

Life



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 2:7; Ps. 139:13, 14; John 1:1–3; 3; 10:10; 2 Cor. 5:17; Phil. 2:1–5.*

Memory Text: “‘I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full’ ” (*John 10:10, NIV*).

People nowadays live much longer than in previous generations, especially people in the so-called developed world. And that's, of course, good. Yet, it's one thing to live a long time, but what about the quality of life itself? Sometimes doctors perform all kinds of heroic actions to artificially keep a person alive even if the person has very little, if any, quality of life left.

But quality of life is not restricted to an acceptable level of physical well-being; it has a wider application. What do we do with the years that we have been given? Do we live with a purpose and in harmony with others? Do we live in satisfying relationships with fellow human beings and, most of all, with our Creator? These are important questions for all who have been given the gift of life.

The Week at a Glance: Life is a gift from God only. Now that we have this life, what does it mean for us? How are we to live it? Because it's a gift, we are under a divine obligation to take care of our lives, both physically and spiritually. At the same time, our belief in Jesus brings us into the community of other believers, and we become part of a new family, both in heaven and on earth, all of which should impact the quality of life we have here now.

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

The Gift of Physical Life

How did life originate? Some people point to a godless evolutionary unfolding of human existence. Others argue for a divine role in the slow process of millions of years during which “simple” forms of life somehow made their appearance and, subsequently, developed into more complex organisms, including humans. This theory, however, creates more questions than it answers (and besides, nothing in the Bible even hints that God used evolution to create humanity). Meanwhile, several renowned scholars have in recent years convincingly argued that this theory is in a deep crisis. But even the staunchest supporters of evolutionary thinking must admit that life remains as great a mystery as ever.

At the same time, those who believe in God as the Creator of this world and of all the universe do not have all the answers either. But the creationist approach is far more logical and coherent than the improbable theory that human life resulted from chance.

What does divine revelation tell us about the origin of life? *Gen. 2:7, John 1:1–3.*

What is true for the mystery of life in general is also true for each human life. Although we possess a lot of scientific knowledge about the processes involved in the conception and growth of human life, each new parent who holds a newborn child in his or her arms knows intuitively that this new life is nothing less than a miracle. It is a fundamental Christian conviction that life—and human life in a very special sense—is sacred.

In what words does David describe the miracle of human life and the magnificent design of the human body? *Ps. 139:13, 14.*

Who does not know the words of the well-known song that says God has “the whole world in His hands”? This applies to the universe and to our entire planet. But also to each one of us individually; whoever we are and wherever we are, God holds us in His hands. We owe our physical life to Him, all of it—from beginning to end.

What difference does it make that God is the Creator of all life, including our own? How should our stance on the origin of life impact our views about things such as the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia?

Physical Education

If we owe our existence to our Creator, it stands to reason that we also owe it to Him to be careful with what He has entrusted to us. There is ample evidence in the Bible that God is interested in our physical well-being. He manifested His care for the people of Israel time and again. He gave His people numerous instructions about healthful eating and sanitation. He gave them manna in the wilderness. He looked after Elijah when there was famine in the land. These are just a few of many examples of God's care for our physical well-being.

This truth becomes even clearer in the ministry of our Lord. Even a cursory reading of the Gospels leaves us in no doubt that Jesus' understanding of religion was very much practice-oriented.

In what ways did Jesus show interest in His own physical well-being and that of the people around Him? Take a look at the following passages and analyze what implications they have for us today.

- healing (*Mark 5*)
- rest (*Mark 6:30–32*)
- feeding (*Mark 6:33–43; esp. vs. 34*)
- Sabbath (*Luke 4:16*)

In what other areas did Jesus show His concern for the physical well-being of people?

The way we treat our body has everything to do with stewardship. Whether our material possessions, our time, our talents, or our body—it is all God's property, and thus, we are required as faithful stewards to look after these gifts. But care for our body also is intimately related to the biblical view of the human person. Many Christians believe that we consist of an immortal soul that inhabits a mortal shell of flesh and blood. The Bible, however, depicts humanity as a unity of body, soul, and spirit, which cannot be separated. Our religion, therefore, does not concern just an immortal “something” but our entire being. It impacts all aspects of our existence.

