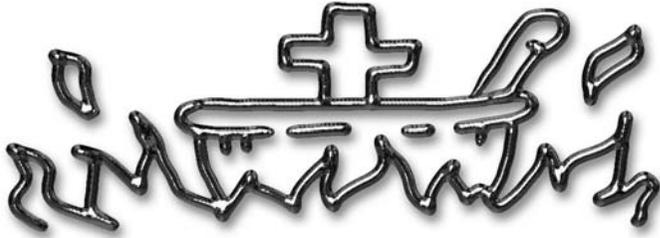


Christ *in the* Crucible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 2:1–18; 27:51, 52; Luke 2:7, 22–24; 22:41–44; John 8:58, 59; Rom. 6:23; Titus 1:2.*

Memory Text: “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” (*Matthew 27:46*).

Whenever we look at the issue of suffering, the question comes: How did sin and suffering first arise? Through divine revelation we have good answers: They arose because free beings abused the freedom God had given them. This leads to another question: Did God know beforehand that these beings would fall? Yes, but obviously He thought it was, as C. S. Lewis wrote, “worth the risk.”

Worth the risk? For whom? For us, while God sits in heaven on His throne? Not exactly. The freedom of all His intelligent creatures was so sacred that, rather than deny us freedom, God agreed to bear in Himself the brunt of the suffering caused by our abuse of that freedom. And we see that suffering in the life and death of Jesus, who, through suffering in our flesh, has created bonds between heaven and earth that will last throughout eternity.

The Week at a Glance: What did Christ suffer in our behalf? What can we learn from His suffering?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 29.*

The Early Days

Scripture gives us little information about the early years of Jesus. A few verses, however, tell us something about those conditions and the kind of world the Savior entered.

Read Luke 2:7, 22–24 (see also Lev. 12:6–8) and Matthew 2:1–18. What do we see in these texts that gives us an indication of the kind of life Jesus faced from the start?

Of course, Jesus was not the first person to live in poverty or to face those who wanted to kill Him, even from an early age. There is, however, another element that helps us understand the uniqueness of what Christ suffered from the earliest times.

Read John 1:46. What element does this add to help us understand what sufferings the young Jesus had faced?

With the exception of Adam and Eve before the Fall, Jesus was the only sinless Person who ever lived on the earth. In His purity, in His sinlessness, He was immersed in a world of sin. What a torture it must have been, even as a child, for His pure soul constantly to be in contact with sin. Even in our hardness because of sin, we ourselves often shrink away at sins and evil that we find repulsive. Imagine what it must have been like for Christ, whose soul was pure, who wasn't the least bit tainted by sin. Think of the sharp contrast between Christ and others around Him in that regard. It must have been exceedingly painful for Him.

Ask yourself, “How sensitive am I to the sins that exist all around us? Does it bother me, or am I hardened to it?” If you are hardened to it, could it be because of the things you read, watch, or even do? Think about it.

I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

► **Key Text:** *Matthew 27:46*

► **Teach the Class to:**

Know: God, through Jesus, was prepared to sacrifice all to reconcile us to Him.

Feel: The immensity of what Christ came to earth to do for us and the comparative insignificance of our own plight.

Do: Remember the results of Christ's suffering for us, our redemption, and live our lives accordingly.

► **Lesson Outline:**

I. Worth the Risk (*John 1:14*)

A What was the nature of the risk taken by God in creating humans with free will? Did free will mean that the Fall was inevitable?

B What was the risk of Christ's attempt to redeem us? Could Christ have failed? What would failure have meant to Him and to us?

C Why did the Fall make Jesus Christ's mission necessary?

II. God Among Us (*Matt. 23:37*)

A What might it have been like to be a sinless being in a world dominated by sin?

B People in Christ's time respected religion and religious figures; why then was Christ so misunderstood and in some cases rejected?

C In what way was Christ's life and ministry a preparation for what came later on the cross?

III. Because He Lives (*John 10:28*)

A Isaiah says that Christ has "borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (*Isa. 53:4*). How can this knowledge help us to deal with the very real grief and sorrow we still face in our lives?

B What has Christ earned for us as a result of His sacrifice, both now and in the future?

