this hurtful way of dealing with their inner conflicts.

Indeed, feeling well about oneself helps to prevent being involved in gossip and slander. Members of the body of Christ need to consider themselves privileged for having received the gift of salvation (*Ps. 17:8, 1 Pet. 2:9*). With this understanding, the emphasis becomes building others up and working toward mutual edification. Words of encouragement and approval, emphasis on the positive side of things, humility, and a joyful attitude are ways of supporting those with personal problems.

Another way to help is to serve as relational mediators. Jesus calls peacemakers “‘blessed’ ” and “‘children of God’ ” (*Matt. 5:9*), and James says that peacemakers will reap “a harvest of righteousness” (*James 3:18, NIV*).

**Read** Matthew 7:12. Why is this so key to all relationships?

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This principle can be considered as a priceless jewel for social relationships. It is positive, it is based on love, it is universal, and it stretches above and beyond human law. The “golden rule” also brings about practical benefits to everyone involved.

A Chinese farmer was tending his rice paddy up in the mountain terraces overlooking the valley and the sea. One day he saw the beginning of a tidal wave—the sea retreated, leaving a wide portion of the bay exposed, and he knew that the water would return with force, destroying everything in the valley. He thought of his friends working in the valley and decided to set his rice field on fire. His friends immediately ran up the mountain to put the fire out and thus missed being killed in the tidal wave. As a result of this spirit of helping one another, their lives were saved.

The lesson is clear.

**Further Study:** Read Ephesians 4:25–32 and underline the words that touch your heart more directly. Reflect on all the things you can do, with God’s help, to improve your relationship with other people.

These are portions of a letter that Ellen White wrote in 1908 to an evangelist: “I have this message for you from the Lord: Be kind in speech, gentle in action. Guard yourself carefully, for you are inclined to be severe and dictatorial, and to say rash things. . . . Harsh expressions grieve the Lord; unwise words do harm. I am charged to say to you, Be gentle in your speech; watch well your words; let no harshness come into your utterances or into your gestures. . . .

“When the daily experience is one of looking unto Jesus and learning of Him, you will reveal a wholesome, harmonious character. Soften your representations, and let not condemnatory words be spoken. Learn of the great Teacher. Words of kindness and sympathy will do good as a medicine, and will heal souls that are in despair. The knowledge of the Word of God brought into the practical life will have a healing, soothing power. Harshness of speech will never bring blessing to yourself or to any other soul.”—*Gospel Workers*, pp. 163, 164.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 How much do you like to gossip? And even if you don’t do it yourself, how eager and open are you to hear gossip from others? Why, in a sense, is that just as bad as spreading gossip yourself? How can you stop being part of what can cause other people a great deal of pain?
- 2 Forgiveness can be so difficult, especially when we have been very badly hurt. How do you learn to forgive those who don’t ask for forgiveness, who don’t care about your forgiveness, and who might even scorn it? What is your responsibility in such cases?
- 3 Verbal and physical abuse within families is a reality that brings much pain to individuals and groups. What should be the Christian attitude to help prevent this problem? What should be recommended when forgiveness does not cause any change in abusive behavior?
- 4 Think over your life right now. What steps can you take to bring about an improvement in your relationships? Why are humility, trust in God, and a desire to do right so important in such a process?

# Standing for the Right

by PHYLLIS VALLIERES

Dorothy had been looking for work for two years, and at times she struggled to understand why God hadn't helped her find a job. Then a Bible text came to mind: "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent" (*Rev. 3:19, NIV*). Dorothy bowed her head and asked God to forgive her unbelief.

She arrived at a job interview and was asked to complete a test in electronic soldering. She had never soldered anything before, and the supervisor was amazed at her work. "Are you sure you've never done this type of work before?" he asked. Dorothy got the job.

Dorothy often sang as she worked beside Cindy, her supervisor. "Why are you so happy?" Cindy asked. When Dorothy said that Jesus is her personal friend, Cindy said, "I want what you have."

Dorothy gave Cindy a Bible. Cindy read it and asked questions about what she read. Before long Cindy gave her life to Christ.

Dorothy had been working for the company for several months when a supervisor announced that workers would have two weeks off with pay at Christmas, but that they must work four Saturdays to earn the vacation. Dorothy offered to work on Sundays instead, but the supervisor doubted whether it could be arranged. Dorothy said, "If God wants me to work here, He will work this out, but I will not work on His Sabbath."

Some coworkers sneered at her for asking for special privileges. Dorothy prayed, "God please don't leave me. I need your strength to stand firm."

Her request was granted, and Dorothy went to work on Sundays. There she met Jean and felt God telling her to talk to her. The two ate together, and Dorothy said, "God arranged for us to meet today." Jean agreed, for she wanted to know more about God. Dorothy arranged for her to study the Bible with some friends of hers, and soon Jean and her brother and her boyfriend were studying the Bible together. Several months later Jean and her boyfriend asked the pastor to marry them, and all three were baptized.

"It pays to stand for the right, even when I can't see where God is leading," Dorothy says.

We can share our faith with others as we give our mission offerings as well, for those funds help fund outreach programs around the world.

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PHYLLIS VALLIERES is a nursing instructor at Loyalist College in Ontario, Canada. Dorothy Burton continues to share her faith in Ontario, as well.

# Guilt



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 3:8–13; 1 John 1:9; Psalm 32; 1 Tim. 4:1, 2; Matt. 26:75; Rom. 8:1.*

**Memory Text:** “If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared” (*Psalm 130:3, 4, NIV*).

A sense of guilt is one of the most painful and incapacitating emotional experiences. It may cause shame, fear, sorrow, anger, distress, and even physical illness. Although often unpleasant, these feelings can be used by God to lead sinners to repentance and to the foot of the Cross, where they can find the forgiveness they've been longing for. Sometimes, however, the guilt mechanism makes people feel guilty about something for which they are not responsible, as in the case of some accident survivors or children of divorce.

But when the sense of guilt is justified, it serves as a good conscience. Guilt produces enough discomfort to make the person do something about it. Depending on personal choices, guilt may be highly destructive, as in the case of Judas, or highly positive, as in the case of Peter.

This week we will study four biblical accounts of guilt in order to understand this process better and to see what we can learn about it. We can see how, if properly channeled, guilt can be used by the Lord to our advantage. So much depends, really, on our attitude toward the guilt we feel and what we choose to do with it.

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

## Shame

**Read** Genesis 3:8–13. How did Adam and Eve manifest the guilt they experienced? What especially was bad about Adam’s reaction?

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Guilt was the first adverse emotion felt by the human race. Soon after Adam and Eve sinned, their behavior changed. They “hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (*vs. 8, NIV*). This unprecedented reaction indicated fear of their Father and Friend and, at the same time, their shame to face Him. Up until their fall, they had found joy in God’s presence, but now they hid before His approaching. A beautiful bond was broken. In addition to fear and shame, they felt sorrow, especially as they were made aware of the terrible consequences of having disobeyed God.

Notice Adam’s and Eve’s words: “ ‘The woman you put here with me . . .’ ” and “ ‘The serpent deceived me . . .’ ” (*NIV*). Guilt brings about a seemingly automatic reaction to place the blame on somebody else or to justify one’s own behavior with argumentation. Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, called this reaction “projection” and argued that people project their guilt on others or on circumstances in order to lighten the burden of guilt. This “projection” is considered a defense mechanism. But blaming others does not work well for interpersonal relationships and poses a barrier to God’s forgiveness. The true solution consists of accepting full responsibility for one’s own actions and seeking the only One who can provide freedom from guilt: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (*Rom. 8:1, NIV*).

Sometimes people suffer from guilt for the wrong reasons. Close relatives to those who commit suicide, survivors of a massive accident or calamity, and children of a recently divorced couple are typical examples of what is, in most instances, unfounded guilt. People in these situations need to be assured that they cannot be held responsible for the behavior of others or for unforeseeable events. And if in certain cases they do have some blame, they must take responsibility for their actions, seek forgiveness from those whom they have hurt, and then hold fast to such Bible promises as: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (*Ps. 103:12, NIV*).

**How do you find yourself reacting to guilt? Are you quick, as Adam was, to blame others for your wrong actions? How can you learn to face up to the things you have done wrong and then, through the grace of God, move on?**

## Joseph's Brothers' Distress

**What** particular remorse-eliciting memory lingered in the minds of Joseph's brothers? *Gen. 42:21*. What does that tell us about them?

Guilt is associated with a particular occurrence of the past, sometimes an image or a brief event that tends to be replayed mentally. Other times it takes the form of a flashback image that invades one's mind or appears in dreams or nightmares. The image of the adolescent Joseph pleading with his older brothers for his life must have come to Jacob's sons again and again.

**How** else did guilt affect Joseph's brothers? *Gen. 45:3*.

People affected by guilt think on it repeatedly, lamenting the fact that they did what they did, showing fear for the consequence, and entering into self-blame. Such rumination produces much distress, frustration, and anger at oneself for not having done differently. Unfortunately, no matter how much time is devoted to recalling those thoughts, the past will remain unchanged. Repentance and forgiveness are required. Joseph's noble character emerges, and he offers forgiveness and encourages them to stop being angry at themselves. He assures them that the occurrence of events had to do with God's design to save many lives. The fact that God was able to use their evil action for good doesn't, however, change the fact that they were guilty of a horrible crime.

**How** would obeying what's in these verses help us deal with guilt? *James 5:16, 1 John 1:9*.

All sins bring pain to the sinner and to God. Many sins also involve other people. Each corner of the triangle (God—Others—Me) needs to be worked out in order to bring a resolution to past wrongdoings. John tells us that God is prepared to forgive and to purify us from unrighteousness. In addition, James tells us to confess sins to each other; we should do this, especially to those whom we've wronged.

**Humble confession is the only way to free oneself from guilt. "Your sins may be as mountains before you; but if you humble your heart and confess your sins, trusting in the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour, He will forgive and will cleanse you from all unrighteousness. . . . [The work of His righteousness] is peace, and its effect quietness and assurance forever."**—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 566. **What do you need to confess in order to experience the promises here?**



## Sapped Strength

**Read** Psalm 32. What does this teach us about guilt and confession? What does David mean by “keeping silent”? What happens when one remains silent? What was David’s solution to his guilt?

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Honest confession is good for the soul, and seemingly also for the body. David’s language clearly suggests that his mental state of guilt was causing physical pain, as well: bones wasted away (*vs. 3, NIV*) and strength sapped (*vs. 4, NIV*). Health professionals today recognize the close link between psychological stress and physical maladies. The expression “psychosomatic disease” has been part of the health professionals’ language for decades, and it refers to physical symptoms caused largely by psychological processes. More recently the field of psychoneuroimmunology has identified the key role that mental states play in protecting our bodies from or exposing them to diseases.

Guilt, as does any other strong adverse emotion, causes immediate deterioration in behavior and can, in the long run, destroy physical health. But for those who know the Lord, there is no need of putting themselves at risk.

David’s testimony reveals the antidote for guilt: “Then I acknowledged my sin to you. . . . And you forgave the guilt of my sin” (*vs. 5, NIV*).

Thus, shame, remorse, sadness, and hopelessness caused by guilt can vanish through the Lord’s wonderful forgiveness, and joy and happiness can come instead (*vs. 11*).

**Read** 1 Timothy 4:1, 2. What does he mean by seared consciences?

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Paul forewarned Timothy of individuals who would teach strange doctrines to believers. They would do this because their consciences had been “seared as with a hot iron” (*vs. 2, NIV*). As fire may burn nerve endings and make certain parts of the body insensible, a conscience also may become seared by: (a) repeated violation of correct principles until no sense of wrongness remains and (b) strong environmental influences that cause one to view something wrong with indifference or even as good.

**What things that once bothered you now don’t? If so, might that be a seared conscience at work? Try to step back and take a good look at things you do that don’t bother your conscience but perhaps should.**

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## Bitter Weeping

**One** of the greatest manifestations of guilt appears in **Matthew 26:75**. What made Peter's sense of guilt so great? Have you ever had a similar experience? If so, what did you learn from it that could help you from making a similar mistake?

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On two occasions Peter stated his intention to be firm and never to deny the Master. His second affirmation came even after the Lord had predicted that Peter would deny Him three times that very night. Hours later two women identified Peter as one of Jesus' disciples, and he denied the Lord each time. Then a group of servants of the high priest's household identified him, and he exclaimed: "I am not" (*John 18:25, NIV*). Notice that the accusers (minors, females, servants) were considered of low social rank in the context. This must have added to Peter's shame and guilt later on.

The crucial point, however, is that Peter's weeping led to repentance, to a change of heart and to a true conversion, no matter how painful the process itself. Sometimes that's what it takes: we need to see ourselves as we really are, to see what's really in our hearts and what treachery we are capable of—and then we will fall, broken like Peter, before the Lord.

"With blinding tears he [Peter] makes his way to the solitudes of the Garden of Gethsemane and there prostrates himself where he saw his Saviour's prostrate form when the bloody sweat was forced from His pores by His great agony. Peter remembers with remorse that he was asleep when Jesus prayed during those fearful hours. His proud heart breaks, and penitential tears moisten the sods so recently stained with the bloody sweat drops of God's dear Son. He left that garden a converted man. He was ready then to pity the tempted. He was humbled and could sympathize with the weak and erring."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 416.

The first half of the book of Acts provides an unquestionable testimony of Peter's transformation. His preaching and leadership and miracle workings were extraordinary and led to the salvation of many. His work also led to the foundation of the church as the body of Christ. His death, anticipated by Jesus in John 21:18, was received as an honor, for he died in the same manner as his Master.

**In what ways have your falls and failures made you more sensitive to the falls and failures of others? How can you learn to minister, out of your pain, to others in theirs?**

## Total Forgiveness

**“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1, NKJV). What does this text promise us? How can we make this promise our own?**

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God’s forgiveness is so great, so deep, and so wide that it is impossible to understand fully. Even the best quality of human forgiveness cannot compare with that of God. He is so perfect, and we are so flawed; and yet, through the provision God Himself provided in Jesus, we all can have full and complete pardon the moment we claim the promises for ourselves in full faith and surrender to the Lord.

**Read** the three texts below. How do they shed light to help you understand God’s forgiveness?

*Ps. 103:12* \_\_\_\_\_

*Isa. 1:18* \_\_\_\_\_

*Mic. 7:19* \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible uses allegories from the concrete and familiar realms in order to help us understand the meaning of difficult concepts. As far as we can perceive, snow and wool are good examples of whiteness; the depths of the sea are among the deepest places we can imagine; and nothing can be geographically farther apart than east from west. Yet, these are limited allegories of God’s forgiveness.

In the Abbey of Elstow, a stained-glass window portrays an image inspired in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Christian, the central character, can be seen kneeling at the foot of the Cross. His heavy burden of guilt is rolling away from his shoulders, bringing ineffable relief to his soul. Christian says: “I saw it no more.” The burden was gone. Its pain, sting, anxiety, and shame disappeared forever. Because of our imperfection, selfishness, and defective relationships, it is very hard for us to understand the perfect and total forgiveness of God. We simply can accept it by faith and pray: “Lord, I humbly confess my sins to You and accept Your pardon and cleansing. Amen.”