While the Bible indicates that some foods are unsuitable for human consumption (see, for example, Leviticus 11), the kingdom is not to be reduced to a question of what we eat and drink (see Rom. 14:17). How do we strike the right balance, not just in diet but in all areas of healthy living?

Spiritual Life

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

What is your understanding of what that above text means? How are we a “new creature” in Jesus?

All inhabitants of this earth, whether they ever realize it or not, are God’s by birth. Yet, life we all share in this world is, as we all know, very temporary. Sin has brought decay and death not only to every human being but to all life on the planet. Nothing is immune to the crushing devastation caused by sin.

The good news, however, is that we have a choice whether this life is all we have or whether we will accept the wonderful gift of eternal life.

This eternal life, however, demands a turning around, a conversion. The Bible uses several metaphors to describe this crucial experience. The most graphic is that of a new birth, the image used to depict the turning point at which a person accepts the gift of eternal life in Christ. When this happens, the “old person” dies, and a “new person” is born.

Nowhere in the Bible is the need for this new birth described with greater clarity than in John 3. Read the section (*vss. 1–21*) that relates Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus. What does it tell us about the nature of this new birth? What is your own understanding of the new birth?

The new life of the follower of Jesus, who has turned around from a life of self-service to a life of commitment to the kingdom, will be characterized by growth. The newly born spiritual person needs to feed on the right kind of spiritual food and must gradually mature. The apostle Peter encourages us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18, NIV).

If someone were to ask you, “Have you been born-again?” what would you reply? What does your answer say to you about your walk with Jesus?

Social Life

Humans are, by nature, social beings. Of course, there are moments we like to be alone. We need private time for prayer and contemplation. Some need more private space and private time than do others. But we tend to feel sorry for people who are always alone, and particularly for those who do not have sufficient social skills to establish bonds of friendship and who consistently fail to enter into meaningful relationships.

The Bible pictures people as parts of various social networks. The family, friendship, ethnicity, community, and church are dominant themes. The Bible points to Jesus' Father as the Father of all humankind, which means we all are brothers and sisters in a very real sense (*Acts 17:26*). Living in relationships is the essence of human life. When Adam was created, God immediately created a partner for him. Family life was a divinely devised model for human happiness. The Bible repeatedly underlines the tremendous value of genuine friendship and the blessings of belonging to a wider community.

What is the key to successfully managing of our social relationships? How well do you manifest these principles? *Phil. 2:1–5*.

The various aspects of our Christian life are blended in our membership to the body of Christ: the church. The church is more than a place where like-minded people meet and enjoy fellowship. Nonetheless, for many the church is indeed the focal point of their social life. This has both positive and negative aspects. Without Christian friends we have few, if any, role models. Associating with others who also serve God and also have adopted a biblical lifestyle will help us to remain faithful and to grow in our Christian relationship. But if we have no friends outside the circle of fellow believers, we will have few opportunities for witnessing. In many parts of the world friendship evangelism is the most successful method of church growth.

Studies have shown that most new Adventists lose virtually all their non-Adventist friends within seven years. Take a look at yourself. Is this the pattern you see? What are the reasons? Why is it worth investing time and energy to build friendships with non-Adventists, or even with non-Christians?

Fullness of Life

John 10:10 records Jesus' famous statement that He has come to give us life "to the full" (*NIV*). Other Bible translations speak of "abundant life."

Here is a partial list of important components of this "full" life. Try to add other components to that list and find scriptural support for these various aspects:

1. It is a life full of possibilities.
2. It is a life with a purpose.
3. It is a life of inner peace.
4. It is a life with a mission.

As we grow in our Christian life, we become more and more convinced that Christ does indeed offer us life "to the full." We often have, however, a hard time explaining this to those who have not committed themselves to Christ. For them the Christian life appears to be rather boring. They dislike the fact that it seems to bring all kinds of restrictions. But Christians have learned that not all experiences one might have actually make our lives richer. Many things we might do carry a minus sign rather than a plus sign and contribute to an inner emptiness rather than a fullness of life.

What are some kinds of experiences we're all better off without, and why?

