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## Meet the Principal Contributor to This Quarter's Lessons

Dr. Jean Zurcher, now retired, is a scholar, teacher, and administrator. He holds two degrees: Diplôme d'Evangeliste, Collonges, Licence es Sciences Morales, and Doctorate in Philosophy, University of Geneva.

As a teacher and administrator, his career has spanned three continents. He served as a teacher of history in Collonges, France, returning later as the principal; as teacher and principal in Tananarive, Madagascar; as secretary of the Euro-Africa Division in Bern, Switzerland.

Being recognized as an international authority in education, theology, and philosophy, Dr. Zurcher has received many awards and distinctions from the University of Geneva, the Dutch, French and Malagasy governments, the General Conference Department of Education, and Andrews University.

Dr. Zurcher also serves as chairman of the Biblical Research Committee of the Euro-Africa Division and as a member of the Ellen G. White Estate.

As a result of his many years of experience and learning, Dr. Zurcher has published numerous books and articles in both French and English. His writings have been translated into more than ten languages.



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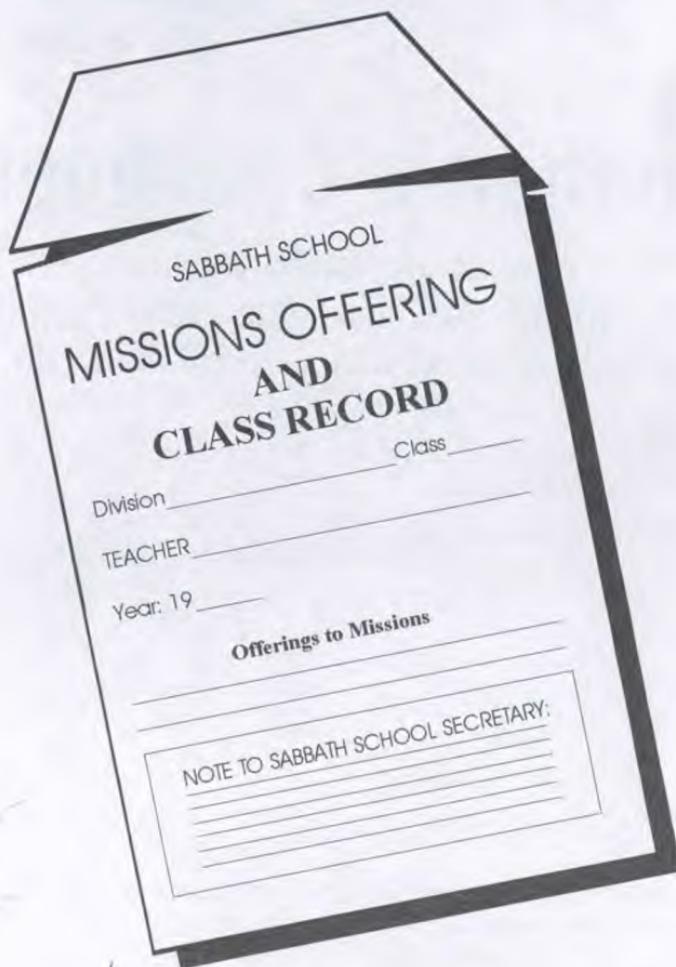
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# Happy Are You!

## Citizens of the Kingdom

The Christians of the last days live in a world that is more and more complex and corrupt. At the same time, despite increasing iniquity and the growing coldness of many Christians, God requires that His people "show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

It is fitting, then, to define the spiritual life that Jesus taught which characterizes the citizens of His kingdom. We expect the coming of Jesus in our day, and by grace we must be fit for it. Ellen White notes that "Enoch's life and character, which were so holy that he was translated to heaven without seeing death, represent what the lives and characters of all must be, if, like Enoch, they are to be translated when Christ shall come."—*Our High Calling*, p. 278.

The characteristics of the citizens of the kingdom are clearly outlined in the first part of the Sermon on the Mount, usually called the Beatitudes. Here Jesus superbly portrays the spirit that, beginning here on earth, must imbue all those who hope, one day, to live in the kingdom of heaven.

"Here He [Jesus] specified who should be the subjects of His heavenly kingdom. He did not speak one word to flatter the men of the highest authority, the worldly dignitaries. But He presents before all the traits of character which must be possessed by the peculiar people who will compose the royal family in the kingdom of heaven. He specifies those who shall become heirs of God and joint-heirs with Himself. He proclaims publicly His choice of subjects, and assigns them their place in His service as united with Himself. Those who possess the character specified, will share with Him in the blessing and the glory and the honor that will ever come to Him."

—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1084.

For this reason the Beatitudes will serve as the basis of our study this quarter. The first lesson is introductory to the Beatitudes and is about the kingdom of heaven, of which we are called to be citizens. In the second lesson we begin a study of the Beatitudes of Jesus, which continues through lesson 12. These lessons (2 through 12) correspond to the Bible passages that Ellen White has included in the chapter "The Beatitudes" in the book *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*. Lesson 13 is drawn from Jesus' illustration of the two gates given near the close of the Sermon on the Mount. This lesson presents Jesus' appeal to enter "in at the strait gate" (Matt. 7:13), which represents in part the principles taught in the Beatitudes.

May the careful study of these lessons awaken the desire of each one to grow more and more like Jesus, thus glorifying God and contributing to the hastening of Christ's kingdom of glory.

# The Kingdom of Heaven



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Matt. 5:1, 17-20; Luke 17:20, 21; John 1:11; Matt. 13:33; Exod. 20:19.

**MEMORY TEXT:** “Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?” (James 2:5, NKJV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes it has been entrusted with special last-day truth about God. How best to share its insight into the kingdom of heaven is our subject this week.

**GOD'S REPRESENTATIVES.** In the Bible the phrases *kingdom of heaven* or *kingdom of God* refer more to a kind or quality or condition of people than to any one geographical area, political entity, class, or race. The kingdom of heaven occurs wherever there are individuals who freely and imaginatively live out the value system of God. “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20).

Now God has always had a people to keep the ideals of His kingdom alive on this earth. In the Old Testament it was the patriarchs and then the Hebrew nation. Since the first advent it has been Christianity.

Unfortunately, the majority of men and women in every age has rejected or ignored God. From time to time this has even been true of His own representatives. God's chosen people have misinterpreted and misused the truths entrusted to them. They have at times lost sight of God's gracious character and in turn become exclusive and narrow.

**HOW TO READ THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (Matt. 5:1).**

It's always helpful to consider the context of any scriptural passage. However, there are special cases where it is almost a must. This is true in the case of the Sermon on the Mount. At the very outset in her book *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, page 1, Ellen White offers the following suggestion: "Let us in imagination go back to that scene, and, as we sit with the disciples on the mountainside, enter into the thoughts and feelings that filled their hearts. Understanding what the words of Jesus meant to those who heard them, we may discern in them a new vividness and beauty, and may also gather for ourselves their deeper lessons."

**Who was the intended audience for what has become known as the Sermon on the Mount? Matt. 5:1. As suggested in the above statement, let us go in imagination to that event on the mountainside. What thoughts and feelings fill your mind as a result?**

Jesus' ministry had been in progress for some time when He decided that the disciples should begin to bear heavier evangelistic responsibilities. He had prayed all night for wisdom to say precisely what they needed to hear in order to overcome their inherited misconceptions of His work and role as the Messiah. The disciples were the intended audience; but, as always, Jesus was happy to share the truth with anyone who was willing to listen.

**What lesson did Jesus want to teach His disciples when He gave the Beatitudes? Matt. 5:20. What does this say to you about your righteousness?**

It was not unusual for a Jewish teacher to expound upon the law in order to refine its application to fit the needs of a specific time and place. So if Jesus followed this Jewish method of contrasting the old with the new in the latter part of Matthew 5, that would not have aroused any suspicion. But content was a different matter.

The disciples were Jews, and they shared their countrymen's belief that the Messiah's sole purpose would be to reestablish the kingdom of Judah. Their understanding of Jesus' mission was clouded by these false expectations. They needed a corrective.

**Do you have any false expectations of Jesus? If Yes, what helpful corrective can the Holy Spirit apply in your life today?**

**RECOGNIZING OUR RESPONSIBILITY (Matt. 5:19. See also verses 17, 18, 20).**

God had given His people two gifts: (a) a knowledge of Himself, and (b) a knowledge of the ideals He had in mind for created beings. The chosen people had memorized the ideals but had lost sight of the God who stood behind them. Hence the law became a matter for prideful achievement. Religious individuals were inclined to draw attention to themselves rather than to God. While God's friends are supposed to be living evidence for the quality of heaven's values, they are above all responsible for keeping a true knowledge of God alive in society. This is what our world desperately needs today.

**In what way does God depend upon His earthly friends in sustaining the values of the kingdom of heaven? Matt. 5:17-19. What does this say to you about the God you serve?**

"The Saviour came to glorify the Father by the demonstration of His love. . . . The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

When our spiritual ancestors forgot God, the law became an end in itself. It became burdensome; joyful and willing obedience was replaced by legalistic and mechanical obedience. When we experience God's wonderful grace in our daily lives, pleasing Him becomes the source of our highest joy and contentment.

**What is the message of those who would uphold the kingdom of heaven today? Matt. 5:20. How is such message applicable in your life?**

"It is the darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men are losing their knowledge of His character. It has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 415.

**Do you concentrate on your own personal achievement, to the point of crowding out a desire to share with your neighbors your knowledge of the kind of person God is?**

**THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS HERE (Luke 17:20, 21).**

**What is the relation between the church and the kingdom of God?**

The phrases *kingdom of heaven* and *kingdom of God* are virtually interchangeable: they refer to the presence of God's values and His offer of salvation. There were times in Old Testament history when God's values and His offer of salvation shone brightly, and there were others when these were hardly visible. However, it was the life of Jesus that gave a full illumination of what it means to be a member of the kingdom of God. Since the time of Christ, the Christian church has tried to keep this illumination vivid, with some success and some failure.

**How visible is the kingdom of heaven in the world today? Luke 17:20.**

"The kingdom of God comes not with outward show. It comes through the gentleness of the inspiration of His word, through the inward working of His Spirit, the fellowship of the soul with Him who is its life. The greatest manifestation of its power is seen in human nature brought to the perfection of the character of Christ."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 36.

This passage in Luke indicates that members of God's kingdom on earth are difficult to identify by mere external means. They may be members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; they may be in other religious communities. Or like the centurion who came to Jesus, they may show no outward allegiance to any religion. Eventually all of God's friends will come together as a remnant, but in the meantime what does their being scattered throughout all communions and peoples imply?

**Why did many of Jesus' countrymen not realize the presence of the kingdom of heaven? Luke 17:21. He revealed most clearly the character of His Father in His life. What role did this have in their rejection of Him?**

When you hear the phrase *kingdom of heaven*, do you tend to think of a specific church or institution, or do you think of an ongoing witness to the life of Christ? How is the kingdom of God expressed in your life?

**DIMENSIONS OF THE KINGDOM—PART I (John 1:11).**

**Why do you think the majority of God's chosen people rejected Jesus' description of the kingdom of heaven?**

Jesus' offer of membership in the kingdom of God was rejected by most of His countrymen. They challenged His right to offer membership in the kingdom of God, because His description of the kingdom differed so widely from theirs. "The Jews looked for the kingdom of God to be established in the same way as the kingdoms of the world. To promote righteousness they resorted to external measures."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 77. They had completely inverted the value system of God, which placed service as the most prestigious of virtues.

**What did God hope that the Israelites would achieve? Luke 13: 18, 19.**

"As in obedience to His natural laws the earth should produce its treasures, so in obedience to His moral law the hearts of the people were to reflect the attributes of His character. Even the heathen would recognize the superiority of those who served and worshiped the living God."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 289.

**What does it mean to be a faithful member of God's kingdom? (Matt. 6:10). What part does trust in our heavenly Father play in this regard?**

Jesus did not reject the law and the inspired guidelines His countrymen cherished. What He did reject was the picture of God they had come to entertain. It is a law that people become like the God they worship. Israel formed their understanding of God after earthly kings. They had long since forgotten God's reticence even to permit them a human king, and they had molded their religious insights after the principles that moved worldly governments. Jesus' ardent desire was to awaken in them a renewed picture of the Father that was lost sight of, a picture of love, graciousness, and trustworthiness.

**How do you distinguish between true and false success? What is the connection between success and service in your relationships with others?**

**DIMENSIONS OF THE KINGDOM—PART II (Matt. 13:33).**

The kingdom of heaven was not withdrawn from the earth when Jesus ascended to the throne of His heavenly Father. Through the working of His Spirit in the lives of His earthly friends, the true principles of God's kingdom were to be kept attractive and highly visible until He should come again.

**In what way is religious truth like leaven? Matt. 13:33.**

"As the leaven, when mingled with the meal, works from within outward, so it is by the renewing of the heart that the grace of God works to transform the life. . . . There are many who try to reform by correcting this or that bad habit, and they hope in this way to become Christians, but they are beginning in the wrong place. Our first work is with the heart . . . .

"True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 97, 98. Quite simply, our spiritual ancestors lost sight of their Redeemer. Their motives for obedience became pride and a desire for status of various kinds. Consequently, their pride in their status became their god, confusing in their own minds and in the minds of others who God is and what He is truly like.

**What is your role as a church member in sustaining the kingdom of heaven? Ps. 67:1-3.**

"Through His people Christ is to manifest His character and the principles of His kingdom." Moreover, "We are to praise God by tangible service, by doing all in our power to advance the glory of His name. God imparts His gifts to us that we also may give, and thus make known His character to the world."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 296, 300.

**How do you show in your actions that gratitude to God is a living reality in your life? Is the spirit of ingratitude sometimes manifested in the way you view God and the way you treat other people? If so, what are some steps that you can begin taking today to help remedy this problem? What impact does your spirit of praise, gratitude and service have in building up the kingdom of God around you?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 1-5; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 27-30, 407, 577; *Christ's Object Lessons*, "Talents Multiplied by Use," pp. 353-355; "The Lord's Vineyard," pp. 284-296; "Like Unto Leaven," pp. 101, 102; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 737-742.

"An important lesson for every minister of Christ to learn, is that of adapting his labors to the condition of those whom he seeks to benefit. Tenderness, patience, decision, and firmness are alike needful; but these are to be exercised with proper discrimination. To deal wisely with different classes of minds, under varied circumstances and conditions, is a work requiring wisdom and judgment enlightened and sanctified by the Spirit of God."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 386.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What caused the Jews to look for Christ to set up His kingdom on earth? What would cause people to make that same mistake today?
2. Had we been Jews at the time of Christ's first advent, would we have accepted Christ, given the prevailing preconceived notions that the Messiah should work in an atmosphere of thunder and lightning? Would we have understood that the reception of truth is progressive, that God refines His presentation of it as people themselves become more refined? Note this from Ellen White: "The Word of God presents special truths for every age. . . . God is leading out His people step by step. Truth is progressive."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1000.
3. How can Christians best demonstrate to the world what kind of person God is?

**SUMMARY:** The kingdom of heaven is not a visible or tangible entity, such as a place or a particular group of people. Rather, it is the reflection of God's character exemplified through the lives of His followers.



## Adventist Radio Spreads Hope Across Russia

Inside Story

The Russian-language Voice of Hope radio broadcast is the most listened-to religious radio broadcast in the former Soviet Union, according to a survey conducted by the Moscow State University recently.

The Voice of Hope is broadcast over two of Russia's most powerful stations: Radio-1 and Radio Russia, and is heard on nearly 900 stations throughout the former Soviet Union. These stations were established during the Communist era to blanket every Russian home in the Soviet Union with Communist propaganda. Now they tell the Russian-speaking world that Jesus is the answer to their needs. According to a separate poll conducted by the Voice of Hope, 14 million people in Russia listen to the broadcast regularly, and another 20 million people know about the program.

The Voice of Hope recently introduced a new weekly phone-in program that deals with current events and issues in society from a Christian perspective. From the start, callers from all over Russia and former Soviet countries kept six telephone lines busy for nearly two hours.

In 1990 the Voice of Hope became the first Christian radio program to broadcast over the Soviet Union's national radio network. The first 20-minute program was broadcast by a single local station, and brought in 75 requests for Bible studies. By the end of that year, 10 more local stations were broadcasting a weekly program.

In the beginning the church in Russia had no studio or equipment to produce its programs. So a state-owned station offered the use of their studios free of charge. Today the church-owned media center houses radio and TV studios, editorial and administrative offices, and a Bible correspondence school.

The broadcast's extensive coverage has reaped extraordinary results. The Bible school receives between 500 to 1,000 letters each week from listeners across the country. Since 1992, more than 18,000 people have completed the New Life Lessons.

When an Adventist leader went to a small city in the far north of Russia where no known Adventists lived, he found a group of Sabbathkeepers! They had heard the Adventist message through the Voice of Hope programs and were enrolled in the Bible course. They were ready to be baptized, testimony to the power of God and radio to change lives.

**Information for this story was supplied by the Adventist News Network and Adventist World Radio.**

Produced by the General Conference Office of Mission Awareness

# The Poor in Spirit



## Sabbath Afternoon

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Matt. 5:3-11; Luke 4:18, 19; 6:20; 14:21; 2 Cor. 8:9; James 2:5.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3, NKJV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** In the Beatitudes, Jesus sought to outline the prescription for true happiness. This week, we discover who the "poor in spirit" are and examine the blessings Christ pronounced upon them.

**THE BEATITUDES.** In the next 11 lessons we will study in detail each trait of Christian character that Jesus enumerated in the Beatitudes. First let us consider some pertinent comments on this subject.

"A study of Christ's wonderful sermon on the mount will teach the believer what must be the characteristics of those whom the Lord calls 'Blessed.' "—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1083.

"The beatitudes were His [Christ's] greeting to the whole human family. Looking upon the vast throng gathered to listen to the Sermon on the Mount, He seemed for the moment to have forgotten that He was not in heaven, and He used the familiar salutation of the world of light. From His lips flowed blessings as the gushing forth of a long-sealed fountain."—*Education*, p. 79.

The Sermon on the Mount penetrates the facade of our moral bankruptcy of merely keeping the letter of the law but ignoring to live its spirit. It cuts us to the heart with the conviction that we desperately need the Spirit and righteousness of Christ, no matter how moral we or others think we are.

**OBJECT OF THE BEATITUDES (Matt. 5:3-11).**

"In the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ addresses Himself to the supreme desire of every human heart—happiness. This desire was implanted in man by the Creator Himself, and was originally ordained to lead him to find true happiness through cooperation with the God who created him. Sin is involved when men attempt to achieve happiness as an end in itself, by a short cut that bypasses obedience to the divine requirements.

"Thus at the commencement of His inaugural address as King of the kingdom of divine grace Christ proclaims that the main objective of the kingdom is to restore the lost happiness of Eden to the hearts of men, and that those who choose to enter in by the 'strait' gate and the 'narrow' way (Matt. 7:13,14) will find true happiness. They will find inward peace and joy, true and lasting satisfaction for heart and soul that come only when 'the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,' is present to keep their 'hearts and minds through Christ Jesus' (Phil. 4:7)." — *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 324.

**According to Matthew, how many beatitudes did Jesus pronounce? Matt. 5:3-12. Compare with Luke 6:20-26 and see what insights you may discover in the woes pronounced.**

"The word *makarios* [“happy, blessed”] appears nine times in verses 3-11. But verses 10, 11 refer to the same aspect of Christian experience, and are therefore to be considered one beatitude, thus leaving eight rather than nine beatitudes. Luke gives only four beatitudes, the first, fourth, second, and eighth of Matthew, in that order (Luke 6:20-23), but he adds four corresponding woes (vs. 24-26)." — *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 324.

**Should we attribute a symbolic meaning to the Beatitudes given in the book of Matthew? In what beatitude do you sense a particular need for in your spiritual life?**

It has been said that the Beatitudes are to the spiritual life what the octave is to music. We should not imagine that the Beatitudes place candidates for the kingdom of God in eight distinct categories, nor that there are eight different roads leading to that end. The Beatitudes, like the fruit of the Spirit, are all part of the whole; they go together. All the graces will be possessed by the candidate for the kingdom of God.

**BLESSED ARE THE POOR (Matt. 5:3; Luke 6:20).**

Jesus specifically points out that the poverty He is referring to is a poverty of spirit rather than merely a poverty in earthly possessions. This spirit—consciousness of spiritual deficiency—alludes to a certain honesty and humility in assessing one's spiritual possessions. Without it the materially poor can themselves be attached to riches, desiring passionately to possess them. Then the poor like the rich, enslaved to a desire for earthly possessions, are not "poor in spirit."

"Happy are they, He said, who recognize their spiritual poverty, and feel their need of redemption. The gospel is to be preached to the poor. Not to the spiritually proud, those who claim to be rich and in need of nothing, is it revealed, but to those who are humble and contrite. One fountain only has been opened for sin, a fountain for the poor in spirit."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 299, 300.

**Why does God choose the poor rather than the rich to inherit the kingdom? James 2:5. What is the relationship between the materially poor and the poor in spirit?**

In reality God is not partial to special groups. He does not exclude anyone. If the Messianic promises are addressed especially to the disinherited, to the poor of the world, it is because by circumstance they are more inclined to turn to God and to look to Him for all things. It is their inner inclinations that render the poor more open to the gospel, not poverty itself. On the other hand, history bears witness that the poor of every age and place are the first to respond to God's call. (See 1 Cor. 1:26-29.) Jesus pointed out this fact in the parable of the marriage supper.

**What characteristic of the rich forms an obstacle to inheriting the kingdom of God?**

The obstacle is not money itself; rather it is a selfish attachment to money, the greedy quest for it, limitless confidence in it. After declaring, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" Jesus clarified His statement by adding, "How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:23, 24).

**Considering your level of spiritual growth, what would help you sense your own poverty of spirit and lead you to seek His Spirit? Riches, poverty, or somewhere between? Why?**

**GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR (Luke 4:18, 19).**

The poor occupied an important place in our Lord's teaching and ministry. This says a great deal about the abundance of grace and compassion in His heart for the neglected in society. And happily the early church knew how to follow His example in ministering to the poor and suffering. "Christ came to preach the gospel to the poor. He reached the people where they were. He brought plain, simple truth to their comprehension."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 1119, 1120.

"Christ came to this earth to walk and work among the poor and suffering. They received the greatest share of His attention. And today, in the person of His children, He visits the poor and needy, relieving woe and alleviating suffering."—*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 226.

