

Seeing *the* Invisible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 40:27–31, John 14:1–14, Rom. 8:28–39, Eph. 1:18–23.*

Memory Text: “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (*Hebrews 11:27, NKJV*).

The definition of faith in the book of Hebrews is always challenging. “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (*Heb. 11:1, NIV*). How can we be sure about what we do not see? Yet, this is exactly what Moses illustrates in our memory text: “He persevered because he saw him who is invisible” (*vs. 27, NIV*).

It is even more challenging to realize that we are called to see “him who is invisible” not simply when times are good but especially when everything is going wrong. For this we need faith, a Christlike faith that must be shaped by the truth about God and God’s kingdom. The truth about our Father’s goodness, the power in the name of Jesus, the power of the resurrection, and the compassion of God are essential truths that will enable us to stand strong when we are in the crucible and may be tempted to doubt everything.

The Week at a Glance: What truths about God can help sustain us through even the worst situations?

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 24.*

Our Father's Extravagance

"If God really loved me, He would certainly do _____ for me!" I wonder how many times that thought has flickered through our minds. We look at our circumstances and then begin to wonder whether God really loves us, because if He really did, things would be different.

There are two rationales that often lead us to doubt God's goodness. First, when we have a burning desire in our hearts and minds for something that we believe is good, the idea that God might want something different for us may seem ridiculous. Second, we may doubt God's goodness because our experience clashes with what we believe. If something looks good or feels good or sounds good or tastes good, then it must be good. And so we get angry with God when we can't have it.

This is where faith comes into play. Faith comes into action precisely at those times we are tempted to doubt God and His goodness.

Romans 8:28–39 is a powerful passage that describes the goodness of God toward us. What reasons can you find in the text that can guard our minds against doubting God's goodness?

In verse 32 there is an important piece of logic that is extremely helpful in guarding us from becoming overwhelmed by our circumstances. "If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us?" (*The Message*). How could we possibly think that God would send Jesus to die for us and then turn mean and stingy?

This means that the truth of God's generosity to us, seen in the death of Christ, must have a stronger impact in our thinking than all of the doubts that the crucible may generate inside us.

How is it possible for a truth (God's goodness) to have a more powerful effect on you than your doubts? Spend some time meditating on the truth that God has given Jesus to die in your place and that this incredible generosity continues in a thousand different ways for you today. What does this do for your faith?

I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

► **Key Text:** *Hebrews 11:27*

► **Teach the Class to:**

Know: What we believe in is true even in the absence of readily visible evidence.

Feel: Trust that God can sustain us through our temptations to doubt.

Do: Let go of our worries and anxieties as we cling to an invisible but all-powerful God.

► **Lesson Outline:**

I. Belief Versus Experience (*Rom. 8:28–39*)

A Do *faith* and *reality* contradict each other? How can we know when we should ignore what appears to be real in favor of what our faith tells us?

B As Christians, what does the historical fact of Christ's sacrifice tell us about God's plan for us?

C Can we find concrete examples of God's goodness and care for us as individuals, even in the worst circumstances?

II. Faith Amid Doubt (*John 14:1–14*)

A What did Jesus mean when He told His disciples they could do *anything* in His name (*John 14:1–14*)?

B Does *anything* in this context necessarily mean a spectacular change in the circumstances that distress us?

C Why might God not choose to work spectacular, nature-reversing miracles on our behalf?

III. Prayer Versus Worry (*1 Pet. 5:7*)

A Is worry a sin? Why, or why not?

B Why is prayer in Jesus' name a particularly powerful weapon against worry and anxiety?

C What is it about a prayerful attitude of mind that precludes worry?

► **Summary:** While our relationship to God often may appear to be of the long-distance variety, we are assured that He is always close at hand. We must learn to see through the eyes of faith to be aware of His continual presence.

In the Name of Jesus

“**If you ask anything in My name, I will do it**” (*John 14:14, NKJV*).

Jesus was not going to be with the disciples much longer. The One who had been their support and encouragement was going to heaven, and the disciples were beginning to feel confused and powerless. But although the disciples would not be able to physically see Him any longer, Jesus gave them a remarkable promise.

