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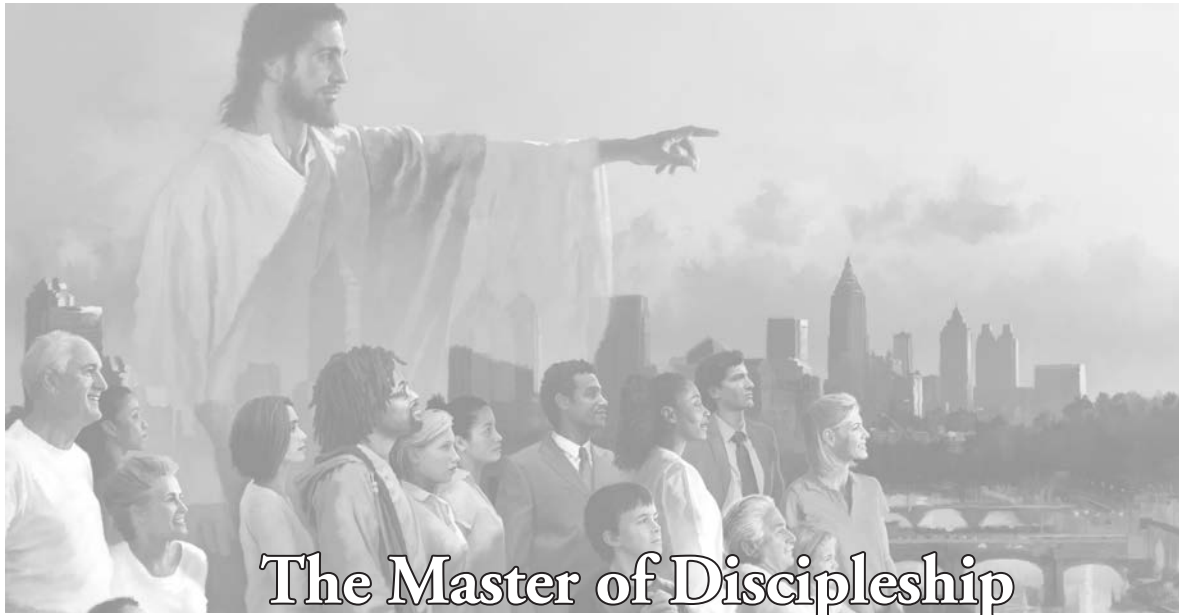
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The Master of Discipleship

In the beginning God created a perfect, sinless world. Human beings enjoyed the privilege of honoring, worshiping, and following their Creator. Life should have continued thus for eternity.

Christ's sacrifice provided our only hope. Calvary's redemption offers us freedom and our only escape from insignificance and meaninglessness. Sinful humans are offered liberty, forgiveness, and the opportunity for restoration to their original state.

God beckons believers everywhere to become heralds of this matchless grace—ambassadors who communicate this divine redemption to those enslaved by Satan, calling them to follow, worship, and praise their Maker. Christ's example of disciple-making must become the model that believers follow in answering the Great Commission (*Matt. 28:19, 20*).

Therefore, the topic of our quarter is discipleship. Though the term has many facets, in this study we will look at discipleship as the process by which we become followers of Jesus and, as such, better soul winners.

After all, Jesus is every Christian's example, especially in the work of soul winning. Is it illogical to suppose that the keys to effective evangelism are discovered in popular psychology, mass-marketing techniques, and elaborate promotional programs rather than in following the simple example of Christ?

How did Jesus attract His followers? What can we learn from Christ's example that would enable us to more effectively lead others to Him? How can we fulfill the Great Commission?

How did Jesus appeal to such diverse groups: the wealthy and the destitute, the religious and the irreligious, the politically powerful and the powerless? How did Jesus unlock callous hearts, inspire hope among outcasts, gently awaken the child's tender heart, and leap over ethnic and social barriers in order to make disciples? How did He penetrate the fortresses of wealth and power, open the cocoons of spiritually arrogant religious leaders, or revive hope among those fighting terminal illnesses?

These are not merely discussion questions that stimulate intellectual interchange; rather, they are a crucial area of study for Christians whose passionate desire is to follow Jesus' example of guiding lost sheep to the loving Shepherd.

Paul also challenged believers to follow him as he followed Christ. It is unthinkable that believers in the twenty-first century should accept a lower standard than that which Paul established in the first century.

In the end, following Jesus vastly exceeds the limiting view that discipleship equals methods for correcting aberrant behaviors and habits, however important these changes are. A comprehensive understanding of discipleship is incomplete until it incorporates a passionate desire to follow Jesus and, as a supernatural result, a passionate desire to lead others to Christ, as well.

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Or, as we have so eloquently been told: "No sooner does one come to Christ than there is born in his heart a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus; the saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart. If we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and are filled with the joy of His indwelling Spirit, we shall not be able to hold our peace. If we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good we shall have something to tell. . . . There will be an intensity of desire to follow in the path that Jesus trod."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 78, 79.

Thus, our subject for this quarter.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and
4. What can I do with what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Create).

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

Step 1—Motivate: Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

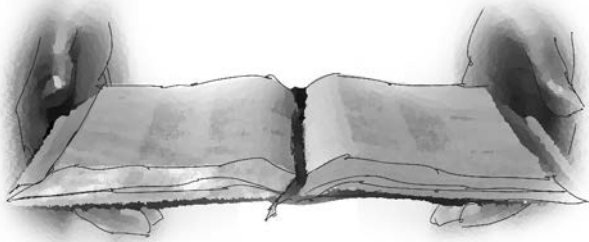
Step 2—Explore: Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Step 3—Apply: Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

Step 4—Create: Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (*James 1:22*). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.

Disciples *and* Scripture



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Luke 4:1–12, Matt. 12:3–8, Matt. 5:17–39, Luke 24:13–32, Acts 1:16–20.*

Memory Text: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (*John 5:39*).

Using a metal detector purchased from a rummage sale, Englishman Terry Herbert discovered gold-plated Anglo-Saxon weaponry and silver artifacts buried beneath a farmer’s field. The estimated monetary value of the find exceeded \$5 million in U.S. dollars.

Like someone seeking treasure in a field of dirt, rocks, and rubbish, we must be careful not to let things get in our way and make us miss the real treasure above: Jesus Christ. Searching for eternal riches, Pharisees and Sadducees alike “excavated” the ancient sacred writings. Ironically, their treasure map, Scripture, had been so radically misread that they missed the point—Jesus—completely.

Explicitly and implicitly Jesus incorporated Scripture into His disciple-making methodology. The ultimate “treasure quest” was rooted in the prophetic writings, which pointed to Him. Thus, to miss Jesus is to miss the mark. All this means, then, is that all our disciple-making endeavors must, ultimately, be about Jesus and that which He has done for us.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 4.

Jesus and the Bible

Because Jesus is the example for all believers, His level of commitment to Scripture becomes more than a matter of passing interest.

Read Luke 4:1–12 and 16–21. What do these passages suggest about Christ’s attitude toward the Bible?

The narrative of Christ’s wilderness temptations shows that, by quoting Scripture, Jesus rebuffed every satanic challenge and invitation. The Scripture scrolls were not likely available to Christ during this 40-day desert sojourn. This clearly indicates that Christ had committed substantial portions of Scripture to memory. While the Scriptures quoted in the wilderness were taken from the writings of Moses, Jesus quotes elsewhere from the other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures (*Matt. 21:42, 22:44*). Clearly, Christ had a widespread knowledge of Scripture.

Notice, however, that Christ understands that the Scriptures are more than just a tool for overcoming temptation and achieving personal holiness. Jesus recognizes that Scripture points to Him. During the synagogue visit recorded in Luke 4:16–30, Jesus quotes Isaiah and then declares that this text points to Himself as the One anointed to release the oppressed and proclaim freedom. Jesus understood that He fulfilled Messianic prophecy. Thus, Jesus not only understood that the Bible pointed to Him, but early on in His ministry He used the Bible to point others to Him, as well.

Though it’s important to know the Bible, that alone isn’t enough. Some of the biggest-name Bible scholars have not even been believing Christians. Thus, we need to ask ourselves, How can we make sure that our study and reading of the Bible help us to come to a better knowledge of Jesus and what He has done for us? That is, how can we make Bible study something that transforms our lives?

The Authority of Scripture

Read the following texts. What do they tell us about the way in which Jesus viewed the Bible? *Matt. 5:17–20, 12:3–8, 15:3–11, John 10:34–37, 17:14–19, Luke 24:44.*

Whenever Christ debated with the religious authorities, He relied not on abstract philosophy, not even on personal authority, but on the teachings of Scripture. When determining right from wrong, Jesus based His argument on a scriptural bedrock. When opponents challenged Christ's doctrinal purity, He directed them to specific passages within Scripture. When considering practical matters, Jesus referred listeners to divine revelation. Christ understood that His divinely ordained mission was to accomplish that which the ancient prophets had predicted.

Contrast Christ's exalted understanding of Scripture with the prevailing attitude often exhibited among even professed Christians today. Entire denominations have come to deem the Bible as interesting but, basically, unreliable historical manuscripts. Everything—the six-day Creation, the Exodus, even the bodily resurrection of Jesus (much less a literal Second Coming)—has been called into question, or even relegated to the status of myth.

The implications for discipleship are clear. Why would anyone want to give his or her life to a cause based on nothing but myths? Instead, people burdened with real problems need a real Savior. Otherwise, the gospel becomes a tarnished treasure or, metaphorically, plastic coinage covered with simulated gold. From a distance, some might be fooled, but, upon closer examination, the plastic will suffer rejection. The only safe course is to follow Christ's example of exalting, honoring, and obeying the Bible.

Death is no myth, is it? Nor is it just a symbol. It is one of the harshest realities that we all face. Think through the implications, then, of any view of the Bible that treats biblical teachings, such as the resurrection of Jesus or His second coming, as mere symbols or myths. Why must we, individually and as a church, never allow ourselves to get caught up in this satanic trap?

Public Proclamation

Jesus attracted people to Himself in various settings, including public ones. Scripture assumed a prominent role in Christ’s public proclamations. Direct quotations and scriptural allusions filled His sermons and public discourse.

Read Matthew 5:17–39. In what ways do these verses show how Christ utilized Scripture for public ministry?

During Christ’s earthly sojourn, the ordinary Israelites’ relationship with Scripture was apparently highly legalistic. They looked to Scripture for regulations and ethical guidance. Upright behavior was considered the payment for eternal bliss. Jesus, however, overturned their legalistic notions and substituted a heart-based religion for a system of external controls.

Christ-centered religion is rooted in a heart transformation that leads to ethical behavior. Ironically, some of the Pharisees had bypassed having a living relationship with God in their haste to achieve moral perfection. Jesus identified these shortcomings, and as a cure He beckoned listeners to accept Him as Savior and Master. With Jesus as the internally controlling force, behavioral standards were not lowered but elevated. All one has to do is read the Sermon on the Mount to see just how elevated His moral standards were.

“As something strange and new, these words fall upon the ears of the wondering multitude. Such teaching is contrary to all they have ever heard from priest or rabbi. They see in it nothing to flatter their pride or to feed their ambitious hopes. But there is about this new Teacher a power that holds them spellbound. The sweetness of divine love flows from His very presence as the fragrance from a flower. . . . All feel instinctively that here is One who reads the secrets of the soul, yet who comes near to them with tender compassion.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 6.

It’s easier than we think to be legalistic, judgmental, and condemnatory, isn’t it? How can we protect ourselves from falling into these common practices?

Personal Ministry

Examples of Christ’s public ministry abound. Equally fascinating are Christ’s personal encounters, both with ordinary and elite members of society. These stories offer unique insights into the centrality of Scripture in Christ’s ministry.

Read John 13:18–20 and Luke 10:25–28, 24:13–32. What role did Scripture play in these passages? What purpose did Jesus have for quoting these particular verses? What resulted from these small group encounters with Scripture?

Repeatedly, Christ quotes Scripture in conjunction with His calls to discipleship. This clearly implies that Jesus’ authority and credibility rested on Scripture, not merely on personal charisma. This is seen especially in the ways in which Jesus used the Scriptures as He worked with the two disciples who were on the road to Emmaus.

“Beginning at Moses, the very Alpha of Bible history, Christ expounded in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Had He first made Himself known to them, their hearts would have been satisfied. In the fullness of their joy they would have hungered for nothing more. But it was necessary for them to understand the witness borne to Him by the types and prophecies of the Old Testament. Upon these their faith must be established. Christ performed no miracle to convince them, but it was His first work to explain the Scriptures. They had looked upon His death as the destruction of all their hopes. Now He showed from the prophets that this was the very strongest evidence for their faith.

“In teaching these disciples, Jesus showed the importance of the Old Testament as a witness to His mission.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 796–799.

Dwell on Luke 24:32, especially the phrase that their “heart[s] burn[ed] within.” What does that mean? When was the last time your heart burned within you over the truths that we have been given? If it hasn’t in a long time, might it be because your heart has grown cold? If so, how can you change?

The Next Generation

Without a doubt, as we have seen, Jesus places a heavy emphasis on the Bible. Never did He question the authority, veracity, or authenticity of a single Bible text. And yet, through the centuries and even today, many people do just that.

Read Matthew 12:15–21, Mark 1:1–3, Acts 1:16–20, 3:22–24, and Romans 10:10, 11. What do these texts tell us about the ways in which the earliest Christians viewed Scripture? What lessons can we take from them for ourselves and how we relate to the Bible?

The earliest Christian writers continued the practice of using Scripture to authenticate the messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth. In effect, they were saying that Christianity was inextricably connected to God's self-revelation through the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jesus Himself had appealed to these sacred writings. Now Christ's disciples were doing the same. Appeals to personal experience, miracles, and other witnesses for Christ were important and had their place; obviously, however, nothing supplanted Scripture as the primary witness for Jesus.

Christ's earliest followers sought guidance from Scripture concerning the church's mission, its everyday practices, and its spiritual discipline. Human speculation and guesswork were minimized; Scripture became preeminent. Prayerful consideration of God's revelation was evident in church councils (*see Acts 15*). Scripture touched every facet of the life of the early church.

How foolish would it be, then, for us, especially at the end of time, to have any other attitude toward the Bible?

How can we all learn to make the Bible central to our faith and use it to point us to Jesus? What are practical ways in which we can allow the teaching of the Bible to truly impact how we live and how we relate to others?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Bible Teaching and Study,” pp. 190–192, in *Education*; “The Walk to Emmaus,” pp. 795–801, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Thessalonica,” pp. 221–230, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Christ in His ministry had opened the minds of His disciples to these prophecies. . . . Peter in preaching Christ had produced his evidence from the Old Testament. Stephen had pursued the same course. And Paul also in his ministry appealed to the scriptures foretelling the birth, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. By the inspired testimony of Moses and the prophets he clearly proved the identity of Jesus of Nazareth with the Messiah and showed that from the days of Adam it was the voice of Christ which had been speaking through patriarchs and prophets.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 221, 222.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are some practical ways in which you can incorporate Scripture into your daily routine? How can you use the Bible in your personal witnessing?
- 2 Why did Jesus emphasize scriptural interpretation rather than miracles and personal charisma? What happens if music, the health message, social functions, or anything else replaces the Bible as being central to our faith?
- 3 How dependent on Scripture must today’s Christians become? Evaluate the importance of Scripture in your church’s life regarding the establishment of priorities, the channeling of resources, and faithfulness to mission.
- 4 Dwell on the fact that we have no indication in the Bible of any Bible writers ever calling into question the veracity or authenticity of any other texts. Why should that be so important to us, today, at a time when so many people, including many Bible scholars, seem to have made it their first priority to challenge the truth of the Bible at every level?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *John 5:39*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that his or her primary source for knowing Jesus comes from reading His story in the Gospels.

Feel: Identify with the values Christ lived and taught in His daily interaction with others.

Do: Look for opportunities to reflect Christ's character of love, mercy, justice, and compassion in his or her daily life.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Bible Is More Than a Book of Facts About Ancient Life.

A What are some well-known facts about Jesus that are almost universally accepted by Christians?

B How do these facts affect your life any more than the fact that there was a man named Abraham Lincoln or Winston Churchill?

C In what way is the Bible more than simply a book?

II. Feel: The Power of Jesus' Life Changes Our Lives.

A As you read the Bible, how are your five senses (touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing) engaged in the story?

B What emotions can you identify within each story? Consider, for example, Luke 8:41–56. List one emotion for each person: Jairus, the sick woman, the disciples, and so on.

III. Do: Can You See the World Through Jesus' Eyes?

A How will Jesus' life and ministry be reflected in your life this week?

B What will it take for you to see the people in your life as Jesus sees them?

► **Summary:** The lasting power of Jesus' ministry isn't just reflected in what He said or in the number of miracles He performed. His lasting influence also is seen in the lives of His followers today.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *John 5:39*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: To be like Christ, we have to understand His character and mission as described in the Bible.

Just for Teachers: Jesus, as a historical figure, was incredibly complex. He defied stereotypes when He lived on earth, and He defies stereotypes now. Those who want to live in harmony with His life and teachings must be guided by the Holy Spirit to develop as balanced a view of His ministry as possible. Only then are we equipped to become His disciples.

Opening Activity/Discussion: Ask volunteers in your class (the entire class, if possible) to share their favorite story about Jesus. (Write a two- or three-word description of each story on a flip chart, white board, or paper, if such supplies are available. Record the answers to the following two questions below, as well. In the event that supplies are not available, proceed with the discussion as follows.)

Go around again and ask class members to share their favorite parable told by Jesus.

Go around one more time and ask them to share their favorite saying or teaching by Christ.

Now, as a class, review the stories, parables, and sayings. What aspect of Jesus' character is highlighted by each story, parable, or saying?

We tend to be drawn to those aspects of Christ's character with which we most closely identify, whether it's His love, His power, His justice, His mercy, et cetera. And truly, Jesus' character is reflected in all these things. But to highlight one or two aspects of Christ's character to the exclusion of others poses a twofold danger. Not only does it make Him less than multidimensional, it makes our lives as disciples unbalanced, as well.

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Jesus was on earth for just a short time. He knew that, in addition to helping His disciples learn about God, He also had to help them “unlearn” some things.

Bible Commentary

Let's look at three passages of Scripture to discern what they say about the

Messiah, taking note of how these teachings are interpreted (or misinterpreted) by Jesus' disciples and the rest of the Jews.

I. The Sermon on the Mount (*Review Matthew 5 with your class.*)

One of Jesus' first public presentations is about the values of God's kingdom. He begins by highlighting things that most people would avoid: poverty of spirit (*Matt. 5:3*), mourning (*vs. 4*), meekness (*vs. 5*), spiritual hunger and thirst (*vs. 6*), and so on.

In verse 17, He announces, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets [the Old Testament]; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (*NIV*).

Then He highlights some well-known and significant Old Testament laws, and His speech assumes this pattern: "You have heard . . . but I say . . ." such as when He states, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder. . . .' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (*vss. 21, 22, NIV*).

In the same way, Jesus addresses adultery (*vss. 27, 28*), divorce (*vss. 31, 32*), the making of oaths (*vss. 33–37*), retribution (*vss. 38–42*), and loving one's enemies (*vss. 43–48*).

We can imagine the shock the disciples felt. They may have thought, *What? Thinking about doing something wrong is the same as really doing it?*

Everyone listening to Jesus knew it was wrong to murder, commit adultery, swear, et cetera. But they weren't prepared to understand that just even thinking about those things was wrong, as well.

Consider This: Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he" (*NKJV*), meaning that thought shapes action. Similarly, in His sermon on the mount, Jesus sought to make this distinction in His disciples' minds. How did this principle undercut the popular notion that an appearance of sanctity and righteousness was not a reliable indication of one's rightness with God? What does it imply today about the influence of our thoughts and feelings on our actions?

II. The Faith of the Canaanite Woman (*Review Matthew 15:21–28 with your class.*)

When a Canaanite woman approached Jesus about healing her daughter, "Jesus did not answer a word" (*Matt. 15:23, NIV*). After all, with few exceptions, Jews weren't encouraged to have any contact with anyone who wasn't a Jew. So, the disciples felt justified in exhorting Jesus, "'Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us'" (*vs. 23, NIV*).

Jesus then responded to the woman in the way that was culturally

acceptable among the Jews, and which no doubt resonated with His disciples: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” (vs. 24, *NIV*). After her continued entreaties, Jesus merely said, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs” (vs. 26, *NIV*).

Even though on some level the woman probably expected to hear this response, she replied in a way that demonstrated her hope that Jesus wasn’t typical. She said, “‘Yes, Lord . . . but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table’” (vs. 27, *NIV*).

Jesus rewarded the woman’s faith and reminded His disciples (and us) that healing and salvation aren’t the sole possessions of those who call themselves “God’s people.”

Consider This: Jesus could have sternly rebuked His disciples’ bigotry and hard-heartedness in front of the Syrophoenician woman. Instead, Jesus used His encounter with the woman to mirror the narrow attitude of His disciples back to them. At first, they apparently saw nothing unusual in the way Jesus initially treated this woman. But what made Jesus’ subtle method of instruction so much more effective than humiliating them in front of one whom they despised?

III. Jesus Encourages His Disappointed Disciples (Review Luke 24:13–35 with your class.)

Late on the day of Christ’s resurrection, two disciples walk toward the village of Emmaus. As they walk, a stranger, whom they do not recognize as Jesus, joins them and asks, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” (Luke 24:17, *NIV*).

They confess their confusion and disappointment as they reveal their hopes and dreams about the Messiah and how their hopes were dashed by Jesus’ crucifixion.

After chiding the two disciples about their misunderstanding of Scripture, Jesus sets them straight: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (vs. 27, *NIV*).

They apparently knew enough of the Scriptures to know something about the Messiah but not as much as they needed to know. Like many of us, they had to “unlearn” some things so that they could know and appreciate Christ more completely.

Consider This: Sure, we know the Bible has the answers to life’s important questions; it is not silent in response to the soul’s longing for truth about salvation, morality, and hope in the life to come. But as long as we live (and even into eternity), we will continue to be learners (disciples, if you will) of God’s ways. What evidence do we see in our lives to demonstrate that we are learning more about Christ—His character and His ministry?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Contrary to what some think, the Bible is far more than a textbook with answers to questions we might find on a quiz or test. The Bible also contains spiritual principles that are applied to different situations and settings. True, it gives us guidance in answer to the dilemmas of life, from the simple to the complex. But most of all, the Bible teaches us how to be like Jesus.

Life Application: Ask each person to share how many years he or she has been a Christian or Seventh-day Adventist. Now ask the following two questions:

- ① When was the last time you learned something about following Christ? If you had to unlearn something, what was it?
- ② How would you characterize the spiritual experience you are now living with the one you experienced when you first became a disciple?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The life of discipleship is similar to life in general in that we go through stages: childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, old age, et cetera. The stages aren't good or bad, per se; growing is just part of life. Not growing is a sign that something's wrong. For example, adults aren't usually commended for being "childish," and youth are often encouraged to "grow up."

Activity: On a white board or flip chart, if such supplies are available, put these categories at the top of five columns: childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, and old age. For each column, ask class members to write a characteristic in one or two words that correlates to their experience as disciples. Alternately, to do the exercise without supplies, simply go through each category, one at a time, and ask your class members to list characteristics for each category.

We sometimes chide ourselves for not being as "on fire" as we were when we first accepted Christ. That's like saying that married couples aren't truly in love if they're not as passionate as they were as newlyweds.

Discuss: How do Christians maintain their passion for Christ and His kingdom as they move through different stages in their development as Christians? Is this passion manifested differently in the different stages?

Discipling Through Metaphor



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Sam. 12:1–7, Isa. 28:24–28, Matt. 7:24–27, 13:1–30, Luke 20:9–19.

Memory Text: “Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: ‘I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world’ ” (Matthew 13:34, 35, NIV).

Christianity is reasonable and logical. Intellect should be cultivated. Intellect alone, however, insufficiently expresses the complete human personality. Unlike robots, which are programmed to process reason and logic, humans are capable of loving, feeling, hurting, crying, caring, laughing, and imagining. Thus, Jesus framed eternal truths in ways that went beyond mere intellect alone. Jesus spoke through concrete pictures drawn from everyday life in order to reach people where they were. Children and adults could understand deep truths delivered through parables wrapped in images and metaphors.

Meanwhile, complex concepts such as justification, righteousness, and sanctification were easily grasped through the Master Storyteller's art. In other words, concepts that are often difficult to grasp in ordinary language can be taught through symbols and metaphors.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 11.

Old Testament Examples

Read 2 Samuel 12:1–7, Isaiah 28:24–28, Jeremiah 13:12–14, and Ezekiel 15:1–7. How do these parables and allegories expand our understanding of God’s relationship with humankind? Which objects or settings utilized by these prophets later appear in Christ’s parables?

As we can see, Nathan tells a parable in order to disguise the real purpose of his visit. David implicates himself as the transgressor, thereby pronouncing his own sentence. Using a literary device (a parable), Nathan accomplishes something that otherwise might have produced confrontation and, perhaps, even execution (his own!).

Isaiah’s poetic story draws from the agricultural background familiar to his listeners. Centuries later, Jesus would employ those same settings. Isaiah’s parable teaches about God’s unlimited mercy during times of punishment. The twelfth chapter of Hebrews likewise understands God’s punishments as tools for correction rather than weapons for vengeance. Divine punishments reflected their redemptive purposes; they were sufficient to encourage repentance, revival, and reformation. Nevertheless, when greater stubbornness and rebellion occurred, greater punishments followed.

Jeremiah’s parable is a terrifying illustration of judgment. Whenever human beings frustrate God’s redemptive purpose, God eventually releases them to the consequences that they have chosen. Christ likewise shares judgment parables with His listeners. Ezekiel uses a different symbol to convey a similar message.

What is it about storytelling that makes it such a powerful way to express truth? What are some of your favorite stories, and why do you like them? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Architectural Wisdom

Read Matthew 7:24–27. What do these verses contribute to our understanding of Christian discipleship? Why do you think Jesus used this example from nature to teach such a crucial truth?

Modern literate societies take literacy for granted. However, even today, numerous nonliterate societies exist. Throughout ancient history, literacy was the exception rather than the rule. Ruling classes and literary specialists (scribes) obtained their power through their skill in reading. Thus, Jesus framed His messages within forms that everyday, nonliterate people could understand. (Obviously, literate listeners could also understand them.)

Prior to Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press, manuscripts, in most places in the world, were handwritten—a time-consuming process. Relatively few could afford to obtain such valuable commodities. Therefore, oral communication through legends, parables, and similar devices became the standard for the conveyance of information.

God offers salvation for the entire human race. Should it be surprising, then, that Christ used forms of communication that could reach the greatest number of people? Oral tradition, transferred from generation to generation through simple stories, became the currency of redemptive thought.

Read Luke 14:27–33. What lessons can we glean from these stories? How do the metaphors here illuminate our understanding of discipleship?

Building entails preparation. Cost estimates are developed long before actual construction commences. Discipleship likewise involves preparation. Miraculous feedings, spectacular healings, and apparent success could lead prospective disciples to assume that following Jesus was easy. Jesus encouraged His listeners, however, to study the complete picture. Self-sacrifice, suffering, humiliation, and rejection constituted considerable costs. Notice once again that Jesus chose to convey this message using metaphorical language when He could have just offered a checklist of specific drawbacks that His disciples might encounter.

Agricultural Analogies

Read Matthew 13:1–30. What was Jesus teaching His audience about discipleship? What lessons can modern Christians derive from these metaphors?

Christ’s parable of the sower is familiar to many readers. The setting for the story was commonplace for an agrarian society, something to which Jesus’ listeners could easily relate. The connection with discipleship is obvious. Essentially Jesus is challenging His listeners to evaluate their standing as disciples. Rather than confronting each individual specifically, He speaks through parables, inviting disciples to confront themselves. Looking into their soul’s mirror, they can evaluate their materialistic tendencies, review their capacity for perseverance, analyze their worldly entanglements, and choose the lifestyle of uncompromising discipleship.

At the same time, true discipleship places judgment (condemnation) in the hands of the Master, not those of the disciple. Human discernment is incomplete, human knowledge partial. God alone possesses faultless understanding. Jesus warns, too, that satanic infiltration does happen. Disciples cannot surrender their judgment (discernment) to other professed believers because these believers may be weeds, not wheat. Both grow together until harvesttime.

“In Christ’s parable teaching the same principle is seen as in His own mission to the world. That we might become acquainted with His divine character and life, Christ took our nature and dwelt among us. Divinity was revealed in humanity; the invisible glory in the visible human form. Men could learn of the unknown through the known; heavenly things were revealed through the earthly.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 17.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus talked about the “deceitfulness of riches.” What was He talking about? How can “riches” deceive even those who don’t have them?

The Revolutionary's War

Christ's ministry was revolutionary but without common weapons. His tools were infinitely more powerful than were swords or knives. Life-changing words, frequently expressed through parables and metaphors, became His not-so-secret weapons in the fight against evil.

Christ's tactics and strategies caught many leaders off guard; they were ill-equipped to counter the power of His appeal to the masses. Many of His parables contained messages that worked against the leaders. The religious leaders rightly saw that their influence would be largely curtailed wherever Christ's message penetrated the people's hearts.

Read Matthew 21:28–32 and Luke 14:16–24, 20:9–19. What powerful messages come through these parables? Though the parables were often directed to specific people, what principles here apply to us, no matter who we are?

“The parable of the vineyard applies not alone to the Jewish nation. It has a lesson for us. The church in this generation has been endowed by God with great privileges and blessings, and He expects corresponding returns.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 296.

