

How to Be Holy



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 17

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 119:1–16; Psalm 90; Psalm 81:7, 8; Psalm 141; Psalm 1:1–3.

When we keep God's law, we will live in a close relationship with Him.

MEMORY VERSE: “Teach us how short our lives are so that we can become wise” (Psalm 90:12, ERV).

AS WE SAW LAST WEEK, God can forgive us because of His mercy. God can give us new hearts and make us holy because of His mercy, too.

The Bible teaches us how to live a holy life (Psalm 119:9). This teaching includes obeying God's law. When we keep God's law, we will live in a close relationship with Him. Then God will fill our lives with blessings (Psalm 119:1, 2; Psalm 128). This promise is good news.

Does God's promise to bless us mean that our lives as Christians will be easy from now on? Of course not. Sin is powerful (Psalm 141:2–4). If we aren't careful, sin may separate us from God. God gives us tests. He also allows Satan to tempt us or try to get us to sin. Why? God wants to show us what is in our hearts. If God's children obey Him, God will make their faith strong. Their trust in God will grow. Tests and troubles will come to us. God allows these things to happen so that we can learn how to be holy. We must pray and ask God to help us to know how short our lives are. Then we will grow in wisdom (Psalm 90:12). When we pray this prayer, we show God that we want to live with faith and trust in Him forever.

**A CAREFUL STUDY OF GOD’S TEACHINGS
(Psalm 119:1–16)**

How do we keep God’s law? What blessings do we get from keeping it? Read Psalm 119:1–16 and verses 161–168 for the answers.

What is a life of faith? A life of faith is the same as going on a journey with God for the rest of our lives. On this journey, we will keep God’s law (Psalm 119:1). His love is the same as a light that shines on us during our journey with Him (Psalm 89:15). We also promise to serve and obey God with all our hearts (Psalm 119:1, 2, 10).

When we follow God’s teachings, we will live holy lives (Psalm 119:1). Our lives will be the same as a perfect offering to God (Exodus 12:5). We will be the same as “living” offerings (Romans 12:1). We will hate sin. Sin makes the heart dirty. God’s love makes us clean. When we give ourselves fully to God, we will do the things that make God happy (Psalm 101:2, 6; also read Psalm 18:32).

God’s commandments are more than a set of rules. When we keep God’s law, we will understand what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil (Psalm 111:10; also read 1 Chronicles 22:12). Our obedience to God’s law changes more than our behavior. God’s law will change our hearts and minds, too.

God’s commandments show His plan for everyone on the earth. God’s law shows us how to be wise and how to live in freedom and peace (Psalm 119:7–11, 133). In Psalm 119, the poet loves God’s law because the law teaches him that God will keep His promises (Psalm 119:77, 174).

“Those [people] who love your teachings will find true [real] peace. Nothing can make them fall [cause them to fail or sin]” (Psalm 119:165, ERV). In the Bible, “falling down” is a word picture for failing God or for sinning. God’s Word, the Bible, is the same as a lamp (Psalm 119:105) that shines with light and shows us the road to heaven. The Bible protects us from tripping and falling into sin (Psalm 119:110) on the way there.

How did Jesus show in His life that God’s Word is very powerful (Matthew 4:1–11)? How does your answer help you understand why we should obey God’s law?



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TEACH US HOW SHORT OUR LIVES ARE (Psalm 90)

How long do we live compared to God? Read Psalm 90; Psalm 102:11; and Psalm 103:14–16 for the answer.



Thanks to Jesus, God made a way for us to be saved from the sin problem (John 1:29; John 3:14–21).

Human life is very short compared to God, who lives forever. In God’s eyes, 1,000 years are the same as three or four hours during the night (Psalm 90:4). Compared to God, our lives don’t continue for very long (Psalm 90:10). The strongest human is the same as the weakest plant (Psalm 90:5, 6; Psalm 103:15, 16). Our short lives are filled with hard work and sadness (Psalm 90:10). Many people feel sad when they remember that life is very short. They get upset that life will go on without them when they die.