"Life to the full" is not a combination of good health, good looks, satisfactory education, and a nice income. And although strong, loving relationships are certainly part of it, there is considerably more than these things. Life "to the full" is the kind of life that has meaning. It is a life that issues inner peace. Its happiness does not depend primarily on external, material circumstances. It is a life that is connected to the Source of life and will, therefore, be eternal.

Why does all this talk of an "abundant life" sound pleasing? What about those who seem to have an "abundant life" but don't know Jesus and don't seem to have the slightest interest in knowing Him? How do we understand this phenomenon, especially when we all know Christians who are suffering terribly now? See 2 Cor. 4:18.

Further Study: Ellen G. White’s famous book *Steps to Christ* focuses on our life in Christ. If, in the context of this week’s lesson, one has to choose one particular chapter, one might well go to chapter 8: “Growing Up Into Christ” (pp. 67–76). “A life in Christ is a life of restfulness. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there should be an abiding, peaceful trust. Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. Your weakness is united to His strength, your ignorance to His wisdom, your frailty to His enduring might. So you are not to look to yourself, not to let the mind dwell upon self, but look to Christ. Let the mind dwell upon His love, upon the beauty, the perfection, of His character.”—Page 70.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ When people are severely disabled or terminally ill, the question often asked is whether their life still has “quality.” Should the quality of life be defined primarily in physical terms, or are other aspects also important, or possibly even more essential? How, too, does our understanding of the origin of life influence our answer?
- ❷ For many people the looming specter of death robs life of all meaning and purpose. After all, if sooner or later we’ll all be dead and every memory of us forgotten, what can this life possibly mean? How has Jesus answered that question for us and eliminated this concern?
- ❸ What aspects of your contemporary culture rob life of its full meaning? That is, what kind of ideals and moral values are being promoted that reduce life to something less than it should be? How can we as Adventist Christians respond to these challenges?
- ❹ In what ways can our health message and principles of better living play into the promise of an “abundant life”? Might we be shortchanging ourselves on this promise?

Summary: This week’s lesson focused on the “full” or “abundant” life found in Jesus Christ. It is a life lived in a responsible way, caring for our physical life as best we can. It is also a life lived in relationships, for God designed humans to live in communion with others. Most of all, it is a life totally renewed in Jesus, a life that will be changed and growing in God’s grace.

Making Up for Lost Time

by JESSE HURDLE

I ran away from home when I was 12 and grew up on the streets of Trinidad. I survived by stealing and fighting and selling drugs. At 18 I returned to Tobago, where my mom lived. She had become a Seventh-day Adventist and wanted me to go to church with her, but I wasn't interested.

I married a good woman, but I didn't change. She went to church and prayed for me, and I went out to gamble. Then something happened, and I realized that my life was heading in the wrong direction. I hardly knew my children, and I was a terrible example to them. So, one Sabbath I went to church with my wife and committed my life to Christ. "This is an answer to prayer!" she cried.

I had a lot to make right with God and my family, but God changed me. He saved me and my marriage in spite of myself.

The church members surrounded me with prayer and put me to work. I grew in Christ and obeyed when He told me to share my faith with others.

I told my friends, my colleagues, and people on the street how God had changed me. I challenged them to give God a try.

Still, I was surprised when God asked me to hold evangelistic meetings, for I'd never gone beyond primary school. But we stepped out in faith and made the meetings a family affair. We pitched a tent and held three weeks of meetings. My wife sang, my daughter helped with the programs, and my son handled the public address system. When the meetings came to a close, the people asked for more, so we added another week of meetings. Twelve people were baptized.

Ronny was one of my best friends. He helped me repair the church roof and would do anything I asked. But he refused to let God into his life. "I'll go to church when the undertaker takes me," he'd say. I talked, I prayed, I urged. But he refused. Then one day he died of a massive heart attack at 45. His death was a huge blow to me. I felt that I had failed God because my friend refused to accept Jesus as his Savior.



Ronny's death made me realize that death is only one heartbeat away. I can't let someone go without sharing a word about God. I may not get another chance to speak to them. I think of the people I led into drugs before I was a Christian. Now I want to lead them all to Christ.

Please share your faith with others, and give your mission offerings now. One day it will be too late.

JESSE HURDLE shares his faith with everyone he meets in Tobago.