

# Escape From *the* World's Ways



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Ps. 119:11; Eph. 6:18; Rom. 8:5, 6; Heb. 11:1–6; 1 Kings 3:14; Ezek. 36:26, 27.*

**Memory Text:** “Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. . . . He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage” (*Proverbs 11:4, 28, NKJV*).

**A**lthough Satan failed with Jesus, he has succeeded with everyone else. He will continue to do so unless we fight in the armor and power of God, who alone offers us the freedom from the lure of the world.

Thus, we must focus our attention on our heavenly Provider. David realized true value in this life when he wrote, “The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing” (*Ps. 34:10, NIV*). Solomon recognized that wisdom and understanding were more valuable than silver and gold (*Prov. 3:13, 14*). True happiness and right living come from turning our eyes from the possessions we own and looking to the living Christ, who owns us.

Our only hope to escape the allure of the world is a vital and successful relationship with Jesus. This week, we will study the elements of that relationship and how crucial it is for our own spiritual success to recognize the power behind the mask of the world and see the importance of Christ as the real reason for living.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 27.

## A Relationship With Christ

Love of worldly possessions, even by those who don't have much, can be a powerful chain that binds the soul to the world instead of to Christ. Even if we don't have much in terms of earthly possessions, the passionate desire to attain material goods can become a terrible curse that will, if not brought under the control of the Lord, lead a soul away from salvation. Satan knows this, which is why he uses the love of material possessions to ensnare as many as he possibly can.

What is our only protection?

**“Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth”** (*Col. 3:2, NKJV*). **How do we do what Paul tells us to do?** See also *Ps. 119:11, Eph. 6:18*.

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**What other texts can you find that talk about what we should be keeping our mind focused on?** See, for example, *Phil. 4:8*.

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The only cure for worldliness, in whatever form it comes, is a continual devotion to Christ (*Ps. 34:1*) through the ups and downs of life. Moses “regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt” (*Heb. 11:26, NIV*). Before any other relationship, Christ must be our first priority. Christ is looking for a commitment based on conviction, not on preference; that is, we must be devoted to Christ because of who He is and what He has done for us, not because of any immediate advantages our faith and commitment to Him might bring.

Our lives are to be hidden in Jesus, and His plans are to be our plans. True commitment is putting our hand to the plow without “‘looking back’ ” (*Luke 9:62, NKJV*). When we make that kind of commitment, Jesus elevates us to our full potential. When we surrender to Him, He will break the world's hold upon our souls. We must become Christ-centered instead of stuff-centered; that alone will fill the void in our lives.

**Think about a time you acquired a material possession, something that you really wanted badly. How long did the joy and fulfillment last before it faded away and you were right back where you started?**

## In the Word

More than six billion Bibles have been distributed worldwide, but how many are viewed as the Word of the living God? How many are read with a sincere heart open to know truth?

Proper Bible study directs our spiritual compass and enables us to navigate a world of falsehood and confusion. The Bible is a living document of divine origin (*Heb. 4:12*), and as such it points us to truths that we cannot get anywhere else. The Bible is Christ's road map for daily living, and it educates us by expanding our intellect and refining our characters.

**Read John 5:39, 14:6, and 20:31. The Bible, specifically the Gospels, gives us our most authoritative information about Jesus. What do these specific texts in John say about Him and why He is so important to us and to all that we believe?**

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We study the Bible because it's the ultimate source of the Truth. Jesus is the Truth, and in the Bible we find Jesus as we can know Him because of how He has been revealed to us there. Here, in God's Word, the Old and New Testaments, we learn about who Jesus is and what He has accomplished for us. We then fall in love with Him and commit our lives and souls to His eternal safekeeping. By following Jesus and obeying His words, as revealed in His Word, we can become free from the bonds of sin and of the world. " 'Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed' " (*John 8:36, NKJV*).

**Read Romans 8:5, 6. What are we being warned against here, and how can the study of the Word of God help us in this struggle over our minds?**

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The love of the world, especially the love of worldly possessions, can easily draw us away from God if we are not careful. That's why we must keep ourselves in the Word, which points us to the eternal and spiritual realities that are so crucial for the Christian life.

