

Adult
Sabbath School
Bible Study Guide
July | Aug | Sept 2022

IN THE CRUCIBLE WITH CHRIST



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The Crucified Creator



“All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (*John 1:3*).

All things” were made by Him, Jesus, and yet—according to Scripture—“Jesus wept” (*John 11:35*). The Creator wept? Even more so, Jesus was “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (*Isa. 53:3*). The Creator, a man of sorrows, despised and rejected? And He once cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (*Matt. 27:46*).

How could these things be? It’s because Jesus, our Creator, also was our Redeemer, and as such, He was the Crucified God—the Creator who took on humanity and in that humanity suffered through a life of privation and toil that ended with Him hung on a Roman cross.

Thus, our Creator, the One in whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (*Acts 17:28*), suffered in humanity in ways that none of us ever could. We can experience only our own griefs, our own sorrows; at the cross He bore “our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (*Isa. 53:4*)—all of them. It’s the most amazing act in all cosmic history.

With that background (that of the crucified God lifted up before us), we will for the next few months seek to better comprehend the incomprehensible—our own suffering, the sufferings of Christians, of those who have committed their lives to Christ. We make no claims to have all the answers or even many; we’re claiming only that “God is love” (*1 John 4:8*) and that although these things happen, we can trust God despite them and, indeed, grow in grace through them, no matter how painful the process.

This quarter we will study the Word of God and see how other flesh and blood, though radiated in faith, nevertheless faced despair, betrayal, disappointment, loss, injustice, and abuse (sound like anything you can relate to?). How did they cope? What did they learn? What can their examples teach us?

As we look at these people, their experiences, their struggles, and their trials of faith (which might be much like our own), we must always see them contrasted against the background of the Cross. We must always remember that no matter what anyone faces, Jesus Christ, our Creator and Redeemer, went through worse.

Our God is a suffering God. Even Albert Camus, hardly a Christian, understood some of the implications of the Cross and the sufferings of God there: “The night on Golgotha is so important in the history of man only because, in its shadow, the divinity abandoned its traditional privileges and drank to the last drop, despair included, the agony of death.”—Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), p. 33. Or, as Ellen White expressed it: “The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 263.

“The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 263.

Our lessons are not a theodicy, the justification of God in the face of evil. Instead, as we’ve said, they’re an attempt to help us work through the inevitable suffering we all face here in a world in which sinning is as easy as breathing. What we will try to show is that pain, suffering, and loss don’t mean that God has abandoned us; they mean only that, even as believers, we now share in the common lot of a fallen race. The difference is that, through Jesus and the hope He offers, we can find meaning and purpose in what seems meaningless and purposeless and that somehow, even if we can’t imagine how, we can trust the promise that “all things work together for good to those who love God” (*Rom. 8:28, NKJV*)—the God who, though He made all things, suffered all things, too (and that’s why we love Him).

Gavin Anthony, this quarter’s principal contributor, grew up in Sri Lanka as a missionary kid. He worked as a pastor in England and

was conference president in Iceland when he authored these lessons.

LESSON 1

*June 25—July 1

The Shepherd's Crucible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Psalm 23, Rom. 12:18–21.*

Memory Text: “He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake” (*Psalm 23:3, NKJV*).

Sophie leaned back against her bedroom door and slid to the floor. Tears were welling up fast, and it was only a moment before she was sobbing. “How could he? How could he!” Sophie had just received news that was breaking her heart. Someone she thought was a friend, someone she respected and trusted, was spreading awful gossip about her in order to ruin her reputation and the work she had been doing. Grabbing her Bible off the bed, she suddenly found herself staring at some very familiar words: “He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the

valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (*Ps. 23:3, 4, NKJV*).

“Surely this can’t be!” she blurted out to herself. But the logic seemed inescapable. The Shepherd in the psalm was guiding His sheep in paths of righteousness, but these very paths also seemed to wind their way into the valley of the shadow of death. Could it be possible that even this painful betrayal by a friend, this dark valley, could be used by God to train her in righteousness?

The Week at a Glance: At what times have you grown more spiritually—through the easy times or the harder ones?

* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 2.*

SUNDAY June 26

A Guide for the Journey: The Shepherd

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (*Ps. 23:1, NKJV*).

Some children were asked to draw a picture of God. Without exception, each one drew a picture with a heart somewhere in it. When asked why, they declared unanimously that God is love. It was as simple as that.

It is easy to have a good opinion of God and His purposes when everything is going well. But as we grow older and life becomes harder and more complicated, our view of God often changes. God doesn't change, of course (*Heb. 13:8, James 1:17*), but we do.

Because of the pastoral lifestyle of the people in Old Testament times, Psalm 23 uses the image of a shepherd to describe the way God cares for us. The symbol of a shepherd is used for God—in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It's a wonderful picture and one that is changeless, too. Before we look at Psalm 23, let's survey how different Bible writers understand the work and character of the Shepherd throughout the Bible.

What do you learn about the Shepherd from each text?

Isa. 40:11 _____

Jer. 23:3, 4 _____

Ezek. 34:12 _____

John 10:14–16 _____

1 Pet. 2:25 _____

Now turn to Psalm 23. What does the Shepherd do to care for His sheep?

Ps. 23:2 _____

Ps. 23:3 _____

Ps. 23:4 _____

Ps. 23:5 _____

Ps. 23:6 _____

What does it mean to you to know that there is Someone like this caring for you? How could you use this picture to encourage someone whose picture of God has been obscured because of his or her own struggles, whatever they are?

MONDAY *June 27*

Locations on the Journey

“He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake” (*Ps. 23:3, NRSV*).

Imagine the “paths of righteousness” (*Ps. 23:3*) stretching out before you, way out into the distance. You cannot see the end, but you know that at the end of the journey is home, God’s house. As you focus a little closer to you, do you see where the path leads? You can see some places clearly, but other parts are totally obstructed by large or dangerous obstacles. Sometimes the path disappears over a ridge. Some parts of the path are easy to walk along; others are difficult. It was just like this as Israel traveled from Egypt to the Promised Land, and it is described the same way in this psalm.

Identify from Psalm 23 the locations that David sees the sheep passing through when following the paths of righteousness as they make their way to the house of the Lord.

But why are these paths called “paths of righteousness” or “right paths” (*NIV, NRSV*)? Here are four important reasons. First, they are

the right paths because they lead to the right destination—the Shepherd’s home. Second, they are the right paths because they keep us in harmony with the right Person—the Shepherd Himself. Third, they are the right paths because they train us to be the right people—like the Shepherd. Fourth, they are the right paths because they give us the right witness—as we become the right people, we give glory to the Lord. They are “right” or “righteous” paths, whether the going is easy or hard.

It is important to realize that when God leads us, it is not simply a question of His delivering a parcel to the destination. It is much more than guidance and protection. Like the many examples all through the Bible in which God is leading His people (whether it is leading Abraham by His promises or leading Israel by the pillar of fire and cloud), when God is guiding, it is always about His training His people in righteousness.

How conscious are you that righteousness is the Shepherd’s priority for your life? How can trials change your life so that you better reflect the character of Christ?

TUESDAY *June 28*

Unexpected Detour 1: The Valley

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4, NKJV).

It would be nice if the paths of righteousness wound their way only along the grass-covered banks of cool streams. But that is not the way David paints it. Also, along these paths is the valley of the shadow of death—not a place that we are eager to visit! At certain times of the year, the wadis and ravines found in Israel are prone to flash floods that can come unexpectedly and prove overwhelming. These places also are characteristically narrow, with steep sides that block out the light. Hence, “the shadow of death” is an image for “very deep shadow,” or “deep darkness.”

Think about the times you have been in your own “valley of the shadow of death.” What has it been like? Did you have fear, even though you knew that the Shepherd was there? Which Bible texts were most precious to you at that time, and why?

How do you think the sheep ended up in the valley? Do you think the sheep went there on their own, or did the Shepherd lead the sheep that way Himself? Justify your answer.

Elisabeth Elliot writes, “A lamb who found himself in the valley of the shadow of death might conclude that he had been falsely led. It was needful for him to traverse that darkness in order to learn not to fear. The shepherd is still with him.”—*Quest for Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell Books, 1996), p. 218.

Have you ever felt that you have been “falsely led” into the valley? How did you respond to God during this time? Why do you think the Shepherd might be willing to risk being misunderstood by permitting us to enter a dark valley?

WEDNESDAY *June 29*

Unexpected Detour 2: The Surrounded Table

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over” (Ps. 23:5, NKJV).

Throughout our lives, we will inevitably bump into some enemies. How do you deal with them? Have you ever lain awake at night, tossing and turning, dreaming up ways to take revenge on those who are trying to hurt you or destroy your work? It can be hard for Christians to know how to handle enemies.

What types of enemies have you had in your life? How have you responded to those who have tried to hurt you or those you care for? How well did you follow Christ’s words to us in Matthew 5:44, or Paul’s in Romans 12:18–21?

In Psalm 23:5, David shows us an interesting way of dealing with enemies. He obscures their presence by looking instead at what God is doing in his behalf. And God is there preparing a banquet for him.

In David’s culture, when an honored guest came for a feast, the host would anoint his head with oil as the guest was about to enter

the banqueting hall. The oil was a mixture of olive oil and perfume. Then the guest would be seated in front of far more food than one could ever eat.

How could the three items (table, oil, cup) in Psalm 23:5 help to remind us about how God provides, even when we are in the valley?

As Paul reminds us, “our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (*Eph. 6:12, NRSV*). Our enemies include those we see and those we don’t. Whether we like it or not, we are surrounded. Yet, when we are with the Shepherd, not one enemy, visible or invisible, can steal what He has provided for us.

Reflect on how the Shepherd has treated you when you have been surrounded by enemies. What can you see in these times that can enable you to give thanks even during such difficulties?

THURSDAY *June 30*

A Certain Promise for the Journey

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Ps. 23:6, NKJV).

When we are in the valley or surrounded by enemies, it is sometimes tempting to believe that we have been left alone. It does not always feel as though God has been doing much; we reason that if He had been helping, we wouldn't be in this situation to begin with. But David obviously does not see it like this.

In spite of his trials, what two things does David say in Psalm 23:6 that he is certain of? (See also Eph. 1:4, 2 Pet. 1:10, and Heb. 11:13–15.)

Some translations say that goodness and unfailing love (God's covenantal commitment) will “follow” me all the days of my life. However, the original verb is much stronger, and the text should read that goodness and unfailing love will “pursue” me all the days of my life. (In fact, it's the same Hebrew verb used in such verses as

Genesis 14:14, Joshua 10:19, and 1 Samuel 25:29, where the idea of “pursuit” is very clear.)

What picture do you get in your mind when you imagine goodness and unfailing love “pursuing” you? What do you think David meant to tell us about God by describing His care for us this way?

No matter how deep the valley or how persistent the enemies, the certainty of God’s goodness and unfailing love and the certainty of His guidance to the very end of our journey is unquestionable. If these thoughts could sustain Jesus through Calvary, we should take heart, as well.

There are times, however, when those we care for are full of questions. Like David, the best way to address these concerns is often not with a theological description of what God can do. Rather, as David shows us in Psalm 23:6, it is through an affirmation, the sharing of a personal conviction, of the truth about our God.

What evidence is there from your own knowledge of God that can illustrate the certainty that His goodness and unfailing love pursue us? What evidence could you add from the Bible? How could you share this with those who may be questioning the certainty of God’s care? How is the Cross the greatest example of this “pursuit”?

FRIDAY *July 1*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Missionaries in the Home,” p. 143, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4; “The Divine Shepherd,” pp. 476–484, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Those who are finally victorious will have seasons of terrible perplexity and trial in their religious life; but they must not cast away their confidence, for this is a part of their discipline in the school of Christ, and it is essential in order that all dross may be purged away. The servant of God must endure with fortitude the attacks of the enemy, his grievous taunts, and must overcome the obstacles which Satan will place in his way. . . .

“But if you keep looking up, not down at your difficulties, you will not faint in the way, you will soon see Jesus reaching His hand to help you, and you will only have to give Him your hand in simple confidence, and let Him lead you. As you become trustful, you will become hopeful. . . .

“You will find help in Christ to form a strong, symmetrical, beautiful character. Satan cannot make of none effect the light shining forth from such a character. . . . God has given us His best gift, even His only-begotten Son, to uplift, ennoble, and fit us, by putting on us His own perfection of character, for a home in His kingdom.”—Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People*, pp. 63, 64.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** To what extent have you been aware that the “terrible perplexity and trial” that comes into your life may actually be part of your “discipline in the school of Christ”?

2 How might our help, comfort, and encouragement to those in the valley be part of the Shepherd's way of getting people through their crises? What things can you as a church do to be better used by the Lord to help those in need?

3 In class, go around and have each person talk about how goodness and mercy "pursued" them. What can you learn from one another's experiences?

4 Think about the last hours of Christ's life, as He entered into the crucible. From what you can tell, either from the Bible or Ellen G. White (*The Desire of Ages* is a great source), how was Jesus, in His humanity, able to endure? What can we take from His example for ourselves in whatever crucibles we face, as well?

INSIDE *Story*

Part 1: Possessed at 11

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Sweat poured down 11-year-old Eduardo's face as he raced his skateboard back and forth on the street outside his house on a hot summer morning.

"Eduardo Ferreira dos Santos!" his mother called. "Come in and take a shower before lunch."

Perspiring and panting, Eduardo headed straight for the kitchen, forgetting the shower and thinking only about lunch. Eduardo ignored a stranger seated in the living room, waiting for her nails to be painted. His mother ran her own home business, a beauty salon offering manicures and haircuts.

Before Eduardo reached the kitchen, he was stopped by his 12-year-old sister. "Sit down and catch your breath," she said.

Eduardo obediently plopped down onto a chair. Immediately, an unholy shriek escaped his lips. His body began to convulse. His mother rushed to him. A low, distorted voice spoke from Eduardo's mouth, telling his mother to hand over her son or watch him die. Eduardo's mother began to cry.

"Don't worry," the stranger told Eduardo's mother. "Your son has been chosen to be part of our group. I am a Candomblé leader."

Eduardo's mother had heard about Candomblé, a religion that arrived in Brazil on slave ships from Africa in the early 19th century. Candomblé teaches that people can be possessed by the spirits of gods. The spirits, however, aren't gods but fallen angels. Eduardo had been possessed by one of them, an evil spirit from a legion that surrounded the stranger.

After some time, the evil spirit left, and Eduardo returned to normal. He didn't remember the incident, but his mother couldn't

forget, and she took him to the Candomblé temple. The temple priests welcomed Eduardo like a king.

“What an honor,” one said. “You have been handpicked,” said another.

Only 11, Eduardo was introduced to spiritism and devil worship. Over the next seven years, he spent much time at the temple, learning to be a priest. Evil spirits spoke to him and through him. The most important lesson, they said, was never to leave a job undone. If he started a task, he had to finish it.

As an adult, Eduardo became high priest of a temple. He earned money from people who wanted him to curse their enemies. But the evil spirits forbade him from cursing Seventh-day Adventists and other Protestant Christians. “They are protected,” the spirits said, adding that any attempt to curse them would cause Eduardo to lose his powers. The spirits also banned Eduardo from communicating with Adventists and other Protestants.

Eduardo found a common-law wife, Sidilene Silva de Oliveira, and they had a son, Eduardo Junior. Life was peaceful until Junior said he wanted to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS lives.

Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

LESSON 2

*July 2–8



The Crucibles That Come

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Pet. 4:12–19, 1 Pet. 5:8–11, Rom. 1:21–32, Jer. 9:7–16, 2 Cor. 12:7–10.*

Memory Text: “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (*1 Peter 4:12, 13, NKJV*).

In chemistry labs one often places various materials into a small container and heats them to extreme temperatures. As the container becomes hotter, the materials either melt, fizzle, spit, or burn brightly, depending upon what they are made of. The container is called a crucible.

A crucible is defined in the dictionary as (1) a vessel used for melting a substance that requires a high degree of heat, (2) a severe test, or (3) a place or situation in which concentrated forces interact to cause or influence change or development.

These definitions also give us a helpful insight into what happens in our spiritual lives. This week we’ll highlight some reasons we may suddenly find ourselves under pressure and experiencing tests in places in which circumstances cause us to change, develop, and grow in character. This will help to give us an awareness of what God is doing in our lives so that when we enter a crucible, we will have an idea of how to respond.

The Week at a Glance: What are the causes of the difficult times that we experience through our lives?

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 9.*

SUNDAY *July 3*

Surprises

“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you” (1 Pet. 4:12, NKJV).

Surprises, painful surprises, can come in many ways. A car veering across the road into your path. A sudden notification that you’re losing your job. A medical test that gives you unexpected bad news. Betrayal by someone you loved and who you thought loved you. As bad as the pain can be, it’s always made worse by the element of surprise.

This week we will look at a few specific types of painful situations or crucibles that should not take us by surprise.

To begin, let’s go back to the text for today in Peter. The Greek word for “surprised” in 1 Peter 4:12 means to be “alien” or “foreign.” Peter is urging his readers not to fall into the trap of believing that fiery ordeals and trials are alien to Christian experience. Rather, they are to be considered normal—they can and should be expected.

The word used for “fiery ordeal” (*NIV*, *NRSV*) or “fiery trial” (*NKJV*) comes from another Greek word, and it means “a burning.” In other places it is translated “furnace.” This experience of suffering for our faith could therefore be considered a “smelting process,” the process of the crucible.

Read 1 Peter 4:12–19. What is Peter’s message?

Many of us are surprised about suffering because we often have an oversimplified view of the Christian life. We know there are two sides—God, who is good; and Satan, who is bad. But often, we then automatically put everything that feels good in the box with God and everything that feels bad in the box with Satan. But life is not so simple. We cannot use our feelings to decide what is in God’s box or Satan’s box. Sometimes walking with God can be challenging and hard. And following Satan can appear to bring great rewards. Job, who is righteous yet suffering, illustrates this when he asked God, “ ‘Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?’ ” (*Job 21:7, NIV*).

Peter was referring to trials that are the consequence of standing up for Christ. But there also are other reasons that trials come. How could 1 Peter 4:12–19 help you to explain tactfully to a friend why he or she should not be surprised at the painful trials they might face?

MONDAY *July 4*

Crucibles of Satan

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”
(1 Pet. 5:8, NKJV).

Read the above text. What’s the message there for us? Ask yourself, “How seriously do I take these words?” What things do you do in your life that show whether you take them seriously?

Have you ever watched a hungry lion? It’s awesome because you know it can catch and eat just about anything it wants. Peter says that Satan is prowling around in the same way. When we look around, we can see the consequences of his desire to kill. Death, suffering, and the twisting and perverting of morals and values are everywhere. We cannot escape seeing the work of Satan.

Read 1 Peter 5:8–11. How should Christians react to Satan’s prowling?

What does God promise to do for those who are suffering?
1 Pet. 5:10.

Peter writes these words in the context of responding to Satan's attacks on Christian faith. But as we have mentioned, Satan is at work in many different ways. And although we must be aware of the reality and the power of our enemy, we must never be discouraged, for we must always remember that Jesus has beaten Satan; that Satan is a defeated foe; and that as long as we stay connected with Jesus, as long as we cling to Him in faith, we can never be defeated either. Because of the cross, Christ's victory is our victory.

Think about the other ways that Satan causes pain. How could reading 1 Peter 5:8–11 help us to deal with the anguish that we experience because of our fate in living in a sinful world in which Satan wreaks havoc?

TUESDAY *July 5*

Crucibles of Sin

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18, NKJV).

Everything we do has a consequence. If you stand in the hot sun with ice cream, it will certainly melt. Cause and effect always go together. And no matter how desperately we may want things to be different, it is the same with sin. It always reaps consequences. It is not that God sits in heaven wondering what terrible things He can do to people who sin; no, sin itself comes with its own built-in consequences.

The problem is that many times we think that we can somehow outwit God and sin without experiencing the consequences. It never happens. Paul makes it very clear that sinning has consequences, not only for eternity but also painful and distressing consequences today.

In Romans 1:21–32, Paul describes the process when people fall into sin and the consequences of those sins. Read these verses prayerfully and carefully, and summarize the essence of what Paul is saying, focusing specifically on the stages of sin and its consequences.

A couple of verses earlier Paul describes these consequences as the “wrath of God” (*Rom. 1:18*). God’s wrath in this passage is simply God calling human beings to reap what they sow. Even for Christians, God does not always intervene immediately to remove the pain that results from our own actions. Many times He allows us to experience the consequences of our actions in order for us to understand how deeply damaging and offensive our sin is.

We have been considering the consequences of breaking God’s moral laws. But what about breaking God’s health laws? Our bodies are God’s home. If we abuse our bodies by failing to eat healthfully or to exercise, or if we regularly overwork, this also is sin against God. And this has consequences that can create the conditions of a crucible.

In your own life, how have you reaped the immediate consequences of your own sins? What lessons have you learned? What changes must you make in order not to go through something similar again?

WEDNESDAY July 6

Crucibles of Purification

“Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Behold, I will refine them and try them; for how shall I deal with the daughter of My people?’ ” (Jer. 9:7, NKJV).

“If the Spirit of God brings to your mind a word of the Lord that hurts you, you can be sure that there is something in you that He wants to hurt to the point of its death.”—Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 271.

How do you understand the quote and text above? What has been your own experience with the pains involved in the purification process?

Read Jeremiah 9:7–16. God says that He will “refine and test” (NRSV), or “melt” (KJV), Judah and Jerusalem (Jer. 9:7, NIV). What two reasons does God give for this? (Jer. 9:13, 14). How will the refining happen? (Jer. 9:15, 16).