**What proof of His Messiahship did Jesus send to John the Baptist? Matt. 11:2-5. What does this tell you about the kind of person Christ is?**

Miracles and the preaching of the good news to the poor were the signs that Jesus gave to John's envoys, who had been sent to ascertain whether Jesus was indeed the Messiah announced by the prophets and expected by Israel.

The poor spoken of in the Bible were not necessarily destitute. The word was especially used to designate the peasantry who were ravaged as much by the ruling Jews as by the occupying power, particularly after the exile.

The poor in Israel are mentioned in some of the psalms. (See Ps. 40:17; 69:33; 109:31.) The prophets were their defenders; it was to them that they announced the Messianic kingdom. They are the ones of whom it was said that they awaited "the consolation of Israel" and "redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:25, 38). Although they were mistaken about the nature of His kingdom, God announced the Messiah's advent to them first: the shepherds, Simeon, Anna. Joseph and Mary were of their number—of them who were able to offer only the sacrifices of the poor in the temple. (See Luke 2:21-24.) It was also to the poor in Israel that Jesus first preached the good news of salvation.

**Following the example set by the early church, how are we, as individuals and as a group, prepared to provide for the material and spiritual needs of those less fortunate than we? (See Acts 2:44, 45; 11:28-30.) If an opportunity presents itself to befriend or witness to a poor or an affluent person, whom would you prefer to relate to, and why?**

**THOSE INVITED TO THE FEAST (Luke 14:21).**

"The Jews commonly supposed that persons suffering either financially or physically were in ill favor with God, and thus these classes were often despised and neglected by their fellow men. . . . God, presumably, had cast them off, and society therefore considered them outcasts also. In this parable Jesus denies that such persons are despised by God, and declares that they should not be despised by their fellowmen, even when their sufferings may be due to their own misdeeds or unwise course of action. The poverty stricken and physically defective here seem to represent primarily those who are morally and spiritually bankrupt. They have no good works of their own to offer God in exchange for the blessings of salvation."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 809.

**What example did Jesus give us that illustrates perfectly those who are the "poor in spirit"? See Luke 18:9-14. How is such true poverty of spirit shown in the parable?**

The religious leaders in Christ's day felt quite rich in their own righteousness and religious heritage. They were so blind to their own spiritual bankruptcy and did not feel any need for the spiritual treasure Christ longed to give them. They were so full of themselves that the grace of Christ could not penetrate their prideful hearts. On the other hand, the poor and despised felt their great spiritual lack, and thus were open to God's grace. Christ's words were a balm to their hurting souls, awakening in them the hope of their spiritual potential in joining themselves to Him.

**In a spiritual sense who are "the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind," and "the tax collectors" that you see in your world? How do you bring them to the healing presence of Christ and the circle of your fellowship?**

"The lips may express a poverty of soul that the heart does not acknowledge. While speaking to God of poverty of spirit, the heart may be swelling with the conceit of its own superior humility and exalted righteousness."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 159.

**Are you able to know your heart, to discern depths of its motives? How is that possible? Can you think of a time when you felt proud of some aspect of your spiritual growth?**

**JESUS, OUR EXAMPLE (2 Cor. 8:9).**

No matter how rich people may feel in all aspects of life, without Christ they are hopelessly poor. In their insecurity, individuals grasp tenaciously to whatever riches or positions they think they have, making sure others do not gain advantage on them. Yet, with time, the richest and the most prestigious people of the world leave with nothing, even as they come to this world with nothing. However, Christ the source of all riches of the entire universe voluntarily became poor so that you and I may become rich in Him. What a great exchange! His riches for our poverty.

**Have you experienced this great exchange from poverty to riches in Christ? What impact does this experience of being rich in Christ have on you and others around you?**

"After Christ had condescended to leave His high command, step down from an infinite height and assume humanity, He could have taken upon Him any condition of humanity He might choose. But greatness and rank were nothing to Him, and He selected the lowest and most humble walk of life. The place of His birth was Bethlehem, and on one side His parentage was poor, but God, the owner of the world, was His Father. . . .

"Had He possessed the semblance of outward show, of riches, of grandeur, the poorest class of humanity would have shunned His society; therefore He chose the lowly condition of the far greater number of the people."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 903, 904.

**Where do we find the perfect example of humility? Phil. 2:5-8. What does it mean to have the mind of Christ?**

A story is told of a meeting arranged to bestow honor on the humblest man in a particular town. He was given a ribbon in recognition of his humility. Later on he was noticed wearing the ribbon in public, so the townspeople decided to take it back from him.

Unless we let the mind of Christ be in us, even our genuine humility can turn into subtle expressions of pride and boastfulness.

**How do you recognize your friends' and colleagues' spiritual accomplishments? What are some spiritual consequences of flattery or simple affirmation in the Lord? How do you remain humble?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 154, 323, 324, 1084, 1085; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, "The Beatitudes" (Matt. 5:2, 3), pp. 6-9; *Testimonies*, vol. 7, pp. 226-228; *Christ's Object Lessons*, "Two Worshipers," pp. 150-163; *The Great Controversy*, p. 477; *Testimonies*, vol. 3, pp. 211, 252-256.

"This kingdom is not, as Christ's hearers had hoped, a temporal and earthly dominion. Christ was opening to men the spiritual kingdom of His love, His grace, His righteousness. The ensign of the Messiah's reign is distinguished by the likeness of the Son of man. His subjects are the poor in spirit, the meek, the persecuted for righteousness' sake. The kingdom of heaven is theirs. Though not yet fully accomplished, the work is begun in them which will make them 'meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.' Colossians 1:12."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 8.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Is there a relationship between financial status and spiritual condition? Give examples and biblical evidence to support your response.
2. What has been your experience in sharing the gospel with others? Who has responded most favorably, the rich or the poor?
3. What did Jesus really mean by the term *poor in spirit*? Why did He say that the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit?

**SUMMARY:** A gift is most highly appreciated when it meets a felt need. So it is with God's blessings. Those who recognize their need are the most grateful for and willing to respond to God's offer of grace.



## Sacrifice at Ifangi

Inge Gray

Pastor Charles listened intently to the handful of believers from the village of Ifangi in Benin, West Africa. He was scheduled to begin evangelistic meetings there the next day. Everything was ready, but the believers wanted to postpone the meetings.

"It is the time of the annual feast to Olo, a powerful voodoo god," one man reported. "Olo requires a human sacrifice, but his followers have not yet found a victim to sacrifice. Until the feast is over, the villagers are afraid to go out after dark. If we start the meetings now, no one will come. It is even unsafe for you, pastor, and the church members to be out at night. We think it is best to wait until the feast is over to begin the meetings." Pastor Charles agreed to the plan. His heart ached for these people bound by fear and superstition.

The next week the followers of Olo had sacrificed three men to their fetish god and thus completed their ceremonies. It was safe to begin the evangelistic meetings.

Pastor Charles held the meetings in an open area in the center of the village. A small generator provided power for lights and a loudspeaker. Night by night people came to the meetings, but they did not sit in the chairs provided. Instead they stood just outside the circle of light so they would not be seen. During question-and-answer time, however, the people's curiosity drew them out of the shadows. Soon the seating area was filled, and many more stood around the sides. Pastor Charles presented a stirring message from the Bible as myriads of huge insects swarmed about the lights overhead and fell on him.

At the end of the series, two young men were baptized. The power of the enemy is strong in Benin, where voodoo worship continues to strike fear in the hearts of its followers. How desperately they need to know that the God who created them does not require a human sacrifice. Instead He provided his own Son to die so that they may enjoy a life free from fear and superstition now, and an eternity with God in heaven. Pray that hearts will be open to this message in Benin.



**Inge Gray and her husband, Gordon, led the work in Benin for several years before being called to the Africa-Indian Ocean Division in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire.**

# The Mourners



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Matt. 5:4; Luke 6:21; Jer. 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:3-5; 7:10; Luke 19:41; Matt. 26:36-38; Phil. 1:29, 30.

**MEMORY TEXT:** “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4, NKJV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** All who pass through life will at some point experience suffering—no one can escape. But what may seem a curse can turn to a blessing if, in our suffering, we make God our refuge.

**GOD'S ANSWER TO SUFFERING.** Jesus presents God's answer to the problem of human suffering in the second beatitude. Not by explaining why He permits suffering in our lives and in our world, but by simply promising us a sure consolation.

Jesus was not satisfied merely to give us an encouraging word. He came “to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, ‘He took our infirmities and bore our diseases’ ” (Matt. 8:17, RSV). “A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3), “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.” (1 Peter 2:24, RSV).

“Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb. 5:8, RSV), proving by example the sanctifying worth of the trials God permits. In this life one will never fully understand the role that suffering plays in the perfecting of character. “Faith, patience, forbearance, heavenly-mindedness, trust in your wise, heavenly Father, are the perfect blossoms which mature amidst clouds and disappointments and bereavements.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 934.

**PROMISE OF CONSOLATION AND JOY (Matt. 5:4; Luke 6:21).**

What significance should be given to the mourning and tears mentioned in the second beatitude? To find the answer, the close relationship between the first and the second beatitude should be considered. No one will deny the literal meaning of the second beatitude. Our Lord demonstrated it, and, moreover, He devoted the best of His ministry to the afflicted, the sick, the unfortunate.

But this beatitude, like the first, finds full meaning when applied to the spiritual life. "The mourning here brought to view is true heart sorrow for sin."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 9.

**What spiritual benefits can mourning bring into your life as seen in the context of Ecclesiastes 7:2-4?**

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, and the followers of Christ are to be the most joyous. But that is not a contradiction to a godly spirit of mourning because of bereavement and sorrow for sin in the life. One finds great education in suffering, and mourning is a great teacher to help us reflect on the core issues of life. Mourning can soften the heart, make the spirit more contrite, and it helps us become more understanding of others. Often what is called "having fun" is but a disguise for the troubled heart. And avoiding grief and suffering is but avoidance of the need to confront what really ails us.

**How is our Lord's promise to the afflicted realized both today and in the future? Matt. 5:4; Luke 6:21. What impact does Christ's promise have on a troubled area of your life to bring you again laughter and comfort?**

As the poor and the underprivileged of this world place their confidence in God's promises, there is and there will be consolation for them. The hope of a better world comforts them now; it is already a consolation for them, a source of joy. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus teaches us that they who place their confidence in God and patiently endure suffering in this world will know the joy and happiness of God's children in the ages to come. (See Luke 16:19-31.)

"As God meets the sense of spiritual need with the riches of the grace of heaven . . . so He meets the mourning over sin with the comfort of sins forgiven. Except there be first a sense of need, there will not be mourning for what one lacks—in this case, righteousness of character."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 325.

**PARTAKERS OF HIS HOLINESS (Heb. 12:10, 11).**

What is God's purpose in permitting afflictions, and what is the immediate effect of afflictions on us? Heb. 12:10, 11.

God allows us to pass through fiery trials because He sees something very precious in us that needs refining. He allows suffering and tribulation to smooth the rough edges of our character, transforming it to be more Christlike. A master carpenter takes a piece of a crude log; he cuts, chisels, carves, sands, and polishes it. The result is a masterpiece that is fit for a palace. "The trials of life are God's workmen, to remove the impurities and roughness from our character. . . . Only His precious stones are polished after the similitude of a palace."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 10. That is what God ardently desires to do with us in order to help us share in His holiness and companionship for eternity.

**In the midst of trials, do you dwell on the pain of the refining process or on the joy? Why? Heb. 12:11.**

God does not cause our misfortunes, but He does use them to lead us back to Him, to teach, to correct, to educate, and to sanctify us. "Through affliction God reveals to us the plague spots in our characters, that by His grace we may overcome our faults. Unknown chapters in regard to ourselves are opened to us, and the test comes, whether we will accept the reproof and the counsel of God. When brought into trial, we are not to fret and complain. We should not rebel, or worry ourselves out of the hand of Christ. We are to humble the soul before God. The ways of the Lord are obscure to him who desires to see things in a light pleasing to himself. They appear dark and joyless to our human nature. But God's ways are ways of mercy and the end is salvation."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 301.

In order to experience God's comfort in the midst of our mourning, we must always keep in mind that just as the carpenter is always near his wood, the potter is always close to his clay, and the smith is not far from his metal, so also Christ is always with us to encourage and comfort. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13, NKJV).

**You can truly appreciate comforting only when you experience suffering. But where do you see Jesus in all of this?**

**TWO KINDS OF SORROW (2 Cor. 7:10).**

**Differentiate between godly and ungodly sorrow. 2 Cor. 7:10.**

We all have had experiences when others tell us that they are sorry without their really meaning it. We might have done this ourselves too. To say that we are sorry about something could mean that we want to end the discussion, dismiss the person offended, or get out of a difficult situation. Admitting that we have done something wrong is sometimes not encouraged, for it could convey some weakness or deficiency. Sometimes we feel that admitting a wrong, or getting caught in the wrong, is a greater sin than committing the wrong itself.

Obviously this is not what godly sorrow is about. This does not lead to healing and restoration, but to further resentment and alienation. Only godly sorrow shows love and caring for the grieved and determines to allow God to change and restore the relationship.

**What do godly and ungodly sorrow lead to? 2 Cor. 7:10.**

"In 'godly sorrow' there is recognition and admission that one has wronged God and his fellow men, adequate effort to right the wrong, and a reorientation of the life with the purpose of avoiding a repetition of the same mistakes. . . .

"Worldly sorrow consists of regret for the consequences of the sin rather than for the sin itself, and at being discredited before the world and worldly friends (1 Sam. 15:30). Worldly sorrow plays only upon the surface of the problem. It mounts no higher than the man himself, and his own feelings. It leads to future regret and to deeper distress."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 884.

**What biblical examples best illustrate the two kinds of sorrow?  
Matt. 27:3-5; Luke 22:60-62.**

The Greek text makes a clear distinction between the repentance of Peter, which was produced by godly sorrow, and that of Judas. In the first, the word *metanoia* is used, which denotes a change of mind, of goals, of direction—that is, conversion. In the case of Judas, the word *metamelomai*, which is employed, means regret, mere remorse.

**Recall moments when you truly felt godly sorrow and experienced restoration. What can you specifically do to be sure that your sorrow is the godly and not the worldly type?**

**CHRIST'S SORROW (Luke 19:41; Matt. 26:36-38).**

Not all affliction and sadness are necessarily the direct consequence of sin. The sufferings of Job, like those of Jesus, prove this. Jesus suffered because of the sins of others and of the world. He was profoundly saddened by the callousness of the Pharisees (Mark 3:5); He cried over Jerusalem, because of the indifference of her children to the salvation God was offering them, which they finally rejected.

**Jesus wept over Jerusalem. What does this fact tell you about the kind of person Jesus is? Luke 19:41.**

"It was the sight of Jerusalem that pierced the heart of Jesus—Jerusalem that had rejected the Son of God and scorned His love, that refused to be convinced by His mighty miracles, and was about to take His life. He saw what she was in her guilt of rejecting her Redeemer, and what she might have been had she accepted Him who alone could heal her wound. He had come to save her; how could He give her up?"—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 576.

**What do the words of Jesus, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death," say about His sacrifice? Matt. 26:38.**

The sadness experienced by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane was caused by His dread of the death that brings about complete separation from God. "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.' "—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 685.

**What consoled Jesus in His sufferings? Heb. 12:2; Isa. 53:10, 11.**

Have you pondered this lately? "Looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. . . . Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted" (Heb. 12:2, 3, RSV).

How can identifying with Jesus and sharing in His suffering bring comfort and assurance to you?

**GRACE TO SUFFER FOR CHRIST (Phil. 1:29, 30).**

Here Paul is considering the conflicts with Satan that persecution brought about to the Philippian believers. He could write to them with sympathy, for he was certainly familiar with persecution for Christ's sake. He knew they remembered the beating and the imprisonment he faced in their city during his first visit there. Even as he was writing them he was suffering persecution in Rome. He assured them that by God's grace he could bear to suffer for Christ, and they could too.

**Often more emphasis is placed on believing on Christ and not on suffering for Christ. What is the link between the two? Phil. 1:29.**

"Of all the gifts that heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor. Not Enoch, who was translated to heaven, not Elijah, who ascended in a chariot of fire, was greater or more honored than John the Baptist, who perished alone in the dungeon."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 478.

**How should a Christian consider participation in Christ's sufferings? 1 Peter 4:12-16; Col. 1:24.**

Following Christ's example, the Christian should patiently, victoriously, endure the trials of the present life for the advancement of God's work on earth. It is therefore an honor and a source of joy to share the sufferings of Christ for His church. Like Jesus, who did it "for the joy that was set before him" (Heb. 12:2, KJV), His disciple will do it in anticipation of the joy and gladness that they will have at His appearing. (See 1 Peter 4:13.)

**How can joy be an integral part of suffering for Christ in your daily life?**

"Blessed are they also who weep with Jesus in sympathy with the world's sorrow and in sorrow for its sin. In such mourning there is intermingled no thought of self. . . All who are followers of Christ will share in this experience. As they partake of His love they will enter into His travail for the saving of the lost. . . drinking with Him the cup of sorrow, they are partakers also of His joy."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 12, 13.

**FURTHER STUDY:** *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, “The Beatitudes” (Matt. 5:4), pp. 9-13; *Education*, pp. 88-93; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 300, 685-690; *Early Writings*, pp. 46-48.

The words *consolation* and *hope* mentioned in 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 renew the assurance given by Jesus in the second beatitude—consolation for the Christian in each of his trials. Through Jesus, God provided “the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25, RSV). By His Spirit He still makes provision for “all our affliction” (2 Cor. 1:4). Moreover, he who knows this comfort through experience with his God is, in turn, able to sympathize with a suffering brother and, in God’s name, to minister consolation to him.

“Patient endurance of tribulation tests, confirms, and refines the Christian’s faith. Out of this comes ever more confident hope. It is the believer’s initial hope of sharing in the glory of God (see v. 2) that nerves him to endure in the first place. And as he continues to endure, he gains a steady, calm assurance. Hope and faith grow as they are tested and exercised. . . . The experience of Job illustrates how the severe discipline of character can strengthen the faith and hope of a sincere believer.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 525.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Give some illustrations from your own personal experience of how suffering and affliction can enhance your Christian faith.
2. Why does God allow suffering? Does God ever purposely cause us to suffer? Why or why not?
3. To what extent do we sometimes cause our own suffering? How can we avoid bringing unnecessary suffering upon ourselves?
4. How should Christians respond to suffering?

**SUMMARY:** At first glance, the second beatitude seems to refer mainly to those who mourn due to the afflictions of life, such as sickness and misfortune. A deeper look, however, reveals that in addition to those who suffer physically, Christ is describing those who mourn because of sorrow for sin. But to all those who mourn, for whatever reason, Christ offers comfort, consolation, and hope for a better life.



## Dancing With Demons, Part I

Ray and Dawn Spoon

On the island of Palawan in the Philippines, the people come from the surrounding hills to celebrate the *siburan*, a feast in honor of the rice god. While the men play their traditional instruments, the women line up and begin stomping out a rhythm with their feet.

During the feast the *shaman* bows before the large, ornately decorated urns of rice wine, and begins a ritual chant as he waves a branch above and around the wine. The people believe that the spirit of the rice god enters the rice wine and changes it from sour to sweet. After the *shaman* and the chiefs and elders have tasted the wine, everyone else lines up for a drink, for they believe that those who drink the wine will be blessed with a good rice harvest. Even small children participate in this drunken revelry.

Rinal and Seblito, two young men from the village, heard the music and the chants that signaled the beginning of the *siburan*. They were drawn toward the festivities by a lifetime of traditions and memories. But they had recently become Christians, and had promised to "walk on God's trail." The two young men wanted to go to the feast to play the gongs, so they pledged between themselves not to drink, and set out for the feast.

Inside the hut, the music beat a hypnotic rhythm. Sounds of drunken laughter pierced the smoke-filled air. Suddenly two men threw themselves from one side of the hut to the other, thrashing and growling, as demons entered their bodies. Four men wrestled them to the floor and held them while the chief repeated a chant to release them from the demons.

By now the strong rice wine had taken effect. Children were vomiting; adults could barely walk. Around the edges of the hut people slumped in a drunken sleep. Rinal and Seblito tried to slip out the door unnoticed. But someone saw them and shouted, "You can't leave yet! You haven't had any rice wine!" The crowd began urging the youth toward the large pot of strong wine.

(Continued next week)

**Ray and Dawn Spoon are Adventist Frontier Missionaries serving the people on the island of Palawan in the Philippines.**



# The Meek



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Matt. 5:5; 11:28, 29; Num. 12:3; 1 Peter 3:3, 4; Phil. 2:5; 4:5; Col. 3:12; Eph. 4:1, 2.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).

**KEY THOUGHT:** Common belief tends to associate meekness with timidity and weakness. In this week's lesson, however, we'll discover a new dimension of meekness—a trait more to be desired than gold.

**A MEEK AND QUIET SPIRIT.** We live in a society where there seems to be less gentleness and kindness and more aggressiveness and rudeness. Sometimes it comes as a pleasant surprise to others when we treat them with gentleness. But it is this virtue of meekness that God treasures, for it reveals that we are truly His children.

There is a direct relationship between this third beatitude and the two ones preceding it. Poverty of spirit and godly sorrow produce meekness in the heart. "Throughout the Beatitudes there is an advancing line of Christian experience. Those who have felt their need of Christ, those who have mourned because of sin and have sat with Christ in the school of affliction, will learn meekness from the divine Teacher."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 13, 14.

In all the Scriptures God speaks with special affection of those who are gentle in character. Tenderly He encourages them with precious promises and then presents them to us as our examples. By His grace the truly meek gain victory over self, preparing them to take possession of the kingdom.

### NEED OF A DEFINITION (Matt. 5:5).

The Hebrew word *anaw* and its Greek equivalent *praus* are not always translated in the same way. Modern languages give the word *meek* an implied meaning of "mousy," "tame," "timid," "docile"; so today meekness often suggests weakness or a lack of strength of character. To understand this beatitude we should note the meaning of the word *meek*.

"A distillation of inspired definition would seem to characterize meekness as an absence of self-seeking and a presence of self-forgetfulness. It is 'government of self' (*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 348), 'a calm and trustful spirit,' 'lowliness of heart' (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 301), 'the ornament of God's own choice' (*The Sanctified Life*, p. 16). Meekness, then, is an inward calm and peace of mind that shows itself in outward gracious, courteous, kind, and friendly behavior. It has been termed 'an attitude of mind and heart that prepares the way for sanctification.'"—J. M. Lien, *Review and Herald*, August 16, 1973.