No question, we have been greatly blessed by the Lord: redeemed by the blood of Christ, promised salvation based on His righteousness (not our own), given the assurance of eternal life, and offered the Holy Spirit—we have been provided with so much. It is easy, however, to forget all that we have, to take it for granted, or to even scoff at it. Like the vinedressers in the parable, we might not even realize the implications of that which we are doing. In the end, their ignorance didn't excuse them on Judgment Day. It won't excuse us, either.

How often have you been deceived in the past about your own spiritual state? What have you learned from those experiences that could help you to avoid making the same mistakes again?

Christ's Creative Legacy

After the record of Christ's ministry is completed, the telling of parables seems to have disappeared from Scripture. What explains this phenomenon? Certainly, the largest remaining segment of the New Testament centers around Paul. Fourteen New Testament books have been attributed to Paul, and nearly half of Luke's historical narrative in Acts revolves almost exclusively around Paul, as well. Though he didn't use stories in the way that Jesus did, Paul still made considerable use of metaphors, similes, and other creative devices (*see Rom. 7:1–6, 1 Cor. 3:10–15, 2 Cor. 5:1–10*). Though Paul was no storyteller, his presentations were neither boring nor without color. Stylistic differences between Christ's public discourse and Paul's obviously exist, but both exhibit considerable expressive creativity.

Other New Testament writers demonstrate a somewhat closer affinity to Christ's use of parables. Jesus' brother James wrote, "Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring" (*James 2:2, NIV*) to begin a narrative lesson. Yet, neither Christ's brother nor any other disciple utilized stories as extensively as did Christ. Simile and symbolism, however, are widespread. "He will pass away like a wild flower" (*James 1:10, NIV*). "Take ships as an example" (*James 3:4, NIV*). Peter's vision (*Acts 10*) assumed symbolic form. Symbolic narratives shape significant portions of the book of Revelation. "When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman" (*Rev. 12:13, NIV*).

Select a couple of the following texts and identify the metaphors within them. What are the various messages contained within these verses? What imagery is used to convey the message? *Acts 10:9–16, James 3:3–12, Rev. 12:7–17, 18:9–20, 19:11–16.*

However they are expressed, the principle remains the same: metaphors, similes, parables, allegories, and other examples of creative language enable us to communicate in an understandable manner. Building upon the listener's experiences, Christ and His disciples used comparisons and illustrations that stimulated an understanding of truth. We should, when appropriate, not be afraid to do the same.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Teaching in Parables,” pp. 17–27, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

“Jesus desired to awaken inquiry. He sought to arouse the careless, and impress truth upon the heart. Parable teaching was popular, and commanded the respect and attention, not only of the Jews, but of the people of other nations. . . .

“Again, Christ had truths to present which the people were unprepared to accept or even to understand. For this reason also He taught them in parables. By connecting His teaching with the scenes of life, experience, or nature, He secured their attention and impressed their hearts. Afterward, as they looked upon the objects that illustrated His lessons, they recalled the words of the divine Teacher. . . .

“Jesus sought an avenue to every heart. By using a variety of illustrations, He not only presented truth in its different phases, but appealed to the different hearers.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 20, 21.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, share your answer to Sunday’s question. What can you learn from each other’s stories?
- 2 Jesus used images and metaphors from things with which His hearers were very familiar. What could you use from your own culture that could help convey spiritual truths?
- 3 Though Jesus used metaphors from mostly agricultural settings, much of early Christianity was urban in nature. What “urban” images does one find in the writings of Paul or any of the other New Testament writers?
- 4 Think through the elements that make a good story. What are they? How do they work? How can we learn to use these elements in our witness?
- 5 Read Luke 16:19–31. What kind of story did Jesus use here? What lessons can we take from it about the use of fiction in the conveying of spiritual messages?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Matthew 13:34, 35*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that stories and illustrations are not just “filler” in a sermon or talk; they are often the vehicle through which truth is communicated.

Feel: Be inspired by the fact that Jesus was popular with His listeners because He knew how to tell a good story.

Do: Finish this sentence: “The kingdom of heaven is like . . .” and use modern metaphors that communicate gospel values.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Stories Are More Easily Remembered Than Facts.

A Look at the stories Jesus told His followers. On what activities were many of them based?

B If you were assembling stories for a modern audience, what subjects would likely strike a chord?

II. Feel: Many of the Stories Jesus Told, Especially About Human Interaction, Are Just as Relevant Today as They Were 2,000 Years Ago.

A Why do stories like “The Good Samaritan” and “The Prodigal Son” still strike a chord with us today?

B Why do you think Jesus often left His stories open-ended?

C What advantage did Jesus have by making His stories deliberately ambiguous? What lesson is there for us?

III. Do: Want an Audience? Tell a Story.

A In a society awash with words—both in print and broadcast—how can we find an audience, and why?

B What is the most powerful story you can tell?

► **Summary:** In spite of our many technological advances, personal stories (in the form of movies, TV programs, books, magazines) are still the primary way of communicating values. Are we, as Christians, taking advantage of it?

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Matthew 13:34, 35*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Jesus showed us the power of stories and parables in communicating to others the truth about His grace and love.

Just for Teachers: Our society has no shortage of media influences. But amid the cacophony of print, audio, visual, and Internet images, people still stop to listen to a good story. At its heart, the Bible is a collection of stories—stories about God’s interaction with His people, His peoples’ interaction with one another, and their interaction with “outsiders.” Jesus communicated effectively because He told stories so well. Indeed, some of His stories—“The Good Samaritan,” “The Prodigal Son,” “The Good Shepherd”—have universal appeal and are known by both religious and nonreligious people. Our challenge is to reach our society and make disciples. Even after more than two thousand years, that is still done quite effectively through the medium of stories and parables.

Opening Activity/Discussion: Stories resonate with people. They may be communicated orally or through movies, plays, novels, and other art forms.

For example, books such as Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, and movies based on it, have spiritual themes such as Redemption and forgiveness throughout. The novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, which traces the struggle that people have with reconciling good and evil, is another example of a story being used to convey religious messages.

Ask the members of your class what book, movie, musical, oral story, or other narrative art form has had a spiritual effect on them because of its treatment of spiritual themes. Allow them to explain what effect it had.

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Jesus was a master storyteller because He identified with His listeners. He knew what made them tick. The stories He told about farmers, fishermen, housekeepers, parents, and their children were stories with which most people could easily identify.

Bible Commentary

Stories are effective vehicles for communication.

I. Making a Point Without Losing Your Life *(Review 2 Samuel 12:1–14 with your class.)*

Question: How do you correct a king (or boss, or spouse) while protecting your relationship (and your life)? Answer: Carefully.

David thought he had gotten away with murder (literally) when he got rid of Uriah so that he could marry Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. But while David and Bathsheba's secret may have been unknown to most people, it wasn't unknown to God. And God told His prophet, Nathan, to go and confront David.

Think of it: as king, David answered to no one; his power was absolute. Nathan could announce God's judgments all he wanted, but from a human point of view as a ruler, David was not obligated to listen to Nathan or even permit him to live.

But Nathan tells David's story by altering some of the facts and characters involved. It's still a story of greed and cruelty, but instead of a king it involves a rich man; instead of a wife, a sheep.

Of course, David's sense of outrage and moral indignation forces him to declare: " 'As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die!' " (2 Sam. 12:5, NIV).

Then still feeling the righteousness of his declaration, David hears Nathan say, " 'You are the man!' " (vs. 7, NIV). And before David knows what hit him, he finds himself caught in a trap from which he's unable to extricate himself.

Consider This: Not all stories are packed with so much power. But all stories are effective to the extent that they tap into our natural feelings of empathy for justice, mercy, love, and fair play. What stories—either factual or imagined—have had a profound influence on your life? What are those influences?

II. The Farmer, the Seed, and the Soil *(Review Matthew 13:1–23 with your class.)*

This is storytelling at its best. In a simple setting, well known to all His listeners, Jesus tells a story that engages His listeners on at least three levels.

First, there's the farmer. In an economy based on agriculture, it's fairly certain that most of Jesus' listeners would know a farmer, if they weren't farmers themselves. They knew what it meant to put a seed in

the ground and hope for the best. After all, there are no guarantees in farming. A farmer puts a seed in the ground, and anything that happens after that is beyond his control: weather, pests, blight, et cetera.

Then there's the seed. It has no control over where it lands. Its success is entirely at the mercy of the sower and of the ground on which it finds itself.

Finally, there's the ground. Some ground is hard, beaten down by foot traffic; some soil is shallow and rocky; some soil is prone to weeds; and some soil is good, fertile soil.

A good story engages people on more than one level. To identify with the farmer may mean, for example, that we make the most of limited resources; that we are judicious in the way that we scatter our "seed." To identify with the seed means that we are aware of the setting in which we're planted; that we know the challenges of being "planted" where conditions are perilous to our spiritual lives. To identify with the soil means that we understand our spiritual condition and try, with God's help, to ameliorate the natural conditions of our hearts—stony, weedy, well traveled, and beaten down—to make them more likely to be fertile ground that bears fruit for God's kingdom.

Consider This: What is this parable about? Discuss whether it is about the farmer, the seed, or the soil. At what level do the people who first heard this, as well as us today, engage in this story?

III. Open to Interpretation *(Review Matthew 21:28–32, Luke 14:16–24, and Luke 20:9–19 with your class.)*

A good story, parable, or analogy doesn't always neatly resolve its narrative situation.

Jesus almost always left the stories He told open-ended. The parable of "The Prodigal Son," for example, ends with the words " ' "We had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" ' " (*Luke 15:32, NIV*). Did the father persuade his older son to come inside and join the party? Or did the older son decide he could no longer live under the same roof with his younger, profligate brother? Jesus lets each listener fill in the blanks; He doesn't tell them how the story ends or what people should think about it.

The stories recorded in Matthew 21:28–32, Luke 14:16–24, and Luke 20:9–19 are clearly told by Jesus to describe the relationship that God had with His people, the Jews. He didn't say that in so many words, but the intent was clear: "the teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest [Jesus] immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them" (*Luke 20:19, NIV*).

Consider This: Stories, parables, and comparisons are not simply illustrations of the main message. Often they *are* the main message. What is the main message of Jesus' story in Matthew 21:28–32, and how does it describe the relationship between God and the people? Why do you think Jesus clothed truth in stories instead of speaking it plainly and undisguised?

Discussion Questions:

Outside church, where are you likely to hear stories or parables about life situations? What are such stories designed to do?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: Life lessons can be found all around us. While some people have a knack for identifying spiritual applications in various life situations, for others it takes practice.

Life Application: If Jesus were on earth today, He would likely draw lessons from everyday situations with which we are familiar. Doubtless He might tell fewer stories about farmers and fishermen and more stories about professional athletes, public luminaries, and scientists or doctors.

- ❶ Why is it so important to “know your audience”?
- ❷ Who are some of the types of people with whom you try to share the gospel? How is your approach different for each group?

► **STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: While society still puts a premium on good stories, our society is infinitely more complex than the society with which Jesus communicated. For example, people nowadays have a much shorter attention span than people in Jesus' day, even than people did a decade ago.

Activity: On a flip chart or white board, if available, brainstorm about some of the ways that Christians, using modern media, can communicate biblical values. Identify some characteristics of such a message (such as its format and structure), the audience you hope to engage with it, and the result you hope to achieve.

As you discuss this idea, imagine that Jesus is in the room with you. How might He critique and challenge your ideas to be the best they can be? What suggestions do you think He might have to offer you?

Discipleship *and* Prayer



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Dan. 9:2–19; Matt. 14:22, 23; 26:36; John 17:6–26; Heb. 2:17; 1 Pet. 4:7.*

Memory Text: “‘I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me’ ” (*John 17:20, 21, NKJV*).

Whatever else we do in the work for souls, whatever outreach programs we create, we are to earnestly pray for those whom we are seeking to reach. This is central to what it means to be a Christian, even more so a disciple-maker. What powerful changes might occur if constant, fervent prayer was central to our methodology in seeking to make and keep disciples!

“Let the workers grasp the promises of God, saying, ‘Thou hast promised, ‘Ask, and ye shall receive.’ I must have this soul converted to Jesus Christ.’ Solicit prayer for the souls for whom you labor; present them before the church as objects for the supplication. . . . Select another and still another soul, daily seeking guidance from God, laying everything before Him in earnest prayer, and working in divine wisdom.”—Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry*, pp. 244, 245.

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

Time-tested Compassion

Frequently, prayer assumes a self-centered posture. Believers present their wish lists before God, hoping to get that which they ask for. Though, of course, we are told to set our petitions before God, sometimes our motives are not pure. After all, are not our hearts corrupt, wicked, and deceitful? Might not our prayers, at times, simply reflect the sinfulness that lies within?

Intercessory prayer, however, focuses on another person's needs, thus removing the likelihood of selfish motivation. Throughout history, intercessory prayers have represented the highest expressions of spiritual discourse. Untainted by the desire for personal gratification, these conversations demonstrate selflessness, compassion, and earnest longing for the salvation of others.

Read Daniel 9:2–19. What burdens Daniel throughout this prayer? What role does confession play within the prayer? Because of his advanced age, Daniel would not likely personally benefit from Jerusalem's restoration. Therefore, what motivated this prayer?

Seventy years have passed since Jeremiah uttered the prophecy that Daniel now considers. After so many years, Daniel's Jerusalem friends have likely already perished. Jerusalem's restoration would not restore Daniel's personal fortunes either. Nothing in Daniel's prayer suggests selfish concerns. The ancient prophet expressly implores God regarding the future of the exiled Jewish nation and the reputation of Jehovah Himself. Extended confession precedes his requests. In confession, Daniel includes himself among the disobedient. The prophet is unwilling to presume his own innocence. Daniel himself takes responsibility while primarily pursuing restoration in order to benefit others.

Think about your prayer life: what you pray for, why, and for whom. How much death to self is involved in it? How can you learn to be less self-centered in your prayer life? That is, how can your prayers, even the ones for yourself, be less selfish?

Time for Prayer

Think through what prayer really is: fallen, sinful beings, worthy of death, are able, instantly, to have direct communication with the Creator of the universe—our Holy God.

Also, when God in Christ clothed Himself in human flesh, accepting humanity's limitations, He, too, sensed the necessity of prayer. Though not standing before the Father in the same position that we as fallen sinners are, Jesus as a human still saw the necessity for prayer.

Read Matthew 14:22, 23; 26:36; Mark 1:35–37; and Luke 5:15, 16; 6:12, 13. **What characterized Jesus' personal prayer life? Describe the circumstances that surrounded Jesus' praying. What lessons can we glean from the particulars of Christ's prayer life, such as the frequency, location, and timing?**

Christ certainly modeled the prayer life that He enjoined on His disciples. Mornings, evenings, after preaching, before preaching, whenever possible—Jesus prayed. Gardens, mountains, solitary places, wherever distractions subsided—Jesus prayed. Separated from the Father's presence spatially, Jesus united with the Father through prayer spiritually. Christ's spiritual lifeblood came coursing through the spiritual artery of prayer. Should Christ's modern followers—weakened by sinful tendencies, choked by worldly cares, frustrated by failures—settle for something less than Jesus' prayer life?

“Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 93.

Read Mark 11:22–26, Luke 11:13, John 14:12–14. **How are we to understand the promises written here about prayer? How have you experienced what Jesus said here? At the same time, how have you learned to cope when things you have prayed for haven't happened the way that you had hoped?**

Timeless Teaching

Prayer miraculously bonds finite souls with their infinite Creator. Prayer is spiritual adhesive. Bonded with the heavenly Father, believers transcend their earthly natures and sinful tendencies. This transformation separates them from the world. Should Satan successfully recast prayer into a self-centered mold, thus robbing prayer of its potential for our transformation, we might be powerfully compromised and our witness stymied.

Read Matthew 6:7, 8; 7:7–11; 18:19, 20. What do these verses teach us about prayer?

The sincere believer trusts in God’s ability to honor His promises. Never has anyone lodged a request that intimidates God. His authority is unlimited, His strength unmatched. God’s people approach heaven’s portals with trust in the Lord—that He will do what is best for us, even if we can’t see it at the time. Faith is not simply trusting in what we can see; true faith is trusting God when we can’t see the outcome that we want and anticipate (*see Heb. 11:1–7*). No doubt, as long as you serve the Lord, as long as you walk in faith, you will have to trust in God even when you don’t see things working out as you had hoped, or even prayed for. Even a quick reading of the Bible will show you that you will not be alone either.

Read Matthew 6:9–15, 26:39. What do these verses teach?

Trust should not be confused with arrogance or insolence. Boldly approaching God’s throne involves no sense of entitlement. The believer’s demeanor is characterized by boldness and humility. In Gethsemane, Christ plainly declared His preference but concluded, “ ‘Not My will, but Yours’ ” (*Luke 22:42, NKJV*). In addition to complete surrender, a forgiving spirit is another indication of humility. We ourselves, having been forgiven so much, must do the same to others.

Are you angry with someone, finding it hard to forgive? Take it to the Lord in prayer. Pray for yourself that you will learn to forgive. Pray for that person. Over time, what do you think will happen?

Timeless Compassion

Christ was the embodiment of perfection; that is, all God's perfections were revealed in Him. Thus, was anyone ever more compassionate than Christ? Who possessed a stronger desire than Jesus to alleviate human distress?

We, therefore, ask, What relationship did Christ's compassion and intercession have with discipleship?

Read Luke 22:31, 32 and John 17:6–26 (see also Heb. 2:17). **How did Jesus' identification with humanity influence His intercessory prayers? What are the ultimate objectives of Christ's intercessory prayers?**

Jesus could effectively intercede on His disciples' behalf because He was actively engaged in their lives, thoroughly understood them, and passionately desired their good. Effective intercession today demands nothing less. The twenty-first century disciple-maker will discard time-consuming pursuits that interfere with his or her relationships with lost souls. Making money, achieving fame, even educational excellence must become subservient to the greater goal of the redemption of the lost. This is an important truth that so easily slips from sight, because we are so often caught in the daily grind of living.

Jesus invested Himself in the lives of His disciples. He visited their homes, became acquainted with their relatives, spent leisure time in their company, and worked alongside them. Nothing significant to their lives escaped His notice. Disciple-making today requires more than tract distribution and airtight biblical argumentation. Praying in a sympathetic consciousness of another's distress, and with a passionate desire to alleviate that distress, is still the standard of intercessory prayer in effective disciple-making.

Though it can sound quaint, there's a lot of truth in the statement "People care little about what you know until they know how much you care."

Timeless Compassion Replicated

The sincerest offering of praise is imitation. Christ's earliest disciples imitated their Master's prayer life. Naturally, they prayed for personal safety, for their daily necessities, and for individual spiritual guidance. Nevertheless, intercessory prayer became an important component of their discipleship.

Read Acts 1:13, 14; 1 Timothy 2:1–4; James 5:13–16; 1 John 5:16; Jude 20–22; and 1 Peter 4:7. **What role did prayer assume in the early church? What were some of the specific situations for which they prayed? What can we learn from these examples?**

Constant prayer anchored the early church. Whenever Paul departed for missionary purposes, he was commissioned through prayer (*Acts 13:3, 14:23*). Even their farewells were clothed in prayer (*Acts 20:36, 21:5*). Frequently their prayers assumed the form of intercession. They prayed for government leaders, fellow believers, and, generally speaking, everyone! Paul interceded for the father of Publius, the chief official who suffered from dysentery. Even when he lay dying, Stephen interceded for his murderers. The centrality of prayer among the earliest believers can hardly be overstated. Scripture says that prayer pleases God because He desires salvation for everyone and seeks the advancement of truth. Through prayer—combined with apostolic teaching, fervent preaching, miraculous wonders, and loving fellowship—the early church rapidly multiplied. Despite vigorous persecution, Christianity enveloped the empire. Thousands upon thousands accepted the gospel. Transformed lives burned as living lights from Caesar's palace to points unknown.

How much time do you spend in intercessory prayer? Think through your answer. Better yet, perhaps the question should be, How much more time should you spend in intercessory prayer?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “A Reformatory Movement,” p. 126, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9; “By Personal Efforts and Living Faith,” pp. 244, 245, in *Medical Ministry*.

“He who does nothing but pray will soon cease to pray, or his prayers will become a formal routine. When men take themselves out of social life, away from the sphere of Christian duty and cross bearing; when they cease to work earnestly for the Master, who worked earnestly for them, they lose the subject matter of prayer and have no incentive to devotion. Their prayers become personal and selfish. They cannot pray in regard to the wants of humanity or the upbuilding of Christ’s kingdom, pleading for strength wherewith to work.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 101.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why does an absence of intercessory prayer stunt the growth of the church? Conversely, how does an active intercessory prayer life stimulate disciple-making activity? What are the keys to effective intercessory prayer? How can the intercessor know what to pray about?
- 2 What should members do on behalf of those for whom they pray that would go beyond their private petitions at home? How can members build relationships with the neighbors, relatives, and coworkers for whom they pray? Why should private prayers for others always be accompanied by sustained efforts to be friends with those same people?
- 3 What steps should twenty-first-century Christians take to experience dynamic prayer lives? What is the relationship between successful disciple-making and the encountering of God’s divine presence through prayer? Can prayer change those prayed for without first changing those who pray for them? How might the subject matter for prayer be altered by having passion for lost souls? What impact does personal holiness and prayer have on the would-be soul winner’s capacity for the sharing of truth?
- 4 What specific things can believers do to expand their contacts with those who have not accepted Christ? What can Christians do to get beyond surface relationships with their peers so that they will know specific needs for which to pray?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *John 17:20, 21*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize that prayer is an essential ingredient in the life of a disciple.

Feel: Affirm the importance and necessity of prayer while also admitting that it is a practice bathed in mystery.

Do: Cultivate an attitude of prayer that permeates his or her daily life.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Prayer Is Not Just About “Getting Things.”

A Name some of the Bible’s great heroes of prayer. In what ways do their experiences reflect our ideals about prayer?

B What one word would you use to describe effective prayer? Why did you choose that one? What does it say about God?

II. Feel: Effective Prayer Doesn’t Have a Secret Formula.

A Prayer is communication with God, pure and simple. What subjects are most likely to come up in your conversations with God? Why those?

B Does it matter to you that God cares about what you care about? How does it feel to know that He’s heard your prayer?

C Why is it so hard to give God the freedom to answer our prayers in His own time?

III. Do: Pray Without Ceasing.

A The Bible’s great heroes of prayer were those to whom God was an ever-present reality. How do you cultivate that reality in your life?

B In what ways do your family, friends, and coworkers understand that you’re a person of prayer?

► **Summary:** There is power in prayer. It is not that we tell God what to do and He does it. It is that, through prayer, we think His thoughts and live accordingly.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *John 17:20, 21*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Prayer is an essential ingredient in the life of discipleship. It involves much more than just getting answers.

Just for Teachers: Most people entertain a lot of misconceptions about prayer. They treat it as though it were some kind of magic formula that “forces” God to do whatever we ask of Him. Others believe that if they don’t receive what they ask for, they’re not praying hard enough or that their spiritual experience is somehow deficient. This week’s lesson will show that answered prayer is not necessarily a reliable barometer of someone’s spiritual condition. Lots of godly people pray without realizing answers to their prayers.

Opening Activity/Discussion: Begin your conversation by having each member of your class describe his or her earliest memories of experiences with prayer. Such experience could include simple prayers (“Now I lay me down to sleep . . .”), involve some notable answers to prayer, or involve some crisis in which heartfelt prayers seemed to have been ignored. Be sure to provide a safe place where people can share their experiences frankly—their faith as well as their doubts.

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: It’s easy to simplify the experience of prayer, leaving the impression that God “always” does this or that He “never” does that. In fact, as we will see, prayer is one of the most mysterious of all God’s activities in our experience. We should always pray, but we should avoid claiming too much credit for what happens when we pray.

Bible Commentary

I. The Prayer of a Righteous Man (*Review Daniel 9:2–19 with your class.*)

Among the interesting aspects of Daniel’s prayer are these:

First, Daniel prayed in the first-person plural (we). This is significant because we often assume the role of *intercessors*; that is, we pray as if the

problem rests with someone other than ourselves. But Daniel prayed, “ ‘We have sinned and done wrong. *We* have been wicked and have rebelled; *we* have turned away from your commands and laws’ ” (*Dan. 9:5, NIV; emphasis added*). Even though Daniel is one of the few characters in the Bible about whom nothing negative is written, Daniel still identified with his people who, no doubt, were guilty of all the things he mentioned. When Daniel prayed, he didn’t seek to fix the blame on “them”; instead, he used the pronouns “we,” “us,” and “our.” He fully identified with his people.

After Daniel confessed his and his people’s sin, he extolled God in terms that recognized God’s majestic power. Daniel used words such as “great,” “awesome” (*vs. 4, NIV*), “righteous” (*vs. 7, NIV*), “merciful,” “forgiving” (*vs. 9, NIV*). In other words, after confessing his and his people’s shortcomings, Daniel acknowledges that their only hope is in the mercy and forgiveness of a great and righteous God.

Daniel’s request is simple and to the point: “ ‘O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act!’ ” (*vs. 19, NIV*). Daniel doesn’t presume to tell God what to do; he only asks that God will act on behalf of His people.

Consider This: While we are taught to pray earnestly and persistently, Daniel’s prayer reminds us to trust God to act in our behalf in a way that best suits His purposes, not ours. What other examples of effective, powerful prayer can you recall from the Bible? Have you ever prayed as Daniel prayed? If so, what was the result? If not, why not?

II. Praying Without Ceasing (*Review Mark 1:35 with your class.*)

The example of Jesus getting up to pray while it was still dark, along with the record that Jesus often spent entire nights in prayer, has led some to assume that God is somehow honored if we sacrifice sleep in favor of a more strident prayer life.

But nowhere (except perhaps in the Garden of Gethsemane) did Jesus give the impression that there is any virtue in praying instead of sleeping.

That being said, we can all remember situations in which we were so burdened by situations and circumstances beyond our control that sleeping, even eating, was all but impossible. Additionally, while our burdens prevented us from sleeping, our only hope came from clinging to God and, like Jacob, praying, “ ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me’ ” (*Gen. 32:26, NIV*).

If anything, Jacob’s protracted wrestling match with the Angel and the long, dark hours of Christ’s Gethsemane experience teach us the value of persistence and perseverance in prayer.

Consider This: Prayer, like salvation, is about faith, not works. We pray not in order to twist God’s arm so that He’ll give us what we ask but

because we can't do anything else. (Where else would we go?) When do you find it most difficult to pray? How do you overcome this difficulty? Define prayer by finishing this sentence: "For me, prayer is . . ."

III. Praying Without Answers *(Review 2 Corinthians 12:7–10 and Luke 22:39–44 with your class.)*

Sadly, too many Christians, when they confide that their prayers don't seem to be answered, are informed that they don't have enough faith or that they have been praying the "wrong" way. In other words, if they had more faith or if they prayed correctly, God would be obligated to answer their prayers.

While this sounds plausible in theory, in fact, prayer doesn't work like that. We pray to an all-wise, all-loving God, because we can't trust ourselves to ask for the right things or even to know what the right things are.

Consider the apostle Paul: he mentions "a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan," sent "to torment" him (*2 Cor. 12:7, NIV*). No one would accuse Paul of being faithless; yet, no matter how much he prayed for relief, God allowed his request to go unanswered, or so it seemed.

With the benefit of hindsight, Paul was able to admit that God knew what He was doing. "He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'" (*vs. 9, NIV*). And Paul was able to conclude, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses. . . . For when I am weak, then I am strong" (*vss. 9, 10, NIV*).

Another example of a prayer that seemingly went "unanswered" is Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (*Luke 22:39–44*). With the weight of the sins of the entire world on His shoulders, no one would blame Jesus for begging His Father to remove that burden from Him. (One could argue that the Father did remove it—but only after Christ gained the victory over sin through His death and resurrection.)

Instead, Jesus bowed before the perfect will of His Father and allowed Himself to be taken as the plan of salvation demanded. While Jesus had enough "faith" to deliver Himself from certain death, He also had enough "faith" to go ahead and play His part in the salvation of humanity.

Consider This: Does it take more faith to get what we want when we pray or, after stating our case before a loving God, to accept what He offers on the basis of His perfect will? Discuss.

Discussion Questions:

❶ Would you rather worship a God who can be persuaded to answer our prayers no matter what? Or would you rather believe in a God who answers prayers in such a way that sometimes they may only be fully explained and understood in eternity? Discuss.

- ② What Bible character, text, promise, et cetera has been most influential in your understanding of prayer as a spiritual discipline? Why?

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The subject of prayer is not only complex, it also has the potential of being a source of guilt. While some people, it seems, are always ready to share a story about some incredible answer to prayer, for others, a real, live answer to prayer is rare. For this reason, this subject has to be presented with great sensitivity.

Life Application: When Paul told the saints in Thessalonica to “pray continually” (*1 Thess. 5:17, NIV*), he wasn’t saying that they had to stay continually on their knees; he was saying that their hearts and minds should always be in an attitude of prayer.

Activity: Invite each member of the class to share experiences of unusual places or unorthodox ways in which they’ve found to pray “without ceasing.”

- ① Simply put, prayer is communication—both talking and listening. When has God spoken to you? What did He say?

- ② How do you know when you’re praying “well”?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The success of one’s prayer life has nothing to do with how many answers one receives or what one receives physically as a result of praying. Success is measured more by how well we have communicated with God, both in talking and in listening.

Activity: Hand out pieces of paper, where such supplies are available. Have each class member grade his or her prayer life on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the highest), and write the number on the paper without showing it to anyone. Have each member fold his or her paper, and put it in a basket or a hat.

