

Social Support: *The Tie That Binds*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:27, John 1:1–3, Rom. 14:7, 1 Cor. 12:14–26, 1 Corinthians 13, Gal. 6:2, Eph. 4:1–16.*

Memory Text: “ ‘A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another’ ” (*John 13:34, 35, NIV*).

It is very clear that being unloved, lonely, and isolated increases the likelihood of various risky behaviors. Disease and premature death from all causes rises by 200 to 500 percent or more in such individuals. Saddest of all, isolation deprives us of the joy of everyday life, the joy that comes from satisfying and fulfilling relationships. One study was conducted on 170 military wives receiving prenatal care at a military hospital. The research showed that women without emotional and psychological support had three times as many complications as those with adequate support.

Anything that promotes a sense of isolation may lead to illness and suffering. That which promotes love and intimacy, connection, and community is healing and brings health. And no wonder, because, as humans, we were meant to live in community and fellowship with one another.

With these ideas in mind, we come to the final week in our study about health and temperance, and our topic deals with the important question of interpersonal relationships and how these can impact our physical well-being.

The Week at a Glance: Loving one another is the distinguishing characteristic of the disciples of Christ. Love blesses not only the recipient but the giver, as well.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 26.*

The Original Image

As human beings, we are so immersed in sin that we often can forget just how bad it is, just how much it has affected us. It is not easy to realize how far we have fallen, because we have been down for so long.

Read Genesis 1:27. How does the fact that Jesus Himself is God help us understand better what it means to have been made in the image of God? How does knowing about Jesus help us understand the kind of characters our first parents had at the Creation?

The Bible is clear: we were made in the image of God. It is clear, too, that Jesus is God (*see John 1:1–3*). Thus, in the beginning, humans reflected somewhat the moral character of Jesus. The Jesus who loved us so much that He stooped down and took on our humanity in order to save us—that is what humans were originally like. The Jesus who was willing to minister to others by washing the feet of His betrayer—that is what humans were somewhat like. The Jesus who, even while dying on the cross, took time to comfort the dying thief—that is what humans were like. The Jesus who cried out, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (*Luke 23:34*)—that is what humans were to some degree like before sin entered.

The unselfish love and concern for others that marked Jesus’ life also must have been reflected to some degree in Adam and Eve before the Fall, who were from creation made “in the image of God.”

Hence, the idea of being like Jesus means being remade into the image in which we were originally created. And it is obvious from looking at Jesus, from seeing how He lived and how He treated people and how He loved even His enemies, that at the heart of Christ’s character was unselfish love for others. As humans, then, we originally were made to love and care unselfishly for those who were around us. That is certainly part of what it means to have been made in the image of God.

We were made, therefore, to love and to be loved, and this we cannot do in a vacuum. We need people to love, just as people need to be loved. This is what community and family are all about.

Dwell more on this idea about what it means to have been made in the image of God and that Jesus is God. How does this fact help us understand just how fallen we are and how much we need a Savior? More so, how should this help us understand why we need to treat people better than we often do?

People: Social Beings

People are social beings. Not long after Adam was created, God provided a companion for him. He said, “It is not good for the man to be alone” (*Genesis 2:18, NIV*). We need one another.

Hence, a crucial point regarding this reality must be understood.

Read Romans 14:7. What important principle is found in this text? How have you experienced the powerful reality of this truth?

In life or death, we impact others, especially those in our family. The responsible caring for our own health brings blessings not only to ourselves but to those with whom we share our lives.

What do the following texts tell us about how social relationships were meant as a blessing for us? *Gen. 2:18, Eccles. 4:9–12, 1 Cor. 12:14–26, Gal. 6:2.*

Because good relationships positively influence both our own and others’ lives, we should learn to give and receive graciously. It is incorrect to say, “It’s my body, and it’s nobody’s business but mine.” Society pays, directly or indirectly, for every person’s poor health choices. Human life, a precious creation of God, is of utmost worth and is deserving of preservation. In many places the value of life is not appreciated; for the Christian, every person is valuable. It is important to invest not only in your own health but also in the health of others.

A doctor studied the importance of social ties and social support in relationship to disease and mortality rates. The close social, cultural, and traditional ties of the Japanese culture made for exemplary health outcomes. The better the social ties, the better the health. He further indicated that social isolation results in poorer health and higher mortality rates. Meaningful social relationships positively influence physical, mental, and emotional behaviors.

In what ways have you benefited from a social network? How can you help others in the same way you have benefited? Do you tend to take more from the network, or give more? What does your answer say about you?

Unity in Redemption

All humanity is related through our common ancestry (*Acts 17:26*). We're related, too, through the love that God has for all of us. Everyone may be redeemed by Christ's precious blood, because God wants no one to be lost (*2 Pet. 3:9*).