### How should we interpret the promise made to the meek? Matt. 5:5.

Through the psalmist God promised the earth to the meek (Ps. 37: 11). Daniel said it is "the kingdom under the whole heaven" that "shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High" (Dan. 7:27). "But the earth promised by Jesus is above all the earth restored, a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13).

Another interpretation, however, should not be excluded. Is not self-control the first victory gained by the meek? As gentleness of character naturally conquers hearts, it works itself into another's favor more effectively than does force or talent. That is why gentleness must characterize the peaceful conquerors whom Jesus sends into the world to prepare it for His kingdom.

"Human nature is ever struggling for expression, ready for contest; but he who learns of Christ is emptied of self, of pride, of love of supremacy, and there is silence in the soul. Self is yielded to the disposal of the Holy Spirit. Then we are not anxious to have the highest place. We have no ambition to crowd and elbow ourselves into notice; but we feel that our highest place is at the feet of our Saviour."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 15.

**What do you first think of when you think of someone who is meek? Do you know of a person who exhibits a true spirit of meekness? In what ways can you manifest a spirit of meekness that is not weakness?**

**JESUS, MODEL OF MEEKNESS (Matt. 11:28, 29).**

What is the spiritual significance of our scriptural passage beginning with Christ's words, "Come unto Me"? How does this relate to what He said in the rest of the passage? Matt. 11:28, 29.

Jesus not only *teaches* truth: He *is* truth. Whatever He teaches, He lived: what He asks His hearers to become, He Himself is. That is why He can invite men to come to Him, the One who is "meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 9:36).

"We are to enter the school of Christ, to learn from Him meekness and lowliness. Redemption is that process by which the soul is trained for heaven. This training means a knowledge of Christ."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 330.

**How did Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem illustrate in a special way His gentleness and His humility? Matt. 21:4, 5.**

Dwelling on the example of our Saviour's humility should wash away from our hearts any residue of arrogance and sense of superiority. And Christ's meekness was never in any way weakness, but rather the epitome of spiritual strength.

"Through all the lowly experiences of life He consented to pass, walking among the children of men, not as a king, to demand homage, but as one whose mission it was to serve others. There was in His manner no taint of bigotry, no cold austerity. The world's Redeemer had a greater than angelic nature, yet united with His divine majesty were meekness and humility that attracted all to Himself."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 14.

"In this one triumphant scene [triumphal ride into Jerusalem] of His earthly life, the Saviour might have appeared escorted by heavenly angels, and heralded by the trump of God; but such a demonstration would have been contrary to the purpose of His mission, contrary to the law which had governed His life. He remained true to the humble lot He had accepted. The burden of humanity He must bear until His life was given for the life of the world."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 571.

**What was the principal object of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 11:28, 29? How would you relate to certain situations when emulating Christ's example of meekness is perceived as a sign of passivity and weakness?**

**FROM VIOLENCE TO MEEKNESS (Num. 12:3; Acts 7:22).**

Moses was not naturally a meek man. (See Exod. 2:11-14.) Convinced that he was to be the liberator of the Israelites, he sought to obtain their liberation by force of arms.

**How do you explain the radical change in Moses in becoming the meekest man? Num. 12:3.**

"In the military schools of Egypt, Moses was taught the law of force, and so strong a hold did this teaching have upon his character that it required forty years of quiet and communion with God and nature to fit him for the leadership of Israel by the law of love." —*Education*, p. 65. "There were other lessons that, amid the solitude of the mountains, Moses was to receive. In the school of self-denial and hardship he was to learn patience, to temper his passions." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 247.

**What testimony did Paul bear concerning the transformation of his character? 1 Tim. 1:12, 13; Acts 8:3; 26:9-11; 2 Tim. 3:10.**

Note some of the expressions Paul used to describe his character before conversion: "blasphemer," "persecutor," "injurious," "extremely zealous." "I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it" (Gal. 1:13, RSV). In the book of Acts, Luke points out the same brutality: "Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison" (8:3). In his discourse before King Agrippa, Paul declared: "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth . . . ; I . . . shut up many of the saints in prison. . . . And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme; and in raging fury against them, I persecuted them" (Acts 26:9-11). Several years later this same Paul wrote: "When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate" (1 Cor. 4:12, 13). Then, as he faced death, Paul again said of himself, and charged his closest co-worker to bear him witness: "You have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love" (2 Tim. 3:10).

Although the transformation of life may not be as spectacular as that of Moses or Paul, the goal before you is the same. Can others see such a transformation in your life that they want to imitate you as you imitate Christ?

**A PRICELESS VIRTUE (1 Peter 3:3, 4).**

Why do you think God places such great value on the "ornament" of meekness manifested in our lives? List a few reasons.

"Meekness is the inward adorning, which God estimates as of great price. The apostle speaks of this as more excellent and valuable than gold or pearls or costly array. While the outward adorning beautifies only the mortal body, the ornament of meekness adorns the soul and connects finite man with the infinite God. This is the ornament of God's own choice. He who garnished the heavens with the orbs of light has by the same Spirit promised that 'he will beautify the meek with salvation' (Ps. 149:4). Angels of heaven will register as best adorned those who put on the Lord Jesus Christ and walk with Him in meekness and lowliness of mind."—*The Sanctified Life*, p. 16.

What recommendation does Paul make to every man of God concerning the fruit of the Spirit, of which meekness is a part? Gal. 5:22, 23; 1 Tim. 6:11.

As we allow the Holy Spirit to help us to possess His precious fruit of meekness, we become more self-controlling and gain mastery over our evil tempers. This fruit, cherished daily in the heart, will transform our selfish and impetuous character and make it more Christlike.

Why is meekness absolutely essential in the process of sanctification?

"The most precious fruit of sanctification is the grace of meekness. When this grace presides in the soul, the disposition is molded by its influence. There is a continual waiting upon God and a submission of the will to His. The understanding grasps every divine truth, and the will bows to every divine precept, without doubting or murmuring. True meekness softens and subdues the heart and gives the mind a fitness for the engrafted word. It brings the thoughts into obedience to Jesus Christ."—*The Sanctified Life*, pp. 14, 15.

Many people are obsessed with all sorts of adornment to show themselves in a certain light. What are the "adornments" in your life that hinder you from fully possessing the precious adornment of meekness? How can the Holy Spirit make meekness become more prominent in your life?

**TO BE CHRISTLIKE (Phil. 2:5; Col. 3:12; Eph. 4:1, 2).**

Study the three scriptural references for today and list the spiritual qualities that will help us have the mind of Christ as we become more like Him. What is the relationship between the virtue of meekness and the other virtues listed?

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"To man is granted the privilege of becoming an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ. To those who have been thus exalted, are unfolded the unsearchable riches of Christ, which are of a thousand-fold more value than the wealth of the world. Thus, through the merits of Jesus Christ, finite man is elevated to fellowship with God and with His dear Son."—*The Sanctified Life*, p. 17.

How is gentleness manifested in the lives of God's children? Consider carefully the following points from Scripture and see how they help you manifest the spirit of gentleness:

1. By receiving "with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21, RSV).
2. By how we treat others: "shewing all meekness unto all men" (Titus 3:2, KJV).
3. By our manner of petitioning others: "Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:1).
4. By our manner of instructing souls in the truth: "Exhort with great patience and instruction" (2 Tim. 4:2, NASB).
5. By the way we correct our adversaries: "Correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth" (2 Tim. 2:25, RSV).

"The value of our work does not consist in making a loud noise in the world, in being zealous, eager, and active in our own strength. The value of our work is in proportion to the impartation of the Holy Spirit. The value of our work comes through trust in God, which brings holier qualities of mind, so that in patience we may possess our souls. . . . The cause of God is best advanced by those who are meek and lowly in heart."—*Evangelism*, p. 631.

**In doing the Lord's work, to what extent are you allowing the Lord of the work to manifest in you His graciousness and meekness in your home, church, and community?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, “The Beatitudes” (Matt. 5:5), pp. 13-18; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 328-332, 354; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 245-248; *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 119-121; *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 348; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 622, 623.

Throughout all ages the true strength of Christianity has been in the love that Christians manifest one toward another. Not only love for those who love us, or for our neighbor, but also for our enemies. (See Matt. 5:43-46.) “How they love one another!” was the testimony that people bore concerning the first Christians. It is also what the world should be able to say of the church entrusted with the proclamation of God’s last message for a doomed world.

“Those who claim to believe in Christ are to represent Christ in deeds of kindness and mercy. Such will never know until the day of judgment what good they have done in seeking to follow the example of the Saviour.”—*Welfare Ministry*, p. 86.

“If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 189.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. If a person is meek, does that imply that he or she has to be a “pushover”? Where does one draw the line between meekness and allowing another person to take unfair advantage?
2. Jesus describes Himself as meek and lowly. How do we reconcile this with such behaviors as throwing the moneychangers out of the temple?
3. Based upon this week’s study, how would you define meekness?
4. How can we as Christians best develop the trait of meekness?
5. Why is it so important for Christians to be meek in character? How would you rank meekness with the other Christian virtues?

**SUMMARY:** One of the greatest victories the Christian can attain is victory over self. And it is not until self is overcome that we can truly achieve meekness. True meekness will sanctify us and positively impact our relationships with others. It is the essence of Christianity.



## Dancing With Demons, Part 2

Ray and Dawn Spoon

Inside Story

Rinal and Seblito were new Christians. They knew that it was unwise to go to the *siburan*, the feast to the rice god. But it was difficult to stay away. They reasoned that they would go only to play the gongs, the traditional musical instrument. They promised each other that they would not even taste the strong, homemade rice wine.

But as the dancing and drinking progressed, the pressure on Rinal and Seblito to drink was almost beyond endurance. Finally, they were able to slip away from the feast unnoticed.

The two young men returned to their house, where they prayed together then went to sleep. The next morning they awoke feeling refreshed. As they left their house, their neighbors asked them how they could have slept so soundly during the night. Then Rinal and Seblito learned that throughout the night drunken men had tried to rouse them and entice them back to the feast to drink. But they could not be awakened.

The two new Christians realized that God had protected them from the devil's temptation. They understand now that going to the *siburan*, even to play the gongs, was venturing onto the devil's ground. They vowed they would never attend another pagan feast again.

Seblito and Rinal no longer dance with demons; they have chosen to "walk on God's trail." Their neighbors notice the changes in their lives and ask, "What has happened to Seblito? He does not argue with his father any more. He is gentle with the children. He is not proud or cocky as he used to be."

What has happened to Seblito? He and Rinal are growing in Christ. They were the first mountain people of Palawan to become Seventh-day Adventist Christians. Pray that many more Palawanos

will decide to leave their demon-possessed practices and join the ranks of those who "walk on God's trail."



**Rinal and Seblito (left)** enjoy time studying God's Word. Ray and Dawn Spoon are Adventist Frontier Missionaries, church planting on the island of Palawan in the Philippines.

# Those Who Hunger and Thirst



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 5:6, 20; 6:33; Luke 15:3-7; 11-32; Rom. 3:21-24.

**MEMORY TEXT:** “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6, RSV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** Everyone has experienced the cravings associated with physical hunger and thirst. These needs can be easily satisfied with a plate of food or a glass of water. But the hungering and thirsting of the soul, the longing for righteousness, only God can satisfy.

**GOD'S ANSWER TO SPIRITUAL FAMINE.** With each beatitude the character of a true disciple of Christ is portrayed more clearly. Each, in turn, sheds light upon a different facet of Christian character.

Rare is the person who does not hunger and thirst after righteousness. In this evil world in which we live the unsatisfied are many. They, consciously or unconsciously, feel the inner emptiness of human misery and suffer from a kind of soul sickness. Surely the hungering and thirsting after righteousness has never been greater than it is today.

In speaking of the signs that are to take place just before the coming of our Lord in glory, the prophet Amos foretold a spiritual famine: “not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11, RSV).

It is not enough to hunger and thirst after righteousness in order to be filled. One still must go to Him who has been “made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). Being the only Righteous One, He alone is able to invite men to come and drink at the Source of the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

**HUNGERING AND THIRSTING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS (Matt. 5:6).**

**What kind of righteousness is Christ referring to in this fourth beatitude? Matt. 5:6.**

"In every instance of its use in the NT (94 times) *dikaiosune* is translated 'righteousness.' Among the Greeks 'righteousness' consisted in conformity to accepted customs. To the Jews it was essentially a matter of conformity to the requirements of the law as interpreted by Jewish tradition. (See Gal. 2:21.) But for Christ's followers, righteousness took on a broader meaning. Instead of going about to establish their own righteousness, Christians were called to submit 'themselves unto the righteousness of God' (Rom. 10:3). They sought for the righteousness 'which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith' (Phil. 3:9)." —*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 326.

**What assurance does Jesus give to all who hunger and thirst for righteousness? Matt. 5:6. How does such an assurance become a reality in your life and in your witness?**

This metaphor was especially meaningful to Christ's hearers, most of whom had experienced hunger and thirst at one time or another. Moreover, no word could have been more pleasing to their ears than the promise of righteousness at a time when Israel was awaiting the advent of the Messiah. Their hope was rekindled that He would deliver them from their yoke of bondage, establish righteousness, and administer law over all people.

"Only those who long for righteousness with the eager anxiety of a man starving for lack of food or famishing for want of water, will find it. No earthly source can satisfy the hunger and thirst of the soul, whether it be material riches, profound philosophies, the satisfaction of physical appetites, or honor and power. After experimenting with all of these things, Solomon concluded that 'all is vanity.'" —*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 326.

"The sense of unworthiness will lead the heart to hunger and thirst for righteousness, and this desire will not be disappointed. Those who make room in their hearts for Jesus will realize His love. All who long to bear the likeness of the character of God shall be satisfied." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 302.

**Under what condition can you appropriate the Master's promise to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness?**

**THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD (Matt. 6:33).**

What is the righteousness of God that Christ wants us to seek, and what is its relationship to the kingdom of God? Matt. 6:33.

The righteousness of God should be the constant concern of the Christian. There are individuals who seek only the commonplace needs of daily life; that is, they are blind to the true reality of life, ignorant of God and of His redemptive act. They who hunger and thirst after righteousness will never be satisfied until they find true righteousness, the righteousness of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

"Righteousness is love, and love is the light and the life of God. The righteousness of God is embodied in Christ. We receive righteousness by receiving Him.

"Not by painful struggles or wearisome toil, not by gift or sacrifice, is righteousness obtained; but it is freely given to every soul who hungers and thirsts to receive it. . . . 'This is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.' . . . Jeremiah 23:6." —*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 18.

According to the prophet Daniel, what type of righteousness would the Messiah bring to earth, and why is it called such? Dan. 9:24.

"Men will learn of the reconciliation for iniquity and of the everlasting righteousness which the Messiah has brought in through His sacrifice. The cross of Calvary is the great center. This truth acted upon will make Christ's sacrifice effectual. This is that which Gabriel revealed to Daniel in answer to fervent prayer. It was of this that Moses and Elijah and Christ talked at His transfiguration. By the humiliation of the cross He was to bring everlasting deliverance to all who would walk after Him, giving positive evidence that they are separated from the world."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 1172, 1173.

"The message of Christ's righteousness is to sound from one end of the earth to the other to prepare the way of the Lord. This is the glory of God, which closes the work of the third angel."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 19.

**Is the everlasting righteousness of Christ a living reality in your life today? Share with your class members how you are helping in some way to sound this message of Christ's righteousness from one end of the earth to the other.**

**CHRIST OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (Rom. 3:21-26).**

What does it mean to have Christ as our righteousness? How do you explain the fact that God in demonstrating His righteousness remains just and the justifier of those who believe in Christ? Rom. 3:22, 24, 26.

"When in love and gratitude the believer in Jesus commits himself without reservation to the mercy and will of God, the righteousness of justification is imputed to him. And as he continues daily in this experience of trust, surrender, and fellowship, his faith increases, enabling him to receive more and more of the imparted righteousness of sanctification."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 502.

**What is the evidence in the life that one has by faith put on the righteousness of Christ? Rom. 6:18, 19.**

Sometimes it is not clear to us what it means to put on the righteousness of Christ. But it is imperative that we have no illusions about this all-important matter. Of course, salvation by faith in Christ is free and cannot be earned, for its inestimable cost is His very life. However, we must seek Christ's righteousness and His salvation with all our interest and perseverance. He gave His life to save us, and we must give our lives in total submission to Him to appropriate such priceless salvation.

A garment is there to be worn, and the garment of Christ's righteousness will do us no good unless we are clothed with it. For unless in loving submission to Christ we live for Him and not for the world, we have a form of godliness but deny its power (2 Tim. 3:5).

"When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 312.

**What is Christ's role and what is our role when it comes to doing good works of righteousness? Eph. 2:8-10.**

"The religion of Christ means more than the forgiveness of sin; it means taking away our sins, and filling the vacuum with the graces of the Holy Spirit. . . . When Christ reigns in the soul, there is purity, freedom from sin. The glory, the fullness, the completeness of the gospel plan is fulfilled in the life."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 419, 420.

**JUSTIFIED BY GRACE (Luke 15:3-7).**

The parable of the lost sheep teaches clearly that God calls after an individual while he or she is still lost and that all Heaven rejoices when a single sinner repents. Jesus affirmed this truth when He said, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Lost people, like lost sheep, can never find their way to God of themselves, neither by their intelligence or through force of will. That is why, while we are still His enemies, God reconciles us to Himself "by the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:10). "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9,10).

**What is the central truth of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican? Luke 18:9-14.**

The parable of the Pharisee and the publican aptly illustrates the fact that justification is possible only through faith, and not by works. Full of self-righteousness, the Pharisee was not among those who hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God. His numerous works, so he thought, were sufficient for him. The publican, on the contrary, counted only on God's mercy when he prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). In conclusion Jesus affirmed: "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other" (verse 14).

**What is the central truth of the parable of the great debtor? Matt. 18:23-35. Where do you find yourself in it?**

The parable of the great debtor teaches that salvation is free. Like that servant, the sinner is incapable of repaying his debt to God. Like the king in the parable, our Lord is "moved with compassion" and has forgiven the debt (Matt. 18:27).

We are not saved *by* good works, but *for* good works. "By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-10, RSV).

**What is your motivation for doing good works? Is it to please and glorify God or is it to impress Him?**

**JUSTIFICATION TAUGHT IN PARABLES (Luke 15:11-32).**

Jesus never employed the expressions "justification by faith" or "imputed" and "imparted righteousness." Instead of theological expressions, which are always abstract and sometimes obscure, Jesus used concrete, living lessons that everyone could understand. In this way the parable of the prodigal son wonderfully illustrates the doctrine of imputed righteousness. The prodigal son experienced physical and spiritual hunger as a consequence of his foolish behavior, and this led him to repentance. He also experienced the joy of having his father satisfy his needs with blessings and kindness. How well this account depicts the sinner's dependence upon God for both his title to heaven and his fitness for it.

By the "best robe" is symbolized God's imputing of Christ's righteousness to sinners in response to their faith in God's pardon of their sins.

**In what way does the parable of the marriage feast teach the doctrine of imparted righteousness? Matt. 22:1-14.**

"The parable of the wedding garment opens before us a lesson of the highest consequence. By the marriage is represented the union of humanity with divinity; the wedding garment represents the character which all must possess who shall be accounted fit guests for the wedding."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 307.

"By His perfect obedience He [Christ] has made it possible for every human being to obey God's commandments. When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness. Then as the Lord looks upon us He sees, not the fig-leaf garment, not the nakedness and deformity of sin, but His own robe of righteousness, which is perfect obedience to the law of Jehovah."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 312.

Both imputed and imparted righteousness are acts of God's grace. "We have nothing in ourselves of which to boast. We have no ground for self-exaltation. Our only ground of hope is in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and in that wrought by His Spirit working in and through us."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 63.

**Have you accepted Christ's offer of grace? Are you experiencing the transforming power of this grace in your walk with Christ? Why not pray today for God to lead you to share your testimony with someone in need of His grace.**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read to the extent that you are able to *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, "The Beatitudes" (Matt. 5:6), pp. 18-21; *Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 265, 266; Ellen G White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, "This Is Justification by Faith," vol. 6, pp. 1070, 1071; *Christ's Object Lessons*, "This Man Receiveth Sinners" (The Lost Sheep), pp. 186-192 and "Lost and Is Found," pp. 198-211; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 584-586.

Jesus did not abolish His law, nor did He release His disciples from the obligation to observe it. Instead, He enlarged upon its requirements. Christians, generally speaking, believe that Christianity is an easing of Judaism. They are pleased to set a religion of love and pardon up over a religion of stern justice; they even go so far as to speak of the Jewish law as being in opposition to Christian grace, as if salvation by grace releases a person from obedience to God's law.

Far from making void the law, faith establishes it (Rom. 3:31), and grace makes its observance possible (Rom. 8:4), not simply according to the letter of the law, but in its spirit. This is possible because God writes His law in the heart (Heb. 8:10). He requires more than formal observance of its requirements. The scribes and Pharisees viewed the demands of the law as resting upon acts and deeds, but Jesus' requirements plumb the very secret intents of the heart. Our Lord requires more, not less, from those who are candidates for His kingdom.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Can a person become righteous if he or she does not thirst for it? Why or why not?
2. Since righteousness comes only through faith and not by works, does this mean that works are unnecessary?
3. How would you distinguish between the righteousness of the Pharisees and the righteousness of Christ?

**SUMMARY:** The righteousness we should seek is the righteousness of Christ—"His own robe of righteousness which is perfect obedience to the law of Jehovah."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 312.



## On Fire for God, Part 1

J. H. Zachary

Serafima worked in a fashionable store in Moscow. With Russia's new free market, her future looked bright. But one day an army officer came looking for her son. He was absent from his military post without leave, an extremely serious accusation. Suddenly Serafima's world began to crumble. Jewish by birth and the product of the godless Communist system, Serafima was not even sure that there was a God. But she was desperate; she began to pray.

God heard her prayers, she is sure, for not long after she prayed, the government granted amnesty to soldiers who had left their posts. Serafima's son could come home. Following this experience, Serafima believed that there was a God who cared for her and her son. But she did not know Him, nor did she know how to find Him.

