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Editorial Office 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904
Come visit us at our Web site at [<http://www.absg.adventist.org>]

Principal Contributor
Zdravko Stefanović

Associate Editor
Soraya Homayouni

Pacific Press® Coordinator
Wendy Marcum

Publication Manager
Lea Alexander Greve

Art Director and Illustrator
Lars Justinen

Editor
Clifford R. Goldstein

Editorial Assistant
Sharon Thomas-Crews

The teachers edition components were written by the following:

1. The Lesson in Brief, Lessons 1-13, and The Learning Cycles 1-5, 7, 9-13: Jiri Moskala, ThD, PhD, professor of Old Testament Exegesis and Theology, chair, Old Testament Department, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A.

2. The Learning Cycles, 6 and 8: Jennifer Schmidt, freelance writer, Stevensville, Maryland, U.S.A.



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UNNATURAL ACT

The mind, someone said, is never satisfied, never. That’s because it faces a cruel paradox: the mind, which can contemplate the eternal, is composed of matter that isn’t eternal—and, worst of all, the mind knows that it is not eternal. Like chickens and oysters, we are going to die. The difference, however, is that chickens and oysters don’t know it. We do, and that realization causes us a great deal of anguish and suffering.

How did we get into this mess? The answer is, of course, one word: sin. Sin leads to death. Humans sin; therefore, humans die. It doesn’t get simpler than that.

“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned” (*Rom. 5:12, NRSV*).

Yes, humans die. And here’s the rub: we were never supposed to. We were originally created for eternal life. The plan, from the start, was that we would live forever. Death, then, is an intruder—the most unnatural of all acts. We’re so accustomed to death that we take it for granted; we just accept it as being a “part of life.”

Death as a part of life? If that sounds absurd and paradoxical, it’s because it is. Death is the negation of life, not an aspect of it.

It is in this context that we come to this quarter’s lesson. Perhaps it can be best expressed by the famous quote, in which Ellen G. White writes that the great theme

of the Bible is “the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 109.

And what is it that God does for us that we don’t have the power to do for ourselves? Of course, He saves us from the most unnatural of acts, death—the eternal death that would be ours were it not for God’s grace as revealed in the plan of salvation. In other words, it’s the call to us, both as individuals and as a church, to “seek the LORD and live” (*Amos 5:6, NIV*).

The theme we are going to study, then, is that of God doing for us what we can never do for ourselves, which is to give us the gift of life—eternal life in Jesus. We are, however, going to explore it in a place where we don’t often go, the “Minor Prophets,” the twelve short books that end the Old Testament. These prophets have been dubbed “the Minor Prophets,” not because they are of less importance than the Major ones but because their books are much shorter than those written by the other Old Testament writers.

Indeed, whether through Hosea’s marriage to an unfaithful wife, or Jonah’s attempt to flee God’s prophetic call, or Zechariah’s amazing vision of Joshua and the angel (and all the others as well), the Minor Prophets together have a powerful message, one that comes through again and again. The message is about God’s grace toward undeserving sinners. The message is that God wants to save us from our sins, to save us from the devastation that sin, rebellion, and disobedience bring. Again and again in these books we see the Lord pleading with His people to repent, to put away their sins, to return unto Him, and to find life not death, salvation not damnation, hope not despair.

There is nothing “minor” about that theme. It’s present truth—God’s message to us today just as it was a message to those who lived in the time of these twelve writers who, though long gone, still speak.

The question is, Will we listen? The answer is, We must, for it is a matter of life and death.

Zdravko Stefanović teaches Biblical Studies at Adventist University of Health Sciences in Orlando, Florida. He is married to Bozana, a math professor, and they have two sons. The family treasures fond memories of their 12-year mission service in East Asia and also of their 12 years of teaching at Walla Walla.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and
4. What can I do with what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Create).

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

Step 1—Motivate: Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

Step 2—Explore: Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Step 3—Apply: Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

Step 4—Create: Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (*James 1:22*). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.