Mix up the pieces of paper. Then pull them from the basket one by one, reading each number without comment. After all the numbers have been read, conclude your class by praying that each person will experience God in a new way as a result of his or her individual prayer life. (Alternatively, do this exercise without supplies, ask each class member to silently contemplate his or her prayer life and any improvements he or she might like to experience in it [i.e., more prayer, deeper faith, etc.]. Then conclude class with prayer for a more meaningful prayer life for each member.)

Discipling Children



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 127:3–5; Deut. 6:6, 7; Luke 2:40–52; Matt. 18:1–6; 10–14; Mark 10:13–16.*

Memory Text: “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read, “From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise”?” ” (*Matthew 21:16, NIV*).

In our desire to preach to the world and to make disciples from every nation, we must not forget a whole class of people—children. Christian studies regarding children and youth differ about many things. Nevertheless, across denominational lines one thing seems consistent: the majority of Christians have committed their lives to Christ at a relatively young age. Fewer converts come from the older populace. Many churches apparently miss this important fact in their evangelistic planning, directing the greatest proportion of their resources toward the adult population. Christ's earliest disciples also seem to have underestimated the value of children's ministry. Jesus rejected that attitude and made room for children, even giving them priority.

Hence, we must do the same.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 25.

The Hebrew Child's Advantage

Hebrew children enjoyed special treatment when compared with their ancient counterparts from surrounding nations. Child sacrifice as divine appeasement had permeated many cultures. Otherwise, children's value was often measured by their economic contributions to society. Work productivity, not intrinsic worth, defined their relationship with the adult world. It is painful to say that some of these attitudes, especially when it comes to economic worth, are found even in our present world. Truly, the day of wrath must come.

Evidently Israel's apostasy affected the population's estimate of children. Manasseh's dalliance with witchcraft and other national religions induced the sacrificing of his sons (*2 Chron. 33:6*). Nevertheless, Manasseh's reign was the exception rather than the rule; under more spiritual leadership, Israelites greatly valued their offspring.

Read Psalm 127:3–5; 128:3–6; Jeremiah 7:31; Deuteronomy 6:6, 7. What do these texts suggest about God's estimate of children? How might a proper understanding of Scripture affect our relationships with children?

Education, birthright, and many other cultural practices clearly demonstrated how valuable children were in the ancient Hebrew culture. Not surprisingly, Christ expanded the already exalted position of children, as compared with surrounding cultures, to new dimensions. After all, children are human beings, and Christ's death was for every person, whatever their age—a point we should never forget.

It's hard to believe that there are adults so corrupted, so evil, so degraded that they hurt children, sometimes even their own. How can we, in whatever situation we are in, do everything we can to love, protect, and nurture the children within our sphere of influence?

Jesus' Childhood

Had Jesus bypassed childhood, arriving as a full-fledged adult on planet Earth, serious questions might be raised regarding His ability to identify with children. Christ, however, developed as all children must, skipping none of the developmental stages associated with growth and maturity. He understands teenage temptations. He underwent the frailties and insecurities of childhood. Christ encountered those challenges that, in their own sphere, all children face. His experiencing childhood was another crucial way in which our Savior revealed His true humanity.

Read Luke 2:40–52. What does this teach about Jesus' childhood?

“Among the Jews the twelfth year was the dividing line between childhood and youth. On completing this year a Hebrew boy was called a son of the law, and also a son of God. He was given special opportunities for religious instruction, and was expected to participate in the sacred feasts and observances. It was in accordance with this custom that Jesus in His boyhood made the Passover visit to Jerusalem.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 75.

According to the texts, Jesus acquired wisdom. God bestowed grace on Him. From Christ's boyhood temple encounter during the Passover visit, we can see that Jesus had deep scriptural wisdom. Rabbinical teachers were markedly impressed by Jesus' questions and answers.

God surely used multiple childhood experiences to shape that attractively flawless character. Perhaps the discipline of learning carpentry skills, the attention of devoted parents, regular exposure to Scripture, and His interactions with Nazareth's townspeople formed the foundation of His early upbringing. In the end, however remarkable a child Jesus was, He had still been—as we all have been—a child.

“The child Jesus did not receive instruction in the synagogue schools. His mother was His first human teacher. From her lips and from the scrolls of the prophets, He learned of heavenly things. The very words which He Himself had spoken to Moses for Israel He was now taught at His mother's knee.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 70. Dwell on the incredible implications of those words. What do they teach us about the humanity of Christ?

Healing the Children

Read the following passages: Matthew 9:18–26, Mark 7:24–30, Luke 9:37–43, John 4:46–54. Whose children were restored in these stories? How are these children’s backgrounds similar? What differences might you detect? What lessons can we learn from these texts that can help us today?

In all these stories, one overwhelming similarity is that, in each case, a desperate parent came to Jesus, seeking help for a child. What parent cannot relate? What parent hasn’t felt pain, anguish, fear, and outright horror when a child was very sick, or even dying? For those who have been there, there’s nothing worse.

And though Jesus Himself had not been a parent, He related enough to them in His humanity that He healed their children. In each case, the healing came. He turned no one away. Thus, His love, not just for the parents but for the children, came through clearly.

Of course, this leads to a whole host of questions regarding cases when praying and pleading parents call out to Jesus and, yet, their children are not healed. There is, perhaps, no sadder experience than burying children. Death should be reserved for older generations. The unnatural order of parents mourning their children’s deaths makes the heart revolt. During these funerals, nearly every parent asks, “Shouldn’t it have been me?”

Mourning physical death and observing spiritual decay may be equally painful. How many parents have agonized about children overwhelmed by drug addiction, by pornography, or adolescent indifference? Whatever the affliction, we must learn to trust in the Lord and His goodness and love, even when things do not turn out so happily, as they did in the biblical stories listed above. Ellen G. White, a prophet, buried two children. Our world is a rough place. Our God, though, is a loving God, and that truth is what we must cling to, no matter what.

A Fearsome Warning

Analyze the following texts: Matthew 11:25, 26; 18:1–6, 10–14. What truths, not just about children but about faith in general, can we learn through these stories? Think about just how harsh Jesus' warning was here. Why should we tremble before it?

There exists a unique genuineness within children that Jesus frequently appealed to when illustrating His kingdom. Their genuineness, humility, dependency, and innocence somehow capture the essence of Christian living. We should all long for that simplicity and trust in living out our faith.

Modern disciple-makers need to learn another lesson: children need never leave their childlike dependency behind. Properly educated, children may carry their trusting innocence into adulthood. Certainly, as children mature and get older, they will question things, they will have struggles and doubts and unanswered questions, as we all do. But a childlike faith is never unfashionable. As parents, or as adults in general, we should do all that we can to instill in children a knowledge of God and His love, and nothing can do that more than by revealing that love to them through our lives, our kindness, our compassion, and our care. We can preach and sermonize all we want; in the end, as with adults, the best way to disciple children is to live out before them the love of God in our lives.

In cold, fearsome, and stark contrast, criminal acts against children—especially during church-sponsored activities—can destroy a child's confidence about the church and, usually, about the God of the church. What wrath must justly await those who perpetrate such actions and those who protect the perpetrators. Christ and His message awaken confidence and trust. How dare any human organization compromise that childlike faith through lack of vigilance?

What is your church doing not only to nurture its children but also to make sure that they are protected in every way possible? Think what it means when Jesus said their angels “do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 18:10). Why should that make anyone who hurts a child tremble?

Suffer the Little Children

Read Mark 10:13–16. How does Christ’s acceptance of children facilitate their acceptance of Him? How should His rebuke of the disciples be understood? What must we take away from this account for ourselves and how we relate to children?

Surely Christ’s disciples were well-intentioned, although ignorant. They attempted to protect His valuable time, preserving His energy for more “important” matters. How greatly they misunderstood what Jesus wanted them to know.

Imagine being forsaken by gruff adults only to be embraced by the loving and caring personage of Jesus. No wonder children embraced Him. In this story, we have been left with an invaluable example regarding the ways in which children should be treated by those who profess to be disciple-makers.

“In the children who were brought in contact with Him, Jesus saw the men and women who should be heirs of His grace and subjects of His kingdom, and some of whom would become martyrs for His sake. He knew that these children would listen to Him and accept Him as their Redeemer far more readily than would grown-up people, many of whom were the worldly wise and hardhearted. In His teaching He came down to their level. He, the Majesty of heaven, did not disdain to answer their questions, and simplify His important lessons to meet their childish understanding. He planted in their minds the seeds of truth, which in after years would spring up, and bear fruit unto eternal life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 512–515.

How often have we met adults who suffer through so much pain, so much turmoil, so much heartache over things that happened to them in their childhood? What should this tell us about how gently, carefully, prayerfully, and lovingly we should treat children?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Blessing the Children,” pp. 511–517; “The Temple Cleansed Again,” p. 592, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Baptism,” pp. 93–95, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6; “Bible Teaching and Study,” pp. 185, 186, in *Education*.

“It is still true that children are the most susceptible to the teachings of the gospel; their hearts are open to divine influences, and strong to retain the lessons received. The little children may be Christians, having an experience in accordance with their years. They need to be educated in spiritual things, and parents should give them every advantage, that they may form characters after the similitude of the character of Christ.

“Fathers and mothers should look upon their children as younger members of the Lord’s family, committed to them to educate for heaven. The lessons that we ourselves learn from Christ we should give to our children, as the young minds can receive them, little by little opening to them the beauty of the principles of heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 515.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why do you think it’s true that many who accept Christ do so when younger rather than when they are older? Skeptics could argue that it’s because they are too naive and ignorant to realize the silliness of what they are doing. On the other hand, could it be because they have yet to be so hardened and tainted with cynicism and skepticism as are many adults? That is, their innocence and openness make them more susceptible to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Discuss.
- 2 How can today’s church organize to become more Christlike in its appeal to children? What can each member personally do to be friendlier toward youth who may experiment with bizarre fashions, unusual musical tastes, and sometimes outlandish behavior? How can the church become more energetic, thus attracting active youth?
- 3 What steps may members take to prepare themselves to respond to interested youth who desire baptism and a life-changing commitment to Christ?
- 4 Dwell more on the attributes of children that caused Jesus to say “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (*Matt. 18:3*). What does that text mean? At the same time, what does that not mean?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Matthew 21:16*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Realize that he or she doesn't have to be a parent to be open to ministry to children. Every adult is a mentor of some kind.

Feel: Nurture the feeling that there's nothing more valuable than identifying the talents of children and encouraging them to cultivate the talents in service to Christ.

Do: Make it a practice every week to interact in some positive way with the children in his or her church, school, or community.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Children Are Little Packages of God-Given Potential.

A Try to remember when you were a child. How would you describe your relationship with the church?

B How were you regarded by the adults in your life—your parents, your pastor, and your teachers?

C What do you wish those adults knew about your childhood dreams and aspirations?

II. Feel: Jesus' Tender Regard for Children

A How does your picture of Jesus correspond with your attitude toward the children in your life?

B How do the children in your life regard you? What do they know about God as a result of their interactions with you?

III. Do: Reflecting Jesus' Love to His Youngest Disciples

A How will your life be different this week as a result of seeing children as Jesus sees them?

B With what ages of children are you most comfortable working? Why those?

► **Summary:** The earlier we can train disciples for Christ, the better. But sometimes, instead of cultivating their talent and enthusiasm when they're young, we tell them, "Come back when you're older." That is a mistake.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Matthew 21:16*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The heart of Jesus was always touched by those who were vulnerable and at risk. This explains His passion for embracing children.

Just for Teachers: Many of us can remember when the adage “Children should be seen and not heard” was a given in most societies. Now most people in our churches are enlightened enough to know that God has a high regard for children. Yet, while they may acknowledge that children’s ministries are an important component of any healthy congregation, they may also express the attitude that children’s ministries are someone else’s responsibility. This week’s lesson is a reminder that we’re all responsible for helping turn children into disciples.

Opening Activity/Discussion: Have the members of your class recall their experiences growing up in the church. Who were their Sabbath School teachers? What songs did they sing? What do they remember about their pastors? Did they feel as though the church was a friendly place, or did they think of themselves as “invisible”?

How about people who didn’t have the benefit of a Christian background? What do they think they missed? If they didn’t have Christian influences as children, how did they come to know about Christ?

Those of us who grew up in the church, though, will never forget the lyrics: “There’s another task to do, / There’s a battle to renew; / And the Captain calls for you, / Volunteers! Volunteers!” (And what about: “Into the tent where a gypsy boy lay, / Dying alone at the close of the day”?) And how can we forget: “Standing by a purpose true, / Heeding God’s command, / Honor them the faithful few! / All hail to Daniel’s Band!”?

Church school, Pathfinders, Junior Missionary Volunteer (JMV) Society, Harvest Ingathering: these are our indelible memories. Where would we be without them?

Discuss: How did our earliest experiences in the church shape us as children, for good or for bad? What can we take away from these moments that can help us to grow disciples for Christ among the children of today?

► STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: We're not all parents, but we were all once children. And even though parents are primarily responsible for their children's emotional, physical, and spiritual development, there's still much we can do as part of a support team to make sure the children in our churches and communities are exposed to God's love and Christian principles.

Bible Commentary

I. Sermons in Shoes *(Review Deuteronomy 6:4–9 with your class.)*

The great, overarching mandate for Jews of countless generations is summarized in this passage called the *Shema*, which means the imperative, “Hear!”

Israelites were enjoined not only to remember and observe all the ancient principles of their faith but also to communicate those principles to their children. Of course, that communication took place verbally, but it also took place by example: “when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (*Deut. 6:7, NIV*).

Consider This: Childhood is a time of discovery. Kids learn what's dangerous and what's safe. They look to their parents and other adults for information that they can trust. This doesn't happen only at school, church, or other times of formal instruction. It also happens at picnics, hikes, driving in the car, at sporting events, et cetera. If you're an adult and a child is present, you're a mentor. You will be tested. Kids will decide that God can be trusted if they find they can trust you. What role models in your childhood and youth persuaded you that God could be trusted? What children or youth have you been able to influence for Christ and His kingdom? How did you do it?

II. The Gift of Life *(Review Matthew 9:18–26, Mark 7:24–30, Luke 9:37–43, and John 4:46–54 with your class.)*

There's nothing more final than death and nothing more tragic than children dying before they grow and develop their personalities, talents, and potential. That's what makes these miracles so significant. Jesus was not only restoring a member of the family, He was also restoring all the hopes and dreams the parents had for their children.

Beyond that, Jesus was giving those children a gift they would remember

the rest of their lives: the opportunity of knowing they had been saved for a purpose—growing up to honor God and use their talents for His glory.

Consider This: Anyone who has any contact with children knows that beneath those innocent exteriors lie unimaginable potential. Sure, now they're awkward and ungainly, but in 15 or 20 years they could be in a seminary, medical, or law school, at the controls of some supersonic jet airliner, developing the latest Internet site, or sitting behind a news desk on network TV. How does your congregation demonstrate the high regard it has for its children and youth? Is that enough? Explain. What success stories can you tell about the children and youth who attended your church school or Sabbath School?

III. The Least of These *(Review Matthew 18:1–7 with your class.)*

One of the reasons Jesus stood up for children is because they often have no one else to advocate for them. Of course, they have parents, grandparents, teachers, and mentors, but we often learn (too late) about some child who slipped through the cracks and fell into perilous habits.

Sometimes it seems as though the devil aims his most powerful weapons at our children and youth. Is there a way to fortify them against worldly temptations?

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ When you were a child, who were the mentors who kept you on the “straight and narrow”? How did they do it?
- ❷ What temptations did you struggle with when you were a child? How do they compare with the temptations faced by today's children and youth?
- ❸ As you think about the temptations faced by many of our children and youth, what strategies can the church develop to mitigate the strength of those temptations?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: **It's easy to talk in the abstract about discipling kids; who's going to argue with that? But taking the members of your class from understanding to action is the difference between theory and practice.**

Life Application: We all know from the Bible and from personal experience that childhood is the best time to reach people with the gospel and train them to be disciples. That's the premise of this Bible promise: “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (*Prov. 22:6*,

NI). This promise isn't only for parents; it's for every adult who wants to keep children and youth engaged in the church and connected to Jesus Christ.

① Make a list of at least five, possibly as many as ten, influences with which today's children and youth have to cope.

② Make a list of at least five, possibly as many as ten, ways in which the church can counteract those worldly influences. What, if anything, is your congregation doing to ensure this?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: From time to time, Sabbath School classes have found it useful to adopt some kind of outreach or nurture project as a way of focusing the classes on an activity they could rally behind. What particular ministry for the kids in your church would you be willing to try?

Activity: Brainstorm a list of at least thirty ideas that your Sabbath School class would be willing to try to benefit/mentor the kids in your church. Write your ideas on a flip chart or white board, if available. Just list them without comment; good ideas are often sparked by “bad” or “half-baked” ideas, so encourage everyone to participate. And remember, these are ideas your class can participate in as a group. Possibilities might include the following:

- Establish a class fund to help a student from a single-parent family to attend a Seventh-day Adventist school.
- Take the kids to sing to the elderly. Afterward, treat the children to a fun activity or dessert.
- Partner with a children's Sabbath School class to provide Sabbath School supplies to Seventh-day Adventists in another part of the world.
- Take the Primary Sabbath School class to some fun place.
- Take the Junior Sabbath School class water- or snow-skiing or on a hike.
- Hand out helium-filled balloons after church one Sabbath a month to all the kids.
- Show up at all the school programs (whether church-oriented or public-school oriented).

Have some fun! Be a little spontaneous and imaginative, and you will give the kids in your church something to remember. Then, if the Lord hasn't returned in 40 years and the kids in your church are adults, they'll remember you as the ones who kept them connected to Christ.

Discipling *the* Sick



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 53:4, Matt. 8:17, Mark 2:1–12, Phil. 4:4–9, 1 John 3:20–22, John 11:37–44.*

Memory Text: “Large crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel” (*Matthew 15:30, 31, NIV*).

During His ministry, Jesus devoted more time to healing the sick than to preaching. His miracles testified to the truth of His words, that He came not to destroy, but to save. Wherever He went, the tidings of His mercy preceded Him. Where He had passed, the objects of His compassion were rejoicing in health and making trial of their new-found powers. Crowds were collecting around them to hear from their lips the works that the Lord had wrought. His voice was the first sound that many had ever heard, His name the first word they had ever spoken, His face the first they had ever looked upon. Why should they not love Jesus and sound His praise? As He passed through the towns and cities He was like a vital current, diffusing life and joy.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 19, 20.

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

The Healing Messiah

Read Isaiah 53:4, Matthew 8:17, John 9:1–3. In what way are we to understand these texts? What questions do they raise? What hope do they offer us?

In antiquity, sickness was considered the result of sinful actions. (And even today, who hasn't at times—even if only for a moment—wondered if illness, either one's own or that of a loved one, wasn't brought on as a punishment for sin?) In the book of Job, Job's friends suggested that his misfortunes, which included personal illness, resulted from hidden faults; the implication was that somehow his sinfulness caused his predicament. Similarly, Christ's disciples understood blindness as the punishment for someone's sinfulness. This suggests that sickness required not diagnosis or medication but atonement. Matthew references Isaiah's Messianic prophecy, stating that Christ fulfilled this prediction and that healing can be found in Him.

Various ancient pagan traditions included healing deities; none, however, proposed that gods actually took the infirmities upon themselves. Isaiah foretold a Redeemer who would assume our sicknesses and sinfulness. Other ancient traditions made provision for substitutionary atonement in order to benefit royalty. Substitutes were sacrificed in the king's place in order to satisfy divine designs against a king, thus transferring evil's punishment from one individual to another. Nowhere, however, were there traditions of kings dying as substitutes for their subjects.

This, however, is exactly what Isaiah said, and what Matthew confirmed: heaven's Royalty suffering human sicknesses. Interestingly enough, the word translated as “griefs” in Isaiah 53:4 comes from a Hebrew word that means, basically, “sickness” or “disease.”

Jesus recognized that His mission was both to preach deliverance and to heal the brokenhearted (*Luke 4:17–19*). He attracted many through the power that came from His love and character. Others followed Him because they admired His easily understood preaching. Still others became disciples because of how He treated the impoverished. Many, however, followed Christ because He had touched and healed their brokenness.

We all have our broken places. How can we learn to disciple others through sympathy in their own brokenness—a brokenness that we can understand so well because of our own?

Healing the Body

Study Mark 2:1–12. What can we learn regarding the connection between physical sickness and sinfulness? What lessons should we not take from this story, as well?

Contrary to biblical doctrine, ancient Greek philosophy separated the spiritual (soul) and physical (body) dimensions of human existence. Believing that human souls were immortal, many Greeks devalued the importance of their bodies. Because bodies were temporal, passing away with time, they were considered less valuable than was the enduring soul.

In fact, in one of the most famous texts from antiquity, Plato depicts his teacher Socrates, who is about to face death, as waxing long and eloquently on how corrupt and evil the body is, and that at death his immortal soul will finally be free to do all the things that the body has hindered it from doing.

The Bible, of course, teaches something radically different. Human bodies are the direct creation of God, who fearfully and wonderfully made them (*Ps. 139:14*). Furthermore, bodies are not separate from souls. Body, mind, and spirit are merely differing aspects of human personality or existence, not independently existent entities. Consequently, whatever affects the body affects the mind and spirit—the other interrelated aspects of personhood. Thus, whenever Christ healed, He was not merely eradicating cancer or curing heart disease; He was transforming the physical, mental, and spiritual human experience.

Jesus healed more than just bodies. Christ always healed whole persons. His holistic approach recognized that physical health was inseparable from spiritual health. Through physical healing, He effected spiritual transformation. That was, to a great degree, the whole purpose. After all, why heal people who in the long run will die anyway and face eternal destruction at the end of time?

Though sickness can result directly from sinful practices, so often people, even infants, get sick for no obvious reason other than that we are all victims of a fallen world. Why is it so important to keep this sad truth in mind when seeking to minister to anyone who is sick or who is agonizing over a sick loved one?

Healing the Mind and Body

Through physical healing and mental restoration, Jesus made disciples. Often Christ's patients suffered both mental and physical diseases. Physical restoration itself was never the final objective. The ultimate goal was always discipleship. Healing could provide twenty, fifty, perhaps seventy-five additional quality years. Discipleship offered eternal life with Christ.

In Luke 8:26–39, the demon-possessed man from the Gerasene region begged to accompany Jesus. Instead, Christ commissioned him to evangelize his family and townspeople. Having been so miraculously delivered, he could be a powerful witness for Jesus.

Study Matthew 6:19–34, 1 Peter 5:7, 2 Corinthians 4:7–10, Philippians 4:4–9, 1 John 3:20–22. How might the principles taught in these verses relieve the anxiety, guilt, and shame that underlie many mental illnesses?

Physical sickness is sometimes caused by mental stimuli. The relationship between mind and body is well established by medical science. Anxiety predisposes some to stomach problems. Worry causes sleep disorders. Uncontrollable anger factors into heart disease. Teaching people about mental-health principles should highlight the importance of trusting God, naturally leading them toward personal spiritual commitment and full discipleship.

“Each day has its burdens, its cares and perplexities; and when we meet how ready we are to talk of our difficulties and trials. So many borrowed troubles intrude, so many fears are indulged, such a weight of anxiety is expressed, that one might suppose we had no pitying, loving Saviour ready to hear all our requests and to be to us a present help in every time of need.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 121.

Though a close walk with the Lord is no guarantee of good health, there's no question that the peace of mind that comes from knowing the Lord can have a positive impact on us, even physically. What are some practical ways in which we can learn to take the principles taught in today's lesson and apply them to ourselves, especially if we are prone toward worry?

The Resurrection and the Life

In a world where death always has the final word, at least for now, what great hope is found in these verses? *Luke 7:11–17, Mark 5:21–43, John 11:37–44.*

Politicians, entertainers, and athletes must necessarily offer something to generate a following. Politicians utilize hypnotic rhetoric and incredible promises. Entertainers use their abilities to generate emotion and audience identification. Athletes amaze throngs with their physical skills. Envious onlookers follow, wishing they possessed such prowess.

What does Jesus offer? Reduced unemployment? Fatter paychecks? Amazing ball-handling skills? Incredible vocal range? Tear-jerking performances? Instead, Jesus offers something no one else in the world can: eternal life in a new world. In contrast to that, what else matters?

While television shopping networks insult our intelligence with their too-good-to-be-true offers, Jesus seemingly exceeds their excesses with His deal of a lifetime: eternal life offered freely with absolutely no shipping and handling charges! Skeptics would doubtless scoff about such an unprecedented offer. Competitors would manufacture cheap imitations (such as Satan’s immortal-soul concept). Potential buyers would cautiously investigate the claims. So, Jesus provided three known demonstrations to counter the skeptics, expose imitations, and satisfy genuine seekers. Jairus’s daughter, the widow’s son, and, finally, Lazarus proved that this too-good-to-be-true offer was authentic. Disease and accidents might initially prevail, but eternal life would ultimately conquer. Healing would not happen every time it was requested, but everlasting life was guaranteed to all who made Jesus their Savior.

It’s the same with us today. As we know, many times the healing we want just simply does not come in the way that we want it. People linger and suffer for years from debilitating and painful diseases that, far from being healed, sometimes get worse. Others die from disease, despite anointing and prayer. We have no answers as to why, in some cases, healing comes now, and in others it doesn’t.

What we do have, though, is something so much better than even a miraculous healing, and that is the promise of the resurrection to eternal life at the end of the age, when Jesus will come and “the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever” (*Dan. 7:18, NKJV*).

Why is this promise—the promise of eternal life—so crucial and so important to us? Where would we be without it? What hope would you have for anything, anything at all, without it?

Christ's Healing Legacy

Review Acts 3:1–19, 5:12–16, 9:36–42, 20:7–10, 1 Corinthians 12:7–9, 28–31, James 5:13–16. How should modern Christians evaluate the importance of healing ministry to the New Testament church?

First-century disciples witnessed firsthand Christ's promise of seeing "greater things than these" fulfilled (*John 1:50, compare John 5:20, 14:12*). Miraculous healings and resurrections attended the ministries of early Christianity's most prominent disciples: Peter and Paul. These events figured significantly in the early church's growth. God's eternal presence, signified by miraculous healing, influenced thousands of religious leaders to accept Christ. Their flocks often followed.

Sometimes new disciples misunderstood the divine purpose. Simon attempted to purchase miraculous power, revealing self-centered motivations (*Acts 8:9–25*). Most, however, recognized that the significance of these miraculous wonders rested in the fact that they revealed God's presence among them. These displays of divine power proved that God existed and that He was worthy of their praise.

Although Christ had ascended to heaven, throngs still followed Him through the ministries of His disciples. They furthered the mission Jesus had started. They were fulfilling the vision Christ had shared.

Clearly, health was an ongoing concern and a healing ministry an ongoing function of Christ's church. Healing was listed among the spiritual gifts. Instructions for ministering God's healing grace to those afflicted by sickness were recorded in Scripture. These gifts would benefit believers until Christ's second coming, when His personal presence would render them unnecessary. Church history chronicles the dedication of believers to health ministry during many different time periods. Certainly, relieving human suffering was an important motivation. Others, however, recognized healing as the first step toward coming to know the complete gospel.

Further Study: Read Luke 18:35–43; 13:10–17; 14:1–6; John 6:1, 2; Mark 6:5–7, 6:54–56; 7:31–37; 8:22–26; Matthew 8:1–17; 12:15–23. Ellen G. White, “Our Example,” pp. 17–21; “Healing of the Soul,” pp. 73–85, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “The Divine Plan in the Medical Missionary Work,” pp. 25–29, in *Medical Ministry*.

“The paralytic found in Christ healing for both the soul and the body. He needed health of soul before he could appreciate health of body. Before the physical malady could be healed, Christ must bring relief to the mind, and cleanse the soul from sin. This lesson should not be overlooked. There are today thousands suffering from physical disease who, like the paralytic, are longing for the message, ‘Thy sins are forgiven.’ The burden of sin, with its unrest and unsatisfied desires, is the foundation of their maladies. They can find no relief until they come to the Healer of the soul. The peace which He alone can impart would restore vigor to the mind and health to the body. . . .

“In the home of the paralytic there was great rejoicing when he returned to his family, carrying with ease the couch upon which he had been slowly borne from their presence but a short time before. . . . Glad thanksgiving went up from that home, and God was glorified through His Son, who had restored hope to the hopeless and strength to the stricken one. This man and his family were ready to lay down their lives for Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 77, 79.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How can healing ministries open hearts and minds otherwise closed to the gospel? How can Christians guard themselves against the error of thinking that healing is an end in itself?
- 2 How can churches that are not connected with hospitals participate in healing ministry? How can Christians involved with healing ministry avoid association in the public’s mind with so-called faith healers?
- 3 What do we say to those potential disciples who, reading about the healings in the Bible, come to our churches or hospitals in search of a healing that does not happen? What answers do we have for them? What answers do we have for ourselves as we seek to understand these situations? What answers are found in the Bible that can help us at times like these?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Matthew 15:30, 31*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Comprehend that while sickness is always an unwelcome visitor, people afflicted with disease are often open to spiritual influences.

Feel: Desire to minister to those who are sick by serving their emotional and spiritual needs, as well as their physical needs.

Do: Help to alleviate the burdens that affect others spiritually or emotionally.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Illness Is No Indication of a Person’s Spiritual Condition.

A Why was it easy for people in ancient times to blame illness on someone’s displeasing God?

B How did Jesus work to counteract this notion?

C Is that mentality still noticeable in the church? If so, how? How can Jesus’ example be used in our approach to overcoming this mentality?

II. Feel: Jesus Healed Spiritually and Emotionally, as Well as Physically.

A What are your favorite stories of healing in Jesus’ earthly ministry? Why those?