The Bible is clear that through redemption in Jesus, all barriers between us should be brought down, because we are the same before the Lord: sinners in need of God's grace.

How does Paul describe the people who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus? *Eph. 4:1–16*. What does this mean in terms of how we should relate to one another?

No one hates his or her own body (*Eph. 5:29, 30*). All parts of the body interact to function effectively. If one part of the body suffers, all functions are affected. The closer we are to others, the more readily and powerfully we feel the impact of their problems.

When we interact socially and helpfully with others, it improves health. Two hundred seventy-six healthy volunteers were exposed to the common cold virus. The effect of a variety of interpersonal relationships was explored. Those reporting the fewest types of relationships had more than four times the risk of developing a cold than those reporting greater numbers of relationships. These differences were not explicable by factors such as immunity, smoking, exercise, amount of sleep, alcohol intake, and so forth. It was shown that the *diversity* of relationships was more important than the total number of people with whom the individuals interacted. Mutually supportive, diverse relationships increased resistance to infection, at least according to this study.

All this points to what we have been talking about all this quarter: our emotional, mental, and spiritual health can have a powerful impact on our physical health. Central to our emotional and spiritual health are the kinds of interpersonal relationships we share with others.

Sure, there are times when most everyone wants to be alone, but that is not the same as being part of a larger community that can act as a support group, especially in times of need.

How can you better involve yourself in the life of your church community? How much death to self will it take to be more involved? What gifts do you have that can benefit others?

Support One Another

Recognizing the outstanding benefits of service one to another, we can understand why Mrs. White made this statement in *Medical Ministry*: “Christian kindness and earnest consecration are constantly to be manifest in the life.”—Page 204. A person can have all the theological knowledge in the world, but if the person is not kind, loving, and caring about others, what good does this knowledge do? This seems to be very much the theme of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. It would do us all some good to read that chapter over often, even daily and then ask ourselves how well we are following what Paul says there.

What do the following verses teach us about how we are to relate to one another?

John 13:35

Rom. 15:7

Eph. 4:32

Col. 3:13

1 Thess. 4:18

James 5:16

1 Pet. 3:8

1 Pet. 4:9

1 John 1:7

An outstanding virtue of the Christian is to follow the example of Jesus in loving people despite their weaknesses. Jesus loved His disciples regardless of their many shortcomings and failures. He was caring and inclusive, even when he was rejected and betrayed. We are called to do the same. This can happen only as Christ works in our lives, and He can do that only to the extent that we surrender and allow Him to. As we grasp just how much grace and mercy have been extended to us by God, we can start doing the same to others. Loving the loving and the kind is relatively easy; most anyone can do that. It is when we are called to love the unloving, the ones who are hard to get along with, the ones who treat us nastily and unfairly—then it takes the grace of God working in us.

How well do you love those who are not so easy to love? How can you learn to do better in that area? How would Jesus treat that person? Go and do likewise.

Serve One Another

The life of Jesus on earth was a life of service. From the earliest days of His ministry right up until the end, He was serving humanity. In fact, according to the Bible, He still is serving us today (*Heb. 2:17, 18*).

We each have been created with specific spiritual gifts for service. What are the various spiritual gifts and services found in the following verses?

Rom. 12:4–8

1 Cor. 12:1–5

Eph. 4:8–11

As we have seen, as human beings, we were made to love others, as Jesus loved. And when we do this, we do not simply benefit others. We benefit ourselves, as well.

Think for a moment how good you feel when you reach out and help others, when you selflessly give of yourself with no intention of getting anything back for yourself. Something inside us is touched. There is a sense of well-being; we get a satisfaction that, really, nothing else can match. And that is because, by giving of ourselves, we are living as we were meant to live. We are doing what we were originally created to do.

As we have seen, a positive mental outlook on life can have a positive impact on us physically, as well. Our body reacts better when we feel positive, happy, and fulfilled. No wonder, then, that scientific studies have shown positive medical benefits that arise from doing good for others. It makes perfect sense: by helping others, we feel better, and when we feel better, our physical being is improved. What a perfect combination!

“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love” (*Gal. 5:13, NIV*). What does it mean to serve one another in love? How can you take these words and apply them in a practical way in your own life right now? Think of someone whom you can “serve in love” and do it, even if it takes self-denial on your part. After all, there is no question—someone out there needs you.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Social Purity,” pp. 567–671, in *Counsels on Health*; “Saved to Serve,” pp. 95–107, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Development and Service,” pp. 497–502, in *The Ministry of Healing*.

“Many feel that it would be a great privilege to visit the scenes of Christ’s life on earth, to walk where He trod, to look upon the lake beside which He loved to teach, and the hills and valleys on which His eyes so often rested. But we need not go to Nazareth, to Capernaum, or to Bethany, in order to walk in the steps of Jesus. We shall find His footprints beside the sickbed, in the hovels of poverty, in the crowded alleys of the great cities, and in every place where there are human hearts in need of consolation.

