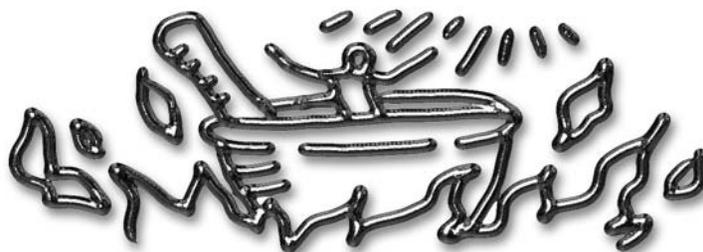


Making Our Best Effort



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 3

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 32; Matthew 5:29; John 16:5–15; Colossians 1:28, 29; 1 Peter 1:13.

MEMORY VERSE: “That’s [That is] what I am working for. I work hard with all of Christ’s strength. His strength works powerfully in me” (Colossians 1:29, NIV).

A MAN AND WOMAN SAT TOGETHER ON A TALK SHOW. Both had experienced the murder of a child. The woman’s son had been murdered 20 years before. But her anger and bitterness were as great as ever. The man was completely different. His daughter had been murdered by terrorists a few years earlier. He spoke about forgiveness toward the killers and about how God had changed his heart. No matter how terrible the pain was, this man became a good example of how God can bring healing to the darkest moments of our lives.

How can two people act so differently? How does spiritual change happen in the life of the Christian? How can the change help us to mature (grow) through life’s crucibles¹ without giving up?

THIS WEEK’S LESSON UP CLOSE: How important are our wills² and will-power in the battle with self and sin? How can we avoid the trap of letting our feelings rule the decisions (choices) we make? Why must we refuse to give up when in the crucible?

1. crucibles—boiling pots for purifying metals. They also represent a testing time, or a time of suffering, that strengthens character, or who we are.

2. wills—our desires or decisions (choices) to do something.

SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 4**THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH
(John 16:5–15)**

Have you ever prayed, “Please God, make me good!” but little seems to change? We may pray for God’s changing power to work within us, but our lives seem to remain the same. Why is this so? We know that God has unlimited powers that He so eagerly and freely offers us. We really want to make the most of all He offers us. But our lives do not seem to change in a way that equals what God is offering.

Why? One reason is very simple: The Holy Spirit has unlimited power to change us. But our choices may limit what God can do.

In John 16:5–15, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of truth” (verse 13, NIV). What does this suggest that the Holy Spirit does for us?

The Holy Spirit can bring us the truth about our sinfulness. But He cannot make us repent. He can also show us the greatest truth about God. But He cannot force us to believe or obey it. If God forced us in the smallest of ways, we would lose our free will. Then Satan would blame God for trying

to influence³ our minds and hearts. This would give Satan the right to blame God for cheating in the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan). During the great controversy in heaven, our Father (God) did not force Satan or any of the angels to believe that He (God) was good. God did not force the angels to repent. And in the Garden of Eden, God made the truth about the tree in the middle of the garden very clear. But He did not prevent Eve and Adam from using their free will to disobey. God will not act any differently with us today. So, the Spirit presents the truth about God and sin. He then says, “After what I have shown you, what will you do now?”



God made the truth about the tree in Eden very clear. But He did not prevent Eve and Adam from eating from it.

It is the same when we are in the crucible. Sometimes the crucible is there because we have not obeyed

3. influence—to have power, or an effect, over persons or things.

God or repented⁴ of our sins. For our Father to work in such cases, we must knowingly choose to repent and obey. In this way God's power can enter through us and change us.

How has the "Spirit of truth" changed you recently? How well are you listening to His voice? What choices are you making with your free will?

MONDAY—NOVEMBER 5

THE DIVINE-HUMAN EFFORT (Colossians 1:28, 29)

What is the greatest deed you have ever done? This did not happen simply by rolling out of bed in the morning. If we want to get something worthwhile done in this life, it takes time and effort. Following in Christ's footsteps is the same way.

Paul talks about God working in him in Colossians 1:28, 29. But in what ways does he show that the human effort is also necessary? Read also Deuteronomy 4:4; Luke 13:24; 1 Corinthians 9:25; Hebrews 12:4.

In Colossians 1:29 there is a very interesting picture about how Paul understands his relationship with God

in this work. Paul says that he is struggling—but with the power of God.

The word for "labor" means to "grow weary," to "work until one is very tired." This word was used for athletes as they trained. The word for "struggle" can mean in some languages "to agonize (suffer)." So, we have the word picture of an athlete working very hard to win. But then Paul adds something new to the idea. Paul is not only working with everything he has but with everything that God gives him. We know something about Paul's ministry (work). It was a ministry done with hard work and discipline but done with God's power. This relationship works in the same way as we try to develop Christ's character⁵ in us.