**How can we be sure our sins are forgiven if we don’t feel that they are forgiven? What reasons do we have to believe we’re forgiven, despite our feelings?**

**Further Study:** “When sin struggles for the mastery in the human heart, when guilt seems to oppress the soul and burden the conscience, when unbelief clouds the mind, who lets in the beams of light? Whose grace is sufficient to subdue sin, and who gives the precious forgiveness and pardons all our sins, expelling the darkness, and making us hopeful and joyful in God?—Jesus, the sin-pardoning Saviour. He is still our Advocate in the courts of heaven; and those whose lives are hid with Christ in God must arise and shine, because the glory of the Lord has risen upon them.”—Ellen G. White, *Bible Training School*, May 1915. “If you have given offense to your friend or neighbor, you are to acknowledge your wrong, and it is his duty freely to forgive you. Then you are to seek the forgiveness of God, because the brother you have wounded is the property of God, and in injuring him you have sinned against his Creator.”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 128.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Madame Mao, the wife of the former leader of Communist China, Mao Tse-Tung, lived in constant fear and guilt, all because of many of the bad things she had done. She was so paranoid, in fact, so full of guilt, that any sudden noises, any unexpected sounds, would send her into cold sweats or into a fury. It got so bad that she demanded that her staff keep birds away from her compound so she didn’t have to hear them singing. Though an extreme case, what does this tell us about the power of guilt to ruin our lives?
- ❷ What advice would you give to someone who is struggling with guilt over past sins, who claims to have accepted Christ and yet still can’t get rid of the feelings of guilt? How can you help them?
- ❸ In Thursday’s lesson the Bible gave us a number of images to describe God’s forgiveness. Have class members come up with some of their own metaphors to describe the depth of the forgiveness that is found in Jesus for those who will accept it.
- ❹ In a world in which no God existed, could guilt exist? Discuss your answer.
- ❺ As we saw this week, God can use guilt to bring us to faith and repentance. Are there any other “benefits” to guilt? If so, what might they be?

## Finding a Spiritual Home

Jason Feng grew up in the mountains of Taiwan, off the coast of China. His grandparents were Seventh-day Adventists, but most of the church's handful of members were elderly, and Jason didn't feel that he belonged. His friends attended the larger Protestant church in his area, so he joined them. He became a Sunday School teacher and youth leader.

When Jason was injured in an accident he spent time at home recovering. He was disappointed that no one from the Protestant church came to visit him as custom dictated. But the Adventist pastor came, and he brought Ken, a young ministerial intern. Jason and Ken became friends.

Jason's grandmother noticed Jason's growing friendship with Ken and asked the pastor to hold meetings on Friday in her home. She invited Jason and his family. Out of respect for his grandmother, Jason attended. Even Jason's father attended the meetings, although he didn't go to church on Sabbath.

Ken, the young intern, invited Jason to study the Bible with him, and Jason agreed. Jason's grandmother's Bible study grew, and soon a new congregation of believers formed in the area. Jason joined the new church and felt spiritually fed. He realized that church wasn't a place to just have fun with friends, as he had with his friends in the Protestant church he had attended. He realized that the church provided an opportunity to worship God and study deeply into His Word.

Jason felt a burden to reach out to other young people who had left the Seventh-day Adventist Church and invite them back. He encourages these youth to become leaders in the church that they had once left. Several have returned to the church because of his influence.

Today a new church stands in Jason's village, and the Adventist youth join the 30 or so worshipers in a lively service each Sabbath. During school holidays, the congregation grows as Adventists who have moved away from the area return to celebrate the holidays with their families. Jason and several other youth were baptized into the new Adventist church that has been established in his village. At last he felt at home.

"I find such gratitude and satisfaction when I see people accept Jesus and grow in Christ," Jason says. "I want to do this till Jesus comes."

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JASON FENG is preparing to become a pastor or Global Mission worker among his indigenous group in the mountains of Taiwan.

# Good Thinking



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Mark 7:21–23, Luke 6:45, Acts 14:2, 15:24, Gal. 3:1, Ps. 19:14, Col. 3:1–17.*

**Memory Text:** “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (*Philippians 4:8, NIV*).

As one of the most utilized forms of mental health intervention today, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is based on the assumption that most psychological problems are improved by identifying and changing inaccurate and dysfunctional perceptions, thoughts, and behaviors. People with depression tend to interpret facts negatively; people with anxiety tend to look at the future with apprehension; and those with low self-esteem maximize others' success and minimize their own. CBT, therefore, trains people to identify and change their unhealthy thinking habits into better alternatives that promote desirable behavior and eliminate unwanted ones.

The Bible teaches us about the connection between thoughts and actions (*Luke 6:45*). Good thought patterns not only are healthy but also provide a way toward integrity: “Do not those who plot evil go astray? But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness” (*Prov. 14:22, NIV*).

This week we'll look at some biblical truths that can help us gain control over our mental activity by allowing Christ to take charge of our mind.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 5.*

## Thoughts: The Root of Behavior

**Read** Mark 7:21–23 and Luke 6:45. What do these texts tell us about the importance of controlling, not just our actions, not just our deeds, not just our words but our thoughts, as well?

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People who suffer from impulse-control disorders fail to resist the impulse to steal, to attack someone, or to gamble. Mental health clinicians know that these impulses often are preceded by a certain thought (or chain of thoughts), which leads to the undesirable behavior. Consequently, patients are trained to identify those thought triggers, dispel them immediately, and occupy their minds with something else. In this way, they gain control of their thoughts and avoid the actions that these wrong thoughts so often lead to.

Indeed, sinful acts often are preceded by definite thoughts. (Isn't this what temptation is all about?) It is the duty of every Christian to learn to identify, with God's help, the first steps in this process, because dwelling on wrong thoughts leads almost inevitably to sin.

**What** alternative is proposed by Paul to deal with immoral behavior?  
*Rom. 8:5–8.*

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Mind and behavior are shown by Paul as intimately linked. The Spirit-filled mind will seek good deeds, and the sin-dominated mind will bring about sinful deeds. It is not enough to change the behavior for the sake of convenience or to present a righteous face to the world. The heart (mind) needs to be transformed or else the eventual fruits will show the true nature of that heart.

“We need a constant sense of the ennobling power of pure thoughts and the damaging influence of evil thoughts. Let us place our thoughts upon holy things. Let them be pure and true; for the only security for any soul is right-thinking.”—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, August 23, 1905.

**Suppose you had to express, verbally, to others the thoughts you have had during the past 24 hours. What would you say? How embarrassed would you be? What does your answer say to you about the changes you need to make?**

## Thoughts as a Source of Distress

**What** are the things that really frighten you? What are ways that you can learn to trust the Lord, despite that fear? After all, isn't the Lord's power greater than whatever threats you face?

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Much suffering can occur through thinking. Psychologist Philip Zimbardo, in his book *Psychology and Life*, reports the case of a young woman taken to a hospital because she was terrified of dying. Apparently there was nothing wrong with her, but she was admitted overnight for observation. Hours later she died. Further investigation showed that years before, a psychic had predicted her death on her twenty-third birthday. This woman died, a victim of her own panic, the day before she would have become 23. No question, people can suffer seriously from their negative thoughts; hence the need of wholesome thinking (tomorrow's lesson).

Also, just as important to remember: we also adversely can affect others' thinking by expressing our negativity to others. Words are very powerful tools, either for good or for evil. Our words either build up or tear down. There is life and death in the words we speak. How careful we need to be with the thoughts and sentiments that come out of our mouths.

**Read** Acts 14:2, 15:24, and Galatians 3:1. What do they tell us about the power to impact people negatively?

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“If you do not feel lighthearted and joyous, do not talk of your feelings. Cast no shadow upon the lives of others. A cold, sunless religion never draws souls to Christ. It drives them away from Him into the nets that Satan has spread for the feet of the straying.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 488.

**Think about times someone's “mere” words tore you down in a big way. How can you be sure you never do that to anyone else?**



## Wholesome Thinking

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (*Phil. 4:8, NIV*).

**What** is the essence of Paul’s words to us here? What is the key to doing what he says? *See also 2 Pet. 3:1, 2.*

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Remembering, repeating, thinking about, and meditating on the words in the Bible is one of the greatest spiritual blessings available to us, and it is a sure way to cultivate what Peter called “wholesome thinking” (*2 Pet. 3:1, NIV*). Many people have obtained invaluable blessings by committing to memory treasured Bible texts. When confronted with moments of worry, doubt, fear, frustration, or temptation, they have repeated such thoughts in their minds and have obtained relief and peace through the power of the Holy Spirit.

With so many alluring competitors (TV, computer, etc.), this generation of believers is being tempted to put the Bible aside. It is necessary therefore to make a committed decision to read and reflect upon the Word every day. The Word of God is the only true fortification we have against the mental onslaught of unspiritual distractions that come from the world.

**Look** again at the text above. Make a list of what things you encounter that are true, pure, lovely, and so forth. What does that list consist of? What do these things have in common? Bring your list to class and share it with others on Sabbath.

Prayer is another way to keep the mind out of trouble. While we talk to God, there is little chance for lustful or other forms of selfish thoughts. Acquiring prayerful habits is a sure protection from sinful thoughts and, consequently, from sinful actions. The Bible is clear: God cares about our thoughts, because our thoughts impact our words, our actions, and our overall well-being. God wants us to have good thoughts because good thoughts (wholesome thinking) are good for us, both physically and mentally. The good news is that through meditating on the Bible, through prayer, and through Spirit-inspired choices on our part, we can keep our minds and hearts on things that will uplift ourselves and others, as well.

## The Thoughts of Our Hearts

Read 1 Kings 8:39, Psalm 19:14, 1 Chronicles 28:9, and 1 Samuel 16:7. What crucial point are these texts making? More important, how should this truth impact us and how we think? Does this truth make you nervous and fearful, or does it give you hope? Or both? Analyze the reason for your answer.

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“For you alone know the hearts of all men” (*1 Kings 8:39, NIV*). The word *heart* often is used in the Bible as the seat of thoughts and emotions (*see Matt. 9:4*). Only God has access to the intimacy of our mental activity, to our true intentions, and to our secret yearnings. Nothing, even in the form of a fleeting thought, can be hidden from the Creator.

God’s knowledge of our soul is to our advantage. When people are too discouraged to utter a sensible word of prayer, God knows their need. Humans can look only at the outer appearance and behaviors, and then try to imagine what someone else is thinking; God knows the thoughts in ways others never can.

Likewise, Satan and his angels only can observe, listen, and estimate what goes on inside. “Satan cannot read our thoughts, but he can see our actions, hear our words; and from his long knowledge of the human family, he can shape his temptations to take advantage of our weak points of character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Review and Herald*, May 19, 1891.

As you make everyday decisions (personal or work-related) or think of other people, pause for a moment and send a quiet prayer to God. Enjoy the understanding of an intimate dialogue that is for you and God alone. Nobody else in the universe is privy to this communication. Allowing Christ into your thinking process will safeguard you from temptation and bring spiritual blessings. This process will, beyond doubt, help you build a closer walk with the Lord.

**How does the day’s lesson help you better understand the biblical admonition not to judge others? How many times have your motives been misjudged by those who don’t know your heart? Why, then, is it important not to judge others in return?**

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## The Peace of Christ in Our Hearts

**Read** Colossians 3:1–17. What are the specific actions that we are called upon to do in order to live the kind of life in Christ we are promised?

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This passage takes us to the root of moral and immoral behaviors, the heart and mind. It also points at the only One who can work goodness in us by governing our thoughts, Jesus Christ: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (*Col. 3:15, NIV*). Note expressions such as “set your hearts,” “set your minds,” “put on love,” “let the peace of Christ,” “let the word of Christ.” They indicate that avoiding sin and acquiring virtue are matters of choice and preparation, not improvisation. Sin can be overcome only by setting hearts and minds on things from above. Christ is the source of virtue and goodness. Christ, when allowed by us, is the only One capable of bringing true peace to our minds.

Our minds, then, being the core of our existence, need to be put under the care of Jesus. It is central to the development of character, and it cannot be left to the mercy of circumstances. Sinful tendencies and corrupt environments both work against purity in thought. Yet, the Lord does not leave us abandoned; He extends His help and protection to all who want it. “Our thoughts, if stayed upon God, will be guided by divine love and power.” Thus, we must “live on the words that proceed from the lips of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 669.

In the middle of spiritual warfare, a person may be tempted and find it very difficult to dispel certain adverse thoughts. In those moments, it may be easier to distract oneself by changing place or activity or seeking good company. This may permit a change that facilitates prayer and assurance.

**Thought is a very mysterious human process. We really don't know for sure even what it is or exactly how it works. In most cases, though, in the inner recesses of our consciousness, we alone make the choice regarding what we are going to think about. A thought can be changed in an instant. We simply have to make the choice to change it. (In some cases, though, mental illness can affect a person's ability to change their thoughts easily, and so professional treatment [if available] can be extremely beneficial.) What about your thoughts? Next time the wrong ones come, what are you going to do?**

**Further Study:** “More precious than the golden wedge of Ophir is the power of right thought. We need to place a high value upon the right control of our thoughts. . . . Every impure thought defiles the soul, impairs the moral sense, and tends to obliterate the impressions of the Holy Spirit. It dims the spiritual vision, so that men cannot behold God. The Lord may and does forgive the repenting sinner; but though forgiven, the soul is marred. All impurity of speech and thought must be shunned by him who would have clear discernment of spiritual truth. . . . We are to use every means that God has placed within our reach for the government and cultivation of our thoughts. We are to bring our minds into harmony with Christ’s mind. His truth will sanctify us, body, soul, and spirit, and we shall be enabled to rise above temptation.”—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, August 23, 1905.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** In class, go over the list you made on Tuesday and compare yours with others in your class. What can you learn from one another’s picks?
- 2** What is the meaning of “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”? *2 Cor. 10:5*. How can we learn to do that?
- 3** How do the Internet, TV programs, recreational reading, advertisements, et cetera, work in your mind? How much of your thinking and doing may be affected by these sources? Why do we fool ourselves if we believe that what we read or watch doesn’t impact our thinking?
- 4** What are ways in which our actions, even subconsciously, reveal the thoughts in our minds? How does body language show what’s going on inside?
- 5** What advice would you give to someone who is struggling with impulsive behavior? What promises can you present to them from the Bible? Why is it also important to keep before them all the promises of forgiveness and acceptance through Jesus? How can you keep them from giving up in complete despair, believing that, because they have not achieved the victory that they want, their relationship with God is somehow deficient? How can you help them learn never to give up on the promises of forgiveness, no matter how unworthy they feel?
- 6** How careful are you with your words, which simply reflect your thoughts? How can you be sure your words always are working for good and not for evil?

## The Power of Faith

by BENJAMIN SCHOUN

Ragasa lives in Madagascar, an island off the eastern coast of Africa. She grew up in a family that worshiped demons. When she reached adulthood the demons told her that if she did as they asked, they would give her great powers.

Ragasa agreed. The demons gave her powers to control lightning, withstand bullets, and much more. Through her powers, Ragasa became an influential woman. Then she did something that angered the demons, and they caused her to become seriously ill. No one could help her; and the demons to whom she had turned in the past refused to make her well.

One day she heard a knock at the door. She answered the door and found two young women standing there. As they talked with Ragasa, she felt comfortable with these strangers. She related her struggles with the demons and her resulting sickness.

The young women told Ragasa that they were Seventh-day Adventist Christians, and they asked if they could pray for her. Ragasa agreed, for she had no other options.

In a short time Ragasa was well. She began studying the Bible with her new friends. The women encouraged Ragasa to listen to Adventist World Radio, for it would bring her comfort and help her in her struggles against the demons. Ragasa listened to the station, and soon she fell deeply in love with Jesus Christ.

Adventists in the region learned of Ragasa's conversion and fasted and prayed for her before her baptism. The demons were powerless in the face of God's praying children, and Ragasa was baptized without trouble from her former masters.

Because of the love of the two young visitors and the ministry of Adventist World Radio, God transformed this once-powerful, demon-possessed woman into a humble Christian servant. In gratitude to God for His salvation, Ragasa invites others to listen to Adventist World Radio with her. Now a congregation of more than 100 worship together around Ragasa's radio every week.

Congregations such as Ragasa's have no pastor; they have no teacher except the radio programs. They have no church building, for they cannot afford one. Yet they believe and worship as we do.

Your mission offerings help support the work of Adventist World Radio and other outreach programs around the world. Thank you for sharing so that others, like Ragasa, can know that God loves them.

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BENJAMIN SCHOUN is president of Adventist World Radio.



Students at James Memorial Higher Secondary School in Tamil Nadu outline where their new classroom block will stand thanks to our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.



For 100 years Adventist schools in India have been a powerful tool to introduce people to Jesus. Our schools provide a solid foundation for leadership both in the church and in the secular world. Education continues to be a strong pillar for outreach to the more than one billion people on this sub-continent. Thousands, perhaps millions, can trace their faith to an Adventist school.