God's refining and testing involved drastic action. There are perhaps three reasons why refining and testing may feel like a crucible. First, we experience pain as God allows circumstances to bring our sin to our attention. A little earlier, Jeremiah unhappily writes, " 'The bellows blow fiercely to burn away the lead with fire, but the refining goes on in vain; the wicked are not purged out' " (*Jer. 6:29, NIV*). Thus, sometimes drastic action is needed in order to get our attention. Second, we experience anguish as we feel sorrow for the sin we now see clearly. Third, we experience frustration as we try to live differently. It can be quite uncomfortable and difficult to keep choosing to give up the things that have been so much a part of us.

Think about the sins that you struggle with. If God were going to refine and test you today, how might He do it? What action could you take now to deal with this before God would need to take drastic steps with you, as He did with Israel?

THURSDAY *July 7*

Crucibles of Maturity

“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure” (2 Cor. 12:7, NKJV).

There is a big difference between cutting down and pruning. We cut down plants that we don’t want anymore; we prune plants that we want to develop into greater fruitfulness. Both processes, however, do involve a sharp knife. Indeed, pruning requires cutting parts off the plant that might seem to a novice gardener like destroying it. In a spiritual context, Bruce Wilkinson writes, “Are you praying for God’s superabundant blessings and pleading that He will make you more like His Son?

“If your answer is yes, then you are asking for the shears.”—*Secrets of the Vine* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001), p. 60.

People have wondered what Paul actually meant by a “thorn in my flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7, NIV). Ideas range from Paul being under constant attacks from enemies to having a speech difficulty. It seems that this was actually a problem with his eyesight (see Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1107). Amazingly, Paul believed that his “thorn” was “given me.”

What do you think Paul meant by “given me”? Who gave it to him? How was God able to use it for Paul’s benefit?

Notice that Paul's "thorn" had a definite purpose: "to keep me from becoming conceited" (2 Cor. 12:7, NIV). It was not because of any specific sin he had committed but to prevent him from sinning in the future. Paul recognized that by nature he had a weakness to sin and that this "thorn" could guard against it.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7–10. How does Paul deal with his "thorn"? Do you think that Paul's weakness had any other spiritual benefits for him? How can the way that Paul responds help you to deal with "thorns" that you may have to carry?

In what ways might God's ideas for your spiritual development be very different from your own? Think about areas in your life in which you need to become more fruitful in righteousness. What spiritual qualities would you like to ask God to develop in you through His "pruning"?

FRIDAY *July 8*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Effectual Prayer,” in *Signs of the Times*, November 18, 1903; Ellen G. White Comments, p. 1182, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4; “God Permits Trial and Affliction to Purify Me,” p. 92, in *My Life Today*.

“He who reads the hearts of men knows their characters better than they themselves know them. He sees that some have powers and susceptibilities which, rightly directed, might be used in the advancement of His work. In His providence He brings these persons into different positions and varied circumstances that they may discover in their character the defects which have been concealed from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to correct these defects, and to fit themselves for His service. Often He permits the fires of affliction to assail them that they may be purified.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 471.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** It really can be hard while we are reaping the consequences of our sin. “Will I ever be able to be made right with God again?” we ask. What promises does God make that can encourage us to persevere through such times and not give up? (See what Paul writes later in Romans 5:1–11.) What can you say to someone who is asking this very question?
- 2** What does Ellen G. White mean by “His providence”? How does this work? How do you know when something happens by God’s providence? What acts of God’s “providence” have led to trials in your own life? As a class, discuss what you’ve

learned at this time. How might you help someone else who is wondering whether some event is indeed “His providence”?

3 If you know someone who is going through a crucible experience right now, does it matter, or should it matter, what brought it on? That is, how should you react to this person and his or her suffering, regardless of what caused it?

4 A Christian young man living in South America went through a bitter trial. After it was over, he moved to Europe and later commented to someone, “I left my corpse in South America.” What does that mean? Why must we all, in a sense, leave our corpse somewhere? What role do trials have in that process?

5 As a class, plan an outing to a hospital or somewhere where you could be of help, comfort, and cheer to those who, for whatever reason, are in a crucible.

INSIDE *Story*

Part 2: Bullied at School

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Mother was worried about Junior. The usually cheerful 15-year-old boy had become uptight and hostile in their home in Manaus, Brazil. Against her wishes, he had signed up to learn Capoeira, an African-Brazilian martial art.

"Eduardo, I don't like Junior learning martial arts," she told her husband.

"It's no problem for me to take him," he replied. "The classes are just up the street from the Candomblé temple where I work."

"That also bothers me," Mother said. "I didn't know whether Capoeira and Candomblé are somehow related, but I don't want my son doing either."

Father scowled. "Junior told me that some boys are bullying him at school," he said. "That's why he decided to take martial arts."

The next day, as Mother waited at school to take Junior home, she poured out her heart to Dilma Araujos dos Santos, the mother of one of Junior's classmates, Clifferson. "My son doesn't have any good friends," she said.

A few days later, Clifferson invited Junior to a video gamers club at his house. Mother, pleased that Junior had found a friend, allowed him to go.

At Clifferson's house, Junior found several boys playing a sports video game. After a few minutes, Clifferson turned off the game and invited the boys to sing about Jesus. Then the boys opened Bibles and talked about what Jesus meant to them. "Are you Christians?" Junior asked. "Yes," Clifferson said. "At our club, we play sports games and talk about Jesus."

Junior liked his new friends; he didn't miss any meetings after that.

One day, Clifferson's mother invited Junior to go to church with the family. Junior was happy to spend more time with Clifferson, and stopped going to martial arts classes. He didn't tell Mother he was visiting Alpha Seventh-day Adventist Community Church. He only said he was going out.

Mother soon noticed that Junior was eager to leave the house on Saturday, and she asked what he was doing. He showed her the YouTube channel where the church live-streamed its Sabbath services. Mother began to watch.

One Sabbath, Junior told Mother that a man had given his heart to Jesus and been baptized at the church. "I want to be baptized," he said.

A few Sabbaths later, Mother accompanied Junior to church. She listened as the Sabbath School teacher taught from the adult Bible study guide. Someone gave her a Bible, and she looked up the verses the teacher read from Revelation. A chill ran down her spine when she read, " 'But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death' " (Rev. 21:8, NKJV).

That's the destiny of my husband, Mother thought. He will perish in the lake of fire. She began to pray for Father.

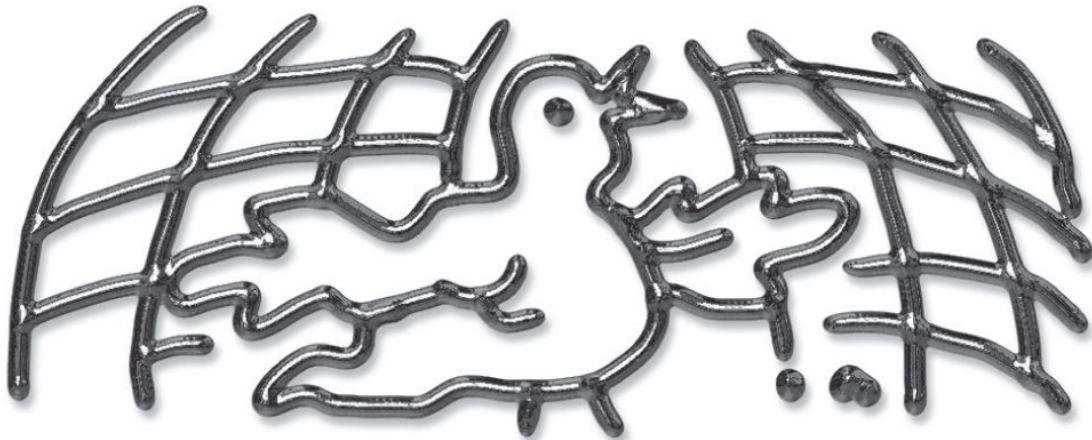
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LESSON 3

*July 9–15

The Birdcage



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exodus 14, Exod. 15:22–27, Exod. 17:1–7, Luke 4:1–13, 1 Pet. 1:6–9, Proverbs 3.*

Memory Text: “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials” (1 Peter 1:6, NKJV).

In the full light of day, and in hearing of the music of other voices, the caged bird will not sing the song that his master seeks to teach him. He learns a snatch of this, a trill of that, but never a separate and entire melody. But the master covers the cage, and places it where the bird will listen to the one song he is to sing. In the dark, he tries and tries again to sing that song until it is learned, and he breaks forth in perfect melody. Then the bird is brought forth, and ever after he can sing that song in the light. Thus God deals with His children. He has a song to teach us, and when we have learned it

amid the shadows of affliction we can sing it ever afterward.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 472.

Notice that the one who carries the bird into the darkness is the master himself.

It is easy to understand that Satan causes pain, but would God Himself actively take a part in guiding us into crucibles where we experience confusion or hurt?

The Week at a Glance: What examples can you think of in the Bible in which God Himself leads people into experiences that He knows will include suffering? What do you think were the new songs He wanted them to sing?

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 16.*

SUNDAY *July 10*

To the Promised Land via a Dead End

“And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD” (*Exod. 14:10, NKJV*).

Have you ever been set up, led into a trap or to a dead end? Sometimes it can be nice, like walking unexpectedly into a room of waiting friends who all shout “Surprise! Happy birthday!” At other times it can be quite a shock, even a very unpleasant one. It may have been bullies when you were at school or a work colleague who unexpectedly tried to make you look bad.

From the day the Israelites left Egypt to the day they reached the Promised Land, “the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night” (*Exod. 13:21, NIV*). Every part of their journey was led by God Himself. But look at where He led them first: to a place where the sea was before them, mountains were on either side, and Pharaoh’s army was within eyesight right behind!

Read Exodus 14. Why did God bring the Israelites to a place where He knew they would be terrified?

Following “the pillar” doesn’t assure us of constant happiness. It also can be a hard experience, because training in righteousness takes us to places that test our hearts, which are so naturally deceitful (*Jer. 17:9*). During these difficulties, the key to knowing when we are truly following God is not necessarily the absence of trials or pain but, rather, an openness to God’s instruction and a continual submission of our minds and hearts to His leading.

What lesson did the Israelites learn from this experience?
Exod. 14:31.

Why is trusting God sometimes so hard, even though we may know many of the wonderful promises He has for us? Recount a difficult situation you believe the Lord led you into in order to teach you to “believe” in and to “fear” Him.

MONDAY *July 11*

Bitter Waters

“The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink” (Exod. 17:1, NIV).

Perhaps we might not get from God everything we want, but couldn't we expect to get all that we need? Not what we think we need but what we truly need?

There was one thing the Israelites certainly needed, and that was water. Just after God in the cloud led the Israelites through the Red Sea, they followed Him through the hot, waterless desert for three days. Particularly in the desert, where finding water is so critical, their desperation is understandable. When would they get the water they needed?

So, where does God lead them? The pillar goes to Marah, where, at last, there is water. They must have been excited. But when they tasted the water, they immediately spat it out because it was bitter. “So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, ‘What are we to drink?’ ” (Exod. 15:24, NIV).

Then, a few days later, God does it again. This time, however, the pillar actually stops where there is no water at all (Exod. 17:1).

Read Exodus 15:22–27 and Exodus 17:1–7. What did God reveal to Israel about Himself at Marah and at Rephidim? What lessons should they have learned?

In Rephidim, what question did the children of Israel ask? *Exod. 17:7*. Have you ever asked the same question? If so, why? How did you feel, and what lessons did you learn after you had it answered? How many times do we need to get it answered before we stop asking it altogether?

TUESDAY *July 12*

The Great Controversy in the Desert

“Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil” (Luke 4:1, 2, NKJV).

Read Luke 4:1–13. What lessons can you learn from this account about how to overcome temptation and not give in to sin?

Temptations can be so difficult because they appeal to things we really desire, and they always seem to come at our weakest moments.

Luke 4 is the beginning of the story of Jesus’ temptation by Satan, and it brings some difficult issues to our attention. At first glance, it appears that the Holy Spirit is leading Jesus into temptation. However, God never tempts us (*James 1:13*). Rather, as we have been seeing, God does lead us to crucibles of testing. What is striking in Luke 4 is that the Holy Spirit can lead us to times of testing that involve being exposed to Satan’s fierce temptations. At such times, when we feel these temptations so strongly, we may misunderstand and think we have not been following God correctly.

But this is not necessarily true. “Often when placed in a trying situation we doubt that the Spirit of God has been leading us. But it was the Spirit’s leading that brought Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. When God brings us into trial, He has a purpose to accomplish for our good. Jesus did not presume on God’s promises by going unbidden into temptation, neither did He give up to despondency when temptation came upon Him. Nor should we.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 126, 129.

Sometimes, when in the crucible, we get burned rather than purified. It is therefore very comforting to know that when we crumple under temptation, we can hope again because Jesus stood firm. The good news is that because Jesus is our Sin Bearer, because He paid the penalty for our failure to endure that temptation (whatever it was), because He went through a crucible worse than any of us will ever face, we are not cast off or forsaken by God. There is hope, even for the “chief” of sinners (*1 Tim. 1:15*).

What temptations are you facing now? Spend some time in prayer, asking the Lord to teach you how to apply the lessons from Jesus’ example to your own life. Remember, you don’t have to succumb to temptation, ever! Remember, too, that if you do succumb, you have a Savior.

WEDNESDAY *July 13*

An Enduring Legacy

Read 1 Peter 1:6, 7. What is Peter saying?

Peter was writing to people who were battling through difficulties and often felt very alone. He was writing “to God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (*1 Pet. 1:1, NIV*). This is the area we know today as western Turkey. A few verses later, Peter says that he knows that they are experiencing “grief in all kinds of trials” (*1 Pet. 1:6, NIV*).

What does Peter mean by saying that they are “exiles” and “scattered”? How might that add to their trials?

Being a Christian during those times was a new thing; believers were small in number and in various places where they were a decided minority who were often misunderstood at best, persecuted at worst. Peter assures them, however, that these trials are not

random or chaotic (*1 Pet. 1:6, 7*). Genuine faith is the goal of those who persevere through “all kinds of trials.”

Read 1 Peter 1:6–9. What ultimate assurance does Peter seek to give these people amid their trials? What does this hope mean for us, too?

Whatever their trials, whatever they suffer, how can it be compared to the eternity that awaits them when Christ returns? Peter’s words to them are God’s words to us, regardless of whatever we are facing. However difficult or painful our trials, we must never lose sight of the ultimate end, eternal life in a new heaven and new earth, without pain, suffering, or death. With such a promise before us, a promise guaranteed us through the death of Jesus, how important that we not lose faith, but instead, amid our trials, ask the Lord to purge us of everything and anything that stands in the way of our faith.

THURSDAY *July 14*

Trial by Fire

There was a young man whom we'll call Alex. He had come out of a very troubled youth: drugs, violence, even some time in jail. But then, through the kindness of a local church member (whom Alex had stolen from), Alex learned about God and gave his heart to Jesus. Though he still had his problems and struggles, and though elements of his past still lingered, Alex was a new person in Jesus. He loved God and sought to express that love by obeying His commandments (*1 John 5:1, 2*). At one point, Alex felt impressed that he should be a minister. Everything pointed to it. He was answering God's call, no doubt about it.

At college things went well at first. Then one thing after another went awry, and his life began coming apart. His source of money started to dry up; a close friend turned against him, making accusations about him that were false but that damaged his reputation. Next, he kept on getting sick; no one knew what it was, but it impacted his studies to the point where he was afraid that he was going to have to drop out of school completely. On top of it all, he was fighting fierce temptations with drugs, which were readily available in the local community. At one point he even fell in that area. Alex couldn't understand why all this was happening, especially because he was sure that the Lord had led him to this school to begin with. *Was Alex wrong about that? If so, was his whole experience with God a huge mistake?* Even the most basic elements of his faith were coming under doubt.

Imagine that, amid this crisis, Alex comes to you and asks for advice. What would you say? What experiences of your own

have you had that could help someone like him? What Bible texts would you use? How helpful might the following texts be in such a situation? *Proverbs 3, Jer. 29:13, Rom. 8:28, 2 Cor. 12:9, Heb. 13:5.*

Almost all who follow the Lord have had crises during which they've been tempted to doubt the Lord's leading. The important thing in such situations is to cling to the promises, recount God's leading in the past, and pray for faith and endurance. The Lord will never give up on us. The question for us is: How do we not succumb to the temptation to give up on Him?

FRIDAY *July 15*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Exodus,” pp. 281–290; “From the Red Sea to Sinai,” pp. 291–302, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Temptation,” pp. 114–123, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“But of old the Lord led his people to Rephidim, and he may choose to lead us there also, to test our loyalty. He does not always bring us to pleasant places. If he did, in our self-sufficiency we should forget that he is our helper. He longs to manifest himself to us, and to reveal the abundant supplies at our disposal, and he permits trial and disappointment to come to us that we may realize our helplessness, and learn to call upon him for aid. He can cause cooling streams to flow from the flinty rock. We shall never know, until we are face to face with God, when we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known, how many burdens he has borne for us, and how many burdens he would have been glad to bear, if, with childlike faith, we had brought them to him.”—Ellen G. White, “Rephidim,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 7, 1903.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** We often talk of temptation as an individual thing, which, of course, it is. At the same time, are there any corporate temptations, things that we as a church or a local church family might have to guard against as a group? If so, what?
- 2** Ask those who are willing to talk about any of the “unpleasant places” that they have been brought to. Why were these unpleasant? If they had to revisit those experiences today, would they view them any differently?

- 3** We all understand the principle behind God allowing us to be purified and refined by trials. How, though, do we understand the situation in which trials appear to have no value—for instance, someone is killed instantly in a car wreck? As a class, seek to work through possible answers.
- 4** As a class, take time together to pray for each other, that each might be strengthened to endure trials and stay faithful.
- 5** Does your class know of anyone who, having faced trials, lost the way? If so, as a class what could you do in a very tangible way to help lead that person back?

INSIDE *Story*

Part 3: Abandoned by Father

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Father always seemed to be angry after Mother told him that she was going to the Adventist Church. Every little thing irritated him. One night, he exploded with rage when Mother arrived home late from a church event.

The next morning, Mother arrived at the dental clinic, where she worked as a secretary, in Manaus, Brazil, and learned that she no longer had a job. The clinic had closed. All the way home, she wondered how to tell Father. But he wasn't at home, and he didn't answer phone calls. Then Mother noticed that his clothes were missing from the closet. He had left home.

Mother didn't say a word to their son, Junior. The boy, busy at school and the gamers club, only noticed that Father was gone three days later when he received a WhatsApp video message on his cell phone. Father said Adventism and his faith, Candomblé, could not coexist in the same house.

Mother also received a WhatsApp message. Father said he had moved to the Candomblé temple, where he worshiped evil spirits as a high priest.

"I'm never going to give up my religion," he said. "You have to accept it."

Mother had never heard about the great controversy between Christ and Satan. But she was worried, and she met with Ricardo Coelho, pastor of Alpha Seventh-day Adventist Community Church. Weeping, she confided that Father worked as a Candomblé high priest and had deserted the family.

Pastor Ricardo comforted Mother and, opening his Bible, said kindly, "Let me share some advice with you." In 1 Corinthians 7:3, he read, "Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and

likewise also the wife to her husband' ” (NKJV). In Proverbs 14:1, he read, “ ‘The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands’ ” (NKJV). Looking at Mother, he said, “Be a good wife to your husband, Eduardo, and pray for him.”

The Bible verses encouraged Mother, and she decided to pray even more.

Weeks passed, and Mother ran out of money. She found strength in the Bible and prayed the promise of Joshua 1:9, which says, “ ‘Be strong and of good courage ... for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go’ ” (NKJV).

When Grandmother, Father’s mother, learned that the family was low on food, she called Father, and he began to deliver groceries.

One day, Grandmother told Mother that spirits had summoned her and Junior to the temple. When the pair arrived, Father was possessed by an evil spirit who spoke through him in a low, distorted voice. The spirit said Father could go back home but threatened to kill him if Mother or Junior tried to teach him about their religion or invited him to church.

Father returned home that day. He had been gone for two months. Mother prayed even more.

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LESSON 4

*July 16–22

Seeing *the* Goldsmith's Face



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 5:16, 1 Cor. 4:9, Eph. 3:10, Job 23:1–10, Matt. 25:1–12, Dan. 12:1–10, Eph. 4:11–16.*

Memory Text: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18, NKJV).

Amy Carmichael took a group of children to a traditional goldsmith in India. In the middle of a charcoal fire was a curved roof tile. On the tile was a mixture of salt, tamarind fruit, and brick dust. Embedded in this mixture was gold. As the fire devoured the mixture, the gold became purer. The goldsmith took the gold out with tongs and, if it was not pure enough, he replaced it in the fire with a new mixture. But each time the gold was

replaced, the heat was increased. The group asked, “How do you know when the gold is purified?” He replied, “When I can see my face in it.”—Amy Carmichael, *Learning of God* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1989), p. 50.

God is seeking to purify us, to refine us like gold, to transform us into His image. That’s an astonishing goal, and it seems even more astonishing that a Christlike character is developed in us only as we pass through life’s crucibles.

The Week at a Glance: What role does suffering have in the purifying process? How do we understand all this in the context of the great controversy?

* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 23.*

SUNDAY *July 17*

“In His Image”

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (*Rom. 8:29, NKJV*).

In the beginning, God made us in His image (*Gen. 1:27*), but that image has been corrupted by sin.

In what ways do we see this defacing of God’s image in humanity?

It’s obvious: we all have been corrupted by sin (*Rom. 3:10–19*). Yet, God’s desire is to restore us to what we should have been originally. This is where our verse today fits in. It reveals God’s plan that those who submit their lives to the Holy Spirit may be “conformed to the image of his Son” (*Rom. 8:29, NIV*).

But there’s another dimension. “The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

How do you understand what Ellen White says to us in the quote cited above? (See also Job 1, Matt. 5:16, 1 Cor. 4:9, and Eph. 3:10.)

As Christians, we must never forget that we are in the midst of a cosmic drama. The great controversy between Christ and Satan is unfolding all around us. The battle takes many shapes and is manifested in many ways. And though much is hidden, we can understand that, as followers of Christ, we have a part to play in this drama and can bring honor to Christ through our lives.