Psalm 90 shows us that God cares for us, all during our very short lives. The Lord is the same as a shelter for His people (Psalm 90:1, 2). As our shelter, the Lord is a safe place for His people during hard times.

Psalm 90 also teaches us that God is very angry at sin. The poet says: “No one really knows the full power [strength] of your anger” (Psalm 90:11, ERV). No one felt all God’s anger against sin. That’s because God holds His anger back and shows us His mercy. So, we have hope. God allows us many chances to say we are sorry for sin. We may come to Him and ask for wisdom to be holy.

Wisdom in the Bible means more than our having knowledge or being smart. Wisdom is respect for God. What type of wisdom do we need? We need wisdom to know that our lives are very short. The number of years that we will live is limited. When we understand this Bible truth, we will become wise. This wisdom will teach us about faith and obedience. We can get this wisdom only when we confess our sins and stop doing them (Psalm 90:8, 12). Then we must accept God’s gifts of forgiveness, love, and mercy (Psalm 90:13, 14).

Our problem is that we are sinners. Sin has hurt this earth and ruined so many lives.

Thanks to Jesus, God made a way for us to be saved from the sin problem (John 1:29; John 3:14–21). Without Jesus, we have no hope at all.

Yes, our lives are very short. What hope do we have in Jesus (John 3:16)? What hope do we have without Him?

THE LORD'S TEST (Psalm 81:7, 8)

Read Psalm 81:7, 8; Psalm 95:7–11; and Psalm 105:17–22. What do these verses teach us about the tests that God gives us?

Meribah is the place where Israel gave God a test. Israel didn't trust God to keep His promise to take care of their needs (Exodus 17:1–7; Psalm 95:8, 9). Psalm 81 looks at the story about Meribah in a new way. The poet who wrote Psalm 81 says that God gave Israel a test at Meribah (Psalm 81:7). When Israel disobeyed God and refused to trust in Him (Psalm 81:11), the people failed God's test.

Psalm 81 teaches us two important lessons about Meribah. First, God's people must not make the same mistakes their fathers made in the past. God's people must trust God and obey Him (Psalm 81:13). Second, God saved His people after they failed the test He gave them (Psalm 81:7). God's saving mercy in the past gives us hope that God will show us mercy in the future.

Psalm 105 shows us that God uses hard times as a test. God gave Joseph a test to remove any doubt from his heart about His promise. The test also helped to make Joseph's faith in God strong. Joseph learned to trust in God to lead him (Genesis 37:5–10; Psalm 105:19).

We understand why God gives us tests. But why does God punish us? When God punishes His people, He wants them to learn from their mistakes. He wants them to grow strong and be ready for His blessings. That's why God allowed Joseph to have a hard life when he was young (Psalm 105:20–22). But we must learn from our tests. If we reject God's lessons, our hearts will grow hard and stubborn.

"God expects His children to obey His law right away and without question. But people are asleep. Satan's lies keep them from doing what is right. Satan gives them excuses not to keep God's law. Satan lies and causes people to do what they know is wrong. Satan uses the same lie he used with Eve in the Garden of Eden. 'You will not die' [Genesis 3:4, ERV]. When we disobey God, we harden our hearts. We cause other people to sin, too. At first, our sin looks very bad to them. But after a while, our sin stops looking so evil in their eyes because they get used to the sin. They question if the sin is really sin at all. Then they start doing the same sin."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 4, page 146, adapted.



God gave Joseph a test to remove any doubt from his heart about His promise.

THE WAY SIN WORKS IN OUR HEARTS (Psalm 141)



The only thing that can save the poet from sinning is praying and trusting fully in God (Psalm 141:1, 2).

What does the poet pray for in Psalm 141?

Psalm 141 is a prayer for protection. The poet asks God to protect Him from sin. The poet is in danger from evil people and the plans they make against him (Psalm 141:9, 10). The poet is also in danger from the sin in his own heart. The poet says that his heart is the real danger to his safety. That's because the war between good and evil happens in the heart. At times, the poet wants to sin and join with people who do evil.