► **Summary:** God not only has provided us with comfort and guidance in the crucible of life on earth, but He has sent His only Son to show us the way out. Let us remember this as we face the inevitable trials that come our way.

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Despised and Rejected of Men

Read the following texts, keeping in mind the whole time the fact that Jesus was divine, the Creator of heaven and earth and that He came to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (*Matt. 12:22–24; Luke 4:21–30; John 8:58, 59*). **How do these texts help us understand the sufferings that Jesus faced here on earth?**

Whether by leaders, or even by the common people, Jesus' life, acts, and teaching were constantly misunderstood, leading to rejection and hatred by people He came to save. In a certain sense it must be like a parent who sees a wayward child in need of help, and though the parent is willing to give everything for that child, the child spurns the parent, heaping scorn and rejection upon perhaps the only person who can spare that child from utter ruin. That's what Jesus faced while here on earth. How painful it must have been for Him.

Read Matthew 23:37. **What does that tell us about how Christ felt about the rejection? As you read, ask yourself, too, "Was He feeling bad for Himself [as we often do when facing rejection], or was it for another reason?" If for another reason, what was it?**

We've all felt the sting of rejection, and maybe our pain was similar to Christ's in that it was unselfish: We were pained not because we were rejected but because of what the rejection would mean for the one who was rejecting you (perhaps someone you care about who refuses to accept salvation in Christ). Imagine, though, what it must have felt to Jesus, who was fully aware of what He was to face in order to save them, and at the same time fully aware of what the consequences of their rejection would be. "It was because of His innocence that He [Christ] felt so keenly the assaults of Satan."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 129.

What can you learn from Christ that can help you better cope with the pain of rejection? What does His example show you? How can you apply it to your own life?

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?*

“They shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint” (NKJV). These are the familiar words at the end of Isaiah 40:31. The connotation is that the running and walking are expected to continue for some time and that it will not be an easy journey. But the runners and walkers will not grow weary.

Who are they, and what will they not grow weary of? They are . . . “they that wait upon the Lord” (vs. 31), and as they wait on Him, they shall not grow weary of the difficulties and the suffering that they *must* encounter in this life of sin. They will keep on running and walking without giving up, because the Lord, who suffered just as they suffer, will be running and walking with them.

The Central Concept for This Lesson Is: Although we suffer many trying and difficult experiences, we can find comfort in knowing that Jesus also suffered and that He will give us strength to continue on.

Have each class member give a synonym for the word *fight*. Start off with the word *confrontation*. Then go from person to person until no more words can be thought of. Some examples are: *conflict, battle, struggle, warfare, encounter, dispute, combat, brawl, and wrestle*. Then discuss Ephesians 6:12, emphasizing that every difficult encounter that we may experience is a battle with the enemy, which we can overcome through the power of God.

► **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?*

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Jesus in Gethsemane

“And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch” (*Mark 14:34*).

Whatever Jesus suffered through His 33 years here on earth, nothing compared to what He started to face in the last hours before the Cross. From the eternal ages (*Eph. 1:1–4; 2 Tim. 1:8, 9; Titus 1:1, 2*) the sacrifice of Jesus as the offering for the world’s sin was planned, and now it was all coming to pass.

What do the following texts tell us about Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane? *Matt. 26:39, Mark 14:33–36, Luke 22:41–44.*

“He went a little distance from them—not so far but that they could both see and hear Him—and fell prostrate upon the ground. He felt that by sin He was being separated from His Father. The gulf was so broad, so black, so deep, that His spirit shuddered before it. This agony He must not exert His divine power to escape. As man He must suffer the consequences of man’s sin. As man He must endure the wrath of God against transgression.

“Christ was now standing in a different attitude from that in which He had ever stood before. His suffering can best be described in the words of the prophet, ‘Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts.’ *Zech. 13:7*. As the substitute and surety for sinful man, Christ was suffering under divine justice. He saw what justice meant. Hitherto He had been as an intercessor for others; now He longed to have an intercessor for Himself.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 686.

Dwell upon what was happening to Jesus in Gethsemane. Already the sins of the world were starting to fall upon Him. Try to imagine what that must have been like. No human being has ever been called to go through anything like this before. What does this tell us about God’s love for us? What hope can you draw from this for yourself?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Bible Commentary****I. Ready for Battle***(Review Ephesians 6:10–18.)*

No soldier goes into combat without protective gear. In the battle against sin and suffering, we, too, must be guarded and ready to fight. Go back to Ephesians 6:11: “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (NKJV).

