

Extreme Heat



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 22, Job 1:6–2:10, Isa. 43:1–7, Hos. 2:1–12, 2 Cor. 11:23–29.*

Memory Text: “Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand” (*Isaiah 53:10, NKJV*).

As the wife of the famous Christian writer C. S. Lewis was dying, Lewis wrote, “Not that I am [I think] in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not ‘So there’s no God after all’, but ‘So this is what God’s really like.’ ”—*A Grief Observed* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1961), pp. 6, 7.

When things become really painful, some of us reject God completely. For others like Lewis, there is the temptation to change our view of God and imagine all sorts of bad things about Him. The question is, Just how hot can it get? How much heat is God willing to risk putting His people through in order to bring about His ultimate purpose of shaping us into the “likeness of his Son”? (*Rom. 8:29, NIV*).

The Week at a Glance: Why do you think God is willing to risk being misunderstood by those He wants to know and love Him? How much do you think God is willing to be misunderstood in order to mold you into the “likeness of his Son”?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 3.*

Abraham in the Crucible

Read Genesis 22. Out of nowhere and without explanation, God suddenly calls Abraham to offer his own child as a burnt offering. Can you imagine how Abraham must have felt? On a human level, it was a totally revolting idea for a holy God to request that you sacrifice your own son. On a spiritual level, even if Abraham thought that this was acceptable, what about God's promises of an inheritance? Without his son, the promise would be gone.

Why did God ask Abraham to offer this sacrifice? If God knows everything, what was the point?

God's request and its timing were not random. Indeed, the test was calculated to exert the deepest possible anguish, for "God had reserved his last, most trying test for Abraham until the burden of years was heavy on him, and he longed for rest."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 147. Was this the test of a mad God? Not at all, for "the agony which he endured during the dark days of that fearful trial was permitted that he might understand from his own experience something of the greatness of the sacrifice made by the infinite God for man's redemption."—Page 154.

This was just a test—God never intended for Abraham to kill his son. This highlights something very important about the way God sometimes works. God may ask us to do something that He never intends for us to complete. He may ask us to go somewhere He never intends for us to arrive at. What is important to God is not necessarily the end, but what we learn as we are reshaped by the process.

Jesus may have been thinking about Abraham's experience when He said to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (*John 8:56, NIV*). Abraham could have missed out on this insight, dismissing the instructions as from Satan. The key to Abraham's surviving and learning through the whole process was his knowing God's voice.

How do you know the voice of God? How do you know when God is talking to you? What are the ways He communicates His will to you?

I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

► **Key Text:** *Isaiah 53:10*

► **Teach the Class to:**

Know: God's character remains the same even when circumstances might cause one to doubt His goodness.

Feel: God's care and concern for us when we easily might conclude that the opposite is the case.

Do: To communicate with God and rely upon His guidance at all times and in all circumstances, even when our gut feelings suggest otherwise.

► **Lesson Outline:**

I. God Must Be Crazy? (*Genesis 22*)

A Most of us think we have a clear concept of who God is and what He expects of us. What do we do with episodes in the Bible in which God seems to do—or demand—things that go against this understanding?

B Abraham knew God's voice. How can we know God's voice, as opposed to some other voice that might be leading us astray?

C Does God ever command us to do things that we know to be immoral?

II. In the Crucible (*2 Cor. 1:8, 9*)

A Have you ever held back from a full commitment to God out of fear of what He might ask of you?

B How can we affirm God's righteousness and goodness when we have no evidence for it in our lives? How might Job's example help us?

C Have you ever felt that God was absent from you? How did you deal with these feelings? Can you see God's presence in retrospect?

III. Recognizing God at Work (*1 Cor. 4:5, 13:12*)

A How does the evidence of the past provide us with reason to hope in the future?

B How can we maintain contact with God when His presence is not obvious?

► **Summary:** While God does not want us to suffer, sometimes the suffering is necessary for us to grow in our relationship with Him. Sometimes we may not understand why it is coming our way or what God means by it, but by staying connected to Him, we can gain insight into God's goodness.

Wayward Israel

The story of Hosea has some powerful lessons to teach us. Hosea's situation is remarkable. His wife, Gomer, runs away and has children with other men. Though she is sleeping around, God calls Hosea to take his wife back and fully show his love to her again. This story is meant as a parable about God and Israel. Israel had left God and were prostituting themselves spiritually to other gods, but God still loved them and wanted to show His love to them. But just look at God's methods!

