

The Christian Life



SABBATH—DECEMBER 8

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Deuteronomy 8:11–17; Philippians 2:3, 4; 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52; Revelation 22:1–5; Matthew 22:39; Genesis 2:21–25.

MEMORY VERSE: “We know what love is because Jesus Christ gave his life for us. So we should give our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1 John 3:16, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: Anyone can call himself or herself a Christian. But what does that mean to us in everyday life?

“WHAT GOOD IS IT, DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, IF YOU SAY YOU HAVE FAITH BUT DON'T [DO NOT] SHOW IT BY YOUR ACTIONS? Can that kind of faith save anyone?” (James 2:14, NLT).

The Bible focuses on “sound [good] doctrine [Bible teaching].” But it also focuses on holy living (1 Timothy 1:10; Titus 2:1–5). This points out that the true goal of biblical teaching is an ethical (right; holy) life with responsibility toward others. If you study carefully, you will understand that those verses in Timothy and Titus connect strong doctrine with correct living. It is almost the same as saying that correct living itself is sound doctrine!

The Christian is saved so that he or she can serve as God's tool for the salvation and good of others against the background of the great controversy (war) between good and evil. The saying “so heavenly minded that you're [you are] no earthly good” is an old one. But it is a truth that Christians need to avoid. Yes, heaven will be our home, but for now we are still on earth. So we need to know how to live while here. This week we will study how we can practice “hands-on” Christianity in our lives.

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 9**STEWARDSHIP¹**
(Deuteronomy 8:11–17)

We need to think about salvation as an important part of service to others. We cannot avoid the Christian principle (important rule) of stewardship. The *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* describes “stewardship” as “the responsibility of God’s people for the use of everything God has given them—life, health, time, talents and abilities, property, opportunities to be of service to others, and their knowledge of truth” (adapted).

Look at Deuteronomy 8:11–17; Psalm 24:1; Philippians 2:3, 4; and 1 John 3:16. With each verse, ask yourself, how can I show in my own life the wonderful principles (important rules) taught in these verses? How should these truths influence the way I live? How should they influence my relationships to others and to God? And how should they influence how I use the gifts God has given me?

The Bible teaches that the fundamental (main; first) purpose for all of God’s creation is to give Him glory (praise). Sin has sidetracked us in a very big way. But God directed His saving action to bring us back to give glory to God. Christ has bought us for the sake of God’s glory (Ephesians 1:11–14). We show our acceptance

of the complete lordship of Christ through our words and actions. In this way, we bring glory to God. Our acceptance of Christ’s lordship over our lives will involve our service to others through the use of our time, talents, abilities, and property.

Read again the verses for today. Which ones touch your heart the most, and why? What encourages you to live a life working for the good of others? Why is it so important for you spiritually to live for others?



We are to use all our talents for God’s glory.

MONDAY—DECEMBER 10**TITHE:² JUST A SMALL AMOUNT**
(Nehemiah 10:38, 39)

“A priest from Aaron’s family line must go with the Levites when they receive the tenth shares. And the Levites must bring a tenth of

1. stewardship—wise and careful management and use of time, talents, money, and property.

2. tithe—the practice of giving one-tenth of one’s income to the church.

those shares up to the house of our God. They must put it in the rooms where the treasures are stored” (Nehemiah 10:38, NIV).

Think about your life. Think about how short it is. Think about how you must die someday (unless Christ returns in your lifetime). Think what it would mean if the grave is the final end. You are just a tiny form of life that lives out its life cycle (often in pain, hardship, fear). And then it ends, one way or another. When all those cells die, nothing is left but a dead body on which bugs and bacteria feed (eat) until they also die.

Such would be the future end for all of us in a universe so large that our planet would seem to be nothing but a cruel joke that most of us do not find funny.

Instead, look at what we have been given in Christ. Look at what has been offered to us through Jesus. Look at what the plan of salvation tells us about our worth. Look at what has been done for us so that we do not have to meet the end described above.

What have we been given in Christ? Read 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52; Revelation 21:4; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:6, 7; and Revelation 22:1–5. What should these things mean to us? How should these promises influence every part of our life?