One day her son hurried home and told her, "Mother, you must come to hear Mark Finley. He has really helped me to understand about God!" Serafima went to Finley's meetings, and in time both she and her son were baptized.

On the first Friday after her baptism, she went to her boss to ask for Sabbath off. Because of her strong record as a leader in sales, he granted her request. As winter approached, and the sun set earlier, Serafima asked for Fridays off. "I am sorry," her boss said. "Your God will have to take care of that." Serafima knew she would lose her job if she insisted on keeping the Sabbath. And jobs were precious. She wondered what God had in mind.

Serafima learned about the literature ministry. Was this where God was leading her? She was willing to try. Her friendly, outgoing manner and prior sales experience soon put her at the top in sales. But she was not interested in sales; she wanted to share with others the wonderful experience of coming to know God. Daily she prayed, "Help me find someone who will respond to you, Lord."

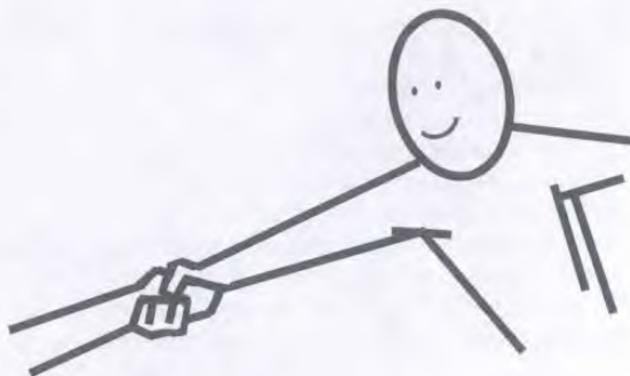
God answered her prayer and sent her to a certain city to work. She knew no one there, but God had pointed the way. In faith, she packed her bags and bought a one-way ticket for the town God had told her to visit.

(Continued next week)

**Serafima Levinson (left). James Zachary is director of evangelism for The Quiet Hour in Redlands, California.**



# The Merciful



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Matt. 5:7; 6:12, 14, 15; Exod. 34:6, 7; Luke 6:36; John 3:16; Heb. 2:17; James 2:12, 13.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

**KEY THOUGHT:** Satan tries to portray God as a harsh and unmerciful tyrant. But the Scriptures repeatedly reveal a God who is characterized by infinite mercy and grace. It is His desire that we, like Him, show mercy to others, and by so doing, we shall obtain mercy.

**LOVE THY NEIGHBOR.** The fifth beatitude, the subject of this week's lesson study, confronts Christians with their obligation toward their neighbors, because it is impossible to be merciful without sharing with others what God Himself has in mercy given them. They who have been filled must in turn help nourish those who hunger and thirst in this world in which we live. "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8) is the Lord's mandate to His disciples.

Jesus Himself is our great example, the supreme manifestation of divine mercy. "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 John 3:1, RSV). "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10, RSV).

This love embraces all humanity. God's mercy knows no limit except as it is blocked by the callousness of the sinner's heart. The promise is certain; all who, following our Lord's example, show themselves merciful will obtain mercy.

**THE MERCIFUL (Matt. 5:7).**

Current language identifies mercy with compassion or pardon. To give this word all the richness of meaning given it in the Bible, one must add the ideas of active kindness, graciousness, tender pity, and, above all, fidelity. Actually, for the Bible writers, mercy is the coming together of two currents of thought—compassion and faithfulness: God's compassion and faithfulness toward His people, and their fidelity to Him and to His alliance. The merciful, then, are those who follow the example of their heavenly Father and show compassion toward their neighbors, whoever they might be, and who are faithful in their obligations toward God.

**How must we understand the promise that Jesus made to the merciful? Matt. 5:7; 7:12.**

God promises that whoever is merciful will obtain mercy. Jesus also illustrated this principle in several of His parables. This promise is sure as far as it concerns God's attitude toward us. The children of God can experience it every day of their lives. But in small measure this principle is also verified in people's relationships with one another.

"The principle of the golden rule (ch. 7:12) applies both to our treatment of others and to the kind of treatment they accord us in return. The cruel, hardhearted, mean-spirited man rarely receives kind and merciful treatment at the hand of his fellow man. But how often those who are kind and considerate of the needs and feelings of others find that the world often repays them in kind."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 327.

**Unfortunately, sometimes merciful treatment is not repaid in kind. How would you relate to such a situation?**

"God imparts His blessing to us that we may impart to others. When we ask Him for our daily bread, He looks into our hearts to see if we will share the same with those more needy than ourselves. When we pray, 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' He watches to see if we will manifest compassion toward those with whom we associate. This is the evidence of our connection with God, that we are merciful even as our Father in heaven is merciful."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 283, 284.

**What does it mean to be merciful in your everyday life? In what tangible ways can you demonstrate mercy to those around you?**

**GOD IS MERCIFUL (Exod. 34:6, 7).**

Moses had already received a revelation of divine transcendency, when God appeared to him in the burning bush. At that time God revealed His name: "I AM THAT I AM" (Exod. 3:14). At the time of this second manifestation God revealed to Moses—and through him to all His children—the very essence of His character, infinitely "merciful and gracious." All the words used in this disclosure tend to underline the infinite goodness of God toward sinful humanity. The circumstances under which this revelation was made further emphasize His merciful character. It was as though it was God's response to the infidelity of the children of Israel, who had just made a golden calf to worship, and to the righteous anger of Moses (Exodus 32). In reality God had already revealed this trait of character when He wrote His law on the tables of stone that Moses had just broken. There He stated (in the third commandment), "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, . . . shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Exod. 20:5, 6).

**The following texts show how Bible authors took pleasure in emphasizing the merciful character of God. In the space provided below, write how you would enter into their experience and express your own joy as you contemplate the mercy of God.**

Neh. 9:17, 31 \_\_\_\_\_

Ps. 86:15 \_\_\_\_\_

Joel 2:13 \_\_\_\_\_

James 5:11 \_\_\_\_\_

Actually the whole Bible repeats again and again the thought, "Father of mercies," as the apostle Paul called Him (2 Cor. 1:3). The authors of the psalms were particularly happy to sing of the unfathomable mercy of God, unto which they never ceased to appeal. They discerned it everywhere, operating throughout all the history of the children of Israel. In all His acts they discovered that "the Lord is merciful and gracious" (Ps. 103:7, 8). Not only is God "rich in mercy. . ." (Eph. 2:4), but He even "delighteth in mercy" (Micah 7:18). (Compare Matt. 12:7.)

**To what degree does your personal experience allow you to declare with the psalmist: "All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies"? (Ps. 25:10, RSV).**

**JESUS, MERCIFUL HIGH PRIEST (John 3:16; Heb. 2:17).**

What does God's gift of His only Son reveal about His great love for lost sinners?

God the Father must have loved fallen humanity as much as He loved Jesus His only Son. That is why He was willing to give Him to die on the cross for us. In His mercy He emptied Heaven of its best and most in giving Jesus to earth. "Only He [Jesus] who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it manifest. Nothing less than the infinite sacrifice made by Christ in behalf of fallen man could express the Father's love to lost humanity."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 14.

How did Jesus give evidence of God's mercy in His life and teaching? Luke 4:18, 19; 19:10; Matt. 5:44.

Most of Christ's ministry involved acts of compassion and mercy to the suffering. He delighted to heal all those who were oppressed by Satan. It is recorded that He was often moved with compassion as He touched the hurting people. Great love and mercy were clearly evident in all He did.

What was conferred on Jesus in preparation for His high priesthood in the heavenly sanctuary? Why? Heb. 2:17, 18; 4:14-16.

Jesus was the One who volunteered to give Himself in saving fallen humanity. In His incarnation He became one with the human race in order that He might become acquainted with the suffering and trials that beset us. His love and mercy for us drove Him to become God with us, reaching us at our level. Indeed "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). God and His Son have always loved us the same, and Christ's death did not make the Father love us more.

"This great sacrifice was not made in order to create in the Father's heart a love for man, not to make Him willing to save. No, no! 'God so loved the world, that He gave his only-begotten Son.' John 3:16. The Father loves us, not because of the great propitiation, but He provided the propitiation because He loves us. Christ was the medium through which He could pour out His infinite love upon a fallen world."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 13.

Many Christians believe that Christ's sacrifice made God more favorable and loving toward us. What do you think?

**IN THE LIKENESS OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER (Luke 6:36).**

In its parallel passage in Matthew's Gospel, this verse reads: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). In other words, the perfection to which Jesus calls His disciples is expressed in the mercy that they show, after the example set by God, not only to those who love them, but also to their enemies, those who hate and persecute them. (See Matt. 5:43-47; Luke 6:27-35.)

The character of God, which has been revealed to us, is our standard for life. We are invited to become more and more like Him. "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Eph. 4:32 through 5:1).

"Every child lives by the life of his father. If you are God's children, begotten by His Spirit, you live by the life of God."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 78. "When we are born of our Father, it is normal to resemble Him in our lives. It is like when we say that something runs in the family, or that it is a family tradition. Today we use the expression 'chip off the old block' and 'spitting image.' There is a family likeness, certain characteristics that run in the family and draw others' attention to the parents whom we belong to and resemble."—Philip G. Samaan, *Christ's Way to Spiritual Growth* (Hagerstown, Md: Review and Herald, 1995), p. 70.

"The merciful are 'partakers of the divine nature,' and in them the compassionate love of God finds expression. All whose hearts are in sympathy with the heart of Infinite Love will seek to reclaim and not to condemn. Christ dwelling in the soul is a spring that never runs dry. Where He abides, there will be an overflowing of beneficence."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 22.

**Exactly what is the lesson taught in the parable of the good Samaritan? Luke 10:25-37.**

This parable is a perfect illustration of God's mercy in dealing with people, as well as a vital demonstration of how the Christians should act toward their neighbors. In truth, the feelings of compassion shown by the Samaritan express the holy emotion that made the Son of God come to earth to save humanity. They are also the sentiments that should impel every Christian toward his or her neighbor, whoever they may be, every time an occasion of need arises.

**Toward whom must we be merciful? Is there ever any trace of discrimination when we consider this question?**

**FORGIVEN AS WE FORGIVE (Matt. 6:12, 14, 15).**

How did Jesus explain the principle of reciprocity regarding mercy, forgiveness, and judgment? Matt 5:7; 6:12, 14-15; 7:1, 2.

"Jesus teaches that we can receive forgiveness from God only as we forgive others."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 113.

The main cause for withholding forgiveness from others who have wronged us is that we have not yet been overwhelmed by the enormity of God's forgiveness to us. His forgiveness means life, and without it we would have been condemned to eternal death. That thought should fill our hearts with such enormous gratitude that forgiving our neighbor's offenses would seem minute in comparison to His forgiveness. We may think that we are justified in withholding forgiveness because those who have offended us have not confessed their wrong. Yes, they need to do that, but we should not wait to do our part, for God is always ready to pardon the sinner. Moreover, if we hold on to an unforgiving spirit against others who have wronged us, we are only injuring ourselves, not only spiritually but physically and mentally, as well.

Show how the parable of the great debtor is a commentary on the principle stated by Jesus. Matt. 18:23-35.

"But the great lesson of the parable lies in the contrast between God's compassion and man's hardheartedness; in the fact that God's forgiving mercy is to be the measure of our own. 'Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?'

"We are not forgiven because we forgive, but as we forgive. The ground of all forgiveness is found in the unmerited love of God, but by our attitude toward others we show whether we have made that love our own. Wherefore Christ says, 'With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged. . . .' Matt. 7:2."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 251.

"Forgiveness has a broader meaning than many suppose. . . . God's forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart. David had the true conception of forgiveness when he prayed, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.' Psalm 51:10."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 114.

**Is there someone to whom you need to offer forgivness? How would you go about it? What difference would it make to you if that person has not asked to be forgiven?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, "The Beatitudes" (Matt. 5:7), pp. 21-24; *Steps to Christ*, "God's Love for Man," pp. 9-15; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 350, 351; *Christ's Object Lessons*, "Who Is My Neighbor?" pp. 382-389, and "The Measure of Forgiveness," pp. 243-251; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 637-641.

The apostle James (James 2:12, NIV) calls to mind the great and awesome scene of the heavenly judgment. The law of God, which he calls "the law that gives freedom," will be the standard by which the character and life of men will be judged. God will not make exception for persons, and "judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy" (verse 13, NKJV). "A good man sheweth favour" (Ps. 112:5), and "the merciful life will triumph" (James 2:13, Moffatt). Thus the promises that Jesus made in the fifth beatitude will be fully realized.

The mercy of which Jesus speaks is an active principle expressed in acts of love toward one's neighbors. If this is not so, then mercy is of little value. In this judgment scene, acts of mercy are presented to us as being the test for admission to the kingdom. For this same reason James includes acts of mercy in his definition of "pure and undefiled" religion (James 1:27, RSV).

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are some ways in which we can show mercy and compassion to our fellow humans? Can you think of some examples in which someone you know demonstrated an act of mercy? What were the results?
2. What should be your motivation for showing mercy to others? If you are showing mercy merely in order to obtain mercy, are you truly merciful?
3. Is there any situation in which you are justified in withholding forgiveness? What should be your course of action when you find it difficult to forgive someone?

**SUMMARY:** Only those who are merciful to others can expect to be shown mercy in the day of judgment. Stated another way, only the merciful will find their way to the kingdom of God.



## On Fire for God, Part 2

J. H. Zachary

When Serafima Levinson met Jesus, He set her heart on fire. She lost her job when she refused to work on the Sabbath, but God hired her as a literature evangelist and sent her out to witness for Him. Sometimes God calls her to an unfamiliar city to minister. She packs her bags, taking more books than clothes, and purchases a one-way ticket to her destination. "I know that God will bless me, provide for my needs, and give me my return fare," she testifies. And He has. In one city where she worked, a group of 30 new believers now meets in an old synagogue. In another city more than 120 new Adventists meet to worship and study.

Serafima is on fire for God. She does not wait until she arrives at her destination to begin work; she sells her books and literature on trains and buses too. During one train trip a man saw what she was doing and shouted. "This woman is from the devil! Do not buy her books!" He towered over Serafima's small frame, shouting, "Woman, get off the train—now!"

For one tense moment the people riding the train watched in hushed fear. Then Serafima calmly answered, "I sell books that bring peace and hope. If you do not want to listen to me, then you will have to get off the train." He did. The people on the train pressed in to buy her books.

On another occasion, she set up a little stand at the entrance to a cathedral where religious people would pass by. A young man saw what she was doing and began to shout, "Beware, here is a wolf in sheep's clothing! Have nothing to do with her!" His shouting drew the attention of the people, who came to see her books. Sales soared!

Nothing can stop Serafima. She is a faithful servant, going where her Leader sends, selling His books, and winning souls for His kingdom. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Serafima has raised up four companies of believers in Russia. "God has given me a new life filled with hope. I must share it with everyone I meet!" Serafima smiles.



**Serafima Levinson (left). James Zachary is director of evangelism for The Quiet Hour in Redlands, California.**

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST

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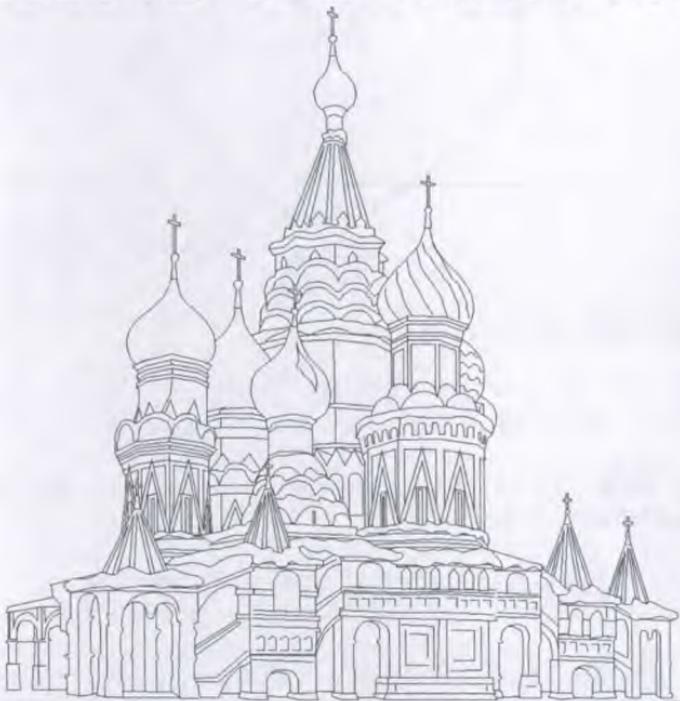
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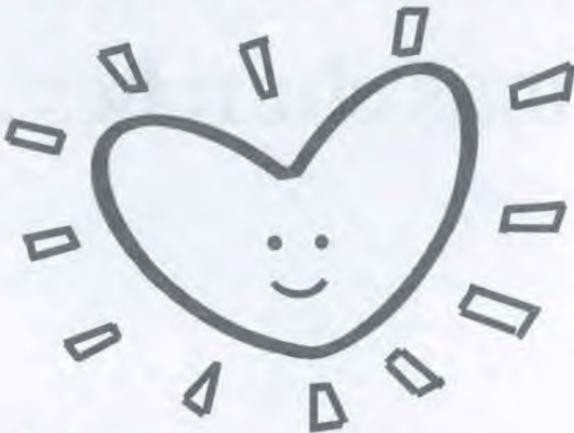
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# The Pure in Heart



## Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 5:8; 15:18-20; Heb. 4:12, 13; 8:10; Prov. 4:23; 1 Kings 8:39; Ps. 51:3, 4, 6, 10, 17.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

**KEY THOUGHT:** The pure in heart are those who search for God with all their heart, and to such God promises to reveal Himself.

**SIMPLE, SINCERE, HONEST.** With the sixth beatitude Jesus leads us to the wellspring of our being, the heart. One author has called it "the inner sanctuary of the soul." It is on the state of the heart that purity of thought, word, and action depend, "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." On one occasion Jesus questioned His hearers, "How can ye, being evil, speak good things?" (Matt. 12:34).

In addressing the "pure in heart," Jesus was obviously not referring to absolute moral purity, nor to irreproachable conduct. Taken in this way, this declaration would be completely foreign to the real meaning of the Beatitudes and to the essence of the gospel. Jesus confirmed this when He said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" to repentance (Matt. 9:13, RSV).

Jesus addresses people who are good-hearted, straightforward, simple, sincere, honest with themselves and with God. Here Jesus speaks to these people and promises them a vision of God because of the purity of their intentions. Only one thing is important: to enter into a living and personal relationship with Jesus—to live in His presence in this life so that we may live with Him forever in the life made new.

**THE “HEART”—A KEY WORD (Prov. 4:23).**

The word *heart* is used hundreds of times in the Bible, but only rarely—not to say never—does the word refer to the physical organ itself. Furthermore, in a figurative sense, the Bible authors give the word a much broader meaning than modern languages attribute to it. For us today the heart is usually linked with emotions: in the Bible it designates the inward man, the intimate, hidden area of the being, as well as the center of emotions and the intellect.

It should be noted that Bible writers considered the heart to be the seat of the intellect and, more specifically, the center of the will. From the heart good and evil thoughts issue, and in the heart resolutions take shape that determine human destiny.

“When Jesus speaks of the new heart, He means the mind, the life, the whole being.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1164.

**Why is it so crucial to keep our heart with all diligence? Prov. 4:23. In what ways can we do this?**

These words of wisdom that we considered clearly tell us three important things about keeping a special thing that is vital to our Christian life:

*What* should we keep? Our heart, the center of our whole being.

*How* should we keep it? With all diligence.

*Why* should we keep it that way? Because it is so critical to all aspects of our lives. Our spiritual development and eternal destiny issue from it and are determined by it.

**What did Jesus refer to when He spoke of purity of heart? Matt. 5:8.**

It was not ceremonial purity that Jesus had in mind (Matt. 15:18-20; 23:25), but inward cleanliness of heart. If the motives are pure, the life will be pure.

“Those with pure hearts have forsaken sin as a ruling principle in the life, and their lives are without reserve consecrated to God. . . . To be ‘pure in heart’ does not mean that one is absolutely sinless, but it does mean that his motives are right, that by the grace of Christ he has turned his back on past mistakes and that he is pressing toward the mark of perfection in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:13-15).”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 327.

**How does purity of heart lead you to see God?**

**THE HEART IS DECEITFUL (Matt. 15:18-20).**

What is the main point that Christ makes about the relationship of inward and outward defilement of a person? Matt. 15:18-20. How would you respond to someone who says that what proceeds from the mouth may defile the heart too?

The source of evil is found within the heart of man, not without. Nothing is helped when only the outside is cleansed, as the Pharisees were accustomed to doing. "First cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate," Jesus advised them, "that the outside also may be clean" (Matt. 23:26, RSV). Without real transformation of the heart, we cannot bear good fruit. At best we may appear righteous to others on the outside, but within we remain "full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Matt. 23:28).

What explanation is given in the Bible of the heart's disposition to evil? Jer. 17:9.

The fall of our first parents in Eden took place at the heart level, at the seat of the intellect and of the will. Adam and Eve exercised their own wills instead of following God's bidding. Disobedience to the will of God changed the heart, the very source of their being, the wellspring of all issues. That is why, since Eden, every human activity bears the stain of the heart, that is, of the mind and will.

Since Eden our hearts have been evil. It was because "the wickedness of man was great in the earth. And that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5, RSV) that God could not intervene in favor of the antediluvians. And God has warned that "as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of man" (Luke 17:26).

"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Eph 4:17-19, KJV).

**How is what the Bible terms "hardness of heart" brought about?  
What specific steps can you take to prevent this spiritual disease?  
How can this serious condition of the hardening of the heart be reversed?**

**GOD ALONE KNOWS THE HEART (1 Kings 8:39; Heb. 4:12, 13).**

The human heart is difficult to understand. Confusion of thought makes objective judgment of oneself impossible. Others can judge only on appearance, which, because of the natural duplicity of the heart, often does not correspond to the true inner condition.

If we think we can deceive God by hiding anything from Him, we are only deceiving ourselves. He is able to read the most intimate secrets. God not only sees the things that we are able to hide from others, but also perceives things that we do not know are there. Even when “you . . . justify yourselves before men,” Jesus said, “God knows your hearts” (Luke 16:15, RSV). This is why only God is in a position to judge. “The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7, KJV).

