

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; wherever 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?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *John 10:10*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: That life comes from God and God alone.

Feel: The transformation that occurs when Christ enters your life.

Do: Allow His presence to shape your choices daily.

▶ **Lesson Outline:**

I. The Gift of Life (*John 1:1–3*)

A God is the Source of life for everything on earth. Does this amazing gift obligate us to respond in any specific ways? Why or why not?

B God has given us many guidelines for taking care of our bodies: dietary recommendations, as well as broader lifestyle instruction. What do these guidelines say about the value God places on human life?

II. An Abundant Life (*2 Cor. 5:17*)

A Just as God gave us life in the beginning, we are born again into a new life in Christ. What has changed in your life as a result of your relationship with Jesus? Explain.

B In the memory text for this week, Jesus says He came that we may have life more abundantly. How has He made your life more fulfilling?

III. A New Life in Christ (*2 Pet. 3:18*)

With Christ in our lives, we can live with purpose and meaning. Second Peter urges us to grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus. In what tangible ways can you strive to do that every day?

▶ **Summary:** Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be reborn (*John 3:1–21*). Do all you can to start each day reborn in Christ.

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?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God gives us not only life but a way of life. He created us and redeemed us. As such, our lives are not our own. We are responsible to God for the uses to which we put the life He gives to us.

Just for Teachers: In this week’s lesson, we discuss and explore the meaning of life itself as a gift from God.

The age-old question What is the meaning of life? has sparked endless debate and conjecture from the beginning of time. Some scientists say the answer is survival of the species. Atheist Richard Dawkins, who wrote *The Selfish Gene* (1976) proposes that life is just the way genes choose to replicate themselves. Other answers to the meaning of life range from the sublime to the absurd: enlightenment, individual success, power, pleasure, and even the number 42 (as Douglas Adams humorously proposes in *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*). Still other minds question whether the concept of “the meaning of life” itself has meaning.

When we ask how life came into being, ideas tend to be clearer and more distinct but still mutually contradictory and often full of gaps. Evolutionists, such as Dawkins, say evolution is as indisputable as gravity, but critics of evolution still persist in casting doubt on it. Theorists closer to the fringe of acceptable belief suggest that life on earth was seeded by extraterrestrials, but they don’t generally explain where the extraterrestrials came from. Advocates of intelligent design say there must be an Intelligent Designer, but in the current legal climate (at least in America), their lawyers won’t let them say who that is.

As Christians we turn to the Bible, where we find clear, distinct, and coherent answers to both these questions. God created us to love and serve Him and to be loved and served by Him. We don’t have all the answers to the mysteries of life, but His love for us is a very good start.

Discuss With the Class: The Bible says that Christ is the Alpha and Omega—the Beginning and End—of life and time (*Rev. 1:11*). What does this belief mean in our individual lives and for life itself?

Consider This: How do you demonstrate that the focus of your life is to love and serve God?

C O N T I N U E D 

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 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, the life we all share in this world, as we all know, is 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 as to 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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED▶ **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: The following passages convey the fact that God is concerned and involved in all aspects of our lives and that we, in turn, should be always mindful of His presence in all that we do.

Bible Commentary

Overview: The Bible regards God’s Creatorship as self-evident. God’s greatness and goodness are proven by the things He has made and the way He has made them. The evidence includes our own bodies. As such, our own existence should serve—the Bible suggests—to remind us of God, His love for us, and His plans for our destiny.

I. Abundant Life *(Review with your class John 10:10.)*

Ever wonder why God created light before He created a light source? The sun doesn’t show up until day four of Creation week, nearly a hundred hours after light has been shining without it. Perhaps God wanted us to remember that before there was anything else, He—the Light of the world—was already there. His power, love, goodness, and the fullness of His life are underived; all stem from Him and from His very nature as God.

God has given us the fullness of His life through His Son. When Jesus says that He has come so that we “ ‘may have life, and have it to the full’ ” (*John 10:10, NIV*), He is referring not just to physical life in its various aspects but to spiritual and eternal life, as well. The Gospel of John is quite emphatic from the beginning that Christ is the Source of that life (*John 1:3, 4*). John goes on to say that this Life is the “light of all people” (*vs. 4, NRSV*). Here John equates life with light, God’s first creation, suggesting that life shares the qualities of light. Even now we use it to symbolize wisdom and understanding, revelation and inspiration.

Consider This: How has the Lord of light revealed Himself to you in the events and in the course of your life?

II. Intricately Wrought in the Depths of the Earth *(Review with your class Psalm 139:13, 14.)*

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

According to *The Interpreter's Bible*, some scholars propose that Psalm 139:15 is possibly “a reflection of the idea that the human fetus was made by God elsewhere before being introduced into the womb” (vol. 4, p. 716). It is easy to get caught up in such idle speculation and overlook the larger purpose of the psalm: to serve as a testimony to God’s omniscience. God was aware of us and had plans for us even before the physical elements of our existence had come together in the unique combinations that make us who we are.

We also can consider that God’s awareness of us is a poetic recognition of the fact that our “physicality” and “spirituality” are intertwined. Thus, we are not spirits that come down from some mysterious realm and plant ourselves in physical bodies. Our physical bodies are us, and we need to respect them as God’s house.

Consider This: Because God created us as physical beings with bodies, what should our attitude be toward our bodies, and how should we display this attitude in all that we do?

III. Life Is With People *(Review with your class Philipians 2:1–5.)*

The harmony and order that still can be seen in life, existence, and the natural world point to God as their Originator. In the same way, the body of believers known as the church—God’s new creation—also should display the harmony that God intended among the beings He created. How do we display this harmony? The answer is simple. Put aside the self-seeking and self-promotion that the world tells us are necessary for survival. Love others more than self and seek to do them good. Embrace the selfless life of Christ as your own.

Consider This: Churches are very similar to families in that members may have relatively little in common with other members. List the ways in which we can ease the tensions that inevitably arise. How can we promote harmonious relations with one another?

► STEP 3—Practice

Just for Teachers: Encourage your students to use the following

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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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

questions to think about God in Christ as the Source of life and as something that directs our attention to God.

Thought Questions:

- 1 Most people have at least a passive belief in the existence of a Creator God. Why is it important to believe in the young-earth creationist account, rather than, say, theistic evolutionism?
- 2 Many or most of Jesus' miracles deal with healing, which indicated that both He and His hearers viewed healing as a holy act. What does this idea suggest for us about the importance of our physical well-being to God?

Application Question:

As Seventh-day Adventists, we know that God intends us to be healthy. Vibrant health is one aspect of the abundant life He offers. Sadly, the health message often is perceived as a rigid set of restrictions, or worse, as justification for those who follow it to consider themselves superior to others who don't. How can we present the health message in such a way that people understand that God intends it for our happiness and well-being?

► STEP 4—Apply

Just for Teachers: This week we have learned that God gives us not only life but also a way of life. Use the following activity to encourage your students to explore and discover what this way of life means to them.

- Psalm 139:13, 14 states that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” And it's true; virtually any of our organs is a marvel of design and engineering. The possibility of any of them emerging by chance is extremely remote. Examine one of these organs or systems with your class. The eye is a popular example (here is a site with reproducible material on the topic: <http://www.bibleprobe.com/humaneye.htm>).
- One of the purposes of our lives is to be a blessing to others, particularly in our own community. Do you know someone in your church or in your community experiencing difficulty performing basic functions in his or her life? What exactly are the needs of this person, and how can you help? Example: doing something for the house or yard of an elderly or ill person; making bag lunches to give to the homeless. What other examples can you think of? Schedule a time as a class to help this person or persons.

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.