Will the poet follow God's wisdom? Or will the poet join evil people in a life of sin (Psalm 141:4, 5)? The only thing that can save the poet from sinning is praying and trusting fully in God (Psalm 141:1, 2). So, the poet prays for help. The poet asks God to help him control what he says and for strength to say no to sin (Psalm 141:3, 4).

Read Psalm 1:1 and Psalm 141:4. What do these poems teach us about sin and evil?

Psalm 141:4 shows us how sin works. First, sin starts in the heart. Sin causes us to want to do evil. Second, sin causes us to act and to do evil. After we sin the first time, we often keep sinning again and again. Third, we accept evil into our hearts as something that is good.

In the same way, Psalm 1:1 tells us what happens when we sin. Sin prevents God's children from following God and obeying His commandments. Sin causes us to join evil people who break God's law and who make fun of God. God commands us not to behave as these sinners behave. We must not allow them to lead us away from the Lord.

The Book of Psalms shows us that the only way we can be safe from sin is to depend on the Lord. The Lord will make us free from sin. The Book of Psalms teaches us to control what we say. We must choose our words carefully. We also must be careful to follow only God. Evil people will give us advice that leads us away from God. We must go to God for wisdom because He will judge both good people and evil people (Psalm 1:4–6; Psalm 141:8–10). Until that time, God's people must be patient and trust in Him.

A HOLY LIFE AND ITS MANY BLESSINGS (Psalm 1:1–3)

What blessings does God promise to people who honor Him? Read Psalm 1:1–3; Psalm 112:1–9; and Psalm 128 for the answer.

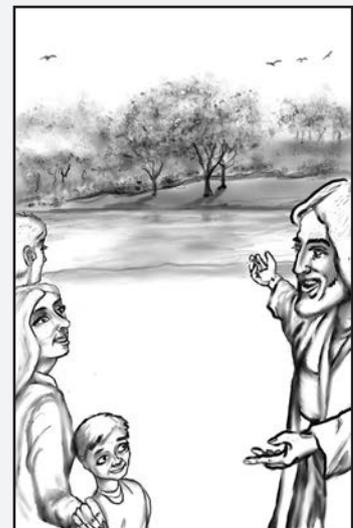
God promises many blessings to the people who honor Him. Peace is one of the most wonderful blessings that God gives. Psalm 1 compares a holy person to a tree. The tree grows next to a stream of water. Fruit grows on the tree. The leaves of the tree don't dry up and die (Psalm 1:3; also read Jeremiah 17:7, 8 and Ezekiel 47:12). The word picture of the tree shows us that God is the One who blesses the tree. When we live in faith with God in His temple in heaven, we will enjoy a loving relationship with Him. Evil people are not the same as the lovely tree, with its fruit and green leaves. Evil people are the same as straw that the wind blows away. Evil people have no future hope. God's people have the hope of everlasting life.

Psalm 128:2, 3 talk about the blessings we will enjoy on the new earth. At that time, we will sit under our own grape vines and fig trees. These plants are symbols of peace (Micah 4:4). In Psalm 122, the poet asks people to pray for God to bless Jerusalem with peace (Psalm 122:6–8; Psalm 128:5, 6). This prayer shows the poet's hope in the coming Savior who will end evil and bring peace on earth.

"In the Bible, God promises His people a special gift. This gift is 'a country.' Hebrews 11:14–16. Jesus is the Shepherd from heaven. Jesus leads His flock to the living waters to drink. The tree of life is there, too. The tree of life grows new fruit every month. The leaves from the tree of life help people heal. In heaven, there are streams that always flow with clear water. Next to the streams, the shadows of the trees make the walking paths cool with shade. The Lord made these paths for His people. Beyond the plains are beautiful hills and the tall mountains of God. The plains are a place of peace. There, God's people shall find a home. They won't be pilgrims or wanderers anymore."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 675, adapted.

This hope of a new life will happen when Jesus makes the earth new (Matthew 26:29; Revelation 21). Then God will give us everything He promised.

