

The Intensity of His Walk



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 4:4, Luke 2:40, 6:12, John 4:34, John 17, 1 John 2:6.*

Memory Text: “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” (*1 John 2:6, NIV*).

Adventists are a peace-loving people. We feel elated when the church or its members get positive press, when everybody thinks we are good. But how might we react if we woke up one day to find huge headlines in the media branding us as losers, disruptors, or insurrectionists? Would our sense of assurance and confidence in God be strong enough to sustain us? We admire Jesus after the fact; but do we have any idea what it meant for Him to be vilified and demonized by the highest civic and ecclesiastical powers of His day?

In the end we see Him manhandled by Roman soldiers: “They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. . . . Then they led him out to crucify him” (*Mark 15:17–20, NIV*).

What prepares a person to endure such physical and psychological abuse without cracking? How does a person remain steadfast and calm when the whole world turns against him or her—with not a shred of visible human support in sight? For Jesus, the answer lay in His communion with God, in the intensity of His walk with Him—which forms the subject of this week's lesson.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 24.*

The Early Years *(Luke 2:40)*

As we have stressed already, we know very little about Christ's early years. We hear about His birth and very early years, including the visit to the temple at age 12 (*see Luke 2*). But that is all, until His baptism by John at the start of His public ministry, when He was "about thirty" (*NIV; see Luke 3:21–23*).

Nevertheless, it is possible to look at His life, as we know it, and draw certain reasonable conclusions in respect to the spiritual foundation that gave it support. If we assume from our own experience that the stability and strength we see in Jesus during His public ministry did not materialize overnight nor arise from shallowness and superficiality, then we are bound to conclude, again from our own experience, that they sprang from an intense walk with God.

Read again the story of Jesus at the temple (*Luke 2:39–52*). **What things are found there that help us understand the spiritual foundation upon which the young Jesus grew? Also, what role did His parents play in His growth?**

Incredibly, these passages (apart from the birth narratives) are all we have on the first 30 years of Jesus' life. Furthermore, biblical scholars estimate that the vast majority of the Gospel materials center on the final week of Jesus' life, making them (as has often been said) "Passion narratives," not biographies, as such. They were produced, evidently, for the well-defined purpose of shining the spotlight on the two critical events of the Christian faith: the mystery of Jesus' birth (the Incarnation) and the significance of His death and resurrection. Between these two events we see His unselfish life of service and sacrifice. And we correctly may assume that the focus and dedication we see in His public ministry represent the flowering of a relationship with God that was consistent, deeply personal, and intense.

What principles can we take from this story that we, in our own context, can apply to ourselves and our own spiritual life?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *1 Thessalonians 5:17*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Identify that Jesus' power to overcome temptation came from His closeness with the Father.

Feel: Cultivate a desire to spend much time in prayer daily.

Do: Strive to develop a close connection with God.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. A Strong Foundation

A Jesus' upbringing gave Him a strong spiritual foundation.

B Very early in life Jesus developed and maintained a close relationship with His heavenly Father.

C Jesus' close connection to the Father gave Him strength and stability in His public ministry.

II. Tempted As We Are

A Every response to the tempter in the wilderness gave evidence of Jesus' unvarying communion with the heavenly Father.

B Jesus lived His life on earth in the flesh—experiencing what we experience (only worse)—but still did not succumb to sin.

III. A Purpose for Life

A Throughout His life on earth, Jesus often spent many hours alone in prayer.

B Jesus was ever cognizant of His mission to reach lost souls. This was His daily focus and purpose.

C As we follow Christ's example in His relationship to the Father, our service for the Lord and relationship with Him must be constant.

▶ **Summary:** We must be totally dependent on the Lord, just as Jesus was dependent on the Father in heaven. Like Jesus, we also can acquire a close connection with God through continual prayer and communion with Him.

At the Start of His Ministry *(Matt. 4:4)*

Following His baptism, Jesus goes out into the Judean desert for 40 days to pray, to reflect upon His mission. Perhaps none of us studying this lesson has had any personal knowledge of what that means. Here we come face-to-face with an intensity we can hardly grasp, a spiritual concentration much beyond our usual experience, a pursuit of intimate closeness with God that leaves our mouths wide open.

But the explicit reason for this wilderness foray was for testing (*Matt. 4:1; cf. Luke 4:2*), and the tempter was on hand to take advantage of the opportunity. Using the Savior's extreme hunger as his tool, he desperately tried to drive a wedge between Jesus and His Father, to wrench Jesus' firm grasp on God, to break the intensity of His walk with Him, to intrude upon the intimate closeness.

