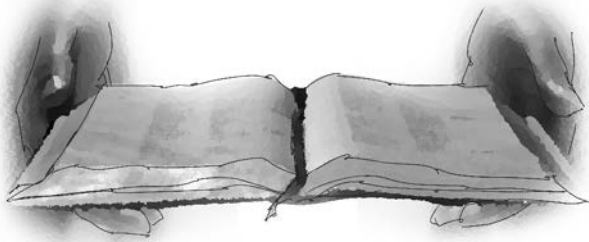


Disciples *and* Scripture



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Luke 4:1–12, Matt. 12:3–8, Matt. 5:17–39, Luke 24:13–32, Acts 1:16–20.*

Memory Text: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (*John 5:39*).

Using a metal detector purchased from a rummage sale, Englishman Terry Herbert discovered gold-plated Anglo-Saxon weaponry and silver artifacts buried beneath a farmer’s field. The estimated monetary value of the find exceeded \$5 million in U.S. dollars.

Like someone seeking treasure in a field of dirt, rocks, and rubbish, we must be careful not to let things get in our way and make us miss the real treasure above: Jesus Christ. Searching for eternal riches, Pharisees and Sadducees alike “excavated” the ancient sacred writings. Ironically, their treasure map, Scripture, had been so radically misread that they missed the point—Jesus—completely.

Explicitly and implicitly Jesus incorporated Scripture into His disciple-making methodology. The ultimate “treasure quest” was rooted in the prophetic writings, which pointed to Him. Thus, to miss Jesus is to miss the mark. All this means, then, is that all our disciple-making endeavors must, ultimately, be about Jesus and that which He has done for us.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 4.

Jesus and the Bible

Because Jesus is the example for all believers, His level of commitment to Scripture becomes more than a matter of passing interest.

Read Luke 4:1–12 and 16–21. What do these passages suggest about Christ’s attitude toward the Bible?

The narrative of Christ’s wilderness temptations shows that, by quoting Scripture, Jesus rebuffed every satanic challenge and invitation. The Scripture scrolls were not likely available to Christ during this 40-day desert sojourn. This clearly indicates that Christ had committed substantial portions of Scripture to memory. While the Scriptures quoted in the wilderness were taken from the writings of Moses, Jesus quotes elsewhere from the other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures (*Matt. 21:42, 22:44*). Clearly, Christ had a widespread knowledge of Scripture.

Notice, however, that Christ understands that the Scriptures are more than just a tool for overcoming temptation and achieving personal holiness. Jesus recognizes that Scripture points to Him. During the synagogue visit recorded in Luke 4:16–30, Jesus quotes Isaiah and then declares that this text points to Himself as the One anointed to release the oppressed and proclaim freedom. Jesus understood that He fulfilled Messianic prophecy. Thus, Jesus not only understood that the Bible pointed to Him, but early on in His ministry He used the Bible to point others to Him, as well.

Though it’s important to know the Bible, that alone isn’t enough. Some of the biggest-name Bible scholars have not even been believing Christians. Thus, we need to ask ourselves, How can we make sure that our study and reading of the Bible help us to come to a better knowledge of Jesus and what He has done for us? That is, how can we make Bible study something that transforms our lives?

The Authority of Scripture

Read the following texts. What do they tell us about the way in which Jesus viewed the Bible? *Matt. 5:17–20, 12:3–8, 15:3–11, John 10:34–37, 17:14–19, Luke 24:44.*

Whenever Christ debated with the religious authorities, He relied not on abstract philosophy, not even on personal authority, but on the teachings of Scripture. When determining right from wrong, Jesus based His argument on a scriptural bedrock. When opponents challenged Christ's doctrinal purity, He directed them to specific passages within Scripture. When considering practical matters, Jesus referred listeners to divine revelation. Christ understood that His divinely ordained mission was to accomplish that which the ancient prophets had predicted.

Contrast Christ's exalted understanding of Scripture with the prevailing attitude often exhibited among even professed Christians today. Entire denominations have come to deem the Bible as interesting but, basically, unreliable historical manuscripts. Everything—the six-day Creation, the Exodus, even the bodily resurrection of Jesus (much less a literal Second Coming)—has been called into question, or even relegated to the status of myth.

The implications for discipleship are clear. Why would anyone want to give his or her life to a cause based on nothing but myths? Instead, people burdened with real problems need a real Savior. Otherwise, the gospel becomes a tarnished treasure or, metaphorically, plastic coinage covered with simulated gold. From a distance, some might be fooled, but, upon closer examination, the plastic will suffer rejection. The only safe course is to follow Christ's example of exalting, honoring, and obeying the Bible.