B What clues in those stories help you understand that Jesus was interested in more than physical healing?

III. Do: Be Aware of the Suffering—Apparent and Not-So-Apparent—Around You.

A We often greet people by asking, “How are you?” And the response is usually, “Fine.” How do you know when someone isn’t “fine”?

B Can you remember a time in your life when you felt physically or emotionally sick? What helped you get past it?

► **Summary:** We are still learning about the intimate correlation between physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Jesus knew at a glance how to minister to the people He met. How can we do the same?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Matthew 15:30, 31*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: **Even in an age when life expectancy is on the increase and so much is known about health and healing, sickness is an ever-present reality because of evil in the world.**

Just for Teachers: **Everyone has had to experience sickness. Gone are the days in which people universally looked at sickness and disease as some kind of punishment from a capricious deity. But many people still struggle with the *why* of sickness and suffering. And rather than admit what they don't know, some Christians seek to provide answers rather than comfort.**

Opening Activity/Discussion: Throughout recorded history, people have sought relief from illness with a variety of treatments. On a flip chart or white board, if available, write the following symptoms on the left and their ancient Egyptian herbal prescriptions on the right but in a mixed-up order. When your class has assembled, have the members take turns drawing a line from the symptom to what they think the appropriate, traditional treatment for it is. Have some small gifts to give to those with the most correct answers (lip balm, sunscreen, mouthwash, et cetera). If such supplies are not available, simply name the illness and ask your class if they can guess which one of the traditional treatments or home remedies for it is. The illnesses and their cures are given in their correct order below.

- Pain relief—thyme
- Diuretics and laxatives—dill, balsam, apple, onions, parsley
- Asthma—sesame, honey and milk, frankincense
- Digestive aids—garlic, sandalwood, juniper, mint
- Breath freshener—mint, caraway
- Chest pains—juniper, mustard seeds, aloe
- Headaches—aloe, poppy seeds
- Wound dressing—honey (a natural antibiotic)
- Anesthetic—poppy seeds (also used for insomnia)
- Burns and skin diseases—aloe
- Epilepsy—camphor
- Vomiting—mustard seeds to induce it, mint to stop it

(Source: Robin Fowler “Egyptian Medical Treatments,” Suite 101, <http://suite101.com/a/egyptian-medical-treatments-a20616>, accessed June 19, 2012.)

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Which of these ancient remedies is still used today? In the Bible, sickness was often used as a metaphor for sin. Who is the only remedy, and why?
- ❷ What are the ways in which Christ seeks to heal us today emotionally, spiritually, and mentally, as well as physically?

► STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: One reason Seventh-day Adventists are deeply invested in developing healing ministries within our hospitals, clinics, and medical schools is because we have a good understanding of the relationship between health and spirituality. Though we don't fully understand the relationship between the two, we can't completely appreciate spiritual things and live the "abundant life" if we're suffering from a physical ailment or impediment.

Bible Commentary**I. The Healer and His Helpers** (*Review Mark 2:1–12 with your class.*)

When word began to get around about Jesus' healing powers, people who hoped for relief from their physical suffering were brought to Him. This particular story is interesting for several reasons:

First, the man was powerless to bring himself; he had to rely on the kindness of friends to take him to Jesus. The man apparently chose the right friends, because when they discovered their approach to Jesus was blocked, they refused to admit defeat. They went up to the living space on the flat roof, opened a hole in it, and lowered the man so he could be close to Jesus.

Second, Jesus saw a man obviously in physical distress. But instead of healing him, Jesus' first words were, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (*vs. 5, NIV*).

This, of course, prompted the following response from the teachers of the law: "Why does this fellow talk like that? . . . Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (*vs. 7, NIV*).

But just to show that He had the power to forgive sins, Jesus said to the man, "Get up, take your mat and go home" (*vs. 11, NIV*).

On some level, people who are sick often suffer from some level of guilt; they wonder if there's a reason they are suffering. Unfortunately, we can't predict if or when God will choose to heal. All we can do is trust in God's willingness to do what's best and surround ourselves with friends who will do whatever they have to do to keep us close to Him.

Consider This: Which friends came through for you when you were in physical or emotional distress? What did they do? What have you found most effective in easing the suffering of those around you? What tangible form does comforting take?

II. The Ultimate Cure *(Review John 11:1–44 with your class.)*

The story of Jesus and Lazarus is significant for a number of reasons:

The Bible mentions Mary, Martha, and Lazarus more than once. And it's been suggested that Jesus used to stop by their home in Bethany whenever He was in the area. So, it's kind of surprising that after Jesus had been notified that Lazarus was sick (*vs. 3*), He stayed where He was another two days (*vs. 6*).

Anyone who's ever wondered about God's timing should notice this. Jesus and His disciples could have traveled to Bethany as soon as they heard Lazarus was sick, but they didn't. When they finally showed up, it was too late.

Both Martha and Mary reminded Jesus of the consequences of His delay, as though He were unaware of what He had done. But the reminder gave Him the opportunity to make this well-known and encouraging statement: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies” (*vs. 25, NIV*).

The miracle of the raising of Lazarus, exceptional as it was, is complicated by the fact that, with the exception of Jesus' description of him as “our friend Lazarus” (*vs. 11*), we don't know much about him. We know he had sisters, Mary and Martha; we know that he lived in Bethany; but we don't know what he did for a living or how he came to be acquainted with Jesus.

The point is we don't have to be talented, famous, or rich to be raised to life. Jesus' promise—“I am the resurrection and the life”—applies as much to us as it did to Lazarus.

Consider This: What lessons can we learn from Jesus' delay in answering the request to heal Lazarus? How close to Jesus do you feel at this moment? As close as Lazarus did? Do you think that Jesus would go out of His way to give you your own resurrection? Why, or why not?

III. Our Healing Ministry *(Review Acts 3:1–9, 9:36–42 with your class.)*

The stories about Peter and John at the temple gate Beautiful and Peter and Tabitha (Dorcas) in Joppa remind us that when the Christian church was just getting established, God may have used miraculous healings as a way of endorsing the disciples' ministry. The record about the healing of the lame man by Peter and John states: “When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging . . . , and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had

happened to him” (*Acts 3:9, 10, NIV*).

About Tabitha the Bible says, “This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord” (*Acts 9:42, NIV*).

Consider This: While God’s church today may not demonstrate all the gifts of miraculous healing that the early disciples did, we still have to minister to those who are sick. That ministry is to be the presence of Christ to those who are sick, to support them in their suffering, to run their errands, to assure them of God’s love, and to point them to the One who is “the Resurrection and the Life.”

Discussion Questions:

- ① What spiritual gifts are useful in ministering to those who are sick? Which ones do you have, and how may they be used in this endeavor?
- ② When you’ve been sick, who provided the most support? What form did it take? How was it helpful?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: **Serving people who are sick is as good for us as it is for them. In so doing, we work hand in hand with the One who spent so much time healing during His earthly ministry.**

Life Application: Is there someone in your church who is responsible for keeping track of who is sick or in the hospital? Should there be? Discuss.

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: **Because discipleship is such a hands-on, practical subject, spend some time as a class discussing how a ministry to the sick can be implemented and sustained.**

Activity: Take a few moments to list those in your congregation who would benefit from a little attention from the rest of the congregation. They may not necessarily be sick; they may be elderly or otherwise incapacitated. List all you can think of.

For each name, plan a strategy to stay in touch with that individual. Then list the name of a person in your class (or in another class) who can act as a point person to see that someone is providing physical and moral support to those who need special attention.

Discipling *the* “Ordinary”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Luke 2:21–28; Matt. 15:32–39; 16:13–17; Luke 12:6, 7; 13:1–5; James 2:1–9.*

Memory Text: “Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him” (*Mark 1:16–18*).

Christ’s death was the great equalizer: it showed that we all are sinners in need of God’s grace. In light of the Cross, ethnic, political, economic, and social barriers crumble. Sometimes, though, in our soul winning, we forget that crucial truth, and we especially seek to win those who might be deemed “honorable” or “great” in the eyes of the world.

Not so with Jesus, who saw the meaninglessness and emptiness of worldly greatness and honor. In fact, in many cases, it was the most “successful” people—the favorably positioned Pharisees, the wealthy Sadducees, and the Roman aristocracy—who troubled Him the most. In contrast, the “ordinary” people—carpenters, fishermen, farmers, housewives, shepherds, soldiers, and servants—generally thronged and embraced Him.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 8.

Humble Beginnings

Read Luke 2:21–28, Mark 6:2–4, Leviticus 12:8. What do these verses tell us about the economic class into which Jesus was born? How would that class have influenced His ministry?

Joseph and Mary’s purification offering clearly indicated their economically poor background. This tradition sprang from the Mosaic legislation recorded in Leviticus 12:8, and it required that a lamb be brought for this offering. However, a compassionate exemption had been provided for impoverished people. Turtledoves or pigeons could be substituted because of humble circumstances. Thus, right from the start—from His birth in a stable to the offerings given by His parents—Jesus is portrayed as having assumed His humanity in the home of poor and “ordinary” people. In fact, archaeological evidence also seems to indicate that the town of Nazareth, where Jesus spent His childhood, was a relatively impoverished and unimportant town, as well. And though carpentry is an honorable trade, it certainly didn’t place Him among the “elite.”

“The parents of Jesus were poor, and dependent upon their daily toil. He was familiar with poverty, self-denial, and privation. This experience was a safeguard to Him. In His industrious life there were no idle moments to invite temptation. No aimless hours opened the way for corrupting associations. So far as possible, He closed the door to the tempter. Neither gain nor pleasure, applause nor censure, could induce Him to consent to a wrong act. He was wise to discern evil, and strong to resist it.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 72.

The Creator of all that was made (see John 1:1–3) entered humanity, not just as a human being, an infant, which would have been astonishing enough, but by way of the home of a relatively impoverished family! How are we to respond to something so incredible? What is the only way to respond?

Transforming the “Common”

Read John 2:1–11 and Matthew 15:32–39. How did Jesus use simple, everyday desires and needs to make disciples and transform lives?

“Ordinary” people share natural physical, emotional, and social desires. They want physical nourishment, personal significance, and friendship. Jesus understood these characteristics, placing Himself in social situations that provided opportunities to reach people through these universal desires.

Whether Jesus was changing water into unfermented wine from the fruit of the vine, or turning fishermen into preachers (*Mark 1:16–18*), He specialized in transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary. Onlookers frequently questioned Jesus’ personal credentials (*Mark 6:3*). They questioned the absence of ostentation. Because they longed for the extraordinary, they overlooked that which they considered to be ordinary and did so at what was potentially an eternal loss.

So often Jesus sought people who were considered to be ordinary because, lacking self-sufficiency, they were prepared to trust God completely for their success. People who are enamored by their talents, abilities, and accomplishments cannot often sense their need of something greater than themselves. What a horrible deception! Many among Christ’s contemporaries possessed superior academic training, social position, or personal wealth. Nevertheless, their names have long been forgotten. Remembered, however, are ordinary people—farmers, fishermen, carpenters, shepherds, potters, housewives, domestic servants—who were transformed into extraordinary witnesses for Christ.

We all tend to be a little enamored by the very successful and the very rich, don’t we? How much of that attitude do you see in yourself? How can you learn to keep before yourself the value of all people, regardless of their status, fame, or wealth?

A Flawed Fisherman’s Calling

In the New Testament, Peter stands out as one of the most influential of all the disciples. In fact, he ended up being one of the most influential people in all human history. Talk about changing the “ordinary” into the extraordinary!

Read the following texts. How do they help us to understand how Peter was so radically changed, despite tremendous faults?

Luke 5:1–11. What did Peter say here that showed that he was open to his need of Jesus? Why is this trait so crucial to cultivate in our own lives?

Matthew 16:13–17. What do these verses tell us about Peter and his openness to the Holy Spirit?

Matthew 26:75. What do we also see here that gives us insight into Peter and how God was able to use him?

Jesus, no doubt, spent a great deal of time with Peter, and Peter had many powerful experiences with Him. Though only an “ordinary” fisherman with plenty of faults, through his time with Jesus, Peter was radically converted—even after making some grievous errors, including denying Jesus three times, just as Jesus told him he would.

Though many points emerge from the story of Peter, the moment he first caught a glimpse of who Jesus was, he was aware of his own faults and admitted them. Hence, through patience and forbearance, Jesus was able to turn Peter’s flawed character into someone who helped to change history.

Why must we be so careful about making judgments about those whom we might not deem as “savable”? Why is that so easy to do?

Heavenly Evaluation

An evangelist once celebrated (perhaps bragged about) the attendance of quality upper-class people at his seminars. (One would hope he equally celebrated the attendance of the more “ordinary” types, as well.)

With Christ, however, no class distinctions existed; no one was “ordinary”; everyone was an exception. Not surprisingly, Jesus reached the masses with commonplace illustrations and straightforward speech. Nothing about His manner suggested that anyone was excluded from His concern. Modern disciple-makers must likewise carefully guard against giving the impression that they regard some more highly than they do others in terms of outreach.

Read Luke 12:6, 7; 13:1–5; Matthew 6:25–30. What do these texts teach us about the worth of every person? Of course, it is easy for us to say that we believe this, but in what ways might we be guilty of harboring the kind of distinctions that the universality of the Cross has eradicated forever?

The cheapest birds in the temple marketplace were sparrows. Pairs could be purchased for an *assarion*, the smallest, least valuable copper coin. Nonetheless, commonplace, insignificant sparrows were not forgotten in heaven.

How much more is this the case with human beings, the ones for whom Christ died? Christ died for us, not for birds. The Cross proves, in ways that we cannot begin to fathom, the “infinite worth” (to borrow from a phrase that Ellen G. White used a lot) of every human being, regardless of his or her status in life—a status that is often nothing more than a human concoction based on concepts and attributes that are meaningless in heaven, or even contrary to the very principles of heaven itself.

Ellen G. White wrote that “Christ would have died for one soul in order that that one might live through the eternal ages.” —Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, p. 73. One soul! Dwell on the implications of this incredible concept. How should this influence the ways in which we view not only others but ourselves, as well?

A Classless Society

Perhaps the most socially attractive feature of primitive Christianity was the absence of class distinctions. Dividing walls had crumbled beneath the gospel's weight. The common person triumphed through Christ. Christ transformed the ordinary into the extraordinary. Carpenters, tax collectors, stonecutters, queens, domestic servants, priests, Greeks, Romans, men, women, the wealthy, and the destitute all became equals within Christ's kingdom of grace. In reality, the Christian community was to be a "classless society."

What do each of the following texts teach about our common humanity? Considering the cultural background of the time, and of the Bible writers themselves, why might it not have been so easy for them to grasp this crucial concept?

Gal. 3:28, 29 _____

James 2:1–9 _____

1 Pet. 1:17, 2:9 _____

1 John 3:16–19 _____

Read Acts 2:43–47, 4:32–37. In what ways did early Christians apply, in practice, the principle of universal acceptance? How did the notion that God loves ordinary, everyday people enable the explosive expansion of primitive Christianity? At the same time, we need to ask ourselves, How well do we, individually and collectively, apply these principles to the ways in which we minister to the world? What kinds of things hold us back from doing better in this important area?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Lifework,” pp. 269, 270, in *Education*; and “Laboring for the Middle Class,” pp. 564–566, in *Evangelism*.

“In this closing work of the gospel there is a vast field to be occupied; and, more than ever before, the work is to enlist helpers from the common people. Both the youth and those older in years will be called from the field, from the vineyard, and from the workshop, and sent forth by the Master to give His message. Many of these have had little opportunity for education; but Christ sees in them qualifications that will enable them to fulfill His purpose. If they put their hearts into the work, and continue to be learners, He will fit them to labor for Him.”
—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 269, 270.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why was Jesus so effective in making disciples among the common people? Why was His message not as readily received among the wealthy and socially elite? How might Jesus’ humble upbringing have contributed to His effectiveness in reaching the hearts and minds of ordinary people? How effective in reaching the average person might Jesus have been if He had come as a royal prince or a wealthy landowner?
- 2 Read 1 Corinthians 1:26–29 in class together. What are the key points? Read carefully where Paul wrote that God chose “the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty” (NKJV). What does that mean? How, in the context of being a Christian, are we to understand this fascinating idea? In what ways do these verses show just how twisted and perverted the ways of the world are? How can we make sure that we ourselves don’t get caught up in these corrupted ways?
- 3 What can our Bible study groups do to become more user-friendly for ordinary people? How might that affect our choice of Bible translations? Why should disciple-makers concentrate on practical subjects rather than theoretical ones, especially when first reaching out to people who are hurting and in need of help?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Mark 1:16–18*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Accept that everyone is important to God. Theoretically, His followers are blind to class distinctions.

Feel: Embrace the feeling that even in his or her ordinariness, God sees something valuable in each one of us.

Do: Live as God’s children in a society that prizes artificial distinctions such as ethnicity, nationality, economics, and education.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Discipleship Is Not Determined by Human Standards.

A What are some of the categories we use to divide ourselves into groups and subgroups? List at least five.

B What are some characteristics that God looks for when grooming someone as a disciple?

C What characteristics unite us as Seventh-day Adventists?

II. Feel: God Wants Us to Know That in His Kingdom We All Have Something to Offer.

A As you think about yourself, what unique qualities do you contribute to the life of your congregation? What about your community?

B What special qualities do others in your congregation bring to the larger experience? Be specific; name names.

III. Do: Discipleship Is the Laboratory Where God Does His Experiments.

A How will people in your church and community recognize Heaven’s principles in your life this week?

B In God’s kingdom, how is being “ordinary” a badge of honor? What Bible characters at first glance seemed ordinary?

► **Summary:** Christianity’s greatness is that it swept the world by the testimony of people who were mostly uneducated and unsophisticated. There’s doubtless a message there for us. While there’s nothing wrong with education, people who know their limitations and trust God for guidance can certainly accomplish extraordinary things for Him.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Mark 1:16–18*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The kingdom of God is blind to human categories such as rich, poor, old, young, educated, and uneducated.

Just for Teachers: While this lesson is all about the sameness, or ordinariness, of the people Christ came to save, we can't help but categorize one another based on our similarities and differences. Admit it; when somebody walks into a room we, at some point, ask ourselves two questions: (1) How are we the same? (2) How are we different?

To be fair, to “discriminate” is something we're taught from childhood. It's how we understand where we fit into the scheme of society, who our friends are, and of whom we should be afraid.

But Jesus' ministry was all about showing that we are all God's children by virtue of Creation—some of whom have accepted salvation and others who haven't yet. Before the Cross, we are all the same, sinners in need of God's grace.

► **STEP 2**—Explore

Just for Teachers: While we may be ordinary according to the definition used in today's lesson, that doesn't mean that we're all the same. In actuality, we're all unique, and the fact that we've been called to be disciples of Christ suggests that He sees something in us that we can use to contribute uniquely to His kingdom.

Bible Commentary

I. A Man Like Us (Review Luke 2:21–40 with your class.)

Even though Jesus' birth was foretold by angels, and celebrated both by wise men who had traveled a great distance and by shepherds who had received the news from an angel choir, Jesus and His parents didn't receive any more attention when He appeared in the temple in Jerusalem to be circumcised than the other dozens of people who were there that day. For all practical purposes, He was ordinary.

His presence in the temple was celebrated only by Simeon, a righteous and devout man, and the elderly prophetess Anna—and that was just

because they were hoping for and expecting the Messiah.

The sum total of Jesus' childhood is summarized in the words, "And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him" (*Luke 2:40, NIV*).

Consider This: For most of His life, Jesus lived in obscurity. Yet, from what we know about His public ministry, His private life could hardly have been ordinary. In your imagination, how do you visualize the way in which Jesus lived an extraordinary life? How do you suppose that prepared Him for His public ministry?

II. The Miracle at Cana (*Review John 2:1–11 and Matthew 15:32–39 with your class.*)

Jesus, whose birth was foretold centuries before it happened and whose ministry was divinely appointed, chose as His first public miracle the turning of water into new wine at the wedding feast in Cana. Even though He was there as a guest, Jesus assumed the role of host. He told the servants to fill six stone jars (the kind that typically held water for footwashing) with water. Each jar held between 20 and 30 gallons of water. Then, suddenly, the water turned to new wine—that's a total of 120–180 gallons of it!

Clearly, a power that transcended humans was at work here. (It's a wonder the Bible doesn't record even more of the weddings that Jesus and His disciples went to.) The point is that Jesus went to this wedding with the intention of ensuring everyone's enjoyment. And He knew what was important to making that joy happen.

In fact, Jesus protested the way people compared Him with John the Baptist by quoting the proverb: " ' "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn" ' " (*Matt. 11:17, NIV*). In other words, Jesus just couldn't satisfy His critics. Realizing that He would have critics no matter what He did, He just lived true to His principles.

Consider This: Jesus was at home in every situation. Rich and poor, young and old—all felt comfortable in His presence, perhaps because He never pretended to be something He wasn't. How is that different from our experience?

III. An Impossible Dream? (*Review Acts 2:42–47 with your class.*)

The early Christian church was remarkable for the fact that people from all walks of life, from all classes, worshiped and fellowshiped together.

That experience, however, was apparently short-lived. Fairly soon in

the early Christians' experience, "the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food" (*Acts 6:1, NIV*).

That developed further a system of formal organization in the church to establish leaders and followers. One could argue that organization is essential to the smooth operation of any corporation or entity. But with organization comes responsibility and lines of authority; before long people no longer see themselves as equals. As the pigs in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* declare, everyone is equal, but "some . . . are more equal than others."

The history of Christianity is replete with examples of people who let power go to their heads. Yet, Jesus was clear: " 'whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant' " (*Matt. 20:26, NIV*). In other words, they lead best who serve best.

Consider This: As much as Christians like to think of themselves as immune to the artificial categories so prevalent in the world, the church still requires some people to exercise their gifts of leadership while others are called to support them in their leadership responsibilities.

Discussion Questions:

- ① What Christian leaders have balanced well the role of leader with that of fellow member? How did they do this?
- ② Is organization a by-product of sin? In other words, will there be directors, associate directors, and assistant directors in heaven? Give reasons for your answer.

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The word *ordinary* often sounds so boring. But when our car breaks down, an ordinary mechanic can work miracles. When your plumbing is out of order, an ordinary plumber is a lifesaver. Likewise, there is nothing ordinary about the church members with whom we share our pews each Sabbath.

Life Application: Every once in a while it's useful to take inventory of the people who contribute to our church life. Not just the preachers, soloists, and deacons but the people who lead in children's Sabbath School, the people who cook for fellowship dinners (and clean up afterward), the ones who come in to turn on the furnace in winter and the air conditioning unit or fans in summer, and the ones who mow the lawn, fix the plumbing, and take out the trash.

Sometimes when we think of "church," we think "pastor" or "office staff."

But just as the human body is made up of lots of “ordinary” parts, so is Christ’s church made up of many “ordinary” members—who, it turns out, are essential to the continued success of the church in your community.

❶ Which people who serve your local church would you miss most if suddenly they stopped doing their jobs? How can you show them how much you appreciate them?

❷ A smile and a handshake go a long way. When’s the last time you thanked someone for the service that he or she provides your church? Write a Thank-you note to that person, sharing how much you value his or her work.

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: It’s really quite remarkable that so many “ordinary” people contribute so much to the successful operation of the church and all its ministries. Shouldn’t something be done to recognize them?

Activity: As a group, plan some gesture or activity that shows appreciation to the many “ordinary” people whose service is often unnoticed by most of the members of your church. Below are some options. If none of these suggestions work for you, feel free to come up with your own ideas.

- Send a Thank-you card, signed by all the members of your class, with a short note: “We could just ‘kiss’ you for the way you _____ every Sabbath.” Attach a Hershey’s chocolate kiss with cellophane tape to the envelope.

- Take up a collection, buy a gift card, and give it to the treasurer with a note: “We want you to know that you really count around here!”

- Plan an after-church dinner for all those who lead the children’s Sabbath School. In addition to thanking them for their faithful service, send them away with a gift: small bottles of perfume or aftershave, small bags of cookies or candy, a pen or pencil, et cetera.

- Brainstorm other ways to appreciate “ordinary” people—not just once or twice a year—but as often as possible. After all, we may be ordinary, but we’re all unique!

Jesus *and the Social Outcasts*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 21:28–32, John 8:1–11, Mark 5:1–20, John 4:5–32, Matt. 9:9–13.*

Memory Text: “The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, ‘Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’ ” (*John 4:28–30, NKJV*).

A young woman—having come from an unbelievably sad and horrible background (which included two out-of-wedlock children by the time she was fifteen years old)—sat in prison, awaiting trial for having murdered a social worker who had come to take away her baby, the only person from whom she ever felt any love.

Without a mother, father, husband, any relative, or even a friend, she faced the forbidding future alone. Through the visits of a pastor, however, this hopeless young woman learned that—despite all the mistakes, despite the desperation of the situation, and despite whatever loomed on the horizon—Christ loved and forgave her. No matter how society viewed this young girl, she knew, for herself, God’s eternal love. This social outcast discovered meaning and purpose in her Lord, whose love and acceptance transcended all societal norms and mores, even the “good” ones.

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

Bottom Dwellers

Societies establish hierarchies. Wealthy or well-educated people usually acquire the highest positions.

Good moral citizens, the “ordinary” people, normally occupy the middle rungs on the social ladder. That leaves the bottom dwellers, those such as prostitutes, substance abusers, criminals, the homeless, and others. During Christ’s time, that list also included lepers and tax collectors.

Read Matthew 21:28–32 and Luke 15:1–10. What do these passages teach regarding Christ’s attitude toward social outcasts?

What happened that propelled the social outcasts ahead of the self-righteous? What did the bottom dwellers discover that the social elite often missed? Why was Jesus apparently more effective in reaching the bottom strata than He was with the upper echelons?

Although hardened by sinful pleasures, and sometimes encased in self-constructed tough exteriors, the social outcasts were, and still are, easier to reach than the prideful, haughty, and self-righteous elite. Often, beneath the outcasts’ bravado lies emotional emptiness characterized by poor self-worth. Frequently, especially during the teenage years, such people openly rebel, frantically trying to establish a personal identity to compensate for the insecurities felt within. That identity is, purposefully, established in opposition to the wishes of whoever serves as the authority figure (often parents) for that person.

Jesus wasted no effort damaging the outcasts’ already diminished sense of self-worth. Instead, He created a renewed sense of personal value. He established that foundation by consistently loving and accepting the outcasts, whose hearts were often melted by the warm and loving receptions that they had received from Christ.

What is your own attitude toward those whom your society deems to be social outcasts? Be honest: in a lot of cases, don’t you feel a certain sense of superiority? If so, dwell on the implications of those feelings.

“In the Very Act”

Read John 8:1–11. What does this text teach us about Jesus and social outcasts?

Having refreshed Himself spiritually at His Mount of Olives retreat, Jesus returned to the temple. Crowds gathered. While Christ taught, the Pharisees dragged an adulterous woman before Him. They questioned Jesus regarding Moses’ legislation concerning adultery, which prescribed execution. Jesus recognized that this questioning was insincere. The purpose was entrapment, not truth-seeking. Capital (death penalty) jurisdiction had been withdrawn from Jewish courts. Jewish leadership reasoned that Christ’s patriotic Jewish following might be compromised should He publicly reject stoning the woman. Conversely, should He endorse execution, their accusation would be that Christ had violated Roman authority.

Caught amid the leaders’ political intrigue was this helpless and guilty woman. Unfamiliar with Jesus’ ministry, she could not have known His merciful nature. Ironically, He appears to pronounce her death sentence; however, He prefaced His statement with those unforgettable words, “He that is without sin . . .”

Those words leveled the playing field. Sinless people might be authorized to mercilessly execute punishment. Yet, sinful people were, in a sense, obligated to be merciful. But, with the exception of Jesus, there were no sinless people present. Gradually the religious leaders dispersed, and this social outcast, guilty as she may have been, received grace.

“In His act of pardoning this woman and encouraging her to live a better life, the character of Jesus shines forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness. While He does not palliate sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, He seeks not to condemn, but to save. The world had for this erring woman only contempt and scorn; but Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 462.

Though Ellen G. White does give more details about the intrigue regarding this woman, the woman, nevertheless, was an adulteress, caught “in the very act.” The scheming of the leaders didn’t change that fact. And yet, she was still forgiven. How do we learn to show grace, even to the guilty, while still not “palliating” sin?

The Lowest of the Low

Read Mark 5:1–20. Compare this man’s situation with the plight of modern homeless people. Compare his description with that of mentally ill patients. What similarities and differences exist? How does modern society treat people who suffer from mental illness? What explains Christ’s admonition to publicize the event, though He consistently counsels others to maintain secrecy?

From the perspective of many of us today, it’s hard to imagine someone in such a horrific state, living in a cemetery even. Though some argue that this man was merely insane, the text teaches otherwise. (Besides, how does that idea fit with what happened to the pigs?)

A crucial point for us in this story is that no one, no matter how deranged—whether from demon possession, mental illness, drug use, whatever—is to be ignored. In some cases, professional help is needed and should be given when possible.

As Christians, we must remember that Christ died for everyone, and even those whom we might deem to be beyond our help still deserve as much mercy and respect and kindness as possible. Besides, who are we to judge anyone to be a hopeless case, to be beyond the power of God? From our perspective, things can look bad, but from God’s perspective every human being is of infinite worth. Were it not for the Cross, all our cases would be hopeless, a point worth remembering as we confront very disturbed and damaged people.

Dwell on some of the people you know who are truly in bad shape, whether mentally, spiritually, physically, or for whatever reason. Try to view them in the way that you think our unconditionally loving God views them. Besides praying for them, what can you do, in any way, to minister to their needs and show them something of the love of God?