Love of worldly things never elevates the mind to spiritual morality; instead, it replaces biblical principles with greed, selfishness, and lust. Love, as revealed in the Bible, builds relationships by teaching us the importance of the giving of ourselves to others. In contrast, worldliness is all about getting things for ourselves, which is the opposite of everything Jesus represents.

## The Life of Prayer

“ ‘And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent’ ” (*John 17:3, NKJV*). It is no wonder that Christians often say that their faith is about a relationship with God. If knowing God is “ ‘eternal life,’ ” then we can find that life through a relationship with Him. And, of course, central to that relationship is communication. We saw yesterday that God communicates to us through His divine Word. We, in turn, commune with Him through prayer.

If, as we have seen, we are to set our minds and hearts upon heavenly things as opposed to things of this world, then prayer is essential. This is because, by its very nature, prayer points us to a higher realm than that of the world itself.

Yet even here, we must be careful, because sometimes our prayers can be merely an expression of our own selfish nature. That’s why we need to pray in submission to the will of God.

Years ago, a woman sang these words, “Oh, Lord, won’t you buy me a Mercedes-Benz?” It was, in her own way, an attack on the materialism of those who profess faith in God. We, too, must be sure that when we pray—which is in itself an act of submission to God and death to the world—we are seeking God’s will, not just our own.

**Read** Hebrews 11:1–6. What is the crucial component that must be mingled with all our prayers? Also, what does it mean to come to God in faith and to pray in faith?

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If there is no faith attached to our prayers, there will be presumption, Satan’s counterfeit faith. “Prayer and faith are closely allied, and they need to be studied together. In the prayer of faith there is a divine science; it is a science that everyone who would make his lifework a success must understand. Christ says, ‘What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.’ Mark 11:24. He makes it plain that our asking must be according to God’s will; we must ask for the things that He has promised, and whatever we receive must be used in doing His will. The conditions met, the promise is unequivocal.”—Ellen G. White, *Prayer*; p. 57.

**Look at your own prayer life. What do you pray for? What do your prayers tell about your priorities? What other things might you need to be praying for?**

## The Life of Wisdom

One of the most beautiful stories in the Bible is found in the story of Solomon's request to God to give him above all things "an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" (*1 Kings 3:9, NKJV*).

**What important words did God say to Solomon that, had he heeded, would have spared the king the ruin that his possessions brought upon him? Why was what God said to him here so important for all of us? *1 Kings 3:14; see also 1 John 5:3, 1 Pet. 4:17.***

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Solomon had great wisdom, but wisdom in and of itself, if not acted upon and lived out, becomes nothing more than good information. In the biblical sense of the word, wisdom not acted upon is not truly wisdom. Many will be lost who will have had plenty of correct information about God and His requirements. But Solomon's lack of obedience caused him to stray from the paths to which the Lord had called him. Only later in life did he truly come to his senses, writing in humility: "For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her" (*Prov. 8:11, NKJV*).

Wisdom is the application of knowledge and understanding. Knowledge represents the facts; understanding represents discernment; and wisdom comes in the process of applying our understanding and knowledge to our lives. A wise steward needs not only knowledge and understanding, but also the experience that comes from living out that knowledge and understanding.

Solomon's example shows us how easily even the wisest and most understanding of people can get swept up in the emptiness of a materialistic lifestyle if that person doesn't live out the knowledge that he or she has been given.

**Compare 1 Corinthians 3:19 and Proverbs 24:13, 14. What is the difference between the two kinds of wisdom talked about in these texts? Share your answers with the class on Sabbath.**

## The Holy Spirit

The great controversy is real; two sides are battling for our souls. One is drawing us to Christ (*John 6:44*) and one to the world (*1 John 2:16*). The power of the Holy Spirit in our lives can and will draw us in the right direction if we only will submit to Him.

“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (*John 16:13, NKJV; see also John 14:16*). The Holy Spirit empowers us to live by principle and by faith, not by whims or emotions that so dominate the world. Successful preparation for living in heaven comes by living faithfully in this world under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Paul counsels: “Your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (*1 Cor. 2:5, NKJV*). The lure of the world, often through material possessions, draws us away from the Lord. In contrast, if we do not resist, the power of the Holy Spirit will pull us toward Jesus.