Death is no myth, is it? Nor is it just a symbol. It is one of the harshest realities that we all face. Think through the implications, then, of any view of the Bible that treats biblical teachings, such as the resurrection of Jesus or His second coming, as mere symbols or myths. Why must we, individually and as a church, never allow ourselves to get caught up in this satanic trap?

Public Proclamation

Jesus attracted people to Himself in various settings, including public ones. Scripture assumed a prominent role in Christ’s public proclamations. Direct quotations and scriptural allusions filled His sermons and public discourse.

Read Matthew 5:17–39. In what ways do these verses show how Christ utilized Scripture for public ministry?

During Christ’s earthly sojourn, the ordinary Israelites’ relationship with Scripture was apparently highly legalistic. They looked to Scripture for regulations and ethical guidance. Upright behavior was considered the payment for eternal bliss. Jesus, however, overturned their legalistic notions and substituted a heart-based religion for a system of external controls.

Christ-centered religion is rooted in a heart transformation that leads to ethical behavior. Ironically, some of the Pharisees had bypassed having a living relationship with God in their haste to achieve moral perfection. Jesus identified these shortcomings, and as a cure He beckoned listeners to accept Him as Savior and Master. With Jesus as the internally controlling force, behavioral standards were not lowered but elevated. All one has to do is read the Sermon on the Mount to see just how elevated His moral standards were.

“As something strange and new, these words fall upon the ears of the wondering multitude. Such teaching is contrary to all they have ever heard from priest or rabbi. They see in it nothing to flatter their pride or to feed their ambitious hopes. But there is about this new Teacher a power that holds them spellbound. The sweetness of divine love flows from His very presence as the fragrance from a flower. . . . All feel instinctively that here is One who reads the secrets of the soul, yet who comes near to them with tender compassion.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 6.

It’s easier than we think to be legalistic, judgmental, and condemnatory, isn’t it? How can we protect ourselves from falling into these common practices?

Personal Ministry

Examples of Christ’s public ministry abound. Equally fascinating are Christ’s personal encounters, both with ordinary and elite members of society. These stories offer unique insights into the centrality of Scripture in Christ’s ministry.

Read John 13:18–20 and Luke 10:25–28, 24:13–32. What role did Scripture play in these passages? What purpose did Jesus have for quoting these particular verses? What resulted from these small group encounters with Scripture?

Repeatedly, Christ quotes Scripture in conjunction with His calls to discipleship. This clearly implies that Jesus’ authority and credibility rested on Scripture, not merely on personal charisma. This is seen especially in the ways in which Jesus used the Scriptures as He worked with the two disciples who were on the road to Emmaus.

“Beginning at Moses, the very Alpha of Bible history, Christ expounded in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Had He first made Himself known to them, their hearts would have been satisfied. In the fullness of their joy they would have hungered for nothing more. But it was necessary for them to understand the witness borne to Him by the types and prophecies of the Old Testament. Upon these their faith must be established. Christ performed no miracle to convince them, but it was His first work to explain the Scriptures. They had looked upon His death as the destruction of all their hopes. Now He showed from the prophets that this was the very strongest evidence for their faith.

“In teaching these disciples, Jesus showed the importance of the Old Testament as a witness to His mission.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 796–799.

Dwell on Luke 24:32, especially the phrase that their “heart[s] burn[ed] within.” What does that mean? When was the last time your heart burned within you over the truths that we have been given? If it hasn’t in a long time, might it be because your heart has grown cold? If so, how can you change?

The Next Generation

Without a doubt, as we have seen, Jesus places a heavy emphasis on the Bible. Never did He question the authority, veracity, or authenticity of a single Bible text. And yet, through the centuries and even today, many people do just that.

Read Matthew 12:15–21, Mark 1:1–3, Acts 1:16–20, 3:22–24, and Romans 10:10, 11. What do these texts tell us about the ways in which the earliest Christians viewed Scripture? What lessons can we take from them for ourselves and how we relate to the Bible?

The earliest Christian writers continued the practice of using Scripture to authenticate the messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth. In effect, they were saying that Christianity was inextricably connected to God's self-revelation through the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jesus Himself had appealed to these sacred writings. Now Christ's disciples were doing the same. Appeals to personal experience, miracles, and other witnesses for Christ were important and had their place; obviously, however, nothing supplanted Scripture as the primary witness for Jesus.

Christ's earliest followers sought guidance from Scripture concerning the church's mission, its everyday practices, and its spiritual discipline. Human speculation and guesswork were minimized; Scripture became preeminent. Prayerful consideration of God's revelation was evident in church councils (*see Acts 15*). Scripture touched every facet of the life of the early church.

How foolish would it be, then, for us, especially at the end of time, to have any other attitude toward the Bible?