How does Jesus' response, as revealed in the following texts, show the intensity of His walk with God? What can we learn from this that we can apply to ourselves? *Matt. 4:3–10, Luke 4:3–12.*

To understand what is going on here, we need to keep in mind Jesus' unique status in the whole scheme of salvation. He was the spotless Son of God. Coming into the world in human nature, He had to live completely above the sinful sphere, not just for a day but for His entire time with us. He was to struggle as we do, to be tempted as we are, yet He had to remain immaculate. We might compare it to going through 33 years with your computer, writing articles, doing homework, answering letters, and never making a single mistake, never needing to use the delete key or the undo feature; or to going through a course in algebra or physics, and getting every problem right; or to playing the piano for 33 years without ever hitting a wrong note.

That was Jesus' lot. He came, not just to set an example in selfless living but to die as the sinless One and thereby bring salvation to the planet. Hence His total concentration, the utter intensity of His walk with God; nothing could be taken for granted, nothing left to chance. A single misstep and the game was over.

Imagine what it must have been to have never sinned, not even in thought, during His whole life. That is what righteousness is all about. Dwell on what you owe to Jesus, who offers you what you could never attain yourself.

Learning Cycle

► STEP 1—Motivate

When your spouse or someone you love and share life with is absent for an extended period of time, how do you stay in touch? You probably have considered telephone, mail, or e-mail. Discuss other creative options to continue your relationship over the long distance.

In class, invite members to share when they might have experienced an extended separation. What “secrets of survival” did they learn that would benefit someone who may be facing a similar situation?

► STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Walking as Jesus Walked

(Review 1 John 2:6 with your class.)

The four Gospels give us insight into what it means to “walk as Jesus did” (*1 John 2:6, NIV*). Luke tells us that “the grace of God was upon him” (*Luke 2:40*). Luke also tells us Jesus spent extended periods in intentional communication with God (*Luke 6:12*). John tells us that Jesus’ connection with God included action. He looked for opportunities to share the water of life with others in places some were afraid to go (*John 4:1–35*).

Consider This: From the Gospels, what can we learn from the pattern of Jesus’ life? What stories most clearly help you follow His example?

II. Discovery and Investigation

John 1:43–46 records the calling of Jesus’ first disciples. As a group, read this passage and then outline the different events that took place.

Consider This: Our culture invites us to experience something before we invest our money, time, or energy in it. In John 1:46, Philip invites Nathanael to come and see. Discuss what is significant about this approach to witnessing. How can discovery and personal investigation be fruitful tools as we share Jesus with our friends and work associates?

CONTINUED 

In His Life of Prayer *(Luke 6:12)*

Jesus lived for prayer. His public ministry began with an extended period of special prayer and communion (as we saw yesterday), and the record indicates that He returned from the experience supercharged with living power (*see Luke 4:14*). It would have been unnatural for Him to go a single moment without lifting up His soul to God, without experiencing that living connection between Himself and Heaven. And what we find is that although His was a life of continuous communion with His Father, before every major event or development He took time for special supplication.

How do the following passages demonstrate Jesus' reliance upon God for guidance, direction, and strength during moments of high importance, stress, or danger? In each case, note the special event in question:

Matt. 14:23 (compare vss. 24–33)

Luke 6:12 (compare vss. 13–16)

John 17 (compare 18:1–3)

Mark 1:35 seems to be describing not just one instance but rather a pattern, when it speaks about Jesus rising “a long while before daylight” (*NKJV*) and going out to “a solitary place” (*NKJV*) for prayer. He began each day with God. But times of special need increased the tempo. Luke 6:12 informs us that Jesus spent the entire night in prayer on a mountainside immediately preceding the selection of the Twelve Apostles, apparently from among a larger group of followers (*see Luke 6:13*). Before His jaw-dropping walk on the lake, He had taken time out for a period of intense communication with His Father. And during the Passion Week, as He faced the Cross, Jesus offered an intense supplicatory prayer for His immediate disciples and for His people to the end of time.

Take another look at Jesus' great prayer in John 17. What elements of a deeply personal walk with God do you find there? What events drive you to your knees? What has been your experience with the power of prayer to sustain you? How might you improve your prayer life?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Compare and Contrast: How did you find out about Jesus and His promises to you? What types of witnessing techniques have you experienced or been involved in? Which were most successful? Compare them with how Jesus shared the gospel.

Consider This: After Philip met Jesus, he was excited. Why didn't he just dismiss this Man as an interesting encounter? Why did he take the next step and share with his friends about Jesus?

Consider These Possibilities: We see lots of advertisements for a wide variety of goods and services. What advertising techniques work best as you consider items your family might purchase? Even if you are really interested in an item, what keeps you from taking steps toward owning it? How might these insights apply to how we witness about Jesus?