Read John 14:1–14. According to verses 13 and 14, Jesus promises to do for us “anything” that we ask in His name. Because of this, we almost always add onto the end of our prayers, “In Jesus’ name, amen.”

When we say this, what do we normally think it means? What does Jesus mean when He encourages us to pray like this? What clues are there in these verses that help us to understand the point He’s making?

When our request is “in the name of Jesus,” we can be certain that the whole machinery of heaven is at work on our behalf. We may not see the angels working all around us. But they are—sent from the throne of heaven in the name of Jesus, to fulfill our requests.

Sometimes when we pray in the name of Jesus, we open our eyes and expect everything to be different around us—but it all looks the same. However, while the power of God may come with dramatic effect, as when Jesus calmed the storm, it may also come in quietness, unnoticed, as when the power of God sustained Jesus in Gethsemane. Something dramatic may not suddenly happen, but that doesn’t mean that God is not at work for us.

Read again John 14:1–14. As you read, imagine that Jesus is talking directly to you, face to face. What hope and encouragement can you draw from these promises? At the same time, ask yourself, “What things in my life could be standing in the way of having these promises fulfilled for me? What changes must I purpose in my heart to do?”

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?*

Have you ever watched a stage magician make a person float in midair? He generally will pretend to place his accomplice in a trance then lay him or her across the backs of two chairs. When he removes the chairs, the body seems to hover there without support. The magician even may pass a hoop over the body to convince you there's nothing holding it up.

But it is only a clever trick. Ingeniously hidden from view is a strong steel support that reaches from behind a curtain and attaches to a body brace worn by the *float*. The body of the magician's accomplice looks like it is floating only because the support is invisible to the viewers.

Skeptics may ridicule believers for placing their trust in an often-invisible God. But while God doesn't reveal Himself readily to the gaze of a skeptical, unbelieving world, His support for the people He loves is tangible and undeniable.

► **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

I. Our Father's Extravagance

(Read Romans 8:28–39.)

While God promises here to work for the good of those who love Him, the context shows that this promise has a long-term perspective in mind: The completion of His making all things work for our good doesn't appear until we are glorified—that is, until the resurrection of the saints and our making our homes in heaven.

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The Power of the Resurrection

The Resurrection addresses the problem of human powerlessness. When we think about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we often think about how the death of Jesus was the event that made us legally right with God. And that is, of course, true.

However, the Resurrection adds a specific dimension to salvation. The resurrection of Jesus is meaningful not just because it shows us that one day we will be resurrected, as well. The Resurrection placed Jesus at the right hand of the Father in a position of power and authority. This resurrection power is the same power that God makes available for us today!

In Ephesians 1:18–23, Paul talks about the power of God. What does this text teach us about the power of the Resurrection? What hope and promises for yourself can you find in these verses?

Paul is praying that the Ephesians understand a few things that can be understood properly only with divine help: (1) that there is the hope of transformation and an eternal future to which Jesus has called us; (2) that we understand the power that was manifested in our behalf.

Paul then tries to describe how astonishing this power is. The power that is available to us today is the same power that resurrected Jesus not just out of the ground and back to life but to the place of power at the Father's right hand.

But Paul doesn't stop there. The Resurrection didn't simply give Jesus just any sort of power but the power to rule and provide every possible thing His people could ever need—for all eternity!

Make a list of the areas in your life where you need the power of the resurrected Jesus. When you have finished, pray that this power will be applied to all these areas of need. At the same time, what can you do better, what choices can you make, that can allow this power to work more freely in your life?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: How can we most effectively remind ourselves and teach our children that even in troubling life situations, God is working for our ultimate good?

II. In the Name of Jesus

The words *in Jesus' name* often are tacked on to the end of prayers, as though they were a way to make prayers work better. The third commandment (*Exod. 20:7*) warns of the danger of making insincere or thoughtless transactions in the name of God. So saying *in Jesus' name*, without fully appreciating the implications of what these words mean about accepting and living within God's will, may amount to a kind of taking of Jesus' name in vain.