The Woman at the Well

Study John 4:5–32, and then answer the following questions:

1. What social conventions did Jesus break, and why? What should this tell us about social conventions and the way in which they should be regarded when they interfere with witnessing? What social conventions might be hindering your witness to others?

2. In what way did Jesus confront the woman about her sinful life? What lessons could we take from His approach?

3. What does this story reveal about the prejudices of Jesus' disciples? Again we have to ask ourselves, in what ways are we guilty of the same thing?

4. Though obviously impressed by the fact that Jesus knew she had been sexually promiscuous, what did the woman say in her witness that showed she still had some questions about who Jesus was? What lessons can we draw from this about our own need for patience when it comes to the making of disciples?

Publicans and Sinners

It's hard to imagine what our world would have been like had not sin intruded. The beauty of nature, even after millennia, still testifies to the majesty and power and goodness of God. Our sin-darkened minds can barely grasp what humanity and human relations would have been like had our world not fallen. One thing we can be sure of is that the class distinctions, prejudices, and cultural and ethnic boundaries that impact every society and culture would not exist.

Sad to say, too, it's hardly feasible that before Christ returns these boundaries are going to vanish. On the contrary, as our world gets worse, there is no doubt that these barriers will, as well. As Christians, however, we must do what we can in every way possible to seek to transcend these barriers that have caused so much heartache and suffering and pain in our world, especially to those whom society rejects as the greatest outcasts.

Read Matthew 9:9–13. In what way is the essence of true Christianity revealed here, not just in what Jesus said but in that which He did? Focus especially on His words, taken from the Old Testament: “‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’ ” (*Hosea 6:6, NKJV*). Especially given the context, why must we be so careful that we do not become guilty of possessing the attitude that Jesus is so powerfully condemning here—especially when we are all to some degree creatures of our particular societies, and thus influenced by the prejudices and social barriers that are inherent in every society?

“The Pharisees beheld Christ sitting and eating with publicans and sinners. He was calm and self-possessed, kind, courteous, and friendly; and while they could not but admire the picture presented, it was so unlike their own course of action, they could not endure the sight. The haughty Pharisees exalted themselves, and disparaged those who had not been blessed with such privileges and light as they themselves had had. They hated and despised the publicans and sinners. Yet in the sight of God their guilt was the greater. Heaven's light was flashing across their pathway, saying, ‘This is the way, walk ye in it’; but they had spurned the gift.”—Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1088.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “At Jacob’s Well,” pp. 183–195; “Peace, Be Still,” pp. 333–341; “Among Snares,” pp. 460–462, in *The Desire of Ages*; and “Helping the Tempted,” pp. 164–169; “Working for the Intemperate,” pp. 171–182; “Help for the Unemployed and the Homeless,” pp. 183–200, in *The Ministry of Healing*.

“The one class that He would never countenance was those who stood apart in their self-esteem and looked down upon others. . . .

“The fallen must be led to feel that it is not too late for them to be men. Christ honored man with His confidence and thus placed him on his honor. Even those who had fallen the lowest He treated with respect. It was a continual pain to Christ to be brought into contact with enmity, depravity, and impurity; but never did He utter one expression to show that His sensibilities were shocked or His refined tastes offended. Whatever the evil habits, the strong prejudices, or the overbearing passions of human beings, He met them all with pitying tenderness. As we partake of His Spirit, we shall regard all men as brethren, with similar temptations and trials, often falling and struggling to rise again, battling with discouragements and difficulties, craving sympathy and help. Then we shall meet them in such a way as not to discourage or repel them, but to awaken hope in their hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 164, 165.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What personal attitudes might need to be changed in order for you to become an effective witness to social outcasts? What congregational practices should be altered to make your church more effective? How should modern Christians establish reasonable expectations when working for those who are deemed to be the hardest and most difficult cases?
- 2 How did Jesus avoid both excusing sins and condemning sinners? In what ways did Christ utilize trust, encouragement, and confidence in reversing the downward spiral of social outcasts? Since social outcasts were generally suspicious of religious leaders, how did Christ make these potential disciples comfortable with Himself?
- 3 What barriers stand between social outcasts and your church? How can those barriers be overturned?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *John 4:28–30*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Come to terms with the fact that, compared to others, Christians live lives of privilege. Our standard of living is usually slightly higher than those around us, and we struggle with fewer addictions than our peers.

Feel: Understand deeply that these privileges come with responsibilities.

Do: Commit to being sensitive to the needs of the marginalized in his or her community, as Jesus did, all in order to lift others out of their low estate socially and economically.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Serving Jesus Means Helping Others.

A This week’s lesson gives four examples of the types of people we often consider to be “outcasts.” Which type are you most likely to encounter in your normal daily activities?

B How much does God expect us to go out of our way to help those in need?

II. Feel: Service to Christ by Serving the Outcast Calls for “Radical Discipleship.”

A How far out of your comfort zone are you willing to go in order to serve outcasts in Christ’s name? Where would you draw the line?

B Is it necessary to feel uncomfortable in order to know we’re doing some good? If so, what does that say about our concept of service?

III. Do: Be Aware of Your Surroundings.

A Helping others can sometimes mean handing out food or money. But that’s often treating a symptom of the problem. What is the real problem?

B In addition to the question, What would Jesus do? perhaps another good question is, How can I do the most good in His name?

► **Summary:** Helping society’s outcasts represents one of the world’s greatest challenges. But that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t do whatever we can to address it.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Spotlight on Scripture: *John 4:28–30*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: **There's probably nothing more difficult than looking beyond the exterior of society's outcasts. Yet, our profession of Christianity is not authentic if we can't detect something of the image of God in each person.**

Just for Teachers: **This week's lesson highlights well-known Bible stories. Although the stories under discussion focus on society's outcasts, most of us will find it practically impossible to imagine the conditions under which they live.**

Opening Activity/Discussion: Write on slips of paper, if supplies are available, the following examples of social outcasts:

- Homeless person
- Meth addict
- High school dropout
- Prostitute
- Emotionally troubled teen
- Person who lives in his or her car
- Illegal immigrant
- Fugitive from justice
- Panhandler
- Pregnant teen

Put the slips of paper in a basket or hat, and then ask each class member to pull one out and read it. Then ask each class member to imagine the life this person must live. Ask leading questions such as:

- Where would you live?
- How would you get money to survive?
- Who would you trust?
- How would people treat you?
- What experience would you have had with church-going people?
- How do you imagine you would get out of your own difficulties?
- What would be your greatest regrets?

Most of us can only imagine the situations with which we've had personal experience. The examples listed above, although true to life, may not be part of our personal experience. How, then, can we identify with people such as these? More important, how do we minister to those who have lived through such experiences?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The following stories are all too familiar—so familiar that you might be tempted to race through them. Resist the temptation to touch only the high points, not bothering to ask penetrating questions.

Bible Commentary

I. Caught in the Act (*Review John 8:1–11 with your class.*)

Jesus was often the center of unwanted attention. But this time the woman dragged and dumped before Him was the picture of desperation. Society’s guardians of morality had hauled her before Jesus under the pretext of defending the law in order to trap Him.

Let’s be clear. These particular Pharisees and teachers of the law cared nothing about justice. If they did, they would have brought both the man and the woman whom they had caught in the act of adultery. No, their only purpose in presenting just her alone to Jesus was to declare Him guilty either of (1) setting aside the law of Moses or (2) assuming prerogatives that belonged to their Roman oppressors. They hoped to paint Jesus into a corner from which there was no escape.

Of course, Jesus saw through the Pharisees’ and teachers’ artifice. Instead of answering them directly, He simply stooped to the ground and began writing in the sand. Then He asked the question that must have sounded to the woman like a death sentence: “‘If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her’ ” (*vs. 7, NIV*). Then He bent again and wrote in the sand.

When Jesus stood up and found only the woman before Him, He asked, “‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ”

“‘No one, sir,’ ” she said.

“‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin’ ” (*vss. 10, 11, NIV*).

While some may see Jesus’ act as being “soft on sin,” most of society’s outcasts don’t have to be reminded of their mistakes. After all, they have to live with their mistakes every day. People who insist on “calling sin by its right name” would do well to remember Jesus’ words, “‘For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him’ ” (*John 3:17, NIV*).

Consider This: The life of discipleship is a life of discipline. But discipline doesn’t have to be harsh or condemning. After all, in life we experience both positive and negative reinforcement. Which type should Christians be known for? Why?

II. A Hopeless Case (Review Mark 5:1–20 with your class.)

This story has all the trappings of a Hollywood horror film: a deranged man lives in the local graveyard. From time to time, brave people go out there, subdue him, chain him, and pray that he doesn't hurt anyone. In the meantime, he can be heard crying out day and night, and he cuts himself with stones.

The proof that the man was not completely hopeless was evinced when Jesus approached him, for he recognized Jesus. “ ‘What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?’ ” he shouted (*vs. 7, NIV*).

At Jesus' word, the evil spirits left the man. When the villagers approached to see what all the commotion was about, they found the man “sitting there, dressed and in his right mind” (*vs. 15, NIV*).

As Jesus prepared to leave the area, the man pleaded to go along as one of Jesus' disciples. But Jesus told him, “ ‘Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you’ ” (*vs. 19, NIV*).

That seems a rather odd approach to discipleship. We have to assume that the influences that led to the man's fallen condition were still there. Why did Jesus leave him? What support could the man have expected from those who knew him? What kind of rumors would those who knew him likely spread?

Indeed, the Bible record is that “the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region” (*vs. 17, NIV*). Why did the people do that? Could it be because they preferred things the way they were before Jesus came along? Were their lives somehow disrupted by the man's healing? If so, how?

Consider This: All we know now about mental illness and addictions was virtually unknown to the people who lived in Jesus' time. And it would be a mistake to assume that we should ignore established medical practices and simply pray for people who are mentally unstable. But we also have to affirm that God's power is available in situations in which nothing more can be humanly done.

III. Asking a Favor (Review John 4:5–32 with your class.)

The story of the woman whom Jesus met at Jacob's well is an example of Jesus' ignoring established social standards to reach out to an individual in need.

For example, Jews typically didn't have anything to do with Samaritans. Furthermore, it was highly unlikely that a Jew would ask a favor of a Samaritan (a reflection of the antipathy they shared for one another). Finally, it was unusual for a woman to speak to a man to whom she wasn't related. Yet, here's Jesus, shattering all these cultural taboos.

It's unlikely that any of Jesus' disciples would have been comfortable doing what Jesus did. But the fact that this story is in the Bible is a powerful reminder that human traditions shouldn't stop us from reaching people of all classes. After all, Jesus' activity on the woman's behalf was also the means of reaching the entire village.

Consider This: Sometimes our efforts to reach others require us to ignore or set aside established traditions or social standards.

Discussion Questions:

① What social standards have changed in your memory? How has the church been involved in initiating those changes?

② In general, do you see religious people demonstrating resistance or facilitation with regard to outreach to social outcasts? Give examples of each.

► **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: Part of our ability to reach out and disciple people of other social backgrounds depends on how familiar we are with how those people live.

Life Application: Most of the people with whom we have contact on a regular basis are a lot like us. But reaching people of different social strata—especially society’s outcasts—requires us to leave our established patterns and comfort zones. Think of a moment in which you attempted to do this. What was the result? In what way(s) did it change your life?

► **STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: Reaching life’s social outcasts may appear to require a rather serious reorientation. But, in fact, our Christian tradition already puts a premium on reaching out to people who are most at risk of being marginalized and left behind.

Activity: Read the following texts, substituting “outcast” for “sinner.”

Psalm 25:8	Psalm 51:13	Matthew 9:13
Matthew 11:19	Luke 15:1, 2	Luke 19:7
Romans 5:8	1 Timothy 1:15	

How is God’s attitude toward “outcasts” shown in these texts? How seriously should we take this attitude? In other words, how would our behavior change if we saw these people as God sees them?

With *the* Rich and Famous



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Deut. 8:17, 18; Gen. 13:5, 6; John 3:1–15; Luke 19:1–10; Mark 4:18, 19; Matt. 19:16–26.*

Memory Text: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (*1 Timothy 6:10, NKJV*).

People,” it has been said, “spend money they don’t have, for things they don’t need, in order to impress people they don’t like.” How much truth that statement contains is debatable; what isn’t debatable, however, is that money can have a powerful influence over all of us. Because personal financial habits comprehensively represent an individual’s values, money is actually a spiritual matter. No doubt that’s why the Bible spends a lot of time talking about it.

Also, fame frequently accompanies wealth. Motion picture stars, outstanding athletes, and national politicians often possess both. Famous people exercise influence, which is one form of power. Jesus, however, was not impressed by anyone’s wealth or power. He simply sought to reach these wealthy people for the same reason that He tried to reach everyone else: He wanted them to have the kind of riches that money cannot buy.

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

Richly Blessed

As fallen human beings, we are subject to jealousy, especially toward those who have more money than we do (regardless of how much money we ourselves might have already). The Bible, however, does not unconditionally disparage wealth or the wealthy. As with so much else in life, problems arise not from things themselves but from the way in which we relate to them.

What counsel regarding wealth does Scripture offer? *Deut. 8:17, 18; Gen. 13:5, 6; 41:41–43; Job 1:1–3; Dan. 4:28–31.* **Why** was it so important for Israel not to forget where its blessings came from?

There is no question that people such as Abraham, Joseph, Mordecai, Esther, Hezekiah, Josiah, and Jehoshaphat were wealthy and spiritually minded, as well. Nebuchadnezzar’s example, however, shows the danger that comes from making wealth an idol, which is so easy for anyone to do. Conversely, for ancient Israel, acknowledging God’s generosity in this supplying of wealth brought spiritual and material blessings. They were specifically warned not to forget from where those blessings came. (A good lesson for all of us, is it not?)

In short, riches themselves do not indicate spiritual poverty or indifference. There have been some very pious and faithful rich people and some pretty nasty and evil ones, as well. Either way, we should not turn a desire for money into an obsession, nor should we despise those who are wealthy. They need salvation as much as everyone else does.

What are your own attitudes toward the rich? It’s easy to be jealous, is it not? How can you learn to move beyond those feelings and to see wealthy individuals as we all are, as souls in need of a saving knowledge of Jesus?

Nighttime Rendezvous

Wealthy, well-positioned famous people did not intimidate Jesus. Christ neither resented nor revered the social elite. The Savior recognized that financial prosperity could not supply peace, personal contentment, meaningful relationships, or deep-seated purpose. The wealthiest magnate could easily be lonelier, emptier, and angrier than the simplest, poorest, and most humble Christian believer.

Analyze Jesus’ interaction with Nicodemus (*John 3:1–15*). Which events probably stimulated Nicodemus’s interest in Jesus’ message? (*Hint: review John 2:13–25.*) What significance does the darkness play? What is Christ’s central message for Nicodemus?

Nicodemus had witnessed God’s power and authority as revealed through Jesus’ ministry and thus sought to meet with Him, but in secret. Jesus might have refused this secretive overture, but, unwilling that any should perish, He readily accepted this opportunity to bring Nicodemus another step closer to the kingdom. Nicodemus’s poverty was spiritual not material. Enriched with worldly goods and an elevated social position, he was, nonetheless, spiritually starving.

Instinctively, Nicodemus rebelled against any suggestion that knowledgeable Israelites like himself should require conversion. Jesus, however, persisted, presenting Nicodemus with the eternal choice between judgment and salvation. Fearing denunciation and ridicule, Nicodemus refused to accept Christ’s invitation. The interview had apparently failed. That spiritual seed, however, lay buried, slowly germinating beneath his heart’s soil.

“After the Lord’s ascension, when the disciples were scattered by persecution, Nicodemus came boldly to the front. He employed his wealth in sustaining the infant church that the Jews had expected to be blotted out at the death of Christ. In the time of peril he who had been so cautious and questioning was firm as a rock, encouraging the faith of the disciples, and furnishing means to carry forward the work of the gospel. He was scorned and persecuted by those who had paid him reverence in other days. He became poor in this world’s goods; yet he faltered not in the faith which had its beginning in that night conference with Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 177.

Rich and Infamous

Respectability does not always accompany wealth. Though many do earn their wealth honestly through hard work, industriousness, and the blessings of God, others are outright crooks. Even worse, some make their money legally but immorally, for not everything immoral is illegal, as we all know so well.

Compare Matthew 9:10–13 with Luke 5:27–32, 19:1–10. What motivated the criticism that Jesus faced? What does His reaction to the criticism teach us about grace?

Jericho, Zacchaeus's residence, had become a significant commercial center and housed the Herodian palace. Because of its geographical location, it maintained a customs gathering station. Zacchaeus could have easily enriched himself *legally* as the chief regional customs officer. The narrative, however, suggests that greed induced him to overstep legal boundaries. Zealous patriots despised even honest customs collectors, seeing them as tools of their Roman oppressors, but they greatly disdained dishonest ones such as Zacchaeus. Matthew (Levi) occupied a similar position in Capernaum, under Herod Antipas. Essentially having assumed the role of Roman governmental agents, they were viewed as traitors, or worse yet, thieving traitors.

Nonetheless, Christ was not deterred. Defying social constraints, Jesus dined with them, drawing intense criticism from priests and commoners alike. And, by Jesus' interaction with them, these despised men were eventually won to the gospel. (For example, Matthew not only became one of the Twelve but also an author in the New Testament!)

Again, we should be careful about the kind of spiritual judgments we make about people. Though not all sins are of the same magnitude, and some are certainly socially worse (and with good reason) than others, all of us are equal before God in that we are all in need of the righteousness of Christ.

Think of some well-known but despised (and perhaps understandably so) personage in your culture. Imagine what it would be like if you had a chance to witness to that person. Would you even want to? What would you say?

Gold-plated Message

Analyze the following passages: Mark 4:18, 19; Luke 1:51–53; 6:22–25; 12:16–21; 16:13. What practical advice do these verses contain? What spiritual warnings are found here? How might these Scriptures be utilized by believers to make disciples among the wealthy?

It has been said that we don't own our things; our things own us. How easy it is to be consumed by material possessions; hence, Jesus warned above about "the deceitfulness of riches."

Think through just how easy it is for money, or the pursuit of it, to blind our spiritual priorities. How crucial that we keep this truth in mind as we seek to reach those whose wealth might have already blinded them.

At the same time, we all need a reality check. Some people live as if the one question that they will be asked on Judgment Day is, How much money did you make?

Christ reverses our misplaced priorities. While possessions are not forbidden, they must be placed in perspective. Material goods are God's instruments designed to benefit humanity. They become blessings when shared rather than when hoarded. When hoarded, they become curses.

Materialistic persons, whether rich or poor, are in danger of sacrificing their eternal well-being for temporal pleasures. Eternal satisfaction is exchanged for passing fancies that deteriorate and become outdated. Humans serve God or money, never both. Everyone, rich or poor, needs to be reminded: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (*Mark 8:36*).

This warning about materialism is important for all believers, not only for their own souls' sakes but for outreach as well. After all, how can we warn the wealthy about the potential spiritual dangers contained by their wealth when we ourselves are caught up in the same thing?

Terms of Endangerment

Study Matthew 19:16–26. What spiritual dangers are revealed in this passage? How might believers benefit today’s “rich young rulers”?

He possessed credentials, qualifications, abundant material resources, unquestioned morality, and unlimited self-esteem! The youthful disciple-candidate earnestly requested the Master’s formula for salvation. Should Christ have been flattered? “Finally we’re converting the upper classes!” Apparently no such exhilaration polluted Christ’s thinking. Had this petitioner expected commendation, he was sorely disappointed. Instead, Christ established the Ten Commandments as the minimum standard of obedience. Perhaps the young ruler had congratulated himself. By his self-measurement, he surpassed the first hurdle. Christ, however, had elsewhere demanded righteousness that exceeded that which other religious leaders possessed. Would that standard be lowered to accommodate this candidate? Judas would have been ecstatic. Whoever handled public relations would have been overjoyed. Think what having wealthy supporters aboard could mean image-wise.

Spiritual deficiencies, however, cannot be overlooked nor minimized, for the mission of Jesus is sacred. Compromise cannot be tolerated. Every selfish indulgence must be surrendered. Christ outlined the three-step process: sell your possessions, furnish the poverty-stricken, follow Me. This was spiritually dangerous territory. Although young, the would-be disciple had accumulated a sizable fortune. Luxurious houses, beautiful vineyards, productive fields, fashionable clothing, jewelry collections, servants, livestock, perhaps speedy customized chariots—all these might have flashed through his mind. God’s terms were inflexible. Neither bargaining nor negotiating could reduce the price: everything for Jesus; worldly greatness exchanged for heavenly treasure.

“How many have come to Christ, ready to cast their interests in with his, and, like the rich young ruler, earnestly desiring to inherit eternal life! But when the cost is presented to them—when they are told that they must forsake all, houses and lands, wife and children, and count not their lives dear unto themselves—they go away sorrowful. They want the treasures of heaven, and the life that measures with the life of God, but they are not willing to give up their earthly treasures. They are not willing to surrender all to obtain the crown of life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 19, 1898.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Nicodemus,” pp. 167–177; “Levi-Matthew,” pp. 272–280; “ ‘One Thing Thou Lackest,’ ” pp. 518–523; “Zacchaeus,” pp. 552–556, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Ministry to the Rich,” pp. 209–216, in *The Ministry of Healing*.

“Much is said concerning our duty to the neglected poor; should not some attention be given to the neglected rich? Many look upon this class as hopeless, and they do little to open the eyes of those, who, blinded and dazed by the glitter of earthly glory, have lost eternity out of their reckoning. Thousands of wealthy men have gone to their graves unwarned. But indifferent as they may appear, many among the rich are soul-burdened. ‘He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase.’ He that says to fine gold, ‘Thou art my confidence,’ has ‘denied the God that is above.’ ‘None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever).’ . . .

“Riches and worldly honor cannot satisfy the soul. Many among the rich are longing for some divine assurance, some spiritual hope. Many long for something that will bring to an end the monotony of their aimless lives. Many in official life feel their need of something which they have not. Few among them go to church; for they feel that they receive little benefit. The teaching they hear does not touch the heart. Shall we make no personal appeal to them?”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 210.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Wealthy converts played important roles in financially sustaining the infant Christian movement. Though exceptions existed, sacrificial giving characterized the well-to-do believers. God’s kingdom consists of honest-hearted people from every social class. Christians should be neither intimidated nor enamored by wealthy people but should fearlessly proclaim God’s revelation that they may be saved. Understanding that we should never compromise theology and principle, what practical changes can your church make so that wealthy people will find it easier to find fellowship there? How is your church’s evangelistic strategy addressing the need to make disciples among the well-to-do? What specific things can your church realistically do to reach the rich?
- 2** Look at the Bible verses that Ellen G. White used in the statement in Friday’s study. What is the essence of what they are saying? How can we help those who think that their happiness will be found in wealth and material possessions to realize that they are on the wrong track?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 Timothy 6:10*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that worldly wealth brings many temptations that people of humble means don't have to contend with.

Feel: Be convicted that God regards the wealthy and important no differently than He does the less privileged.

Do: Realize that underneath each outward exterior—whether rich or poor, famous or unknown—lives a person with identical needs.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Wealth Is Not Bad. “The Love of Money Is the Root of All Evil” (*1 Tim. 6:10; emphasis added*).

A Why are we so easily swayed by displays of worldly wealth? What does that say about us as individuals? As Christians?

B How are the hopes and fears of the wealthy and the powerful different from ours? How are they the same?

II. Feel: Just as Jesus Was Unimpressed by Outward Appearances, so We Must Identify With Others as Persons No Different From Ourselves.

A What did Jesus see in Nicodemus when He spoke to the temple ruler under the cover of darkness?

B What was Jesus' message to Zacchaeus after He invited Himself to Zacchaeus's home?

C What was Jesus' attitude toward the rich young man?

III. Do: The Way We Treat Others Is Based Solely on the Fact That They Are Born in the Image of God.

A What are the most effective ways of treating everyone with the same dignity and respect?

B Share some examples of when you felt valued based on the way you were treated.

► **Summary:** If we follow Christ's example, we can reach people whether they are rich or poor, “important” or “ordinary.”

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *1 Timothy 6:10*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Wealth is a tool. Like fire, wealth can be used in ways that are both constructive and destructive.

Just for Teachers: *Wealth* is a relative term. People who live in highly industrialized countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Japan, France, and Germany would be considered rich by the standards of many others. Yet, most of us wouldn't think of ourselves as rich. We can still learn something from this lesson, however.

Opening Activity/Discussion: Identify the members of your class who have done some international traveling. Have them list some of the “luxuries” that people in developed countries take for granted. Discuss how this colors our perception of wealth.

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Remember that the people in your class likely represent a broad spectrum of income levels. Be sure to be sensitive to this fact and resist painting the wealthy with too broad a brush. Not all wealthy people are selfish or morally deficient. Like some of the people we'll discuss in this week's lesson, many are doing the best they can to use their resources to build up God's kingdom.

Bible Commentary

I. The Man Who Came at Night (*Review John 3:1–21 with your class.*)

Just as Jesus attracted people of all ages, ethnicities, and educational levels, He also attracted people of all economic levels. Nicodemus was one of those who felt his heart warmed by the messages that he heard from Jesus' lips.

But there were barriers that prevented Nicodemus from approaching Jesus in broad daylight. The first barrier was his reputation; he was a Pharisee, or a member of the ruling council. Think of all the perks he and his family would forfeit if he had left the council and declared his allegiance to Christ. He might have lost his comfortable house, and his family might have had to accept a lower standard of living.

Beyond that, it was no doubt helpful to have Nicodemus stay on the council. He had access to people who were thought leaders and who would never otherwise understand what Christ's ministry was all about. We can only imagine what kinds of conversations Nicodemus had with his fellow Pharisees.

Consider This: Jesus knows us intimately. His invitation for us to follow Him takes into account all of our gifts and characteristics. That's why we should never make our experience normative and thereby expect others to conform to our experience. Jesus has something for each of us to do. How would your congregation be diminished if everyone was just like you? What gifts would it not have? The church, like creation, thrives on diversity. How is diversity in gifts celebrated in your congregation?

II. The Man Who Wanted to See Jesus *(Review Luke 19:1–10 with your class.)*

Very few in the Jewish culture were as despised as tax collectors. After all, they were agents of the hated Roman oppressors. And it was widely known that they were able to keep for themselves anything beyond that which they were able to collect for the Romans. So, when people saw the tax collectors' fine clothes and large houses, they knew they had been financed by dishonest means.

So, here's Zacchaeus up in the branches of a tree, with all the accoutrements of wealth—his version of \$300 shoes, a Hart, Schaffner & Marx blended wool suit, a \$100 Perry Ellis necktie, gold rings, and maybe even clutching a fine leather briefcase—bought and paid for by the money he was able to extort from his fellow Jews.

If Jesus had read from the same script as the rest of the Jews, He would have called Zacchaeus out right then and there. Think how Jesus could have blasted Zacchaeus and humiliated him in public. He deserved it, didn't he?

Instead, Jesus just said, “ ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today’ ” (*vs. 5, NIV*).

There's something sublime about how Jesus approaches Zacchaeus. He invites Himself to Zacchaeus's home, and soon after Zacchaeus makes this announcement: “ ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount’ ” (*vs. 8, NIV*).

This couldn't have turned out any better if Jesus had planned it that way. Oh, wait, maybe He did!

Consider This: Again, by recognizing Zacchaeus's unique personality, Jesus tailored His appeal so it would accomplish exactly what He wanted.

Jesus didn't ask for Zacchaeus to give away everything he had; He asked only for Zacchaeus to do the right thing. What similar kinds of things do we have to keep in mind in our dealings with people? How do things like age, education, and economic level affect these dealings? With whom are you most comfortable interacting: someone a lot like you or someone different from you? Why?

III. The Man Who Kept It All *(Review Matthew 19:16–26 with your class.)*

This may be one of the most challenging stories in all the Scriptures to interpret. Yet, that hasn't stopped generations of preachers from condemning the young man in it for rejecting Jesus' invitation to sell everything he had and give the proceeds to the poor. It's doubly ironic that in spite of all the sermons we've heard that are based on this story, we still leave church with the same financial resources that we did when we parked our cars in the church parking lot that morning.

Here's the thing: Jesus doesn't want our money; He wants us. We can sell everything, and go around wearing clothes made out of newspaper, but that, by itself, won't get us any closer to Christ.

When God said in the Old Testament, “ ‘Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse’ ” (*Mal. 3:10, NIV*), the unspoken implication was that He was inviting His people to be partners with Him by using the other 90 percent to live in harmony with His heavenly principles.

Consider This: Contrary to the opinion of some, poor disciples are not better disciples. Rather, we're all blessed with material possessions so we can live to bless others. There are rich people (as well as poor people) who use all their disposable income to serve their own selfish desires. There are also wealthy people—such as Bill and Melinda Gates—who have given more to charity than most of us will see in our lifetimes.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why is there this tension in the church (and in the world, for that matter) between the rich and poor? What might we have been supposed to learn from such disparity? What guidance does Scripture offer in resolving such tensions?
- 2 Have you ever been tempted to treat the wealthy among you differently than you treat the poor? Why? What form did it take? What can we take away from the teachings of Jesus to help change our mind-sets and our behavior in this area?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: “Money can’t buy happiness” is how the adage goes. Still, money is a reality we can’t ignore. For many, money is not just a sign of success; it’s a necessary ingredient in survival.

Life Application: The last several years have seen several countries in the world teeter on the brink of financial insolvency. Many individuals and families have seen their financial security vanish.

- ① How should the church be involved in crafting a solution?