The demand for quality education continues to grow in India. And our schools must grow too. This quarter our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will enable three secondary schools in India to add classroom blocks that will accommodate more students and better curriculum choices. When a method of evangelism works, we need to work with it. And Adventist education in India is evangelism. I'm glad I can help build leaders for tomorrow and God's Kingdom today. For me it's personal.

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# Hope Against Depression



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Psalm 42, 31:10, 39:2–7, 32:1–5, 1 John 1:9, Mic. 7:1–7, Rev. 21:2–4.*

**Memory Text:** “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (*Psalm 34:18, NIV*).

**D**epression, or extreme discouragement to the point of becoming disabled, has been experienced since the inception of sin. A number of Bible characters displayed symptoms that probably would meet today's diagnostic criteria for depression.

Hopelessness is a symptom of depression, and the biblical message of hope can offer us so much in contrast to a world that offers so little. All people, at times, face moments of extreme discouragement for any variety of reasons. No wonder, then, that the Word of God is filled with promises that can give all of us, no matter our situation, reasons to hope for a better future, if not in this world, then certainly in the next.

Of course, when depression is severe, it's important to get professional help, when possible. The Lord can work through these people to help those who are in need of special care. After all, regardless of your relationship with God, were you physically ill you would seek the help of a doctor or health professional. It's the same with those who are suffering from severe clinical depression, which often is caused by a genetic predisposition and chemical imbalance in the brain. Thus, even Christians, at times, might need the help of professionals.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 12.*



## The Downcast Soul

**Read** Psalm 42. How can you relate to what's being expressed there? What hope is offered?

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David experienced serious mood alterations, on many occasions because of unfair persecution (for instance, Saul and Israel's adversaries). In addition, his violation of God's commandments brought about a deep sense of guilt (*Ps. 51:4*), and guilt often is associated with depression.

When one sees oneself negatively ("I am dumb"), looks at the world pessimistically ("life is always unfair"), and contemplates the future hopelessly ("it will never improve"), chances of depression become high. This attitude is called "catastrophic thinking."

Christians may opt for alternative ways to interpret things, a way that incorporates God's plan and messages into the equation.

### Consider the following alternatives:

- *How to look at yourself.* You were created in God's image, to rule over creation (*Gen. 1:26, 27*). God's traits, albeit marred, are still in you. Jesus Christ, through His sacrifice, rescued you from eternal death and granted you privileges—chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation (*1 Pet. 2:9, NIV*). Before God's eyes you have infinite worth.
- *The world.* It is true that the world is rotten and full of evil. At the same time, there also are many right, noble, and admirable things (*Phil. 4:8*) to ponder upon. Furthermore, Christians can understand the existence of evil without despair, as they know its origin and ultimate fate.
- *The future.* What a wonderful future is reserved for God's children! The Bible is full of promises with the assurance of salvation (*Ps. 37:39*).

**Sadness is not a sin. After all, look at how often Jesus felt sad. We mustn't feel guilty because of sadness or depression. In some cases we have good reasons to be hurting. How can you use the biblical truths stated above to help you cope with whatever struggles you are facing now?**

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## The Consequences of Discouragement

“ ‘I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am troubled; O Lord, come to my aid!’ ” (*Isa. 38:14, NIV*).

The biblical description above leaves no doubt about the strong pain manifested by Hezekiah’s crying out loud. There are cultural differences in manifesting emotional distress. People in certain contexts suffer in silence, avoiding any obvious or visible complaint. Others (like Hezekiah) use moaning and wailing when going through sorrow. There also are personal differences; some people are able to approach death with more tranquillity than others can.

Depressive symptoms commonly are found in individuals with a prolonged or terminal disease. Hezekiah was suffering from illness, and its gravity announced death. Thus, he experienced a spell of depression as described in Isaiah 38. Depressive symptoms are so painful that many will attempt suicide to end this horrible experience. In fact, more than 10 percent of clinically depressed patients kill themselves. Clearly, clinical depression is a serious matter and must be treated that way.

### **What** symptoms are expressed in the following texts?

*Ps. 31:10* \_\_\_\_\_

*Ps. 77:4* \_\_\_\_\_

*Ps. 102:4, 5* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 Kings 19:4* \_\_\_\_\_

Depression causes a variety of painful manifestations: (a) a deep sense of sadness (sorrow), (b) a lack of motivation to do anything, even enjoyable activities, (c) a change in appetite and either weight loss or gain, (d) sleep disturbances, sleeping either not enough or too much, (e) feelings of low self-esteem, (f) poor reasoning and memory, and (g) thoughts of death and suicide. Some people experience just one or two symptoms, while others manifest several and suffer for months until the episode ends. In any case, the burden of depression is enormous and must be relieved by medical and spiritual intervention.

**We all suffer sadness and discouragement in one form or another for one reason or another at one time or another. What things bring you down and why? Recall incidents of God’s past guidance in your life. What hope and encouragement can you draw from remembering the Lord’s leading? Why is it important to keep those memories alive?**

## Relief From Depression

**Read** Psalm 39:2–7. What happened when David remained silent? And what was the result of his speaking up?

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Like most emotional disorders, depression necessitates that the sufferer speak about his or her struggles. This act alone can begin to initiate healing. Approaching the Lord in fervent and sincere prayer is a safe way to release tension and psychological pain. Often more is needed, but it can be a good start.

A basic coping strategy for depression consists of talking to a friend (or a therapist) who knows how to listen and, even better, who knows how to help access more intensive resources, if needed. There is a healing effect in verbalizing thoughts and feelings. The church community can provide an excellent context to help the discouraged, but often this is insufficient, especially when professional care is required. Nevertheless, it is important for anyone going through hard times and who feels discouraged or even depressed to have someone they trust to talk to. Sometimes merely talking to someone can go a long way in helping a person feel better.

**Read** Psalm 55:17. What promise is there? Why should this promise mean so much to us?

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The counselor's appointment, if possible at all, may not be available until next week. But like David—who learned how to get help any hour of the day or any day of the week—we, too, can turn to the Lord at any time. David knew that the Lord heard his voice, and that greatly encouraged him.

Even secular psychologists are recommending that clients who believe in prayer pray. All of us, even when not suffering with something such as clinical depression, can experience the impact of how praying to the Lord does help make us feel better. No matter who we are or how deep our discouragement, having a relationship with God can go a long way in bringing us hope and encouragement and healing.

**Ellen G. White once described prayer as “the opening of the heart to God as to a friend.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 533. Though prayer doesn't always solve all our problems, how does it help us deal with them?**

## The Need for Forgiveness

**How** did David find relief for his agony? *Ps. 32:1–5*; see also *1 John 1:9*. **How can we find this same thing for ourselves?**

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The guilt produced by unconfessed sins may become extremely painful. The expressions used by David are a clear indication of intense, inward pain. Psalm 32 and other passages in Psalms show the severity of David's emotional distress.

When we meet sufferers of depression, we must be extremely careful not to blame them for not having confessed their sins! Nor should we simply conclude that they are wicked people, and that's why they are in distress. It is unfortunate that many people seem to be able to offer concern and understanding to those suffering from an organic malady, true clinical depression, but tend to be quite judgmental in dealing with mental or emotional turmoil brought about by their own wrong actions.

Edgar Allan Poe in his "Tell-Tale Heart" refers to the story of a man who committed murder and hid the victim's body under the floorboards of the room in which the murder had been committed. He hoped to leave his guilt hidden with the body, but a strong sense of remorse grew within him. One day he heard the victim's heartbeat; and the beat grew louder and louder. Later it became clear that the pounding was coming not from the grave below but rather, from his own heart.

At the same time, too, there are people who, having confessed their sins, still suffer greatly from a sense of guilt. They often feel unworthy of forgiveness and lament the horrible suffering that they have brought through their sins, even though they have been confessed and are, by faith, forgiven by God. This, too, can be a great source of emotional distress. In such cases, it's important to focus on God's promises of healing and of acceptance, even for the worst of sins. We can't undo the past; what we can do, by God's grace, is seek to learn from our past mistakes and, to whatever degree possible, make restitution for whatever wrong we have done. After all, all we can do is surrender to God and seek His mercy, grace, and healing.

**Many, having confessed their sins, still struggle with guilt over them. Why is it so important that we acknowledge our sins, take responsibility for them, and learn to move on and get past whatever wrongs we have done?**

## Hope Against Distress

**What** was the prophet's way out of the surrounding social and interpersonal problems? *Mic. 7:1–7.*

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In just the first six verses, Micah describes a complete smorgasbord of immoral, unethical, and aggressive acts present in his time. Oppression and abuse of various kinds, lack of respect and consideration, corruption, and deceit all have been present since the inception of sin. We all face it even today. Just take today's newspaper, and you can find a direct correlation with Israel's misery at that time. This sociological chaos becomes especially hurtful when touching close to home—neighbor, friend, spouse, child, parent (*Mic. 7:5, 6*).

Highly defective interpersonal relationships cause much stress and are associated with depression. Clearly stated by Micah (*vs. 7*), the conclusive ingredient to survive in the middle of a crisis is hope.

Hope is essential to live our lives with a reasonable amount of mental health. Hope must be alive even for the unbeliever—youth in search of employment must hope that they'll find a job, a lost traveler will hope to find his way, and investors who have lost their money must believe that there will be better times. Living with zero hope leads to meaninglessness and death.

When Italian philosopher and poet Dante Alighieri (A.D. 1265–1321) attempted to describe hell in his *Divine Comedy*, he envisioned a big sign at the entrance saying: “Abandon all hope, ye who enter here!” The worst possible punishment is to deprive someone of hope.

The kind of hope presented in the Bible goes beyond positive anticipation. It encompasses an eventual perfect solution and salvation based on redemption through Jesus Christ. The historic “blessed hope” of Seventh-day Adventists must become the focal point of our lives. Hoping for Jesus' return helps us to gain perspective over the many unpleasant things that surround us and allows us to look in confidence toward eternity.

**Look** at these promises. **What hope is offered there for us?** *Isa. 65:17, 2 Pet. 3:13, Rev. 21:2–4.* **Why, in one sense, is this the only hope for any of us?**

A vision of faith in the new creation can reassure the suffering soul. In the same way that a woman in childbirth contemplates the final result of her child being born and soon “forgets the anguish” (*John 16:21, NIV*), the troubled soul can, by God's grace, gain hope with the vision of a caring God who promises us a new world without any of the things that bring so much sadness to us in this one.

**Further Study:** Read and reflect on Matthew 26:36–43. Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow “to the point of death” (vs. 38, *NIV*). Visualize the agony of Jesus, with lack of social support and betrayal from His disciples, seeming separation from God, and the load of guilt from humanity. His suffering exceeds any depressive episode experienced by mortals.

“As He neared Gethsemane, He became strangely silent. He had often visited this spot for meditation and prayer; but never with a heart so full of sorrow as upon this night of His last agony. Throughout His life on earth He had walked in the light of God’s presence. When in conflict with men who were inspired by the very spirit of Satan, He could say, ‘He that sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him.’ John 8:29. But now He seemed to be shut out from the light of God’s sustaining presence. Now He was numbered with the transgressors. The guilt of fallen humanity He must bear. Upon Him who knew no sin must be laid the iniquity of us all. So dreadful does sin appear to Him, so great is the weight of guilt which He must bear, that He is tempted to fear it will shut Him out forever from His Father’s love. Feeling how terrible is the wrath of God against transgression, He exclaims, ‘My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 685.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 What great role can your local church community play in helping those who are suffering depression or emotional distress for any reason at all? Whatever your resources are, no matter how limited, what more can be done to help those in need?
- 2 How can you help someone who prays, who counsels, who loves the Lord and who trusts in Him, and yet still feels overwhelmed with sadness, even if he or she doesn’t understand why? How can you help him or her not give up their faith but cling to the hope and promises given in the Word?
- 3 One of the greatest mistakes people can make is to believe that because they feel so down, so depressed, so hopeless, it means that God has abandoned them. Why is that, first of all, not true? What Bible characters (such as Elijah, Jeremiah in jail, John the Baptist in jail, Jesus in Gethsemane) can you point them to in order to show them that sadness and discouragement do not mean God has forsaken them? How can you help them learn that feelings are not a good barometer of faith?

## Rodeo Stars Shine for Christ

by MIKE BROWNHILL

It's not every day that rodeo champions turn their lives over to God, but recently Dale and Patricia Jones, rodeo champions living in South Queensland, Australia, did just that. They were baptized, and Dale's brother, Darryl, recommitted his life to God in a river that flows along the edge of their farm. A few weeks later another brother, Stanley, recommitted his life to God too.

After studying the Bible with several people, Dale and Patricia made their decision to commit their lives to God in baptism as Darryl and other family members watched from the riverbank. Darryl felt that his first love for God had faded, and he stepped into the river, boots and all, and was rebaptized.

The Joneses come from a family of rodeo stars. Their father was a champion, and Dale, Patricia, and Darryl all hold impressive rodeo records and championships. These days, however, Dale and Patricia enjoy a tamer life, breaking and training horses on their ranch.

"The rodeo is a tough place to work," Dale says. "I was proud, and when I'd get hurt I wouldn't admit it because I thought it was a sign of weakness. Now God is softening my proud heart and reigning in my rebellion. It's still a struggle, and sometimes I must stop and ask God to take over my life again."

Dale's wife, Patricia, is a rodeo champion in roping and bull riding, and Darryl holds titles in steer wrestling and is a rodeo circuit champion. Darryl managed to earn these titles even while refusing to compete on Sabbaths. "Since I've been rebaptized, I've regained my zeal in witnessing for my Lord," Darryl says.

Dale and Darryl credit their newfound zeal for God to their parents' prayers. Bill and Bronwyn Jones have been praying for their sons and daughter-in-law for years and rejoiced to see their prayers answered at the riverside baptism.

Patricia says, "Now that I've decided to follow Jesus, life is totally different. We're lapping up the words of Christ. Living for God is so much better than being national rodeo queen!"

Dale and Patricia and their children worship in a new Seventh-day Adventist congregation that was established as a result of a Global Mission outreach in their area. Attendance at the congregation's worship services averages about 30. Our mission offerings support Global Mission pioneers as they plant churches in more than 100 countries around the world. Thank you!

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MIKE BROWNHILL was Global Mission project coordinator in South Queensland, Australia, when Dale, Patricia, and Darryl Jones were baptized.

# Resilience



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Job 19:25; James 5:10, 11; Ruth 1; Esther 2; 2 Cor. 11:23–28; Phil. 4:11–13.*

**Memory Text:** “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging” (*Psalms 46:1–3, NIV*).

Resilience is the process of facing adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or extreme stress and “bouncing back” successfully without becoming too negatively affected by the experience. The concept has received growing attention because of the usefulness of possessing a reasonable amount of resilience in the face of life’s difficulties. After all, who among us doesn’t face major stressors, in one form or another? The question is, How can we have the resilience to deal with what happens and not be destroyed emotionally in the process?

In the 1960s, Victor and Mildred Goertzel wrote *Cradles of Eminence*, which presented biographical analyses of more than seven hundred subjects who went through great childhood adversity (broken homes, financial struggles, physical and/or psychological handicaps, etc.) and yet achieved great success. The book was updated in 2004.

The Bible also tells us of individuals who had to face adversity but who, through God’s grace, bounced back and overcame their problems. Despite difficult circumstances and even flaws in their characters, they were able to be used by God because they had the resilience to press on, even amid adverse circumstances.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 19.*



## The Patience of Job

**Read** James 5:10, 11. What is it about Job that makes him an example to be emulated? See also Job 1–3.

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A woman who underwent counseling to recover from a serious crisis told her friends that one idea transmitted by the counselor was key to her successful recovery. “What helped me most,” she said, “was the counselor insisting that my painful circumstances would come to an end. ‘It looks dark and unending now,’ the counselor used to say, ‘but it will not last too much longer.’ This thought helped me gain resilience.” In other words, the counselor kept the woman’s hope alive.