How can we all learn to make the Bible central to our faith and use it to point us to Jesus? What are practical ways in which we can allow the teaching of the Bible to truly impact how we live and how we relate to others?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Bible Teaching and Study,” pp. 190–192, in *Education*; “The Walk to Emmaus,” pp. 795–801, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Thessalonica,” pp. 221–230, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Christ in His ministry had opened the minds of His disciples to these prophecies. . . . Peter in preaching Christ had produced his evidence from the Old Testament. Stephen had pursued the same course. And Paul also in his ministry appealed to the scriptures foretelling the birth, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. By the inspired testimony of Moses and the prophets he clearly proved the identity of Jesus of Nazareth with the Messiah and showed that from the days of Adam it was the voice of Christ which had been speaking through patriarchs and prophets.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 221, 222.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are some practical ways in which you can incorporate Scripture into your daily routine? How can you use the Bible in your personal witnessing?
- 2 Why did Jesus emphasize scriptural interpretation rather than miracles and personal charisma? What happens if music, the health message, social functions, or anything else replaces the Bible as being central to our faith?
- 3 How dependent on Scripture must today’s Christians become? Evaluate the importance of Scripture in your church’s life regarding the establishment of priorities, the channeling of resources, and faithfulness to mission.
- 4 Dwell on the fact that we have no indication in the Bible of any Bible writers ever calling into question the veracity or authenticity of any other texts. Why should that be so important to us, today, at a time when so many people, including many Bible scholars, seem to have made it their first priority to challenge the truth of the Bible at every level?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *John 5:39*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that his or her primary source for knowing Jesus comes from reading His story in the Gospels.

Feel: Identify with the values Christ lived and taught in His daily interaction with others.

Do: Look for opportunities to reflect Christ's character of love, mercy, justice, and compassion in his or her daily life.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Bible Is More Than a Book of Facts About Ancient Life.

A What are some well-known facts about Jesus that are almost universally accepted by Christians?

B How do these facts affect your life any more than the fact that there was a man named Abraham Lincoln or Winston Churchill?

C In what way is the Bible more than simply a book?

II. Feel: The Power of Jesus' Life Changes Our Lives.

A As you read the Bible, how are your five senses (touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing) engaged in the story?

B What emotions can you identify within each story? Consider, for example, Luke 8:41–56. List one emotion for each person: Jairus, the sick woman, the disciples, and so on.

III. Do: Can You See the World Through Jesus' Eyes?

A How will Jesus' life and ministry be reflected in your life this week?

B What will it take for you to see the people in your life as Jesus sees them?

► **Summary:** The lasting power of Jesus' ministry isn't just reflected in what He said or in the number of miracles He performed. His lasting influence also is seen in the lives of His followers today.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *John 5:39*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: To be like Christ, we have to understand His character and mission as described in the Bible.

Just for Teachers: Jesus, as a historical figure, was incredibly complex. He defied stereotypes when He lived on earth, and He defies stereotypes now. Those who want to live in harmony with His life and teachings must be guided by the Holy Spirit to develop as balanced a view of His ministry as possible. Only then are we equipped to become His disciples.

Opening Activity/Discussion: Ask volunteers in your class (the entire class, if possible) to share their favorite story about Jesus. (Write a two- or three-word description of each story on a flip chart, white board, or paper, if such supplies are available. Record the answers to the following two questions below, as well. In the event that supplies are not available, proceed with the discussion as follows.)

Go around again and ask class members to share their favorite parable told by Jesus.

Go around one more time and ask them to share their favorite saying or teaching by Christ.

Now, as a class, review the stories, parables, and sayings. What aspect of Jesus' character is highlighted by each story, parable, or saying?

We tend to be drawn to those aspects of Christ's character with which we most closely identify, whether it's His love, His power, His justice, His mercy, et cetera. And truly, Jesus' character is reflected in all these things. But to highlight one or two aspects of Christ's character to the exclusion of others poses a twofold danger. Not only does it make Him less than multidimensional, it makes our lives as disciples unbalanced, as well.

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Jesus was on earth for just a short time. He knew that, in addition to helping His disciples learn about God, He also had to help them “unlearn” some things.

Bible Commentary

Let's look at three passages of Scripture to discern what they say about the

Messiah, taking note of how these teachings are interpreted (or misinterpreted) by Jesus' disciples and the rest of the Jews.

I. The Sermon on the Mount (*Review Matthew 5 with your class.*)

One of Jesus' first public presentations is about the values of God's kingdom. He begins by highlighting things that most people would avoid: poverty of spirit (*Matt. 5:3*), mourning (*vs. 4*), meekness (*vs. 5*), spiritual hunger and thirst (*vs. 6*), and so on.

In verse 17, He announces, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets [the Old Testament]; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (*NIV*).

Then He highlights some well-known and significant Old Testament laws, and His speech assumes this pattern: "You have heard . . . but I say . . ." such as when He states, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder. . . .' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (*vss. 21, 22, NIV*).