“We are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the suffering and afflicted. We are to minister to the despairing, and to inspire hope in the hopeless.

“The love of Christ, manifested in unselfish ministry, will be more effective in reforming the evildoer than will the sword or the court of justice. These are necessary to strike terror to the lawbreaker, but the loving missionary can do more than this. Often the heart that hardens under reproof will melt under the love of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 105, 106.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on the idea that, as beings made in the image of God, our first parents were somewhat like Christ, even though they still had a lot to learn. How does this help us understand our need for a Savior? (After all, we can compare ourselves to Jesus and see just how far we have fallen.)
- 2 Consider your church situation and discuss with your Sabbath School class whether the quality of fellowship could be improved. What can you do to improve the level of fellowship within your church? What could your class do to strengthen relationships within your church body? How well does your church deal with those who have special needs, such as shut-ins?
- 3 In class talk about the benefits and happiness that come from serving others. Why do we get so much satisfaction from serving others? What things hold us back from doing this more often? How can we, through the power of Christ, fight against the inherent selfishness in us that keeps us focused on ourselves and our own needs rather than on the needs of others? What is your own experience with selfishness? That is, how have you seen in your own life just how ultimately unsatisfactory and empty existence can be when lived selfishly?

Planting Seeds

by HUBERT XAVIER

My friends and I were relaxing after lunch one day in Grenada, an island in the Caribbean, when a man walked up to us. He pointed his finger at me and said, “The Lord has something for you to do.” Then he turned and walked into the busy marketplace.

We stood there trying to figure out what had just happened. We searched for the man, but he had disappeared. My friends laughed the incident off, but I thought about it a lot. I went to church, but I wasn’t close to God.

Then one day a woman came into the store where I worked and asked me, “Son, have you given your life to Christ yet?” I had never seen her before, and her comment surprised me. “Lady, I’m preparing to do so,” I told her, surprised. She walked away, and when I searched for her a moment later, she had gone. No one else had seen her. *Could God be trying to tell me something?* I wondered.

I told a friend about these incidents, and he invited me to the Seventh-day Adventist church’s Sunday evening Bible study service with him. I went and enjoyed it, so I continued attending. He invited me to attend worship on Sabbath morning, but I had to work. Finally I got up the courage to ask my boss for Saturday morning off so I could go to church.

My friend and I studied the Bible together; and after attending evangelistic meetings, I became convinced that I had found God’s true church. I decided to become an Adventist. But my boss refused to give me Sabbaths off. My relatives urged me to just go to church on Sunday, but I knew what I had to do. I quit.

I found temporary work and threw my energies into working for God, but that didn’t feed me. One day there was no food in my house. I knelt and told God that I was hungry and begged for some food. A knock at the door interrupted my prayer. It was a church elder. “I was passing by and felt impressed to stop and see how you are doing,” he said. He gave me ten dollars and smiled. And so God provided.

Eventually I found work with a company where I don’t have Sabbath problems. As I wait on customers, I tell them what God is doing in my life and invite them to try Jesus too. I’m planting seeds in their hearts and pray that God will make those seeds grow, just as He did in my life.

HUBERT XAVIER lives in Grenada, an island in the Caribbean.

Next quarter's Bible study guide will seek to uncover the great truth of salvation by faith alone as revealed in the book of Romans. The great truths that Paul sought to clarify to readers in his day are not restricted to his first intended audience. His words have reverberated across the centuries, teaching millions the wonderful news of the gospel and its foundational doctrine of justification by faith. This will be the focus of study for this quarter in our guide titled *Redemption in Romans*, written by the late Don Neufeld.

Lesson 1—Paul and Rome

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Date and Place (*Rom. 16:1, 2*)

MONDAY: Personal Touch (*Rom. 15:20–27*)

TUESDAY: Paul Reaches Rome (*Acts 28:16*)

WEDNESDAY: Called to Be Saints (*Rom. 1:7*)

THURSDAY: World Reputation (*Rom. 1:8*)

Memory Text—*Romans 1:8*

Sabbath Gem: While it is important to understand the context in which Paul wrote the book of Romans, it still contains a powerful message for God's church today.

Lesson 2—Jew and Gentile

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Better Promises (*Heb. 8:6*)

MONDAY: Jewish Laws and Regulations (*Leviticus 12, 16, 23*)

TUESDAY: "What Must I Do to be Saved?" (*Acts 15:1–12*)

WEDNESDAY: "No Greater Burden" (*Acts 15:5–29*)

THURSDAY: The Galatian Heresy (*Gal. 1:1–12*)

Memory Text—*John 1:17*

Sabbath Gem: Obedience to God's moral law is as much a part of the New Covenant as it is of the Old Covenant.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.