Paul says that we must work hard for God in the same way athletes must train hard to win.

4. repented—to have said you are sorry for your sins and that you want to stop sinning.

5. Christ's character—being kind, loving, honest, and so on.

We need to remember that we live in a world in which we want more and more with less and less effort. That idea has crept into Christianity, too. Some Christian evangelists⁶ promise that the Holy Spirit will fall upon believers with wonderful power and do wonderful things. But this can be a dangerous half-truth. Believing this can lead people to think that we just need to wait for God's power to come while we do nothing!

What is your own experience with the kind of hard work that Paul was talking about? What things has God put in your heart that you are struggling with? How can you learn to surrender (give yourself) to God's will (plan)?

TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 6

THE DISCIPLINED (TRAINED) WILL (1 Peter 1:13)

One of the greatest enemies of our wills is our own feelings. We are influenced by⁷ pictures and music that can tempt us. They cause us to feel emotions such as anger, fear, or lust. How often do we think such things as "What do I feel like eating for supper?" "What do I feel like doing today?" "Do I feel good about buying this?" Feelings strongly influence our decision making. Feelings are not necessarily bad. But how I feel about

something may have little to do with what is right or best. Our feelings can lie to us ("a human heart is more dishonest than anything else" [Jeremiah 17:9, NIV]). The human heart can create a false picture of real life. It can cause us to make bad choices. Then it can set us up for a crucible of our own making.

What examples can you find from the Bible where people made choices based on feelings rather than on God's Word? What were the results? (Read, for example, Genesis 3:6; 2 Samuel 11:3, 4; Galatians 2:11, 12).

What does Peter worry about in 1 Peter 1:13? What does he want his readers to really do?

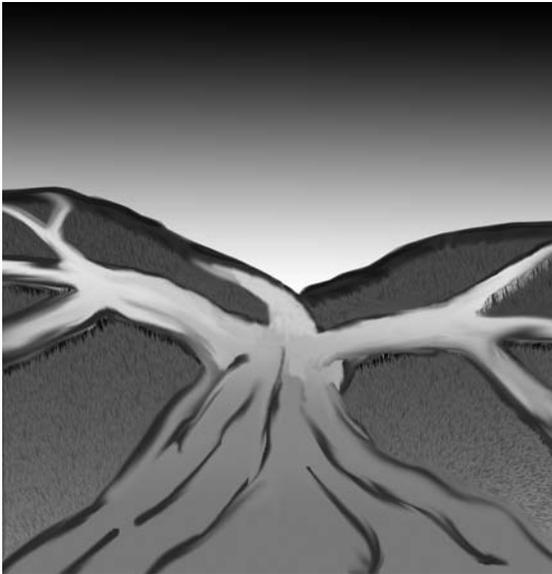
Peter understood that the mind is the rudder⁸ that controls the body. Take away the control of the mind, and we will be controlled by our feelings. Imagine walking along a narrow path to the Shepherd's (God's) home. Along the way there are many paths leading in different directions. Some

6. evangelists—Christians who preach the gospel of Christ to many people at one time.

7. influenced by—to be affected or changed by the power of another person or thing.

8. rudder—a broad, flat piece of wood or metal attached by hinges to the back of a boat or ship that is used for steering (guiding) the boat in the water.

of these paths go to places that we would not want to visit. Others look tempting to our feelings, our emotions, our desires. But if we take any one of these paths, we get off the right path. And we go in a way that might be very difficult to turn away from.



Many paths in life seem right but do not lead to God. God helps us to stay on the right path that leads to Him.

What important decisions (choices) are you facing? Ask yourself honestly, “How can I know if I am making my choices because of feeling, emotion, or desire instead of trusting in God’s Word?”

WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 7

GREAT CHANGE IN LIFESTYLE (Matthew 5:29)

“If your right eye causes you to

sin, poke [take] it out and throw it away. Your eye is one part of your body. It is better to lose it than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matthew 5:29, NIV).

Think about the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:29. Would this require a great change in your lifestyle? If so, why?

Great change in Christian lifestyle is necessary. This is not because God has made the Christian life difficult. This is because we and our culture⁹ have wandered so far away from God’s plans for us. People often wake up and wonder to themselves, “How could I have gone so far away from God?” The answer is always the same: just one step at a time.

In Matthew 5:29, 30, Jesus is speaking about sexual sin. But the same principles (rules) point to dealing with other sin, too. Really, the principles can point to the broad picture of our growth in Christ.

What crucial (important) point is Jesus telling us with those words? Are we really called to cut ourselves up?

9. culture—the ideas, skills, arts, tools, and way of life of a certain people at a certain time; civilization.