How can we grow in patience? George Goodman of England once received a young man who needed to be prayed for. He expressed his need directly: “Mr. Goodman, I wish you would pray for me that I might have patience.”

The elderly man responded, “Yes, I will pray for you that you may have tribulation.”

“Oh no, sir,” the young man replied, “it is patience that I want.”

“I understand,” said Goodman, “and I will pray for you that you may have tribulation.” The Bible teacher opened his Bible and read Romans 5:3 to the amazed young man: “ ‘And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience.’ ”

The story of Job offers a supreme example of resilience. Earlier in his life, Job had understood that God is merciful and righteous. He did not understand the reasons for his suffering; he did not find support from his wife; his property and children were destroyed, and then he contracted a horrible disease. And yet, somehow amid it all, he never lost his faith in God and endured until the tragedy ended.

**Read** Job 19:25. What hope did Job cling to here? How can we better learn to cling to this hope in our own adversity, as well?

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**Think about times you were going through something terrible. What hope sustained you? What words spoken to you were helpful? Which ones were not so helpful, or even harmful? What did you learn that would enable you to better help someone who is going through great adversity now?**

## Joseph in Captivity

Read Genesis 37:19–28 and Genesis 39:12–20 and try to put yourself in Joseph’s sandals. Think how discouraged he must have been. Think of the potential for anger and bitterness that could have, even justifiably, been his. Though the Bible doesn’t tell us in detail what his emotions were, it’s not hard to imagine the pain he suffered from such betrayal and treachery.

Nevertheless, Joseph turned to the Lord at these junctures, and in the end, good things came out of the events. After having been sold by his brothers, Joseph actually experienced his conversion and a much closer relationship with God. “He had been told of the Lord’s promises to Jacob, and how they had been fulfilled—how, in the hour of need, the angels of God had come to instruct, comfort, and protect him. And he had learned of the love of God in providing for men a Redeemer. Now all these precious lessons came vividly before him. Joseph believed that the God of his fathers would be his God. He then and there gave himself fully to the Lord.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 213, 214.

When he was thrown in prison unjustly, the experience opened the path to the court of Pharaoh to accomplish the mission to save many souls and his own people.

**What** do the following texts tell us about how bad situations can be turned to good?

*Rom. 5:3–5* \_\_\_\_\_

*2 Cor. 1:3, 4* \_\_\_\_\_

*2 Cor. 1:8, 9* \_\_\_\_\_

*2 Tim. 1:11, 12* \_\_\_\_\_

God does not want us to suffer needlessly. In fact, the environment Jesus has prepared for us in heaven is tearless and painless (*Rev. 21:4*). But as we wait for that promise to be fulfilled, it seems certain that pain is the path to learn certain lessons. Character development, empathy, humility, discipleship, understanding of good and evil—these are some of the lessons we can learn. Although it is difficult to think of the benefits of suffering, especially in the midst of trial, we can ask God for the necessary strength to pass through difficulties.

**Have you ever had a terrible experience that in the end brought some good, some benefit? How can this help you learn to trust the Lord in any adversity, even when nothing good seems likely to result?**

## Naomi

**What** are some of the misfortunes experienced by Naomi? *Ruth 1.*

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Leaving one's country to settle somewhere else is always scary, especially when the departure is motivated by the need to survive. The famine in Judah forced Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons to emigrate to the country of Moab, an agricultural area where they could obtain food. The Moabites were an idolatrous people (*Judg. 10:6*) whose practices clashed with Jewish beliefs. This in itself must have produced significant turmoil to the newcomers. Sometime after having settled, Naomi's husband died. Mother and sons found themselves in a foreign land, degraded to the condition of widow and orphans, without protection and subject to additional disgrace. Then Naomi's sons, Mahlon and Kilion, married local women. This fact may have brought conflict to the family, at least in the beginning, because of significant religious differences. Although the law did not specifically prohibit marriages between Jews and Moabites, it was stipulated that Moabites or their descendants could not enter the assembly of the Lord until after ten generations (*Deut. 23:3*).

Later on, Mahlon and Kilion, whose names meant "sickness" and "wasting," respectively, also died. It is hard to imagine a more tragic situation in the life of Naomi—no one alive from her close family, and the remaining kin far away in Bethlehem.

**What** was the turning point in Naomi's life? How did God repair the severe adversities suffered by Naomi? *Ruth 1:16–18, 4:13–17.*

At the deepest moment of trouble Naomi's daughter-in-law Ruth served as God-sent emotional support. Naomi must have been a remarkable woman to have inspired the devotion of her two daughters-in-law, especially Ruth, who accepted the God of Israel and made the firm decision to care for her mother-in-law for life in a land whose inhabitants were, historically, her enemies.

Chapters 2 through 4 convey a beautiful succession of events that ended up in a happy family arrangement. Naomi left behind untold suffering and lived to witness the marriage of Ruth to Boaz and the birth of her grandson Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David.

**However much we ultimately need to trust the Lord and surrender everything to Him, at times we do need human help, as well. When was the last time you really needed someone's help? What did you gain from that experience?**

## Esther's Days of Stress

**What** were some of the adversities, struggles, and pressures Esther faced?

*Esther 2:6, 7* \_\_\_\_\_

*Esther 2:10* \_\_\_\_\_

*Esther 2:21, 22* \_\_\_\_\_

*Esther 4:4–17* \_\_\_\_\_

*Esther 7:3, 4; 8:3* \_\_\_\_\_

Since early life Esther had been an orphan. Although she was adopted by her older cousin Mordecai, the stigma of parentless childhood was most surely difficult. In spite of this, Esther grew up as a balanced, determined, and capable young woman.

After she became queen, Esther did not reveal her nationality or family background. This was a particularly heavy challenge. Surrounded by food, luxuries, and practices of life in the court, Esther had to somehow try to maintain her Jewish faith and identity. In addition, the risk of being identified as a member of the Jewish people was real, and the consequences of hiding her identity were uncertain.

Esther also had to take to the king the bad news that officers were conspiring to kill him. This was not an easy task because, if the plot could not be substantiated, Esther and her cousin could be blamed for starting rumors, and who knew the results?

But the greatest responsibility placed on Esther was being left as the sole channel to save her nation. Mordecai asked her to mediate on behalf of the Jews, which she could not do without risking her life. When she hesitated, her cousin put still more pressure on her: “If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish” (*Esther 4:14, NIV*). Talk about stress!

Finally she appeared before the king, knowing that such an act carried with it a high chance of death. In the end, though, things worked out, however dangerous the situation was at times for this young woman.

**All of us, like Esther, are born into situations not of our own making. What is your background? What things were handed you, good and bad, that you didn’t ask for? How can you learn to appreciate more the good that you have been given and to overcome the bad?**

## The Secret of Being Content

Paul was born and grew up in Tarsus, into a Hebrew family from the tribe of Benjamin. He obtained his Roman nationality through his father, a citizen of the Roman Empire. He became a Pharisee, a devout group who adhered to the law (Torah) plus the oral tradition (Mishnah). With this background, he must have enjoyed the privileges of his social and religious status.

However, when Paul responded to the call of Jesus, everything changed. Instead of persecutor, he became the target of radical persecution from some of his own nation and eventually from Romans. He suffered tribulations for three decades and was executed after having been imprisoned at Rome.

**Read 2 Corinthians 11:23–28, which lists some of the adversities Paul had to face. Then read Philippians 4:11–13. After so much suffering, what is the assessment Paul makes of his own life? What lessons are here for us amid whatever struggles we’re going through?**

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Contentment is a crucial component of happiness and psychological well-being. Being content comes to those who see the positive outlook of things, those who look at the past with acceptance and at the future with hope. Interestingly enough, having “everything” doesn’t guarantee contentment and happiness. For some folk, no matter what they have, it’s never enough. Others, having so little, are nevertheless satisfied. What do you think makes the difference?

One of the many current definitions of “intelligence” is the ability to adapt to new situations. This may have to do with living in new places, relating to new people, or experiencing new socioeconomic conditions. Paul’s ability is not a hereditary trait, because he specifically says, “I have learned to be content” (*Phil. 4:12, NIV*). This is not a capacity that some possess and others do not. Adaptation and contentment amid a wide range of circumstances are learned processes that come as a result of time and practice.

Verse 13 gives the ultimate key to Paul’s resilience. Not only could he feel contentment with little or much material resources. He could do anything and everything in Jesus Christ.

**How content are you? How much are you tossed around and victimized by your circumstances? What are ways in which you can learn better to be “content in any and every situation” (*vs. 12, NIV*)?**

**Further Study:** “The powers of darkness gather about the soul and shut Jesus from our sight, and at times we can only wait in sorrow and amazement until the cloud passes over. These seasons are sometimes terrible. Hope seems to fail, and despair seizes upon us. In these dreadful hours we must learn to trust, to depend solely upon the merits of the atonement, and in all our helpless unworthiness cast ourselves upon the merits of the crucified and risen Saviour. We shall never perish while we do this—never! When light shines on our pathway, it is no great thing to be strong in the strength of grace. But to wait patiently in hope when clouds envelop us and all is dark requires faith and submission which causes our will to be swallowed up in the will of God. We are too quickly discouraged, and earnestly cry for the trial to be removed from us, when we should plead for patience to endure and grace to overcome.”—Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 114.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Some people overcome hardships that others are crushed under. What do you think makes the difference?
- 2 Dwell more on the question of trials and tragedy that don’t seem to have any kind of happy ending. What are we to make of them? How do we reconcile them with our faith and the promises of God?
- 3 In the third sentence of the quote in Friday’s study (“In these dreadful hours we must . . .”), what is Ellen G. White telling us? Where is she pointing our hope? Why, in the end, is the gospel, as presented in these words, our only hope, regardless of the tragedy that happens to us now?
- 4 How can you practically apply Peter’s counsel in 1 Peter 4:12, 13? It’s one thing to remain resilient and faithful amid trial, but to do what Peter says? How is that possible?
- 5 Suppose you were dealing with someone in a very dire situation, one in which there seemed no way out, humanly speaking. Suppose, too, that you had only five minutes with that person. In those few minutes, what would you say to give the person hope?

## Called to Serve

by KHAM

I grew up in a Buddhist family in Southeast Asia. My best friend in college was a Seventh-day Adventist. I knew nothing about God or Jesus or Christianity, and sometimes I teased my friend about his religion, but he never became angry with me. I think that deep in my heart, where I wasn't even aware of it yet, God was speaking to me.

Another girl shared her faith with me and challenged me to read the Bible and learn for myself who God is. She promised that in its pages I would find Jesus and salvation.

I decided to learn more about this Jesus and told my best friend. He introduced me to his uncle, a pastor, who offered to study with me. I wanted to know two things: is the Bible true, and who is this Jesus?

The pastor taught me the Bible through its stories. He taught me how to understand God's Written Word and how to pray. The more I sought to know Christ, the more amazed I was at what I found in the Bible. I surrendered my life to God and asked to be baptized.

I finished my studies and took a job as an accountant with an international firm. The job paid well, and life was good.

Then I received an e-mail inviting me to serve as a volunteer accountant at Yap Seventh-day Adventist School. I had never heard of Yap, but I knew that God was calling me to serve Him there. It took a lot of faith, but I resigned my job and accepted the call to Yap.

It's a big step to give up a good job and steady income to live a simple life on a tiny island in the South Pacific. But I'm learning to trust God for everything. He knows what I need and always provides.

During my time in Yap, God has taught me how to trust Him and to keep my eyes focused on Him. The culture is so different from my own, but the people I serve are God's children, and I've learned to love them. He has given me new perspective and teaches me His love and grace.

I am amazed that God invited me, a young Buddhist boy, to become a soldier in His army. Every day He reminds me that I am His and that the children and parents I serve are His also. What a privilege and honor to work for Christ and share His love with others.

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*KHAM wrote his story while serving as the accountant at the Yap Adventist School in Micronesia.*

# Self-esteem



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Ps. 100:3, Acts 17:24–28, Rom. 12:3, Matt. 22:39, 2 Samuel 9, Luke 15, Eph. 4:23–32.*

**Memory Text:** “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (*1 Peter 2:9, NIV*).

**D**iminished self-esteem is a modern plague. It often is brought to the counseling or pastoral offices either by itself or in association with such full-blown problems as substance-related abuse, depression, or eating disorders.

In everyday existence, low self-esteem never may reach clinical proportions, but it almost invariably hurts relationships and impairs performance in most areas of life.

Perhaps the main reason people suffer more than ever from this problem is the media, which often portrays its celebrities as larger than life, leaving others to feel their own inadequacy in contrast to the icons paraded before them.

The idea of self-esteem as presented in the Bible has a different perspective. Conventional psychology sees self-esteem as the evaluation someone makes of their own attributes and characteristics based on their observation of themselves and on others' input. The Bible offers at least two additional components: What humans are by origin (*Gen. 1:26, 27*) and what God thinks of and grants to each person (*John 3:16*). When we add these components, so much regarding self-esteem can change.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 26.*



## Origins

Two prevailing views of human origins exist, each mutually exclusive of the other. One portrays humans as products of pure chance, the result of a cosmic accident in which our existence wasn't planned for. We just happened to come into existence. Though this view always has existed among some people, in recent centuries—particularly after the false theories of Charles Darwin became popular—the idea of humanity existing purely by accident has deceived millions. Thus, many have come to believe that life is inherently without purpose, or that any purpose it might have individuals must try to make for themselves. For millennia most people thought that they had originated from God or from gods; today, many think that they came from the apes.

In contrast, there's the view taught in the Bible.

**Read** Genesis 1:26, 27; Psalm 8:5; 100:3; and Acts 17:24–28. **How radically different is what's presented in these texts from the view of our origins as expressed previously? How should each view impact our own sense of self-worth and self-esteem?**

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Not only did God purposely create us, He created us in His image. He also created other wonderful, life-bearing plants and animals, but in their beauty and perfection they do not bear resemblance to their Maker as humans do. Furthermore, humanity is placed above all of them with dominion and authority.

In contrast to the atheist belief in no transcendent purpose for our human biology and psychology, the Bible teaches us that God chose to share “His image” with the human family. Obviously, much of that image has been marred and lost by generations of sin, yet the imprint continues in each person, and that lost image can be restored progressively by the transforming power of the Spirit working in those who are surrendered to Christ.

**Not only did God create us, He redeemed us, as well. In fact, Ellen White said that Christ would have died for even one person. What does that tell us about our inherent worth, regardless of what the world might think of us? Why is it so important to keep before us our worth in the eyes of God?**

## Self-perceptions

What I see in myself is one important component of self-esteem. However, it is an incomplete and often faulty picture. Subjectivity can lead to misinterpretation when assessing people, including ourselves.

One of the gravest biblical warnings is against passing judgment on someone else: “For at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself” (*Rom. 2:1, NIV; see also Luke 6:41, 42*). Distortion seems universal, and people are subject to commit mistakes when judging others. The same happens with self. There is a great deal of error when one judges oneself in terms of ability, looks, character, power, etc. There always are going to be people smarter, better looking, and more gifted than you; at the same time, there always will be people who will look at you and feel themselves to be inferior.

**Read** prayerfully and carefully **Matthew 22:39**. What is implied in this text regarding how we should view ourselves?

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This text implies that a reasonable amount of love should go to oneself (though this is not the main focus of the text). There should be a healthy pride in things well done, in well-accomplished tasks, and in the good traits and characteristics one may possess. There is an expected attitude of self-protection and caring for oneself. The problem comes when someone does not give credit to God, the Creator of all good things in us.

**How** are we to understand **Romans 12:3** in light of what we’ve looked at so far?

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There is a desirable middle area between extremely low self-esteem and arrogance. And Paul warns against the latter. At the same time, **Romans 12:4–8** explains that the body of Christ needs the input of each member, according to the individual gifts given by grace. There is nothing wrong in acknowledging each gift, using them to strengthen Christ’s church, and thanking God for them.