III. The Power of the Resurrection

(Review *Ephesians 1:18–23*.)

Consider This: Focus specifically on the Resurrection, as opposed to the other events of Jesus' ministry, Passion, and death. Would Jesus' life be meaningful without it? What does it add to our lives 2,000 years later? Why is the Resurrection so central to all that we believe? What do we have without it?

IV. To Carry All Our Worry

(Read *1 Peter 5:7*.)

For many of us, our deepest worries and concerns are private and personal, spoken only to the Lord. Yet in encouraging us to give our burdens to the Lord, Peter quotes from the Jewish hymnbook for public worship, the book of Psalms (*55:22*). David was rarely shy about speaking his deepest personal concerns aloud in worship. The implication may be that what we consider very private spiritual work should be encouraged and prayed about in corporate worship.

Consider This: Might this idea speak to the value of testimony meetings, now rarely practiced?

To Carry All Our Worry

There is a plaque that some people have in their homes that reads “Why pray when you can worry?” It makes us laugh because we know how often we worry rather than come to God and give Him our concerns.

Someone once said that when our life becomes all tied up, give it to God and let Him untie the knots. How God must long to do this for us. Yet, amazingly we manage to hang on to our problems until we are about to snap. Why do we wait until we are desperate before we go to the Lord?

Read 1 Peter 5:7. Peter is quoting Psalm 55:22. What’s the basic message here for us? See also Matt. 6:25–33.

It is a very simple text. There is no secret hidden in it, and it means exactly what it says. To cast means to do just that, to throw, to give away, so that what is causing the aching and the concern no longer has any connection to you. But, of course, our burdens are not just thrown anywhere. Our worry does not disappear into a void. It is given to our Father in heaven, who promises to sort it out. That’s what Jesus is telling us in the verses in Matthew. The problem in doing this is not that it’s hard; rather, it’s that it just seems too easy, too good to be true.

Anxiety is caused by all sorts of reasons. It could be pressure from work. Unexpected criticism. Feeling that we are unwanted or unloved. Health or financial worries. Feeling that we are not good enough for God. Believing that we are not forgiven.

Whatever they are, one reason why we hang on to our problems is that we think we can sort them out better than anyone else. But Peter urges us to reconsider any such idea. The reason we don’t have to worry is that God cares. But does God still care enough to intervene when a divorce is looming or we feel totally useless? The Bible says that He cares enough to transform any situation.

What are things that cause you worry now? However legitimate they are, however troublesome they are, is there anything too hard for the Lord? Maybe our biggest problem is that even though we believe that God knows about it and can fix it, we don’t believe that He will resolve it the way we would like it resolved. Dwell on that last point and ask yourself how true it is in your own life.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**V. Still Faithful When God Cannot Be Seen***(Review Isaiah 40:27–31.)*

Israel appears, in this passage, to want God to fight their battles for them. God's response is that He will strengthen them to fight their own battles. A major component of spiritual strength, as presented here, is optimism: the belief that God has a goal for our lives that we realistically can expect to reach.

► 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?**

Activity

As a class activity this week, draw on the rich heritage of hymns that encourage us to trust God. If the class is of sufficient size and ability, you may wish to sing a few verses of these hymns together. An accompanist isn't necessary; sometimes people listen more carefully to the words of hymns when singing a cappella.

- 1** God's extravagant love: Romans 8:38, 39 is summed up in the fourth verse of "I've Found a Friend."—*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 186.
- 2** The power of Jesus' name: Sing the first verse of the familiar hymn "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name."—*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 229.
- 3** The power of the Resurrection: Sing the chorus of "Because He Lives."—*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 526.
- 4** God will take our worries: A much-underused hymn is no. 477 in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, "Come, Ye Disconsolate." (The word *disconsolate* is an old-fashioned word for a discouraged or worried person.)
- 5** God's invisible power: Try the lovely Welsh hymn, "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise."—*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 21. Its words are some of the most poetic in our hymnal.

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Still Faithful When God Cannot Be Seen

To think that no one cares about what is happening to us is very unpleasant. But to think that God does not know or care about us can be most distressing.