Jesus is not asking us to physically harm our bodies. No, not at all! Rather, He is asking us to control our minds and bodies, no matter what the cost is. Notice that the verse does not say that we should pray that God will quickly remove temptations¹⁰ from our lives. Sometimes God may kindly do this for us. But often He calls us to make a great change in doing something we may not feel like doing at all. What a crucible that can be! The more often we make the right choices, the stronger we will become. Then the power of temptation becomes weaker in our lives.

God sometimes uses crucibles to catch our attention when there are so many things going on around us. It is in the crucible that we realize how far we have wandered from God. The crucible may be God's way of asking us to make a great change in our lifestyle by returning to our Father's plan for us.

THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 8

THE NEED TO REMAIN FAITHFUL DURING TRIALS (Genesis 32)

Read the story of Jacob wrestling with God (Genesis 32). What does this story say to us about remaining faithful, even during the time of trouble? (Keep Jacob's entire situation in mind before you answer.)

We can know what is right and use our wills to do the right thing. But when we are under pressure, it can be very difficult to remain faithful to God and His promises. That is because we are weak and fearful. So, one of the important strengths of the Christian is remaining faithful in the time of trouble. It is the ability to keep going even though you want to give up.

One of the greatest examples in the Bible is Jacob. Many years before, Jacob had tricked his brother, Esau, and his father into giving him the birthright¹¹ (Genesis 27). Ever since, Jacob had been running in fear of Esau's desire to kill him. Jacob had been given wonderful promises of God's guidance and blessing in his dream of a ladder reaching to heaven (Genesis 28). But he was still scared. Jacob wanted very much to believe that God accepted him. Jacob wanted to know that the promises made to him many years before were still true.

As Jacob fought Someone (Jesus), his hip bone was dislocated or pushed out of place. Afterward, Jacob could not have continued the fight because the pain would have been too great. Jacob decided at that time to hang on to Jesus through great pain until he received a promise of God's blessing.

10. temptations—things that try to turn us away from God and try to get us to do, think, feel, or say what is wrong.

11. birthright—the gifts and blessings that belong to a person simply for being born into a certain family or place.

Jesus says to him, “ ‘Let me go. It is morning’ ” (Genesis 32:26, NIV).

Jacob’s blessing came because he held on through the pain. So it is with us. God may also dislocate our “hip” and then call us to hang on to Him through our pain. Indeed, God let the pain from Jacob’s scars continue. We know this because Jacob was still limping when he met his brother. People might think this limp was weakness. But for Jacob it was an example of his strength.

What are some useful choices you can make (friendships, lifestyle, reading material, health habits, spiritual life) that will help you better remain faithful to the Lord during discouragement and temptation?



Jacob’s blessing came because he held on to God even through his pain.

12. patriarchs and prophets—patriarchs were leaders in early Bible times, such as Abraham and Isaac, or other leaders of Israel, such as Moses; prophets are men or women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

13. character—who a person is; all the things that a person does, feels, and thinks are what a person is made of; your character is the sum of the choices you make, such as a choice to be honest or to cheat.

14. testimonies—the writings of Ellen G. White.

FRIDAY—NOVEMBER 9

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “The Night of Wrestling,” pp. 195–203, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*;¹² “Consecration,” pp. 43–48, in *Steps to Christ*.

“This will is a very important part of our character.¹³ When Adam fell into temptation at the Garden of Eden, he gave in to the power of Satan. Ever since, Satan has been working in us to will and to do of his own pleasure. Unfortunately, it causes complete ruin and suffering.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*¹⁴ for the Church, volume 5, p. 515.

“In order to receive God’s help, man must understand and realize his weakness. He must use his own mind to cause the great change in himself. He must be inspired to pray and work hard. Wrong habits and customs must be shaken off. He must be firm in trying to correct these errors and to follow right principles [rules] so that the victory can be gained. Many never earn the position that they might have. This is because they wait for God to do the work for them. Instead, God has given them power to do the work for themselves. All who are qualified for useful service must go through the strictest mental and character training for right living. God will help them by uniting His power

with human effort [work].”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 248.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ How important do you think it is that we understand that our wills were given into the control of Satan at the Fall? By thinking about the character of Jesus, how can we better appreciate just how fallen we are and how great God's grace¹⁵ is toward us?

❷ Read the story of Jesus in Gethsemane in Matthew 26:36–43. What were Jesus' own feelings and desires about doing God's will? What can we

learn from this example?

❸ Talk about the different things in your own culture that can break down your defenses and leave you weak to Satan's attacks. What can you do to help other church members know these dangers? How can you also help those who feel the need for help?

❹ Do you know of an inactive church member who might be getting ready to give up or has already given up? What can you do as a group to encourage this person to not give up Jesus? What useful things can you do to help him or her?

15. grace—God's gift of forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.