**Make a mental list of the good personal attributes, characteristics, and abilities that God has given you. How can you use them and at the same time remain humble? How can looking daily at the Cross help keep us in our place?**

## What Others See

In so many societies, a person's worth is determined by their talents, gifts, appearance, and so forth. We do look at outward appearance (*1 Sam. 16:7*); after all, that's all we can see. Thus, our concept of self often is shaped by the reaction others display, based on their outward observation of us. If everyone tells you that you are pretty, you will be more likely to view yourself as pretty.

But there always is much more to each of us than meets the eye. Individuals experiencing poor self-esteem need to think in terms of personal traits or attributes that are of true value and not necessarily what the world values, because so often what the world values is of no value to God.

**What** are the things that your society and culture place so much value on? How important do you think those things are to God?

There may be exceptions, but most societies tend to place excessive value in outward, observable features. However, other traits, such as honesty, kindness, temperance, or firm commitment to principles and ideals tend to have less value.

**How** does gender/class/nationality prejudice affect people's self-esteem? What should be the Christian's aim in terms of prejudice and discrimination? *Gal. 3:28*.

The effects of prejudice are devastating on self-esteem and performance. As Christians, we should be making a concentrated effort to uplift and encourage others, regardless of their background.

In 2 Samuel 9, there is the story of Mephibosheth, who could have been the target of retaliation by David. No wonder he showed fear, fell on his face to the ground, and called himself "a dead dog." He also was crippled. The restoration of the family property, the reassignment of servants, and the honors granted no doubt brought to Mephibosheth an extra measure of self-worth.

The influence that people have on others' self-esteem is extremely powerful. More than we realize, we have the ability to shape others' self-concept through words, actions, and even how we look at them.

**How careful, or careless, are you with the way you impact the self-esteem of others? Think about your closest relationships. How can you help build up these people as opposed to tearing them down?**

## What God Sees

**Read** Luke 15. What should that one chapter alone tell us about our worth to God? How should this impact our own sense of self-esteem? What do these parables tell us about what God thinks of us? Why is this so important to know and to keep before us?

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If someone feels tempted to dwell upon being inferior, lost, or outcast, they should remember that something else goes with that condition—a special and intense care from God and His angels. The shepherd cared more for the lost sheep than for the remaining ninety-nine. The woman forgot her other coins and searched carefully until she found the lost one. The father appears to have given more attention to the unreasonable demands of the prodigal son than to his first-born. Shepherd, woman, and father all show a special consideration for the least successful individual.

Then, when the lost are found, there is great joy on earth and in heaven. Look at how powerfully these stories reveal to us the love of God for each one of us, regardless of our faults.

This principle can play out in helping those in need. So often, in talking with others, if you can give them a nonthreatening, confidential, and accepting environment, that alone can do them so much good. People, especially hurting people, need to know that someone cares for them, especially in their pain.

A Christian has a clear advantage over someone who does not accept or believe in the Lord. God is on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to listen to the depressed, stressed, lonely, and anxious soul. This relationship with God should be sufficient reason to feel special and to gain some relief from low self-esteem.

Of course, the greatest example of our worth in the eyes of God is the Cross. That more than anything should show us just how valuable we are to God, regardless of whatever weaknesses and faults we have. The Cross tells us that no matter what others think of us, or what our society thinks of us, we are of infinite value to the Creator of the universe. And considering how fleeting and transitory and contingent society and its values are, in the end how much should the view of others and of society as a whole really matter to us anyway?

**How can we help others take the message in Luke 15 and apply it to themselves? How can we help others realize that Jesus here is talking about them personally?**

## A New Self

**Read** Ephesians 4:23, 24. What does Paul mean by “putting on” the new self? What is the nature of this new self?

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People like to try new looks: changing hairstyle, buying new types of clothes, even getting a face-lift or hair transplant. But these changes will bring only minor variations inside. The basic self will remain unchanged.

Paul talks about a new self, related not to appearance but to attitude and mental nature. He says that we are “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (*vs. 24, NIV*).

**Outline** the attitudes and behaviors coming out of the new self. *Eph. 4:25–32.*

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The new self referred to by Paul exhibits successful fruits (truthfulness, unity, honesty, diligence, wholesome talk, kindness, forgiveness). Notice, too, that all of the new self’s attributes have to do with good character and interpersonal relationships, and these can be tied directly to questions of self-esteem. The adverse behaviors mentioned in Ephesians 4, such as lying, anger, and bitterness, leave the person with a diminished sense of value. In contrast, sharing with those in need and being kind and compassionate are actions that can enhance self-esteem, as they change a person’s focus from self and thus leave the person with a sense of accomplishment.

The Christian community needs people who are interested in building others up rather than destroying them. The concept of self easily can be ruined in no time with rude words of criticism. “Upon every family, upon every individual Christian, is laid the duty of barring the way against corrupt speech. When in the company of those who indulge in foolish talk, it is our duty to change the subject of conversation if possible. By the help of the grace of God we should quietly drop words or introduce a subject that will turn the conversation into a profitable channel.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 337.

**Why is it that helping somebody enhances your own self-esteem? Make a list of small things that you can do for your neighbor, partner, or family member. Do them; you may be surprised at how well you feel about yourself.**

**Further Study:** “If God cares for a sparrow . . . how will he care for the purchase of the blood of Christ? One soul is worth more than all the world. For one soul Jesus would have passed through the agony of Calvary that that one might be saved in his kingdom. ‘Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Review and Herald*, May 3, 1892.

“We lose many and rich blessings because we neglect to seek the Lord with humble hearts. When we come to Him in sincerity of heart, asking Him to reveal our defects, He will show us a true picture of ourselves, reflected in the mirror of His Word. Then, having seen ourselves as God sees us, let us not go away forgetting what manner of men we are. Let us study critically the features of our character that are defective, and seek for grace to make them like the pattern presented in the Word of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Lake Union Herald*, November 3, 1909.

The two paragraphs above give us additional insight to maintain the balance between inferiority and vanity. Read Romans 12:2, 3 in the light of these texts to gain understanding into attaining a balanced self-concept.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① The twentieth century was one of the most violent ever, with mass murder seen on a scale as never before. How could the Darwinian view of human existence, which postulates that all life is a product of random mutation and natural selection, be partially responsible for this total disregard for the sanctity of human life? In other words, if human beings are just advanced apes, products of chance alone, what is the inherent value of an individual life?
- ② Tuesday’s lesson looked at how the perceptions of others can impact a person’s self-worth. Though we want to affirm people and help them have a healthy sense of self-worth, we also need to be careful about feeding someone’s ego and pumping them up in ways that could be detrimental to them. How can we strike the right balance here—affirming people without, in the process, damaging them in a different way?
- ③ Dwell more on the question of what the cross of Christ teaches us about our individual worth. Think about what happened at the cross, who was on it, and what His death meant. How should the Cross help us have a better sense of what our individual worth really is?

# The Stubborn Businessman

by BRITTO AMAL RAJ

I am a stubborn man. I thought I could solve all my problems without God's help. But God showed me otherwise.

When I opened my own business, I met unforeseen financial challenges that brought stress on my family and me. My wife urged me to ask her parents for a loan to help us pay our bills, but I was proud and refused.

As the stress increased, so did my smoking and drinking. The family begged me to quit, so I hid my habits from them. I went to church with my family on Sundays, but I returned home unchanged.

The Seventh-day Adventist pastor is one of my neighbors, and we became friends. During one especially difficult time, I asked him for advice and prayer regarding my financial problems. I needed to order a shipment of rags with which to make floor mats, but I had no money to pay for them. Without the rags, I couldn't make mats to earn money. The pastor prayed with me and encouraged me to trust God.

The next day, I received an unexpected shipment of rags. I called the company and learned that they had sent the rags without an order, and I could pay over time. This was an answer to prayer! I made the mats, paid for the rags, and had money for my other bills. Now the company sends shipments on credit, and my business is growing.

I began to think more about my relationship with God. When the pastor invited me to visit the Adventist church, I went. I began seeing my sinful life through God's eyes, and I asked God for forgiveness and strength to give up my bad habits. I threw away my cigarettes and alcohol. I struggled with these temptations, but God delivered me, and I haven't smoked or drank since then.

My pastor friend helped me commit my life completely to God. He studied the Bible with me, and I was baptized.

I'm sharing what I learn with my wife, and she listens. She sees the miracles that God has performed in our lives, and while she doesn't yet attend church with me, she does join me for prayer every morning to commit our lives and family to God.

Your mission offerings help support the ongoing work in India, where nearly a million Adventist believers live and share their faith. Thank you!

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BRITTO AMAL RAJ *shares his faith in a town near Madurai, India.*

# Jealousy



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Isa. 14:12–14; James 3:16, 17; Exod. 20:17; Genesis 37; 1 Samuel 18; Matt. 12:14.*

**Memory Text:** “Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?” (*Proverbs 27:4, NIV*).

One of the most devastating emotions is jealousy. It is the oldest type of sin (*Isa. 14:14*) and can hurt not only interpersonal relationships (*2 Cor. 12:20*) but our physical health, as well (*Prov. 14:30*).

Jealousy tends to be personal; it targets an individual who is perceived as a rival and a threat. As a result, jealousy often causes violence, either psychological (verbal abuse, backbiting, criticism) or physical. Who hasn't, at some point, felt the misery that this emotion brings?

This lesson provides instances of individuals who allowed jealousy to impact their behavior: Satan, Joseph's brothers, King Saul, and the chief priests of New Testament times. The result always was disastrous. How fascinating, too, that all of these jealous individuals enjoyed high status and privileges to begin with. Yet, all fell into the trap of hating someone else for what they were or what they had.

The Lord warns us away from such an erroneous path and urges His children to love their neighbors to the point of rejoicing with them in their gifts, achievements, and possessions as if they were our own.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 5.*



## At the Root of Evil

**What** was the cause of Satan’s expulsion from heaven? *Isa. 14:12–14*. What does it say about freedom that even in a perfect environment, heaven, this terrible trait was able to arise?

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Lucifer, the most magnificent creature from the hands of God, was given the highest place in heaven outside of the Godhead. His honor, beauty, and intelligence were supreme; yet, sin nevertheless grew within him (*Ezek. 28:12–15*). The perfect peace and happiness of all creatures was greatly disturbed by this act of self-exaltation and jealousy toward Christ.

“ ‘I will make myself like the Most High’ ” (*Isa. 14:14, NIV*) was the thought that triggered dissension, rebellion, violence, and much pain to all inhabitants of heaven and then to the entire human family. “Satan was jealous of Jesus. He wished to be consulted concerning the formation of man, and because he was not, he was filled with envy, jealousy, and hatred. He desired to receive the highest honors in heaven next to God.”—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 145.

By contrast, we look at Jesus. The inception of sin through jealousy and selfishness is rebuffed by Jesus’ willingness to be humbled to the lowest level of humankind and to be killed, like a criminal, in order that each person may be saved from the ultimate devastation caused by sin (*2 Thess. 1:9*).

**Read** James 3:16, 17. What contrasts are presented here? What should this tell us about how damaging and demonic jealousy is?

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Our sinful nature is such that the first bad deed makes the next one easier. When the wrong path is initiated with jealousy and selfish ambition, the result seems to be a smorgasbord of sin: “disorder and every evil practice” (*vs. 16, NIV*), as James describes it. The wonderful news is that there is room for another option, one that is “pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere” (*vs. 17, NIV*). This option is love.

**Lucifer did not look at what he had; instead, he chose to contemplate what Christ had. How often do we tend to do something similar? How much jealousy and envy do you harbor for those who have “more” than you? How can you overcome this dangerous emotion?**

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## Joseph's Brothers

So often jealousy and envy arise among those with whom we are very close, which makes the potential for serious consequences even more devastating. Indeed, a large portion of aggression (physical or psychological) today is found within the family circle, and jealousy and rivalry between family members is so often at the root.

**Read** Genesis 37. What is the background to the story? What led up to this criminal act? What role did jealousy play?

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It's hard to believe that these brothers could have been so cruel. Did they not think, too, about what their actions would do to their father? Their jealousy became so powerful that it overruled not only common sense but common decency and morality, as well. What a powerful lesson this should be to all of us about how potentially dangerous this emotion is. No wonder there's an entire commandment dedicated to warning us against it (*see Exod. 20:17*).

Besides all the pain their actions brought upon themselves and their father, they also feared for what Joseph would do to them after the death of their father, Jacob (*Gen. 50:15*).

But Joseph's attitude could not be more noble, for he said: "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?" (*Gen. 50:19, NIV*). Joseph had understood that his duty was to forgive the offenders and to trust in God's mercy and justice.

The life of Joseph has been compared to the life of Jesus Christ. Jealousy moved his brothers to sell him as a slave; some priests and elders were jealous of Jesus, and that jealousy fueled their actions against Him. Joseph was sold to the heathen; Jesus was sold to His enemies. Joseph was falsely accused and sent to prison because of his virtue; Jesus was falsely accused and rejected because of His righteousness. Joseph displayed noble benevolence toward his brothers; Jesus, too, forgave His enemies. The evil actions against Joseph ultimately led to good; the same thing happened with Jesus, in that the evil done against Him was turned to good, as well.

**What kind of pain and suffering has jealousy and envy—whether your own or someone else's—brought to your life? What lessons have you learned from these experiences? How often, too, have you felt jealousy over things that today seem so trivial and meaningless? What lesson should you learn from that, as well?**

## Saul's Jealousy of David: Part 1

A classic case of how jealousy works can be seen in the story of Saul and David. Saul was king, ruler over the nation. He had everything going for him, and yet jealousy entered, and it seemed to change everything about him.

Or did the jealousy merely bring out what was already there inside Saul?

**What** was Saul's initial attitude toward David? *1 Sam. 18:1–5.*

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Saul's actions show that he had a very positive attitude toward David, to whom he gave a high place in the army. Also, considering his own son's attitude toward David, it was clear that David had royal favor.

**What** changed Saul's attitude? *1 Sam. 18:6–9.* Why is Saul's attitude such a common human response?

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The rest of 1 Samuel 18 shows just how damaging Saul's jealousy of David became. It led him to all sorts of deviousness and trickery, and yet, none of it worked. The very things that he feared in David became more and more pronounced!

Jealousy generates a series of negative emotions: low self-esteem, hatred, suspicion, fear, guilt, and anger. Saul was afraid of David, as mentioned several times in the chapter. He might have been afraid of losing his kingly position or afraid of David becoming the absolute hero of Israel. But his main source of fear was "because the Lord was with David but had left Saul" (*1 Sam. 18:12, NIV*).

Being left by God is reason enough to be afraid. But Saul's fear was aggravated by the fact that "the Lord was with David" (*vs. 12, NIV*). Saul was unable to apply to the situation the simple logic of Gamaliel: "If [this] is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop [it]" (*Acts 5:38, 39, NIV*). When the Lord blesses people, there is no point in developing jealousy or seeking their doom. God will continue to bless them.

**However wrong Saul's attitude, why is it relatively easy to understand? What's your immediate attitude to someone you deem could be a threat to your position? Do you surrender everything to the Lord, or do you start plotting a counter strategy?**

## Saul's Jealousy of David: Part 2

**Read 1 Samuel 19.** What path can you see Saul on? What lessons are here for us?

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Saul, at first, worked with some stealth and subtlety in seeking to remove the perceived threat of David. When that didn't work, he came right out into the open with his murderous plans. Most likely he, at first, never dreamed he'd go that far. However, once the floodgates are opened to sin, none of us realize how far down the wrong path sin can lead us.

Killing David became an obsession. Saul's negative feelings, first harbored when women sang and danced to honor David, soon reached the point of murderous attempts on his life. In chapters 18 and 19 alone we find eight specific attempts, either mandated or perpetrated by Saul himself, to murder David.

The rest of the story is a sad one, as things grew worse for Saul. As his hatred and jealousy increased, he became irrationally suspicious of David, obsessive about killing him, and frightened of the surrounding Philistines. On the excuse that they had sided with David, he killed 85 priests of the Lord and many men, women, children, infants, and farm animals in the priestly town of Nob (*1 Sam. 22:17-19*). Look at where he was being led!