Read Hosea 2:1–12. What methods does God say He will use to pull Israel back to Himself? What would these experiences have felt like?

vss. 2, 3

vss. 5–7

vss. 8, 9

vs. 10

This story raises two important issues about the way we experience God when He is bringing us to repentance.

First, we risk not recognizing that God is at work. When Israel went through such hard and painful experiences, it might have been hard for them to recognize that their God was working for their salvation. When our path is blocked by sharp thorns or we are walled in so we don't know where we are going (*vs. 6*)—is this God? When our basic necessities disappear or we are embarrassed (*vss. 9, 10*)—could our Father be in the middle of it all? The truth is that whatever we feel, God is always working to bring us to repentance, because He loves us so very much.

Second, we risk misunderstanding God when He is at work. We may recognize that God is at work, but we don't like what He's doing. While we are feeling hurt and embarrassed, it is easy to blame God for being cruel, for not intervening, or for not caring. But God is always working to renew us through His covenant of love.

Read Hosea 2:14–23. What does this passage reveal about God? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if you have been running from God in any area of your life. If you are convicted that you have been, why wait to go through the crucible? What's stopping you from surrendering all to the Lord?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners' experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, *Why is this lesson important to me?*

Sometimes when the journey through life gets really tough—*extreme heat*, as this week's lesson terms it—the key question, asked in Sabbath's lesson, is, "Just how hot can it get?"

That is followed by a key thought, *How much heat is God willing to risk putting His people through in order to bring about His ultimate purpose of shaping us into the likeness of His Son?*

The human dilemma is a lack of a full understanding of just what the love of God means. As we learned about Job, God was willing to risk a major cosmic test because He was convinced that Job would come through. If God puts us into these situations, or does not prevent them from overtaking us, it is because there is a reason or lesson in there somewhere.

So, God may well deem it necessary to apply some extreme heat so that the refining process can do its intended work.

There are, of course, times when our own missteps dump us into the crucible. At these times another aspect of God's love kicks in, and He launches a rescue operation to get us out.

► **STEP 2—Explore!**

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *What do I need to know from God's Word?*

Bible Commentary

The man sitting beside me in the Sabbath School class said, "I still don't have a job. I have filled out dozens of job applications. I have a fairly impressive résumé. I have never worked on Sabbath and don't intend to. But I still don't have a job. I'm not sure I really want to sit here and talk about God's love!"

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Surviving Through Worship

Read Job 1:6–2:10. What caused Job’s suffering?

There is something astonishing here. The angels come to see God, and Satan comes with them. God asks Satan where he has been, and Satan replies that he has been “ ‘roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it’ ” (*vs. 7, NIV*). Then God poses this question: “ ‘Have you considered my servant Job?’ ” (*vs. 8, NIV*). The question itself is not remarkable; what is remarkable is the One who asks it. It isn’t Satan who points out Job as a subject for examination, but God. Knowing exactly what is going to follow, God calls Job to Satan’s attention. Down on the earth, Job has absolutely no idea how hot his crucible is about to become. And though it’s very clear that it is Satan, not God, who causes Job’s suffering, it is also clear that it is God who gives His explicit permission for Satan to destroy Job’s possessions, children, and his own physical health. If God is giving permission for Job to suffer, what difference does it make whether God or Satan is personally inflicting the suffering? How can God be righteous and holy when He actively allows Satan to cause Job such pain? Is this situation a special case, or is it characteristic of the way God still deals with us today?

In Job 1:20, 21, how does Job respond to the trials?

It is possible to respond to such suffering in two ways. We can become bitter and angry, turning our backs on a God we believe to be cruel or nonexistent, or we can hang on to God more tightly. Job deals with his catastrophe by staying in God’s presence and worshipping Him.

In Job 1:20, 21, we see three aspects of worship that may help when in anguish. First, Job accepts his helplessness and recognizes that he has no claim to anything: “ ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart’ ” (*vs. 21, NIV*). Second, Job acknowledges that God is still in total control: “ ‘The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away’ ” (*vs. 21, NIV*). Third, Job concludes by reasserting his belief in the righteousness of God. “ ‘May the name of the Lord be praised’ ” (*vs. 21, NIV*).

Going through a trial? Follow the steps that Job used. How might they help you as well?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**I. Mysterious Providence**

There's no easy answer to this brother's lament. The new-birth experience results in a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17, NIV) that bestows a new citizenship (Eph. 2:19). But this new citizenship leaves the person physically tied to the same world he or she always lived in, but now as a "stranger" and "alien" (see Heb. 11:13, NIV).