**How willing are we to allow God to search our hearts? Are we afraid to let Him do that? Why? Ps. 139:23, 24.**

“Unfortunately, we would often rather have others be impressed by our outward righteousness than to have God deal with our true inward condition . . . It is possible to act appropriately, anticipating the approving applause of others, without the inner regeneration.”—Philip G. Samaan, *Christ's Way to Spiritual Growth*, p. 64.

**Through what means does God reach the human heart? Heb. 4:12.**

One will never completely understand to what extent God depends on His Word, “the sword of the Spirit,” “sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit . . . , and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12, RSV), to dissipate the darkness of the heart and make the light shine in. We know that by the Word of God the Spirit takes possession of the heart and leads us into all truth.

In the measure that you are willing to listen to the Word of God, the Holy Spirit will open your ears (Isa. 50:5) and “the eyes of your hearts” (Eph. 1:18, RSV), “until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19, KJV). “God's holy, educating Spirit is in His word. . . . Truth is there revealed, and words and sentences are made bright and appropriate for the occasion, as the voice of God speaking to the soul.”—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 132.

**Pray earnestly the prayer in Psalm 139:23, 24 for God to search, to know, and to lead you.**

**O GOD, CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART (Ps. 51:3, 4, 6, 10, 17).**

Before you proceed with today's lesson, study Psalm 51 in its entirety for yourself, and then try to paraphrase it in your own words. What conditions need to be met in order for God to purify your heart?

"This passage in David's history is full of significance to the repenting sinner. It is one of the most forcible illustrations given us of the struggles and temptations of humanity, and of genuine repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 726.

**1. One must have the courage to recognize his sinful state.**

"I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Psalm 51:3, 4, KJV).

Without recognition of one's sinful state, without sincere confession of one's transgressions, there can be no forgiveness. "David's repentance was sincere and deep. There was no effort to palliate his crime. No desire to escape the judgments threatened. . . It was not for pardon only that he prayed, but for purity of heart."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 725.

**2. One must desire to receive truth with all of one's heart.**

"Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart" (Ps. 51:6, RSV).

God uses truth to sanctify us; "thy word is truth" (John 17:17, KJV). On the one hand, by revealing our sins to us, God's Word permits us to see ourselves as we are (see James 1:23, 24); on the other hand, it shows us what we can become by His grace.

**3. One must ask God to create a new heart.**

"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10).

God does not wish merely to tidy the heart; He desires to create a new one, as He promises in Ezekiel 36:26: "A new heart also will I give you."

**4. One must offer self to God as a living sacrifice.**

"The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (verse 17, RSV).

What counts in God's eyes is not the exterior aspects of holiness, but the inner dispositions of the heart and mind. (See Isa. 1:11-17.)

**Do you ask God every day to give you a new heart?**

**GOD'S LAW WRITTEN IN THE HEART (Heb. 8:10).**

Study God's marvelous promise in Hebrews 8:10. What connection do you see between His act of writing His laws on the hearts of His people and His relationship with them?

"At Mt. Sinai the Lord wrote His laws on tables of stone (Deut. 4:13), and in a book (ch. 31:24, 26). He intended that these laws should also be written on the hearts of the people. But the Israelites were content to regard these statutes simply as an external code and their observance a matter of outward compliance. God did not intend that His laws should be thus regarded. He offered His people the experience of a new heart . . . , but they were content with only an external religion. Under the new covenant men's hearts and minds are changed . . . Men do right, not by their own strength, but because Christ dwells in the heart, living out His life in the believer. . . . They are born of the Spirit and bear the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). The change can be effected only by divine power. Only God can 'put' His law in the hearts of His followers, though, of course, not without man's consent and cooperation."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 446.

**What should characterize the life and activities of a genuine Christian? In response, write down the main ideas you glean from your study of the following passages:**

**Deut. 4:29** \_\_\_\_\_

**Deut. 6:5** \_\_\_\_\_

**Col. 3:23** \_\_\_\_\_

God is not pleased with a divided heart, halfhearted service, occasional piety, diluted Christianity. God demands all or nothing. "I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:15, 16, KJV).

"You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can choose to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 47.

**How easy or difficult is it to allow Christ to work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, "The Beatitudes" (Matt. 5:8), pp. 24-27; *Education*, pp. 23-26; *Christ's Object Lessons*, "Things New and Old," p. 132; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 724-726; *Steps to Christ*, "The Test of Discipleship," pp. 57-65; Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 1097-1099.

"By faith we behold Him here and now. In our daily experience we discern His goodness and compassion in the manifestation of His providence. We recognize Him in the character of His Son. The Holy Spirit takes the truth concerning God and Him whom He hath sent, and opens it to the understanding and to the heart. The pure in heart see God in a new and endearing relation, as their Redeemer; and while they discern the purity and loveliness of His character, they long to reflect His image. They see Him as a Father longing to embrace a repenting son, and their hearts are filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

"The pure in heart discern the Creator in the works of His mighty hand, in the things of beauty that comprise the universe. In His written word they read in clearer lines the revelation of His mercy, His goodness, and His grace. . . . We discern the truth by becoming, ourselves, partakers of the divine nature.

"The pure in heart live as in the visible presence of God during the time He apportions them in this world."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 26, 27.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. What is meant by the term *hardness of heart*? What is the remedy?
2. What does it mean to be "pure in heart?"
3. What happens to us when God writes His laws on our hearts? Is it possible to keep God's law if it is not written on our hearts?

**SUMMARY:** When we give our hearts to God, we are making a complete surrender to Him. He expects nothing less.



## AIDS and the Church

Beverly Herbrandson Koester

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Esmi loved singing in the choir, and her three young children enjoyed Pathfinders. Her husband, Mphanda, tolerated her religion, but did not join her. But lately Esmi was too tired to enjoy anything. She and her husband had made a home for his sister-in-law, Toko, and her four children when Toko's husband died. Then Toko's health failed. When she died, the children remained with Esmi and Mphanda. It was not easy, but they managed.

Then Mphanda began to grow thin and weak. Within a few months he too died. Now the burden was on Esmi. She had no time to worry about her own health; she had to keep seven children fed and clothed. Exhaustion set in. She grew weak and thin. She suffered frequent bouts of diarrhea, and could no longer work. Esmi knew she was dying. She committed her children to the Lord's keeping. Her brother, Youseph, promised to raise the children to love the Lord. Grateful, Esmi died in peace.

Today, Youseph and his wife care for 10 children, ages 5 to 13. They confess, "We love every one of them, but it is difficult to raise 10 children from three different families. Seven of these children are suffering the loss of their parents. They are hurting and angry. They do not understand why their parents have been taken from them. We try to show them a loving God, even in this terrible ordeal."

Esmi's story is not uncommon in Malawi, where HIV infects between 35 and 50 percent of the adult population. HIV cuts across social, economic, and religious barriers, hitting middle-aged parents and young women the hardest.

The church is working to relieve the suffering of those affected by HIV and AIDS, care for the orphans, and educate the people to live more healthful lifestyles. But the epidemic has had a big head start.

Pray for Malawi and the other East African countries where HIV and AIDS runs rampant. Pray for Christians as they try to develop Christ's attitude toward the afflicted. Pray for the children growing up without their parents. Pray for families such as the Kandyas, who care for those children left behind. And pray for those who live with the knowledge that they are dying, and must leave their children to face an uncertain world.

Pray.

**Beverly Herbrandson Koester is sponsorship coordinator for the Malawi Union in Blantyre, Malawi.**

# The Peacemakers



## Sabbath Afternoon

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Matt. 5:9, 43, 44; Col. 1:19-21; 2:13, 14; Eph. 2:3, 14; 1 Cor. 14:33; Rom. 8:2, 6; 12:18; 15:33; 16:20.

**MEMORY TEXT:** “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

**KEY THOUGHT:** God is the source of peace. It is His desire that we partake freely of His peace that passes all understanding.

**INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE.** In considering the seventh beatitude, theologians have wondered whether it was not directed especially to Christ's disciples. Evidence shows that Jesus addressed Himself to the multitudes, as well (Matt. 5:1). Furthermore, in this discourse the Master pointed out the steps in our only path of spiritual development. Here we find enumerated the principles that assure the moral growth of every human being—principles and laws with universal application. All are called to receive this divine teaching, but only those who are prepared to realize it in their lives are the ones who fulfill the conditions outlined in the preceding beatitudes.

This truth is evident in the fact that performance of this beatitude is possible only as the provisions described in the preceding beatitudes are achieved. It is impossible to be a “maker of peace” unless “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,” fills “your hearts and minds” with the feelings that are in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7).

Just as Christ came as a peacemaker between Heaven and earth, just so His disciples are called to become “makers of peace” in the world. Thus they will receive the glorious title “children of God,” reserved for those the Lord will usher into the kingdom of heaven.

**MAKERS OF PEACE (Matt. 5:9).**

The word used in the Greek is not found elsewhere the Bible, although the verb *to make peace* is often used. Scholars have been unable to determine the Aramaic expression equivalent to this composite word. But as the Aramaic spoken in Palestine in Christ's time was related to the Hebrew, doubtless Jesus employed a word with Semitic connotations.

"In order to appreciate what Christ meant when He spoke of 'peacemakers' it is helpful to take note of the meaning of peace in Semitic thinking and speech. The Hebrew equivalent of Greek *eirene* is *shalom*, meaning 'completeness,' 'soundness,' 'prosperity,' 'condition of well-being.'"—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 328.

**What relationship do you see between being a peacemaker and being a child of God? Matt. 5:9.**

To be called "children of God" means, strictly speaking, to be called "sons of God." God is the "God of peace" (Rom. 15:33); and Jesus is the "Prince of Peace." It seems natural, then, that those who, in God's name, work for peace in this world should be called "children of God."

"To be a son of God means to resemble Him in character (1 John 3:2; cf. John 8:44). 'Peacemakers' are the 'sons of God' because they are at peace with Him themselves, and are devoted to the cause of leading their fellow men to be at peace with Him."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 328.

**The United Nations sometimes sends its peacekeepers to places where, unfortunately, there is no peace to keep. Why do you think making and keeping peace seem so elusive among individuals and nations? List some reasons.**

"Men cannot manufacture peace. Human plans for the purification and uplifting of individuals or of society will fail of producing peace, because they do not reach the heart. The only power that can create or perpetuate true peace is the grace of Christ. When this is implanted in the heart, it will cast out the evil passions that cause strife and dissension. 'Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree;' and life's desert 'shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.' Isa. 55:13; 35:1."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 305.

**What specific things can you do this week to be a peacemaker (as well as a peacekeeper) in your family, church, and community?**

**CHILDREN OF WRATH (Eph. 2:3; Col. 1:21).**

Keeping in mind yesterday's lesson, contrast the striking differences between the "the children of God," and the "children of wrath." Eph. 2:3; Col. 1:21.

In yielding to temptation and being disobedient to God in Eden, our first parents took their stand against the Creator of the universe, against God's established order, against the laws of life. At the same time they placed themselves on the side of the "prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2).

As a natural consequence, relations between God and His earthly creatures were broken. After sin Adam and Eve first fled from God's presence out of fear. Then with time their descendants drifted farther and farther away from God and they eventually disregarded His rulership in their lives. And, speaking of the "children of disobedience," the apostle Paul adds, "among whom also we all . . . were by nature" (Eph. 2:3).

No one can say that he or she is an exception. We are all by nature "children of wrath," consciously or unconsciously, in a state of war against God, lined up under the banner of the "prince of this world." "Whosoever . . . will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God," because "the friendship of the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4).

**How does our rebellion against God manifest itself? Titus 3:3. Do you see some of these rebellious manifestations in your everyday life? If yes, by God's grace what do you plan to do about it today?**

Enmity between us and God reveals itself on all levels of our existence. By our thoughts and works we become strangers and enemies of God. By doing what we please rather than following God's will, we become children of wrath, introducing into our lives—and into the world—disorder, envy, hatred, violence, strife, suffering, and death.

"Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21, RSV).

**To what extent has God's peace in your heart replaced the works of the flesh with the fruits of the Spirit?**

**THE GOD OF PEACE (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 1 Cor. 14:33).**

What does each of the following verses contribute to our understanding of “the God of peace”?

**Rom. 15:33** \_\_\_\_\_

**Rom. 16:20** \_\_\_\_\_

**1 Cor. 14:33** \_\_\_\_\_

In the beginning of Israel’s history Gideon built an altar unto the Lord, which he named “Jehovahshalom” (Judges 6:24)—“The Lord is peace” (RSV). Most of the Bible authors used this title in one way or another, either to call upon “the God of peace,” or to greet one another, or to bless, or still to call to order and peace.

“God is not a being who either has in Himself or produces disorder, disunion, discord, or confusion . . . He is the God of peace, and it is not to be taught that He could be pleased by a form of worship characterized by confusion of any kind. . . . Christianity tends to promote order (see 1 Cor. 14:40).”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 792, 793.

**Why is the title “God of peace” a just one? Col. 1:20; Rom. 5:8, 10.**

Before the foundation of the world God conceived the plan by which He would establish peace, not only on earth with humankind, but also in heaven among the heavenly hosts. God arranged for the reestablishing of peace wherever there was war against Him in the universe.

God did not wait until we approached Him to heal the breach and make peace. It was He who took the initiative. “While we were yet sinners. . . . When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God” (Rom. 5:8-10). “All things are of God, who hath reconciled . . . the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor. 5:18, 19).

“It was taught by the Jews that before God’s love is extended to the sinner, he must first repent. In their view, repentance is a work by which men earn the favor of Heaven. . . . But in the parable of the lost sheep, Christ teaches that salvation does not come through our seeking after God but through God’s seeking after us.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 189.

**Is there anything that discourages you from coming to the “God of peace” just as you are? Could repentance be a factor in keeping you from responding to His initiative?**

**CHRIST OUR PEACE (Col. 1:19, 20; Eph. 2:14).**

How is Christ our peace by the blood of His cross? Why is the cross so imperative in this regard? Col. 1:19, 20; Eph. 2:14.

Our reconciliation with God was effected through Jesus Christ. He in person was the instrument of our peace with God. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). God established “peace through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20). The redemptive work of Christ is completely contained in the word *peace*.

“Christ came that He might give peace to us such as the world knows not and cannot offer (John 14:27). This ‘peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep’ our ‘hearts and minds through Christ Jesus’ (Phil. 4:7). When Christ enters the heart it is always with the words, ‘Peace be unto you’ (Luke 24:36).”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 693.

**How does the peace of the “Prince of peace” bring reassurance to our troubled and fearful hearts? John 14:27.**

The peace of Christ is not something abstract to theorize about or something ethereal to dream of, but is a living reality in the human heart. This peace that the world cannot give is to help us overcome our fears, and to give us the courage to rise above trying circumstances. The “Prince of peace” becomes a bridge over troubled waters, giving us confidence and serenity because we know that He will never leave us.

“It is peace that you need—Heaven’s forgiveness and peace and love in the soul. Money cannot buy it, intellect cannot procure it, wisdom cannot attain to it; you can never hope, by your own efforts, to secure it. But God offers it to you as a gift, ‘without money and without price.’ Isaiah 55:1. It is yours if you will but reach out your hand and grasp it. The Lord says, ‘Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.’ Isaiah 1:18. ‘A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.’ Ezekiel 36:26.

“You have confessed your sins, and in heart put them away. You have resolved to give yourself to God.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 49.

**Peace for your troubled heart. That is God’s free gift to you already purchased at Calvary. It is yours for the asking. Will you reach out your hand now and grasp it?**

**THE FRUITS OF PEACE (Col. 2:13, 14; Rom. 8:2-6; 12:18).**

Experiencing the peace of Christ bears three kinds of fruit:

**1. Peace with God:** “You, who were dead in trespasses. . . God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross” (Col. 2:13,14, RSV; compare Rom. 8:1).

The prophet Isaiah had prophesied it in these words: “The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (53:5). Reconciled, we no longer live in fear, and “the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: . . . heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:16, 17).

**2. Peace with oneself:** “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. . . . For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:2-6).

“To set the mind on the things of the Spirit, and to have the thoughts and desires governed solely by the Spirit of God, result in that healthful, life-giving harmony of all the functions of the soul that is a sure pledge and foretaste of the life to come. . . . The presence of the Holy Spirit brings love, joy, and peace in the life (Gal. 5:22), the beginning within us of the kingdom of God, which is ‘righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost’ (Rom. 14:17).”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 563.

**3. Peace with others:** “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18).

The peace of God—because it is perfect—manifests itself in our relations with one another. This is why preaching of the gospel of peace demands that we “live in peace” (2 Cor. 13:11, RSV), “follow . . . peace” (2 Tim. 2:22), and “strive for peace with all men” (Heb. 12:14).

“The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7). “There is no other ground of peace than this. The grace of Christ received into the heart, subdues enmity; it allays strife and fills the soul with love. He who is at peace with God and his fellow men cannot be made miserable.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 27, 28.

Of course, it is not always possible to have peace with all people at all times. Paul admonishes us to strive for peace with all (Heb. 12:14), and to live peaceably with all to the extent that it depends on us (Rom. 12:18).

**Are you at peace with God, with yourself, and with others? How do you experience peace in very stressful work conditions? How do you relate to someone who is antagonistic to your Christian principles?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, “The Beatitudes” (Matt. 5:9), pp. 27, 28; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 244; *Steps to Christ*, “Confession,” pp. 37-39; *Counsels on Health*, p. 403; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, “The Spirituality of the Law” (Matt. 5:44), pp. 73-75.

“Christ’s followers are sent to the world with the message of peace. Whoever, by the quiet, unconscious influence of a holy life, shall reveal the love of Christ; whoever, by word or deed, shall lead another to renounce sin and yield his heart to God, is a peacemaker.

“And ‘blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.’ The spirit of peace is evidence of their connection with heaven. The sweet savor of Christ surrounds them. The fragrance of the life, the loveliness of the character, reveal to the world the fact that they are children of God. Men take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus. ‘Everyone that loveth is born of God.’ ‘If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His,’ but ‘as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.’ 1 John 4:7; Romans 8:9, 14.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 28.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. If God expects us to be peacemakers, why did Jesus say “I came not to bring peace, but a sword”?
2. How can a person who is living in difficult or trying circumstances claim to have peace?
3. How can you be a peacemaker without compromising the truth?

**SUMMARY:** When God gives us peace, no one can take it away. God’s peace envelops us with a staying power—a barrier against sin—that keeps us connected to God through Christ no matter what our circumstances. This peace cannot be purchased for any price, but comes freely as a gift from God.

## A New Name, A New Life

Herb and Linda Prndl

"Pastor, I would like to have a new name." Kanyare's timid voice was barely above a whisper, but his dark eyes shone with anticipation.

"Have you chosen a name?" I asked.

"Samuel," came the shy response, "I would like to be called Samuel, like the man of God in the Bible."

Kanyare is a member of the Lobi tribe of Burkina Faso. He had received his present name during the *djoro*, a cruel and demonic initiation ceremony in which the young boys are instructed by witch doctors, beaten, starved, and humiliated. If they endure, the newly initiated boys are given a new name that reflects the spirit worship of the Lobi people.

But Kanyare had met Jesus and was preparing for baptism. He was giving up his heathen life for a new life in Jesus. He wanted a name that would reflect his new life.

Kanyare's decision to follow Christ has brought him his share of difficulties. His father, the village chief, is an alcoholic and has a violent temper. Several of his wives have left his compound, no longer able to endure his drunken beatings. But Kanyare never complains, not when his father took the money he had worked so hard to earn, not when he tore up Kanyare's Bible study papers, not even when his father beat him for no reason at all. Yes, Samuel is a good name for the new Kanyare. The Holy Spirit has changed the heathen Kanyare into a God-fearing Samuel!

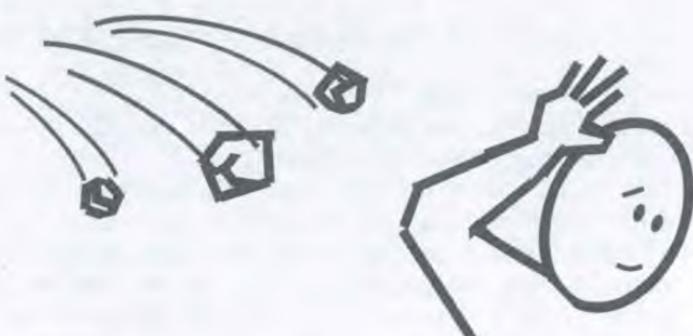
Recently we baptized Samuel along with 18 other precious Lobi believers. These new Christians are quickly learning to share their faith, lead out in worship services, give Bible studies, and visit and pray with the sick. I believe that one day Samuel will become a leader of his people—a leader for God.

Pray for the work in the predominately Muslim country of Burkina Faso in West Africa. The challenge of Islam is great, but our God is greater.

**Herb and Linda Prndl served with Adventist Frontier Missions in Burkina Faso. They have recently moved to Mali where Herb is director for ADRA in Mali.**



# The Persecuted



## Sabbath Afternoon

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Matt. 10:34-36; John 15:18-20; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Peter 4:14-16; Luke 21:12, 13; Matt. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:5.

**MEMORY TEXT:** “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10, RSV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** Christ bids us to take up our cross and follow Him. To do so we must take the road He traveled and bear our share of hardship and opposition. There are no shortcuts, but Christ is our companion.

**THE NARROW PATH.** Unlike the preceding beatitudes, which outline the different stages of spiritual development of the inner being, the last deals with the experiences and duties that await the Christian.

One thing we can be certain of as we follow Jesus is that we will be persecuted. Paul tells us that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). The beatitudes considered so far focus on what genuine happiness is all about. But in this last beatitude, happiness is pronounced on us for being persecuted for the cause of Christ.

“Through trials and persecution, the glory and the character of God is revealed in His chosen ones. The church of God, hated and persecuted by the world, are educated and disciplined in the school of Christ. . . ; they endure self-denial and experience bitter disappointments; but their painful experience teaches them the guilt and woe of sin, and they look upon it with abhorrence. Being partakers of Christ’s sufferings, they are destined to be partakers of His glory.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 31.

**CHRIST, REASON FOR DISCORD (Matt. 10:34-36).**

As you carefully study Matthew 10:34-36, how do you explain that the same Jesus who came to give peace also came to send a sword?

People have often found this declaration of Jesus to be contradictory or incomprehensible. Did He not come to bring divine peace to the world? How can peace and a sword co-exist in living the Christian life?