Full of terror because of the Philistine incursion, he asked the Lord what to do. But Saul had gone too far away from God, turning down divine advice too many times, so he did not obtain an answer. He chose, therefore, to consult an evil spirit through a witch, a practice that he himself had abolished. He even bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground before the evil spirit, which was impersonating the deceased Samuel (*1 Sam. 28:14*). This was the beginning of his end, for the following day he and his sons lost their lives to the Philistines (*1 Samuel 31*), as forewarned by the evil spirit, obviously a demonic manifestation.

Saul, by letting jealousy take root, followed a path to complete apostasy and ruin. Worse, his sin brought suffering not only on himself but on his own family. Sin is bad enough when it hurts us as individuals. Rarely, though, is the damage and pain so localized. In most cases, our wrong deeds impact others negatively, as well.

Look at all the cases we've seen so far. In each example the jealousy and the results of that jealousy had far-reaching consequences, most likely not anticipated by the one who first harbored the emotion. How crucial, then, that we by God's grace seek to die to self the moment this ugly emotion arises in our hearts.

## Jealousy Toward Jesus

“For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy”  
(*Matt. 27:18, NKJV*).

**Skim** over quickly the first 11 chapters of Matthew, focusing specifically on what things Jesus did. Then read Matthew 12:14. What was it about Him and what He did that would have caused the leaders to respond this way? What did their actions reveal about their hearts? As you think about your answer, dwell on the question of how you might have responded were you in their situation.

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The chief priests and elders were knowledgeable and exacting in the observance of the law. But their analysis of religious life was so microscopic that they had lost sight of the point of religion. Jesus brought a fresh view of piety, and the people of Israel (including religious leaders) heard the good news of salvation. Instead, though, of thanking Jesus for alerting them to their self-destructive path, they sought to destroy Him.

How often folk let their own jealousy blind them to what should be obvious. After all that Jesus was doing, the miracles, the healing, the casting out of demons, it's hard to imagine anyone questioning Him as being anything other than from God. The evidence He gave should have been more than convincing (*see Matt. 11:4, 5*).

Perhaps because they were more aware of their own need, the common people were more open to Jesus than were many of the religious leaders, who feared that Jesus would change the status quo and thus endanger their position. Jesus' teaching was in many ways so different from theirs, and His message so much more appealing, that they had good reasons to fear His influence. Unfortunately for them, they were more concerned with preserving their own power and influence than they were in knowing and following the Truth.

The fact that jealousy was motivating them wasn't a secret. According to Matthew 27:18, even the Roman leader Pilate knew what their motives were. That's how obvious it had become. Sadly, these leaders were so blinded by their jealousy that they thought they were defending the faith against some impostor who was leading the people astray. Had they surrendered in humility and faith before the Lord instead of letting their jealousy overrule rational thinking, they would have avoided the tragic course that surely led them to eternal ruin. We would do well in our context, whatever it is, to learn from their mistakes.

**Further Study:** “Satan was once an honored angel in heaven, next to Christ. His countenance, like those of the other angels, was mild and expressive of happiness. His forehead was high and broad, showing great intelligence. His form was perfect; his bearing noble and majestic. But when God said to His Son, ‘Let us make man in our image,’ Satan was jealous of Jesus. He wished to be consulted concerning the formation of man, and because he was not, he was filled with envy, jealousy, and hatred. He desired to receive the highest honors in heaven next to God.”—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 145.

“One great defect in the character of Saul was his love of approbation. This trait had had a controlling influence over his actions and thoughts; everything was marked by his desire for praise and self-exaltation. . . . It was the ambition of Saul to be first in the estimation of men; and when this song of praise was sung, a settled conviction entered the mind of the king that David would obtain the hearts of the people and reign in his stead. Saul opened his heart to the spirit of jealousy by which his soul was poisoned.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 650.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 How many things do you have to be thankful for? Why is it so important to dwell on those things, as opposed to your problems?
- 2 Can jealousy ever be good, ever be a motive for improving oneself? Defend your answer.
- 3 Think about some of the Bible characters who displayed jealousy in this week’s lesson: the most superior angel in heaven, the king of Israel, the religious leaders in Israel. These all were in exalted positions; these all had so much. And yet, they still allowed jealousy to come in and wreak havoc. What does that tell us about why jealousy is an internal problem, a problem of the heart, as opposed to something that arises only from outward conditions? Why could someone have so much of what this world offers and still be stung by the nasty bite of jealousy?
- 4 Ellen White wrote in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (see quote in Friday’s study) that the “one great defect” in the character of Saul was his love of being praised. Just one “little” defect, and look what happened. What should this tell us about the danger of not seeking to overcome all our character flaws before they overcome us? What Bible promises can you claim that should give you the hope and encouragement that victory over these defects can be yours?

# Alive Again: Part 1

by ATTE HELMINEN

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Salo, Finland, was, like many churches, slowly dying. A handful of aging members struggled to keep the church open, and no new members had been added in years. The members had to decide: would they let their church die? Or would they do whatever it took to bring it back to life?

Members prayed for forgiveness for their narrow-minded views and asked God to pull them out of their self-serving mindset and make them other-oriented. They resolved to become a caring community and began reaching out to people they never would have invited to worship before.

A pastor from another town taught them how to reach out to others and share their faith. He taught them how to give Bible studies in a more open and accepting manner than they were used to and challenged them to create their own ministries using the talents and spiritual gifts God had given them.

The members held a health expo that drew crowds from the first day. At the expo, members invited visitors to come to a series of Meet Jesus meetings. Their efforts worked, and within a few months three women joined the church, the first baptism the church had celebrated in years. During the first year, 12 people were baptized. Word spread that the church was alive again, and some Adventists from other areas of the country came to help revive the church. Within three years, church membership doubled.

“We’re learning to be more loving and to use our spiritual gifts for God’s work,” one member says, smiling. “Each of us has found a place in God’s plan for His church. We now have a common joy and a common purpose, and that is to enlarge the family of God.”

And the church continues to grow as people who need hope and love find people with hope and love to share.

Helena was going through a life-and-death struggle with alcohol. Doctors told her to quit or die. One day she came to the church uninvited and smelling of alcohol. Her mother had once been an Adventist, she said, and she just came in one day. Church members welcomed her and cared for her needs. They visited her and tried to be like Jesus to her. Today Helena is alcohol free and a different person. She has been baptized and has become a strong witness for Jesus.

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ATTE HELMINEN is *president of the Finland Finnish Union.*

# Freedom From Addictions



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Prov. 23:29–35; 1 Cor. 7:2–5; Matt. 25:15–30; Mark 10:17–27; 1 Pet. 3:3, 4.*

**Memory Text:** “‘So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed’ ” (*John 8:36, NIV*).

In recent years, many people have broken free from political tyranny and bondage. But there's another kind of bondage, one that can be just as bad as or worse than its political counterpart—the bondage that comes from being an addict. Alcohol, tobacco, and other substances have enslaved millions. Furthermore, powerful nonchemical addictions are on the rise, too: sex, pornography, gambling (or risky investments), and the accumulation of money/goods.

All addictions create dependence (one feels very uncomfortable until the substance is taken or the act realized) and a certain degree of tolerance (one needs a bit more of it to reach the effect of previous times). Thus, it becomes extremely difficult for addicted people to break away from the cycle that has captured them. For this reason, those trapped need support from family, church, and friends. They also might need professional care and, above all, the power of God working in their lives to give them the freedom that they're promised in Christ the Lord.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 12.*



## Alcoholic Beverages

Wine, beer, and other liquor have been associated in the Western world with memorable events, happy occasions, holidays, and important business transactions. There is a seemingly clean and beautiful face to alcoholic beverages. They not only have become socially acceptable but also a “necessity” in certain circumstances. Unfortunately, there’s another side to alcohol that those who make their living selling it don’t want their potential customers to see.

**Read** Proverbs 23:29–35. What do these verses say about the adverse effects of alcohol? From your own experiences, what have you seen of the devastating effects from the use of this poison?

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The image of beautiful wine soon biting like a snake and poisoning like a viper is powerful. Alcohol’s chemical makeup is treated by the human body not as food but as a toxic substance. It is absorbed into the stomach and transported by the bloodstream to the brain, lungs, kidneys, and heart in just a few minutes. The liver especially is taxed in order to process a substance that takes hours of hard work to break down. When the presence of alcohol is chronic and prolonged significantly, the organs deteriorate, and the person suffers from one or more illnesses.

Unfortunately, the effects of alcohol transcend the drinker. Alcohol use comes with a terrible social cost. Half of all automobile and work-place accidents are alcohol-related. Many crimes are committed under the effect of alcohol. Public and private funds are depleted to provide health care to cure maladies caused directly by alcohol. And, closer to home, the spouse and children of the addict often are victims of verbal and physical abuse.

Alcohol, as well as any other psychoactive substance, will affect our ability to make the correct moral choices; under the influence, folk are likely to slip deeper and deeper into sin.

Those trapped in any kind of substance abuse need to realize their problem and their need of help from a power greater than themselves—and that includes God’s grace, the support of family or a caring church community, and the treatment prescribed by qualified professionals (if possible).

**As Seventh-day Adventists, we take a very strong line on alcohol use. Without judging or condemning them, how can we help those among us who are struggling with this problem?**

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## Sex Addiction

**What** does the Bible say about sex as a source of enjoyment and strengthening marriage relationships? *Prov. 5:18, 19; 1 Cor. 7:2–5.*

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Sex is one of the many enjoyable gifts that God has granted to men and women. God designed it not only for procreation but also to be a source of joy, closeness, and unity—but only in the context of marriage between one man and one woman (*Gen. 1:27, 28; 1 Cor. 7:2*). When taken away from this God-ordained framework and purpose, the gift becomes sin—sin often with devastating consequences (*see 1 Cor. 6:18, 19*). God alone knows the extent of havoc that sexual immorality has brought to the human family.

Sex is a very strong drive and thus readily open to abuse. It easily can become an absorbing obsession, one that's very difficult to control. Worse, the more one indulges in it, the more and more sex one needs in order to reach the level of satisfaction attained earlier.

Prostitution and adultery are traditional paths into sexual immorality and addiction (*see Prov. 5:3–14, 9:13–18*). In addition, other forms of sex addiction are available today, such as pornography and cybersex. Internet pornography has created a staggering problem because, with a few mere clicks of a mouse, it can put the most vile and degrading acts into our homes and offices. These practices are highly capable of creating addiction, compulsion, and deterioration of marriage and family ties. It's impossible to calculate the damage, for instance, that adultery has created in the world.

Sexual immorality is easy to start, and those who have not fallen into its trap will do well in keeping far from it. How crucial that when confronted with sexual temptations outside the sacred bonds of marriage, each person should act as Joseph did (*see Gen. 39:7–12*).

God is willing to grant full pardon and freedom to anyone trapped in sex addictions. Submission to Him is crucial (*James 4:7*). But the addiction mechanism is so intricate that professional help may be needed. Support groups that incorporate God as the ultimate Source of help and include specialized skills to treat the problem can be of great benefit, if available.

**How can you help someone who, though guilty of sin in this area, is seeking to know God's forgiveness and healing? Suppose you are struggling here. How can you know that all hope is not lost, just as long as you don't lose hope yourself? Jesus forgives—and heals.**

## Gambling

Though the Bible doesn't come right out and prohibit gambling per se, it's hard to imagine Jesus or Paul working the tables in Las Vegas, isn't it?

At the same time, Paul does warn against love of money, classing it as the root of all evil and the reason people have abandoned the faith (*1 Tim. 6:10*). For some, in their desire for wealth, gambling becomes the snare that Satan uses to seek to destroy them.

**Read** **Matthew 25:15–30.** How could one apply the teaching here to the problem of gambling, especially when the vast majority of people who gamble lose?

Gambling is for losers. The industry thrives because a lot more money is lost than won. What, for instance, are the chances of winning the lottery? The odds are staggeringly against you. You have more chance of getting hit by lightning than you do of winning.

Logic alone should warn us against putting any money and time into gambling (after all, the gambling industry can exist only when people lose more than they make). Yet, people gamble, and soon what they thought of as fun later becomes a compulsion.

Why? Self-esteem needs seem to be at the core. Many find a special satisfaction in fantasizing about winning. When they do not win, they become increasingly hopeful about hitting it next time. So, they gamble again and again. When all money is spent, they borrow, lie, and may steal in order to get another “dose” of this nonchemical “drug.”

We may think that gambling addiction does not happen in our church, but Ellen White wrote about it in her time, for it was a problem even then. There is no reason to believe that today (when gambling is ubiquitous) our church members are free from this problem, especially as online gambling can bring the casino right into our homes.

Recovery from gambling takes a multiple front: First is to admit that you have a serious problem. Then you must quit at once but find refuge in a group (if available) in order to avoid relapse. Be alert and stay away from any stimulus that may entice you to gamble. Enhancing self-esteem also is necessary to avoid relapse. Most important, constant communion with God and clinging to His promises of healing is crucial when struggling with any temptation.

**What would you say and do if someone you know said to you, “I am hooked on gambling, and I just cannot quit”? What Bible promises could you point them to? See 1 Cor. 10:13 and 1 Pet. 4:1, 2.**

## The Love of Money

**“Put falsehood and lying far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; [provide me only with the food I need;] lest, being full, I deny you, saying, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or, being in want, I steal, and profane the name of my God”** (*Prov. 30:8, 9, NAB*).

The Bible does not limit the amount of money one should aim to have but warns against the wrong attitude toward money and possessions—such as covetousness and greed. A wrong outlook might make people obsessive, compulsive, and addicted to moneymaking (albeit honestly earned) or to the accumulation of possessions. These themes may occupy so much time and effort that they become false gods.

Information technology has made things easier, but, at the same time, more risky for those prone to addiction. For example, private investors on the stock exchange now can perform their operations instantly over the Internet. In this setting, some easily are caught for endless hours in front of the computer, all in order to make money; this is not the same thing, however, as someone being a good steward by wisely and carefully investing money.

**Read** Mark 10:17–27. See also 1 Tim. 6:10 and Luke 12:15. **What warning must we take away from these texts?**

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Such expressions as “the man’s face fell” and “he went away sad” (*Mark 10:22, NIV*) tell us that his love for wealth was greater than his love for the Master. Accumulation of money or material possessions is not good or bad in itself. It all depends on where the heart is (*see Matt. 6:21*). It becomes dangerous when it stands in the way of what should be the first goal: seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness (*vs. 33*).

The ship *Chanunga*, on its way from Liverpool to America, had a massive collision with a small vessel from Hamburg. Crowded with more than two hundred passengers, the ship sank a half hour after the crash. The *Chanunga*’s lifesaving boats were lowered in order to reach the shipwrecked persons, but only thirty-four were saved. Why such a small proportion? Almost all had seized their belts of gold and silver and tied them round their waists. Refusing to lose their money, they lost their lives (and their money) instead.

**Who doesn’t like money? The question you need to ask yourself is, “Do I control my desire for money, or does it control me?”**

## Personal Image

**Read 1** Peter 3:3, 4. How different is what's said there from what society teaches us?

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Society has placed an excessive value on personal image. This is a weakness that has accompanied humans for their entire history. In our days, this emphasis on beauty and personal care has reached overwhelming proportions. The worldwide cosmetic industry alone is more than half of the global food retail market. In addition to cosmetics, many people spend endless resources on body building, facelifts, hair transplants, plastic surgery, special diets, and so on, all in order to improve their appearance.

This intensive desire to become more beautiful also has the risk of becoming addictive. Some develop exercise addiction; others the addiction to eat a little less each time, to the point of endangering their lives. Others may become obsessed with their hair or skin, submitting themselves to sophisticated, costly, and never-ending treatments.

**How** would you interpret Matthew 6:19–21 in the context we are looking at? How do the same principles apply?

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There is nothing wrong with being fit, clean, and nice-looking. It is the constant focus on these things that can draw our hearts to them to the point of letting them become idols. Jesus talked about the need to develop treasures in heaven, not on earth, where things do not last and may distract us from God's kingdom. Indeed, there's one thing about looks that you can be sure of: sooner or later, time and gravity will take them away.