III. Practical Habits to Live By

Spiritual Disciplines

Consider This: When Jesus was praying for His disciples (*see John 17*), He gave some significant principles of how to know God. Read this passage as a group and make a list of those principles. Then break into smaller groups to make a practical list of how to live out those principles.

Practical Tools for Having a Real Relationship With God

Notice the process of being conformed to the nature of Christ for the sake of others (*Rom. 12:2*). There are three sets of spiritual disciplines: the inward disciplines, those that take place inside our minds; the outward disciplines, those that take place through our actions; and corporate disciplines, where we work together as fellow believers.

Examples of inward disciplines include meditation (*Isa. 1:18*), prayer (*Ps. 5:1–3*), and fasting (*Esther 4:16, also see Isa. 58:6*). Some outward disciplines are simplicity (*Matt. 6:33, Luke 12:15*), solitude (*Luke 6:12*), and service (*Matt. 25:34–36*). The corporate disciplines include confession (*Matt. 5:23, 24*) and worship (*one example is found in 1 Chron. 16:16, 29*).

Compare and Contrast: On numerous occasions the Scriptures record that Jesus went up on the mountainside alone to pray, sometimes all night. At other times, He took His disciples with Him. How does

CONTINUED 

Intensity for Mission *(John 4:34)*

For American poet Robert Frost in “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” the woods were “lovely, dark and deep/ But I have promises to keep/ And miles to go before I sleep.”

Jesus lived with the constant awareness of the darkness in the “woods” around Him, always deep but never lovely. Like the poet, He constantly was aware of having miles to go before He slept, so much to do in so little time. “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day,” He said, “the night is coming when no one can work” (*John 9:4, NKJV*). We see this mission intensity in His encounter with the woman of Samaria. Suddenly, in the presence of this needy soul, He forgets all hunger and all thirst, totally consumed with the mission at hand.

Meanwhile, the woman, entering into the excitement of the encounter, abandons her water jar and rushes to the village to spread the news of the most focused character she has ever met. The disciples return to find Jesus silent and pensive, praying for the success of this brand-new contact.

When the disciples told Jesus to eat, what did He answer them? *John 4:32–34*. How should we understand those words? What message can we take from them for ourselves?

What do the following passages say about the intensity of Jesus’ passion for His mission? *John 9:1–12, 35–39; 12:27–36*.

Jesus’ sentiments in that last passage are pregnant with meaning. They came following a request by certain visiting Greeks to meet Him (*John 12:20–22*), a request that opened up before Him the possibility of personally taking the message of the kingdom beyond His native Palestine to the far corners of the earth. But He knew that to do so would run counter to the most vital aspect of His total mission, to give His life as a ransom for the nations. Hence, He follows with those powerful words about a kernel of wheat falling into the ground (*vs. 24*), symbolic not just of His own sacrifice but of the principle that all who follow Him must have a full commitment to the will of God, regardless of whatever the personal cost might be.

What has been your own personal experience with what it costs to follow Jesus? Why is the cost cheap enough, no matter how expensive it turns out to be?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Jesus' life and ministry compare with that of His disciples? Discuss why the disciples experienced discouragement and even failure at times. How do we apply the lessons learned from this discussion to our own personal walk with the Savior and our experience of "fruit bearing" or lack of it?

IV. Avoiding Roadblocks (Barriers to Communication With God)

Consider This: After Jesus spent some time in prayer with His disciples nearby, Mark 14:40 records, "When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy" (*NIV*). When you consider your spiritual journey, what roadblocks have kept you from an ever-deepening experience with Jesus? As a group, make a list of those roadblocks. Then brainstorm avenues to overcome or remove them. (For example, if you listed "lack of time," discuss ways to reprioritize your schedule to allow more time. "Turn off the television" might be one suggestion.)

■ *Jesus warned the disciples that some of the towns He sent them to share the gospel in would not receive them. See Luke 9:1–5. Our tendency is to dismiss people before we have formed a relationship with them that would allow them to respond to the gospel invitation. How can we deal with apathy in love and zeal for those who initially appear uninterested?*

► STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

1 As the disciples were in the boat on Galilee, tossed by the ferocious storm (*Matt. 8:23–27, Mark 4:35–41, Luke 8:22–25*), what might have kept them from panicking? In the Gospels, read the portion from the beginning of the Gospel to where the narrative of the storm is recorded. What clues to peace and certainty in difficult situations did the disciples miss? How did Jesus repeat these lessons in the rest of the Gospels?

2 "There is a difference between imitating a good man and counterfeiting him."—Benjamin Franklin. Spiritual disciplines have been described as behaviors that facilitate spiritual growth. Expand on the list of spiritual gifts included in the "Explore" section of the teacher's helps. Choose one that you will incorporate into your schedule during the next week. Ask a trusted friend to hold you accountable for following through on your commitment.