“I speak of the tithing system. I see how small it looks to my mind! How

small the amount! How useless are our attempts to measure our time, money, or love against God’s love. His love and sacrifice are unlimited and cannot be measured! Tithes for Christ! Oh, how little is our payment for that which cost so much! From the cross of Calvary, Christ calls for a full surrender.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [Messages] for the Church*, volume 4, pages 119, 120.

After all that Christ has done for you, can you not show enough faith and give back to Him a small amount of what you have been given?



Oh, how small the amount God asks us to give Him in return for the amount Jesus paid on the cross for our sins!

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 11

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO ONE’S SELF (Matthew 22:39)

Jesus tells us very clearly that “‘[you should] love your neighbor as you love yourself’ ” (Matthew 22:39, NIV). This is a very interesting verse when we consider

that love for self is opposed both to Christianity and to the unselfish giving of self. What did Jesus mean by this verse? How do we interpret (explain) and use this verse in a way that shows what true Christianity should be about?

Love of self is not selfishness. It is not putting yourself before everyone and anything else. Instead, love for self means that you understand your own worth before God. Once you do, you then try to live the best possible life. You do so while knowing that the results of such a life will help both yourself and those whom you know.

How would you connect Jesus' warning above to Philippians 2:5, 8; 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15; 1 Corinthians 10:31–33; and 1 Peter 1:13–16?

Christians understand that they as sinners are saved by a heavy price (Galatians 2:20). Because of this, they want to pattern their lives after Christ's own good life. They want to have Christ's mind, to live no longer for themselves but for Him. And they want to accept the call to holiness (separation from such things as our sexual desires, sinful ways, and impure thoughts and feelings).

If you love yourself, you want what is best for you. And what is best for you is a life that is dedicated to God. This is also a life that shows the character (who God is) and love of God. This is a life that is lived not for self but for the good of others. The surest

way to have a most unhappy life is to live only for self, never thinking of the good of others.

Think more about what it means to love yourself as a Christian. How easy is it for this kind of love to fall back into self-destruction and self-centeredness? What is the only way to protect yourself from that trap?

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 12

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE (Genesis 2:21–25)

Humans are social people. At home, work, and in public places, people are involved in all kinds of relationships. Responsible Christian actions should be clearly happening at all these levels. And the Bible has principles for these relationships.

Study Genesis 2:21–25; Malachi 2:14; and Ephesians 5:28 for a biblical description of marriage.

To describe something is to give its meaning. Today it is said that marriage is difficult to describe because the meaning of marriage is different for different people, times, and cultures. But the Bible has no such flexible idea of marriage. According to the Bible, marriage is a union (joining) started by God. In marriage, two adults of opposite sex promise to share a very close and lasting personal relationship. Also, biblical marriage is equally shared by the male

and female. It is a deep bond (tie) of unity (oneness) where husband and wife share their goals, faithfulness, and trust. As with a relationship with God, the relationship between a husband and a wife should be holy and guarded.

Of course, as we know all too well, people often do not take marriage seriously, even within the church. People enter into a marriage that they believe God has created. But when things get rough, they stand before a human judge who, through man-made laws and rules, separates what God has joined together. We all know that something is terribly wrong with this picture. But, as a church, we struggle with what to do in these situations.

There are many challenges today in society to the Bible's plan for sex: the practice of having many partners inside or outside of marriage, divorce, remarriage, and the practice of homosexuality. What other challenges to God's plan for sex can you think of in today's society? What advice from the Bible can you give on these issues?

Adultery (sex outside of marriage) and pornography (sexual books and pictures) are almost everywhere in society today. These are not even the worst of things that are out there. But God continues to look on human failings with mercy. Yet, these failings must, and can, be overcome through the grace³ of Christ. So, we need to

work gently and with great tenderness to bring people with sexual failings and wrong practices back to God's purity instead of making excuses for these sins and problems.



The relationship between a husband and wife should be holy.