Like material resources, our bodies are a treasure entrusted to us, but we run a serious risk to make it an idol when our devotion to it becomes excessive. It's not always easy to know when a line has been crossed; hence, the need for all of us to be careful in this regard.

**What kind of messages are we creating for our young people in the church in regard to personal image? What are we emphasizing? In what subtle ways might we be sending wrong messages? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**

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**Further Study:** “Words and acts testify plainly what is in the heart. If vanity and pride, love of self and love of dress, fill the heart, the conversation will be upon the fashions, the dress, and the appearance, but not on Christ or the kingdom of heaven. If envious feelings dwell in the heart, they will be manifested in words and acts. Those who measure themselves by others, do as others do, and make no higher attainments, excusing themselves because of the faults and wrongs of others, are feeding on husks and will remain spiritual dwarfs as long as they gratify Satan by thus indulging their own unconsecrated feelings. Some dwell upon what they shall eat and drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed. These thoughts flow out from the abundance of the heart, as though temporal things were the grand aim in life, the highest attainment. These persons forget the words of Christ: “ ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 500.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, go over your answer to Thursday’s final question.
- 2 Why is it so important not to be judgmental toward those who are struggling with an addiction of any kind? It’s easy to be judgmental, of course, but why should we be very careful in that regard?
- 3 Some addictions are deemed more socially acceptable than others, which could only add to their deception. After all, how many people enter treatment for addiction to wealth or power? How can we learn not to let societal values impact how we view these things?
- 4 However strong the grip of addiction could be in your life or in the life of someone you know, is there anything that the Lord can’t free us from? What is the key to allowing Christ to work in our lives so that we can have that victory? *See Luke 9:23.*
- 5 What kind of programs does your local church have that can help people who are struggling with addiction? What can your church do to help those who are in need? In what ways could programs such as these be powerful outreach tools, as well?
- 6 Read 1 Peter 4:1, 2. What is the Lord’s message to us here in regard to what is involved in overcoming sinful addictions?

## Alive Again: Part 2

by ATTE HELMINEN

Pirkko was depressed and discouraged. Things weren't going well in her life. She felt as if she was in a pit from which she couldn't escape. One day she met an old friend, Jari, who is the local church elder in Salo, Finland. They chatted for awhile, and he gave her some books to help her deal with her depression. She was deeply impressed with the books, so Jari gave her some videos and invited her to visit the church.

When Pirkko walked into the small church hall and saw the people, she thought, I don't belong here! I'm so different! But the members welcomed and loved her. She felt the Holy Spirit's presence, and she felt at home.

Pirkko's lifestyle still bothered her, but the church members' love made it easy for her to return. Pirkko invited her daughters to attend church with her, and they came. In time Pirkko and her daughters embraced Christ and were baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. "I have a long way to go," Pirkko says. "But God is leading in my life."

Marko was a self-proclaimed atheist. "Science was my religion, and scientists were my gods," he said. One day he met Pirkko's daughter, and the two chatted for some time. Then she invited him to church. He went just to be polite.

He was impressed with the love people showered on him. He continued attending and realized that he felt good being there. His doubts over God's existence faded as God's love flowed through the lives of the church members. He asked to be baptized.

When he invited his family to his baptism, they were surprised, for he had often spoken against God. But several of them came and saw the difference that Jesus was making in his life. Marko shares his new faith with his family, and several have come to church with him.

"I thank God that I have found Him," Marko says. "I know that if the believers in this church hadn't been so loving, I would still be an unbeliever. It took the fire of love to melt my heart."

The church in Salo is alive once more. It's been reborn, the result of prayerful changes in the lives of its members. It is, essentially, a church replant, and as such needs financial support to carry on its ministries in the community while it grows. Our mission offerings can help the members revitalize and re-grow their church.

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ATTE HELMINEN is president of the Finland Finnish Union.

# Nature as a Source of Health



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 1:27–2:25; Genesis 3; Jer. 10:12, 13; Ps. 19:1–7; Matt. 6:25–34; Psalm 104.*

**Memory Text:** “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge” (*Psalm 19:1, 2, NIV*).

God created Adam and Eve in His own image. What could be a more perfect inheritance? He then placed them in the Garden of Eden. What could be a more perfect setting? Both heredity and environment, then, were divinely balanced to produce and preserve perfect mental and physical health.

Sin, however, ruined everything—and by the second generation jealousy, hatred, and violence contaminated the world. The natural environment also underwent the initial results of sin, and when sin became intolerable, the Flood changed forever the portrait of the earth.

Yet, much goodness and beauty remain in the natural world. Nature still supplies sufficient resources to satisfy our basic needs. Nature also can provide joy, happiness, and well-being to compensate partially for the misery caused by sin.

Thus, despite its sometimes violent and deadly convulsions, nature can be a source of mental and physical health. It also can become a means for us to draw ever closer to the Creator, the fount of all goodness: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights” (*James 1:17*).

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 19.*



## A Perfect Environment

Today, living as we do in a world tainted and corrupted by sin, we can only imagine what it must have been like for our first parents in Eden. No sin, no suffering, no death—nothing to bring them the kind of sorrows and pain that we all know so well. In a sense, we’re so used to these realities, they’re so common, that we forget that they all are intruders, things that were not in the original creation, things that were never meant to be, things that we are promised will one day be forever gone.

**Read** Genesis 1:27–2:25. What picture is presented about what life and the environment were like in Eden? How different is it from what we know today?

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The newly created couple was placed in a garden that God Himself had planted (*Gen. 2:8*). Although the biblical account is brief, imagine when we consider the wonderful bounties nature provides for us today, the luxurious mix of produce that must have come from this, the first garden. Their senses were exposed to sights, sounds, tastes, feelings, and aromas that certainly brought much satisfaction and well-being to our first parents. It truly was Paradise.

There is no doubt that the environment was the best to suit the newly created humans. Their physical, emotional, and mental needs were more than met. Mental states such as uncertainty, anxiety, and worry were completely unknown, because there was nothing there to cause them.

“The Creator chose for our first parents the surroundings best adapted for their health and happiness. He did not place them in a palace or surround them with the artificial adornments and luxuries that so many today are struggling to obtain. . . . In the garden that God prepared as a home for His children, graceful shrubs and delicate flowers greeted the eye at every turn. There were trees of every variety, many of them laden with fragrant and delicious fruit. On their branches the birds caroled their songs of praise. Under their shadow the creatures of the earth sported together without a fear.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 261.

**Try to envision what Eden must have been like. Think of the sights, the smells, the tastes, everything designed to appeal to our senses. What should that tell us about how, in principle, our physical bodies are good and were made for us to enjoy?**

## Sin and Nature

Whatever wonder and beauty we can find in nature, it's today a double-edged sword. Beauty and marvel are there, but so are famine, earthquakes, pestilence, and disease. Something has gone terribly wrong.

**Read over Genesis 3, the Fall. What immediate changes came to both humans and nature as a result of sin?**

Sin brought immediate physical and spiritual consequences to human life. Nature, too, suffered the effects of sin. Sin caused devastating effects upon creation in at least three ways:

- The ground was cursed (*Gen. 3:17*). After departing from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve encountered immediate obstacles in working the soil. The ground began to produce undesirable thorns and thistles. Pests, most probably, got in the way of healthy growth too. Things got worse after the devastation of the Flood.
- Human beings experienced significant changes. Fatigue and pain became a reality. The relationship between the man and the woman changed. The chapter seems to imply that Eve would have originally not had pain in childbirth. The relationship of Adam to the earth had changed, as well, and work now was going to be much more difficult than it would have been before. We do not know how the awareness of their own impending deaths affected the first couple, but it must have changed their outlook on life completely.
- Sin affected human and animal behavior. Hatred, jealousy, selfishness, arrogance, etc., caused aggression against fellow humans and animals. Other unknown ways of damaging the environment (perhaps comparable to what we are witnessing today) may have taken place. Animals started to kill each other for food and for power. As described in Genesis 3–6, corruption and violence escalated to the point that God was grieved for having made all creatures (*Gen. 6:5–7*).

The true extent of all these transformations is not revealed to us, but we can assume that profound changes took place. Yet, God, in His infinite mercy, preserved a great deal of the magnificent original creation for the benefit of human beings.

**Look around at the wonders of nature wherever you are. What echoes of the original creation seem to remain? What hope can you draw from those echoes that point you to the promises of a better world?**

## God's Gifts Through Nature

The natural world presents a powerful testimony to not only the existence of God but also His power. Sadly, as Paul warned, humans (no doubt inspired by Satan) turned away from the living God and worshiped the creation instead of its Creator (*see Rom. 1:19–25*).

**Read** Jeremiah 10:12, 13. What picture is presented here of God's creative power and His present involvement in natural phenomena? What can we learn about the character of God through His created works?

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Of course, as we all know, nature sometimes turns against us, spreading horror through earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, etc. Why these tragedies happen when and where they do are questions that we don't have answers for now. What we do know, however, is that the first few chapters in the book of Job reveal the reality of the great controversy between God and Satan and that Satan can use the forces of nature for evil purposes. And despite these terrible calamities, the goodness of God still can be seen in the natural world.

**Read** Psalm 19:1–6, and then in your own words paraphrase its basic message.

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Nature traditionally has been seen by Seventh-day Adventists as God's second book. Observation and study of the natural world, if done in humility and openness to the influence of the Holy Spirit, will deepen faith and trust in God. It also will provide additional understanding into God's love for His creatures. This can be a great source of mental and spiritual comfort. Sometimes, when all else fails, the beauty of nature, and what it testifies to us about God, can be a source of great comfort and hope.

**If while you are witnessing to someone about God's goodness (especially as revealed in nature) the person brings up the question of tsunamis, earthquakes, famines, and the like, how would you respond? What does the reality of these natural disasters tell us about the limits of what nature can teach us about God?**

## Communion With God in Nature

“ ‘Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin’ ” (*Matt. 6:28*).

A young man, an atheist his whole life, was converted in his early twenties. Right after his new birth, he lived for a number of months in a country setting, and he would often wander in the woods, marveling at the wonders of the God who had created such beauty. Of course, he had seen wonderful things in the natural world before, but only now was he able to see the character of the Lord who had created it all. It was, he said, “as if my eyes were opened for the first time in my whole life!” It was during that time that this new Christian came to truly know the Lord.

**Read** Matthew 6:25–34. What is Jesus telling us that we can learn from studying nature?

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No question, we indeed can learn many valuable spiritual lessons from the study of the created world. But nature can work to our advantage spiritually in another way, as well. Luke 5:16 says that Jesus “withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed,” something that Ellen White said Jesus did often. Sometimes we, too, need to get away from everything and just be alone with the Lord in a natural environment. The beauty, the comfort, the peace, the serenity that one often finds in the natural world can speak to our hearts and minds in ways that nothing else does. There might not be any sudden revelation of new truth; there might be no new insights on a doctrine or a text. What there can be, instead, is an unspoken recognition of the love and power of the One who created all this. However we might individually experience the Lord this way, there’s no question that time alone in nature, in communion with God, can bring healing and peace to our bodies and souls.

“All who are under the training of God need the quiet hour for communion with their own hearts, with nature, and with God. In them is to be revealed a life that is not in harmony with the world, its customs, or its practices; and they need to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God. We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 58.

**When was the last time you communed with the Lord in nature? If possible, make an effort to do just that. You might be surprised at what a positive spiritual effect it will have.**

## Psalm 104

In the nineteenth century, a popular belief known as deism stated that God had created the world but then left it alone. In other words, according to this position, God exists but doesn't want to get involved.

That view, however, is not what the Bible teaches. God didn't just set the world like a wind-up watch and then let it go, come what may. According to the Bible, He's intricately involved in all that happens here. After all, what is the Cross if not God intimately and directly involved in human affairs?

**Read** Psalm 104 prayerfully. What does it tell us about the role of God in creation and in the natural world?

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Perhaps the most telling thing about Psalm 104 is the enthusiasm and excitement that exude from the words themselves. The psalmist rejoices in the creative and sustaining power of the Lord. You almost can hear him shouting out these words in praise and adoration. He sees the reality of God in the everyday function of the natural world.

The God presented in this psalm is not the god of the deists either. He's a God who is involved in what happens here. No doubt, whatever the psalmist's personal troubles, he finds comfort and hope in the power of the Lord. Sure, contemplating the birds in their nests or the lions seeking their food isn't going to solve whatever daily struggles he's facing, but he can see in nature things that speak to him of God's goodness and power, and that gives him hope.

Nature also can be a source of healing to the body, mind, and spirit. In many cases fresh air, sunlight, water, and a healthy diet can do wonders for us both physically and mentally. Natural remedies remain a powerful means of health and healing.

Some doctors, too, often will tell people to get away from work and stress and find rest and relaxation in a natural setting somewhere. Some research shows just how good nature and a natural environment can be for us physically and mentally. After all, God put our first parents in a garden, not in a city square. Something in us resonates better with a field of lilies than it does with an asphalt parking lot.

**Nature is one of God's great gifts. We should do all that we can to take advantage of it. What are ways you can benefit better from what God has given us in nature?**

**Further Study:** “The home of our first parents was to be a pattern for other homes as their children should go forth to occupy the earth. That home, beautified by the hand of God Himself, was not a gorgeous palace. Men, in their pride, delight in magnificent and costly edifices and glory in the works of their own hands; but God placed Adam in a garden. This was his dwelling. The blue heavens were its dome; the earth, with its delicate flowers and carpet of living green, was its floor; and the leafy branches of the goodly trees were its canopy. Its walls were hung with the most magnificent adornings—the handiwork of the great Master Artist. In the surroundings of the holy pair was a lesson for all time—that true happiness is found, not in the indulgence of pride and luxury, but in communion with God through His created works. If men would give less attention to the artificial, and would cultivate greater simplicity, they would come far nearer to answering the purpose of God in their creation.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 49, 50.

“The constant contact with the mystery of life and the loveliness of nature, as well as the tenderness called forth in ministering to these beautiful objects of God’s creation, tends to quicken the mind and refine and elevate the character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 143.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 How can we make sure that we don’t cross the line from being a lover of nature to a worshiper of it? How might that not always be an easy distinction to draw? However wonderful nature is, we always must remember that in the end it can’t save us. Only the God who created nature can. Why is it important to always keep that crucial truth in mind?
- 2 What should we as Seventh-day Adventists have to say in regard to the whole question of the environment? What, if anything in our teaching, could be a helpful and needed component in this important question? At the same time, how should we respond to the following idea: “Well, we know the Lord is coming soon, and this whole world will be destroyed and then made over, so is the environment really that important?”
- 3 In what ways today should all the incredible advancements in scientific and natural knowledge help increase our love of and appreciation for the power of God? Think of all the things we know about the natural world today that the ancients had no inkling of. Thus, in what ways do we have so many more advantages than they ever did in regard to be able to marvel at the creative power of the Lord?

# The Lighthouse in the Darkness

by FRANCIS AHISSON

The delegates from a Protestant church walked out of the Seventh-day Adventist mission office in Benin, West Africa, talking excitedly. They had come to ask the Adventist officials to teach them the Bible, and the mission president agreed to teach them.

On the appointed day many came to hear the Adventist pastor teach them about God. Following the meetings, a congregation was established and a temporary chapel was built to house the worshipers until a more permanent building could be erected.

The church's membership grew to some 60 people as the congregation struggled against the powers of Satan and voodoo worship, which dominates the people of this region. Most of the church members earn a living by fishing or doing unskilled labor, so they don't earn much money. They sacrifice to buy cement blocks for the day when they can build their church.

One woman in the church became seriously ill, and local doctors couldn't help her. Her husband took her to a large city hospital where doctors said she had a tumor and needed surgery. But her husband didn't have the money for the surgery, so he took his wife home, fearful that she would die. He did the only thing he knew to do: he called the church leaders to pray for her.

That night the woman awoke and saw an angel in her room. The angel touched her and said, "God has sent me to heal you." The woman awoke, wondering at her dream. Then she heard a voice tell her, "Stand up and walk." She hadn't been able to stand or walk for several weeks, but she stood and took several steps.