CONTINUED ►

Our Own Walk With God *(1 John 2:6)*

Read prayerfully the above text. What is the principle there for us to follow? Realizing, as we have in previous lessons, that we cannot (and should not) do everything that Christ did, how do we, nevertheless, make this text real in our own lives? In what ways are we to walk as Jesus walked?

The idea of *walking with God* has its roots in hoary antiquity. Perhaps the first explicit biblical reference to the idea comes in Genesis 5:22, 24. Verse 24 says, “Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away” (*NIV*). The Hebrew word there for *walked* appears in a form that implies a kind of continual, ongoing walk, something that happened all the time. Whatever his faults and struggles, Enoch kept a consistent walk with his Lord.

We, as Christians, have the opportunity to do the same. However, it is so easy to let other things get in the way of that walk.

Wherever you live, whatever your culture, what are the things that so easily can hinder your walk with God? Too much leisure time? Too much distraction? Too much to do? Too much work in order to just survive? Once you identify these concerns, what practical steps can you take to try to prevent these things from hurting you spiritually?

Read what Jesus said in Matthew 13:22. What is He saying there that, in many ways, is the essence of what we are talking about today? Thus, it is clear that none of these things can really be a valid excuse for losing our way, because the Lord already has foreseen them. How crucial then that we, to the best of our God-given ability, make the daily choices, as Jesus did, to keep our walk with the Lord intense and ongoing. Why should we give the tempter anything at all to hold on to and thus turn us away from Jesus?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Application Question:**

When children have good news to share (receiving a new toy or having a fun time with a friend), you can't contain their enthusiasm to tell the story. Paul talks about disciples as ones who "shine like stars in the universe" (*Phil. 2:15, NIV*) or as those whose "joy in Christ Jesus will overflow" (*Phil. 1:26, NIV*) with the good news of Jesus' willingness to save. He even prays for all disciples in all ages: "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else" (*1 Thess. 3:12, NIV*). Read these texts together as a class. Discuss their context and how joy and witnessing was possible during difficult times. How can God help you live out that same kind of enthusiasm in your ministry of outreach to others?

Witnessing

What have you learned about Jesus and His connection with His heavenly Father that your non-Christian friend at work needs to know? Set up some time to spend with that friend. Ask God to prepare the way for your relationship to grow in a way that you can help lead that person to Jesus.

► STEP 4—Apply

Before nursing students give their first injection, they practice on oranges. How can we practice walking as Jesus walked? Jesus spent time with His Father in prayer, He spent time teaching His disciples, and He went about serving people through acts of healing. As a group, make a list of two ways we can practice Jesus' example in each area: prayer, teaching, and serving. Covenant as individual class members to follow at least one suggestion in each area during the next week. Take some of the class time next week to report on what happened and how this affected your life and the life of the person(s) you served.

Consider This: What does it mean to be a truly authentic disciple of Jesus Christ? When Jesus commanded " 'go and make disciples' " (*Matt. 28:19, NIV*), what did He mean? If you met a disciple for the first time, how would you know he or she was Jesus' disciple? What would he or she look or act like? Find a friend who would spend time with you in Bible study. Read through the Gospels together asking the question, "What made Jesus' disciples different from the people who hadn't met Jesus yet?"

Further Study: “It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 83.

“In every possible way Satan sought to prevent Jesus from developing a perfect childhood, a faultless manhood, a holy ministry, and an unblemished sacrifice. But he was defeated. He could not lead Jesus into sin. He could not discourage Him, or drive Him from the work He had come to this earth to do. From the desert to Calvary the storm of Satan’s wrath beat upon Him, but the more merciless it fell, the more firmly did the Son of God cling to the hand of His Father, and press on in the bloodstained path.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1130.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ The grudging compliments paid to Jesus in Matthew 22:15, 16 speak of Him as a person of integrity and truth, as unswayed by people’s office or power. What would people say about you? Could they offer you a similar kind of compliment? What about on a larger level, the level of your local church? Is it as willing to help the lower stratum of society as it is to try to impress the *higher-ups*? What does your answer tell you about changes that need to be made, if any?
- ❷ As a class, go over what you wrote down in Thursday’s lesson regarding the things that can hamper your walk with the Lord. Compare notes with other class members. What did you list in common? What were the differences? Even more important, how can you work together to help each other get past these challenges? What practical help can you give each other?
- ❸ In Matthew, Jesus frequently is mentioned as spending time on mountains and teaching on mountainsides. Finally, He is transfigured on a mountain (*Matt. 17:1–9*). This association with higher ground is meant, perhaps, to signify the daily closeness Jesus experienced with the higher realms of reality. What are the ways that we, as a church, can work together to reach, in a sense, the upper regions, even while intensely engaged in the valley below?