Consider This: What are some of the specific things Jesus said and did that assure us that He was shielded by the armor of God? (See Matt. 4:4, Matt. 26:53, Mark 1:35, Luke 19:10, John 17:17, 1 Pet. 2:21–23.)

In these verses we see that Jesus often made reference to the Scriptures. God’s Word was His guide. He had an active prayer life, communing with the Father on a daily basis. He lived a pure life free from sin. He never sought to defend Himself but trusted in the Father’s power to deliver Him in times of need. His sole purpose in life was to do the will of His Father, which was the salvation of humanity. In the life of Christ we see all of the elements of the armor of God that are mentioned in Ephesians 6:14–18: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God.

Consider This: How can we, like Jesus, guard against the “wiles of the devil” (vs. 11)? Give some practical everyday examples (see John 8:31, 32; 1 Cor. 13:4–7; 1 Thess. 5:17; Titus 2:11–13).

II. Letting Him Bear the Burden*(Review Psalm 55:22.)*

One of the darts the enemy throws our way is suffering. Suffering may come as a result of personal loss, problems in relationships, financial difficulties, being misunderstood or mistreated, or some other hardship. All of these things are commonplace in our human experience. Those who wait upon the Lord shall be strengthened, those who put on the armor of God shall stand, and those who cast their burdens on the Lord shall be sustained.

Consider This: Does casting your burden upon the Lord mean that the problem or the suffering will be removed? Explain your answer.

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The Crucified God

Death by crucifixion was one of the harshest punishments the Romans meted out to anyone. It was considered the worst way to die. Thus, how horrific for anyone to be killed that way, much less the Son of God! Jesus, we must always remember, came in human flesh like ours. Between the beatings, the scourgings, the nails hammered into His hands and feet, the harrowing weight of His own body tearing at the wounds, and the physical pain must have been unbearable. This was harsh, even for the worst of criminals; how unfair, then, that Jesus, innocent of everything, should face such a fate.

Yet, as we know, Christ's physical sufferings were mild in contrast to what was really happening. This was more than just the killing of an innocent man.

What events surrounding the death of Jesus showed that more was going on than most people there understood at the time? What significance can we find in each of these events that can help reveal what happened there?

Matt. 27:45

Matt. 27:51, 52

Mark 15:38

Clearly, something much more was happening here than just the death, however unfairly, of an innocent man. According to Scripture, God's wrath against sin, our sin, was poured out upon Jesus. Jesus on the cross suffered not sinful humanity's unjust wrath but a righteous God's righteous indignation against sin, the sins of the whole world. As such, Jesus suffered something deeper, darker, and more painful than any human being could ever know or experience.

As you go through whatever struggles you are facing, what hope and comfort can you draw from the reality of Christ suffering for you on the cross?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**III. Just Stand**

(Review Exodus 14:13, 14.)

Led by Moses, the Israelites left Egypt bound for freedom, until they came to the Red Sea. With Pharaoh's army quickly closing in on them and the sea in front of them, they cried out to the Lord. They thought they surely would perish. But God had another plan. He had not brought them so far to let them die in the wilderness. "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord" (vs. 13, NKJV), was the explicit command of Moses.

Stand still, and having done all . . . *stand*. With nowhere to turn, the only thing left for the Israelites to do was to stand still—to wait—and see the salvation of the Lord.

God would deliver them, but they had to wait on Him and watch what He would do.

Consider This: Is it true that sometimes the best defense is no defense at all? Discuss.

How can you know whether it is best to do something or better to do nothing? Can we wait on the Lord in either case?

►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?**

Thought Questions:

From the very beginning the Savior was threatened or judged by others (see Isa. 9:6, Matt. 2:13). How did Jesus handle threats? How should we handle the threats or judgments of others?

- 1 Jesus was rejected even in His hometown, by those who had known Him His whole life (Luke 4:22, 28, 29). What does this tell us about earthly ties?
- 2 How can we maintain human relationships while remaining loyal to God?