- ② Can the church corporately or as individual congregations do anything to mitigate the world’s financial downturn?

- ③ If you had the power to miraculously change the situation, how would you use it?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Do you know the financial health of the members of your class? Do you know which people have been laid off; who, out of financial necessity, are living with their parents; who have kids in Seventh-day Adventist schools; or who is surviving on a fixed income? You’re not just teaching a lesson about wealth (or the lack of it); you’re teaching a lesson about life.

Activity: Invite your class members to share their favorite Bible promises relative to their financial status. Ask: Which is better, to focus on what we don’t have or to thank God for what we do have? Why?

End with prayer, asking God to guide all the students to be faithful stewards, whether they have a lot or a little.

Discipling *the* Powerful



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 13:1–7, Mark 2:23–28, Matt. 8:5–13, 26:57–68, 27:11–14, Acts 4:1–12.*

Memory Text: “The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” (*Acts 6:7, NRSV*).

The disciples were not endowed with the courage and fortitude of the martyrs until such grace was needed. Then the Saviour's promise was fulfilled. When Peter and John testified before the Sanhedrin council, men ‘marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.’ *Acts 4:13*. Of Stephen it is written that ‘all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel’ [*Acts 6:15*]. Men ‘were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.’ [*Acts 6:10*]. And Paul, writing of his own trial at the court of the Caesars, says, ‘At my first defense no one took my part, but all forsook me. . . . But the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me; that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.’ *2 Tim. 4:16, 17, R. V.*—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 354, 355.

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

Respecting Authority

Over the long centuries, people have struggled to understand the role and function of government and how citizens should relate to it. What gives rulers the right to rule? What is the best form of government? Should people always obey their governments? If not, why not? These are just a few of a host of questions that we still wrestle with to this day.

Read Romans 13:1–7. What important message is in there for us? How, though, can these texts and the message they teach be abused? What examples do we have in history of that happening? How can we as a church learn from these mistakes, even in our own history, as well as from the mistakes of the Christian church in general?

Oppression and brutality characterized the Roman Empire during Christ's time. Roman legions terrorized and subjugated civilized nations, forcibly bringing them into the empire. Hundreds of thousands were dispossessed, imprisoned, and murdered. Puppet governments permitted by Rome were probably worse than Rome itself. Yet, interestingly enough, Jesus never advocated any kind of rebellion against this government, or even the withholding of taxes from it (see *Luke 20:25*). Jesus' singular act of civil disobedience—overturning the money-changers' tables—demonstrated the revulsion He felt regarding priestly abuses. It was not against the Romans, per se.

“The people of God will recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment and will teach obedience to it as a sacred duty within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, the word of God must be recognized as above all human legislation. ‘Thus saith the Lord’ is not to be set aside for Thus saith the church or the state. The crown of Christ is to be uplifted above the diadems of earthly potentates.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 402.

“Have You Not Read . . . ?”

Unfortunately, some of the most powerful and influential people with whom Jesus dealt were the religious leaders of His time, many of whom were openly hostile to Him.

Yet, even in His encounters with them, Jesus always sought to be redemptive. He wasn’t seeking arguments; He was seeking the salvation of all people, even of those powerful and influential people who would eventually condemn Him to death.

Read Mark 2:23–28, 3:1–6, Matthew 12:1–16. How can we see, in these encounters, that Jesus—despite the overt hostility against Him—was trying to reach these men? What did He say and do that should have touched their hearts, were they not so closed?

It’s interesting that, in dealing with these people, Jesus referred to the Scriptures and even sacred history—sources that should have touched the religious leaders. Jesus was appealing to what should have been common ground between them. For instance, He quoted the Bible when He talked about the importance of mercy over ritual. By so doing, He sought to bring the leaders to a deeper meaning of the law that they claimed to cherish and uphold so fervently and devoutly.

In His discourse about pulling an animal out of a pit on the Sabbath day, Jesus then appealed to their most basic notions of decency and kindness, something that these men all should have related to. The problem, however, was that their bitterness and hatred toward Jesus clouded even that.

Finally, the miracles themselves should have spoken loudly to these influential leaders about the extraordinary Man among them.

It’s easy, from our position today, to look back in wonder at the blindness and hardness of these men. How, though, can we make sure that we ourselves, when seeking to protect something that we don’t want to give up, don’t close ourselves to more light from God? Why is that easier to do than we might think?

The Centurion

While several of Christ's encounters with powerful people ended acrimoniously, there were notable exceptions, such as with Nicodemus. Another constructive meeting involved a Roman centurion (ranking military officer).

Read Matthew 8:5–13 and Luke 7:1–10. What can we learn from these accounts about witnessing to people in power?

When the centurion learned that Jesus was approaching, he dispatched several friends to dissuade Christ from coming. Deeply respecting Jewish worship and Jesus' spirituality, he felt undeserving of Christ's personal attention. Finally, just before Jesus arrived, he ventured to approach Him. He explained the situation, expressing faith that Christ's declaration alone could restore the servant. Drawing on military experience, he understood authority. He obeyed his commanding officer, and his subordinates obeyed him. How amazing that this man of power and influence (and a Roman, as well!) could show such deep faith when many who had so many more spiritual advantages spurned Jesus.

Honest self-examination is profitable here. We need to ask ourselves whether we have become complacent and are merely espousing correct doctrines instead of experiencing living faith. Have newer, lesser-equipped believers nevertheless expressed deeper faith than those raised within Christianity? Have our spiritual advantages become occasions for self-dependency? Have spiritual opportunities escaped unnoticed? Whenever we answer affirmatively, Christ is the answer. Anyone can enjoy the centurion's experience. This story should encourage those evangelizing among people in powerful positions. How many twenty-first century centurions are there? May their faith inspire and strengthen ours.

There is a power to a selflessness and self-abnegating ministry that can touch anyone of any rank or class. What of these traits do we manifest in our own lives and witness?

Judgment Day

Read Matthew 26:57–68, 27:11–14, Luke 23:1–12, John 18:19–23, 31–40, 19:8–12. What can we learn from Jesus’ witness to these powerful men?

Within these final scenes of Jesus’ earthly sojourn, Christ’s followers glimpse the painful price of unflinching faithfulness. From arrest until crucifixion, Christ bears witness before the most powerful in the land: monarchs, governors, priests. Person by person He studies those intoxicated with worldly authority. Apparently, they control Him. Soldiers shuffle Jesus between their courtrooms, their councils, their palaces, and their judgment halls, unaware that ultimately this is His world. Whatever judgment they pronounce against Christ is ultimately the judgment they pronounce against themselves.

While Christ witnessed to make disciples, sometimes the outcome was vastly different from what He Himself would have wished. How Jesus would have rejoiced had Pilate, Caiaphas, Herod, and others surrendered their hearts and repented. Stubbornly, they refused His entreaties, callously bypassing their final invitation to salvation.

Likewise, Christ’s twenty-first-century followers should recognize that while they witness to make disciples, the outcome often appears vastly different from what they would wish and pray for. Measurable success may not always attend their efforts. This should neither discourage them nor inhibit further witnessing. The genuine disciple is, like Christ Himself, faithful until death, not faithful until disappointed. Calling listeners to a decision separates wheat from chaff. The wheat is celebrated. The chaff is mourned. The harvest continues. Notwithstanding Christ’s apparently unsuccessful witness before these powerful men, something marvelous happened, for, according to Acts 6:7, not only did the number of disciples multiply, but “a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (*NKJV*). God alone knows how many of those priests were there, listening and watching Jesus in those final hours.

The Early Explosion

Christ's earliest disciples energetically advanced the gospel throughout the civilized world. Houses, synagogues, public stadiums, judgment halls, and royal palaces became stages for kingdom proclamation. Jesus, however, prophesied arrests, trials, and hostile royal audiences for those disciples (*Matt. 10:16–20*). Unfortunately, those saturated with earthly power were slowest to receive Christ.

Read through as much of Acts 4:1–12; 13:5–12, 50; 23:1–6; 25:23–26:28 as you can. Though one can get the idea that so many people were instantly converted out of nowhere, that's not what happened. These dramatic results were the visible product of underlying circumstances. Seedtime precedes harvest. Christ had faithfully proclaimed the gospel. Missionaries had witnessed throughout Judea. Early converts no doubt helped to carry the message. When Christ personally conquered death, confirming His message, thousands of fence-sitters leaped into the kingdom. They had secretly followed Him. Their hearts had responded to His invitations. Cultural factors, job security, and family pressures had slowed their overt responses. Christ's resurrection destroyed the fence, forcing a decision.

Then, of course, the apostle Paul entered the picture. His witness, however, was not universally appreciated. Sometimes prominent men and women persecuted and expelled him. He was stoned, flogged, imprisoned, and otherwise mistreated—often at the instigation of powerful people. Political motives were frequently the foundation for their anti-Christian sentiments.

Governor Felix imprisoned Paul in order to placate religious opposition to Paul. His successor, Festus, was more fair-minded but lacked the political willpower to release Paul. During an official visit, King Agrippa and his sister, Bernice (descendants of Herod's dynasty), requested an audience with Paul. Unfortunately, like their ancestors before them, they rejected his invitation to salvation. Although facing similar rejection and persecution, Christ's twenty-first-century disciples must likewise persevere.

How can disciple-makers working among worldly and religious authorities avoid the discouragement of frequent rejection? Whenever Christ's followers labor for powerful people, who else might be affected by their witnessing?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Centurion,” pp. 315–318; “Before Annas and the Court of Caiaphas,” pp. 698–715; “In Pilate’s Judgment Hall,” pp. 723–740, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Ministry to the Rich,” pp. 209–216, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Almost Thou Persuadest Me,” pp. 433–438, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“It is by no casual, accidental touch that wealthy, world-loving, world-worshiping souls can be drawn to Christ. These persons are often the most difficult of access. Personal effort must be put forth for them by men and women imbued with the missionary spirit, those who will not fail or be discouraged.

“Some are especially fitted to work for the higher classes.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 213.

Discussion Questions:

❶ Whenever Jesus witnessed to powerful people, others noticed. Some were in powerful positions, others not. Like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, many among the educated priestly class came to faith gradually. Some bystanders who witnessed Christ’s confrontations with religious leaders likewise believed. Volcanic turbulence usually lies hidden beneath the mountain’s crust. Visually gauging intensity is impossible. Accurately measuring activity requires special instruments. Similarly, the explosive potential of Jesus’ movement remained hidden during His earthly ministry. Following His resurrection, however, the kingdom erupted, evidenced by massive conversions, even among those in influential positions. The faithful planting was finally yielding its abundant harvest. What should these facts tell us about how important it is that we not get discouraged when our witness doesn’t appear as effective as we would like it to be, especially among the powerful elite?

❷ Ellen G. White wrote in the statement above that some were especially fitted for the work of reaching the powerful. What might some of those qualifications be? At the same time, why must we be careful to not limit those who we might think are not qualified?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Acts 6:7*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Be assured that when standing before powerful people he or she doesn't stand alone.

Feel: Be confident that just as the Holy Spirit spoke through believers in the past, He can use him or her now.

Do: Engage with others, no matter their social status, as he or she witnesses for Christ.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Nobody Can Serve Christ Effectively Without First Knowing Him as Lord and Savior.

A What made the disciples and other believers such powerful witnesses?

B What impression do you hope to leave with those to whom you witness?

II. Feel: Serving Christ Means Using the Talents and Gifts We're Given for His Glory.

A Are you an "up-front" or "behind-the-scenes" person? Does it matter? Explain.

B Over time the disciples developed talents that enabled them to stand before councils and judges. In what situations can you imagine having to stand up for your faith?

III. Do: We Know Best the People We Serve Most.

A What are you known for in your community, both as an individual and as a congregation? Does that increase your profile among the powerbrokers of your community?

B How is success measured when we stand before influential members of our communities? By the number of people who hear us, or by the number of people who respond?

► **Summary:** Jesus' method for reaching powerful people was the same as His method for reaching everyone else: He met and sympathized with them, ministered to them, and won their confidence. Any attempt to "take a shortcut" from His method will be unsuccessful.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Acts 6:7*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Faithful disciples serve wherever, and whomever, they are called to serve.

Just for Teachers: In a culture where celebrity is celebrated and our role models include professional athletes, movie stars, politicians, and performers, we may sometimes feel insignificant, or that we have nothing to share with people who are so obviously more “important” than we are. But as disciples of Christ, we have an important message, one which we never know when we’ll have an opportunity to share.

Opening Activity/Discussion: Ask the members of your class to share an experience when they had a brush with a prominent person. It could’ve been a professional athlete, movie star, GC vice president, televangelist, politician, et cetera. What was the setting? What took place? Were any words exchanged? How did your class members feel as they walked away? Did the encounter make them feel in any way inadequate? Or did the members feel as if they were just with another person—who just happened to be famous?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: For most of us, our encounters with greatness will inevitably be brief, impromptu exchanges. But it’s always possible that a situation will arise in which we can plant a gospel seed or two that, with God’s blessing, will develop into something more.

Bible Commentary

I. God-Established Authorities (*Review Romans 13:1–7 with your class.*)

“The authorities that exist have been established by God” (*vs. 1, NIV*). With these words the apostle Paul reminds his readers that earthly rulers have been appointed by God and that they serve according to His will and design.

However, we have to acknowledge that not everything worldly leaders

do is part of His plan. They, like the rest of us, have the power to make their own choices. So, while He allows them to have power, He's not responsible for what they do.

Paul's counsel to the believers in Rome was to obey and honor the rulers of the various levels of government because they were honoring God when they did so.

But two Bible characters did more than obey their earthly rulers—they served them. Joseph and Daniel both had careers that put them in positions to serve at the highest levels of national government. And by all accounts they did it admirably. They served faithfully without compromising their principles. True, they had their enemies, as all public servants do, but they served as trusted and valued servants of kings.

As such, their service directly benefited the subjects of their respective kingdoms. Joseph's plan to save grain in times of plenty for times of drought saved many lives (including those of his father, his brothers, and their families). Daniel's wise counsel to Nebuchadnezzar led to Nebuchadnezzar's conversion (*see Daniel 4*) and led Nebuchadnezzar to be a wiser and more faithful ruler.

Consider This: While it seems most people seek public office because of the perks and authority it affords, the concept of public service is an honorable one. People who serve well should be supported. People who serve poorly should be held accountable. Our choices at the ballot box do both. What are some other ways in which Christians can hold accountable their elected officials? Just as accountability is important in public service, it's also important in the church. List one example of the church showing poor accountability. List one good example.

II. Giving Orders—and Taking Them (*Review Matthew 8:5–13 and Luke 7:1–10 with your class.*)

Not all contact between the Jews and Romans was antagonistic. Here a centurion with a sick servant knows that Jesus has been known to heal the sick. The problem is that he's Roman, and, given the antipathy most Jews felt for Romans, he hesitates to approach Jesus directly. Instead, he asks some of his Jewish friends to appeal to Jesus on his behalf.

Their approach is instructive: "When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, 'This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue' " (*Luke 7:4, 5, NIV*).

In other words, “This man isn’t like the other Romans; he likes us and has done things for us.” Sadly, they miss the point. Jesus doesn’t hand out favors because someone is Roman or Jewish or because people are good or bad. For Jesus, grace goes where it’s needed the most. When the centurion returns home, he finds that his servant has been healed.

Consider This: The powerful often have as many insecurities as the rest of us do. They only have more resources with which to mask them. They may also be more hesitant to express their needs. Many are often surrounded by some kind of entourage, hangers-on, who are hoping to bask in the celebrity status of the powerful. So, who can the powerful really trust? If we were given access to some powerful person, how would he or she know that we weren’t trying to capitalize on his or her celebrity to get something for ourselves?

III. Before Powerful People *(Review Matthew 26:57–68, 27:11–14, Luke 23:1–12, Acts 24–26 with your class.)*

Both Jesus and Paul had to stand before councils and rulers to explain their ministries. They certainly didn’t ask for such opportunities; nor did they shrink from them, although the result in each case was never in doubt.

The challenge then and now is to be respectful and considerate. Jesus and Paul knew their audiences and used terminology that would have been familiar to their listeners. Although Paul used more words, both he and Jesus showed respect for their judges by being clear and concise.

With so much at stake, we can hardly trust ourselves to answer in our own wisdom. There’s no doubt why Jesus promised, “ ‘On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. . . . At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you’ ” (*Matt. 10:18–20, NIV*).

Consider This: We may never have to defend ourselves before judges and magistrates, but we will sometimes be given opportunities to witness for Christ at a bus stop, in an airliner, or at a social gathering when we’re asked, “So then, what is being a Seventh-day Adventist all about?”

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ If disciples learn from their Master how to live, what lessons should we learn from the way Jesus dealt with the powerful? List at least three.
- ❷ When you're asked in a simple, nonthreatening setting what you believe, what two or three cardinal beliefs do you highlight?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Although this lesson is about discipling the powerful, the principles discussed apply to people of every age, ethnicity, and social standing. While we may tailor our approach slightly, depending on the situation, basic concepts such as respect, courtesy, and loyalty apply across the board.

Life Application: Christians in the first century faced opposition on two fronts: on one side, they were viewed with suspicion by the Jews, who saw them as heretics. On the other, Romans couldn't understand their devotion to a criminal who was condemned to be crucified. In that setting, lots of baseless rumors caused no end of confusion.

So, how did Christians communicate to the widest number of people what they were all about? How was this message carried to Caesar's own household? How can Christians today adopt that same strategy?

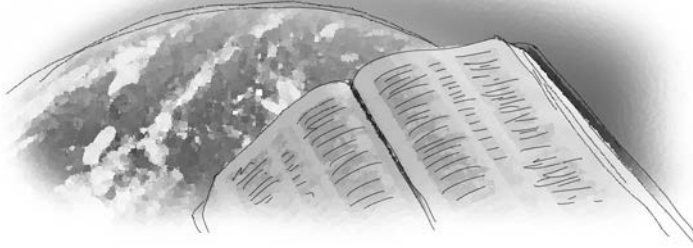
►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Early Christians risked persecution if they attracted too much attention from people in authority. What do we risk by being unnoticed?

Activity: Ask class members to write letters to the editor of the local newspaper. The letters may commend public officials for their support of some issue, or they may challenge readers to exercise more concern about a matter of public health or safety.

Share and discuss some seed ideas: better marked crosswalks, better enforcement of speed limits near schools, stricter measures to keep tobacco out of the hands of minors, et cetera. Class members don't have to mention they are Seventh-day Adventists, or even Christian. The idea is to be known as people who contribute to the public good in a positive way.

Discipling *the* Nations



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 56:6–8; Matt. 11:20–24; John 12:20–32; Rom. 15:12; Acts 1:7, 8.*

Memory Text: “‘For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’” (*Isaiah 56:7, NKJV*).

Christ's message, from its inception, was destined for everyone everywhere. Early on, the gospel went worldwide, because it is universally applicable. Doubtless, this concept challenged the disciples' thinking. Their initial reaction, for instance, to Christ's conversing with the Samaritan woman illustrates this challenge. They thought that Jesus as the Messiah was merely the fulfillment of Jewish prophecies and hopes. Somehow they had missed or misinterpreted the prophets, especially Isaiah, whose message encompassed all peoples. Jesus, the Desire of all nations, was not to be limited to a single group. Salvation might be of the Jews, but it was for everyone. Christ's followers would transcend national boundaries, international conflicts, language differences, and other difficulties, because He had established the pattern of cross-cultural evangelism.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we especially see this call in Revelation 14:6—“Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*NKJV*).

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

The Prophets Foretold

Ancient prophets foretold the conversion of non-Jewish people (Gentiles) to a scripturally based faith. Heathen deities, pagan worship, and destructive lifestyles would be toppled by uncompromising submission to, and faith in, Jehovah. Israel’s enemies would stream into Jerusalem begging for admission, thirsting for spiritual knowledge. Israel’s commission was to broadcast God’s universal invitation to the surrounding nations.

Unfortunately, Israel’s missionary passion was derailed by earthly concerns. The grand vision was buried beneath complacency. Christ’s coming resurrected that vision, at least for some.

Read Isaiah 56:6–8; Micah 4:1, 2; Jonah 3:7–10; 4:1. **What do these verses teach about universal outreach, and about how limited some in Israel were in understanding it?**

Israel was to be the light of the nations. Seeing the wonderful advantages that the Israelites had, heathen nations would inquire about the Israelites’ monotheistic faith, and thus many of them would be converted to the true God.

Unfortunately, that’s not how things generally turned out, as Israel became so inwardly focused that it lost sight of its larger purpose and, often, the God who had offered it so much.

Modern Christians face a similar challenge. Will they sacrificially invest in furthering the gospel, or will they become inwardly focused, forgetting their larger purpose? It’s an easier trap to fall into than we realize.

“In the name of the Lord let us lift up our voices in praise and thanksgiving for the results of work abroad.

“And still our General, who never makes a mistake, says to us: ‘Advance. Enter new territory. Lift up the standard in every land. ‘Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.’”

“Our watchword is to be: Onward, ever onward. The angels of God will go before us to prepare the way. Our burden for the ‘regions beyond’ can never be laid down until the whole earth shall be lightened with the glory of the Lord.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 28, 29.

Woe Unto Thee!

Read Matthew 11:20–24, Luke 4:25–30, 17:11–19, John 10:16. What crucial message comes from these texts? How can we take what is written here and apply it to ourselves, in our own time and context? What principle is revealed here that we have to be very careful about?

Christ wanted His own people, those who had so many advantages, to wake up to what their true calling and purpose was as a people. He wanted them to see that salvation, even for the chosen nation, was not something that a person is born into. It’s not passed on in the genes or by a birthright. It was something that requires a conscious choice to accept, a choice that even those who weren’t of Israel could, and did, make.

Athletic coaches sometimes challenge their athletes by comparing them with competing schools or organizations. “If you’d practice as faithfully, energetically, and intensely as they do, you’d enjoy success.” The coach’s obvious motivation is to inspire, to build up desire rather than diminish it.

In the same way, Jesus wanted His own people to share the fullness of salvation as some non-Jewish people were already doing. No doubt His words scandalized some because He preached something that they didn’t want to hear, however much these truths should have already been known and understood by them.

Some people might indeed have many spiritual advantages that others don’t have, but those who have these advantages must realize that, whatever they have been given, they are all gifts from God, to be used for His glory and not their own.

What about us? What about all the advantages that we, as a people, have been given by God? Why is it important, first, to recognize those advantages; then, second, humbly to realize the responsibilities that come with them?

“We Would See Jesus”

Read John 12:20–32. How is the universality of the gospel message revealed in these verses?

Jerusalem was buzzing with rumors. Christ’s triumphal entry had just occurred. Hosannas, though, were quickly replaced by questions. What was going to happen next? Would Jesus be crowned king?

Among the crowd assembling for Passover were Greek worshipers. Notice their words to Philip, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” In other words, they wanted to see Jesus. They wanted to be with Him. They wanted to learn from Him. What a testimony to the universal character of Christ and His message! How sad, too, that those who should have said the same thing were the very ones who wanted to be rid of Him.

The Greeks probably approached Philip because he carried a Greek name. Coming from Bethsaida, a commercial fishing center—hence, a cultural melting pot—he probably spoke their language too. The text suggests that Jesus was not immediately present. Perhaps He worshiped nearby in places reserved for Jews.

However, then joining His disciples and the Greek interviewers within the outer court, Jesus granted these men their wish. Notice what He said to them: “If any man,” meaning any man, woman, Jew, or Greek, wanted to follow Him, they could, but it would come at a cost.

What was that cost? How do we understand the meaning of this? *See John 12:25.*

Then, with these foreigners still present, heaven thundered a confirming message of judgment and conquest. That Voice was heard, Jesus said, not for Him but for them, Jew and Greek, that their faith could be strengthened. Christ’s words immediately affirmed that His death was to be for all the world.

Breaking Down Barriers

Read John 7:35, 8:48, Luke 10:27–37. In what way do these verses show why regional, ethnic, and other barriers should have no place among Christians as they seek to make disciples among all nations?

Some of the leaders' contempt for Jesus knew no bounds. Again, the terrible irony was that those who should have been in the forefront of receiving Him and His message were the very ones who fought against Him the hardest. Priests of Israel scorned the Son of God when those not of Israel accepted Him as the Messiah. What a powerful and sobering lesson is here for those who deem themselves (perhaps with some justification) spiritually advantaged!

When condemning Christ, they not only labeled Him as having a devil, they made it worse by calling Him a Samaritan, as well. They even mocked Him for His witness among the Greeks, showing obviously their contempt for those not of their own nation and faith. Israel's leaders found it unthinkable that Jesus would consider teaching Greeks. Jesus countered this by emphasizing character above ethnic origin.

How interesting, too, that He used the true story of a Samaritan in order to teach a powerful spiritual lesson about what it meant truly to fulfill God's law. Religious leaders, doubtless restrained by their twisted understanding of Levitical law and defilement, had earlier bypassed the wounded man. The despised foreigner, a Samaritan, had conscientiously defied ethnic prejudice, saving the stranger's life. What a stinging rebuke to all those who spurn and scorn someone in need only because the person is not of their own ethnic, social, or cultural background.

Think of the last time that perhaps you did not help someone in need. What justifications did you use not to help? Looking back now, what should you have done differently?

The Great Commission

Read Romans 15:12; Acts 1:7, 8; John 11:52, 53; Matthew 28:19, 20. What's the essential message here, and how does this message fit in so well with the three angels' messages of Revelation 14?

God's final work is incomplete until the eternal gospel expressed in the message of the three angels found in Revelation 14 has crossed every racial, ethnic, national, and geographical boundary. Without divulging the precise timing, Scripture unequivocally states that this gospel will reach around the world. God's triumph and its proclamation are assured.

The nations' acceptance of that message is prophesied. This must happen, but who will offer themselves as God's channels of grace? Who will join Christ in the overturning of the racial, ethnic, and language barriers that impede the gospel's progress? Who will empty their wallets and pocketbooks? Who will sacrifice earthly comforts and family associations in order to advance heaven's cause? These are the questions that we all must ask ourselves. What are we doing to reach out to others, whoever and wherever they are? How unfortunate that some believers allow racial stereotypes, cultural prejudices, and satanically designed social barriers to dissuade them from vigorous gospel proclamation when their fellow believers are scattered across the globe, willingly yielding their lives that the gospel might be preached.

"Our missionary success has been fully proportionate to our self-denying, self-sacrificing effort. God alone can estimate the work accomplished as the gospel message has been proclaimed in clear, straight lines. New fields have been entered, and aggressive work has been done. The seeds of truth have been sown, the light has flashed upon many minds, bringing enlarged views of God and a more correct estimate as to the character to be formed. Thousands have been brought to a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. They have been imbued with the faith that works by love and purifies the soul."
—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 28.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Great Commission,” pp. 25–34; “Pentecost,” pp. 35–46; in *The Acts of the Apostles*; “In the Outer Court,” pp. 621–626; “The Good Samaritan,” pp. 497–505, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“A certain Samaritan, in his journey, came where the sufferer was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him. He did not question whether the stranger was a Jew or a Gentile. . . .

“Thus the question, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ is forever answered. Christ has shown that our neighbor does not mean merely one of the church or faith to which we belong. It has no reference to race, color, or class distinction. Our neighbor is every person who needs our help. Our neighbor is every soul who is wounded and bruised by the adversary. Our neighbor is everyone who is the property of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 503.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What does our financial support of the church’s worldwide mission indicate about our real commitment to the gospel commission? Why must our involvement reach beyond mere financial support? In what ways can funds presently allocated to church preservation be channeled into cross-cultural evangelism?
- 2 “We are not to feel that the work of the gospel depends principally upon the minister. To every man God has given a work to do in connection with His kingdom. Everyone who professes the name of Christ is to be an earnest, disinterested worker, ready to defend the principles of righteousness. Every soul should take an active part in advancing the cause of God. Whatever our calling, as Christians we have a work to do in making Christ known to the world. We are to be missionaries, having for our chief aim the winning of souls to Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 427. In class, dwell on the meaning of what is written here and, as a class, ask what more you could do to help finish the work that we have been called to do.
- 3 Dwell more on what Jesus said in John 12:25. What does it mean to “hate” our life “in this world”? In what ways are we to express this “hatred”?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Isaiah 56:7*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Assert that in God’s kingdom, adjectives—such as African, Asian, European, American—are ultimately useless.

Feel: Resist the urge to categorize people by age, ethnicity, economic status, and religion.

Do: Take advantage of every possible opportunity to engage people of different backgrounds and perspectives.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: God’s Concern for His Creatures Extends Far Beyond Human Categories.

A Why do we find it so easy to put people into categories: good and bad, resident and alien, saint and sinner?

B Why is this either/or mentality perilous to our attempt to disciple all people?

II. Feel: Our Similarities With Others Often Outnumber Our Differences.

A List ten things we share in common with all our fellow human beings.

B Excluding matters of faith, list ten things that make us different from others.

C Which is easier: to highlight our differences or our similarities? Why is that so?

III. Do: God’s Prophets Were Sometimes Given Messages for His People. But Some Prophets Also Had Messages for Other Nations.

A Did Israel fulfill its destiny of being a light to the nations? Why, or why not?

B What made the nation ultimately ineffective?

C What should Israel have done that it didn’t do? What lesson does its failure hold for us?

► **Summary:** People with a worldwide message are not well-served if they believe God only cares about them, that He is only returning to save them. We have to understand that God longs for us to reveal His love “to every nation, tribe, language and people” (*Rev. 14:6, NIV*).

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Isaiah 56:7*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The kingdom of God is not limited by ethnic or geographic boundaries.