How does the Cross show us that God will keep His promise to us to make the earth new again?



Jesus leads His flock to the living waters to drink.



God wants us to make pictures in our minds about everything Jesus has done for us and to think about these things carefully. (Jesus prays in Gethsemane.)

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: In today's modern life, most people want to be happy more than they want to be wise. Can we really be happy in this life without God's wisdom? The Book of Psalms says we can't. The good news is that God doesn't ask us to choose between wisdom and happiness. God's wisdom brings real happiness to our lives.

In the Bible, wisdom and happiness are more than ideas. They are real experiences that come from our knowing, praising, and trusting God. Psalm 25:14 says, "The LORD tells his secrets to his followers. He teaches them about his agreement [promise]" (ERV).

"Thank God for the blessings He gives to us. Think about all the proof that God gives us of His love. Make a picture in your mind of God's many blessings. Think about these pictures as often as you can: Jesus, the Son of God, left heaven. Then Jesus became a Man so He could save us from Satan's lies. Jesus won the fight against Satan for us. Jesus made a way possible for us to go to God in heaven. Jesus saved fallen humans from sin. Jesus connected us with God again. Jesus helps us to pass our different tests in life. Jesus is our God and our Savior. He covers us in His holy life the same as clothes. Then Jesus invites us to sit down with Him on His throne in heaven. God wants us to make pictures in our minds about all these things and think about them carefully."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 118, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① The Bible teaches us many things. How can Bible knowledge also give us joy? Jesus is the Living Word, or Bible. Why must we invite Jesus to live in our hearts if we want to learn from God's Word, the Bible?
- ② What happens today when God's people continue to reject His teaching as the Israelites did (Psalm 81; Psalm 95)? Why does God say these "modern" Israelites "will never enjoy the rest I planned for them" (Psalm 95:11, NIV)?
- ③ Sometimes a life of sin looks more exciting and fun than a holy life of obedience (Psalm 141). Why do we like sin more than a holy life? Many people who reject God enjoy success. How do we explain their "success"?

SEKULE'S STORY (PART 4): SABBATH GOODBYE PARTY

Two weeks after Sekule was baptized, the Bosnian War started. Then Sekule ran away from his high school in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sekule hid for 15 days. When Sekule went back to school, he discovered that soldiers burned the building where he lived. The soldiers dumped Sekule's religious books in the middle of his room. Then they set the books on fire. Sekule lost everything he owned. So, he went back home to his village in Montenegro.

Sekule's family heard the news that he joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. His family was not happy with his decision. Father didn't understand why Sekule stopped eating meat. Father took him to a doctor to get him some help. Mother thought that a witch put a curse on her son. So, she went to get help for her son from someone who practiced black magic. When the doctor and the magician failed to help Sekule, his parents sent Sekule to the army. The year was 1992. The Bosnian War was happening. In those days, when a family signed up their son for the army, that was the same as their sending him to war.

Back then, families gave big parties for soldiers who joined the army. Sekule's parents planned his party for a Sabbath in December. Two hundred guests were expected to come. But Sekule went to church.

When the winter sun set at around 4 P.M., Sekule came home. He didn't know what to expect. He thought the house would be filled with family members from all over the country and elsewhere. Sekule knew his family would be angry at him for arriving late to his own party and for not showing respect. He was the oldest grandson in his family.

Sekule found Grandfather on the front porch.

Sekule asked him, "Did the people come?"

Grandfather shook his head. "No."

"Why not?" Sekule wondered.

His grandfather said, "No one knows."

Just then people started coming. Sekule asked them, "Why are you coming now?"

Everyone answered the same way: "Somebody told us to come after 5 P.M."

Sekule asked, "Who told you?"

No one knew. That's when Sekule understood that God would protect him when he went into the army.

Sekule Sekulić is a businessman who lives in Montenegro. Read more about his story next week. Thank you for your Sabbath School offerings that help to share the Good News about Jesus in Montenegro.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



The soldiers dumped Sekule's religious books in the middle of his room. Then they set the books on fire.