Imagine being on the field of a huge stadium. Sitting on the bleachers on one side are heavenly beings loyal to the Lord; on the other side are beings who have fallen with Lucifer. If your life for the past 24 hours were played out on that field, which side would have more to cheer about? What does your answer tell you about yourself?

MONDAY *July 18*

Faith Amid the Refining Fire

It's one thing to be in a battle; it's another not even to see the forces arrayed in that battle. In a sense, this is what we as Christians deal with. We know that the forces are out there, we can feel them in our lives, and yet, we have to press ahead in faith, trusting Him "who is invisible" (*Heb. 11:27, NKJV*).

Read Job 23:1–10. What is the essence of Job's struggle? What does he not see? At the same time, what does he take on faith, despite all his trials?

Even amid his terrible trials, Job trusted in the Lord. Despite everything, Job was determined to endure. And one of the things that kept him persevering was gold—not a gold medal; rather, he was looking into the future and realized that if he held on to God, he would come out the better for it—he would come out like gold. How much Job knew of what was happening behind the scenes, we aren't told. Regardless of how much was hidden from him, he endured the refining fire anyway.

Do you fear the fire? Do you worry about the heat that circumstances generate? Perhaps, as with Job, the heat of God

seems unexplainable. It may be the difficulty of adjusting to a new job or a new home. It could be having to survive ill treatment at work, or even within your own family. It could be illness or financial loss. Hard as it is to understand, God can use these trials to refine you and purify you and bring out His image in your character.

Being proven to be gold seems to be an incentive for Job here, something to fix his eyes upon, and that helps pull him through his troubles. It's a powerful testimony to his character already that, amid all the pain and suffering, he was able to sense the reality of the purifying process. Also, however much he didn't understand, he knew that these trials would refine him.

In your own experience, how do trials refine and purify? What other ways could you be refined, other than through suffering?

TUESDAY *July 19*

Jesus' Last Words

Jesus was in Jerusalem, about to die. According to Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' last teaching hour before Passover is spent telling His disciples parables, including the ones about the ten virgins and the sheep and the goats. These stories are related to the way we should live as we wait for Jesus to come. Thus, their relevancy to today—with the signs of Jesus' soon return all around us—has never been more significant.

In the parable of the ten virgins (*Matt. 25:1–12*), many commentators point out that the oil is a symbol for the Holy Spirit. Ellen White agrees, but also says that this oil is a symbol for character and that it is something no one can acquire for us.

Read the parable. In what ways does the meaning of the story change, depending on whether you see oil as a symbol of the Holy Spirit or of the possession of character? What are the implications of this story for you if the oil represents the Holy Spirit, or a Christlike character?

Holy Spirit: _____

Character: _____

Read the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31–46. What criteria are used in separating the sheep and the goats?

Notice that the king separates the sheep and the goats based on their works, their character. Though Jesus is not teaching salvation by works here, we can see how important character development is in the plan of salvation and how those who are truly saved by Christ will reflect that salvation through their lives and characters.

It has been said that “character is what a person is in the dark.” What sort of person are you when no one is looking? What does the answer tell you about changes that you need to make?

WEDNESDAY *July 20*

“The Wise”

Yesterday we looked at the importance of character for those waiting for the Second Coming. Today we will look more specifically at the importance of character for those who are alive at the second coming of Jesus.

Read Daniel 12:1–10. What is the context? What time in earth’s history is being referred to? Most important, what can we tell from these verses about the character of God’s people during these times? What characteristics are given them, in contrast to the wicked? (See also Rev. 22:11.)

Daniel is told that just before Jesus comes, there will be a time of distress unequalled at any other time of history. In Daniel 12:3, 10, we’re given a depiction of the righteous and the wicked during this time. Notice how the wicked “ ‘shall do wickedly’ ” (*Dan. 12:10, NKJV*) in contrast to the righteous, who in verse 3 shine brightly, perhaps because they have been “ ‘purified, made spotless and refined’ ” (*Dan. 12:10, NIV*) during this “ ‘time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time’ ” (*Dan. 12:1,*

NKJV). In contrast, too, the wicked do not understand, but the righteous are “wise” and do understand.

Understand what? Math, science, higher criticism? Proverbs says that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (*Prov. 1:7, NKJV*). Perhaps, in this context, the “wise” are wise because they have an understanding of these final events, the time of trouble as it unfolds. They are not taken by surprise; from their study of the Word, they know it’s coming. And most important, they know enough to allow this time of trouble to purify and refine them; the wicked, on the other hand, are just made more obstinate in their rebellion and thus continue in their wickedness.

The crucial point is that here we are given a depiction of a people who have been through a refining and purifying process.

Though we’ve looked at these texts in the context of the very last days, what principles do we see here that can help us to understand better what the purifying and refining process is all about, even today?

THURSDAY *July 21*

Character and Community

A song goes like this: “I am a rock, I am an island.” Have you ever felt like that—wanting to stand alone? You may even have heard people say, “Well, my walk with God is a private affair. It’s not something I want to talk about.”

Read Ephesians 4:11–16. What’s the point Paul is making here? What role does he give here for community?

When Paul writes to the Ephesians, he describes the church as a body. Jesus is the Head, and His people make up the rest. If you look at Ephesians 4:13, you will notice the ultimate purpose of living in such a community—it is to experience “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (*NIV*). And for that we need each other!

It certainly is possible to be a Christian all alone. Indeed, as for many people throughout the centuries who have been ridiculed or persecuted, standing alone is often unavoidable. It is a powerful witness to the power of God that men and women do not buckle under the pressures that surround them. However, while this is true, Paul emphasizes a critical truth: ultimately, we experience and reveal the fullness of Christ when we are working together in fellowship with each other.

In today's text, what does Paul say must happen before the fullness of Christ may be revealed in our Christian community?

In what way is the witness of a community that is revealing the fullness of Christ different from the witness of an individual that is revealing the fullness of Christ? What are the implications for this in the context of the great controversy? (See *Eph. 3:10*.)

It's easy to be nice when you are by yourself or with strangers, but it is much harder to be nice to people you either know really well or don't like. This means that when we still show these people grace and kindness, we provide an irresistible witness to the truth about God.

FRIDAY *July 22*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “God Promises Us a New Heart of Flesh,” p. 100, in *Sons and Daughters of God*; “‘To Meet the Bridegroom,’ ” pp. 405–421, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “The Time of Trouble,” pp. 613–634, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Character building is the most important work ever entrusted to human beings; and never before was its diligent study so important as now. Never was any previous generation called to meet issues so momentous; never before were young men and young women confronted by perils so great as confront them today.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 225.

“In the parable, the foolish virgins are represented as begging for oil, and failing to receive it at their request. This is symbolic of those who have not prepared themselves by developing a character to stand in a time of crisis. It is as if they should go to their neighbors and say, Give me your character, or I shall be lost. Those that were wise could not impart their oil to the flickering lamps of the foolish virgins. Character is not transferable. It is not to be bought or sold; it is to be acquired. The Lord has given to every individual an opportunity to obtain a righteous character through the hours of probation; but he has not provided a way by which one human agent may impart to another the character which he has developed by going through hard experiences, by learning lessons from the great Teacher, so that he can manifest patience under trial, and exercise faith so that he can remove mountains of impossibility.”—Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*, January 16, 1896.

Discussion Questions:

1 What does “character building” mean? How can you do this? How much of a visible priority is character building within your own life and your church community?

2 Thursday’s study talked about the important role of community in the life of a Christian. How well does your local church function as the body of Christ? How well do you represent the Lord as a community? As a class, talk about what you can do to improve.

3 As a class, talk about the question of why character building is important, even though we are saved by faith alone in Jesus. Since His righteousness and His perfect character are what save us, then why do we need to develop character?

4 Helen Keller, who was deaf and blind from an early age, wrote, “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”—*Leadership*, vol. 17, no. 4. Do you agree? Discuss the relationships between character, suffering, and the great controversy.

INSIDE *Story*

Part 4: Plotting With Spirits

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Months passed before Mother and Junior learned why Father had abandoned them for two months and lived in the Candomblé temple in Manaus, Brazil. It was because Junior wanted to become a Seventh-day Adventist.

After seeing a man baptized at Alpha Seventh-day Adventist Community Church, Junior told Mother that he also wanted to be baptized. Mother told Father, and Father, at the temple, was ordered by evil spirits to stop the plan.

At home, Father tried to convince Junior to reconsider, but the boy stood firm. The evil spirits stepped up their pressure, telling Father that he would be destroyed if he did not stop Junior. Father didn't understand how Junior's baptism could destroy him, but he agreed to a plan by the spirits to move out of the house. The spirits said Mother would lose both her husband and her job on the same day, and she would stop taking Junior to church. Father didn't want to leave home, and he worried about the plan all day. But when Mother arrived home late from a church event that night, he angrily decided to leave.

At first, the plan unfolded as predicted. The next day, Father left the house, and Mother lost her job. But the rest of the plan fell through. The spirits had hoped that Mother would run out of money and stop taking Junior to church. But when Mother couldn't afford to buy gasoline, church members offered rides in their cars. After two months, the spirits declared that they would create a new plan to prevent Junior from being baptized. They told Father to return home.

Meanwhile, Junior had started Bible studies in preparation for baptism. He joined Pathfinders, participated in the church's music program, and helped operate the church's sound system. Although

the evil spirits had promised to stop Junior from being baptized, the boy's desire only grew. To Father's chagrin, Mother also started talking about getting baptized.

Pastor Ricardo set the date for Junior's baptism on October 29, a year after the boy had first heard about the Adventist Church at his friend Clifferson's house. Mother longed to be baptized at the same time. When she told Pastor Ricardo, he gazed at her seriously. "You cannot be baptized because you're not legally married," he said. The words hit Mother like a punch. Her common-law marriage was blocking her desire to be baptized with Junior. Pastor Ricardo saw her disappointment. "Don't worry," he said. "Ask Eduardo to marry you."

Tears flowed down Mother's cheeks as she left church. She doubted Father would agree, but she sought him out. "I have a question. No matter how you answer, our relationship won't change. Will you marry me?"

Father pursed his lips into a pouty, puppy-dog expression. Then his face grew serious. "No," he said. "I'll never marry you."

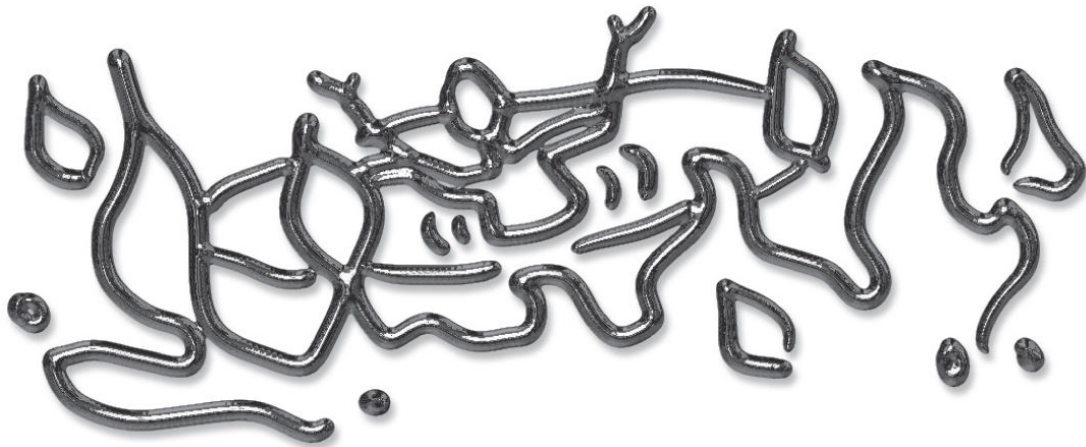
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LESSON 5

*July 23–29

Extreme Heat



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 22, Hos. 2:1–12, Job 1:6–2:10, 2 Cor. 11:23–29, Isa. 43:1–7.*

Memory Text: “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand” (*Isaiah 53:10, NKJV*).

As the wife of the famous Christian writer C. S. Lewis was dying, Lewis wrote, “Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not ‘So there’s no God after all,’ but ‘So this is what God’s really like.’ ”—*A Grief Observed* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1961), pp. 6, 7.

When things become really painful, some of us reject God completely. For others, like Lewis, there is the temptation to change our view of God and imagine all sorts of bad things about Him. The question is, Just how hot can it get? How much heat is God willing to risk putting His people through in order to bring about His ultimate purpose of shaping us into the “image of his Son” (*Rom. 8:29, NIV*)?

The Week at a Glance: Why do you think God is willing to risk being misunderstood by those He wants to know Him and love Him? How much do you think God is willing to be misunderstood in order to mold you into the “image of his Son”?

** Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 30.*

SUNDAY *July 24*

Abraham in the Crucible

Read Genesis 22. Out of nowhere and without explanation, God suddenly calls Abraham to offer his own child as a burnt offering. Can you imagine how Abraham must have felt? It was a totally revolting idea that a holy God should request that he sacrifice his own son. Even if Abraham thought that this was acceptable, what about God's promises of an inheritance? Without his son, the promise would be gone.

Why did God ask Abraham to offer this sacrifice? If God knows everything, what was the point?

God's request and its timing were not random. Indeed, it was calculated to exact the deepest possible anguish, for "God had reserved His last, most trying test for Abraham until the burden of years was heavy upon him, and he longed for rest."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 147. Was this the test of a mad God? Not at all, for "the agony which he endured during the dark days of that fearful trial was permitted that he might understand from his own experience something of the greatness of the sacrifice made by the

infinite God for man's redemption.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 154.

This was just a test—God never intended for Abraham to kill his son. This highlights something very important about the way God sometimes works. God may ask us to do something that He never intends for us to complete. He may ask us to go somewhere He never intends for us to arrive at. What is important to God is not necessarily the end, but what we learn as we are reshaped by the process.

Jesus may have been thinking about Abraham's experience when He said to the Jews, “ ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad’ ” (*John 8:56, NIV*). Abraham could have missed out on this insight, dismissing the instructions as from Satan. The key to Abraham's surviving and learning through the whole process was knowing God's voice.

How do you know the voice of God? How do you know when God is talking to you? What are the ways He communicates His will to you?

MONDAY *July 25*

Wayward Israel

The story of Hosea has some powerful lessons to teach us. Hosea's situation is remarkable. His wife, Gomer, runs away and has children with other men. Though she is sexually unfaithful, God calls Hosea to take his wife back and fully show his love to her again. This story is meant as a parable about God and Israel. The Israelites had left God and were prostituting themselves spiritually to other gods, but God still loved them and wanted to show His love to them. But just look at God's methods!

Read Hosea 2:1–12. What methods does God say He will use to pull Israel back to Himself? What would these experiences have felt like?

Hosea 2:2, 3

Hosea 2:5–7

Hosea 2:8, 9

Hosea 2:10

This story raises two important issues about the way we experience God when He is bringing us to repentance.

First, we risk not recognizing that God is at work. When Israel went through such hard and painful experiences, it might have been hard for them to recognize that their God was working for their salvation. When our path is blocked by sharp thorns or we are walled in so that we don't know where we are going (*Hos. 2:6*)—is this God? When our basic necessities disappear or we are embarrassed (*Hos. 2:9, 10*)—could our Father be in the middle of it all? The truth is that whatever we feel, God is always working to bring us to repentance, because He loves us so very much.

Second, we risk misunderstanding God when He is at work. We may recognize that God is at work, but we don't like what He's doing. While we are feeling hurt and embarrassed, it is easy to blame God for being cruel, for not intervening, or for not caring. But God is always working to renew us through His covenant of love.

Read Hosea 2:14–23. What does this passage reveal about God? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if you have been running from God in any area of your life. If you are convicted that you have been, why wait to go through the crucible? What's stopping you from surrendering all to the Lord now?

TUESDAY *July 26*

Surviving Through Worship

Read Job 1:6–2:10. What caused Job's suffering?

There is something astonishing here. The angels come to see God, and Satan comes with them. God asks Satan where he has been, and Satan replies that he has been “ ‘roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it’ ” (*Job 1:7, NIV*). Then God poses this question: “ ‘Have you considered my servant Job?’ ” (*Job 1:8, NIV*). The question itself is not remarkable; what is remarkable is the One who asks it. It isn't Satan who points out Job as a subject for examination—it's God. Knowing exactly what is going to follow, God calls Job to Satan's attention. Down on the earth, Job has absolutely no idea how hot his crucible is about to become. And though it's very clear that it is Satan, not God, who causes Job's suffering, it also is clear that it is God who gives His explicit permission for Satan to destroy Job's possessions, children, and his own physical health. If God is giving permission for Job to suffer, what difference does it make whether God or Satan is personally inflicting the suffering? How can God be righteous and holy when He actively allows Satan to cause Job such pain? Is this situation a special case, or is it characteristic of the way God still deals with us today?

In Job 1:20, 21, how does Job respond to the trials?

It is possible to respond to such suffering in two ways. We can become bitter and angry, turning our backs on a God we believe to be cruel or nonexistent, or we can hang on to God more tightly. Job deals with his catastrophe by staying in God's presence and worshipping Him.

In Job 1:20, 21, we see three aspects of worship that may help when in anguish. First, Job accepts his helplessness and recognizes that he has no claim to anything: " 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart' " (*Job 1:21, NIV*). Second, Job acknowledges that God is still in total control: " 'The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away' " (*Job 1:21, NIV*). Third, Job concludes by reasserting his belief in the righteousness of God. " 'May the name of the LORD be praised' " (*Job 1:21, NIV*).

Going through a trial? Follow the steps that Job used. How might they help you, as well?

WEDNESDAY *July 27*

Surviving Through Hope

“We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:8, 9, NIV).

As God’s chosen apostle, Paul endured more than most people. Yet, Paul was not crushed. Rather, he grew in his praise for God. Read his list of hardships in 2 Corinthians 11:23–29. Now read 2 Corinthians 1:3–11.

In 2 Corinthians 1:4, Paul states that the reason for receiving God’s compassion and comfort is “so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (NIV). To what extent might suffering be a call to ministry? How could we become more alert to this possibility?

God wants to minister through us to hurting people. This means that He may first allow us to experience the same sort of hurts. Then we’ll offer encouragement, not from theory but from our own experience of the compassion and comfort of God. This is a principle from Jesus’ life (see *Heb. 4:15*).

Paul's vivid descriptions of his hardships are not to make us feel sorry for him. They are for us to know that even when we're in the depths, the Father still can intervene to bring His compassion and comfort. We may despair even of our own lives, and even be killed, but fear not, God is teaching us to rely on Him. We can trust Him, for our God "raises the dead" (2 Cor. 1:9, NIV).

As Paul continues to set his eyes on proclaiming the gospel, he knows that God will rescue him in the future, as well. Paul's ability to remain firm is supported by three things he mentions in 2 Corinthians 1:10, 11. First, God's proven track record: "He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us" (2 Cor. 1:10, NIV). Second, Paul's determination to fix his concentration on God Himself: "On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us" (2 Cor. 1:10, NIV). Third, the saints' continual intercession: "as you help us by your prayers" (2 Cor. 1:11, NIV).

What can you learn from Paul that can help you keep from falling into self-pity amid your own struggles?

THURSDAY *July 28*

Extreme Heat

So far this quarter, we have considered many examples of the crucibles that God uses to bring purity and Christlikeness to our lives. However, some people may view these examples and conclude that God is a severe and demanding taskmaster. Sure, some may say, “We know that God wants something good for us, but these examples don’t reveal much care and love. Instead, God looks more like a bully. He sets out with a purpose that causes us considerable hard times, and there’s nothing we can do about it.”

It’s true that while living on this sin-filled earth, we will understand only a little of why things happen. In heaven we’ll understand so much more (*1 Cor. 4:5, 1 Cor. 13:12*), but for now, we will have to live with the tension of believing that God is present and cares for us, even though things don’t always feel too good. Isaiah describes this tension very well.

Read Isaiah 43:1–7. In verse 2, God says that His people will pass through waters and through fire. These are figurative of extreme dangers, but perhaps they hint at the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan, both fearful times—but times that paved the way to a new life. You may expect that God might say that He would protect His people from these dangers, that He would guide them along an easier route. But like the Shepherd in Psalm 23, He says, rather, that when the difficult times come, God’s people need not be overwhelmed, for He is with them.

Look back at Isaiah 43:1–7. Write down the different ways in which God assures His people of comfort during the times of

water and fire. What picture of God does this paint in your mind? Which promises can you claim for yourself?

We can summarize what we have learned about God's crucibles in three ways. First, God's extreme heat is to destroy not us but our sin. Second, God's extreme heat is not to make us miserable but to make us pure, as we were created to be. Third, God's care for us through all things is constant and tender—He will never leave us alone, no matter what happens to us.

What do these texts teach you about the actions and character of God? *Ps. 103:13, 14; Matt. 28:20; 1 Cor. 10:13; and 1 Pet. 1:7.* How have you experienced the reality of these verses in your own life?

FRIDAY *July 29*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Test of Faith,” pp. 145–155, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Praise Ye the Lord,” pp. 315–319, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5.

“God has always tried His people in the furnace of affliction. It is in the heat of the furnace that the dross is separated from the true gold of the Christian character. Jesus watches the test; He knows what is needed to purify the precious metal, that it may reflect the radiance of His love. It is by close, testing trials that God disciplines His servants. He sees that some have powers which may be used in the advancement of His work, and He puts these persons upon trial; in His providence He brings them into positions that test their character. ... He shows them their own weakness, and teaches them to lean upon Him. ... Thus His object is attained. They are educated, trained, and disciplined, prepared to fulfill the grand purpose for which their powers were given them.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 129, 130.