The next day the doctor couldn't find the tumor. He called his colleagues to examine her, and they too could find nothing wrong with her. "Your tumor is gone," he said. The woman told him about the angel's visit.

News spread through the village that the woman had been healed. The church members rejoiced with her. Her healing has increased the faith of many people in her church and throughout the town. Many people visited the church, wanting to see what kind of church is powerful enough to heal people. And the members gladly gave God the credit for this healing.

Your mission offerings will help this little church in Benin shine the light of God across a country saturated with the darkness of voodoo and witchcraft.

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FRANCIS AHISSON is a lay evangelist working in southern Benin.

# Partnership With Jesus



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Mark 1:21–35; Luke 4:31–42; Matt. 6:14, 15; 25:34–46; 26:36–44; Ps. 31:24.*

**Memory Text:** “ ‘Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me’ ” (*John 15:4, NIV*).

In recent years, research has pointed to the positive effects that religiosity, faith, spirituality, prayer, forgiveness, hope, and church attendance can have on health, including mental health. Numerous prominent scientific publications have reported a connection between religious faith and positive mental and emotional well-being. Surprise of surprises!

Yet, this is not magic; the faith factor applies only to those who are deeply committed to their religious principles. Psychiatrist Montagu Barker, an expert in the interface between religion and mental health, states that religion is a potent safeguard against mental illness, but only when believers possess a strong commitment to their beliefs. If not, religion may become a source of guilt and the cause of emotional, mental, and behavioral disturbances.

This week we will look at our best Example, Jesus, to learn how we can be strong in faith. By studying His life and maintaining a close relationship with Him, we can build solid mechanisms for spiritual growth, which itself can lead to better mental health.

Prayer and Bible study, worship, the practice of forgiveness, service to others, and hope and trust in God are sure pathways to spiritual development and mental health. With Jesus as our Example, we surely can't go wrong.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 26.*



## The Praying Lord

**Read** Mark 1:21–35 and Luke 4:31–42. What lessons can you learn about His habits of prayer? What should this say to us about our need to pray?

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Jesus is found going to the synagogue on that Sabbath in Capernaum, teaching the Scriptures to an amazed group of people who recognized His authority and that He healed a demon-possessed man. After the meeting, Jesus and His disciples went to the house of Peter and Andrew, and there He healed Peter's mother-in-law. At sunset, many (*"the whole town"* [Mark 1:33, NIV]) congregated around Jesus and brought all sorts of ill and demon-possessed to be healed.

"Never before had Capernaum witnessed a day like this. The air was filled with the voice of triumph and shouts of deliverance. Not until the last sufferer had been relieved did Jesus cease His work. It was far into the night when the multitude departed and silence settled down upon the home of Simon."—Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up*, p. 86.

That must have been an exhausting day for Jesus. However, He did not sleep late the next morning. He needed to be in communion with His Father; so He got up before dawn, went to a solitary place, and spent time in prayer. Jesus, the Son of God, He who had been with the Father before the world began (*John 17:5*), He who had created the entire universe (*John 1:3*), nevertheless felt the need for prayer. The concept is remarkable.

After stressful days, we tend to postpone prayer and communion with God. But it is precisely during those moments of psychological drain that we most need the soothing balm of prayer and time in the Word of God. Jesus knew this and practiced consistent closeness with His Father. If this was necessary for Jesus, how much more should it be for us?

Prayer is a positive factor in well-being and mental health. However much we don't understand about prayer, about how it works or even about why it works, we are admonished to pray (*Luke 18:1, 21:36, Rom. 12:12*). Who hasn't felt the positive impact this can have on our spirit and mind when spending time in communion with the Lord through prayer and reading the Word? We don't have to understand all the mysteries of prayer in order to know how crucial it is to have a close relationship with God.

**What kind of prayer life do you have? How much time do you spend in the Word of God? What are ways you can make your devotional time more meaningful and life-changing? However important that we spend time in prayer and reading the Word, time alone isn't the only element. What other factors are needed?**

## Worship and Church Community

Jesus went regularly to the synagogue on Sabbath (*Luke 4:16*). His example should speak to us of the importance of community. The concept of “a lone Christian,” independent of the body, is not biblical. That there are some occasional examples of this in the Bible doesn’t prove that this is God’s plan. All through the Scriptures we see the model of God’s people as a community, a group working together for the mutual benefit of each other and for the church as a whole.

**Read** 1 Corinthians 12:12–31 and Ephesians 4:15, 16. What do these verses tell us about our role and place in a larger church community?

How interesting, too, that in recent years reputable studies are showing that those who attend and participate in church services (compared to those who don’t) on a regular basis are:

- less likely to suffer from substance abuse
- more likely to be sexually responsible
- less involved in risky behaviors
- more likely to practice business and work-related ethics
- more likely to enjoy a richer social network and group support
- more likely to display higher levels of self-esteem and personal efficacy
- more likely to cope better with losses (death of dear ones, calamities, health complications, et cetera)
- more likely to harbor positive emotions (love, forgiveness, contentment, et cetera)
- less likely to harbor negative emotions (guilt, fear, hostility, anger, et cetera).

Belonging to a church can be a great source of blessing. Such an environment can be therapeutic for soul and body. True, at times problems arise in the community, and some leave angry and bitter; but more often than not, those who work through their problems can find in the church support and fellowship and encouragement that they might not get anywhere else. Think about what church could be like if every member took to heart these words from Paul: “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (*Gal. 6:2, NIV*).

**What is your relationship to your local church body? Are you a giver or a taker? Why, at times, might you need to be a taker? At the same time, if we all went to church with the attitude of giving ourselves when and where we could, what kind of community would we have?**

## Forgiveness

“ ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do’ ”  
(*Luke 23:34*).

**Read** *Matthew 6:14, 15*. What powerful message is Jesus giving to us here? What is He saying that is so full of eternal consequence for all of us?

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Jesus taught His disciples to pray: “ ‘Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors’ ” (*vs. 12, NIV*). Then He insisted (*vs. 14, 15*) that if we do not wish to forgive, God will not forgive us.

The thought is terrifying. After all, we all are sinners; and thus, we all need divine forgiveness. Thus, we all must learn to forgive if we want to be forgiven ourselves!

Forgiveness is so important because it’s foundational in repairing and maintaining good relationships. The Lord knows how painful the burden of sin is and how its burden must be released through forgiveness—through the forgiveness that we get from God and through the forgiveness we give to others.

The experience of forgiveness is helpful, not only to those receiving it but also to those granting it. The feeling of grace and generosity experienced by those granting forgiveness brings them closer to God and contributes to character building.

A study conducted among recently divorced individuals showed the difference between those willing and those unwilling to forgive. Mark Rye of the University of Iowa recruited 199 divorced individuals from community singles’ organizations and church-based divorce recovery groups. Not surprisingly, researchers found that those who extended forgiveness to their former spouses enjoyed higher levels of mental health. When compared to those unwilling to forgive, forgiving persons experienced higher levels of well-being and religious satisfaction and lower levels of anger and depression.

This is not an isolated experience. Studies over the past decade are clear. Forgiveness reduces depression and anxiety and increases self-esteem and overall emotional well-being. In sum, forgiveness is good for many things; holding grudges, meanwhile, is dangerous for body and soul.

Is this so unexpected? Who among us hasn’t experienced the healing and relief that come from offering forgiveness to those who have hurt us?

**How can you practice Paul’s counsel: “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (*Col. 3:13, NIV*)? What choices must you make in order to forgive those who have hurt you?**

## Service

The Seventh-day Adventist outreach to the world historically has held two basic branches of ministry: teaching/preaching and healing/helping. They represent the two major tasks of Jesus' ministry (*see Matt. 9:35 and Acts 10:38*). Furthermore, for many people throughout the world, Seventh-day Adventists are known by their health and humanitarian work.

At the same time, these powerful branches have become quite institutionalized in many places. As a result, the ordinary member may fail to engage directly in these ministries. Some provide financial support; others leave these ministries to the professionals; and some, unfortunately, even view them with indifference. In the end, many do not become directly involved in the task of going "around doing good" and thus miss a tremendous blessing. Why? Because there is a great personal blessing that comes from ministering to the needs of others. The simple practice of directly sharing with the needy or of helping someone who is sick or of attentively listening to others' problems will result in great blessing to the one doing the ministering. There's something wired in us, something not totally eradicated by six thousand years of sin, that makes us feel good, even whole, when we serve others.

**Read** Matthew 25:34–46. What is Jesus saying to us here? What does this mean in the light of Ephesians 2:8, 9?

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Salvation cannot be by works. If it were, nobody would be saved. God's grace manifested by the sacrifice of Jesus in our behalf is the only means of salvation. At the same time, personal acceptance of God's grace does produce good works, and these works reveal the reality of our walk with God. The good works we do should be a direct result of knowing that we already have salvation in Jesus, as a result of His works for us. Works are the natural outgrowth of being saved, not a means of getting saved. How crucial that we keep that important distinction always before us.

Meanwhile, there's a tremendous emotional and spiritual blessing for those who, out of thankfulness to God for the salvation they have in Jesus, give of themselves to others. Many people struggling with emotional issues would feel so much better merely by directing their thoughts away from themselves and onto others.

**Unhappy, unsatisfied? Most likely it's because you're too self-absorbed. Get involved in helping others and see what happens.**

## Hope and Trust in God

**“Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord”** (*Ps. 31:24, NIV*). What reasons do we have for putting our hope in the Lord?

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Studies show that hope is a critical factor in mental health. An attitude of hope found in hostages makes a difference in survival. Hope is a great motivator and a source of mental and physical endurance. Most depression treatments work well in patients convinced that their mood can improve significantly and that they can be helped. Indeed, depression and anxiety often afflict those whose outlook on life is pessimistic, catastrophic, and hopeless. A hopeful attitude can make a big difference in our entire mental outlook.

But there is more than the general hope that whatever your present trial is, it will end well. Religious hope transcends the finite and focuses on the eternal. It points us to realities and truths and promises that the world, in and of itself, can never offer. It’s a hope found in the Creator God, who alone can give us what nothing else in the world can.

**Read** Matthew 26:36–44. What can we learn about trusting in God, even in terrible times, from Jesus’ example here?

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The passage tells us of the Savior’s disheartened state. Carefully chosen words are used to describe Jesus’ painful emotions: troubled, exceedingly sorrowful (deeply distressed). Heartbroken and disregarded by His friends, He fell not only on His knees but on His face and asked His Father for relief. When relief did not come, He asked again. And again. Note that every time He posed His request, He asked for God’s will to be done. In the end, Jesus put all His trust in the Father. Regardless of what would happen, He sought to be surrendered to His Father. That was His way, and it must be ours, as well.

**It’s one thing to trust in the Lord in good times. But how can we learn to trust Him in bad times? How do we learn to trust when our prayers are not answered as we wish?**

**Further Study:** “We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ Ps. 46:10. Here alone can true rest be found. And this is the effectual preparation for all who labor for God. Amid the hurrying throng, and the strain of life’s intense activities, the soul that is thus refreshed will be surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace. The life will breathe out fragrance, and will reveal a divine power that will reach men’s hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 363.

“Every ray of light shed upon others will be reflected upon our own hearts. Every kind and sympathizing word spoken to the sorrowful, every act to relieve the oppressed, and every gift to supply the necessities of our fellow beings, given or done with an eye to God’s glory, will result in blessings to the giver. Those who are thus working are obeying a law of heaven and will receive the approval of God. The pleasure of doing good to others imparts a glow to the feelings which flashes through the nerves, quickens the circulation of the blood, and induces mental and physical health.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 56.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 What have prayer and Bible study done for you in your walk with the Lord? Where would you be spiritually were you to cease doing them? Write out a testimony as to what these practices mean to you and why they are so important in your walk with the Lord.
- 2 What has been your own experience with your local church community? How can you improve that experience? How can you work with your church to make it a place where all people would feel comfortable coming, where all people could be welcomed, where all people could learn about salvation and the present truth message we have for the world? In what areas is your church strong, and in what areas must it improve?
- 3 What has been your own experience in regard to giving and getting forgiveness? What have you learned that could help those who are in need of learning to forgive?
- 4 Suppose someone were to come to you and say, “Yes, I believe in God, in Jesus, in salvation, but I just don’t know how to walk in faith. I just don’t know how to trust God.” What practical advice would you give?

## No Longer Alone

Alima felt lost and alone. Painfully shy, she spent most of her time at home. Often, as she cleaned the family's small house, she would pause at her father's picture and cry, "Why did you leave us? If you loved us, you wouldn't have died!"

Only later did her mother reveal that her father had died in a drunken brawl. When Alima realized that alcohol had caused her father's death, she vowed never to touch it.

Like many in Mongolia, Alima believed that the deities had drawn her life's destiny, and she must follow the path set for her. But often she pleaded, "Why did you make my path so hard? Why must I go through this suffering?"

One day as Alima walked across her small town, she met two foreign women. They smiled and greeted her. They talked for some time, and then they invited her to attend a seminar on healthful living. Alima liked the women and agreed to attend the seminar.

Alima found much to agree with in the health seminar—especially the dangers of alcohol. As she learned more about healthful living, she also learned about God. The two Christian women invited her to learn more about Jesus, who hears and answers her prayers. Again, Alima accepted.

Alima read the Bible with these two young women and listened to their explanation of God's love. They invited her to evangelistic meetings, and there Alima learned more about this God who loves her so much that He died for her. His love offered her a better life, but He would never force her to follow His plan for her. Alima accepted God's love and took her stand to follow His path.

She invited her sisters to attend church with her, and they went. Her mother doesn't yet attend the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but Alima and her sisters pray that one day she will come.

Alima's shyness disappeared as she grew confident of God's love. In its place was born a desire to tell others that they can be free from fears if they follow God's perfect plan for their lives.

Alima became a short-term missionary, serving in a large city in Mongolia. "I praise God that He cares enough about a lonely and troubled little girl to send someone to teach me about Jesus. Now I can teach others and bring them hope too."

Your mission offerings help establish groups of believers in Mongolia, where just over 2,000 believers share His love with others.

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ALIMA BATKHUU *is studying to serve God in Mongolia.*

Next quarter's Bible study guide, *Garments of Grace: Clothing Imagery in the Bible*, by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide staff, will focus on the biblical symbolism of clothing imagery. From the fanciful adornment of Lucifer in heaven to the filthy rags of our own righteousness, the Bible uses clothing and clothing imagery to portray truths about sin, pride, righteousness, salvation, justification, resurrection, and eternal life in Christ. This study will examine the garments that people wore and what that clothing really meant, what truths they symbolized, what great realities they pointed to, and what lessons we can learn from them.

## Lesson 1—In the Loom of Heaven

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Staring in the Mirror** (*Isaiah 64*)

MONDAY: **Imputed Righteousness** (*Rom. 4:1–7*)

TUESDAY: **Without the Law** (*Rom. 3:21–31*)

WEDNESDAY: **Clothes Make the Man** (*Rom. 6:1–13*)

THURSDAY: **Cheap Grace and Legalism** (*Phil. 3:3–16*)

**Memory Text**—*Romans 4:7, NIV*

**Sabbath Gem:** Christ is the sinner's Substitute and Surety. He has obeyed the law in the sinner's place, in order that the sinner may believe in Him and grow up into Him in all things to the full stature of a man in Christ Jesus, and thus be complete in Him.

## Lesson 2—From Exalted to Cast Down

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Creator of All That's Been Made** (*John 1:1–3*)

MONDAY: **A Beautiful and Perfect Being** (*Ezek. 28:12–19*)

TUESDAY: **The Fall of a Perfect Being** (*Ezek. 28:17*)

WEDNESDAY: **Wanting to Be God** (*Ezek. 28:14*)

THURSDAY: **Satan on Earth** (*Rev. 12:7–12*)

**Memory Text**—*Ezekiel 28:15*

**Sabbath Gem:** What this text shows is that, in God's universe, the concept of "perfect" includes freedom, moral freedom, and the ability to choose right and wrong. Lucifer abuses the freedom given to him and falls away from the Lord. What can we learn from this tragic mistake?

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