**Success** in the battle with the world and its lures will be accomplished only from outside of ourselves. Read *Ezek. 36:26, 27; John 14:26; and Eph. 3:16, 17*. When we let the Holy Spirit take possession of us, what things will God do to ensure that we have spiritual victory?

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“It is through false theories and traditions that Satan gains his power over the mind. By directing men to false standards, he misshapes the character. Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit speaks to the mind, and impresses truth upon the heart. Thus He exposes error, and expels it from the soul. It is by the Spirit of truth, working through the word of God, that Christ subdues His chosen people to Himself.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

The Holy Spirit is the reporter of truth and is the ultimate gift that Jesus could give to represent the deity on earth after His ascension. The Holy Spirit strives to give us power to overcome the powerful lure of the world and its “charms.”

**The world does pull at us all, doesn't it? What choices can you make, right now, that can help you surrender to the Holy Spirit, who alone can give you power to resist the world's temptations?**

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**Further Thought:** A steward operates from the twin principles of duty and love. “Remember that duty has a twin sister, Love; these united can accomplish almost everything, but separated, neither is capable of good.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 62. Duty is love in action. We need only to dwell on Christ’s sacrifice in order for love to awaken our duty.

In contrast are the principles of the world: hate and its twin, rebellion. Rebellion can be hate in action. Lucifer rebelled against God (*Ezek. 28:16, 17*) and will never stop doing so until he is destroyed. He turned the authority of love into the love of authority. The religious leaders of Israel hated the authority and power Jesus possessed (*Matt. 22:29*). Even when they fled the temple or withdrew from His piercing gaze, they did not change their ways.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** Dwell more on this idea of love and duty. What does Ellen G. White mean when, after calling them twins, she says that one without the other is not “capable of good”? What does love look like without duty, and what does duty look like without love? Why must they both be together?
- 2** The memory verse for this week reads: “Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. . . . He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage” (*Prov. 11:4, 28, NKJV*). What is the meaning of this text? What is it saying about riches, and what is it *not* saying?
- 3** In class, discuss the life of Solomon. Ask how he could have gone so far off track. Look through the book of Ecclesiastes for texts that help reveal the futility and emptiness of worldly possessions, even when we have, like Solomon, so many of them. What have we learned this week about prayer, about Bible study, and about a relationship with Christ that can keep us on the right track spiritually?
- 4** How can people who do not have a lot of worldly possessions nevertheless still be caught in the trap that Satan sets for them?
- 5** What answer did you come up with in response to Wednesday’s final question about the different kinds of wisdom?

## Angel Carries Concrete Blocks

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Vladimir Moskolenko nudged his wife, Galina, awake in the sleepy Ukrainian town of Buzke. He had an unusual dream to share.

“I was standing with concrete blocks in my hands,” he said. “They were so heavy. Then suddenly an enormous, beautiful, shining angel stood before me. He smiled at me. And he put his hands on mine, carrying the concrete, and raised them up.”

Galina Moskolenko sat up. She had been praying for U.S.\$5,000 to pay for concrete blocks to be used to transform an abandoned building into a Seventh-day Adventist church in their town of 1,400 people.

“Listen, some kind of financial help is on its way,” Moskolenko said. “I don’t know where it will come from, but it will come.”

Two days later, a church member called and said, “Three friends are visiting me from Poland.”

“Here comes our money,” Moskolenko told her husband.

On Sabbath, the Polish visitors listened to Moskolenko’s sermon. After sundown, she told them about the debt.

A bank transfer of \$5,000 arrived several days later.

The gleaming Buzke church, which opened in 2016 after 11 years of construction, was built on prayer and miracles, Moskolenko said. An Adventist couple from Australia provided \$2,000 for a new roof. The Euro-Asia Division and the local conference provided mission funds. U.S. and Czech church members also contributed.

God and His angels intervened repeatedly, said Moskolenko, 54. She told of a bureaucratic showdown after local authorities rejected a request to knock a hole in a wall to create a second window. “I prayed about it and thought: *God, please help us knock a hole in the wall,*” she said.