“If in the providence of God we are called upon to endure trials, let us accept the cross and drink the bitter cup, remembering that it is a Father’s hand that holds it to our lips. Let us trust Him in the darkness as well as in the day. Can we not believe that He will give us everything that is for our good? ... Even in the night of affliction how can we refuse to lift heart and voice in grateful praise, when we remember the love to us expressed by the cross of Calvary?”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 316.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, have someone recount his or her own test of faith that, if not quite as intense as Abraham’s, was still hard

enough. What can you learn from that person's experience, from his or her successes or failures?

2 Review the last 24 hours of Christ's life before His crucifixion. What extremes did He face? How did He endure? What principles can we take from His example and apply for ourselves when we are in the midst of our own crucibles?

3 Discuss the idea, touched on this week, about how through our own suffering we can minister to others who are suffering. No matter how true it might be, what are some of the problems we might encounter with this idea?

4 Ellen G. White wrote above: "Let us trust Him in the darkness as well as in the day." That's easier said than done. How can we help each other develop the kind of faith that will enable us to do just that? Why is it important to trust God in the bad times?

INSIDE *Story*

Part 5: Crashing a Baptism

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The day of Junior's baptism arrived. Five people, including Junior, were to be baptized at 4:00 P.M. at Alpha Seventh-day Adventist Community Church in Manaus, Brazil. "I won't go," Father said. "Drive me to the temple."

On the way to church, Mother wondered out loud whether Father might still show up in his high priestly robes from the Candomblé temple. "I don't care if Father comes in all his robes," Junior said. "I'll accept him."

At the church, Pastor Ricardo announced that Junior would be baptized first and invited him to share his story as he stood near the baptismal pool. Junior shared how he was bullied at school and his classmate Clifferson had invited him to a video gamers club that sang about Jesus and discussed the Bible. When Junior finished, he waded into the baptismal pool and turned around to look at the congregation. At that moment, Father, wearing his high priestly robes, entered the sanctuary. Mother burst into tears. "He's here," she said. "He said he wouldn't come, but he's here."

Heads turned to look at the back of the hall. Mother prayed silently, and church members familiar with Father's work also prayed. Others stared in amazement at Father's flowing robes. Everyone treated him with respect.

A church deacon stood beside Father, greeting him. "Welcome, Eduardo!" said the deacon, Roberto Fernandez. "We were waiting for you. Come!" He led Father to the baptismal pool, where Junior was waiting to be baptized.

A million thoughts filled Junior's mind. *God planned everything*, he thought. *No one knew in advance that I would be baptized first*,

and Father arrived just as I entered the pool. God's plans are perfect!

Each of the five baptisms was supposed to take 10 minutes, but Junior's lasted an hour. Several friends from the video gamers club stood up to praise God for Junior's decision and to encourage him to be faithful. Pastor Ricardo asked the Pathfinders to sing, and everyone joined in.

As Junior came out of the water, the Pathfinders joyfully waved their yellow scarves. Junior, dripping wet, hugged Father. "Daddy, despite your religion, I love you very much," he said. Looking at the audience, he added, "I thank you for being here. But most of all I thank my father for being here."

Then Father addressed Junior. "Son, I accept your religion because many supernatural things have happened," he said. "I have kept you away from my religion this whole time, and I didn't want you to become involved in any religion. However, I accept your religion because I sense a supernatural energy right now. I only hope that my own path to Jesus isn't painful."

As the family got into the car afterward, Father said, "This is such a nice place, and the people are so nice." He was beaming with joy.

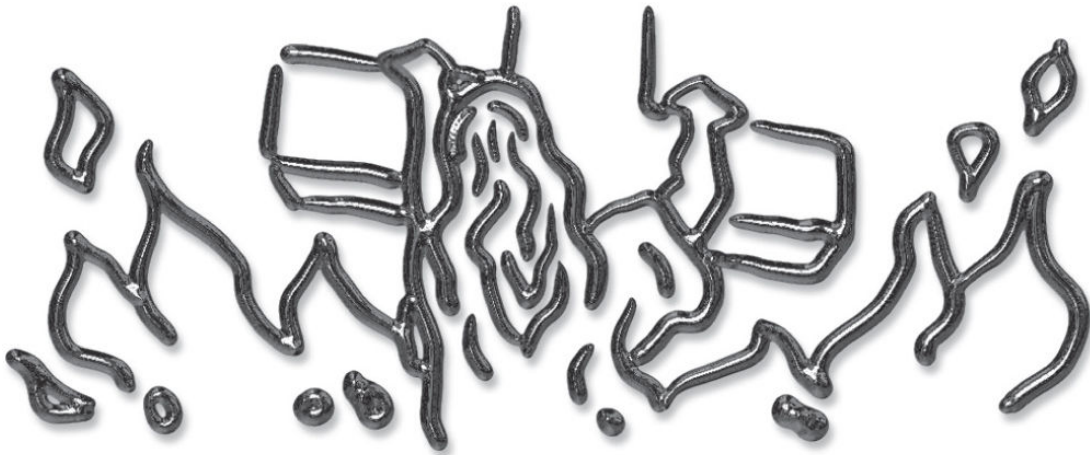
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LESSON 6

*July 30–August 5

Struggling With All Energy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 16:5–15; Col. 1:28, 29; 1 Pet. 1:13; Matt. 5:29; Genesis 32.*

Memory Text: “To this end I strenuously contend, struggling with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me” (*Colossians 1:29, NIV*).

A man and woman sat together on a talk show. Both had experienced the murder of a child. The woman's son had been murdered 20 years before, and her anger and bitterness were as great as ever. The man was totally different. His daughter had been murdered by terrorists a few years earlier. He spoke about forgiveness toward the killers and about how God had transformed his hurt. However terrible the pain, this man

had become an illustration of how God can bring healing to the darkest moments of our lives.

How can two people respond so differently? How does spiritual change occur in the life of a Christian, enabling that individual to mature through life's crucibles rather than being completely overwhelmed by them?

The Week at a Glance: What is the role of our wills, and willpower, in the battle with self and sin? How can we avoid the mistake of letting our feelings rule the decisions we make? Why must we persevere and not give up when in the crucible?

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 6.*

SUNDAY *July 31*

The Spirit of Truth

Have you ever prayed “Please, God, make me good!” but little seems to change? How is it possible that we can pray for God’s great transforming power to work within us, but our lives seem to remain the same? We know that God has unlimited supernatural resources that He so eagerly and freely offers us. We really want to take advantage of it all, and yet, our lives don’t seem to change in a way that matches what God is offering.

Why? One reason is disturbingly simple: while the Spirit has unlimited power to transform us, it is possible by our own choices to restrict what God can do.

Read John 16:5–15. In this passage, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of truth” (*John 16:13, NIV*). What does this imply that the Holy Spirit does for us?

While the Holy Spirit can bring us the truth about our sinfulness, He cannot make us repent. He also can show us the greatest truth about God, but He cannot force us to believe or obey it. If God did compel us in even the slightest way, we would lose our free will, and Satan would accuse God of manipulating our minds and hearts and would thus be able to accuse God of cheating in the great controversy. When the great controversy broke out in heaven, our

Father did not compel Satan or any of the angels to believe that He was good and just or compel them to repent. And in the Garden of Eden, when so much was at stake again, God made the truth about the tree in the middle of the garden very clear but did not prevent Eve and Adam from exercising their free will to disobey. God will not act any differently with us today. So, the Spirit presents the truth about God and sin and then says, "In view of what I have shown you, what will you do now?"

It is the same when we are in the crucible. Sometimes the crucible is there precisely because we have not obeyed or repented of our sins. For our Father to work in such cases, we must consciously choose to open the doors of repentance and obedience in order for God's power to enter in and transform us.

What convictions has the "Spirit of truth" brought to you recently? How well are you listening to His voice? And, most important, what choices are you making with your free will?

MONDAY *August 1*

The Divine-Human Combination

What is your greatest accomplishment ever? Chances are, whatever you achieved did not happen simply by rolling out of bed in the morning. If we want to achieve something worthwhile in this life, it takes time and effort. Our discipleship to Christ is no different.

Read Colossians 1:28, 29. Though Paul talks about God working in him, in what ways does he show the human effort also involved? (See also Deut. 4:4, Luke 13:24, 1 Cor. 9:25, and Heb. 12:4.)

In Colossians 1:29, there is a very interesting insight into the way Paul sees his relationship with God in this work. He says that he is struggling—but with the power of God.

The Greek word translated “labor” means to “grow weary,” to “work to the point of exhaustion.” This word was used particularly of athletes as they trained. The word for “struggle,” which comes next, can mean in some languages “to agonize.” So, we have the word picture of an athlete straining with everything to win. But then Paul adds a twist to the idea, because Paul is straining, not with everything he has, but with everything that God gives him. So, we

are left with a simple conclusion about Paul's ministry—it was a ministry done with great personal effort and discipline but done with God's power. This relationship works in exactly the same way as we pursue the development of Christ's character in us.

This is important to remember, because we live in a world in which we want more and more with less and less effort. That idea has crept into Christianity, too. Some Christian evangelists promise that if you just believe, the Holy Spirit will fall upon you with amazing supernatural power and perform great miracles. But this can be a dangerous half-truth, because it can lead people to the conclusion that we just need to wait for God's power to come while sitting comfortably in our seats!

What is your own experience with the kind of striving Paul talked about? What things has God laid upon your heart that you are struggling with? How can you learn to surrender to God's will?

TUESDAY *August 2*

The Disciplined Will

One of the greatest enemies of our wills is our own feelings. We are increasingly living in a culture bombarded with pictures and music that can appeal directly to our senses, triggering our emotions—anger, fear, or lust—without our realizing it. How often do we think such things as *What do I feel like eating for supper? What do I feel like doing today? Do I feel good about buying this?* Feelings have thus become intimately involved in our decision-making. Feelings are not necessarily bad, but how I feel about something may have little to do with what is right or best. Indeed, our feelings can lie to us (“The heart is deceitful above all things” [*Jer. 17:9*]) and can create a false picture of reality, causing us to make bad choices, setting us up for a crucible of our own making.

What examples can you find from the Bible where people made choices based on feelings rather than on God’s Word? What were the consequences? (See, for example, *Gen. 3:6*; *2 Sam. 11:2–4*; and *Gal. 2:11, 12*.)

Read 1 Peter 1:13. What is Peter concerned about, and what does he want his readers actually to do?

Peter understood that the mind is the rudder for the body that we control. Take away the control of the mind, and we will be controlled by whatever feelings blow our way.

Imagine walking along a narrow path to the Shepherd's home. Along the way there are many paths leading in different directions. Some of these paths go to places that we would not want to visit. Others look tempting; they appeal to our feelings, our emotions, our desires. If, though, we take any one of them, we get off the right path and go in a way that might be exceedingly difficult to get off.

What important decisions are you facing? Ask yourself honestly, *How can I know if I am basing my choices on feeling, emotion, or desire, as opposed to the Word of God?*

WEDNESDAY *August 3*

Radical Commitment

“If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matt. 5:29, NIV).

Dwell on the words of Jesus in the above text. Would you call them radical? If so, why?

Radical action is necessary not because God has made the Christian life difficult, but because we and our culture have drifted so far away from God’s plans for us. People often wake up and wonder to themselves, *How could I have gone so far away from God?* The answer is always the same: just one step at a time.

Read Matthew 5:29, 30. Jesus is speaking in the context of sexual sin. However, the underlying principles apply to dealing with other sin, as well. Indeed, the principles can apply to our growth in Christ in general.

What crucial point is Jesus making with those words? Are we really called literally to maim ourselves?

Jesus isn't calling us to harm our bodies physically—not at all! Rather, He is calling us to control our minds and therefore our bodies, no matter the cost. Notice that the text does not say that we should pray and that God will instantly remove the sinful tendencies from our lives. Sometimes God may graciously do this for us, but often He calls us to make a radical commitment to give up something, or start doing something, that we may not feel like doing at all. What a crucible that can be! The more often we make the right choices, the stronger we will become, and the weaker the power of temptation in our lives.

God sometimes uses crucibles to catch our attention when there are so many noisy distractions around us. It is in the crucible that we realize how far we have drifted from God. The crucible may be God's call for us to make a radical decision to return to our Father's plan for us.

THURSDAY *August 4*

The Need to Persevere

Read the story of Jacob wrestling with God (*Genesis 32*). What does this story say to us about perseverance, even amid great discouragement? (Keep the whole context of Jacob's situation in mind before you answer.)

We can know what is right and exercise our wills to do the right thing; but when we are under pressure, it can be very difficult to keep holding on to God and His promises. That's because we are weak and fearful. Therefore, one of the important strengths of the Christian is perseverance, the ability to keep going despite wanting to give up.

One of the greatest examples of perseverance in the Bible is Jacob. Many years before, Jacob had tricked his brother, Esau, and his father into giving him the birthright (*Genesis 27*), and ever since, he had been running in fear of Esau's desire to kill him. Even though he had been given wonderful promises of God's guidance and blessing in his dream of a ladder reaching to heaven (*Genesis 28*), he was still scared. Jacob was desperate for God's assurance that he was accepted and that the promises made to him many years before were still true. As he fought someone who was actually Jesus, Jacob had his hip dislocated. From that point on, it could not

have been possible to fight, as the pain would have been too excruciating. There must have been a subtle shift from fighting to hanging on. Jacob is hanging on to Jesus through unbearable pain until he receives an assurance of His blessing. So, Jesus says to him, “ ‘Let me go, for it is daybreak’ ” (*Gen. 32:26, NIV*).

Jacob’s blessing came because he held on through the pain. So it is with us. God also may dislocate our “hip” and then call us to hang on to Him through our pain. Indeed, God allowed the painful scars to continue—Jacob was still limping when he met his brother. To outside appearances it was a weakness, but for Jacob it was an indication of his strength.

What are some practical choices you can make (associations, lifestyle, reading material, health habits, spiritual life) that will help you better persevere with the Lord amid discouragement and temptation?

FRIDAY *August 5*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Night of Wrestling,” pp. 195–203, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Consecration,” pp. 43–48, in *Steps to Christ*.

“This will, that forms so important a factor in the character of man, was at the Fall given into the control of Satan; and he has ever since been working in man to will and to do of his own pleasure, but to the utter ruin and misery of man.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 515.

“In order to receive God’s help, man must realize his weakness and deficiency; he must apply his own mind to the great change to be wrought in himself; he must be aroused to earnest and persevering prayer and effort. Wrong habits and customs must be shaken off; and it is only by determined endeavor to correct these errors and to conform to right principles that the victory can be gained. Many never attain to the position that they might occupy, because they wait for God to do for them that which He has given them power to do for themselves. All who are fitted for usefulness must be trained by the severest mental and moral discipline, and God will assist them by uniting divine power with human effort.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 248.

Discussion Questions:

1 To what extent do you think that we actually recognize that our wills were “at the Fall given into the control of Satan”? How, by focusing on the character of Jesus, can we better understand just how fallen we are and how great God’s grace is toward us?

2 Read the story of Jesus in Gethsemane (*Matt. 26:36–42*). What were Jesus' own feelings and desires, as opposed to God's will? What can we learn from this example?

3 As a class, talk about the distinct things in your own culture that can work to break down our defenses and leave us more vulnerable to Satan's attacks. What can we do to help other church members be aware of these dangers, as well as help those who feel the need for help?

4 Do you know someone in your church who hasn't been there for quite a long time, who might be getting ready to give up or already has given up? What can you do as a group to encourage this person, to help him or her not turn away from Jesus? What practical things can you do to help?

INSIDE *Story*

Part 6: Temple Plot Foiled

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Months passed before Junior and Mother found out why Father had changed his mind and went to Junior's baptism. Evil spirits had forbidden Father from going to the Sabbath afternoon baptism, so he had turned down his son's invitation to attend. On the day of the baptism, Father felt restless and asked Mother to drive him to the Candomblé temple in Manaus, Brazil. Around 5:00 P.M., spirits at the temple told Father to dress in his high-priestly robes and go to Alpha Seventh-day Adventist Community Church. They promised to possess people in the church to prevent Junior from being baptized.

Father donned his robes and hailed a taxi. He could hear an invisible legion of evil spirits swirling around him. At the church's entrance, the spirits suddenly declared that they could not go in.

Father remembered the most important lesson that the spirits had taught him years earlier: Never leave a job undone. If he started a task, he had to finish it. Father boldly entered the church. As he walked into the crowded main hall, a sweet, sanctified energy flowed over him. It was unlike anything he had ever experienced, and it felt good. Later he realized that it must have been the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Father's anger about the baptism vanished. A deacon, Roberto Fernandez, met him at the back, gave him a hug, and led him to the baptismal pool. Father turned around and looked at the congregation, where he saw people with bowed heads. He thought they were frightened but later understood that they were praying. When he saw Junior in the baptismal pool, he realized that the spirits had lied to him. Junior wasn't being forced to join the Adventist Church. It was his own decision.

After a song, Pastor Ricardo raised his arm and said, “As a minister of the gospel, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.” Then he immersed Junior under the water.

After the baptism, Junior took the microphone and looked at Father.

“Daddy, despite your religion, I love you very much,” he said.

He hugged Father and started crying. His words broke Father’s heart.

When the ceremony ended, church members showered Father with hugs. He was shocked. He never expected to be treated with such love. “This is such a nice place, and the people are so nice,” he said as he got into the car.

Back home, Father called everyone he knew to announce proudly that his son had been baptized. He described the experience as incredible.

Mother realized that the Holy Spirit had started to work in his heart. An unbelievable peace filled their home for four days. Then the evil spirits ordered Father to kill Mother and Junior.

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LESSON 7

*August 6–12

Indestructible Hope



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Hab. 1:1–4, Job 38–41, Isa. 41:8–14, Jer. 29:1–10, Heb. 12:1–13.*

Memory Text: “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (*Romans 5:5, NKJV*).

When in church surrounded by smiling people, how easy it is to talk and sing about hope. But when we find ourselves within the crucible, hope does not always seem so easy. As circumstances press in around us, we begin to question everything, particularly the wisdom of God.

In one of his books, C. S. Lewis writes about a make-believe lion. Wanting to meet this lion, someone asks if the lion is safe. The person is told that he's not safe, “but he's good.”

Even though we don't always understand God and He seems to do unpredictable things, that doesn't mean that God is against us. It

simply means that we don't have the full picture yet. But we struggle with the idea that for us to have peace, confidence, and hope, God must be understandable and predictable. He needs to be, in our thinking, "safe." As such, we set ourselves up for disappointment.

The Week at a Glance: How does our understanding of the character of God help us maintain hope in the crucible?

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 13.*

SUNDAY *August 7*

The Big Picture

When we are hurting, it is very easy to presume that what happens to us is the only thing that matters. But there is a slightly larger picture than just “me” (see *Rev. 12:7, Rom. 8:22*).

Read Habakkuk 1:1–4. What did Habakkuk face?

You might expect that God would say something like, “That’s really terrible, Habakkuk; let Me come and help you immediately.” But God’s answer is the opposite. He tells Habakkuk that it is going to get worse. Read this in Habakkuk 1:5–11.

Israel had been taken into captivity by the Assyrians, but God promises that worse is coming: The Babylonians will now carry away the people of Judah. Habakkuk cries out again in verses 12–17 and then waits to see what God is going to say.

How does God’s introduction to the promised destruction of Babylon in Habakkuk 2:2, 3 bring hope?

Habakkuk 2 is God's promise of the destruction of the Babylonians. Hebrews 10:37 quotes Habakkuk 2:3, hinting of a Messianic application to this promise in the future. With the same certainty that the destruction of Babylon was promised, so we also have the certainty of the destruction of " 'Babylon the Great' " (Rev. 18:2, *NIV*).

Habakkuk was trapped between the great evil surrounding him and God's promise of worse to come. Yet, this is precisely where we find ourselves in salvation history. Great evil is around us, but the Bible predicts that much worse is to come. The key to Habakkuk's survival is that he is brought to see the whole picture. Therefore, in chapter 3 he is able to pray an incredible prayer of praise because of what God will do in the future.

Read Habakkuk 3:16–19. What does Habakkuk identify as his reasons for hope? What is the hope of God's people as we wait for the last prophetic scenes to unfold? How can you make this hope your own?

MONDAY *August 8*

Who Our Father Is

Oswald Chambers writes, “Have you been asking God what He is going to do? He will never tell you. God does not tell you what He is going to do; He reveals to you Who He is.”—*My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour & Company, Inc., 1963), January 2.

What do you think Chambers means by this idea?

As we know, the book of Job begins with great personal tragedy for Job. He loses everything, except his life and his wife, and she suggests that he “ ‘curse God and die!’ ” (*Job 2:9, NIV*). What follows is a discussion in which his friends try to work out why it has all happened. Throughout all of these discussions, God remains silent.

Then suddenly in Job 38, God appears and speaks: “ ‘Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?’ ” (*Job 38:2, NIV*). Without pausing, God asks Job some 60 jaw-dropping questions. Open your Bible and scan through these in Job 38 and 39.

After the last question, Job replies, “ ‘I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more’ ” (*Job 40:4, 5, NIV*). But God is not finished. He then begins again and asks another set of “big” questions in succession.

Read Job's final response in Job 42:1–6. What was God trying to tell Job, and what was the effect on him?

God never answers any of the “why” questions of Job’s friends. But God does paint a picture of His unparalleled greatness as revealed through the astonishing works of Creation. After this, Job certainly does not need any answers. The need for explanations has been eclipsed by an overwhelming picture of the magnificence of God.

This story reveals a fascinating paradox. Hope and encouragement can spring from the realization that we know so little. Instinctively, we try to find comfort by knowing everything, and so we become discouraged when we cannot know. But sometimes God highlights our ignorance so that we may realize that human hope can find security only in a Being much greater than ourselves.

Are things that you just can’t understand happening now? If so, focus on the character of God. How can doing that give you the hope that you need to persevere through what’s, for now, incomprehensible?

TUESDAY *August 9*

Our Father's Presence

“ ‘For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you’ ” (Isa. 41:13, NIV).