In the same way, Jesus addresses adultery (*vss. 27, 28*), divorce (*vss. 31, 32*), the making of oaths (*vss. 33–37*), retribution (*vss. 38–42*), and loving one's enemies (*vss. 43–48*).

We can imagine the shock the disciples felt. They may have thought, *What? Thinking about doing something wrong is the same as really doing it?*

Everyone listening to Jesus knew it was wrong to murder, commit adultery, swear, et cetera. But they weren't prepared to understand that just even thinking about those things was wrong, as well.

Consider This: Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he" (*NKJV*), meaning that thought shapes action. Similarly, in His sermon on the mount, Jesus sought to make this distinction in His disciples' minds. How did this principle undercut the popular notion that an appearance of sanctity and righteousness was not a reliable indication of one's rightness with God? What does it imply today about the influence of our thoughts and feelings on our actions?

II. The Faith of the Canaanite Woman (*Review Matthew 15:21–28 with your class.*)

When a Canaanite woman approached Jesus about healing her daughter, "Jesus did not answer a word" (*Matt. 15:23, NIV*). After all, with few exceptions, Jews weren't encouraged to have any contact with anyone who wasn't a Jew. So, the disciples felt justified in exhorting Jesus, "'Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us'" (*vs. 23, NIV*).

Jesus then responded to the woman in the way that was culturally

acceptable among the Jews, and which no doubt resonated with His disciples: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” (vs. 24, *NIV*). After her continued entreaties, Jesus merely said, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs” (vs. 26, *NIV*).

Even though on some level the woman probably expected to hear this response, she replied in a way that demonstrated her hope that Jesus wasn’t typical. She said, “‘Yes, Lord . . . but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table’” (vs. 27, *NIV*).

Jesus rewarded the woman’s faith and reminded His disciples (and us) that healing and salvation aren’t the sole possessions of those who call themselves “God’s people.”

Consider This: Jesus could have sternly rebuked His disciples’ bigotry and hard-heartedness in front of the Syrophoenician woman. Instead, Jesus used His encounter with the woman to mirror the narrow attitude of His disciples back to them. At first, they apparently saw nothing unusual in the way Jesus initially treated this woman. But what made Jesus’ subtle method of instruction so much more effective than humiliating them in front of one whom they despised?

III. Jesus Encourages His Disappointed Disciples (Review Luke 24:13–35 with your class.)

Late on the day of Christ’s resurrection, two disciples walk toward the village of Emmaus. As they walk, a stranger, whom they do not recognize as Jesus, joins them and asks, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” (Luke 24:17, *NIV*).

They confess their confusion and disappointment as they reveal their hopes and dreams about the Messiah and how their hopes were dashed by Jesus’ crucifixion.

After chiding the two disciples about their misunderstanding of Scripture, Jesus sets them straight: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (vs. 27, *NIV*).

They apparently knew enough of the Scriptures to know something about the Messiah but not as much as they needed to know. Like many of us, they had to “unlearn” some things so that they could know and appreciate Christ more completely.

Consider This: Sure, we know the Bible has the answers to life’s important questions; it is not silent in response to the soul’s longing for truth about salvation, morality, and hope in the life to come. But as long as we live (and even into eternity), we will continue to be learners (disciples, if you will) of God’s ways. What evidence do we see in our lives to demonstrate that we are learning more about Christ—His character and His ministry?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Contrary to what some think, the Bible is far more than a textbook with answers to questions we might find on a quiz or test. The Bible also contains spiritual principles that are applied to different situations and settings. True, it gives us guidance in answer to the dilemmas of life, from the simple to the complex. But most of all, the Bible teaches us how to be like Jesus.

Life Application: Ask each person to share how many years he or she has been a Christian or Seventh-day Adventist. Now ask the following two questions:

- ① When was the last time you learned something about following Christ? If you had to unlearn something, what was it?
- ② How would you characterize the spiritual experience you are now living with the one you experienced when you first became a disciple?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The life of discipleship is similar to life in general in that we go through stages: childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, old age, et cetera. The stages aren't good or bad, per se; growing is just part of life. Not growing is a sign that something's wrong. For example, adults aren't usually commended for being "childish," and youth are often encouraged to "grow up."

Activity: On a white board or flip chart, if such supplies are available, put these categories at the top of five columns: childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, and old age. For each column, ask class members to write a characteristic in one or two words that correlates to their experience as disciples. Alternately, to do the exercise without supplies, simply go through each category, one at a time, and ask your class members to list characteristics for each category.

We sometimes chide ourselves for not being as "on fire" as we were when we first accepted Christ. That's like saying that married couples aren't truly in love if they're not as passionate as they were as newlyweds.

Discuss: How do Christians maintain their passion for Christ and His kingdom as they move through different stages in their development as Christians? Is this passion manifested differently in the different stages?