"Rightly understood, the two are in perfect harmony. The gospel is a message of peace . . . . But the world at large are under the control of Satan, Christ's bitterest foe. The gospel presents to them principles of life which are wholly at variance with their habits and desires, and they rise in rebellion against it. They hate the purity which reveals and condemns their sins, and they persecute and destroy those who would urge upon them its just and holy claims. It is in this sense—because the exalted truths it brings occasion hatred and strife—that the gospel is called a sword."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 46, 47.

**What biblical example is given by John that explains the attitude of the world toward God's children? (1 John 3:12, 13). How do you see such an example manifested in the present?**

Here we have an inspired answer to the questions, Why did Cain kill Abel? Why has the world persecuted God's children through the ages? Ever since sin entered this world, there has been enmity between the children of rebellion and the children of God, between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of darkness of this world. (See Gen. 3:15; Rev. 12:7-17.) This conflict will continue until the day when "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ" (Rev. 11:15, KJV).

**Do you believe that the premise expressed by Christ about persecution is still valid in our day? Explain your answer.**

"The character of the persecution changes with the times, but the principle—the spirit that underlies it—is the same that has slain the chosen of the Lord ever since the days of Abel."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 29.

**Are you or someone you know facing persecution for righteousness' sake at this time? What has such persecution brought about in terms of spiritual strength and growth?**

**"THEY WILL ALSO PERSECUTE YOU" (John 15:18-20).**

In a world where people seek acceptance, succumb to peer pressure, and go after popularity, how do you relate to Christ's words that His followers will be hated and persecuted as He was?

"Jesus does not present to His followers the hope of attaining earthly glory and riches, and of having a life free from trial, but He presents to them the privilege of walking with their Master in the paths of self-denial and reproach, because the world knows them not. He who came to redeem the lost world was opposed by the united forces of the adversaries of God and man. In an unpitying confederacy, evil men and evil angels arrayed themselves against the Prince of Peace. Though His every word and act breathed of divine compassion, His unlikeness to the world provoked the bitterest hostility."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 29.

**When Jesus told His disciples that they would have tribulations in the world, what encouragement and assurance did He give them? John 16:33.**

Not only did Jesus warn His disciples of the tribulations that they would have to endure, but He also encouraged and assured them that they would gain the victory, "because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). We, the disciples of Christ who are living in the last days of earth's history, can soldier on with confidence and cheerfulness knowing that our Master has overcome the world.

"Christ did not fail, neither was He discouraged, and His followers are to manifest a faith of the same enduring nature. They are to have power to resist evil, power that neither earth, nor death, nor hell can master, power that will enable them to overcome as Christ overcame." —*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 679, 680.

Are you allowing anything to come between you and Christ? Is there something that may be undermining your love and loyalty to Him? Prayerfully contemplate the words of Paul in order to fortify your faith in Christ. As you submit yourself to Him through trials and persecution, His love and truth will ultimately triumph in your life. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written. For thy sake we are killed all the day long: we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:35-37).

**DESIRE TO LIVE A GODLY LIFE (2 Tim. 3:12).**

Do you find yourself desiring to live a godly life in this world, yet are not willing to face persecution? What do you think of Paul's statement in this regard? 2 Tim. 3:12.

"Between righteousness and sin, love and hatred, truth and falsehood, there is an irrepressible conflict. When one presents the love of Christ and the beauty of holiness, he is drawing away the subjects of Satan's kingdom, and the prince of evil is aroused to resist it. Persecution and reproach await all who are imbued with the Spirit of Christ." —*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 29.

**Do you view the persecution against you from a different perspective when you understand it through the context of the great controversy between good and evil?**

It is tempting when we are in the midst of persecution for Christ's sake to think of our own immediate situation. But do we realize that we join the whole universe in this struggle between Christ and Satan? We are certainly not struggling alone, for we are indeed in the company of Christ, the angels and all the saints of God. The more we love Christ and are loyal to His truth, the angrier Satan and his evil forces become. But let us take courage, for the forces of righteousness on our side are exceedingly greater than all of Satan's forces assailed against us.

**What did Paul consider his duty in preparing the churches for persecution? Acts 14:22.**

**Question:** "Why is it, then, that persecution seems in a great degree to slumber?"

**Answer:** "The only reason is that the church has conformed to the world's standard and therefore awakens no opposition. . . It is only because of the spirit of compromise with sin, because the great truths of the word of God are so indifferently regarded, because there is so little vital godliness in the church, that Christianity is apparently so popular with the world. Let there be a revival of the faith and power of the early church, and the spirit of persecution will be revived, and the fires of persecution will be rekindled." —*The Great Controversy*, p. 48.

**Have you experienced persecution for Christ's sake lately? If not, why not?**

**REPROACHED FOR CHRIST'S NAME (1 Peter 4:14-16).**

How does being reproached for Christ's sake bring joy to us and glory to God? 1 Peter 4:14, 16.

As Jesus stated in the eighth beatitude, only they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake can know the joy that comes from above in spite of the trial. The satisfaction that the persecuted Christians enjoy comes to them because they are partakers of "Christ's sufferings" (1 Peter 4:13), because they know that they are suffering as Christians, and because they have proof that the "spirit of glory and of God" rests on them (verse 14, KJV).

In apostolic times the name *Christian* was possibly first given to ridicule those who followed Christ. That is why the apostle Peter exhorts Christians not to be ashamed, but rather to glory. And that is exactly what happened. Christians of the first centuries brought glory to Christ by being persecuted for His sake.

**What more is said concerning affliction for the sake of conscience as opposed to every other motive? 1 Peter 2:19-21; 4:15.**

If it is a Christian grace to suffer unjustly for the sake of conscience, it is, on the contrary, a terrible disgrace—and a reproach for the cause of God—to suffer as a "murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters" (verse 15).

What attitude should one have toward persecution? Should one flee from it or strive for it? We should not flee it as such, but face it bravely when it comes, knowing that Christ is always with us. Some manifest an extreme tendency of hoping to be persecuted by others. They have a persecution complex that seems to bring trouble prematurely upon them.

"None should disobey His [the Lord's] command in order to escape persecution. But let all consider the words of Christ: 'When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another.' Matthew 10:23. If it can be avoided, do not put yourselves into the power of men who are worked by the spirit of antichrist. Everything that we can do should be done that those who are willing to suffer for the truth's sake may be saved from oppression and cruelty."—*Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 230.

**What is your attitude toward persecution? How do you deal with it when it comes your way? Do you find yourself fighting it, shunning it, resigning yourself to it, or accepting it?**

**TO BEAR TESTIMONY (Luke 21:13).**

If it is wrong to seek persecution, it is certainly a greater mistake to believe that God brings it about for the good of His children and the progress of His work. God never causes evil, nor does He ever wish it for His children. But as, where sin abounds, grace much more abounds (Rom. 5:20); so, where persecution rages, God accords grace to endure and to triumph in order that testimony may be borne to truth.

**What experiences in Paul's life fulfilled the words expressed by Jesus in Luke 21:12 and 13? Phil. 1:12-14; Acts 16:22-34.**

"God means that truth shall be brought to the front and become the subject of examination and discussion, even through the contempt placed upon it. The minds of the people must be agitated; every controversy, every reproach, every effort to restrict liberty of conscience, is God's means of awakening minds that otherwise might slumber."

—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 33.

**How did God use the first persecution of the church at Jerusalem to accomplish His purposes? How did He make Satan's weapons of persecution backfire on him?**

The first persecution of the church at Jerusalem is a typical example of the way God uses the enemy's ambush to accomplish His purposes. (See Acts 8:1, 4; 11:19-21.)

"In vain were Satan's efforts to destroy the church of Christ by violence. The great controversy in which the disciples of Jesus yielded up their lives did not cease when these faithful standard-bearers fell at their post. By defeat they conquered. God's workmen were slain, but His work went steadily forward. The gospel continued to spread and the number of its adherents to increase. It penetrated into regions that were inaccessible even to the eagles of Rome. Said a Christian, expostulating with the heathen rulers who were urging forward the persecution: You may 'kill us, torture us, condemn us. . . . Your injustice is the proof that we are innocent. . . . The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.'—Tertullian, *Apology, The Great Controversy*, pp. 41, 42.

**Do you know any examples of the entering of the gospel into a country, a region, a city, or a family in spite of (or thanks to) obstacles? Be ready to tell your story briefly, if you should have the opportunity.**

**FURTHER STUDY:** *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, "The Beatitudes" (Matt. 5:10), pp. 29-31; *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 23, 84-86; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 305, 306; *Testimonies*, vol. 9, pp. 285-287.

Even though the promises of Jesus contained in the Beatitudes are already being partially fulfilled in this life, their perfect realization will not take place until the glorious advent of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Look up, look up, and let your faith continually increase. Let this faith guide you along the narrow path that leads through the gates of the city of God into the great beyond, the wide, unbounded future of glory that is for the redeemed. 'Be patient therefore, brethren unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.' James 5:7, 8."—*Testimonies*, vol. 9, pp. 287, 288.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. On several occasions Jesus warned His disciples that they would be persecuted. What reason did He give for the persecution?
2. Why did the apostle Paul consider persecution almost inevitable in the life of the Christian?
3. Only under what conditions can persecution be considered as a reason to rejoice?
4. Do we sometimes bring on unnecessary persecution? In what ways? How can this be avoided?
5. What good can come from persecution? Can you give examples of situations in which someone was persecuted (on the job, for example) that resulted in blessings?

**SUMMARY:** An old adage says: "Life is not a bed of roses." Likewise, Christians should not expect their journey through life on earth to be an easy one. Only when we reach our final destination are we promised freedom from the trials, cares, and perplexities of this life.



## The Rock Split in Two

J. H. Zachary

Hidden among the 1,125 islands that make up the Marshall Islands is tiny Ebon Atoll, a circle of 26 islets in the Pacific. A huge rock juts out of the ocean near one of these islets. For years this rock has symbolized the Ebonite's resistance to change from outsiders. Ebonites say, "Many try to break Ebon, but it won't break." However, recent miracles have caused some to change their minds.

In 1996 Min Kong Wook from Korea and Alfred Barreta from the Philippines arrived on Ebon as young missionary volunteers serving with the 1000 Missionary Movement. Neither knew Marshallese, the native language. The islanders were amazed when, after studying for only a few weeks, the two young men could read, sing, and speak Marshallese. "The Lord has done this for us," Alfred explained. The people called it a miracle.

Home for the two missionaries is a humble native hut. Their only light is a kerosene lamp. Food and water are often a problem. "When we run out of food, we fish. If we catch fish, we eat. Sometimes we have only rice, unless we run out before the supply ship arrives," Alfred said. The islanders catch rain water for drinking and bathing. Despite these inconveniences, Alfred exclaims, "God is so good!"

For years the islanders avoided Kejen, a cruel drunkard who bullied his neighbors. But Kejen was attracted to the missionaries, and soon he began studying the Bible with them. The islanders watched as the Holy Spirit transformed Kejen into a kind, gentle man who now looks for ways to help others. If a family is hungry, Kejen goes fishing and gives them his catch. His life is a powerful witness to the islanders of God's transforming power.

As the Ebonites saw evidence of God's power working in the lives of Alfred, Min, and Kejen, they began listening to the missionaries' message. Two Ebonite women were the first new believers baptized into the Adventist church. On the night of the baptism, the rock that symbolized the Ebonites' resistance to change mysteriously split in two, as if cut by a large knife. Because the islanders believe God split the rock, they are open to hear the gospel.

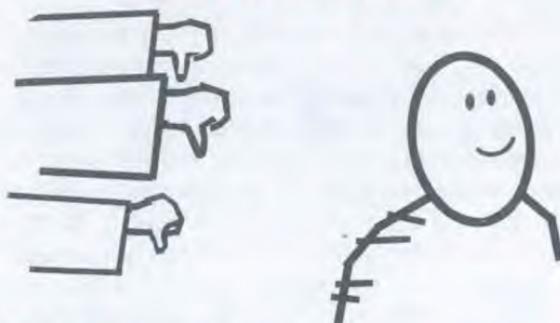
So far 40 persons have been baptized. The believers meet in a tent-like structure that often blows down during storms and on windy days. The believers are praying for a simple church. Min and Alfred believe their prayers will become a reality. "God has done some very special things for Ebon," they say.

**J. H. Zachary is director of evangelism for The Quiet Hour in Redlands, California.**

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# “When Men Shall Revile You”



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Matt. 5:11, 12; 21:35, 38; 1 Tim. 1:13; 2 Cor. 4:4; John 16:2; Dan. 7:21, 22, 25; 12:1; Rev. 7:13-15.

**MEMORY TEXT:** “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt. 5:12).

**KEY THOUGHT:** In Matthew 5:12, Christ directly admonishes his disciples to be happy when they are persecuted for His sake. Christ was not suggesting that they take pleasure in suffering for its own sake, but rather, that in suffering they look forward to their reward in heaven.

**SUFFERING FOR CHRIST.** From their content, these words of Jesus seem to be a simple unfolding of the statement made in the last beatitude. By the verb forms, however, it appears that He was speaking directly to His disciples, that He was no longer satisfied to speak in a general way to all the congregation assembled. Supporting this inference is the change from the impersonal third-person form of the verbs used in the preceding beatitudes to the more direct second-person form. Here Jesus is no longer making a simple statement of blessing for those who meet the qualifications pointed out in the preceding beatitudes. Instead, He is addressing His disciples in a personal, direct way, inviting them to be happily counted worthy of suffering shame for His name, and to rejoice in anticipation of the recompense awaiting them in heaven. It is in this setting that we will direct our thinking to the age-old conflict between forces of good and evil and to the final tribulation that soon will be the portion of witnesses to truth.

**HAPPY ARE YOU (Matt. 5:11).**

What attitude should the persecuted believer possess? The true cause of the happiness of those whom Jesus declared "blessed" is not found in themselves. Rather it is in the Lord's promise to them. In each beatitude Jesus stated the reason for happiness in the second part of the declaration. The poor in spirit, they that mourn, those who hunger and thirst, the persecuted. All are blessed because Jesus is able to promise them the kingdom of heaven, consolation, satisfaction, the title "son of God," a vision of God.

Clearly, persecution itself cannot be a cause for rejoicing for those who suffer. The apostles did not glory in the furnace, trials, tribulations. Persecution was of no value as a meritorious experience. The happiness of the persecuted Christians has its source in Christ. They are happy who are reviled, persecuted, or falsely accused "for my sake," Jesus specified, or "for my name's sake" (Luke 21:12). That is so "because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you," and because you suffer "as a Christian" (1 Peter 4:14, 16, RSV).

**What are two reasons for rejoicing, according to Jesus? Matt. 5:12.**

The Beatitudes have already outlined the recompense for suffering during the earthly phase of the Messianic kingdom. The Master now indicates the place of the reward. "Great is your reward in heaven." Only in the kingdom of heaven will the redeemed receive the reward that the Lord has prepared for them.

The second reason indicated here is found in the comparison made with the prophets. They who are persecuted, as were the prophets, can count on receiving the same recompense reserved for the prophets. "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:39, 40).

"As men seek to come into harmony with God, they will find that the offense of the cross has not ceased. Principalities and powers and wicked spirits in high places are arrayed against all who yield obedience to the law of heaven. Therefore, so far from causing grief, persecution should bring joy to the disciples of Christ, for it is an evidence that they are following in the steps of their Master."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 29, 30.

**How do you react when others slander you and say all sorts of false things about you for being a true disciple of Christ?**

**THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD (Matt. 21:35, 38).**

The parable of the vineyard proves the infinite patience and goodness of God toward people, at the same time that it points out man's ingratitude and cruelty. True, this parable was directed especially to the Israelites, but it also illustrates the general attitude of humankind toward God's messengers. Stephen's literal application of this truth in his discourse resulted in his martyrdom. He said, "Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered" (Acts 7:52, RSV).

**What did Jesus say was the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees toward the prophets? Matt. 23:29-35.**

"The gems of truth that fell from Christ's lips on that eventful day [when He pronounced woe on the scribes and Pharisees] were treasured in many hearts. For them new thoughts started into life, new aspirations were awakened, and a new history began. After the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, these persons came to the front, and fulfilled their divine commission with a wisdom and zeal corresponding to the greatness of the work. . . . Mighty were the results flowing from the words of the Saviour to that wondering, awestruck crowd in the temple at Jerusalem."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 620.

**What does Stephen's martyrdom tell you about the kind of relationship he had with Jesus? Acts 7:55, 56, 60.**

Being willing to give our lives for Christ shows that we are dead to self and alive in Christ. It reveals that we are totally devoted to Christ, and that He is very precious to us, more precious than life itself. It is a clear indication that our lives are hid in Christ and that we have the assurance of eternal life in Him. There is no more effective testimony for the gospel than that of men and women ready to give their lives for it.

"When the noble and eloquent Stephen was stoned to death at the instigation of the Sanhedrin council, there was no loss to the cause of the gospel . . . Saul, the persecuting Pharisee, became a chosen vessel to bear the name of Christ before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 33, 34.

**If the "crime" of being a true disciple of Christ is punishable by death, and you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?**

**BLINDED BY THE GOD OF THIS WORLD (1 Tim. 1:13; 2 Cor. 4:4; John 16:2).**

Those persecuted for righteousness' sake have unanimously pleaded extenuating circumstances for their persecutors. Jesus set the example when on the cross He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). After openly accusing his audience of having "killed the Prince of life," Peter, for his part, added, "Now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers" (Acts 3:15, 17). Speaking from experience, the apostle Paul explained that if "the princes of this world" had known "the wisdom of God," "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:6-8). No one knew better than Paul how easily religious prejudice can lead to violence. "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9, RSV).

**Who is actually responsible for the constant war against God's people throughout history? Matt. 22:3-6; John 13:27; 2 Thess. 2:9; Eph. 6:11, 12.**

Just as there is the mystery of godliness to designate the incomprehensible work of God on the human heart, there is also a mystery of iniquity to indicate the work, no less mysterious, of him whom the Bible calls "the devil" and "Satan." He is the antichrist, the great adversary of God's children. When he cannot defeat them by violence, he tries to seduce them through all sorts of subtle deceptions and miracles.

**What is the essential difference between God's work on people to make them His instruments and the work of Satan?**

"God never forces the will or the conscience; but Satan's constant resort—to gain control of those whom he cannot otherwise seduce—is compulsion by cruelty. Through fear or force he endeavors to rule the conscience and to secure homage to himself. To accomplish this, he works through both religious and secular authorities, moving them to the enforcement of human laws in defiance of the law of God."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 591.

**Are you willing to pray for your persecutors, who hate you for no reason except that you love Christ? What does it say about the quality of your spiritual experience when you give your persecutors the benefit of doubt or plead extenuating circumstances in their behalf?**

**POSSESSING THE EVERLASTING KINGDOM (Dan. 7: 21, 22, 25).**

If, as the prophet Amos affirmed, “The Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7, KJV), God would surely reveal the trouble that awaited His people throughout history. He would do this, not to frighten them, but to encourage them to be faithful and warn them to be prepared. With mathematical precision God did unveil the 1260 years of papal persecution to Daniel. Seven times this prophetic period is mentioned in the Bible (Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5), and each time in connection with the war that the powers of darkness would wage against God’s people. In His prophetic discourse Jesus also alluded to this dramatic time in the history of the Christian church. (See Matt. 24:8-10.)

**What assurance does prophecy give concerning the outcome of this war? Dan. 7:22, 28, 18.**

“All earthly kings and governments will pass away, but the kingdom of the Most High will endure forever. The usurpation and misrule of the wicked may last for a time, but soon it will be at an end. Then this earth will be restored to its rightful Owner, who will share it with the saints. Those who have long been destitute and despised by men will soon be honored and exalted by God.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 830.

**Why did God intervene to shorten the persecution of the 1260-year prophecy? Matt. 24:22.**

“The persecution of the church did not continue throughout the entire period of the 1260 years. God in mercy to His people cut short the time of their fiery trial. In foretelling the ‘great tribulation’ to befall the church, the Saviour said: ‘Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.’ Matthew 24:22. Through the influence of the Reformation the persecution was brought to an end prior to 1798.”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 266, 267.

**What difference does it make in your life today to have the assurance that the truth will ultimately triumph, the great controversy will finally end, and evil will forever be eradicated? Do you find yourself longing for that day? What can you do to tell others about this good news?**

**PREPARATION FOR THE TIME OF TROUBLE (Dan. 12:1).**

As you study Daniel 12:1, what great hope do you see in the midst of the terrible time of trouble?

It is easy to find ourselves focusing on the great time of trouble and find ourselves greatly troubled. However, we must see the time of trouble from the context of Daniel 12:1. Notice that the depiction of the time of trouble is introduced and concluded with great encouragement. It is introduced with Michael standing up for God's people, and it is concluded with God's people being delivered.

In the last days God's people should not be deceived concerning the future of the world and the coming crisis. With the Lord standing up for them and assuring them of deliverance, they will undergo such crisis and come through victoriously. God has not left us in darkness regarding this subject. Not only has He given us the Bible prophecies intended especially for Christians in the end of time, but again through the Spirit of Prophecy He gave the remnant church a clear vision of final events.

"The world is stirred with the spirit of war. The prophecy of the eleventh chapter of Daniel has nearly reached its complete fulfillment. Soon the scenes of trouble spoken of in the prophecies will take place."—*Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 14.

**What reassuring promise did the Lord give His church concerning the great trial ahead? What does it mean to keep the word of His patience? Rev. 3:10.**

The time of trouble and testing will drive us to hold on to the sure promises of God. Such time will require us to be persevering, tenacious, and patient just as our Lord was under trial.

"When the testing time shall come, those who have made God's word their rule of life will be revealed. In summer there is no noticeable difference between evergreens and other trees; but when the blasts of winter come, the evergreens remain unchanged, while other trees are stripped of their foliage."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 602.

"None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 593, 594.

**Do you find yourself dwelling more on the time of trouble or more on Christ, who will keep you during the time of trouble? Reflect prayerfully on your answer.**

**FURTHER STUDY:** *The Great Controversy*, pp. 477, 516, 517; *Christ's Object Lessons*, "The Lord's Vineyard," pp. 296-300; "Without a Wedding Garment," pp. 310-312; *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 298.