Someone once said, “When God seems far away, who is the one who has moved?” When problems strike, we presume that God has deserted us. The truth is that He hasn’t gone anywhere.

God’s presence seemed very far away to the Jews in exile. Yet, through Isaiah, God assures them of future deliverance. However, while the actual return to Jerusalem was still many years in the future, God wanted His people to know that He had not moved away from them and that there was every reason for hope.

Read Isaiah 41:8–14. What reasons for hope can you identify for people waiting eagerly for future deliverance? How does this promise help us as we wait for our exile on earth to end?

One of the most powerful images in these verses is found in verse 13. The sovereign God of the universe says that His people do not need to fear, because He is the one who takes “ ‘hold of your right

hand' ” (*NIV*). It is one thing to imagine God guiding events on earth from a big throne light-years away from our earth. But it is an altogether different picture to realize that He is close enough to hold the hands of His dearly beloved people.

When we are busy, it can be hard to remember that God is so close to us. But when we do remember that He is Immanuel, “God with us,” it makes such a difference. When God’s presence is with us, so are His purposes, His promises, and His transforming power.

Over the next few days, try an experiment. At every moment possible, try to remind yourself that the God of the universe is close enough to you to hold your hand and is personally promising you help. Keep a record of how this changes the way you live. Be prepared to discuss your experience in class on Sabbath.

WEDNESDAY *August 10*

Our Father's Plans for Us

Everyone is looking for hope. But where is it found? For some people, hope is found in the smile of a friend. For others, hope grows out of financial security or a stable marriage. Where do you normally look for hope and courage?

In the book of Jeremiah, the prophet is writing to people who had lost hope in their exile. "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion" (*Ps. 137:1, NIV*). But even though they are heartbroken, Jeremiah lays out reasons they should not give up hope.

What reasons for hope are given in Jeremiah 29:1–10?

In this passage, there are three important sources of hope worth highlighting.

First, God tells His people that they should not give up hope, because their situation is not the result of chance or unpredictable evil. For God Himself says, “I carried [Judah] into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon” (*Jer. 29:4, NIV*). Though evil seems to surround them, Judah has never left the center of God’s hands.

Second, God tells His people that they should not give up hope, because He can work even within their present difficulties. “ ‘Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper’ ” (*Jer. 29:7, NIV*).

Third, God tells His people that they should not give up hope, because He is going to bring an end to their exile at a specific time: “This is what the LORD says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place’ ” (*Jer. 29:10, NIV*).

After God explains how He was in charge of their past, is in charge of their present, and will be in charge of their future, He then beautifully conveys His tender care for His people (see *Jer. 29:11–14*).

Read Jeremiah 29:11–14, saying your name after the word *you*, as if God is making these promises to you personally. Apply these promises for yourself in whatever your present struggles might be.

THURSDAY *August 11*

Our Father's Discipline

Read Hebrews 12:5–13. What's the message to us here, and how does it fit in with what we have been studying this quarter?

In Hebrews 12:5–13, Paul describes trials in the context of discipline. In the New International Version Bible translation of this passage, various forms of the word “discipline” appear ten times. In the Greek world, this word was the most basic word for “education.” So, to understand “discipline” is to understand how God educates us in the school of faith that Paul has been describing before in Hebrews 11.

Throughout Hebrews 11, Paul has been painting pictures of men and women of faith. Their faith was what kept them going when they were faced with all sorts of trying situations. As we enter chapter 12, Paul turns to us, the readers, and says that since so many people before us have persevered against incredible odds, we also can run and finish the life of faith. The key is to fix our eyes upon Jesus (*Heb. 12:2*), that He may be an Example when times are difficult (*Heb. 12:3*). Reading chapter 12 is like being given a set of reading glasses. Without these glasses our vision or understanding of hardship will always be fuzzy. But looking through these glasses will correct the blurred explanation of suffering that our culture presses

upon us. Then we will be able to understand clearly and be able to respond to trials intelligently.

Read through the “glasses” of Hebrews 12:1–13. Now concentrate on verses 5–13 and answer these questions:

What is the source of discipline?

What is our response to discipline?

What is the goal of discipline?

Read through Hebrews 12:1–13 again. Make a list of all the reasons you can identify with as grounds for hope. How have you experienced this hope in your own times of spiritual “education”?

FRIDAY *August 12*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The School of the Hereafter,” pp. 301–309, in *Education*; “Help in Daily Living,” pp. 470, 471, in *The Ministry of Healing*.

“Into the experience of all there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement—days when sorrow is the portion, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind benefactor of His earthborn children; days when troubles harass the soul, till death seems preferable to life. It is then that many lose their hold on God and are brought into the slavery of doubt, the bondage of unbelief. Could we at such times discern with spiritual insight the meaning of God’s providences we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, striving to plant our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills, and new faith, new life, would spring into being.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 162.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Ellen G. White says that “all” of us experience times of “keen disappointment and utter discouragement.” How well do we notice each other as we go through such times? How can we better learn to be agents of hope for each other when we experience such bitter disappointments?
- 2** As a class, go over your answers to Tuesday’s final question. What difference did it make in your life as you kept the reality of God’s nearness ever before you?
- 3** In class, read aloud sections in Job 38–41. What kind of picture of God does it present? What do you learn that gives

you hope and encouragement? How does the Sabbath fit into this picture? How does it help keep before us the nature and character of God?

4 Hope that transforms comes from heaven. This means that we can pray for hope to be brought into each other's lives. Spend some time praying for those whose hope has been faltering recently, that their hope may be renewed. More than that, what can you do for others who are in a losing struggle to find hope?

5 If someone is willing, ask that person to recount a time that despair and trials caused him or her to lose hope and faith. What turned that person around? What can we share with one another that can help when we are in times of doubt and despair?

INSIDE *Story*

Part 7: Father Surrenders

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Four days after Junior's baptism, evil spirits ordered Father to kill his family. Otherwise, they warned, Junior and Mother would destroy him because they were praying for him. For the first time, Father mustered up the courage to talk back. "How?" he asked. "Aren't our prayers more powerful?"

The spirits backed down and told Father to leave his home in Manaus, Brazil. They told him to take a boat to one of five cities where Candomblé priests were waiting for him. But when Father sought to buy a boat ticket, none was available to those cities. The only tickets were to Coari. Remembering an uncle in Coari, Father decided to sail there.

Uncle Cesario Ferreira was thrilled to see Father, and he organized a family reunion. Father didn't know the relatives well, but he confided that a spiritual conflict had erupted at home. Ninety-two-year-old Aunt Tereza patted him on the shoulder. "Son, it's time for you to give up," she said. "You have been serving evil spirits your whole life. Now it's time to serve God."

Father looked shocked. "Are you a Protestant Christian?" he asked, remembering that the evil spirits had told him to stay away from them.

Aunt Tereza smiled and motioned toward the other relatives, who also were smiling. "Son, we're all Protestant Christians!" she said.

The next day, Father worriedly called a temple priest for advice. Uncle Cesario, who was preparing breakfast, overheard the conversation. After Father hung up, he said, "Son, did you know that Jesus cast out evil spirits?"

"How did He do that?" Father asked.

For the next three days, Uncle Cesario read Bible stories about how Jesus cast out evil spirits. On the fourth day, he told about the man possessed by a legion of evil spirits in Mark 5:1–19. Father was surprised that the spirits told Jesus, “ ‘My name is Legion; for we are many’ ” (verse 9, NKJV). “That’s true!” he said. “When I went to the church for Junior’s baptism, I went with a legion of evil spirits.”

The fifth day, Uncle Cesario didn’t tell any stories. Father was afraid to ask why, and he went for a long walk. That evening, he became upset when a temple priest called him to ask for help securing animals for sacrifices.

“Let the spirits be the sacrifice!” he blurted out. “They commanded me to kill my own son. Solve your problems without me!”

Father, still upset, sat down at the table for supper. “Son,” Uncle Cesario said, “did you know that the devil killed Job’s own son and other children?” Father had never heard of Job, and he wept as he heard the story from the Bible. At the end, Father said, “I’ve made a decision. I’ll leave Candomblé and get to know the Adventists’ God. Please pray. The devil will try to kill me.”

The next day, Father returned home and announced his decision to Mother. “I’m willing to follow your God,” he said.

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LESSON 8

*August 13–19

Seeing *the* Invisible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 8:28–39, John 14:1–14, Eph. 1:18–23, Isa. 40:27–31.*

Memory Text: “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (*Hebrews 11:27, NKJV*).

The definition of faith in the book of Hebrews is always challenging. “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (*Heb. 11:1, NIV*). How can we be sure about what we do not see? Yet, this is exactly what Moses illustrates in our memory verse: “He persevered because he saw him who is invisible” (*Heb. 11:27, NIV*).

It is even more challenging to realize that we are called to see “him who is invisible” not simply when times are good but especially when everything is going wrong. For this we need faith, a Christlike

faith that must be shaped by the truth about God and God's kingdom. The truth about our Father's goodness, the power in the name of Jesus, the power of the Resurrection, and the compassion of God are essential truths that will enable us to stand strong when we are in the crucible and may be tempted to doubt everything.

The Week at a Glance: What truths about God can help sustain us through even the worst situations?

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 20.*

SUNDAY *August 14*

Our Father's Extravagance

"If God really loved me, He would certainly do _____ for me!" I wonder how many times that thought has flickered through our minds. We look at our circumstances and then begin to wonder whether God really loves us, because if He really did, things would be different.

There are two rationales that often lead us to doubt God's goodness. First, when we have a burning desire in our hearts and minds for something that we believe is good, the idea that God might want something different for us may seem ridiculous. Second, we may doubt God's goodness because our experience clashes with what we believe. If something looks good or feels good or sounds good or tastes good, then it must be good. And so we get angry with God when we can't have it.

This is where faith comes into play. Faith comes into action precisely at those times we are tempted to doubt God and His goodness.

Romans 8:28–39 is a powerful passage that describes the goodness of God toward us. What reasons can you find in the text that can guard our minds against doubting God's goodness?

In Romans 8:32, there is an important piece of logic that is extremely helpful in guarding us from becoming overwhelmed by our circumstances. “If God didn’t hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn’t gladly and freely do for us?” (*The Message*). How could we possibly think that God would send Jesus to die for us and then turn mean and stingy?

This means that the truth of God’s generosity to us, seen in the death of Christ, must have a stronger impact in our thinking than all of the doubts that the crucible may generate inside us.

How is it possible for a truth (God’s goodness) to have a more powerful effect on you than your doubts? Spend some time meditating on the truth that God has given Jesus to die in your place, and that this incredible generosity continues in a thousand different ways for you today. What does this do for your faith?

MONDAY *August 15*

In the Name of Jesus

“ ‘If you ask anything in My name, I will do it’ ” (*John 14:14, NKJV*).

Jesus was not going to be with the disciples much longer. The One who had been their support and encouragement was going to heaven, and the disciples were beginning to feel confused and powerless. But though the disciples would not be able to see Him physically any longer, Jesus gave them a remarkable promise.

Read John 14:1–14. According to verses 13 and 14, Jesus promises to do for us “anything” that we ask in His name. Because of this, we almost always add on to the end of our prayers, “In Jesus’ name, amen.”

When we say this, what do we normally think it means? What does Jesus mean when He encourages us to pray like this? What clues are there in these verses that help us to understand the point He’s making?

When our request is “in the name of Jesus,” we can be certain that the whole machinery of heaven is at work on our behalf. We

may not see the angels working all around us. But they are—sent from the throne of heaven in the name of Jesus, to fulfill our requests.

Sometimes when we pray in the name of Jesus, we open our eyes and expect everything to be different around us—but it all looks the same. However, while the power of God may come with dramatic effect, as when Jesus calmed the storm, it also may come in quietness, unnoticed, as when the power of God sustained Jesus in Gethsemane. Something dramatic may not suddenly happen, but that doesn't mean that God is not at work for us.

Read John 14:1–14 again. As you read, imagine that Jesus is talking directly to you, face-to-face. What hope and encouragement can you draw from these promises? At the same time, ask yourself, “What things in my life could be standing in the way of having these promises fulfilled for me? What changes must I purpose in my heart to make?”

TUESDAY *August 16*

The Power of the Resurrection

The Resurrection addresses the problem of human powerlessness. When we think about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we often think about how the death of Jesus was the event that made us legally right with God. And that, of course, is true.

However, the Resurrection adds a specific dimension to salvation. The resurrection of Jesus is meaningful not just because it shows us that one day we will be resurrected, as well. The Resurrection placed Jesus at the right hand of the Father in a position of power and authority. This Resurrection power is the same power that God makes available for us today!

In Ephesians 1:18–23, Paul talks about the power of God. What does this text teach us about the power of the Resurrection? What hope and promises for yourself can you find in these verses?

Paul is praying that the Ephesians understand a few things that can be understood properly only with divine help: (1) that there is the hope of transformation and an eternal future to which Jesus has

called us and (2) that we understand the power that was manifested in our behalf.

Paul then tries to describe how astonishing this power is. The power that is available to us today is the same power that resurrected Jesus not just out of the ground and back to life, but to the place of power at the Father's right hand.

But Paul doesn't stop there. The Resurrection didn't simply give Jesus just any sort of power. It gave Him the power to rule and provide every possible thing His people could ever need—for all eternity!

Make a list of the areas in your life where you need the power of the resurrected Jesus. When you have finished, pray that this power will be applied to all these areas of need. At the same time, what can you do better? What choices can you make that can allow this power to work more freely in your life?

WEDNESDAY *August 17*

To Carry All Our Worry

There is a plaque that some people have in their homes that reads “Why pray when you can worry?” It makes us laugh because we know how often we worry rather than come to God and give Him our concerns.

Someone once said that when our life becomes all tied up, we should give it to God and let Him untie the knots. How God must long to do this for us. Yet, amazingly, we manage to hang on to our problems until we are about to snap. Why do we wait until we are desperate before we go to the Lord?

Read 1 Peter 5:7. Peter is quoting from Psalm 55:22. What’s the basic message here for us? (See also Matt. 6:25–33.)

It is a very simple text. There is no secret hidden in it, and it means exactly what it says. To cast means to do just that, to throw, to give away, so that what is causing the aching and the concern no longer has any connection to you. But, of course, our burdens are not thrown just anywhere. Our worry does not disappear into a void. It is given to our Father in heaven, who promises to sort it out. That’s what Jesus is telling us in the verses in Matthew. The problem in doing this is not that it’s hard; rather, it’s that it just seems too easy, too good to be true.

Anxiety is caused by all sorts of things. It could be due to pressure from work, unexpected criticism, feeling that we are unwanted or unloved, health or financial worries, feeling that we are not good enough for God, or believing that we are not forgiven.

Whatever the reasons are, one reason we hang on to our problems is that we think we can sort them out better than anyone else can. But Peter urges us to reconsider any such idea. The reason we don't have to worry is that God cares. But does God still care enough to intervene when a divorce is looming or we feel totally useless? The Bible says that He cares enough to transform any situation.

What are things that cause you worry now? However legitimate they are, however troublesome they are, is there anything too hard for the Lord? Maybe our biggest problem is that even though we believe that God knows about it and can fix it, we don't believe that He will resolve it the way we would like it resolved. Dwell on that last point and ask yourself how true it is in your own life.

THURSDAY August 18

Still Faithful When God Cannot Be Seen

To think that no one cares about what is happening to us is very unpleasant. But to think that God does not know or care about us can be most distressing.

To the Judaeans exiled in Babylon, God did not seem to care much about their situation. They were still exiled, still feeling abandoned by God because of their sin. But Isaiah speaks words of comfort to them. Isaiah 40 is a beautiful passage in which Isaiah speaks so tenderly to the people about their God: “He tends his flock like a shepherd: he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young” (*Isa. 40:11, NIV*). But after so long, the exiles were thinking, *Where are You, O Lord? We can’t see any evidence that You are still there—or care!*

Read Isaiah 40:27–31. In what ways does Isaiah describe God? How is this description of God meant to answer their belief that “ ‘my way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God’ ” (*Isa. 40:27, NIV*)?

Another group of people who might have considered that their way was hidden from God is found in the book of Esther. In this book, God is not mentioned even once. However, the whole story is an unfolding drama of God's intervention to save His people from an irrevocable law to have them destroyed. Not only does this story describe events of the past, but it also symbolizes a time in the future when God's people will again be persecuted and a law again will be introduced for their destruction (*Rev. 13:15*). Can you imagine how easy it would be to conclude that if such terrible circumstances existed, God must surely have deserted His people? But we are not to fear. The same God who saved His chosen ones in the story of Esther will save them again in the final crisis.

We have read how Isaiah described God to the exiles. How would you describe God to people who felt that God had disappeared and had abandoned them? How would you teach them to see through the eyes of faith and not be dependent on what they see around them with their human eyes?

FRIDAY August 19

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “In the Days of Queen Esther,” pp. 598–606, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“Has not God said He would give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him? And is not this Spirit a real, true actual guide? Some men seem afraid to take God at His word, as though it would be presumption in them. They pray for the Lord to teach us and yet are afraid to credit the pledged word of God and believe we have been taught of Him. So long as we come to our heavenly Father humbly and with a spirit to be taught, willing and anxious to learn, why should we doubt God’s fulfillment of His own promise? You must not for a moment doubt Him and dishonor Him thereby. When you have sought to know His will, your part in the operation with God is to believe that you will be led and guided and blessed in the doing of His will. We may mistrust ourselves lest we misinterpret His teachings, but make even this a subject of prayer, and trust Him, still trust Him to the uttermost, that His Holy Spirit will lead you to interpret aright His plans and the working of His providence.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 6, p. 225.

“Faith grows strong by coming in conflict with doubts and opposing influences. The experience gained in these trials is of more value than the most costly jewels.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 555.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, talk about the kinds of things we believe in that we do not see, things that we know are real yet are beyond our sight. How can this help us understand what it means to see “Him who is invisible”?

2 Discuss the final question found at the end of Wednesday's study. How often do we find ourselves in that situation? What can we do that will better enable us to trust that the Lord's way is the best, even if it's not what we want?

3 If "faith grows strong by coming in conflict with doubts and opposing influences" and this leads to something extremely valuable, "of more value than the most costly jewels," how should this shape the way we look at such conflicts?

4 Most of us have seen people, even fellow Christians, in situations in which, at least from our perspective, the outcome was horrible. The worst thing we imagined happened, despite the prayers and best efforts. How do we understand this in light of what we have been studying?

INSIDE *Story*

Part 8: Married to Christ

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

A week after giving his heart to Jesus, Father started to clear out the temple in Manaus, Brazil. He gathered the images and the stone altars where he had sacrificed animals and bowed to evil spirits. At the spirits' request, Father shipped the temple paraphernalia to two women in another town.

He finished the task on a Friday. As he got into his car, evil spirits growled that they were going to kill him. Suddenly, a dark shadow shaped like a man and comprised of three spirits entered the car. The spirits showed Father a distant light. Out of the light loomed a cross, filled with mud. The spirits sneered that it was the end for Father. "As a dead man, can I make a last statement?" Father asked. Without waiting for a reply, he said, "Jesus, please sit beside me in the car and take me home." The dark shadow vanished. It was the first time that Father had called on Jesus, and he felt protected.

The next morning, Father attended Sabbath worship services for the first time. It was a Communion Sabbath, and he sensed a supernatural energy similar to what he had experienced at Junior's baptism. As someone washed his feet, Father's sins passed before his eyes. Tears flowed as he asked God for forgiveness. He felt as though the Holy Spirit was washing him clean.

A short time later, Father proposed to Mother, and they officially got married. Mother was especially happy. Now she could be baptized.

The day before her baptism, Father and Junior went to Alpha Seventh-day Adventist Community Church to listen as Mother rehearsed with a choir. A ladder, which was being used to decorate the church, suddenly toppled over, and the man standing on it slammed into Father, knocking him to the floor.

Father offered assurances that he was fine but, a moment later, began to shriek. Two evil spirits had possessed him.

Junior ran to Father. He lay on the ground, his body quivering. A spirit snarled through his mouth that he had wanted to kill Father with the ladder.

Junior had heard about the great controversy between Christ and Satan, but he had never witnessed it in real life. He prayed. The choir spontaneously sang, “Jesus Christ, You are the Bridegroom, the Sower, my Father and my Shepherd, the Pearl of Great Price. Christ, You are everything.”

Mother grabbed Father’s twisted hands and tried to straighten them. They felt terribly cold. A spirit spewed hatred at her.

Then Father spoke in a small and distant voice. “It hurts,” he said.

After about an hour of praying and singing, Father returned to normal.

Although in pain, Father joined Junior at church for Mother’s baptism on Sabbath morning. With joy, Mother sank into the water.

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LESSON 9

*August 20–26

A Life of Praise



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Phil. 4:4–7, Josh. 5:13–6:20, Psalm 145, Acts 16:16–34, 2 Chron. 20:1–30.*

Memory Text: “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice!” (*Philippians 4:4, NKJV*).

It's always easy to shout with joy to the Lord when we feel joy. It's not so easy, however, when things are bad, when we are in the worst situations imaginable, when the crucible heats up. Yet, it's precisely then that we need—perhaps more than ever—to praise God, for praise is a means of helping us sustain faith.

Indeed, praise can transform even our darkest circumstances, maybe not in the sense of changing the facts around us, but in the

sense that it can change us, and those around us, in a way that helps us face challenges.

Praise is faith in action. It may not always be natural to us, but when we practice praise so that it becomes a natural part of our lives, it has the power both to convert and to conquer.

The Week at a Glance: What is praise? How could praise be such a powerful spiritual weapon in difficult circumstances? How can praise transform us and the situation around us?

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

SUNDAY *August 21*

Framework for Praise

The great Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky had been sentenced to death, only to have the sentence commuted at the last moment. He spent years in prison instead. Talking about his prison experience, he wrote: “Believe to the end, even if all men go astray and you are left the only one faithful; bring your offering even then and praise God in your loneliness.”