To the Judeans exiled in Babylon, God did not seem to care much about their situation. They were still exiled, still feeling abandoned by God because of their sin. But Isaiah speaks words of comfort to them. Isaiah 40 is a beautiful passage in which Isaiah speaks so tenderly to the people about their God: “He tends his flock like a shepherd: he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young” (*vs. 11, NIV*). But after so long, the exiles were thinking, *Where are You, O Lord? We can’t see any evidence that You are still there—or care!*

Read Isaiah 40:27–31. In what ways does Isaiah describe God? How is this description of God meant to answer their belief that “My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God?” (*vs. 27, NIV*).

Another group of people who might have considered that their way was hidden from God is found in the book of Esther. In this book, God is not mentioned even once. However, the whole story is an unfolding drama of God’s intervention to save His people from an irrevocable law to have them destroyed. Not only does this story describe the events of the past, but it symbolizes a time in the future during which God’s people will again be persecuted and a law again introduced for their destruction (*Rev. 13:15*). Can you imagine how easy it would be to conclude that if such terrible circumstances were existing, God must surely have deserted His people? But we are not to fear. The same God who saved His chosen ones in the story of Esther will save them again in the final crisis.

We have read how Isaiah described God to the exiles. How would you describe God to people who felt that God had disappeared and abandoned them? How would you teach them to see through the eyes of faith and not be dependent on what they see around them with their human eyes?

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?*

Just because something is invisible doesn’t mean it is without power. Think of magnetism, wind, radiation, and germs. None are visible to the naked eye, but their effects can be extraordinary. Though God is invisible, His effects on our life can be extraordinary, as well—just as they were in the life of Moses.

“Moses had a deep sense of the personal presence of God. . . . Moses believed in God as one whom he needed and who would help him because of his need. God was to him a present help.

“Much of the faith which we see is merely nominal; the real, trusting, persevering faith is rare. Moses realized in his own experience the promise that God will be a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 651.

Consider This: Faith, as we see it demonstrated today, is so often shallow or, at best, merely intellectual. Real faith is not just a statement of belief but the effect of God’s invisible power demonstrated in visible ways. How can we put our faith into practice in such a way that we see God’s power solving life’s problems and encouraging us in our daily walk?

“Moses was full of confidence in God because he had appropriating faith. He needed help, and he prayed for it, grasped it by faith, and wove into his experience the belief that God cared for him. He believed that God ruled his life in particular. He saw and acknowledged God in every detail of his life and felt that he was under the eye of the All-seeing One, who weighs motives, who tries the heart.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 651, 652.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “In the Days of Queen Esther,” pp. 598–606, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“Has not God said He would give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him? And is not this Spirit a real, true actual guide? Some men seem afraid to take God at His word, as though it would be presumption in them. They pray for the Lord to teach us and yet are afraid to credit the pledged word of God and believe we have been taught of Him. So long as we come to our heavenly Father humbly and with a spirit to be taught, willing and anxious to learn, why should we doubt God’s fulfillment of His own promise? You must not for a moment doubt Him and dishonor Him thereby. When you have sought to know His will, your part in the operation with God is to believe that you will be led and guided and blessed in the doing of His will. We may mistrust ourselves lest we misinterpret His teachings, but make even this a subject of prayer, and trust Him, still trust Him to the uttermost, that His Holy Spirit will lead you to interpret aright His plans and the working of His providence.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 6, p. 225.

“Faith grows strong by coming in conflict with doubts and opposing influences. The experience gained in these trials is of more value than the most costly jewels.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 555.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, talk about the kinds of things we believe in that we do not see, things that we know are real yet are beyond our sight. How can this help us understand what it means to see “Him who is invisible”?
- ❷ Discuss the final question found at the end of Wednesday’s lesson. How often do we find ourselves in that situation? What can we do that will better enable us to trust that the Lord’s way is the best, even if it’s not what we want?
- ❸ If “faith grows strong by coming in conflict with doubts and opposing influences” and this leads to something extremely valuable—“of more value than the most costly jewels”—how should this shape the way we look at such conflicts?