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 13

CHRISTIAN ACTIONS (John 17:14–18)

Beyond the family, the Christian has other social and professional responsibilities. He or she needs to recognize the biblical view that Christians are in the world but “not of the world”⁴ (John 17:14–18).

With this in mind, study the following three areas of daily life and discuss the Christian's responsibilities when it comes to his or her lifestyle and actions:

1. Employer/Employee Relations: (James 5:4–6; Ephesians 6:5–9). Christian employers need to recognize employees as equals in Christ.

3. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

4. “not of the world”—This Bible truth means that even though Christians live in a sinful world, they should not live in sin as worldly people do. Instead, they should live according to Christian principles.

The employers also must recognize the principle that good work requires fair pay. On the other hand, Christian workers should avoid the temptation to be lazy at work.

“Parents are guilty of sin if they let their children have nothing to do. The children soon learn to love being lazy, they grow up to be useless men and women. When they are old enough to earn their living and find work, they work in a lazy way, but expect to be paid as much as if they were faithful.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 345.

2. Duties as Citizens (Romans 13:1–7). The Christian places God first in all things and tests all actions and responsibilities by this standard. For example, the Christian will oppose discrimination (unfairness to people) in any way. At the same time, “loyalty to God first does not mean anyone can become overcontrolling and cause social confusion. Christians pay taxes, take part in duties as good citizens, respect traffic laws and property rules, and cooperate with government leaders in keeping crime under control.”—Adapted from *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology [Study of God]* (Maryland: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), page 701.

3. Social Responsibility (Isaiah 61:1–3; Matthew 25:31–46). Compare the following statement with the verses above: “The Christian can make use of his calling for the kingdom of God if he loves his neighbor and carries on his work in the communities of fam-

ily and economic [related to money], national, and political life. . . . Only by being involved in the work as a good citizen and by being faithful to his social duty, can he possibly be true to the example of Christ.”—Adapted from H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), page 97.

In your work and social life, are people able to see your Christian values? Which parts of your life help people to be interested in your faith? What does your answer tell you about the way in which you live?



A parent must teach children to learn to love to help out.

FRIDAY—DECEMBER 14

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read chapters 22, 23, in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005); and Miroslav M. Kis, “Christian Lifestyle and Behavior,” pages 675–723, in Raoul Dederen (editor), *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*.

“Acts of kindness were designed by God to keep the hearts of the children of men soft and merciful. They also encourage in them an interest and love for one another. For our sakes Jesus became poor so that we might be made rich. The law of tithing was based on a firm principle. And it was designed to be a blessing to man.

“The system of tithing was arranged to prevent that great evil—love of riches. Christ knew that in doing business, the love of riches would be the greatest cause of pulling true godliness⁵ out of the heart. Jesus understood that the love of money would freeze deep and hard into men’s souls. It would stop the flow of mercy and make man not sensitive to people who are suffering.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 3, page 547.

“If a person has health and strength, that is to his advantage. Then he must make a right use of it. If he spends hours being lazy and doing useless visiting and talking, he is failing to do honest business. God’s word does not permit such laziness. Such persons have work to do to provide for their own families, and then save what is left for charity as God has blessed them.

“We are not placed in this world just to care for ourselves. But we are required to help with the great work of

salvation. In this way we are copying the self-denying, self-sacrificing [giving], useful life of Christ.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 1, page 325.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ The issue (problem) of divorce is a great social question. It should be, because divorce is so common in certain countries. How do we use the clear teaching of the Bible when dealing with this problem? If we used the teachings of Jesus more strictly, would fewer people want to divorce? Discuss this difficult issue.

❷ Think more about the whole question of tithing. Some argue that they should be able to tithe to whom they choose instead of through the organized church. What is the great danger of that attitude (thought or feeling)?

❸ As a church, we cannot pretend that we do not know all the Bible instruction about the caretaking of the poor and the needy among us. No one who calls himself or herself a Christian can refuse this command. At the same time, what are the traps of our calling if caretaking causes us to forget our more important duty to God? Discuss.

5. godliness—leading a good and righteous (holy) Christian life.