In these lessons, we already have seen how Paul endured incredible opposition and persecution. But now he is sitting in a Roman prison. And yet he is not depressed; instead, he is eagerly writing to encourage the believers in Philippi!

Read Philippians 4:4–7. How do you think Paul could have written such things when he himself was sitting in a prison? In this passage, what are the keys to gaining the “peace of God”?

It is one thing to rejoice when everything is going well. But Paul exhorts us to rejoice always. That may sound strange. If we take what Paul writes literally, there are two critical implications for us.

First, if we are to rejoice always, it must mean that we should be rejoicing even when circumstances do not appear to give any grounds for rejoicing. Second, if we are to rejoice always, it also

must mean that we are going to have to learn to rejoice at times when we do not feel like it.

Paul is calling us to praise God even though many times it may seem quite unnatural to us. It may even seem unreasonable. But as we will see, it is precisely because there are times when it appears unreasonable that we are called to rejoice. In other words, praise is an act of faith. Just as faith is based not on our circumstances but rather on the truth about God, so praise is something we do not because we feel good but because of the truth of who God is and what He has promised us. And amazingly, it is such faith that begins to shape our thoughts, feelings, and circumstances.

What is the truth about God that Paul identifies in today's passage—truth that enables him to rejoice, even in prison? Write down a short list of what you know to be the truth about God. Go through the list and praise God for each item. How does this change the way that you feel about and view your circumstances?

MONDAY *August 22*

Praying Down Walls

There's an expression in English: "to be painted into a corner." Imagine painting the floor of a room but then realizing that you have wound up in a corner and cannot get out—except by walking over the fresh paint. You have to stay there until it dries!

Sometimes our faith seems to paint us into a corner. We arrive at a situation, and, like the wet paint on the floor, our faith "traps" us. We look at the situation, and either we have to reject God, faith, and everything we have believed in, or our faith compels us to believe what appears impossible.

God brought the Israelites to a corner. After they had wandered for 40 years in the wilderness, God did not lead His people to empty, peaceful grasslands. God led them to one of the most strongly fortified cities in the whole area. Then they had to walk around Jericho in silence for six days. On the seventh day, God told them to shout—and that shouting, together with the trumpets, would bring victory.

Read Joshua 5:13–6:20. What is God trying to teach the Israelites?

Shouting loudly was not going to cause vibrations to trigger the walls to collapse. When God called the Israelites to "shout," it was

the same type of shouting that David writes about in Psalm 66: “Shout for joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious!” (*Ps. 66:1, 2, NIV*). This shouting was praise! After six days of looking at the huge walls, they must have concluded that they hadn’t a chance of breaking them down themselves.

How does this idea help us understand the meaning of Hebrews 11:30?

When God is on the verge of doing something new in our lives, He may bring us to a Jericho, for He may need to teach us that the power to triumph does not come in our own strength and strategies. Everything we need comes from outside of ourselves. So, no matter what is in front of us, no matter how insurmountable it may seem, our role is to praise God—the Source of everything we need. This is faith in action.

TUESDAY *August 23*

The Life of Praise

Praising the Lord might not be natural to us, even in good circumstances. Thus, how much more difficult to do it in bad ones? Yet, that is what we are called to do. Praise is something that we must practice until it changes from being an activity done at a particular time to an atmosphere in which we live. Praise shouldn't so much be a specific act but a specific way of life itself.

Read Psalm 145. What are the reasons David gives for praising God? In what ways should the words of this psalm be your own?

The great British preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote a book called *The Practice of Praise*. It is based on verse 7 of today's psalm. In this short verse, Spurgeon calls our attention to three important things that can help in developing praise in our lives.

1. *Praise is practiced as we look around us.* If we do not look around us to see the greatness of God, we will have no reason to

praise Him. What can you see in the created world that is praiseworthy, such as the beauty of God's creation? What can you see in the spiritual world that is praiseworthy, such as the growing faith in a young Christian?

2. *Praise is practiced as we remember what we have seen.* If we want to live in an atmosphere of praise, we must be able to recall the reason for it. In what ways can we remember the great things about God (such as by developing new rituals or symbols that remind us of His goodness), so that His goodness and the truth about Him do not slip from our minds?

3. *Praise is practiced as we talk about it.* Praise is not something that we do in our heads. It is meant to come out of our mouths, to be heard by those around us. What reasons can you think of to praise God verbally? What will the effect of such praise be, and on whom?

Take a pen and some paper and spend some time working through these three points. What can you do to develop the habit of praise in your life?

WEDNESDAY *August 24*

A Witness Who Convicts

In the book of Acts, praise had an astonishing effect on those who heard it. Read Acts 16:16–34. Having been stripped and beaten hard, Paul and Silas were thrown into prison. No one was there to put ointment on their badly cut and bruised backs. In great physical pain and with their feet in stocks, they were placed in the darkness of the inner prison. But as the other prisoners sat listening, Paul and Silas begin to pray and sing.

After the earthquake, and after he had discovered that neither Paul nor Silas nor any of the other prisoners had escaped, the jailer “fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ ” (*Acts 16:29, 30, NIV*).

Why did this event cause the jailer to focus on his own need of salvation? What role do you think Paul and Silas’s prayers and songs played in the prisoners’ not running away, and in the conversion of this man and his whole family?

It is amazing to think that our praise can transform the eternal destinies of those around us. If Paul and Silas had sat in the dark

mumbling and complaining as prisoners often do, do you think anyone would have been saved that night?

We don't know what happened to the jailer and his family later on, but can you imagine them reading the words that Paul later wrote from another prison in Rome: "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have" (*Phil. 1:29, 30, NIV*). If they did read this and reflect on how Paul's suffering had brought them joy, it surely must have brought a song to their hearts and a fresh challenge to remain faithful, no matter the cost.

Who do you think could be influenced for God by a song of praise that could come from your heart? Make a concerted effort to be more open and effusive in your praise to God around others. You don't know the positive effect it could have.

THURSDAY *August 25*

A Weapon That Conquers

Read 2 Chronicles 20:1–30. As Jehoshaphat discovered, praise is a powerful weapon. After receiving the report that a “vast army” was coming against him, Jehoshaphat did not immediately jump to military action, but “resolved to inquire of the LORD” (*2 Chron. 20:3, NIV*). As the people of Judah came to Jerusalem for a fast, Jehoshaphat admitted the reality of the situation, saying that “ ‘we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you’ ” (*2 Chron. 20:12, NIV*).

When you see a “vast army” approaching, what is your instinctive reaction? From Jehoshaphat’s response in 2 Chronicles 20:3–12, what can you learn about dealing with overwhelming opposition?

As the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, he boldly announced: “ ‘ “You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you” ’ ” (*2 Chron. 20:17, NIV*). After that, they worshiped God and sang

praises to Him “with a very loud voice” (*2 Chron. 20:19, NIV*). Even though God was going to fight for them, they still had to go out to face the enemy.

But this was no ordinary march to war. Jehoshaphat appointed a choir to sing praises to the Lord as they marched out. “As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated” (*2 Chron. 20:22, NIV*). According to the author, God intervened at the very moment they exercised their faith in His promise, as they began to “praise him for the splendor of his holiness” (*2 Chron. 20:21, NIV*).

Read through the texts for today again. What spiritual principles can you find there that can apply to your own walk with God, especially in times of trial and stress?

FRIDAY *August 26*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Jehoshaphat,” pp. 190–203, in *Prophets and Kings*; “The Fall of Jericho,” pp. 487–498, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“Then let us educate our hearts and lips to speak the praise of God for His matchless love. Let us educate our souls to be hopeful and to abide in the light shining from the cross of Calvary. Never should we forget that we are children of the heavenly King, sons and daughters of the Lord of hosts. It is our privilege to maintain a calm repose in God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 253.

“And while I adore and magnify Him, I want you to magnify Him with me. Praise the Lord even when you fall into darkness. Praise Him even in temptation. ‘Rejoice in the Lord alway,’ says the apostle; ‘and again I say, Rejoice.’ Will that bring gloom and darkness into your families? No, indeed; it will bring a sunbeam. You will thus gather rays of eternal light from the throne of glory and scatter them around you. Let me exhort you to engage in this work, scatter this light and life around you, not only in your own path, but in the paths of those with whom you associate. Let it be your object to make those around you better, to elevate them, to point them to heaven and glory, and lead them to seek, above all earthly things, the eternal substance, the immortal inheritance, the riches which are imperishable.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 593, 594.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What role does community praise have in the life of the Christian? How would you describe the praise in your Sabbath services? Is it uplifting? Does it encourage members

to maintain faithfulness amid trial and trauma? If not, what can be done?

2 What does it mean to “praise the Lord even when you fall into darkness” or to “praise Him even in temptation”? How can praise help us through these situations?

3 Let members give testimonies on how praise has affected their lives. What can you learn from one another’s experiences?

4 As a class, pick a psalm of praise and spend time reading it. What does it teach you about praise? What impact does praise have on your faith?

INSIDE *Story*

Part 9: Growing in Christ

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

After Mother's baptism, Father faced a severe spiritual struggle. Evil spirits possessed him at night, and he struggled to sleep. Whenever he was possessed and saw Mother, the spirits spewed hatred at her.

Father and Mother strengthened their faith by praying and studying the Sabbath School lesson every day. Father learned to pray on his knees and to have personal time with God. The couple made it a habit to pray, have personal devotions, and study the Sabbath School lesson daily.

Mother trusted God, and she felt His constant care. She found faith and assurance in the Bible, and several verses especially helped her during Father's struggle with evil spirits. "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you," she read in James 4:7. "But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one," she read in 2 Thessalonians 3:3. She claimed the promise of Jesus in John 10:10: "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." When she found a Bible verse that helped or gave hope, she copied it into a special journal and prayed those verses to God during her 5:00 A.M. prayer time.

Mother also wrote a special prayer for Father that she prayed every morning for a year. She prayed, "Lord, I ask You for my husband, Eduardo, and for him to turn to You with all his heart. Help me to love him and to renew my love for him. I surrender to You, Lord, and ask You to bless him as he seeks to honor You. Discipline him when needed. Transform him into a man who will desire to follow

You. Help me to encourage him and to respect him. Help me to love him. I pray this in the name of Jesus, amen.”

Father, meanwhile, started Bible studies in preparation for baptism. He wanted to be baptized on October 29, exactly a year to the day after Junior’s baptism.

As Father studied the Bible, he curiously watched YouTube sermons by preachers from the Adventist Church. He also watched sermons from other Christian denominations, wanting to test their teachings against the Bible. To his shock, evil spirits taunted him as he listened to the other preachers, saying that they would have sent him to one of their churches rather than the Adventist Church if they had known that he was interested in those preachers.

Father stopped watching the other sermons. *Now I know that I’m in the right church!* he thought.

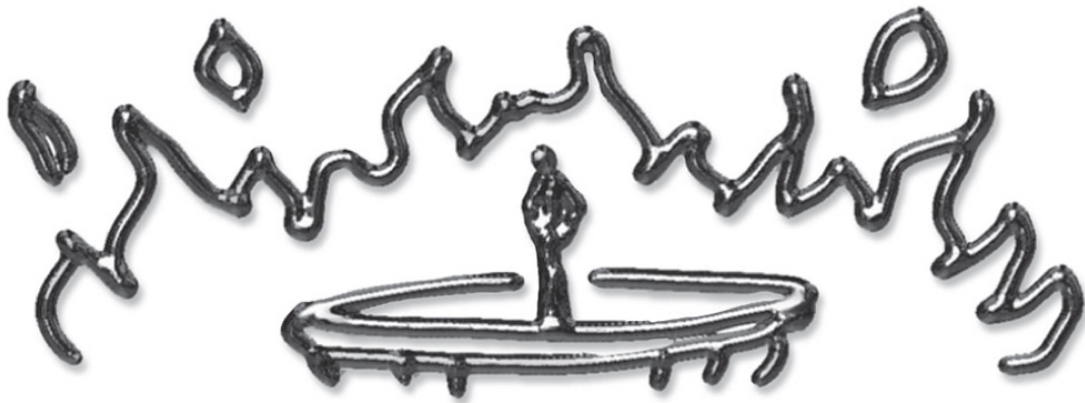
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LESSON 10

*August 27–September 2

Meekness *in the Crucible*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Ezek. 24:15–27, Exod. 32:1–14, Matt. 5:43–48, 1 Pet. 2:18–25, Ps. 62:1–8.

Memory Text: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5, NKJV).

We don't hear the word *meek* used much, except maybe when reading about Moses or studying the Beatitudes. It's not hard to figure out why, either. Meekness is defined as “enduring injury with patience and without resentment.” No wonder we don't hear much about it; it's hardly a trait well respected in cultures today. Sometimes the Bible translates this word as “humble.” Again, humility isn't a character trait seen as desirable by most cultures either.

But meekness, enduring injury with patience and without resentment, is one of the most powerful characteristics of Jesus and

His followers. And yet, it's not an end in itself: meekness of spirit can be a powerful weapon in the hands of those who are in the midst of pain and suffering. Indeed, the crucible is a great place to learn meekness of heart, for through our own meekness and broken places we can be powerful witnesses for God.

The Week at a Glance: What is the relationship between suffering and meekness? How can we, in our own meekness and broken places, be a witness to others? How can meekness really be a strength, not a weakness, for the Christian?

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 3.*

SUNDAY *August 28*

“Broken Bread and Poured-Out Wine”

Consider: Oswald Chambers has said that we are to become “broken bread and poured-out wine” for others. What do you think he means by this?

All through the Bible there are examples of people who were “broken” to serve others. Moses was called to endure unending waves of gossip and criticism as he led people to the Promised Land. Joseph was called to a journey that involved betrayal and imprisonment as he was brought to a position of service in Egypt. In each case, God permitted the situations in order that His people’s lives could become theaters of His grace and care, not only for themselves but also for the good of others, as well. God may use us in the same way. It is easy to feel angry or hurt in such situations. But as we noted yesterday, meekness is the God-given ability to endure such things “with patience and without resentment.”

Read Ezekiel 24:15–27. What’s happening here? Why was Ezekiel put through this crucible?

In Ezekiel 24:24, God says, “ ‘ “Ezekiel will be a sign to you; you will do just as he has done. When this happens, you will know that I am the Sovereign LORD” ’ ” (NIV). Through Ezekiel’s example, the people of Israel were going to be convicted of the truth about who God was, the Sovereign Lord—and they would see this truth as they experienced the fulfillment of the prophecy that Ezekiel’s life symbolized and the suffering that he had faced. Who knows how many people will see “the Sovereign LORD” through us in our own broken places, as well?

Sooner or later life itself breaks us all. What has been your experience with being broken? What lessons have you learned? How can your own broken soul be used by the Lord to help other people?

MONDAY *August 29*

Interceding for Grace

Read Exodus 32:1–14. What role do we find Moses playing here?

After the people began worshiping the golden calf, God decided they had gone too far and announced that He would destroy the people and make Moses a great nation. But rather than taking up God's offer, Moses pleaded for God to show grace to His people, and God relented.

Exodus 32:1–14 raises two important issues. First, God's offer to destroy the rebellious people and bless Moses was a test for him. God wanted Moses to demonstrate just how much compassion he felt for these desperately disobedient people. And Moses passed the test. Like Jesus, he pleaded for mercy for sinners. This reveals something very interesting: sometimes God also may allow us to face opposition; He might allow us to be in a crucible so that He, we, and the watching universe can see how much compassion we have for those who are wayward.

What reasons did Moses give for asking the Lord not to destroy Israel?

Second, this passage shows that opposition and disobedience is a call to reveal grace. Grace is needed when people least deserve it. But when they least deserve it also is the time that we feel the least like offering it. But when Moses' sister Miriam was criticizing him, he cried out to the Lord to heal her from leprosy (*Numbers 12*). When God was angry with Korah and his followers and threatened to destroy them all, Moses fell on his face to plead for their lives. The next day, when Israel grumbled against Moses for the death of the rebels and God threatened to destroy them all again, Moses fell facedown and urged Aaron quickly to make atonement for them all (*Numbers 16*). In his own meekness, in his own selflessness in the midst of this crucible, Moses sought grace on behalf of those who certainly didn't deserve it.

Think about the people around you who you think are the least deserving of grace. How can you, with meekness and selfless humility, be a revelation of God's grace to them?

TUESDAY *August 30*

Loving Those Who Hurt Us

Someone once said: “Loving our enemies, then, does not mean that we are supposed to love the dirt in which the pearl is buried; rather it means that we love the pearl which lies in the dust. ... God does not love us because we are by nature lovable. But we become lovable because He loves us.”

When you look at your “enemies,” what do you normally see—the pearl or the dirt around it?

Read Matthew 5:43–48. Jesus calls us to love and pray for our enemies. What example from nature does Jesus give us there that helps us understand why we should love our enemies? What’s the point He is teaching us?

In Matthew 5:45, Jesus uses the example of His Father in heaven to illustrate how we should treat those who hurt us, who perhaps put

us in the worst kind of crucibles. Jesus says that His Father sends the blessing of rain to both the righteous and the unrighteous; if God gives even the unjust rain, how then should we treat them?

Jesus isn't trying to say that we should always have warm, fuzzy feelings toward everyone who causes us trouble, though this also may be possible. Fundamentally, love for our enemies is not meant to be a feeling we have for them but specific actions toward them that reveal care and consideration.

Jesus concludes this passage with a verse that often causes a lot of debate: “ ‘Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect’ ” (*Matt. 5:48, NIV*). But the meaning is very clear in the context: those people who want to be perfect as God is perfect must show love to their enemies as God shows love to His. To be perfect in God's sight is to love the opposition; and to do this takes a meekness of heart that only God can give.

Keeping in mind our definition of meekness (“enduring injury with patience and without resentment”), list the changes you must make in order to allow the Lord to give you the kind of meekness of heart that will help you have the right attitude toward “enemies.”

WEDNESDAY *August 31*

A Closed Mouth

The most powerful examples of meekness in the crucible come from Jesus. When He said to come and “learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (*Matt. 11:29*), He meant it in ways we probably can’t imagine.

Read 1 Peter 2:18–25. Peter is offering some surprising advice to slaves. He describes how Jesus responded to unjust and painful treatment and suggests to them that He has left them “an example, that you should follow His steps” (*1 Pet. 2:21, NKJV*). What principles of meekness and humility in the crucible can we learn from Jesus’ example, as expressed here by Peter?

It is terrible to watch someone else treat another unjustly. And it is extremely painful when we are on the receiving end of such treatment. Because we normally have a strong sense of justice, when injustice occurs, our instincts are to “put things right” while holding on to what we believe to be a righteous and just anger.

It is not easy to live meekly. It is perhaps impossible unless we embrace one critical truth—that in all unjust situations, we must

believe that our Father in heaven is in control and that He will act on our behalf when it is according to His will. This also means that we must be open to the possibility that like Jesus, we may not always be saved from injustice. But we must always remember that our Father in heaven is still with us and in charge.

Peter's advice, modeled on Jesus' life, is surprising because it seems that silence in the face of unjust suffering is a greater witness to the glory of God than "putting people right." When questioned by Caiaphas and Pilate, Jesus could have said a lot of things to correct the situation and to justify Himself, but He didn't. His silence was a testimony to His meekness.

How do you deal with situations in which you have been treated unfairly? How can you better apply some of the principles looked at here today to your own life?

THURSDAY *september 1*

Our Rock and Refuge

So often the most proud people, the most arrogant and pushy, are those who suffer from low self-esteem. Their arrogance and pride—and total lack of meekness or humility—exist as a cover, perhaps even unconsciously, for something lacking inside. What they need is something we all need: a sense of security, of worthiness, of acceptance, especially in times of distress and suffering. We can find that only through the Lord. In short, meekness and humility, far from being attributes of weakness, are often the most powerful manifestation of a soul firmly grounded on the Rock.

Read Psalm 62:1–8. What seems to be the background for this psalm? What points is David making? What spiritual principles can you learn from what he is saying? Most important, how can you learn to apply these principles to your own life?

“Without cause men will become our enemies. The motives of the people of God will be misinterpreted, not only by the world, but by their own brethren. The Lord’s servants will be put in hard places. A mountain will be made of a molehill to justify men in pursuing a

selfish, unrighteous course. ... By misrepresentation these men will be clothed in the dark vestments of dishonesty because circumstances beyond their control made their work perplexing. They will be pointed to as men that cannot be trusted. And this will be done by the members of the church. God's servants must arm themselves with the mind of Christ. They must not expect to escape insult and misjudgment. They will be called enthusiasts and fanatics. But let them not become discouraged. God's hands are on the wheel of His providence, guiding His work to the glory of His name."—Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 177.

How immune are you to the reproaches and barbs of others? Most likely not that immune, right? How can you cleave to the Lord and anchor your sense of self-worth on the One who loves you so much that He died for your sins, and thus help protect yourself against the slights of others?

FRIDAY *September 2*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Importance of Seeking True Knowledge,” pp. 453, 454, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “The Sermon on the Mount,” pp. 298–314, in *The Desire of Ages*; “The Worker and His Qualifications,” p. 630, in *Evangelism*.

“The difficulties we have to encounter may be very much lessened by that meekness which hides itself in Christ. If we possess the humility of our Master, we shall rise above the slights, the rebuffs, the annoyances, to which we are daily exposed, and they will cease to cast a gloom over the spirit. The highest evidence of nobility in a Christian is self-control. He who under abuse or cruelty fails to maintain a calm and trustful spirit robs God of His right to reveal in him His own perfection of character. Lowliness of heart is the strength that gives victory to the followers of Christ; it is the token of their connection with the courts above.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 301.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** How does humility allow us to “rise above” hurts and annoyances? What do you think is the most important characteristic of humility that allows us to do this?
- 2** In your own particular culture, how are the characteristics of humility and meekness viewed? Are they respected, despised, or what? What kind of pressures do you face in your culture that work against you in cultivating these characteristics?