Then something interesting happened.

“We started to repair the one existing window, and a crack formed in the wall,” she said. “The whole wall was going to collapse.

“Our construction workers quickly brought in a tractor with something to support the wall. But as they worked to prop up the wall, it collapsed as if an angel had said, ‘There you go!’ ” Moskolenko said, flicking a finger in the air.

That, she said, is what happens when you do your best and trust in God: He accomplishes the impossible.



*Galina Moskolenko (at left) is a church leader in Buzke, Ukraine.*



## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *Proverbs 11:4, 28*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Discover God's method for escaping worldliness.

**Feel:** Experience release from worldliness through spiritual renewal.

**Do:** Cultivate a new personal focus to discourage a return to worldliness.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Knowing Jesus**

**A** How does Scripture study reorganize our priorities and inspire spiritual renewal?

**B** How can prayer be focused so that it goes beyond a mere human wish list to become an instrument of spiritual transformation?

**C** What is the role of wisdom in overcoming worldliness?

**D** How does the Holy Spirit work with the Father and the Son to reorient and redirect our lives?

**II. Feel: Sensing Jesus' Presence**

**A** How can we cultivate a deeper sense of God's presence in our lives?

**B** How can we develop a more intense appreciation of the Holy Spirit's role in spiritual renewal?

**III. Do: Demonstrating Our Devotion**

**A** How do we respond to the invitation to experience spiritual renewal?

**B** How do Christians avoid emotional peaks and valleys in order to maintain a steadily growing experience?

**C** What steps can we take in order to have flourishing spiritual lives?

► **Summary:** Cultivating the spiritual life is the only sure way to escape worldliness. Bible study, prayer, Christian service, Christian fellowship, and the act of considering the wonders of nature may all contribute to reshaping our worldview and call us to spiritual wholeness.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Proverbs 11:4, 28*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Spiritual life flourishes only as believers intentionally cultivate those practices that create spiritual intimacy with their Creator-Redeemer.

**Just for Teachers:** Gardeners and farmers know the importance of maintaining constant contact with the soil. Pull a plant out of the ground, and it will die. The roots, the foundation of the plant, cannot sustain life or produce seed without the nutrients they receive by staying in contact with the ground. The physical closeness of the roots with the ground is crucial in order for the plant to live. Sunlight and moisture likewise have roles to play, but unless the roots are secured in their nutrient-rich soil, other positive factors are of little value.

This principle also applies to the spiritual life. Unless the Christian stays close to Jesus, the spiritual intimacy so vital to Christian growth cannot take root. Thus, scriptural study, prayer, Christian fellowship, and Christian service cannot be considered optional elements of the Christian experience. Rather, they must be considered essential components of a growing spiritual life.

**Opening Activity:** A week before this study, uproot a plant (a variety of weed is fine) and let it die and dry up in the sunshine. Bring the dead plant and a small potted plant to class. If your class meets outdoors around growing plants, you need not bring the living, potted plant, but may refer to the living plants around you for the purpose of the illustration. Ask the class what properties the dead plant shares with living plants. Answers might include the shape, the size, and possibly the color of the plant. Inquire of the class what the essential difference is between the two plants. Then ask the class why they think that the dead plant died. After telling them that uprooting the plant caused it to die, draw comparisons to our spiritual lives. If we are not constantly receiving God's grace through the means He has supplied, what will inevitably happen to our spiritual lives?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** One of the most remarkable assertions of Scripture is recorded in Romans 8:4-6: "So that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to

the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (*NRSV, emphasis supplied*). Paul—who, in the earlier chapters of Romans, built the case regarding the ways in which Jesus satisfies the just requirements of the law—now boldly asserts that these requirements may now be fulfilled in *us*. The difference between the pre-Christian life and the new life is the direction or focus of our thinking; and the outcomes are as different as life and death. What practices help us focus on things above?