Application Questions:

- 1 Jesus was heartbroken by those who rejected Him, yet His sorrow was

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The Suffering God

We might as well get used to it: As long as we are here, in this world, we are going to suffer. It is, as fallen creatures, our fate. Nothing in the Bible promises us anything differently. On the contrary . . .

What do the following texts have to tell us about the topic at hand? *Acts 14:22, Phil. 1:29, 2 Tim. 3:12.*

Yet, in the midst of our suffering, two things we should keep in mind.

First, Christ, our Lord, has suffered worse than any of us ever could. At the Cross, He “has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (*Isa. 53:4, NKJV*); what we know only as individuals, He suffered corporately, for us all. He, who was sinless, became “sin for us” (*2 Cor. 5:21*), suffering in a way that we, as sinful creatures, couldn’t begin to imagine.

But second, as we suffer, we should remember the results of Christ’s suffering; that is, what we have been promised through what Christ has done for us.

Read John 10:28, Romans 6:23, Titus 1:2, and 1 John 2:25. What are we promised?

Whatever our sufferings here, thanks to Jesus, thanks to His bearing in Himself the punishment of our sin, thanks to the great provision of the gospel—that through faith we can stand perfect in Jesus right now—we have the promise of eternal life. We have the promise that because of what Christ has done, because of the fullness and completeness of His perfect life and perfect sacrifice, our existence here, full of pain, disappointment, and loss, is no more than an instant, a flash, here and gone. In contrast to this, there is the eternity that awaits us, an eternity in a new heavens and a new earth, one without sin, suffering, and death. And all this is promised to us and made certain for us only because of Christ and the crucible He went into so that one day, coming soon, He would see “the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (*Isa. 53:11*).

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

not for Himself. It was for them, because He could not save them (*see Matt. 23:37*). In light of how Jesus felt about those who rejected Him, how should we relate to those who treat us unkindly?

2 Like Christ, our main purpose in life should be salvation—the salvation of every soul, including our own. Name some specific ways that we can keep our focus on the Lord’s soon coming, even in difficult experiences.

Witnessing:

Is it possible that God uses our suffering as an avenue for saving others? If so, give an example. If not, explain your answer.

► 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?**

Consider This: Share with the class a trying experience that you have had. How did you handle it? Is there anything you could have done differently? Would you consider this a kind of suffering? Tell how this experience may have strengthened you spiritually.

Try This: Ask class members to keep a journal for one week of any trials that they encounter, recording how they respond to each situation, and how to apply the principles outlined in this week’s lesson.

Invite a class member to close with prayer.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Gethsemane,” pp. 685–697; “Calvary,” pp. 741–757, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Three times has He uttered that prayer. Three times has humanity shrunk from the last, crowning sacrifice. But now the history of the human race comes up before the world’s Redeemer. He sees that the transgressors of the law, if left to themselves, must perish. He sees the helplessness of man. He sees the power of sin. The woes and lamentations of a doomed world rise before Him. He beholds its impending fate, and His decision is made. He will save man at any cost to Himself. He accepts His baptism of blood, that through Him perishing millions may gain everlasting life. He has left the courts of heaven, where all is purity, happiness, and glory, to save the one lost sheep, the one world that has fallen by transgression. And He will not turn from His mission. He will become the propitiation of a race that has willed to sin. His prayer now breathes only submission: ‘If this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 690, 693.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How does it help us in our own sufferings, this knowledge that God Himself, in the person of Christ, suffered worse than any of us ever could? What should the sufferings of Christ in our behalf mean to us? What comfort can we draw from this amazing truth? As you think about your answer, keep in mind the following statement from Ellen White: “All the suffering which is the result of sin was poured into the bosom of the sinless Son of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 129.
- 2 As a class, go over the sufferings of Christ looked at in this week’s lesson. What were the crucibles that Christ faced? In what ways are they like our own; in what ways are they different? What can we learn from how He handled these challenges that can help us amid our own crucibles?
- 3 What are some of your favorite Bible promises, promises that you can cling to amid sorrow and pain? Write them out, claim them for yourself, and share them in class.
- 4 Write out a summary paragraph, highlighting whatever few main points you got from this quarter’s lesson. What questions were resolved for you? What issues still remain unanswered? How can we help each other work through those things that still greatly perplex and trouble us?