Just for Teachers: While the Bible is often a record of God’s dealings with His people, the Jews, another theme runs throughout the Bible: that God actually regards all people on earth as His possessions. This lesson challenges the claim of exclusivity among God’s “chosen” people.

Opening Activity/Discussion: To the Jewish mind, there were only two classes of people in the world: Jews and everyone else. The “everyone else” they called Gentiles. People could be Babylonian, Assyrian, Roman, Chinese, or Ethiopian—they were all Gentiles. This attitude, however, was common in the ancient world; the Greeks, for instance, viewed non-Greeks as “barbarians.”

What are the implications of this type of attitude? If God cared only about the Jews, what does that say about Him? Fortunately, God is greater than most of us can begin to imagine.

Have you ever traveled somewhere where you were obviously “not from around here”? What was it like to feel like an outsider?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: You don’t have to read much of the Bible to understand that, Yes, God considered Himself the God of the Jews. But He also regarded Himself as God of all humanity. That God had an interest in people other than Jews goes as far back as the Creation story in which He is responsible for the Creation of the entire world, as well as humankind’s first parents, Adam and Eve.

Old Testament stories about Joseph, Rahab, Ruth, Daniel, Esther, and Jonah demonstrate that not only was God aware of people of other nations, He often went out of His way to embrace them and make them part of His faith community.

New Testament characters such as the wise men who appeared from a far country to worship the Baby Jesus, the good Samaritan, the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, the Roman centurion who had a sick servant, the woman of Tyre and Sidon whose daughter was

sick, and several others show that Jesus wasn't hindered from helping others simply because they weren't Jews.

Bible Commentary

I. A God Too Good for the Gentiles *(Review Jonah 3, 4 with your class.)*

The story of Jonah is instructive because it shows God's concern for people of other nations as well as how Jews, in this case Jonah, understood their mission, and the difference between the two.

God sent Jonah to Nineveh with a message of judgment: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned" (*Jon. 3:4, NIV*). There was no indication that the people in Nineveh could do anything to avert this evil; their fate was sealed. They had 40 days.

But Jonah was apparently such a convincing evangelist that, when the king heard about Jonah's message, he urged all the people (even the animals) to repent in sackcloth and ashes. "Who knows?" he said, "God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish" (*vs. 9, NIV*).

The Bible record states, "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened" (*vs. 10, NIV*). Good news! Right?

Not to Jonah. An entire city was spared, but that didn't please Jonah one bit. "That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish," Jonah prayed. "I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (*Jon. 4:2, NIV*). Apparently, Jonah was fine with God being compassionate with him and his fellow Jews; in fact, he confessed as much when he prayed in the belly of the fish, "Salvation comes from the LORD" (*Jon. 2:9, NIV*). But mercy and compassion for the Gentiles? That, in Jonah's mind, was carrying things a little too far.

Consider This: Do you find it at all shocking that God cares as much about Gentiles as He cares about Jews? Does He care as much about Roman Catholics as He cares about Seventh-day Adventists? What about Christians and Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists—does He care about all of them? Even atheists? Explain.

Read Psalm 86:9, and Isaiah 52:10, 56:7, and 61:11. In the context of the story of Jonah, how do you understand these texts?

II. And the Hero Is . . . *(Review Luke 10:25–37 with your class.)*

When Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan, there were no "good" Samaritans, according to most Jews. The antipathy between Jews and

Samaritans went back hundreds of years.

The telling of the story comes in the context of Jesus' conversation with "an expert in the law" (vs. 25, *NIV*). The man's question was, " 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' " (vs. 25, *NIV*).

Jesus' answer was twofold: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart . . .'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself' " (vs. 27, *NIV*).

When pressed about whom the man should consider as his neighbor, Jesus told the story about a man who was beaten, robbed, and left for dead along the Jericho Road. A priest and a Levite passed by without doing anything to help. It was one of those despised Samaritans who stopped to help the victim. Not only did the Samaritan dress the man's wounds, he put the man on his donkey, took him to an inn, and paid for the man's care.

Consider This: Jesus' question, " 'Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?' " (vs. 36, *NIV*), is freighted with some startling implications. If the priest and Levite, who were supposedly closest to God, passed by without doing anything, what right did they have to call themselves God's people? And if the Samaritan stopped and did what any decent person would have done, what does that say about those whom we are tempted to dismiss as unworthy of God's grace? How can grace be grace if it is not undeserved?

III. What the World Needs Now (*Review John 12:20–32 with your class.*)

Following Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem less than a week prior to His crucifixion, Jerusalem was abuzz with rumors and speculation about what Jesus would do next.

The Pharisees also were getting more desperate as they saw Jesus' influence increase and theirs decrease. " 'Look how the whole world has gone after him!' " they complained (*John 12:19, NIV*).

Such is the setting for the following request from some Greeks who were in Jerusalem for Passover: " 'Sir . . . we would like to see Jesus' " (vs. 21, *NIV*).

Interestingly, it's in this context that Jesus made this significant statement: " 'But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself' " (vs. 32, *NIV*). In other words, when people say that they want to see Jesus, they aren't asking to know about us—they're asking for a glimpse of Christ's character. We aren't being good disciples if we make the message about ourselves—our strengths, talents, or teachings. We're only being good disciples if Christ is reflected in our lives, and we direct people's attention to Him.

Consider This: More than seven billion people live on planet Earth. And each of the several great world religions has its own sacred writings. How do Seventh-day Adventists—even with their familiarity of Bible truth—intend to reach everyone?

Discussion Questions:

How do you feel about the idea that God’s everlasting gospel applies to people of all nations? Confused? Frightened? Delighted? Why? Be honest with your feelings and reasons.

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Some parts of the world are sometimes described as “post-Christian.” This is a huge challenge—especially in those parts of the world (North America, western Europe, South Pacific) that were formerly known as Christian. Clearly, we have our work cut out for us.

Thought Questions:

- ❶ If God loves all people, why should we invite them to accept His gospel? Hint: even though we believe in salvation by grace through faith, there’s still a place for works. What is it?
- ❷ Imagine this: a delegation from your community visits your church board with the request “We would like to see Jesus.” What would you say? What would you do?

►STEP 4—Create

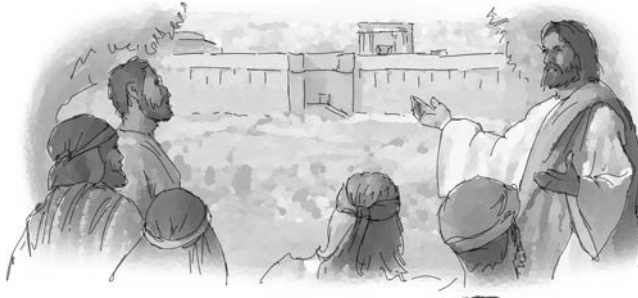
Just for Teachers: We live in a world much more complex than ever imagined by our Seventh-day Adventist pioneers. Who would have thought a generation ago that Islam would be one of the fastest-growing religions in North America? Clearly, we have to be open to new, creative methods for reaching out to others.

Activity: Depending on where you live, you might know someone who practices one of the world’s faith traditions other than Christianity (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, et cetera). Learn from them what they believe and then think through ways you could reach them with our message.

Discussion Questions:

- How well do you know people of other (non-Christian) faiths?
- Do you feel threatened by them? If so, why?
- If you wanted to discuss religion with them, how easy would it be?
- What form of evangelism would be most effective in reaching them?

Discipling Spiritual Leaders



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 6:12–16, John 16:7–14, Luke 6:20–49, Jer. 50:31, Isa. 57:15, Acts 1.*

Memory Text: “Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles” (*Luke 6:12, 13, NKJV*).

While Jesus was ever active in making disciples, He recognized that His earthly sojourn was short. Therefore He invested Himself in the training of disciples to continue the work after He left. He was both their Master Teacher and their Master Trainer. While teaching and training are obviously related, *teaching* usually connotes the impartation of knowledge, whereas *training* suggests formation or qualification through practice and discipline.

The disciples' preparation for leadership certainly involved the receiving of knowledge, but spiritual growth was uppermost. They needed an experience in the things of God, of faith, of hardship, of sanctification, and of self-sacrifice, along with an intellectual understanding of doctrine and theology. Knowledge alone was insufficient preparation for the rigorous challenges ahead. Jesus gave them both.

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

Leadership Starts Here

Christ's earthly sojourn was relatively brief. Therefore, the training of disciple-makers was imperative. Whom should He select? How many should He choose? Jesus' disciples doubtless numbered in the hundreds. Should everyone undergo mass education? Christ understood that leadership was cultivated effectively within small groups, not mass-produced through lectureships. Limited numbers would be chosen for Christ's initial graduating class.

Study Luke 6:12–16. What did Jesus do before He chose His disciples, and why was this so important?

Choosing effectively required advanced wisdom. Jesus approached His heavenly Father through prayer to acquire this wisdom. Likewise, prayer should precede the selection of leadership candidates in twenty-first-century disciple-making. Since Christ apparently believed that He needed extensive prayer in order to obtain the wisdom required, how much more should today's Christians petition for divine wisdom when choosing those charged with overseeing the progress of the Great Commission?

Having chosen twelve, Jesus designated them apostles—His commissioned representatives invested with spiritual authority. The larger group of disciples witnessed this ordaining or commissioning with no apparent jealousy or negative feelings. Later, Jesus would commission a larger group of seventy-two and, perhaps, others not recorded within Scripture. The twelve apostles, however, retained the identity of those most closely associated with Jesus; they shouldered the largest responsibilities and, therefore, required the most extensive training and commitment. This arrangement clearly implies intentional organizational structure among the earliest Christians. Christ spiritually invested the leaders within that organization with capabilities and education commensurate to their assigned tasks.

Think through the implications of how much time Jesus spent in prayer. What should this tell us about our own prayer lives? What does prayer do for you?

Knowledge and Experience: Part 1

Information was an irreplaceable component of Jesus' message. Information alone cannot transform, but every transformation includes information. Certainly, concepts possess no inherent power for initiating change; God's Spirit, however, working through human hearts, constitutes the irreplaceable element necessary for conversion.

Read John 16:7–14. What is Jesus saying here that helps us to understand how limited intellectual knowledge is, in and of itself, in the understanding and experiencing of true Christianity?

Biblical knowledge coupled together with God's Divine Spirit form the spiritual combination that transforms individuals and societies. The disciple-maker must strive for both of them in faith and study.

Christianity highly regards intelligence, thinking, and imagination. The existence of reasoned thought throughout Scripture, the tremendous respect afforded teachers within Judaism, and the priceless attention that scribes devoted to preserving ancient writings all testify to the importance of knowledge.

Christianity is not an irrational faith. Nevertheless, certain elements within Christianity have elevated emotion, feeling, and experience above knowledge. This mind-set declares that what people believe is relatively unimportant because experience alone is meaningful. Obedience and adherence to specific truths are deemed relatively unimportant; emotion and religious excitement become the measuring stick for spiritual genuineness.

Scripture's very existence counters this mindless fascination with experience. Experience without knowledge becomes a supercharged missile without direction. Conversely, knowledge without experience becomes lifeless and oftentimes legalistic. True Christian leaders understood the need to cultivate both of these elements, not only in themselves but in those they disciple.

Think through all the good reasons that you have for your faith. At the same time, what role has experience played? Why do we need both?

Knowledge and Experience: Part 2

Read Luke 6:20–49. In what ways are both knowledge and experience revealed in these texts? That is, how are they blended here in a way that shows why both are needed, not only in our own walk with the Lord but in disciple-making, as well?

Spiritual knowledge is indispensable for spiritual transformation. Christ Himself was regarded as the Master Teacher. In open classrooms bordered by seashores, mountains, and God’s created wonders, Christ disseminated transformative knowledge. The Holy Spirit awakened previously seared consciences to accept these truths. Disciple-making is incomplete without experience, but experience must be directed by knowledge.

Twenty-first-century disciple-makers must thoroughly acquaint themselves with Scripture, the source of authentic spiritual information. Likewise, they should disseminate doctrine and teachings without regard to popularity or convenience. God expects seasoned believers to withhold nothing, patiently guiding infant converts into an ever-expanding understanding and appreciation for the wonderful, life-changing truths of Christianity—especially the present truth of the three angels’ messages.

In the context of making disciples, what does Jesus say in Luke 6:39 that everyone who seeks to make disciples must keep in mind? How can we be sure that we are not like that which Jesus is warning about here?

In the end, a combination of knowledge and experience that produces unselfish love will be the most potent force for any disciple-maker to possess.

The Early Leaders

It is of no small interest and importance that in choosing leaders, Jesus picked from among the humbler, less-educated class of people. Christ did not choose the learning or eloquence of the Sanhedrin. Passing by the self-righteous teachers, the Master Worker chose humble, unlearned men to proclaim the truths that were to move the world. These men He purposed to train and educate as the leaders of His church. They in turn were to educate others and send them out with the gospel message. “That they might have success in their work they were to be given the power of the Holy Spirit. Not by human might or human wisdom was the gospel to be proclaimed, but by the power of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 17.

What do the following texts tell us about why Christ chose the ones He did to lead His church, as opposed to those whom many might deem as having the qualities needed for leadership? *Zeph. 2:3, Matt. 11:29, Jer. 50:31, Isa. 57:15.*

We must be careful, though, to not make wrong assumptions about why Jesus chose the ones that He did. Jesus was not against the educated or learned class; He Himself displayed, at a young age (*Luke 2:46, 47*), a great deal of knowledge. It’s just that so often those with the most education, wealth, or power aren’t ready to humble themselves in the way that people, especially leaders, need to in order for the Lord to be able to use them. This is not always the case, of course; the Lord did use such men (think of Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea; see also *Acts 6:7*). It just means that so often these types tend not to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19 and Philippians 2:3. What traits are expressed here, and why are these traits so crucial, not just for a leader but for anyone who professes the name of Christ? How can we learn to possess these traits in our own lives?

What Jesus Left

Future generations testify regarding the success of previous efforts. Whenever those efforts generate lasting results, the principles underlying those accomplishments should be studied and replicated. Did Christ's disciple-making methodology produce significant outcomes?

Of course it did. It changed the world. None of us, in fact, would be reading this Bible study guide more than two thousand years later, were it not for Christ's success in His training of the early church leaders.

Read Acts 1. What does this first chapter in the formation of the early church show us about the need for God-ordained leaders? What were they looking for in a leader? (See vs. 22.) What can we take away from this need for ourselves as we seek the right leaders?

Jesus established His kingdom and exemplified the principles that would perpetuate its growth. Pioneering the pathway through darkness to sunrise, Christ selected leaders whose weaknesses were overshadowed by His strength because they completely depended upon Him. Although lightly esteemed by the religious leaders and academically deficient, they outshined the Pharisees where it counted: transparency, humility, dependence, and authenticity. How crucial that all of us, whatever our positions in the church, display such characteristics. Over time, those who possessed a substantial formal education and an elevated social standing became part of the church.

“As Christ’s representatives the apostles were to make a decided impression on the world. The fact that they were humble men would not diminish their influence, but increase it; for the minds of their hearers would be carried from them to the Saviour, who, though unseen, was still working with them. The wonderful teaching of the apostles, their words of courage and trust, would assure all that it was not in their own power that they worked, but in the power of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 22, 23.

What do you look for in church leaders? Why? What are the top three things that you want to see in them? Bring your answers to class on Sabbath and compare answers.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The First Evangelists,” pp. 349–358; “The Last Journey From Galilee,” pp. 488–496; and “The Sermon on the Mount,” pp. 298–314, in *The Desire of Ages*. “The Training of the Twelve,” pp. 17–24; “The Great Commission,” pp. 25–34; and “The Seven Deacons,” pp. 87–96, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“All over the field of Christ’s labor there were souls awakened to their need, and hungering and thirsting for truth. The time had come to send the tidings of His love to these longing hearts. To all these the disciples were to go as His representatives. The believers would be led to look upon them as divinely appointed teachers, and when the Saviour should thus be taken from them they would not be left without instructors.

“On this first tour the disciples were to go only where Jesus had been before them, and had made friends. Their preparation for the journey was to be of the simplest kind. Nothing must be allowed to divert their minds from their great work, or in any way excite opposition and close the door for further labor.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 351.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, discuss your answer to Thursday’s final question. What can you learn from each other’s answers?
- 2 Read Acts 6:1–6. Why does the incident here reveal one of the reasons as to why the church needs good leaders?
- 3 Dwell more on this idea of a balance between experience and knowledge in the Christian life. Is it possible that different people will need different balances; that is, some people will put more of an emphasis on experience than they do on knowledge, while others will focus more on knowledge than they do experience? If so, how can we learn to be sensitive to these differences in our efforts to make disciples? How can we learn that perhaps what we need isn’t exactly what others will need? Also, look at this text: “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:22). How does this text reveal the differences between knowledge and experience?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Luke 6:12, 13*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that Christ's influence as an individual was directly related to the extent that His disciples embraced and embodied the values of God's kingdom.

Feel: Long to be effective in fulfilling his or her mission for Christ by being intentional about developing Christian characteristics in others.

Do: Mentor four or five individuals to be Christ's disciples in order to build up God's kingdom.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Christ's Ministry on Earth Was Made More Effective by Those Whom He Chose as His Disciples.

A What characteristics did Jesus look for as He surrounded Himself with people who would help Him in His mission?

B While it's sometimes simpler just to "do it myself," why is it important to give others opportunities to serve as disciples?

II. Feel: Christ Was Always on the Lookout for People Who Were Open to Being His Disciples.

A What did Jesus know about the disciples that made them good candidates to lead His church after He ascended to heaven?

B Why didn't He choose more disciples that were cultured and educated?

III. Do: God Has Called Us to Make Disciples, as Well as to Be Disciples.

A What do you see as the major impediment to making disciples by being a mentor?

B What have you learned from the disciples who mentored you?

▶ **Summary:** No one is indispensable. When we're gone, somebody will take our place. Jesus left behind His disciples. Who are we training to help finish the work?

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Luke 6:12, 13*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Just as Jesus called His first disciples based on factors that would serve His kingdom, He still ordains leaders who will build up His church.

Just for Teachers: You're a living, breathing example of the principles you will be discussing in this week's lesson. At some point someone recognized in you a talent for teaching. This talent may have been something you knew about for years, or it may have come to you as something of a surprise. No matter; here you are, preparing to teach this week's lesson.

So, here's your assignment, teacher: your job this week is to help the members of your class understand that they also have gifts that will enable them to provide leadership at some level to your church congregation.

Opening Activity/Discussion: Ask each of your class members: As a child, what did you hope to do for a living?

As you grew older, went to school, and thought about a future career, what career(s) did you consider?

What did you study? And how does that relate to what you're doing now?

Now that you've been doing what you're doing for a certain period of time, do you see a career change in your future? If so, to what?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: There's a great difference between Jesus calling the 12 disciples and having the church nominating committee choose people to fill different offices in the church. Or is there?

By the time Jesus chose the Twelve, He knew pretty well their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their personalities and characters. If we don't know our fellow church members as well, we ought to. After all, people should be paired with jobs that suit them. As they say about careers, "Find something you love to do, and you'll never work a day in your life!"

Bible Commentary

I. He Chose Twelve *(Review Luke 6:12–16 with your class.)*

Before Jesus chose the Twelve who would spend the most time with Him

in His earthly ministry, He spent the night in prayer.

We know *whom* He chose, but we don't know *why* He chose them. Were they the best candidates available? With the benefit of hindsight, we know that some of them took some less-than-positive personality traits into their roles as apostles. And why not? Very few of us have spotless personalities.

What bears mentioning is a definition of the word *apostle*. *Apostle* is a highly technical word. It means literally "one who is sent." Therefore, those named as apostles had all the authority of the One who sent them, of the One they represented. In a secular setting, it meant someone could go to the market, buy something, and sign the master's name. The apostle's signature was as good as the master's.

One other thing: an apostle had an effectiveness of one generation. In other words, Jesus could make Peter an apostle, but Peter couldn't name somebody else as an apostle of Jesus. Technically, the title "an apostle of Jesus Christ" couldn't be transferred beyond those first Twelve Apostles (with the exception of Matthias, in Acts 1).

Consider This: Some of the disciples—Peter, John, James, Thomas, Andrew, Matthew—are somewhat well-known to us. Others, like Simon the Zealot; Bartholomew; and James, son of Alphaeus, we only know by their names. Yet, for some reason, Jesus called them to join Him as His apostles. It just goes to show that not all of Christ's followers need to be well-known. James and John were known as the "sons of thunder" (*Mark 3:17*). Thomas has been known as a doubter (*John 20:27*). If someone were to describe you in one or two words, what would those words be? What makes you a likely candidate to be one of Christ's disciples (which you are)?

II. Guided by the Holy Spirit (*Review John 16:5–15 with your class.*)

When Jesus left His disciples and returned to heaven, He left them with something extremely valuable—the Holy Spirit. Jesus admitted that He didn't have time to tell His disciples everything they needed to know but that " 'when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth' " (*vs. 13, NIV*).

By providing the Holy Spirit, Jesus was allowing for His work to expand exponentially. Christ's earthly ministry was limited by time and space; He could be in only one place at a time. But His apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, could take His message to 12 times as many places as He could.

And Christ's followers ever since have accomplished much for God's kingdom by staying open to the influence of the Holy Spirit and establishing new frontiers for Christ. Through 2,000 years of Christian history, God

has used countless dedicated people with their wide variety of gifts. Look around: your contemporaries are part of that great heritage.

Consider This: Christ said the Holy Spirit would guide His followers into “all truth” (*vs. 13*). Does that mean the disciples still had more truth to learn? How about us? Is there still more truth for Christ’s disciples to discover today?

III. A Graceful Church (*Review Acts 4:32, 33 with your class.*)

Sometimes we point to the thousands who were baptized at Pentecost as an endorsement that the early Christian church was blessed by the Holy Spirit. But that’s like going to camp meeting, being blessed by the church’s best music and preaching, and expecting the same thing when you return to your local church.

Yes, the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples as a rushing, mighty wind at Pentecost, and there were tokens of Holy Spirit power beyond that. But the real power of the Holy Spirit is demonstrated when, week after week, month after month, year after year, local church members use their spiritual gifts “to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (*vs. 33, NIV*).

The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the local church not only helps members identify and understand their spiritual gifts, it also keeps them motivated and encouraged as they use their gifts. How does your congregation reinforce and support its members in the use of their spiritual gifts?

Consider This: Some people are so preoccupied with the “latter rain” (*Joel 2:23*) that they don’t recognize the Spirit’s movement in thousands of congregations around the world. When the church is a sanctuary for all those beaten down by the tragedies and hardships of life, that’s tangible evidence that the Holy Spirit is active, because “much grace” (*Acts 4:33, NIV*) is upon them all.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 You know the leaders of your church’s congregation. Which ones do you look up to the most? Why?
- 2 Who else in your local congregation shows signs of some kind of spiritual leadership? What are those signs? What are you doing about it? What does your local church do to help its members identify their spiritual gifts?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: This is not just a theoretical exercise. Every year (sometimes more often) people in your congregation look for qualified people to fill this position or that. How would this lesson improve that process in the future?

Life Application: You're starting a church from scratch. You have to make sure things get done.

First, identify the things the church ought to be doing (don't forget preaching, witnessing, ministries to children, the poor, and the elderly, et cetera). Second, decide who's going to do those things. Third, describe the process by which the Holy Spirit puts the right person with the right gifts and talents in the appropriate role.

How much of the process is guided by the experience of the first Christians? How much of the process is colored by how your congregation has always done things in the past?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: It's time to see how your vision of the church and its ministries translate to a first-century setting.

Activity: Jesus Chairs the Nominating Committee

Write this sample list of officers from a typical nominating committee on a flip chart or white board, if available (alternately, if supplies are not available, read the list and then discuss the activity questions that follow):

- Children's Sabbath School Coordinator
- Clerk
- Communication Director
- Deacon/Deaconess
- Elder
- Fellowship Dinner Coordinator
- Home and School Leader
- Personal Ministries Director
- Risk Management Coordinator
- Sabbath School Superintendent
- Sabbath School Secretary
- Social Committee Chair
- Treasurer

Ask: How essential is a list like this to the mission of our church? Does a list like this enhance or impede the mission of the church? What would Jesus do with a list like this? What would He add? What would He take away?

The Harvest *and the* Harvesters



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 1:40–46, 4:28–30, Luke 24:47–53, Acts 1:6–8, Matt. 9:36–38, Luke 15.*

Memory Text: “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (*John 15:8*).

In many respects this week's study is a continuation of the previous lesson. Christ established spiritual leaders for the distinct purpose of proclaiming the kingdom of God. The principles and methodology that Jesus employed must remain the spiritual foundation for the Christian's preparation today.

In other words, modern leadership development theories must never supplant the foundation that Christ Himself laid. Whenever hype and publicity take precedence over spiritual growth, the results are shallowness and spiritual sterility. Whenever proselytizing displaces repentance, conversion, and spiritual transformation, the mission falters. Training leaders to conduct membership drives, media blitzes, and public relations campaigns instead of preparing them for spiritual warfare is courting disaster. True evangelism and disciple-making are centered around (1) the acknowledgment of our sinfulness, (2) genuine heartfelt contrition, (3) our unreserved spiritual surrender, and (4) the irrepressible compulsion to disseminate God's divine message to others.

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

Beggars' Bread

Nearing His earthly departure, Christ's concern focused upon His disciples, whom He had selflessly served and deeply loved. They would not be abandoned. Although Jesus Himself had to return to heaven, the Holy Spirit was commissioned to supply the spiritual intimacy that the disciples had enjoyed in His presence. Christ's instruction regarding the Spirit's work was so valuable that John devotes several chapters to its preservation. One defining element was the Spirit's testimony concerning Christ, even though the Spirit would not testify unaided. Accompanied by the Spirit, Christ's disciples would likewise testify concerning Jesus' ministry. God could have commissioned angels, unassisted by human beings, to broadcast the gospel. Instead, He elected to appoint sinful, erring, unpredictable humans for this sacred calling.

Read John 1:40–46; 4:28–30; 15:26, 27; 19:35, 36. What do these texts teach us about the ways in which the human and divine work together in the winning of souls?

Evangelism has been defined as “beggars telling other beggars where to find bread.” Andrew certainly excelled here. The writings of his brother Peter were to be included in Scripture one day, Peter's ministry was chronicled in Acts, and Christ included Peter among His three closest associates. Those honors never attended Andrew. Nevertheless, he received special recognition for following Christ's simple instruction to lead people to Jesus.

How many of God's chosen vessels—prolific leaders in evangelism, administration, and leadership—have been introduced to Christ by faithful disciples whose identities, humanly speaking, have long been forgotten? Although these people were not prominent themselves, think how crippled God's work might have been had they not faithfully witnessed about Jesus. Christ prepared His disciples for greater tasks by first offering simple assignments well within their reach. The Samaritan woman, Philip, and Andrew demonstrate the power of simple testimonies and heartfelt invitations. We all are called to do likewise.

When Jesus Urged Patience

Read Luke 24:47–53, Acts 1:6–8, 16:6–10. Why was waiting for the Spirit necessary? What was the Spirit’s role in the evangelistic outreach of the primitive church? What encouragement might modern believers draw from Paul’s experience when facing frustration? What lessons regarding patience and waiting for God’s timing are suggested within these passages?

Through discourse and example, Jesus taught His disciples patience. Facing bigotry, ignorance, misunderstanding, and outright conspiracy, Christ nonetheless patiently persevered. Such perseverance was anchored by Christ’s complete dependence upon God’s divine Spirit. Jesus understood that unless these disciples should likewise experience this dependence, the kingdom’s advancement was seriously jeopardized. Conversely, should they learn this lesson at the outset, their future ministry would be destined for heavenly attainments. Therefore, His departing command was “Wait.”

Christ desires that modern believers master that lesson also. Well-intentioned but self-confident Christians, when unwilling to patiently await the Spirit’s guidance, can embarrass themselves and God’s kingdom.

The apostle Paul drafted ambitious plans for entering Bithynia; but even headstrong Paul was sensitive to God’s leading and accepted rather than resisted the Spirit’s interference. The apostle willingly received the Spirit’s directive that sent him to Macedonia instead. Numerous miracles attended his efforts there. Had Paul rushed headlong with his designs, the European mission might have stalled indefinitely.

How can our anxious spirits be calmed to await patiently for the Spirit’s leading? What practical things should modern believers do in their attempts to cultivate such patience? What does patient, prayerful trust indicate regarding our relationship with God?

Exercising Authority

Compare the following passages: Mark 6:7–13, Matthew 16:14–19, 18:17–20, 28:18–20, John 20:21–23. What do these verses tell us about the kind of authority that Jesus’ disciples had? What does this mean for us today?

“Peter had expressed the truth which is the foundation of the church’s faith, and Jesus now honored him as the representative of the whole body of believers. He said, ‘I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’

“ ‘The keys of the kingdom of heaven’ are the words of Christ. All the words of Holy Scripture are His, and are here included. These words have power to open and to shut heaven. They declare the conditions upon which men are received or rejected. Thus the work of those who preach God’s word is a savor of life unto life or of death unto death. Theirs is a mission weighted with eternal results.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 413, 414.

As the Father commissioned Jesus, so Christ commissions His disciples. Through the Spirit, the Father invested Christ with divine power. Through the Spirit, Jesus likewise invests His disciples with divine power commensurate with their earthly assignments. No follower should fear that Christ has shortchanged them. Every necessary skill, talent, capability, and strength has been supplied.

Sometimes human leadership fails to recognize the principles involved. Whenever leaders assign tasks without extending commensurate power, failure is predictable. Often leaders’ insecurities surface through controlling behaviors that subjugate the thoughts, God-ordained creativity, and individuality of others. Thus emasculated, the subjugated disciple fails to be effective. Such behavior would look like a conductor attempting to play every instrument simultaneously instead of conducting a symphony.