Our lesson this week calls this situation *extreme heat*, and it surely is. Satan influences the powers behind all this (Eph. 6:12). The powers extend to social and governmental systems, the environment, and a host of things that comprise our everyday world.

In spite of all this, the Bible tells us that the everlasting arms of God's providence are our refuge (Deut. 33:27).

II. Unexplainable Trials and Tribulations

One of the outstanding points in Job's experience is God's confidence in Job! Job's perception of God and His workings eventually broadened, but God had a marked confidence in Job from the very beginning. We would hope and pray that that would be God's confidence in each of us as individuals.


It also would be of value to point out that Job's friends got their ideas from "disquieting dreams" (Job 4:13, NIV), traditional ideas (Job 8:8), and personal opinion (Job 11:5, 6). All of these sources abound in our own social circles. In spite of his trials and tribulations, Job never went to these sources. He stuck with the Lord.

III. Adventures, Trials, and Tribulations

With the exception of his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7), Paul's trials and tribulations are different from those of Job. Paul was a missionary who voluntarily endured shipwrecks, stoning, imprisonment, floggings, bandit raids, dangerous river crossings, lack of sleep and food, and a host of assorted discomforts (2 Cor. 11:23–27). To him these things were an expected part of his ministry, and he harbored no complaints about them.

► STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: **How can I practice the information I just learned?**

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Surviving Through Hope

“We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:8, 9, NIV).

As God’s chosen apostle, Paul had endured more than most people. Yet, Paul was not crushed. Rather, he grew in his praise for God. Read his list of hardships in 2 Corinthians 11:23–29. Now read 2 Corinthians 1:3–11.

In verse 4, Paul states that the reason for receiving God’s compassion and comfort is “so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (NIV). To what extent might suffering be a call to ministry? How could we become more alert to this possibility?

God wants to minister through us to hurting people. This means that He may first allow us to experience the same sort of hurts. Then we’ll offer encouragement, not from theory but from our own experience of the compassion and comfort of God. This is a principle from Jesus’ life (*see Heb. 4:15*).

Paul’s vivid descriptions of his hardships are not to make us feel sorry for him. They are for us to know that even when we’re in the depths, the Father still can intervene to bring His compassion and comfort. We may despair even of our own lives, and even be killed, but fear not, God is teaching us to rely on Him. We can trust Him, for our God “raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:9, NIV).

As Paul continues to set his eyes on proclaiming the gospel, he knows that God will rescue him in the future as well. Paul’s ability to remain firm is supported by three things he mentions in 2 Corinthians 1:10, 11. First, God’s proven track record: “He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us” (*vs. 10, NIV*). Second, Paul’s determination to fix his concentration on God Himself: “On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us” (*vs. 10, NIV*). Third, the saints’ continual intercession: “as you help us by your prayers” (*vs. 11, NIV*).

What can you learn from Paul that can help you from falling into self-pity amid your own struggles?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

This man Hosea really goes through some *extreme heat*. He marries a girl who turns out to be a prostitute. She leaves and goes back to plying her trade, ending up pregnant with other men's (plural) children. It hardly gets tougher than that!

If we were to find ourselves in this kind of situation, probably the most common reaction would be to seek a divorce lawyer. Hosea jumped from the frying pan into the fire—he went and found his wife and won her back.

We know that this is a story aimed at Israel in Hosea's own time, but it sounds a lot like a contemporary reality in many people's lives.

Consider These Applications With the Class:

- 1 Monday's lesson states, "God is always working to bring us to repentance, because He loves us so very much." Does God truly expect me to act like Hosea when facing such a circumstance or its equivalent? How hot does my *extreme heat* have to get before God backs off—or I burn up?
- 2 Devise a case study that contains the elements of Hosea's experience but positioned in your particular environment.

Witnessing

The story of Hosea opens the doors to witnessing activities. If people in the church membership or friends of yours are going through some really tough family situations, the story of Hosea can be of encouragement.

On the other hand, it might just make people mad! Out of their personal anger their reaction may well be, "I will never forgive what he or she did to me!"

In spite of these reactions, retelling the story does bring hope. If the Lord could help Hosea to the point that He did, maybe there is some hope for my situation after all. The dawning of these thoughts may well open the way to a resolution, even if the heat is almost too much to bear.