3 Are there any great examples of meekness and humility among people alive today? If so, who are they, how have they expressed these traits, and what can you learn from them?

4 Why is it that we so often equate meekness and humility with weakness?

5 We saw how David sought the Lord as a refuge. But how does that work? How is that refuge always manifested? In other words, how can we, as a church, be a refuge for those who need a refuge? What kind of refuge does your own local church provide? What can you do to help make it a place of refuge for those who need it?

INSIDE *Story*

Part 10: Power of a Name

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Father was awakened by invisible hands clutching his throat in Manaus, Brazil. Futilely he tried to pull away the hands. Finally, he gasped, “Lord, please help me!” But the deadly grip tightened. When all hope seemed lost, he heard a soft voice say, “Ask Jesus to help. Say the name of Jesus.”

“Jesus, save me!” Father cried. The unseen hands immediately released their grip. Father, gasping, understood the power of Jesus’ name for the first time. Still lying in bed, he exclaimed joyfully, “I am saved by the name of Jesus! I am saved by the blood of Jesus and Jesus’ sacrifice!” From that day, Father called on Jesus’ name whenever evil spirits harassed him.

As baptismal studies continued, Father was astonished to learn that God condemns the spiritism that he had practiced in the Candomblé temple. In Deuteronomy 18:9–14, he read, “ ‘There shall not be found among you anyone . . . who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord’ ” (verses 10, 11, NKJV). In the Ten Commandments, he read, “ ‘You shall have no other gods before Me’ ” (Exodus 20:3, NKJV). He thought, *I was worshiping other gods*. Continuing the chapter, he read, “ ‘You shall not make for yourself a carved image’ ” (verse 4, NKJV), and told himself, “I have been following everything that God calls an abomination.” When he reached the Fourth Commandment — “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy”—he told Mother, “I got the wrong day. The spirits told me to keep another day holy.”

In Revelation 21:8, he read, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and

all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” It was the same verse that Mother read when she first went to Sabbath School and that had prompted her to start praying for Father. When Father read the verse, he realized that he had been headed for the lake of fire.

Father reached a breakthrough when the Bible study focused on the state of the dead. He read that people sleep after death and do not have spirits that fly around. “The body dies, and that’s the end,” he told Mother with surprise. “The gift of life is what goes back to God.” The evil spirits had taught that people’s spirits float around after their bodies die and some of those spirits were among the legion of evil spirits that accompanied Candomblé leaders.

The evil spirits continued to annoy Father. But the more they attacked, the more Father called on the name of Jesus. A desire grew in him to lead others to Christ. *Instead of teaching people the way of darkness, he thought, I should use my knowledge and own experience to guide people to the light.*

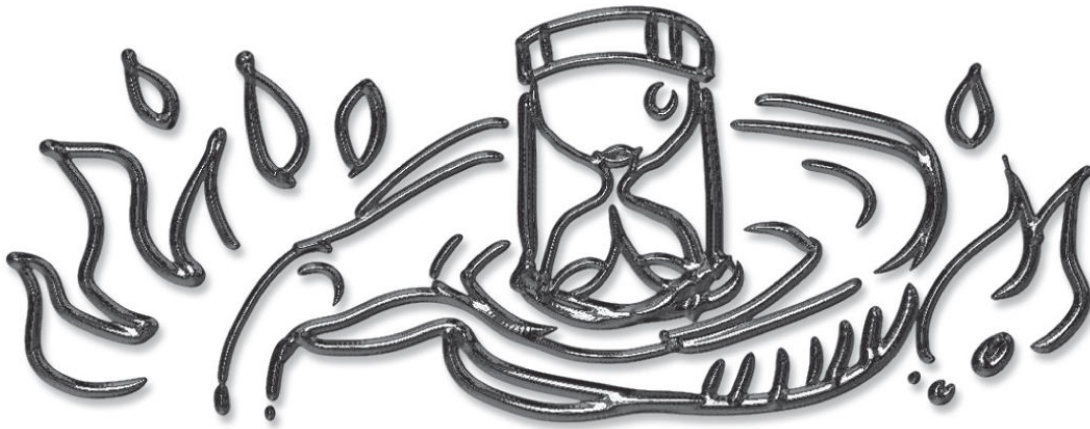
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LESSON 11

*September 3–9

Waiting *in the Crucible*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 15:4, 5; Rom. 5:3–5; 1 Samuel 26; Ps. 37:1–11.*

Memory Text: “But the fruit of the Spirit is ... longsuffering” (*Galatians 5:22, NKJV*).

Scientists did an experiment with four-year-old children and marshmallows. Each child was told by a scientist that they could have a marshmallow; however, if the child waited until the scientist returned from an errand, they would be given two. Some of the children stuffed the marshmallow into their mouths the moment the scientist left; others waited. The differences were noted.

The scientists then kept track of these children into their teenage years. The ones who had waited turned out to be better adjusted,

better students, and more confident than those who didn't. It seemed that patience was indicative of something greater, something important in the human character. It is no wonder, then, that the Lord tells us to cultivate it.

This week, we'll look at what could be behind some of the most trying of all crucibles: the crucibles of waiting.

The Week at a Glance: Why do we sometimes have to wait so long for things? What lessons can we learn about patience while in the crucible?

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 10.*

SUNDAY *September 4*

The God of Patience

Read Romans 15:4, 5. What is found in these verses for us?

We are normally impatient about things that we really want or have been promised but don't have yet. We are often satisfied only when we get what we are longing for. And because we rarely get what we want when we want it, it means that we are often doomed to irritation and impatience. And when we are in this state, it is almost impossible to maintain peace and trust in God.

Waiting is painful by definition. In Hebrew, one of the words for "wait patiently" (*Ps. 37:7, NKJV*) comes from a Hebrew word that can be translated "to be much pained," "to shake," "to tremble," "to be wounded," "to be sorrowful." Learning patience is not easy; sometimes it's the very essence of what it means to be in the crucible.

Read Psalm 27:14, Psalm 37:7, and Romans 5:3–5. What are these verses saying to us? What does patience lead to?

While we wait, we can concentrate on one of two things. We can focus on the things that we are waiting for, or we can focus on the One who holds those things in His hands. What makes such a difference when we wait for something isn't so much how long we have to wait but our attitude while we wait. If we trust the Lord, if we have placed our lives in His hands, if we have surrendered our wills to Him, then we can trust that He will do what's best for us *when* it's best for us, no matter how hard it is sometimes to believe it.

What things are you desperately waiting for? How can you learn to surrender everything to God and to His timing? Pray your way into an attitude of complete surrender and submission to the Lord.

MONDAY September 5

In God's Time

Read Romans 5:6 and Galatians 4:4. What do they tell us about God's timing?

In these verses, Paul tells us that Jesus came to die for us at exactly the right time. But Paul does not tell us why it was the right time. It is very easy to read these verses and wonder, *Why did Jesus wait for thousands of years until He came to the earth to deal with sin—didn't the universe understand that sin was a very bad thing long before then?* We may ask why Jesus is waiting to come the second time, as well. We also may ask, *Why is the Lord waiting so long to answer my prayer?*

Think about, for instance, the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27, the prophecy that points to Jesus as the Messiah (review it if you need to). How long was this time period? What does this tell you about learning to wait for things in God's time, even if it takes what seems to us a long time?

There are many important spiritual reasons why we will experience waiting times. First, waiting can refocus our attention away from “things” and back to God Himself. Second, waiting allows us to develop a clearer picture of our own motives and desires. Third, waiting builds perseverance—spiritual stamina. Fourth, waiting opens the door to developing many spiritual strengths, such as faith and trust. Fifth, waiting allows God to put down other pieces in the puzzle of the bigger picture. Sixth, we may never know the reason we have to wait; hence, we learn to live by faith. Can you think of any other reasons for waiting?

What examples can you find in the Bible of God doing things in His own time that can help you learn to trust that He will do for you what’s right in His own time, as well? (Think, for instance, about Abraham and Sarah and the promise of a son.) At the same time, ask yourself, “What might I be doing that could be delaying the answer to a prayer that could have been answered long ago?”

TUESDAY *September 6*

David: An Object Lesson in Waiting

In 1 Samuel 16:1–13, we see David anointed by Samuel as king. However, it was a long journey from the fields of his father, Jesse, to the throne in Jerusalem. No doubt, at times, he felt he was in the midst of a crucible.

First, the lad is called to play music to soothe Saul's troubled spirit (*1 Samuel 16*). Later, he becomes Israel's hero as he kills Goliath (*1 Samuel 17*). Then there are many years during which David is running for his life. Both Saul and his son Jonathan know that David is destined to be the next king (*1 Sam. 23:17, 1 Sam. 24:20*). But David does nothing to advance his God-given destiny. In fact, he appears to do the opposite. Even when Saul tries to kill him and David snips a piece of cloth off the king's robe, he wishes he had never done such a thing (*1 Sam. 24:5–7*). Again when Saul is trying to kill David, David refuses to kill Saul when the opportunity arises (*1 Sam. 26:7–11*).

Read 1 Samuel 26:1–11. Why does David refuse to kill Saul? What principles does this teach us about the way God brings about His plans for our lives?

Now read 1 Samuel 26:12–25. How does David’s refusal to kill Saul affect Saul? What does this teach us about the advantages of waiting for God?

Looking at the whole of David’s road to the throne, we could perhaps summarize it in a short sentence—don’t grab what God has not yet given. God’s gifts are always best received from His hand and in His time. This may require a very long time of waiting. Bean sprouts may literally grow up within hours, while an oak tree will take many years. But then when the strong winds come, the tree will not be uprooted.

Think about how easily David could have justified killing Saul. (After all, David was told he’d have the throne, and Saul was so evil anyway.) Yet, his actions speak of true faith in God. What conclusion might you be able to draw from this example for yourself in light of whatever you might be waiting for?

WEDNESDAY *September 7*

Elijah: The Problem of Rushing

The showdown on top of Mount Carmel had ended (*1 Kings 18*). Fire had come out of heaven, all the people had acknowledged the true God, and the false prophets had been put to death. God had been vindicated. You would have thought that Elijah had been growing in spiritual strength as the day went on, but suddenly he heard something that terrified him so much that he wanted to die. Read the rest of the story in *1 Kings 19:1–9*. The last words in the text are worrisome: “And the word of the LORD came to him: ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ ” (*1 Kings 19:9, NIV*). Evidently, Elijah’s fear caused him to run and find himself in the wrong place.

After such a powerful intervention by the Lord on Mount Carmel, Elijah should have been full of faith and trust; instead, he ran in fear for his life. What lesson can we learn from this bad example?

This story illustrates something important: when we rush, we can very easily find ourselves in the wrong place. In Elijah’s case, it was his fear that caused him to be overwhelmed and rush into the desert,

wishing that he had never been born. But there are other things that cause us to rush outside of God's plan for us.

Read the following texts. What things caused the characters depicted here to rush outside of God's will? *Gen. 16:1–3; Num. 20:10–12; Judg. 14:1–3; Matt. 20:20, 21; Luke 9:52–56; Acts 9:1.*

How easy it is to let such things as ambition, anger, passion, lack of faith, or a supposed “zeal” for the Lord cause us to rush ahead to where we shouldn't be. No one is immune to this danger. The key is to cultivate a trusting faith in the goodness and mercy of God, who we know loves us and wants what's best for us. This doesn't happen automatically. Faith might be a gift, but it's a gift that needs to be cultivated, nurtured, and jealously guarded.

THURSDAY *September 8*

Learning to Take Delight in the Lord

“Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Ps. 37:4, NRSV).

Psalm 37:4 is a wonderful promise. Imagine getting what you have always wanted. But getting the desires of our hearts hinges on having hearts that take delight in the Lord. So, what does it mean to “take delight in the LORD”?

Read Psalm 37:1–11. The context for Psalm 37:4 is, perhaps, a little surprising. David is writing about being surrounded by people who are working against God and against him. When people are working against us, the natural response is often to get angry or to set out to justify ourselves. But David advises something different.

In the following verses, what is David’s counsel to God’s people in this situation?

Ps. 37:1 _____

Ps. 37:5 _____

Ps. 37:7 _____

Ps. 37:8 _____

Read Psalm 37:4 again. In the context of the verses you have just made comments on, what does it mean to “take delight in the LORD”?

David is repeating again and again, in different ways, “Trust God.” Trust Him to act. Don’t get upset, because God is your God, and He is working for you—even right now. You don’t have to charge in and try to sort things out by yourself. Your Father in heaven is in charge. Trust Him. Trust Him completely.

It is in this context that David writes about taking delight in the Lord. To take delight in God means that we live in a state of perfect trust. Nothing can ruffle our peace, because God is here and at work. We can praise Him, we can even smile, because no one can outwit our God! When we can learn to do this, we really will receive what our hearts long for, because we will receive what our loving Father wants to give us, at the time that most benefits us and His kingdom.

How can you learn to “take delight in the LORD”? Spend some time in prayer, seeking God’s guidance as to how this may become a reality in your life.

FRIDAY *September 9*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Anointing of David,” pp. 637–642, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

God’s plan for us may require that we do a lot of waiting, and this really can feel like a crucible. Learning patience during this time can happen as we focus on the person of God and trust that He is acting for us. There are many reasons for waiting, but all are concerned with the fulfillment of God’s plans for us and His kingdom. We can lose much if we rush ahead of God, but we can gain much by maintaining an attitude of trust and delight in Him.

The Lord weighs and measures every trial.

“I cannot read the purpose of God in my affliction, but He knows what is best, and I will commit my soul, body, and spirit to Him as unto my faithful Creator. ‘For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day’ (2 Tim. 1:12). If we educated and trained our souls to have more faith, more love, greater patience, and a more perfect trust in our heavenly Father, I know we would have more peace and happiness day by day as we pass through the conflicts of this life.

“The Lord is not pleased to have us fret and worry ourselves out of the arms of Jesus. More is needed of the quiet waiting and watching combined. We think unless we have feeling that we are not in the right track, and we keep looking within for some sign befitting the occasion; but the reckoning is not of feeling but of faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 242.

Discussion Questions:

- ① What does it mean that Jesus “weighs and measures” every trial? How can knowing this help us while we wait?**
- ② Ask people in class to give personal testimonies as to what patient waiting is all about. What were their fears, their joys? How did they cope? What did they learn? What promises did they cling to?**
- ③ What can you do as a church or a class to help others who are in the crucible as they await God’s timing for something?**
- ④ What is the role of prayer in the development of patience? Are there others you can pray for so that the Spirit will develop patience in their lives?**

INSIDE *Story*

Part 11: The Final Attack

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Two weeks before Father's baptism, he inexplicably grew angry after guests left the house following a small-group Bible study in Manaus, Brazil, on Friday evening. He announced that he would sleep in the living room.

The night was darker than usual. Electricity went out in the neighborhood, leaving the houses and streets in pitch blackness.

About 1:00 A.M., Junior woke up to the sound of a voice shrieking that Father was not going to be baptized.

Junior was scared and didn't know what to do. He stayed in his room to see what would happen.

The voice screamed again, saying that Father was not going to be baptized.

Junior waited.

He heard someone enter his room.

"Please, Son, pray with me," Father said. "The enemy is attacking again."

Another voice spoke. "What are you doing?" It was Mother. When she heard the screams from the living room, she had sunk onto her knees and began to pray. Now she invited Father and Junior to join her in pleading for Jesus to chase away the evil spirits.

After some minutes of prayer, Mother suggested that they step outside the house where they would be able to see one another in the dim moonlight.

Outside, Father said he was thirsty. Junior volunteered to go back in and fetch a glass of water. In the kitchen, he spotted a mysterious dark spot on the floor. Calling for Mother, he pointed at the spot and asked, "What's that?" Mother looked closely at the floor. "That's hair!" she said.

Back outside, Junior and Mother took a closer look at Father. Big tufts of hair were missing from his head. It looked as if someone had taken a pair of scissors and chopped off his hair haphazardly.

Father put his hands to the top of his head and winced.

“I’ll have to shave my head,” he said. “I don’t care if I’m bald.”

When the sun rose on Sabbath morning, Father felt terribly tired. He was unusually weak after the nighttime attack by evil spirits, as if he had received a severe beating. He decided to pray at home instead of going to church.

After Mother and Junior left, he prayed, “Jesus, don’t let them take over my body. Please be close to me. I don’t want to be possessed anymore.”

Opening his Bible, he read in Psalms 37:5, “Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass” (NKJV).

Father understood that Jesus was telling him not to be afraid. Jesus would guide him to his baptism. Sure enough, evil spirits never possessed Father again after that Friday night. But he could still hear them.

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LESSON 12

*September 10–16

Dying Like a Seed



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Phil. 2:5–9; Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Sam. 2:12–3:18; 1 Sam. 13:1–14; Zech. 4:1–14.*

Memory Text: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; ... but if it dies, it produces much grain” (*John 12:24, NKJV*).

Jesus’ picture of a kernel of wheat dying is a fascinating analogy of our submission to God’s will. First, there is the falling. The kernel that falls from the wheat stalk has no control over where or how it falls to the ground. It has no control over the ground that surrounds and then presses over it.

Second, there is the waiting. As the kernel lies in the earth, it does not know what the future holds. It cannot “imagine” what life will be like in the future, for it is only a kernel of wheat.

Third, there is the dying. The kernel cannot possibly become a wheat stalk unless it gives up its safe, comfortable situation as a kernel. It must “die”; that is, it must give up what it has always been before so it may be transformed from a seed into a fruit-bearing plant.

The Week at a Glance: If we know that God’s will is best for us, why do we have such a hard time accepting it? What example of submission has Christ left for us? How do you see the analogy of the kernel of wheat as applying to your own life?

** Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 17.*

SUNDAY

September 11

Submission for Service

Read Philippians 2:5–9. What important message is there for us in these verses?

Contemporary culture urges us all to demand and assert our rights. And all this is good and often is the way it should be. But as with Jesus, the will of God may be for us to give up our rights freely in order to serve the Father in ways that will make an eternal impact for God's kingdom. This process of giving them up may be difficult and uncomfortable, creating the conditions of a crucible.

Look at how Jesus did this (*Phil. 2:5–8*). These verses describe three steps that Jesus took in submitting Himself to the Father's will. And at the beginning, Paul alarmingly reminds us: "Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus" (*Phil. 2:5, NIV*).

In order to be in a position to save us, Jesus gave up His equality with the Father and moved to earth in the form and limitations of a human being (*Phil. 2:6, 7, NIV*).

Jesus did not come as a great and glorious human being, but as a servant of other human beings (*Phil. 2:7, NIV*).

As a human servant, Jesus did not live a peaceful and long life but became "obedient to death." He did not even die in a noble and glorious manner. No, He was "obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (*Phil. 2:8, NIV*).

In what areas of life is this example of Jesus a model for us? If rights and equality are good and should be protected, how would you explain the logic of sometimes needing to give them up? Now read Philippians 2:9. In what way does this verse help us to understand the logic of submission to the Father's will?

Pray for wisdom from the Holy Spirit, asking, "What rights am I holding on to right now that actually might be a barrier to submitting to Jesus' will in serving my family, my church, and those around me? To what extent am I willing to endure discomfort to serve others more effectively?"

MONDAY September 12

Dying Comes Before Knowing God's Will

Many Christians sincerely seek to know God's will for their lives. "If only I could know God's will for my life, I would sacrifice everything for Him." But even after promising this to God, we still may be confused about what His will is. The reason for this confusion may be found in Romans 12:1, 2. Paul is describing how we can know God's will, and he makes an important point: if you want to know what God's will is, you have to sacrifice first!

Read Romans 12:1, 2. Paul writes that we will be able to "test and approve what God's will is" (*Rom. 12:2, NIV*) when the following things happen:

1. We have a true understanding of "God's mercy" for us (*Rom. 12:1, NIV*).
2. We offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God (*Rom. 12:1*).
3. Our minds are renewed (*Rom. 12:2*).

It is only the renewed mind that truly can understand God's will. But this renewal hinges on our death to self first. It was not enough that Christ simply suffered for us—He had to die.

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you any areas in which you are not completely "dead." What things does the Holy Spirit need you to give up in order for you to become a "living sacrifice" for God?

When areas of our lives are not completely dead to self, God permits crucibles to bring them to our attention. However, our suffering not only helps us confront our sin—but it also gives us an insight into Jesus' giving Himself up for us. Elisabeth Elliot writes, "The surrender of our heart's deepest longing is perhaps as close as we come to an understanding of the cross. ... Our own experience of crucifixion, though immeasurably less than our Savior's, nonetheless furnishes us with a chance to begin to know Him in the fellowship of His sufferings. In every form of our own suffering, He calls us to that fellowship."—*Quest for Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1996), p. 182.

Read and pray over Romans 12:1, 2. Think about the things you need to give up in order to become a sacrifice. How does this help you to understand the sufferings Jesus faced for you on the cross? How can this knowledge help you enter into fellowship with Jesus and His sufferings?

TUESDAY *September 13*

Willingness to Listen

“The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ Then Samuel said, ‘Speak, for your servant is listening’ ” (1 Sam. 3:10, NIV).

Have you ever heard that still, small voice of the Holy Spirit but ignored it? Consequently, everything went wrong, and you thought to yourself later, *Oh no, why didn't I listen?*

First Samuel describes the story of an old man and his two wicked sons who didn't listen to the Lord and a little boy who did. Though there were strong warnings from God, those who needed to change their course didn't.

Read their story in 1 Samuel 2:12–3:18. What contrast is made apparent here between those who listen to God and those who don't?

Eli's sons had other things on their minds than the things of God. And even when Eli, after hearing what God wanted, spoke to his sons, he didn't seem to do anything else. And his sons were

obviously not ready to submit the details of their lives to God's will. What a contrast to the young Samuel!