"The heirs of God have come from garrets, from hovels, from dungeons, from scaffolds, from mountains, from deserts, from the caves of the earth, from the caverns of the sea. On earth they were 'desstitute, afflicted, tormented.' Millions went down to the grave loaded with infamy because they steadfastly refused to yield to the deceptive claims of Satan. By human tribunals they were adjudged the vilest of criminals. But now 'God is judge himself.' Psalm 50:6. Now the decisions of earth are reversed. . . . They [God's people] are no longer feeble, afflicted, scattered, and oppressed. Henceforth they are to be ever with the Lord. They stand before the throne clad in richer robes than the most honored of the earth have ever worn. They are crowned with diadems more glorious than were ever placed upon the brow of earthly monarchs. The days of pain and weeping are forever ended."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 650.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. When the enemies of God persecute Christians, their aim is usually to crush that person's influence. But what is generally the end result? Give some examples from history.
2. Why are the messengers or the prophets not usually well received by the majority?
3. How can you find more time to commune with your Lord, to study the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy?
4. What can you do to prepare for the persecution to come?

**SUMMARY:** We are engaged in a great controversy—the forces of evil against the powers of good. As we near the end of time, Satan will muster his forces with all his might against God's people because he knows his time is short. Yet, we are not engaged in this battle alone. God has promised to be with us through the end and has prepared blessings for us in heaven beyond what we can imagine.



## Sumathi: Woman With a Mission

John M. Fowler

Sumathi enjoyed her busy life as a pastor's wife, mother, children's Sabbath school teacher, and dorcas leader. She thought she was doing all she could for God. Then, while attending meetings for ministers' wives, she listened to leading women in the church challenge the wives to greater service for God. "You are a chosen vessel to speak for your Lord, just as your husband is. Discover your talents and commit them to God's use."

Sumathi sat dazed as she considered what more she could do for God. *How can I touch someone's life for God's glory? I do not have a good education; I am frail, and I can hardly speak.* Her list continued to grow, but the speakers challenged the women to trust God and allow Him to work through them. Sumathi had no peace until she accepted God's challenge to try.

Back home she began to work for the neediest, most neglected women in town, those who had suffered abuse and degradation at the hands of others. Sumathi visited these women. She told them about Jesus, who once transformed a woman caught in adultery—very much like some of them—from a broken piece of humanity into a loving disciple. Jesus could transform them, too, and give them hope and dignity. After weeks of visiting, studying, praying, and encouraging, 27 women with whom Sumathi was working accepted Christ's offer of wholeness and were baptized.

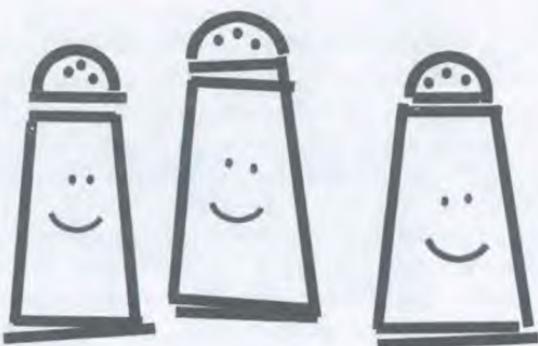
But these women needed more than the mere promise of a new life. They had no education. Without help they would lose hold of their fragile hope. They needed to learn a skill and become financially stable. If Sumathi could teach these women to sew, they could bless others even as Dorcas blessed those around her.

Sumathi had no money to train these women. So she wrote to Shepherdess International, the organization of Adventist ministers' wives, "Give us tools," she challenged, "and we will empower these women, not just spiritually, but economically and socially."

Sumathi received funds to buy seven sewing machines and enough supplies to establish a tailoring center. Today these new believers stand tall. Through the power of Jesus they rose from the depths of despair to live with honor and dignity. They are testimony to the power in Jesus that can save to the uttermost.

**Sumathi Kajhekar and her pastor-husband live in Jalna, Maharashtra State, India. John M. Fowler is associate director of the Education Department at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.**

# “You Are the Salt”



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Col. 4:6; Luke 14:34, 35; Matt. 5:13, 44, 47; 1 John 4:8; John 17:18; Num. 18:19.

**MEMORY TEXT:** “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men” (Matt. 5:13).

**KEY THOUGHT:** A church especially called to represent God to the world faces a constant danger of contemplating its privilege to the point of forgetting its responsibility. Let us renew our sense of responsibility to share God’s love and the insights He has trusted to our care.

**SALT OF THE EARTH.** Jesus called His friends “the salt of the earth.” There are three important points to note:

**1. Jesus stressed the fact that His followers were to use their truth-filled insights to help others.**

“Salt is valued for its preservative properties, and when God calls His children salt, He would teach them that His purpose in making them the subjects of His grace is that they may become agents in saving others.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 35.

**2. Jesus urged His followers to meet people and share their faith.**

“Salt must be mingled with the substance to which it is added; it must penetrate and infuse in order to preserve. So it is through personal contact and association that men are reached by the saving power of the gospel.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 36.

**3. Jesus was issuing a warning. Salt that has lost its savor does not have much value and is usually discarded.**

**THE IMAGERY OF SALT (Col. 4:6).**

At the time of Christ's first advent, salt was used both to make food palatable and to preserve it. Christ's hearers must have been conscious of the role they should have been playing in making attractive and preserving the values of the kingdom of God in society. Jesus had just enunciated the operating principles of God's government in heaven, as well as on earth. All those who claimed to be friends of God had the responsibility of living these principles, as well as sharing them with their nonbelieving friends.

**Jesus said to His disciples: "You *are* the salt," not you *have* the salt. What difference do you see in this distinction? Matt. 5:13.**

"[Dietrich] Bonhoeffer asserts that Christ said, 'you *are* the salt,' not 'you *have* the salt' (*The Cost of Discipleship*, p. 130). Witnessing does not happen by proxy, it is not done by giving something we have, but rather it results from giving ourselves. For we are the salt, and as the salt gives itself, so must we. Indeed, bestowing ourselves in service to others is Christ's great love made tangible."—Philip G. Samaan, *Christ's Way of Reaching People*, p. 32.

**What lesson may we learn from the fact that salt must be added to food before the salt can be effective?**

As salt mingles with the food in order to give it flavor, so Jesus came to this fallen world to associate with people, "salting" their lives with His life. He took the initiative to reach them where they were, and to bring them the flavor of His love and the zest of His life. "It goes without saying that salt is sprinkled on the food, and not vice versa! Salt takes the initiative. We would consider it laughable if someone sprinkled food over the salt."—Philip G. Samaan, *Christ's Way of Reaching People*, p. 48.

"Salt must be mingled with the substance to which it is added; it must penetrate and infuse in order to preserve. So it is through personal contact and association that men are reached by the saving power of the gospel."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 36.

**Has Christ "salted" your life with His life? What difference does this make in your life and the lives of people around you? In what specific ways can you be the "salt of the earth" in your family, church, and community?**

**THE PROBLEM OF FAITHFULNESS (Luke 14:34, 35).**

**How does the salt losing its savor represent God's people who are unfaithful to Him? Luke 14:34, 35.**

Salt that has lost its savor is like a fruitless tree. It occupies needed space, and it raises false hopes—causing both waste and disappointment. How may we, then, avoid becoming as savorless salt? From the beginning, peoples who have been set aside to be special representatives of God have had a problem keeping God at the center of their faith. And without His being at the center of our lives, we become the center of our own lives. And that is the sure way to unfaithfulness. We are utterly tasteless without the life of Christ flavoring our lives.

**What conditions in the Laodicean church are equivalent to savorless salt? Rev. 3:15-17.**

In 1889 Ellen White wrote: "The message to the Laodicean church is applicable to our condition. How plainly is pictured the position of those who think they have all the truth, who take pride in their knowledge of the Word of God, while its sanctifying power has not been felt in their lives,"—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 961. In 1898 she wrote: "Those who live for self are ranged under the head of the Laodicean church who are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot. The ardor of the first love has lapsed into a selfish egotism. . . . There may be a wonderful appearance for zeal and ceremonies, but this is the substance of their self-inflated religion. Christ represents them as nauseating to His taste."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 962.

**What would Ellen White write today?**

"If Christians are such in name only, they are like the salt that has lost its savor. They have no influence for good in the world. Through their misrepresentation of God they are worse than unbelievers."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 306.

Very religious people can, through their misrepresentations of God, do great damage to the very truths they cherish.

**Jesus in His love warns us against the danger of becoming savorless and lukewarm. How can He help you to possess and share the savor and the warmth of His life?**

**SALT SAVOR REPRESENTS LOVE—I (Matt. 5:44, 47).**

Ellen White identifies the savor of the salt with the love of Christ permeating our lives (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 36), but she goes on to expand on this idea. She writes that such love “will flow out to others, not because of favors received from them, but because love is the principle of action.”—page 38. This is *agape* love, which has the ability to love the unlovable. It springs forth from principle, it is intelligent, active, and imaginative.

**How does God’s love make it possible to love the unlovable? 1 John 4:11, 12.**

God is love. He does not simply have love or show love, but He Himself *is* love. While we were His enemies He revealed His unconditional love to us in Christ. We do not deserve such unfathomable love, but His love is not something to be deserved, but it is to be accepted. It is a love that is not simply an impulse or a passing feeling, but rather an abiding principle. What tremendous assurance that should give us! Experiencing such love is the only way to help us love the unlovable. If we experience that He loves us in spite of all our own unlovableness, this leads us to love others unconditionally. “When love fills the heart, it will flow out to others, not because of favors received from them, but because love is the principle of action.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 38.

**What dimension of Christian love makes it so effective in this broken world? 1 Cor. 13:4-8.**

“Love is power. Intellectual and moral strength are involved in this principle, and cannot be separated from it. The power of wealth has a tendency to corrupt and destroy; the power of force is strong to do hurt; but the excellence and value of pure love consist in its efficiency to do good, and to do nothing else than good. . . .”—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 135. It is no wonder that Ellen White suggested that we read 1 Corinthians 13 on a daily basis.

**Is it sometimes hard to love the unlovable? Have you experienced being loved by someone in spite of your unlovely character traits? Is your self-confidence based on worldly status and accomplishments, or on the knowledge that you are accepted as a son or a daughter of God?**

**SALT SAVOR REPRESENTS LOVE—II (1 John 4:8).**

Earlier in this lesson we considered Jesus' efforts at refining people's understanding of what it means to love others. Our Lord also renewed our understanding of the vertical definition of love, that is the love between an individual and God. Unless we experience His love for us and our love for Him in response, we cannot truly love others.

**What efforts that duplicate Satan's appeal to Eve does Satan make today to produce savorless salt in God's church? Gen. 3:4, 5.**

Satan's cunning and subtle approaches, if listened to, can gradually lead us to doubt God and His promises. All the enemy's hellish cleverness goes into putting God in the worst light, thus driving a wedge between Him and His children. "From the beginning it has been Satan's studied plan to cause men to forget God, that he might secure them to himself. Therefore he has sought to misrepresent the character of God, to lead men to cherish a false conception of Him. The Creator has been presented to their minds as clothed with the attributes of the prince of evil himself—as arbitrary, severe, and unforgiving—that He might be feared, shunned, and even hated by men. . . . Christ came to reveal God to the world as a God of love, a God of mercy, tenderness, and compassion."—*In Heavenly Places*, p. 8.

**Compare Philip's inquiry about what the Father is like (John 14:8, 9) with the serpent's words to Eve about God (Gen. 3:4, 5).**

Jesus was constantly encouraging His disciples to think of God in terms of the example of His own everyday life. The disciples had difficulty accepting this. Simply put, the gospel says that God is as loving and compassionate and wonderful as Jesus. To be truly Christian is to make Jesus normative for all we think and say about God and heaven.

"Had God the Father come to our world and dwelt among us, humbling Himself, veiling His glory, that humanity might look upon Him, the history that we have of the life of Christ would not have been changed. . . . In every act of Jesus, in every lesson of His instruction, we are to see and hear and recognize God. In sight, in hearing, in effect, it is the voice and movements of the Father."—*That I May Know Him*, p 338.

**Has Jesus' life become normative for what you think about your heavenly Father? What difference can this make in your life and witness?**

**SALTED BY CHRIST (John 17:18; Num. 18:19).**

Jesus is the salt of heaven sent to sinful humanity in order to share His love, righteousness, life, and salvation. As we allow Christ's life to transform our lives, we share with others what we have received from Him. Jesus said: "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18). As He salts our lives with His life, His mission becomes our mission. We become His faithful representatives in this dying world.

**What is the spiritual significance of the Lord's sealing His alliance with Aaron and his children with a "covenant of salt" in the wilderness? Num. 18:19b.**

This "covenant of salt" signified God's commitment, love and faithfulness to His people. At that time "people also associated salt with friendship, honor, and loyalty. Even today, groups of Bedouins roaming the deserts of the Middle East will seal a covenant of goodwill with salt. . . . 'He ate salt at my table,' or 'there is salt between us' [they say], meaning that they shared food together and thus accepted each other as trusted friends."—Philip G. Samaan, *Christ's Way of Reaching People*, p. 21.

**What should the reality of the Christian experience say to the world about our union in Christ's life and ministry? John 17:21, 23.**

"When God calls His children salt, He would teach them that His purpose in making them the subjects of His grace is that they may become agents in saving others. . . . Christians who are purified through the truth will possess saving qualities that preserve the world from utter moral corruption."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 35, 36.

But what reaction can faithful Christians expect as they reach out to be the salt of people in this world? In John 15:20 Jesus tells us that His mission is our mission, and the way He was treated we will be treated. It is true that the world loves sin and hates righteousness. And it is equally true that we are not to withdraw from the world in order to escape persecution. But have we considered the problems the remnant will have with professedly religious people? Remember that Jesus died at the hands of fellow "believers."

**For what do others recognize you? When people come in contact with you, do they recognize you for your position and achievement, or for being like Jesus?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, "Teaching in Parables," pp. 17-27; *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 329, 330; vol. 7, pp. 961, 962; *Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 133-135; vol. 6, p. 54; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

The Sermon on the Mount, addressed primarily to the disciples, was to help them turn in a direction much different from the one they had traveled all their lives. It is a gentle, yet specific, summary of the values that pervade heaven. Instead of an outright attack on the disciples' ideas, Jesus was tactfully offering as an alternative the truth about God, about heaven, and about the responsibilities of God's children.

By dwelling on the truth instead of giving consistent attention to error, Jesus won His way into the hearts of many of His hearers. "When Jesus spoke, it was not with hesitating uncertainty, with repetition of words and familiar figures. The truth came from His lips clothed in new and interesting representations that gave it the freshness of a new revelation. His voice was never pitched to an unnatural key, and His words came with an earnestness and assurance appropriate to their importance and the momentous consequences involved in their reception or rejection."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Jan. 7, 1890.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What can we do as a church to overcome our Laodicean condition? What is the key ingredient missing from the Laodicean church?
2. What does our failure to be loving (the "salt of the earth") show about our relationship with God?
3. How does Christianity, devoutly lived, give evidence of the reality of God in our lives and witness?

**SUMMARY:** As the salt of the earth, Christians have the responsibility to share the saving truths of the gospel, to love, and to be of service to others. If our Christian experience is not seasoned with these activities, then our salt has definitely lost its savor.



## Power to Believe

J. H. Zachary

Alec Nasichovich grew up in a Muslim family in southern Russia. As a teenager Alec became involved with some youth who introduced him to drugs, eastern religions, astrology, and extra sensory perception. Fascinated by these new ideas, he began communicating with spirits, hoping to find success and happiness. But all he found was trouble with the police and threats from mafia thugs.

One day Alec was talking with some friends when one of them threw out a challenge. "Satan is stronger than God!"

"I do not know God," Alec replied. "But He must be stronger than Satan." Alec's words planted a seed in the heart of his friend that sent him searching for God. Imagine Alec's surprise when he learned that his friend had become a Christian! Alec saw the changes in his friend's life and wondered, "Is God really that powerful?"

Alec and his friend heard about some evangelistic meetings and decided to attend. Soon Alec too was convinced that the Bible was God's holy Book. The two attended every meeting, studying and learning. Alec accepted Jesus as his Lord. His heart overflowed with God's love, and he yearned to share it with others. He wrote a song in which he poured out his love for God and expressed the joy he had found. He sang it at a meeting. "Alec," the pastor's wife said, "You could do so much for God through your singing."

Alec began to write poems describing the joy he found in Jesus. As he strummed his guitar, melodies came to his mind. Eagerly he put his poems to music and sang them whenever he had the chance. Alec has become a singing evangelist, and many have told him, "I found Christ through your music."

Alec has found his spiritual gift. "I want to be a musical missionary for God," he says. Just before evangelistic meetings open in a city, Alec presents a sacred concert and gives his testimony of how Jesus saved him. Then he invites the people to the meetings.

Throughout Russia thousands are hearing the message of God's love and redemption in these last days. Pray for these new believers and for those who lead them.



**Alec Shayachmitov Nasichovich (left) found God and a musical gift. James Zachary is director of evangelism for The Quiet Hour in Redlands, California.**

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# “You Are the Light”



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: John 3:19; 2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 5:8; Matt. 5:14-16; John 17:4; Luke 11:13.

**MEMORY TEXT:** “In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

**KEY THOUGHT:** God has called Seventh-day Adventists to share with the rest of the world the remarkable insights He has given them into the history of the great controversy, the knowledge of His character, and His distinctive message for this time.

**LIGHT AMIDST DARKNESS.** Imagine that you are attending a non-Adventist gathering. Someone there asks you: “What do you Seventh-day Adventists mean when you call yourselves the true church, or the light of the world for the last days? Do you mean you are better than the rest of the Christian world?” Contemplate what answer you would give that would draw him or her to—not away from—Christ.

In terms of their responsibility to be the light of the world, members have three alternatives. First, they may become religiously exclusive, arrogant, and selfish. They may hoard their blessings under the guise of maintaining internal purity.

Second, some church members may conclude that the cost of discipleship is too high. They drift into the ways of the world, allowing it to influence them instead of their influencing it.

Happily, there is a third alternative for those who wish to take seriously the commission to be the light of the world. It is a Christlike missionary motive, which balances humility and a sense of service with gleaming confidence in the values of the kingdom of heaven.

**THE PROBLEM OF DARKNESS (John 3:19).**

In order to light the world effectively, God's people must understand what constitutes the spiritual darkness of their world. In order to establish evangelistic priorities, we need to consider what the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy have singled out as the world's main problem. Our world is plunged in spiritual darkness, desperately groping for some direction. Have we become light in Christ's light? Do they who are in spiritual darkness see His light in our lives?

**How is darkness defined by Paul in Romans 1:19-25?**

Let us refer to a cornerstone passage in *The Desire of Ages* as we attempt to set priorities for witnessing to our non-Adventist friends. "The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan's deceptive power was to be broken. . . . To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known."—page 22.

**What does Paul say most sinners have chosen instead of the revelation of God's character? Rom. 1:26-31.**

Unhappily, relatively few people in every generation have accepted Jesus' revelation of God's character. Few have been willing to accept Jesus' life as evidence that the law of God—the value system that sustains the universe—offers the best possible way of living. "As the evil passions and purposes of men banished God from their thoughts, so forgetfulness of Him inclined them more strongly to evil. The heart in love with sin clothed Him with its own attributes, and this conception strengthened the power of sin. Bent on self-pleasing, men came to regard God as such a one as themselves—a Being whose aim was self-glory, whose requirements were suited to His own pleasure; a Being by whom men were lifted up or cast down according as they helped or hindered His selfish purpose."—*Education*, p. 75.

**Are your personal witnessing efforts well directed at the main problem facing men and women—the problem of depreciating the values God stands for? If not, how can you make them more so?**

**WE ARE LIGHT IN HIS LIGHT (2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 5:8).**

Clearly, Christians are the light of the world only in the sense of service and not in the sense of having something that draws attention to themselves or even their church. Even as they are reflectors rather than sources of light, they should seek to draw the attention of the world, not to themselves, but to Heaven.

**What did Jesus mean when He referred to His disciples as the light of the world? Matt. 5:14.**

Just as a mirror can reflect light only by being close to the light, so the disciples of Christ can reflect the light of Christ only in beholding Him. The moon shines brightly only as it reflects the light of the sun. "No other light ever has shone or ever will shine upon fallen man save that which emanates from Christ. Jesus, the Saviour, is the only light that can illuminate the darkness of a world lying in sin."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 39.

Consider the impact Jesus had on His hearers, when they could see shadows disappearing at the very moment they were listening to the Saviour. The message was plain; consecrated individuals would clear away misconceptions about God that had enslaved the world.

**Are we really the light of the world? 1 John 1:5.**

As we study 1 John 1:5 we notice that God is referred to as "light, and in him there is no darkness at all." But in Matthew 5:14 the disciples are referred to as the light, as well. This point can be clarified by studying Ephesians 5:8. "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord. . ." It is interesting to note that without the Lord we are darkness, but we become light in His light. "The life of Christ in the soul, His love revealed in the character, would make them [His disciples] the light of the world. . . As Christ is the channel for the revelation of the Father, so we are to be the channel for the revelation of Christ. . . The church of Christ, every individual disciple of the Master, is heaven's appointed channel for the revelation of God to men."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 39, 40.

**What must you do to be become an effective channel for the revelation of God and His values to the world? Have you become light in His light? In what ways are you brightening the corner where you are?**

**YOUR GOOD WORKS (Matt. 5:16).**

Ever since the fall of our first parents, the human family has needed a point of reference to check the trustworthiness of God's values and requirements. Being the guardian of freedom that He is, God does not ask men and women to do anything without first giving them evidence of His love and concern for them. Hence, He has always sought to have a people who would communicate His love, thus demonstrating His trustworthiness. In modern times the word *works* has come to have a negative connotation because it is often associated with pride and the attempt to earn salvation by obligating God. Actually *works* is a good word when it results from a saving relationship in Christ and our union with Him, demonstrating the benefits of living God's ideals.

**Was Jesus taking a risk in encouraging His disciples to let the world see their good works? Matt. 5:16; 23:5.**

The crucial question here deals with the motivation and consequence of others' seeing our good works. You see, Christ did not ask His disciples to try hard to make their light shine. He simply invited them to *let* their light shine. For when the light of Christ is in the heart it cannot be hidden, it shines through good works. It is not a matter of parading our good works to glorify self, but that Christ shines so brightly in our lives that others take notice. Notice that *they* see the good works, and seeing them, they glorify only God. As if we could hear them say: "Look what God can do through them! May His name be praised!"

"Let us remember that a Christlike life is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Christianity. . . . Men will believe, not what the minister preaches, but what the church lives. Too often the influence of the sermon preached from the pulpit is counteracted by the sermon preached in the lives of those who claim to be advocates of truth."—*Testimonies*, vol 9, p. 21.