## Bible Commentary

**I. Heavenly Vocabulary** (*Review Psalm 119:11, John 5:39, 20:31, Luke 24:27, and 1 Thessalonians 2:13 with the class.*)

“Sing them over again to me, / Wonderful words of life; / Let me more of their beauty see, / Wonderful words of life. / Words of life and beauty, / Teach me faith and duty; / Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.”—*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (1985), no. 286. So opens the classic hymn penned by P. P. Bliss in 1874, issuing an invitation to spiritual life built upon Scripture. Songwriters, theologians, tradespeople, and virtually anyone who reads champions the value of Scripture in transforming the life. How often have we heard of people “reading themselves into the truth”?

The value of Scripture in spiritual development is beyond calculation. Scripture creates a barrier against sin (*Ps. 119:11*). Although this protective barrier may be hidden to the casual viewer, it is real. It is not necessary to wear Scripture on our garments as did the Pharisees of old (a modern counterpart arguably might be Bible verse T-shirts), but hiding Scripture in our heart through daily study and prayer should be considered a top priority. Would that Paul’s commendation for the Thessalonian believers could be said of all Christians today: “In spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers” (*1 Thess. 1:6, 7, NRSV*).

**Consider This:** How does Scripture safeguard against sin?

**II. Celestial Communication** (*Review Ephesians 6:18, Mark 11:24, and Luke 11:1–13 with the class.*)

English cleric Samuel Chadwick is quoted as saying, “The one concern

of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.” Seldom has the importance of prayer been stated more eloquently. Jesus, history’s only perfect human being, went early into the Judean hills for solitude and prayer. If the perfect Son of God needed constant communion with God to make it through His day, how is it that we imperfect, sinful mortals find prayer so unimportant? If prayer is, indeed, the opening of our heart as to a Friend, why would we neglect so great a privilege—especially considering who this Friend is?

Jesus’ brother James declares, “The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective” (*James 5:15, 16, NRSV*). Oh, that we might crave prayer as earnestly as our lungs crave air!

**Consider This:** How would armies fare in battle without good communication? How well might we expect to do in our battle with Satan without good communication with our Commander?

### III. Wisdom From Above (*Review 1 Kings 3:9–14; Proverbs 8:11; 24:13, 14; and 1 Corinthians 3:19 in class.*)

Wisdom is more than information or mere knowledge. It incorporates the ability to make reasonable decisions and judgments based on knowledge and experience. It implies a wealth of knowledge gathered over time that has been applied and tested in different situations and in different time periods. It often suggests a social context, as when Solomon asked God for the wisdom to lead the nation of Israel effectively. Who could be in a better position to obtain wisdom than the Christian who has direct access to the Ancient of Days, who, from eternity, has infinite knowledge and experience?

**Consider This:** How may the Holy Spirit lead us in applying divine wisdom?

## ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s study is crucial to our development as believers, but if nothing more than an interesting discussion takes place, we will have failed miserably. If we are to be successful in our spiritual growth, class members must find practical ways to incorporate the practices of prayer and Bible study into their lives.

**Application Questions:**

- ① How can I become more consistent in Bible study?
- ② How can I spend more time praying without becoming bored or needlessly repetitive?
- ③ What are practical steps that I can take to help me cultivate wisdom?
- ④ How can interaction with like-minded believers improve my Bible study habits and prayer life?
- ⑤ How might studying church history help me develop greater wisdom?
- ⑥ What influence might an extended period of time with God have on my spiritual growth?
- ⑦ How might employing scriptural principles through service enhance my spiritual renewal?

**►STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Encourage actions that will embed in the daily lifestyles of class members the practices of prayer and Bible study.

**Activities:**

- ① Have friends take pictures of you praying, studying the Bible, or living your faith in Christian service. Take the best and post them on your refrigerator or your nightstand—any place you will see them often in order to encourage yourself to continue.
- ② Create a worship corner in your home, work, or other personal space for personal Bible study and prayer. Dedicate the corner only for that purpose.
- ③ During your Bible study time, begin creating a list of ideas for Christian service. Root this list in scriptural exploration rather than just “needs” that you see in your community.
- ④ Start a prayer journal that includes space for summaries of your conversations with God and the date on which each is entered. If you make requests, allow space for later notations in which you recognize that God has answered prayer.