Preacher Charles Stanley describes how essential it is to cultivate openness to God's voice in what he calls "shifting into neutral." He says: "The Holy Spirit ... does not speak for the sake of passing along information. He speaks to get a response. And He knows when our agenda has such a large slice of our attention that it is a waste of time to suggest anything to the contrary. When that is the case, He is often silent. He waits for us to become neutral enough to hear and eventually obey."—*The Wonderful Spirit-Filled Life* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), pp. 179, 180.

What do you think Stanley means by becoming "neutral enough"? When you think about your openness to God, what things often prevent you from being "neutral enough to hear and eventually obey"? What do you need to do in your life to cultivate openness to God's voice and a decisiveness to be obedient to His direction?

WEDNESDAY *September 14*

Self-Reliance

When Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, it wasn't simply because she doubted God's word. At the heart of the problem was her belief that she had enough wisdom to decide for herself what was good and right. She trusted her own judgment. When we rely on our own judgment as opposed to trusting God's Word, we open ourselves up to all sorts of problems.

The story of Saul describes his steps to self-reliance and the tragedy that so quickly follows. Samuel anointed Saul as God's king (*1 Sam. 10:1*). Then he gave Saul specific instructions (*1 Sam. 10:8*), but Saul disobeyed.

Read the next part of the story in **1 Samuel 13:1–14**. What did Saul do that led to his own downfall?

There are three steps that led Saul down the road to self-reliance so soon after having been made king. The problem is that none of the steps were that bad in themselves. Yet, they contained the seeds of tragedy because they were each taken independently of God. Notice the order in which Saul's fall occurred.

1. Saul said, “I saw” (*NIV*)—the scattering of his troops and Samuel’s absence (*1 Sam. 13:11*). Saul was under pressure, and he evaluated with his own eyes what was happening.

2. Saul moved from “I saw” to “I said”—that the Philistines would conquer them (*1 Sam. 13:12, NKJV*). What he saw with his own eyes shaped what he said, or surmised, about the situation.

3. Saul moved from “I said” to “I felt”—compelled to offer sacrifice (*1 Sam. 13:12, NKJV*). What Saul thought now shaped his feelings.

All of us have done this: we rely on our own human eyesight, which leads us to rely on our own human thinking, which leads us to rely on our own human feelings. And then we act on these feelings.

Why do you think it was so easy for Saul to follow his own judgment, even though he had God’s clear instructions still ringing in his ears? If we know that we are so fragile and have such imperfect knowledge, why do we still try to rely on ourselves? What can we do to learn to trust in the Lord’s commands more than trusting in ourselves?

THURSDAY *September 15*

Substitutes

As we saw yesterday, submission to God's will can be undermined as we rely on our own strength. It also is possible to rely on other substitutes for God. When some people feel depressed, they go shopping for something to make them happy. When some feel inadequate, they pursue fame. When others have difficulties with their spouse, they look for someone else to give them intimacy and excitement.

Many of the things we use can relieve the pressure, but they do not necessarily solve the problem or teach us how to handle the situation better the next time. Only supernatural help from God can do that. The problem is that many times we depend on substitutes for God rather than on God Himself.

Here are three substitutes that we may use instead of God:

1. We use human logic or past experience when we need fresh divine revelation.
2. We block problems from our minds when we need divine solutions.
3. We escape reality and avoid God when we need communion with Him for divine power.

Zechariah helps us to focus on what really matters when we are tempted to use substitutes. After many years away, the exiles had finally returned from Babylon and immediately began to rebuild the temple. But there was an incredible amount of opposition to this (some background can be found in Ezra 4–6). So, Zechariah came with this message of encouragement to Zerubbabel, who was leading the work.

Read this message in Zechariah 4. What does God mean in Zechariah 4:6? How could the completion of a building project be affected by the Holy Spirit? What does this teach us about the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the practical things that we do?

God did not prevent the opposition to the temple or spare Zerubbabel from the stress of dealing with it. And God will not always protect us from opposition. But when opposition comes, God may use it as a crucible to teach us to depend on Him.

When stress comes, what's your first reaction? Food? Television? Prayer? Submission to God? What does your answer tell you about yourself and the things you need to learn or to change?

FRIDAY *September 16*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Eli and His Sons,” pp. 575–580, and “The Presumption of Saul,” pp. 616–626, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

Submission to God’s will comes as we die to our own desires and ambitions. This opens the way for true service to others. We cannot live for God without becoming sacrifices and living in continual openness to God’s voice. For us truly to submit our wills to our Father’s will, we must recognize the dangers of relying on ourselves and on substitutes for God’s Word and power. As submission to God’s will is at the heart of a Christlike life, God may allow crucibles to teach us dependence on Him.

“The neglect of Eli is brought plainly before every father and mother in the land. As the result of his unsanctified affection or his unwillingness to do a disagreeable duty, he reaped a harvest of iniquity in his perverse sons. Both the parent who permitted the wickedness and the children who practiced it were guilty before God, and He would accept no sacrifice or offering for their transgression.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 276.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** As a class, talk about the incredible condescension of the Son of God in coming to earth as a human being in order to die for our sins. What does this tell each of us about what self-sacrifice and self-denial for the good of others means? Though we certainly can’t do anything like what Jesus did, the principle is there and should always be before us. In what ways can we, in our own spheres, emulate the kind of

submission and self-sacrifice that Jesus showed us at the cross?

2 For many people, submitting to God without knowing what will happen next can be a terrifying thing. How would you counsel people who are relying on themselves rather than God? What would you say to help remove their fears of not knowing—or being able to control—the future?

3 As a class, spend some time praying for people you know who have difficulty in submitting to God's will, that they may see that trusting God's will is the only route to a lasting peace. At the same time, what practical things can you do for these people to help them see that they can surrender to God and that His way is the best? In other words, how can God use you to help others know of His love and willingness to provide?

INSIDE *Story*

Part 12: Father Is Baptized!

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The day of Father's baptism finally arrived, and he arrived with Mother and Junior at Manaus Central Seventh-day Adventist Church, a larger church where the baptism would be held, in Manaus, Brazil. About 400 people were seated in the main sanctuary. Pastor Sergio Alan A. Caxeta, president of the Adventist Church's Central Amazon Conference, whose territory includes Manaus, asked Mother how she felt as she and Junior took a seat on the front row. "We're fine," she said, smiling happily.

The pastor acknowledged feeling uneasy until that very afternoon. Then he had prayed, "Lord, please help me. I'm not sure about my own strength. I want Your peace so I can have the certainty that Your power is here when I baptize Eduardo." After the prayer, all doubt had vanished.

Ricardo Coelho, pastor of the family's Alpha Community Church, led Father to the second floor, where seats were reserved for Alpha's 300 members. Father greeted Dilma Araujos dos Santos and her son Clifferson, who first introduced the family to the Adventist Church, and the others. Then Pastor Ricardo asked Father to return downstairs to don a baptismal gown.

As Father descended the stairs, a man suddenly darted up and rushed toward him. Father turned to look at the man and, as their eyes met, the man's pupils slid up into his head and his eyes went white. Then the man fell down and writhed on the stairs. "I've been ordered to kill him!" he shrieked.

Concealed in a pocket, the man was carrying a small dagger, the type that Father once had used to sacrifice animals at the temple. But before the man could pull out the dagger, Pastor Ricardo and

several other men lifted him up and led him to a back room, where they found the weapon.

A short time later, Father waded into the baptismal pool. Alpha church members sang a hymn from the second floor as he went under the water.

Afterward, Pastor Ricardo told the congregation about the attempted attack and invited a physician, Luiz, up to the front to speak. Luiz, who had examined the attacker in the back room, was a frequent guest at the church but had never committed his life to Jesus. "I didn't understand the reality of the great controversy between Christ and Satan until today," he said, his voice shaking. "I saw it right here. Praise the Lord that nothing bad happened. It was God's power." He began to weep. "As a cardiologist, I felt for the attacker's pulse," he said. "I have never seen anything so abnormal. His pulse was too fast. No human could have such a high pulse rate and live."

The experience changed Luiz's life, and he decided to be baptized.

The knife attacker, it turned out, had struggled with satanic possession for some time. The evil spirits left when a pastor gave him Bible studies several months later. Through Father's baptism, at least two souls were led to Jesus.

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LESSON 13

*September 17–23

Christ *in the* Crucible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 2:7, 22–24; Matt. 2:1–18; John 8:58, 59; Luke 22:41–44; Matt. 27:51, 52; Rom. 6:23; Titus 1:2.*

Memory Text: “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ ” (*Matthew 27:46, NKJV*).

Whenever we look at the issue of suffering, the question comes: How did sin and suffering first arise? Through divine revelation we have good answers: they arose because free beings abused the freedom God had given them. This leads to another question: Did God know beforehand that these beings would fall? Yes, but obviously He thought it was, as C. S. Lewis wrote, “worth the risk.”

Worth the risk? For whom? For us, while God sits in heaven on His throne? Not exactly. The freedom of all His intelligent creatures was so sacred that, rather than deny us freedom, God chose to bear in Himself the brunt of the suffering caused by our abuse of that freedom. And we see this suffering in the life and death of Jesus, who, through suffering in our flesh, has created bonds between heaven and earth that will last throughout eternity.

The Week at a Glance: What did Christ suffer in our behalf? What can we learn from His suffering?

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

SUNDAY

September 18

The Early Days

Scripture gives us little information about the early years of Jesus. A few verses, however, tell us something about the conditions He lived under and the kind of world the Savior entered.

Read Luke 2:7, 22–24 (see also Lev. 12:6–8) and Matthew 2:1–18. What do we see in these texts that gives us an indication of the kind of life Jesus faced from the start?

Of course, Jesus was not the first person to live in poverty or to face those who wanted to kill Him, even from an early age. There is, however, another element that helps us understand the uniqueness of what Christ suffered from the earliest times.

Read John 1:46. What element does this add to help us understand what sufferings the young Jesus had faced?

With the exceptions of Adam and Eve before the Fall, Jesus was the only sinless Person who ever lived on the earth. In His purity, in His sinlessness, He was immersed in a world of sin. What torture it must have been, even as a child, for His pure soul constantly to be in contact with sin. Even in our hardness because of sin, we ourselves often shrink away from exposure to sins and evil that we find repulsive. Imagine what it must have been like for Christ, whose soul was pure, who wasn't the least bit tainted by sin. Think of the sharp contrast between Himself and others around Him in that regard. It must have been exceedingly painful for Him.

Ask yourself, "How sensitive am I to the sins that exist all around us? Do they bother me, or am I hardened to them?" If you are hardened to them, could it be because of the things you read, watch, or even do? Think about it.

MONDAY *September 19*

Despised and Rejected of Men

Read the following texts, all the while keeping in mind the fact that Jesus was divine, the Creator of heaven and earth, and that He came to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (*Matt. 12:22–24; Luke 4:21–30; John 8:58, 59*). How do these texts help us understand the sufferings that Jesus faced here on earth?

Whether by leaders, or even by the common people, Jesus' life, acts, and teaching were constantly misunderstood, leading to rejection and hatred from people He came to save. In a certain sense, it must be like a parent who sees a wayward child in need of help, and though the parent is willing to give everything for that child, the child spurns the parent, heaping scorn and rejection upon, perhaps, the only person who can spare that child from utter ruin. That's what Jesus faced while here on earth. How painful it must have been for Him.

Read Matthew 23:37. What does it tell us about how Christ felt about the rejection? As you read, ask yourself, too, *Was He*

feeling bad for Himself (as we often do when facing rejection), or was it for another reason? If for another reason, what was it?

We've all felt the sting of rejection, and maybe our pain was similar to Christ's in that it was unselfish: we were pained, not because we were rejected, but because of what the rejection would mean for the one who was rejecting us (perhaps someone we care about who refuses to accept salvation in Christ). Imagine, though, how it must have felt to Jesus, who was fully aware of what He was to face in order to save them, and at the same time fully aware of what the consequences of their rejection would be. "It was because of His innocence that He [Christ] felt so keenly the assaults of Satan."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 129.

What can you learn from Christ that can help you better cope with the pain of rejection? What does His example show you? How can you apply it to your own life?

TUESDAY

September 20

Jesus in Gethsemane

“And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch” (*Mark 14:34*).

Whatever Jesus suffered throughout His 33 years here on earth, nothing compared to what He began to face in the last hours before the Cross. From the eternal ages (*Eph. 1:1–4; 2 Tim. 1:8, 9; Titus 1:1, 2*), the sacrifice of Jesus as the offering for the world’s sin was planned, and now it was all coming to pass.

What do the following texts tell us about Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane? *Matt. 26:39, Mark 14:33–36, Luke 22:41–44.*

“He went a little distance from them—not so far but that they could both see and hear Him—and fell prostrate upon the ground. He felt that by sin He was being separated from His Father. The gulf was so broad, so black, so deep, that His spirit shuddered before it. This agony He must not exert His divine power to escape. As man He must suffer the consequences of man’s sin. As man He must endure the wrath of God against transgression.

“Christ was now standing in a different attitude from that in which He had ever stood before. His suffering can best be described in the words of the prophet, ‘Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, saith the Lord of hosts.’ Zech. 13:7. As the substitute and surety for sinful man, Christ was suffering under divine justice. He saw what justice meant. Hitherto He had been as an intercessor for others; now He longed to have an intercessor for Himself.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 686.

Dwell upon what was happening to Jesus in Gethsemane. Already, the sins of the world were starting to fall upon Him. Try to imagine what that must have been like. No human being has ever been called to go through anything like this before or since. What does this tell us about God’s love for us? What hope can you draw from this for yourself?

WEDNESDAY *September 21*

The Crucified God

Death by crucifixion was one of the harshest punishments the Romans meted out to anyone. It was considered the worst way to die. Thus, how horrific for anyone to be killed that way, in particular the Son of God! Jesus, we must always remember, came in human flesh like ours. Between the beatings, the scourgings, the nails hammered into His hands and feet, and the harrowing weight of His own body tearing at the wounds, the physical pain must have been unbearable. This was harsh, even for the worst of criminals; how unfair, then, that Jesus, innocent of everything, should face such a fate.

Yet, as we know, Christ's physical sufferings were mild in contrast to what really was happening. This was more than just the killing of an innocent man.

What events surrounding the death of Jesus showed that more was going on than most people there understood at the time? What significance can we find in each of these events that can help reveal what happened there?

Matt.

27:45

Matt.

27:51,

52

Mark

15:38

Clearly, something much more was happening here than just the death, however unfair, of an innocent man. According to Scripture, God's wrath against sin, our sin, was poured out upon Jesus. Jesus on the cross suffered a righteous God's righteous indignation against sin, the sins of the whole world. As such, Jesus suffered something deeper, darker, and more painful than any human being could ever know or experience.

As you go through whatever struggles you are facing, what hope and comfort can you draw from the reality of Christ suffering for you on the cross?

THURSDAY *September 22*

The Suffering God

We might as well get used to it: as long as we are here, in this world, we are going to suffer. As fallen creatures, it is our fate. Nothing in the Bible promises us anything different. On the contrary:

What do the following texts have to tell us about the topic at hand? *Acts 14:22, Phil. 1:29, 2 Tim. 3:12.*

Yet, in the midst of our suffering, we should keep two things in mind.

First, Christ, our Lord, has suffered more than any of us ever could. At the cross, He “has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (*Isa. 53:4, NKJV*); what we know only as individuals, He suffered for us all corporately. He who was sinless became “sin for us” (*2 Cor. 5:21*), suffering in a way that we, as sinful creatures, couldn’t begin to imagine.

But second, as we suffer, we should remember the results of Christ’s suffering; that is, what we have been promised through what Christ has done for us.

Read John 10:28, Romans 6:23, Titus 1:2, and 1 John 2:25.
What are we promised?

Whatever our sufferings here, thanks to Jesus, thanks to His bearing in Himself the punishment of our sin, thanks to the great provision of the gospel—that through faith we can stand perfect in Jesus right now—we have the promise of eternal life. We have the promise that because of what Christ has done, because of the fullness and completeness of His perfect life and perfect sacrifice, our existence here, full of pain, disappointment, and loss, is no more than an instant, a flash, here and gone, in contrast to the eternity that awaits us, an eternity in a new heaven and a new earth, one without sin, suffering, and death. And all this is promised to us and made certain for us only because of Christ and the crucible He went into so that one day, coming soon, He will see “the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (*Isa. 53:11*).

FRIDAY *September 23*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Gethsemane,” pp. 685–697, and “Calvary,” pp. 741–757, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Three times has He uttered that prayer. Three times has humanity shrunk from the last, crowning sacrifice. But now the history of the human race comes up before the world’s Redeemer. He sees that the transgressors of the law, if left to themselves, must perish. He sees the helplessness of man. He sees the power of sin. The woes and lamentations of a doomed world rise before Him. He beholds its impending fate, and His decision is made. He will save man at any cost to Himself. He accepts His baptism of blood, that through Him perishing millions may gain everlasting life. He has left the courts of heaven, where all is purity, happiness, and glory, to save the one lost sheep, the one world that has fallen by transgression. And He will not turn from His mission. He will become the propitiation of a race that has willed to sin. His prayer now breathes only submission: ‘If this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 690, 693.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How does it help us in our own sufferings, this knowledge that God Himself, in the person of Christ, suffered more than any of us ever could? What should the sufferings of Christ in our behalf mean to us? What comfort can we draw from this amazing truth? As you think about your answer, keep in mind the following statement from Ellen White: “All the suffering which is the result of sin was poured into the

bosom of the sinless Son of God.”—*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 129.

2 As a class, go over the sufferings of Christ examined in this week’s lesson. What were the crucibles that Christ faced? In what ways are they like our own, and in what ways are they different? What can we learn from how He handled these challenges that can help us amid our own crucibles?

3 What are some of your favorite Bible promises, promises that you can cling to amid sorrow and pain? Write them out, claim them for yourself, and share them in class.

4 Write out a summary paragraph, highlighting whatever main points you got from this quarter’s lessons. What questions were resolved for you? What issues still remain unanswered? How can we help each other work through those things that still greatly perplex and trouble us?

INSIDE *Story*

Part 13: Preparing to See Jesus

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The evil spirits have fallen silent. Father believes Christ won a victory over Satan with the baptism, and that is why the devil tried so hard to prevent it.

Peace has filled the family home. Mother is a church deaconess, and she still sings in the choir. Junior is 17 and finishing high school.

Father, who is 43, has shared his incredible story in churches around Brazil, and many of those who have heard it have committed their lives to Jesus. In Coari, where Father decided to follow Jesus, 16 people gave their hearts to Christ after hearing his testimony.

Father credits the Holy Spirit, not his story, for changing hearts.

“My experience is shocking, but I see the Holy Spirit working in their hearts as they listen,” he said.

In addition to sharing his story, Father sells Bibles and has presented them to his mother, his older sister, and his two younger brothers. He is praying for them. His mother stopped worshiping in the Candomblé temple long before his baptism. When she learned that evil spirits were trying to kill him, she resolved to have nothing more to do with them.

While Father is rejoicing in his new life in Christ, he remains watchful by praying and reading the Bible every day. He remembers 1 Peter 5:8, which says, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (NKJV). He also is mindful of the warning in Matthew 12:43–45, where Jesus said, “ ‘When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, “I will return to my house from which I came.” And when he

comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first' ” (NKJV).

But Father is not afraid. “Even now, the devil has no power over me,” he said. “That’s what I preach in every church that I visit.”

He dreams of the day when he will meet Jesus face to face. “I pray that the Lord will never give up on me. I also pray not to give Him up,” he said. “I pray that I remain faithful and persevere until the end. I have hope that I will see Him. That is my hope.”



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2022 Bible Study Guide *for the Fourth*

Quarter

The adult Bible study guide for next quarter, *Life Everlasting: On Death, Dying, and the Future Hope*, by Alberto Timm, deals with the subject of the great controversy between good and evil from two perspectives. One is the origin and ongoing existence of sin and death. The other is God's enduring work to solve these problems and bring the world back to its original perfect condition. Special emphasis is given also to the mortal nature of human beings and how the resurrection is the condition for immortality. In reality, we should not fear death because Christ died for us and overcame the power of death. Actually, we are assured that He holds " 'the keys to death and to the place of the dead' " (*Rev. 1:18, NCV*).

With the fall of Adam and Eve, death engulfed not only the human race but all life as well. Expressions of death can be seen all around us. Our world is full of suffering and tears. We need assurance in the present and hope for the future. Next quarter, we will explore the painful subject of death, but through the lens of the hope offered us through Jesus.

Lesson 1—Rebellion in a Perfect Universe

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Creation: An Expression of Love** (*1 John 4:8, 16*)

MONDAY: **Free Will: The Basis for Love** (*1 John 4:7–16*)

TUESDAY: **Mysterious Ingratitude** (*Ezek. 28:12–19*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Price of Pride** (*Isa. 14:12–15*)

THURSDAY: **The Spread of Unbelief** (*Revelation 12*)

Memory Text— *Isaiah 14:12*

Sabbath Gem: Genesis 3 tells us that the fall of Adam and Eve brought sin, evil, and death to our world. But even before the Fall, evil already existed, manifested by the “serpent,” who deceived Eve (*Gen. 3:1–5*). So, we need to go back before the Fall to find the source and origins of the evil that so dominates our world.

Lesson 2—Death in a Sinful World

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Statements in Tension** (*Gen. 2:16, 17*)

MONDAY: **Deceived by the Serpent** (*Gen. 3:1–7*)

TUESDAY: “ ‘You Will Not Die’ ” (*Gen. 3:4*)

WEDNESDAY: **Consequences of Sin** (*Gen. 3:7–19, Rom. 5:12*)

THURSDAY: **The First Gospel Promise** (*Gen. 3:15, 21*)

Memory Text— *Romans 5:12*

Sabbath Gem: With the fall of Adam and Eve, sin and death took over our world, but God planted a seed of hope for humanity even back in Eden.

Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; email: info@christianrecord.org; website: www.christianrecord.org.