**What makes works "good"? What constitutes the right motive in doing good works? Matt. 6:1-3.**

"Every ray of light that we shed upon others is reflected upon ourselves. Every kind and sympathizing word spoken to the sorrowful, every act to relieve the oppressed, and every gift to the needy, if prompted by a right motive, will result in blessings to the giver."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 218.

**GLORIFY YOUR FATHER (John 17:4).**

The highest compliment that can be paid any person is that he or she speaks well of God. (See Job 42:7.) Often God is portrayed as being like an earthly despot who demands praise and adulation from his subjects. But Jesus' life revealed a different picture; in it we see God wanting nothing more from His created beings than that they know Him and share His love for them.

**What does the Bible mean when it refers to God's glory? Exod. 33:18, 19.**

"The word of God reveals His character. He Himself has declared His infinite love and pity. When Moses prayed, 'Show me thy glory,' the Lord answered, 'I will make all my goodness pass before thee.' Exod. 33:18,19. This is His glory."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 10. If God's glory equals His character, then the process of glorifying God amounts to speaking well of His character by faithfully living out His principles in our lives. Glorifying God means worshiping Him as our Friend and Saviour rather than as a harsh and tyrannical ruler.

"Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice—one who is a severe judge, a harsh, exacting creditor. . . . It was to remove this dark shadow, by revealing to the world the infinite love of God, that Jesus came to live among men."—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 10, 11.

**Sometimes there is an emphasis on admiring God without much action in sharing His character with others. Is it true admiration when it does not lead to action? How can we strike a balance?**

True admiration for God involves a compulsion to share what we know to be true about Him with others. We become so moved by what He is like and what He has done for us, that we sense this compulsion to do something about it. Indifferent admiration is not admiration at all. Ellen White reminds us, "We are not only to contemplate the glory of Christ, but also to speak of His excellences. Isaiah not only beheld the glory of Christ, but he also spoke of Him. . . . Who can by faith behold the wonderful plan of redemption, the glory of the only-begotten Son of God, and not speak of it?"—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 43.

**Does your life glorify your Creator? In what ways is this made tangible?**

**LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE (Matt. 5:15).**

Contrast the consequences of hiding our light under a bushel as opposed to setting it up on a candlestick. Matt. 5:15, 16.

We cannot give what we do not have. If we do not have the light of God's love and truth, we cannot give anything but our own darkness to others. We must continue to behold the light in the face of Jesus in order to reflect it to others. And the more we share it with confidence, the brighter it shines. We behold His light in feeding on His Word. Life is not static, for day by day we become more and more like that which we think about and admire.

**How does the Word of God make us wise unto salvation? 2 Tim. 3:15. Why is this the only true wisdom in the world, and how can it help us to dispel the darkness of people to whom we witness?**

"It is a law of the mind that it gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is trained to dwell. If occupied with commonplace matters only, it will become dwarfed and enfeebled. If never required to grapple with difficult problems, it will after a time almost lose the power of growth. As an educating power, the Bible is without a rival."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 596.

As church members we need to have firm confidence in the study of the Bible. As the Holy Spirit makes it a part of our being, it will refine and polish us and make our light shine even brighter.

**God greatly desires to give us His Holy Spirit to set our witness on fire, and to help settle us solidly in Christ. What are some things that hinder us from receiving such a great Gift? Luke 11:13.**

"The promise of the Holy Spirit is casually brought into our discourses, is incidentally touched upon, and that is all. . . . This subject has been set aside, as if sometime in the future would be given to its consideration. . . . This promised blessing, if claimed by faith, would bring all other blessings in its train."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 174, 175.

**How seriously do you take your need for daily spiritual nourishment from the Word of God and for a fuller measure of the Holy Spirit?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 35-38, 463, 464, 825-827; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, "The Beatitudes" (Matt. 5:14), pp. 38-44; "True Motive in Service" (Matt. 6:1), pp. 79-83; *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 576.

Some religions speak of sanctifying things, places, animals, seasons, and heroes of the past, while the character development of believers is virtually ignored. However, growing in our knowledge of Christ and becoming more and more like Him should be our first and foremost spiritual priority. "To honor Christ, to become like Him, to work for Him, is the life's highest ambition and its greatest joy."—*Education*, p. 297.

"It is not by looking away from Him that we imitate the life of Jesus, but by talking of Him, by dwelling upon His perfections, by seeking to refine the taste and elevate the character, by trying—through faith and love, and by earnest, persevering effort—to approach the perfect Pattern. By having a knowledge of Christ—His words, His habits, and His lessons of instruction—we borrow the virtues of the character we have so closely studied, and become imbued with the spirit we have so much admired."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 1098, 1099.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are some specific ways in which Adventists can serve as lights in the world?
2. Are you sometimes afraid to let your light shine in the world? How can you make your light shine brighter?
3. Can you share an experience in which you or someone you know allowed their light to shine? What were the results? In what ways was God glorified?

**SUMMARY:** Christians lighten the world by reflecting Jesus—His character, His words, His actions. Additionally, Seventh-day Adventist Christians have been called to disseminate the light of God's end-time message to a dark world.



## Hitomi's Hope

Hatsue Kinjo

Thirteen-year-old Hitomi lives in Okinawa, Japan. She enjoys school now. But it wasn't always so. She used to attend a public school, but competition for grades was fierce, and Hitomi began to show signs of stress. Her mother worried about the effect the stress was having on Hitomi's health. She discussed her concerns with her neighbor, who suggested she send Hitomi to the Okinawa Saniku Elementary School, a Seventh-day Adventist mission school. Hitomi's mother was not a Christian; in fact she was an atheist. But she wondered if a Christian school really could help her daughter.

Hitomi was not sure she wanted to change schools, but right away she noticed a difference. Her classmates and teachers were kind and helpful to one another, not competing. In fact, when one boy had difficulty with a subject, other children helped him. Hitomi began to relax and enjoy her studies.

Public schools held classes six days a week. But at the Adventist school, Saturday classes met at the church. Class was not compulsory, but Hitomi had heard her friends talk about Sabbath School, and she decided to go to see what it was like. Hitomi enjoyed Sabbath School; it was actually fun! She told her mother about it. Mother decided to go. She wanted to know what her children were being taught. Little by little, Hitomi's mother was led to Jesus.

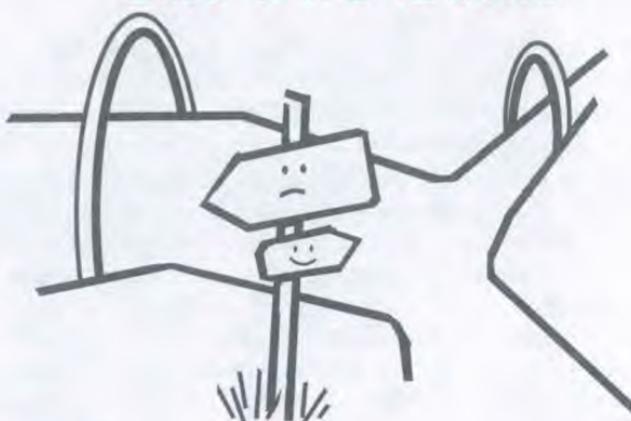
As Mother studied the Bible, she became convicted that she needed to make things right with her mother-in-law. For all her married life her mother-in-law had made her life miserable. But now she knew she would have no peace until she asked her mother-in-law's forgiveness. After months of struggle, she called her mother-in-law and made amends. What joy and peace flooded her heart!

Soon Hitomi's mother was baptized. Now Mother, Hitomi, and her brother attend church together. Everyone is happier, even Father, who sometimes goes with them. He likes what the Adventist school has done for his children, and what the Adventist faith has done for his family. For Hitomi's family, the price of tuition was little enough to pay for changed lives.

**Hitomi (center), her mother, and brother. Hitomi would like to be a missionary nurse. Hatsue Kinjo lives in Okinawa, Japan.**



# The Two Gates



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Prov. 14:12; 25:28; John 17:3; Luke 13:24; Gal. 2:20; Matt. 11:28; Heb. 12:2, 3.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereto" (Matthew 7:13).

**KEY THOUGHT:** God desires His children to prosper—spiritually, mentally, and physically. In His Word, He outlines the prescription for happiness. By following God's plan, we can choose happiness—both in this world and in the world to come.

**THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED.** "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference." So wrote Robert Frost in his poem "The Road Not Taken."

The concept of two roads or gates—one being broad and appealing, the other, narrow and foreboding—is common to both secular and religious literature. Usually the metaphor of two ways refers to our struggles with self-will, in opposition to God's will.

In an age when many Christians feel satisfied in merely possessing some vague notions about God's promise of forgiveness and salvation, Adventists stand out in vivid contrast to that. Our message speaks not only of the desirability of but also the possibility of real character development—now, in this life. We believe that God daily offers both the pardon and the power we need to effect Christlike changes in our lives.

**WHAT YOU SEE IS NOT WHAT YOU GET (Prov. 14:12).**

Choice and taste can undermine our ability to live a Christlike life. The more these are indulged selfishly, the more difficult it is to perceive the right decision in any given situation. This is what happened to the Pharisees. Unbeknownst to them, Satan had substituted his values and characteristics to the point where those leaders behaved more satanically when they thought they were doing God's will.

**Psalm 1 speaks of the two roads traveled by the godly and ungodly. What indication do we see that makes one way pleasurable and the other one painful?**

God respects freedom, but there are consequences to our acts. "All along the road that leads to death there are pains and penalties, there are sorrows and disappointments, there are warnings not to go on. God's love has made it hard for the heedless and headstrong to destroy themselves."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 139.

On the contrary, the narrow road can be rewarding. "God does not require us to give up anything that it is for our best interest to retain. . . .

"It is a mistake to entertain the thought that God is pleased to see His children suffer. All heaven is interested in the happiness of man. Our heavenly Father does not close the avenues of joy to any of His creatures. The divine requirements call upon us to shun those indulgences that would bring suffering and disappointment, that would close to us the door of happiness and heaven."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 46.

**What thoughts do you find in Colossians 3:1, 2 that help you choose the right gate?**

The devil tries in so many subtle ways to get us to set our affections on the things of this earth. He is capable of doing whatever it takes to distract us from heavenly things. His seductive lure is to promise so-called happiness, yet he does not tell us of the terrible price he will exact from us. For what he calls fun will not only leave us with a bitter taste in this life; it will eventually cost us eternal life.

On the other hand, Christ offers us genuine happiness and abundant life that not only leaves us with a good taste in this life, but also leads us to eternal life with Him.

**Can you recall a time in your life when something seemed right to you at the moment, but later you discovered the contrary? How can the Lord help you cope with such subtleties?**

**THINK THINGS THROUGH (John 17:3).**

People who will go to heaven do not think identically on every religious subject. Each individual has specific spiritual needs; each may emphasize a different aspect of a given doctrine. However, these varied emphases must all fit on a spectrum of truthful Bible interpretation. It matters, for instance, that we believe in the mortal nature of man and in the resurrection, rather than in the immortality of the soul.

**What thoughts in Luke 24:25-27, 44-48 help us to understand what the correct interpretation of Scripture has to do with entering the gate of life? What central focus must all such interpretation have?**

"In the road to death the whole race may go, with all their worldliness, all their selfishness, all their pride, dishonesty, and moral debasement. There is room for every man's opinions and doctrines, space to follow his inclinations, to do whatever his self-love may dictate. In order to go in the path that leads to destruction, there is no need of searching for the way; for the gate is wide."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 138.

In the wide gate it not only doesn't matter what we think, it happens not to matter whether we think at all. Or we allow others to think for us and pull us in their direction. Peer pressure plays a big role here: do what is popular, follow the crowd. "Satan is constantly endeavoring to attract attention to man in the place of God. He leads the people to look to bishops, to pastors, to professors of theology, as their guides, instead of searching the Scriptures to learn their duty for themselves."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

**Why does it matter that we understand Christian doctrine? John 8:32. What is the truth? (compare 1:17; 14:6).**

"The position that it is of no consequence what men believe is one of Satan's most successful deceptions. He knows that the truth, received in the love of it, sanctifies the soul of the receiver; therefore he is constantly seeking to substitute false theories, fables, another gospel."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 520.

**Are your religious beliefs inherited, or are they established through personal Bible study? Where do Christ and the Holy Spirit fit in your quest for the truth?**

**SELF-CONTROL IS ESSENTIAL (Prov. 25:28).**

A person without self-control has two spiritual problems: from without as well as from within. Such a person is like a city without walls that succumbs to external enticements and attacks from all sides. On the inside, he or she is like a collapsed city that has no inward strength to resist.

The Christian's argument against such phenomena as drugs, alcohol, hypnotism, and spiritualism rests in a belief that these violate an individual's ability for self-determination. The potential for personal fulfillment is related to the amount of self-discipline one has. Christians find success in self-discipline by surrender of their will to God.

**How does the will help us in the battle against self? As you study carefully Philippians 2:12, 13, discover what is God's part and our part in this.**

**Our part** \_\_\_\_\_

**God's part** \_\_\_\_\_

"The Christian life is a battle and a march. But the victory to be gained is not won by human power. The field of conflict is the domain of the heart. The battle which we have to fight—the greatest battle that was ever fought by man—is the surrender of self to the will of God, the yielding of the heart to the sovereignty of love. The old nature, born of blood and of the will of the flesh, cannot inherit the kingdom of God. The hereditary tendencies, the former habits, must be given up."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 141.

**What spiritual insights do you gain from the study of Galatians 5:22, 23 as far as temperance (self-control) and its culminating the list of all the graces of the fruit of the Spirit is concerned?**

"But to control one's self does not simply mean living a life of denial and deprivation. We should not approach it from a negative perspective, but a positive one. Rather, it means that God is in control of our lives, for we belong to Him by creation and redemption. And His control enables us to have true self-control over our lives."—Philip G. Samaan, *Christ's Way to Spiritual Growth*, p. 185.

**How much time do you spend in prayer and Bible study, seeking to understand the will of God? How much do you let Him help you to fulfill His will in your everyday life?**

**STRIVERS (Luke 13:24).**

We live in a time of de-emphasis on striving to live the life of loving obedience to God. Yet Luke says, “Strive [Greek: *agonizomai*, from which the word *agonize* comes] to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (13:24). It is amazing how much people strive to succeed in a career, win a prize, make money, yet how much do they strive for their eternal salvation? Christians live in spiritual defeat because they hardly give God a chance compared to what they give other pursuits. Imagine what would happen in their spiritual lives if they reached out to God with such interest and striving! “I press toward the mark,” Paul writes, “for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14).

Commenting on this, Ellen White suggests: “I have stated before them [God’s people] that, from what was shown me, but a small number of those now professing to believe the truth would eventually be saved—not because they could not be saved, but because they would not be saved in God’s own appointed way. The way marked out by our divine Lord is too narrow and the gate too strait to admit them while grasping the world or while cherishing selfishness or sin of any kind.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 445, 446.

**What do you see in the following scriptural passages to prevent you from striving after righteousness in the sense of attempting mere salvation by works?**

Phil. 4:13 \_\_\_\_\_

Gal. 2:20 \_\_\_\_\_

We need to strive and press on, yes, but only in the strength of the Lord. We need to fight the fight of faith, where it really counts, to maintain our union with Christ. Such will be accomplished only through much prayer and daily submission of ourselves to Him.

**What does Micah 7:7-9 say that can help you understand how you can strive and yet remain absolutely dependent upon God?**

“When it is in the heart to obey God, when efforts are put forth to this end, Jesus accepts this disposition and effort as man’s best service, and He makes up for the deficiency with His own divine merit.”—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 382.

**COME UNTO ME (Matt. 11:28).**

The secret of spiritual victory is found in Christ's personal invitation "Come unto me." He wants us to go to none other but Himself. And when we go to Him in submission, He will teach us His ways of finding true rest and restoration.

It is paradoxical but true that the denial of self enhances personal freedom and, therefore, peace and satisfaction. Not that the denial of self means living a shriveled and shallow life; on the contrary, if we come to Christ, He will make us free indeed, and help us develop and reach His wonderful ideals for us.

**Compare Philippians 2:3 with Matthew 11:28 regarding the lowliness of heart. What impact would having such lowliness in the heart have on our lives and endeavors?**

"There are many whose hearts are aching under a load of care because they seek to reach the world's standard. They have chosen its service, accepted its perplexities, adopted its customs. Thus their character is marred, and their life made a weariness. In order to gratify ambition and worldly desires, they wound the conscience, and bring upon themselves an additional burden of remorse."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 330, 331.

**What is our only true help in walking the narrow road of this life's challenges? Where should our focus be? Heb. 12:2, 3.**

It was for the joy of saving us that Christ endured the shame and the cross. What a wondrous thought! He endured all of that for you and me. This is so overwhelming that it moves us to endure for the joy of seeing Him face to face in glory. It is focusing on Him that will help us go on despite the weariness and trials.

"Whatever your anxieties and trials, spread out your case before the Lord. . . . The weaker and more helpless you know yourself to be, the stronger will you become in His strength. . . .

"In the heart of Christ, where reigned perfect harmony with God, there was perfect peace. He was never elated by applause, nor dejected by censure or disappointment."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 329, 330.

**How can you learn from Christ not to be "elated by applause, nor dejected by censure"? What difference would this make in your life and the lives of people around you?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 84; *Child Guidance*, p. 484; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 520-523, 528; *Christ's Object Lessons*, "First the Blade, Then the Ear," pp. 65, 66.

One of the great principles of Christianity is that God wouldn't ask His friends to do anything He would not do. Jesus' life reveals this to be true. God asks of His creatures only that which is for their best possible good. But for many this concept is difficult to accept. Few have believed Christ's words, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Few have transferred what they think about the Son to what they think about the Father.

"If we ever attain unto holiness, it will be through the renunciation of self and the reception of the mind of Christ."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 143.

Jesus lived God's values. By accepting, as Ellen White suggests, the "mind of Christ," we accept His confidence in the values of the kingdom of God.

Note this gracious warning: "He who feels whole, who thinks that he is reasonably good, and is contented with his condition, does not seek to become a partaker of the grace and righteousness of Christ."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 7.

"There are many in the broad way who are not fully satisfied with the path in which they walk. . . . They look toward the narrow way and the strait gate; but selfish pleasure, love of the world, pride, unsanctified ambition, place a barrier between them and the Saviour. . . . They desire the good, they make some effort to obtain it; but they do not choose it; they have not a settled purpose to secure it at the cost of all things."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 143.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does a person accept the mind of Christ?
2. What is the key to victory in the Christian life?
3. There are two paths, the broad way and the narrow way.  
What is the difference between the two paths? Is it always possible to tell which path we are traveling?

**SUMMARY:** God, through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus, has made it possible for us to receive salvation. It is offered as a free gift, and we can choose to accept it or reject it. The road to heaven, however, is a narrow one. To travel that narrow road safely, we must be willing to lay aside the baggage of sin and self and to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.



## Saved by a Crucifix

J. H. Zachary

For years Leonid Kozlov lived a double life. A skilled pop music singer and guitarist, he enjoyed a wide following when he performed. But Leonid had a dark side. He had created a twisted theology that convinced him that God was helping him to steal from others, including his friends, and not get caught. Leonid was a thief.

He wore a good luck charm, a crucifix, around his neck on a golden chain. He believed this crucifix would protect him. One night while walking alone, Leonid was attacked by a stranger. In the moonlight he saw the man's knife being raised above his head. Instinctively, Leonid raised his hands to deflect the blow. He felt the sting of the knife on his hand, then on his chest. In a split second Leonid's life and his sins flashed before him. He fell to the ground, and the attacker fled. He lay there several seconds, thinking that his end had come. Then he managed to get up and struggle home. His mother washed the blood away while they waited for an ambulance. In the hospital the doctor cared for his wounds.

The next day Leonid noticed that his crucifix was badly damaged. The blade of the knife must have hit it. As Leonid examined his lucky charm, he thought, *There is a lesson here for me. This crucifix saved me yesterday. God has given me another chance to live. I must obey Him.*" Leonid burst into tears as he considered his wicked life in the light of God's mercy. Leonid began to search for answers to his spiritual questions.

Several weeks later Leonid learned about a series of Bible lectures being held in the city. He attended faithfully. Night by night he thrilled to the new truths he was learning from the Bible. In Jesus he found new hope and a new purpose in life. The Holy Spirit brought conviction to his heart. He gave his life to Christ.

Leonid began sharing his new life in Jesus with others. Instead of singing pop music, he began singing songs to God's glory in churches and evangelistic meetings. But even this was not enough. He enrolled in the seminary and now pastors in the city of Omsk in Russian Siberia. His testimonies fill the hearts of people who are searching for God's truths in these last days.



**J. H. Zachary is director of evangelism for The Quiet Hour in Redlands, California.**

Inside Story

## **Lessons for Third Quarter, 1998**

The third quarter Sabbath School lessons, entitled “*2 Corinthians*,” focus on Paul’s call to Christian ministry.

### **Lesson 1: 2 Corinthians: A Ministry Manual.**

**READ FOR THIS WEEK’S STUDY:** 2 Cor. 1:1–2:4

**MEMORY TEXT:** 2 Cor. 1:3, 4

**KEY THOUGHT:** God does not give us His Spirit for selfish reasons. We are not to enjoy this blessing privately. We are to pass it along to others.

#### **OUTLINE:**

- Divine Consolation, Divine Commission (2 Cor. 1:1-7)
- Crisis in Asia (2 Cor. 1:8-11)
- A Painful Visit (2 Cor. 1:12–2:4)
- We Are the Lord’s Anointed (2 Cor. 1:12–2:4)
- 2 Corinthians—A Guide for Ministry

### **Lesson 2: The Ministry of Forgiveness**

**READ FOR THIS WEEK’S STUDY:** 2 Cor. 2:5-17

**MEMORY TEXT:** 2 Cor. 2:11

**KEY THOUGHT:** When we extend and receive forgiveness we play a major part in the Plan of Redemption.

#### **OUTLINE:**

- A Time to Forgive (2 Cor. 2:5-11)
- “Forgive . . . as We Forgive (2 Cor. 2:5-10)
- Our Scheming Foe (2 Cor. 2:11)
- Led in Triumph (2 Cor. 2:12-17)
- Living in God’s Presence (2 Cor. 2:10, 17)

### **Lessons in Braille**

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