Extreme Heat

So far this quarter, we have considered many examples of the crucibles that God uses to bring purity and Christlikeness to our lives. However, some people may view these examples and conclude that God is a severe and demanding taskmaster. Sure, some may say, “We know that God wants something good for us, but these examples don’t reveal much care and love. Instead, God looks more like a bully. He sets out on a purpose that causes us considerable hard times, and there’s nothing we can do about it.”

It’s true that while living on this sin-filled earth, we will understand only a little of why things happen. In heaven we’ll understand so much more (*1 Cor. 4:5, 13:12*), but for now we will have to live with the tension of believing that God is present and caring for us, even though things don’t always feel too good. Isaiah describes this tension very well.

Read Isaiah 43:1–7. In verses 2 and 3, God says that His people will pass through waters and through fire. These are figurative of extreme dangers, but perhaps they hint at the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan, both fearful times but times that paved the way to a new life. You may expect that God might say that He would protect His people from these dangers, that He will guide them along an easier route. But like the Shepherd in Psalm 23, He rather says that when the difficult times come, God’s people need not be overwhelmed—for He is with them.

Look back at Isaiah 43:1–7. Write down the different ways in which God assures His people of comfort during the times of water and fire. What picture of God does this paint in your mind? Which promises can you claim for yourself?

We could summarize what we have learned about God’s crucibles in three ways. First, God’s extreme heat is to destroy not us but our sin. Second, God’s extreme heat is not to make us miserable but to make us pure, as we were created to be. Third, God’s care for us through all things is constant and tender—He will never leave us alone, no matter what happens to us.

What do these texts teach you about the actions and character of God? *Ps. 103:13, 14; Matt. 28:20; 1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Pet. 1:7.* How have you experienced the reality of these verses in your own life?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED► **STEP 4—Apply!**

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question, **With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?**

Something to Think About

Fay Angus writes, “There’s nothing so tough, stringy and indigestible as an overcooked Christian. . . . Overdoses of ‘spirituality’ can be lethal.” —*Between Your Status and Your Quo* (Glendale, Calif.: Regal Books, 1975), p. 9.

Overcooking due to *extreme heat* can make you angry and frustrated with the Lord; it can turn you into a legalist determined to smash your way into the kingdom by any means, or it can be a refining process ending up as joy, whatever form that may take in your circumstances.

Angus adds, “When someone tells me, ‘I had such a blessing the other day,’ I respond with, ‘Great. Now what are you going to do with it?’ ” That’s the responsibility aspect of the refiner’s fire.

Get the Class Involved

This lesson is an ideal opportunity to get the class involved in some serious consideration of the problem of *extreme heat*. Try the following activity:

- 1 Have the class members write down or relate some *extreme heat* situations they have been through.
- 2 What were the various attitudes that arose as they moved through the *heat*?
- 3 Include how issues were resolved and how the heat turned down.
- 4 What was learned as a result?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Test of Faith,” pp. 145–155, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Praise Ye the Lord,” pp. 315–319, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5.

“God has always tried His people in the furnace of affliction. It is in the heat of the furnace that the dross is separated from the true gold of the Christian character. Jesus watches the test; He knows what is needed to purify the precious metal, that it may reflect the radiance of His love. It is by close, testing trials that God disciplines His servants. He sees that some have powers which may be used in the advancement of His work, and He puts these persons upon trial; in His providence He brings them into positions that test their character. . . . He shows them their own weakness, and teaches them to lean upon Him. . . . Thus His object is attained. They are educated, trained, and disciplined, prepared to fulfill the grand purpose for which their powers were given them.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 129, 130.

“If in the providence of God we are called upon to endure trials, let us accept the cross and drink the bitter cup, remembering that it is a Father’s hand that holds it to our lips. Let us trust Him in the darkness as well as in the day. Can we not believe that He will give us everything that is for our good? . . . Even in the night of affliction how can we refuse to lift heart and voice in grateful praise, when we remember the love to us expressed by the cross of Calvary?”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 316.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** In class, have someone recount his or her own test of faith such as Abraham had. What can you learn from this person’s experience, from his or her successes or failures?
- 2** Review the last 24 hours of Christ’s life. What extremes did He face? How did He endure? What principles can we take from His example and apply for ourselves when in the midst of our own crucible?
- 3** Discuss the idea, touched on this week, about how through our own suffering we can minister to others who are suffering. However true it might be, what are some of the problems we might encounter with this idea?
- 4** Ellen White wrote above: “Let us trust Him in the darkness as well as in the day.” That’s easier said than done. How can we help each other develop the kind of faith that will enable us to do just that? Why is it important to trust God in the bad times?