Jesus’ example speaks volumes here. If anyone ever possessed the right to withhold authority and dictate behavior, Christ certainly did. Instead, He invested others with authority, commissioned them to labor outside of His presence where His only influence would be His instruction and examples and sent them to minister and witness.

Laborers for the Harvest

“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:36–38). What important message can we take from these verses for ourselves, today, and for the task ahead of us?

The spiritual harvest overflowed, but harvesters were scarce. The heart soil had been prepared, the spiritual seed had been planted; germination, plentiful moisture, and abundant sunshine spurred unbelievable growth. Ripened souls awaited harvesting, but where were the harvesters? Utilizing simple, easily understood word-pictures, Jesus sought to inspire contagious zeal.

Sometimes Christians covet their fellowship with other believers and cluster together, blindly bypassing worldly seekers who are ripened for harvest. Perhaps not realizing their divine accountability for perishing souls, they busy themselves with church engagements, civic responsibilities, building maintenance, and other worthwhile projects dedicated to preserving the status quo. These are doubtless good things. Well-intentioned members sometimes question the value of evangelism or express this sentiment: “Pastor, this evangelism stuff is all right, but don’t we need programs for people who are already in church?”

This is a fair enough question, though one must also ask, “When did Jesus ever lament the shortage of grain preservers?” Instead, “more harvesters” was His prayerful plea.

How can we find the right balance between ministering to the needs of those in the church and at the same time not neglecting outreach?

Lost and Found

Through teaching and personal example, Jesus taught His disciples to associate with sinners, even notorious ones such as prostitutes and tax collectors. How else would they disciple the whole world? His teaching often focused on these sinners. His characterization of them as “lost” demonstrates how merciful Christ was. He might have characterized them as “rebellious” (they certainly were) or “depraved.” Instead, He chose “lost.”

Lost doesn’t carry the same negative connotations that are contained in those other words. Rather than castigating fallen souls, we should follow Christ’s example. *Lost* is a generous description, because the responsibility is placed upon the finders. Disparaging remarks drive lost people away. Neutral language conveys acceptance and the possibility for relationship. We therefore must be careful not only about the language we speak, but even about the words we think, because our thoughts will greatly impact our attitudes toward others.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus encourages believers to become finders. He wants us to love and to reach out to the lost, regardless of the kind of people they are or the kind of lives they live.

“This is the service that God has chosen—‘to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke, . . . and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh.’ Isa. 58:6, 7. When you see yourselves as sinners saved only by the love of your heavenly Father, you will have tender pity for others who are suffering in sin. You will no longer meet misery and repentance with jealousy and censure. When the ice of selfishness is melted from your hearts, you will be in sympathy with God, and will share His joy in the saving of the lost.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 210, 211.

Study Luke 15. What essential message comes through in all these parables? What should this message say to us about the way in which God views the lost and what our responsibility to them is?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Last Journey From Galilee,” pp. 488–496; “Who Is the Greatest?” pp. 436–440, in *The Desire of Ages*; “The Training of the Twelve,” pp. 17–24; “The Great Commission,” pp. 25–34; “Pentecost,” pp. 35–46; “The Gift of the Spirit,” pp. 47–56, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“The disciples felt their spiritual need and cried to the Lord for the holy unction that was to fit them for the work of soul saving. They did not ask for a blessing for themselves merely. They were weighted with the burden of the salvation of souls. They realized that the gospel was to be carried to the world, and they claimed the power that Christ had promised.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 37.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What principles from Christ’s training methodology should modern teachers of disciple-making utilize? Imagine what such training would look like in your church.
- 2 In Thursday’s study, we looked at the question of language and the way in which language is used. Think through the kind of words that we, as Seventh-day Adventists, often use. Though we might view the words in a certain way, think about how others who are not familiar with our terms might understand those words. In what ways might we need to be more careful about our choice of words, especially with those whom we are seeking to reach?
- 3 Dwell more on the image we saw earlier about “beggars telling other beggars” where to get bread. How does this so accurately depict that which witnessing and outreach are all about? Why is it important that we do not forget that image and what it means?
- 4 What about your local church? Is it more focused on itself and its own needs or on outreach? How can a focus on outreach help the church? Or, to express it another way, if your church were more focused on witnessing and outreach, might it be less concerned about its own needs? How might outreach itself solve those needs?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *John 15:8*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Comprehend that success in being a disciple doesn't depend on titles or lines of authority.

Feel: Desire a life of service.

Do: Allow the Holy Spirit to guide him or her to people and places where he or she can do the most good.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Jesus' Standard of Usefulness Was Often Different From the Norm.

A What kind of people did Jesus seem to gravitate toward?

B Why does it seem as though we are captivated by titles and authority, even in church?

II. Feel: Humility and Patience Are More Prized Than Earthly Power or Influence.

A Try to remember some recent evangelistic initiative. What evidence indicates that it was guided by the Holy Spirit?

B Why is patience considered a virtue?

III. Do: Allowing the Holy Spirit to Work Through God's People Is Not as Easy as It Sounds.

A How open is your congregation to trying new methods of reaching your community? Discuss ways in which it could be more open.

B How willing is your congregation to let your members use their spiritual gifts, and what could be done to encourage your members to use them more fully?

C Can we receive the Holy Spirit by just praying for Him? If not, what else should we be doing?

▶ **Summary:** We don't use the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit uses us. But often we're so bound by our traditions that opportunities to use our spiritual gifts pass unrecognized. How can we prevent that from happening?

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *John 15:8*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Disciples demonstrate the authenticity of their experience by how closely their experience reflects that of their Master.

Just for Teachers: Everyone who accepts Christ as his or her Savior and is baptized by the Holy Spirit receives spiritual gifts. The gifts vary from person to person, but they are given for both nurture and outreach. The question is not, Do I have a spiritual gift? It is, rather, What are my gifts, and how am I using them?

Opening Activity/Discussion:

List the following spiritual gifts on a white board or flip chart* (where supplies are not available, simply read the list of gifts as follows):

Prophecy	Teaching	Miracles
Healing	Help/Service	Administration
Tongues	Evangelism	Pastoring
Encouragement	Mercy	

You're going to do two things with this list:

First, go around the circle and ask class members what they think their spiritual gifts are.

Second, for each class member, ask the other members of the class to say what they think that person's spiritual gifts are.

**Note: Don't allow your class to confuse "gifts of the Spirit" with "the fruit of the Spirit" (love, joy, peace, patience, et cetera).*

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: We sometimes tend to give the impression that some spiritual gifts are more important than others, which is the equivalent of assigning more importance to certain parts of the body than other parts when, in fact, all are essential to the whole. This week's lesson offers an opportunity to affirm each person in your class, along with the spiritual gift he or she has been given.

Bible Commentary

I. Abiding (Review John 15:1–8 with your class.)

The setting of this passage is the Last Supper. Jesus knew that within hours of making these statements He would be arrested, tried, and condemned. His disciples would be scattered, confused, and terrified. Therefore, this was Jesus' last chance to communicate important concepts that His disciples would find useful in the weeks, months, and years to come.

Jesus is unequivocal. Our success as disciples revolves around one thing: abiding in Him. In other words, a connection with Christ brings fruit. Sadly, a lot of instruction consists of encouraging people to be successful, bear fruit, and obey God. The problem we have today is that many are not taught how to stay connected.

We stay connected with Christ by cultivating the spiritual disciplines that have served Christians for centuries: Bible study, prayer, witnessing, and service. A Christian life that encompasses these disciplines can't help but show results.

Not only will we have results, we will glorify God in the process. Jesus said, " 'This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples' " (vs. 8, *NIV*).

Consider This: Branches that are attached to the vine can't help but bear fruit. It's a natural consequence of their connection to the vine. So, instead of "trying" to bear fruit, we should encourage one another to stay connected. But how, exactly, would one go about that? How is it done in your local church?

II. Harvesting (Review Matthew 9:35–38 with your class.)

Here's something you may or may not have considered: harvesting comes at the conclusion of a process that includes preparing the soil, planting the seed, watering, cultivating, and then harvesting.

Our passage begins with the verse, "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness" (vs. 35, *NIV*).

Jesus was able to say, " 'the harvest is plentiful' " (vs. 37, *NIV*), because He had spent so much time and effort making it so. Today's disciples do themselves a disservice if they imagine that all that's necessary for a harvest is to have more harvesters. However, farming is hard, not because harvesting is hard but because so much time and energy is required to prepare for the harvest. Farmers look forward to the harvest because it means the end of hard, backbreaking work. That's what the psalmist is describing with the famous words, "He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow,

will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him” (*Ps. 126:6, NIV*).

Consider This: Looking at the harvest as an isolated event unrelated to other activities the church is involved in throughout the year is to set ourselves up for frustration. We can’t harvest what we haven’t planted and cultivated. In which activities do you find yourself called: preparing the soil, sowing, nurturing, or reaping? In what ways do you feel equipped to do those things?

III. Finding (*Review Luke 15:1–32 with your class.*)

These three parables—among the most well-known in all the Bible—have some important lessons to teach us.

The parable of the lost sheep (*vss. 3–7*) reminds us that tending sheep is hard work. It’s a 24-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week job. This is because the shepherd’s job is not only to look after the sheep but to protect them from predators. When one of them goes missing, it’s his job to go find it.

According to Jesus’ story, the shepherd risks losing all his sheep by leaving them in the wilderness so that he can go after the sheep that is lost. But it’s worth the risk because when the sheep is found, the shepherd returns rejoicing.

The parable of the lost coin (*vss. 8–10*) is all about value. The lost coin, even though it’s lost, retains its value. That’s why the woman goes through so much time and effort to recover it. As long as it’s missing, it’s useless. The problem is that the coin, unlike the sheep, doesn’t know that it is lost. This awareness of the coin’s plight—its utter helplessness to reverse its lost state—puts an extra burden on the woman to search all the more diligently for it. When the woman finds it, she rejoices because its value is restored to her again.

The parable of the lost son (*vss. 11–32*) is about a parent’s unending love. The father gives his younger son his part of the inheritance, knowing full well that nothing good is going to come of it. Sure enough, the son disappears and so does his inheritance.

Months (years) later, the son returns to the embrace of an ecstatic father, who immediately throws a party to celebrate his son’s return. The celebration is marred, however, by the older son who refuses to join the party. His words to his father are instructive: “ ‘ ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you’ ’ ” (*vs. 29, NIV*). Did you catch that? He thinks of himself as a slave, not a son. He doesn’t leave the farm as his younger brother does, but because of some perverted sense of obligation, he thinks of himself as a slave instead of a son. So while he may have stayed on the farm, he is just as lost as his brother. Hence, while the father celebrates, the older son refuses to join the party.

Consider This: These three parables were told in response to the accusation “ ‘This man [Jesus] welcomes sinners and eats with them’ ” (*vs. 2, NIV*). It may be that Jesus told the parables to illustrate that the worst thing about being lost is not having anyone look for you or celebrate your return. Or it

may be that Jesus' purpose in telling these stories is to say that unless we're involved in searching and finding the lost, we're not fully His disciples.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What activities that your local church is involved in could be considered “sowing” activities? What activities are “nurturing or cultivating” activities? What activities are “harvesting” activities?
- ❷ Is your local church open to welcoming sinners and eating with them? What specifically are you doing to demonstrate that?
- ❸ When have you found it difficult to “go to the party”? What did the Father have to do to make you change your mind?

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: *It's one thing to say the reason there's not much of a harvest is because there aren't many harvesters. But what indicates that if you had more harvesters there would be a greater harvest?*

Life Application: Farmers know which fields are ready for harvest. They don't waste time in fields where the crops aren't yet mature. Which populations in your community are ready for harvest?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: *Think of an assembly line: cars (or washing machines or dishwashers or computers) don't assemble themselves. They go through a process. At each station another component is added until the finished product comes off the assembly line.*

Activity: Design an assembly line for Christians. Get a roll of butcher paper or put pages from a flip chart along a wall. List some “entry events” on your “assembly line,” then add different types of ministries or events to the right of them that will serve as nurturing, cultivating, or mentoring opportunities. Next, list some activities that will “harvest” the interests you've developed. (To do this activity without supplies, ask class members to list the different types of entry events, cultivating opportunities, and harvesting events that could be part of such an assembly line.)

Don't stop yet! How will you celebrate the people who respond to your harvest activities and make sure they're incorporated into the life of your local congregation?

Share your ideas for an assembly line with your pastor or church board. Or as a class you can operate your own “faith factory.”

The Cost of Discipleship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 12:49–53; Deut. 21:15; 1 Cor. 9:24–27; Matt. 18:8, 9; John 14:1–3; Heb. 11:32–12:4.*

Memory Text: “Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort” (*2 Corinthians 1:7, ESV*).

Throughout history, nameless millions willingly sacrificed their lives for Christ. They were imprisoned, tortured, even executed. Millions have foregone employment, suffered ridicule, endured expulsion from family, and persevered through religious persecution rather than forsake Christ. Only God knows the full extent of the suffering that His faithful ones have endured.

Of course, Paul forewarned, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (*2 Tim. 3:12, ESV*). And Peter said, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (*1 Pet. 2:21, ESV*).

Despite the promises of the so-called “prosperity” preachers, luxurious automobiles and financial gain are not automatic embellishments afforded to believers.

In the end, we can be sure that whatever the cost of discipleship is, considering the ultimate reward, that cost is cheap enough.

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

Calculating Cost: First Priority

Study Luke 12:49–53; 14:25, 26; Matthew 10:37. In what way are we to understand these strong words? What is Jesus telling us here?

Modern television newscasters would have concocted a prominent scandal from these words: “Today, celebrated religious leader Jesus of Nazareth advocated familial hatred during His afternoon address. Analysts are comparing these current pronouncements with previously released statements that promoted loving relationships with neighbors and enemies. Informed commentators wonder if this indicates recent policy shifts. Other unconfirmed quotations suggest selling everything and turning the proceeds over to the Jesus movement. Stay tuned for further developments.”

A closer study of the Bible and the way in which the word *hate* is used helps to clarify what Jesus meant. Deuteronomy 21:15 contains Mosaic legislation regarding men with multiple wives. The King James Version, following the natural sense, translates thus: “one beloved and another hated,” concerning those wives. Moses’ point is that if the husband favors one wife above others, he cannot deprive those less favored. The *New Revised Standard Version* and *Modern Language Bible* change the terminology rendering *beloved* with *loved* and *hated* with *disliked*. The *Tanakh* (Jewish Bible) and the *New American Standard Bible* (Protestant) settle on *loved* and *unloved*. Clearly, the intended understanding was relative affection. *Hatred* in this context may indicate “loving less.” Matthew 10:37, the parallel passage, certainly lends credibility to this suggestion.

Jesus’ point is simple yet full of deep implications. Whenever family receives precedence and Christ becomes secondary, Jesus relinquishes lordship. Serving multiple masters is impossible. Christ certainly supported strong family connections. Such connections, however, receive strength from unshakable foundations. That foundation means loving God unreservedly, first and foremost. God disallows every barrier, interruption, or distraction. Discipleship exacts the supreme price: undivided loyalty to Christ.

How do we, on a daily, practical level, put Christ before everyone, including family? What does it mean to do just that, and what could be some of the consequences?

Bearing Our Cross

“And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (*Luke 14:27*).

Discipleship means accepting Christ as Savior and Lord. Following Jesus means that you are ready to undergo the same suffering that Christ did. Thus, we must be honest in the way in which we present our message. Certainly the glorious truths of righteousness by faith, Christ’s forgiveness, Jesus’ imminent return, heaven’s incomparable wonders, and God’s unmerited grace should be taught.

But should believers desire to proclaim God’s complete message, they cannot overlook cross-bearing. Sadly, some believers erroneously think that preaching any message whereby human beings are called into action is legalistic. “Divine grace has accomplished all,” they proudly exclaim, “and the human race does nothing except receive it.” Jesus, however, disagrees.

Read Matthew 16:21–25; Luke 21:12–19; John 15:17–20; 16:1, 2. **What should we take away from these texts about the cost of following Jesus?**

Before baptism, every candidate should understand that Christ Himself has assigned him or her a cross, without which they absolutely cannot become His disciple. Does this dampen the joy of conversion? Would unrealistically promising them carefree lives somehow increase this joy? Conversion releases believers from the burdens of sin, not from the responsibilities of discipleship. By taking the name of Christ and by publicly revealing that choice through baptism, every believer must be aware that discipleship comes with a cost. What, though, does this world offer that makes what Christ offers not worth it? Nothing.

When was the last time that you took up your cross? What was the experience like? What did you learn from it that could help someone else struggling with a similar challenge?

Disciplined Response

Analyze the following passages: Luke 14:31–33, 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, Hebrews 12:1–4, 2 Peter 1:5–11. What are these texts telling us about the life of a disciple? How have you experienced the reality of what the Bible tells us here?

The cost of discipleship involves discipline. Every impulse, every imagination, every ambition, and every desire *must* be submitted to Christ. Every possession, physical or invisible, every talent and ability, and everything of value must be under Christ’s command. What we don’t surrender to Him can, and inevitably will, become an idol, with the potential to lead us astray.

Christ indeed offers us the power to overcome our character defects. Every appetite, emotion, and intellectual inclination can be under the guidance of His Spirit.

Notice the athletic example that Paul used in some of the texts for today. No athlete conspires to run slower, jump lower, or throw shorter. No believer should look backward either, especially when that which is at stake in the “race” is something that’s eternal, as opposed to whatever prize an earthly runner might win as a result of all his or her diligent effort and training.

“The runners put aside every indulgence that would tend to weaken the physical powers, and by severe and continuous discipline trained their muscles to strength and endurance, that when the day of the contest should arrive, they might put the heaviest tax upon their powers. How much more important that the Christian, whose eternal interests are at stake, bring appetite and passion under subjection to reason and the will of God! Never must he allow his attention to be diverted by amusements, luxuries, or ease. All his habits and passions must be brought under the strictest discipline. Reason, enlightened by the teachings of God’s word and guided by His Spirit, must hold the reins of control.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 311.

Comparing Costs

Corporations explore the viability of proposed projects through cost-benefit analysis. Do specific proposals contain the ingredients necessary for bringing successful returns on investments? Does the benefit outweigh the outlay? Another frequently used measurement is durability. Does the proposal offer sustainable returns?

The rewards of discipleship may likewise be measured through comparison with the costs. Those costs may include emotional suffering, social rejection, physical torture, financial deprivation, imprisonment, and death itself. Everyone who undertakes discipleship should first consider carefully the investments involved.

What do the following texts tell us about some of the costs of discipleship? *Matt. 18:8, 9; Luke 6:35; Phil. 2:3.*

What do the following texts say about the benefits? *Luke 18:28–30, John 14:1–3, Rev. 22:1–5.*

There is no question that the cost of following Jesus can be high, perhaps the costliest thing that anyone can do. Indeed, we should question the reality of our faith and our commitment if following Christ hasn't cost a lot, maybe even everything.

But one thing is sure: whatever we gain in this life, whatever we accomplish, whatever we make for ourselves, it is only temporary. It is something that will not last. It will vanish and vanish forever.

In contrast, what we gain through Jesus—eternal life in a new heaven and new earth—is by far worth more than anything and everything that this world could ever offer us.

Think through all the pleasures, all the joys and good things of this world here and now. What are they in comparison to eternity with Christ? How can we learn always to keep this contrast before us? Why is it important that we do so?

A Better Resurrection

Read Hebrews 11:32–12:4. What do these verses say to you, personally, about the cost and the reward of discipleship?

What a powerful concept this passage reveals, especially in the verse that says: “Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection” (*Heb. 11:35, NKJV*).

In a sense, being both a disciple and disciple-maker can be boiled down to one thing: “a better resurrection.” We follow Christ because we have the promise, the hope, of redemption, of a new life in a new world, one without sin, suffering, and death. At the same time, because we have been given this hope, this promise—made certain by the life, death, resurrection, and high-priestly ministry of Jesus—we seek to point others to the same hope, the same promise. In the end, before the great controversy is over, we will either face the first or the second resurrection. We know, for sure, which is the better one. What else matters other than not only being in that resurrection ourselves, but doing whatever we can to lead others to it, as well?

The harvest has ripened; millions await the call to discipleship. We have been blessed not only with the gospel but also with the gospel in the context of the “present truth”—the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14, God’s last warning message to the world.

What are we going to do with these truths that we love so much? Thus, we ask, Where are the reapers? Where are those willing to come alongside Christ and share the risks? Will you accept God’s invitation not to only be a disciple but to make disciples, regardless of the cost to yourself?

Think through the implications of the first resurrection and of the second resurrection. In light of these options, what else matters other than being in the better one and helping others to get there too?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “In the Regions Beyond,” pp. 219, 220; “Berea and Athens,” pp. 241, 242, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Fire comes down from God out of heaven. The earth is broken up. The weapons concealed in its depths are drawn forth. Devouring flames burst from every yawning chasm. The very rocks are on fire. The day has come that shall burn as an oven. The elements melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein are burned up. Malachi 4:1; 2 Peter 3:10. The earth’s surface seems one molten mass—a vast, seething lake of fire. It is the time of the judgment and perdition of ungodly men—‘the day of the Lord’s vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion.’ Isaiah 34:8.

“The wicked receive their recompense in the earth. Proverbs 11:31. They ‘shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts.’ Malachi 4:1. Some are destroyed as in a moment, while others suffer many days. All are punished ‘according to their deeds.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 672, 673.

Discussion Question:

❶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose Christian faith led to his death, wrote a famous book called *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Collier Books, 1963). Below are some quotes from the book. How do these fit in with what we have studied this week?

“The old life is left behind, and completely surrendered. The disciple is dragged out of his relative security into a life of absolute insecurity (that is, in truth, into the absolute security and safety of the fellowship of Jesus).”—Pages 62, 63.

“If we would follow Jesus we must take certain definite steps. The first step, which follows the call, cuts the disciple off from his previous existence.”—Pages 66, 67.

“The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. . . . When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”—Page 99.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *2 Corinthians 1:7*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that, by definition, disciples are people who pattern their lives after their master.

Feel: Long to live a life of service by laying his or her life down for Jesus, just as Jesus laid down His life in service for us.

Do: Live a life of discipleship, which carries its own rewards, both now and in the future.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: People Wouldn't Have Followed Jesus if He Hadn't Had a Magnetic Personality.

A How are Christians known in your community? Are they mostly admired or merely tolerated? Why do you think that is?

B If Jesus was so universally admired, why was He arrested and killed? By whom? And why?

II. Feel: The Life of Discipleship Is Challenging, Yes, but It's Also Characterized by Positive Aspects, as Well.

A What do you enjoy most about being a disciple of Jesus?

B Be realistic. What is the likelihood that you'll suffer for your faith? Give reasons for your answer.

III. Do: Embrace Every Day as a New Opportunity to Represent Christ to the People You'll Meet.

A What is your chosen vehicle for demonstrating the joy of the Lord to the people with whom you come into contact?

B What do your neighbors know about Jesus as a result of your contact with them?

► **Summary:** We all look forward to the new heavens and the new earth that God has prepared for us. But as Christ's disciples, we can live the principles of His kingdom—love, joy, peace, mercy, justice, and purity—now. How are we doing this?

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *2 Corinthians 1:7*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: *A life of discipleship has its own rewards, both now and in the future.*

Just for Teachers: *When we accept the role of disciple, we're saying that we will accept whatever discipline is required to honor our Master. But the discipline we're talking about here is not harsh or authoritarian. We're talking about the kind of discipline adopted by an athlete in training or by a student studying for a rigorous career in law, music, medicine, or science in which he or she studies or flunks out.*

Opening Activity/Discussion: If someone in your class works in an occupation that requires a lot of skill or knowledge (such as a doctor or attorney), ask what sacrifices it took to reach his or her level of proficiency.

Or if someone in your class has trained for an athletic event, such as a marathon or triathlon, ask about the training to which he or she submitted in order to be ready for the event.

Or have a discussion about the discipline exercised by world-class Olympic athletes. Most everyone has an idea about what that entails.

The point is, in each case the discipline an individual endures is mostly self-imposed. In other words, in order to perform at our best, we have to discipline ourselves. What correlation is there between such training and sacrifices and the type of discipline practiced by Christians as disciples of Christ?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: *The world has changed a lot since the early disciples paid with their lives for living for Christ. There are, however, still countries in the world where religious bigotry is so virulent that violence is practiced between believers of different faiths.*

Perhaps more insidious, though, is the climate in which many of us find ourselves: one in which it doesn't matter how people practice their faith or that they practice at all. The rise of secularism and materialism in many countries of the world leaves little time for the pursuit of authentic spirituality.

How do we stay faithful in either, or both, circumstances?

Bible Commentary

I. The Way of the Cross *(Review Matthew 16:24–26 with your class.)*

“ ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’ ” (vs. 24, *NIV*). With those words Jesus gave His disciples a preview of what lay ahead. At the time these words were spoken, the disciples had no idea that Jesus would shortly hang on a cross. But they no doubt knew what the cross was and that it represented a criminal’s death.

Then Jesus added, “ ‘For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it’ ” (vs. 25, *NIV*). In other words, in the life of discipleship, one gains life by giving it away. This was demonstrated supremely in the life, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ. And most of His disciples, and countless thousands in the last two millennia, have experienced the reality of this fact.

Think about it: many of us dedicate our time, talents, finances, and influence to a cause that brings us very few tangible rewards in this life. We do it because that’s the example Christ left for us.

Consider This: From the very beginning, early Christians faced different forms of persecution. Despite that, the early church prospered, even thrived. And down through the centuries, Christians, seeing by faith the reward waiting for them, willingly risked their lives for the sake of Christ. More likely the token of our dedication is not that we literally lay down our lives but that we give our lives in service for others. To what do you feel God calling you? In what sense might God’s call be considered “laying down your life”?

II. The Race of Life *(Review 1 Corinthians 9:24–27 with your class.)*

The reason more of us aren’t Olympic athletes is because most of us don’t have the discipline to dedicate the time and energy it takes to be world-class competitors. People who compete on that level don’t do much of anything else. Nearly every waking hour is dedicated to being stronger or going faster or higher. Ordinary people like us just don’t have the time.

What about disciples? What kind of discipline is necessary to finish the race?

Paul wrote, “I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air” (vs. 26, *NIV*). He lived with purpose; everything he did was designed to make him a better disciple.

Some seem to think that in order to be truly disciplined, Christians have to immerse themselves in spiritual disciplines all day, every day. That

might be practical if we lived in monasteries or convents, but most of us have to make a living; most of us have lives in the real world, not some fantasyland where we never think a secular thought.

Jesus knew that mountaintop experiences are fine. But He didn't stay on the mountaintop, nor did He allow His disciples to build shelters there (*see Matt. 17:3–5*). His ministry was to work among people in whatever village He could do the most good. Jesus is honored when His disciples do likewise.

Consider This: Well-balanced Christians not only think spiritual thoughts, they are engaged in being spouses, parents, coworkers, and friends. They take seriously Jesus' words, " 'You are the salt of the earth' " (*Matt. 5:13, NIV*), and they aren't afraid to engage society. They still practice the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer, witnessing, and service. And because of that, they influence the world more than the world influences them. How are you "seasoning" the world around you? In other words, if something happened to you, what would your family, neighbors, friends, and coworkers miss if you weren't there? In what ways do people know that Christ is a reality in your life? How does it show?

III. The Rest of Our Lives (*Review Matthew 11:28–30 with your class.*)

The life of discipleship is, by definition, a life of discipline. And yes, in centuries past (and in some countries even now), to be a Christian meant to risk persecution, even death. But today the challenge faced by most Christians, at least in secularized, industrialized countries, is to live as spiritually muscular, vibrant disciples. In too many settings Christianity is encrusted with so many stale, useless, and lifeless traditions as to make it all but unrecognizable to that first generation of Christians who "turned the world upside down" (*Acts 17:6*).

Who are the Christians who will stand up and lose themselves in a campaign with eternal consequences? The values of Christ's kingdom—love, grace, mercy, justice, and freedom—are so at odds with the values held dear by the world that when we do engage in such a campaign it will seem as if we're swimming against the current. Yet, Jesus promised, " 'Come to me . . . and I will give you rest' " (*Matt. 11:28, NIV*).

Consider This: Jesus said, " 'Take my yoke upon you and learn from me . . . and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light' " (*vss. 29, 30, NIV*). If that's true, discipleship doesn't cost anything after all; it pays—both now and forever.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How do you measure the cost of discipleship? What sacrifices did you make to follow Christ?

② What's the hardest part about being a Christian where you live?

③ What demand from Christ would you find difficult to accept?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: One of the great challenges of Christianity is to reinterpret it and make it relevant for the twenty-first century. Most of us live in countries where we can worship freely. We may not be understood, but at least we don't have to fear imprisonment or death because of our faith.

Life Application: A religion that doesn't require much isn't valued much. That might be why Christianity is languishing in many parts of the world; the church just isn't making a difference. What do you value most about your Christian faith? Can you imagine being persecuted for some aspect of your faith? If so, what might you be persecuted for? And what form might that persecution take?

► **STEP 4**—Create

Just for Teachers: Your class members should finish this quarter's lessons feeling both challenged by the responsibility of being one of Christ's followers and reassured that not only does He have a place for them to serve but He will also equip them for success. Pass out pieces of paper with copies of the text below (taken from *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson).

Activity: Tuck this text into your Bible and memorize it when you have a chance. Though it is just a paraphrase of the Bible, it catches the message: " 'Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly' " (*Matt. 11:28–30*, *The Message*).