




SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH
JAMAICA UNION
CONFERENCE

LORD
TRANSFORM
ME



A SPECIAL STUDY
ON THE
RIGHTEOUSNESS OF
CHRIST

MESSAGE FROM THE UNION PRESIDENT

Dear Brethren:

The word of God entreats us in 2 Timothy 2:15 to “study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (KJV); and Proverbs 9:10 says “knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (NIV). It is clear that the Lord wants us to be educated in His word.

Not only does God want us, His disciples, to be learned in His word, but He wants us to teach others so that His circle of followers will get wider and wider. Jesus commissioned His disciples: “Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them...teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...” (KJV). It is an imperative that we all must heed.

As we focus on transformation this quinquennium, and our theme *Lord Transform Me* burns in our hearts and minds, let us remember that transformation will not happen in a vacuum. The studying of God’s word is pivotal in our quest to be perfected in God’s love which is the ultimate goal of transformation.

The intention is that we will utilize these lessons in our small groups of three--two members of the Church teaming up and recruiting a non-member into the group—and together they study to help the non-member to become a believer. Everyone will benefit because we will become more intimately acquainted with Christ as we study, while simultaneously introducing others to Him.

I implore you, my brethren, to make effective use of these lessons and help others to be transformed as we allow the word of God to speak to our own hearts. Let us study and pray daily, *Lord, Transform Me!*

Pastor Everett Brown
Jamaica Union Conference

**MESSAGE FROM THE ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR EVANGELISM,
TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Greetings!

Lord Transform Me is an initiative whose time has come. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has had many programme over the years under which Christ mission has been advanced. Lord Transform Me however, is different, because it focuses on “me”; my own relationship with Christ. In this Lord Transform Me programme, ‘being’ takes precedence over ‘doing’. It challenges every one of us to examine our own relationship with Christ, and thereafter, engage in those spiritual disciplines that will lead to personal and corporate transformation. This is absolutely critical and essential, in light of the imminent return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Jamaica Union Conference and Inter-American Division are indebted to Pastor Damian Chambers who developed this excellent series of studies on the **Righteousness of Christ**. If Lord Transform Me is to lead to Christ-likeness, then what does that Christ-likeness look like, and how is it best exemplified? Using his own personal experience and spiritual journey, Pastor Chambers has effectively answered these questions.

Jamaica Union takes pleasure in recommending these lessons to our churches. They are specifically designed for Small Groups and Bible class settings. We implore all our members to spend quality time in God’s Word and claim the promise of the Psalmist who says, “Thy Word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against Thee” (Psalm 119:11).

Best Wishes for a Spirit-filled and transforming study.

Joseph G. Smith
Jamaica Union Conference

INTRODUCTION

The Motivation for Preparing the Study

By Pastor Damian Chambers

A few years ago, as a young minister trying to find direction and purpose, I watched a program on television, where a billionaire was sharing his story about what gave him inspiration. He shared that while starting out, he made it his personal duty to find and interview at least 3 or 4 billionaires about the principles they lived by and what gave them success. He said he wrote down 5 principles that he garnered from his interviews with these gentlemen and these principles contributed significantly to his success in finance.

Then, I thought about it. Who is my role model? Whose success do I want to copy as this man copied the billionaires? I thought about some persons that I admired for their success, but I said, ‘though I admire these persons, I do not want to be exactly like them’. There is only one Person I decided I wanted to be like, and that is Jesus.

Then, I decided to make it my duty, to take a similar journey to what the billionaire did, but I would do it with Jesus. I would study the life of Jesus with the intention of taking note of all the principles by which He lived in order to include those principles in my life.

So, I took the book *Desire of Ages*, and the four gospels, with the challenge of reflecting on and copying the principles by which Jesus lived. It has been a life-transforming experience for me since then. My Christian life has never been the same.

This is a similar journey to which the church is inviting us to take, with this Small Group Bible Study Guide on the righteousness of Christ.

The Goal of the Study

If we are going to experience transformation, we are not at liberty to be transformed into anything of our choosing. Only when we are transformed to be like Jesus will it matter.

Ellen G. White says, "Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own" (*Christ Object Lessons*, 69). John says, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

This is the goal of our transformation—to be like Jesus. And this is the goal of this study, to allow us to take this journey together, through small group setting.

It was Ellen G. White who suggested, ““We should study the life of our Redeemer, for He is the only perfect example for men. We should contemplate the infinite sacrifice of Calvary, and behold the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the righteousness of the law. You will come from a concentrated study of the theme of redemption strengthened and ennobled.” *My Life Today*, p. 293

“It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross” (White, E. G. (1898). *The Desire of Ages* (Vol. 3, p. 83). Pacific Press Publishing Association).

The Outline of the Study

The first four lessons focus on who Jesus is—the major roles He play as the Son of God. Then we look at who man is, in light of what God created us to be and the effect that sin has on our lives. Then, the other two lessons focus on Christ’s righteous provision as the only solution to man’s sin problem. Lessons 10 to 17 cover the experience of taking on Christ’s righteousness. They deal with the twin subjects of justification and sanctification by faith.

The section that follows cover the ‘Life of the Justified’—focusing on four spiritual disciplines of Bible study, Prayer, Fellowship and Ministry and the role they play in the believers’ spiritual growth. The fifth lesson in this section is dedicated to how the believer deals with temptation.

Then there are 2 lessons that deal with things that challenges the believers’ spiritual growth—‘Counterfeit righteousness’ and ‘Hindrances to spiritual growth’. These lessons attempt to identify factors that may prevent a believer from attaining God’s purpose in their lives for spiritual maturity.

The final lesson is on ‘rewards of the righteous’. This focuses on the rewards of living the ‘justified life’ in this life and the life to come.

How to Use this Small Group Bible Study Guide

While this guide can be used, with great benefit for personal study, it is meant to be used in a Small Group setting or during a weekly Bible Class, once per week.

The group leader is to spend at least 2 hours preparing for each week’s time of sharing. This time would include going through the lesson personally, getting familiar with the introduction to the lesson and the notes for each question. This is to allow for spontaneity in presentation and facilitating of the discussion.

- The **introduction** is meant to get the group discussing the topic in a non-formal way.
- There is a maximum of **four questions** for each lesson, because adequate time is given for discussion and sharing on each question.
- Most questions will have more than one **Bible text**, the idea is that, at different times, each member of the group can be given a text to read and explain their thoughts in relation to the question.
- The **reflection** functions as a concluding point in preparation for the prayer focus.
- The **prayer focus** list is not exhausted. It is only a suggestion as to what can be prayed for in response to the lesson.

BIBLE STUDY MEETING – PROGRAMME GUIDE

1. Song Service/Praise Team (10 mins)
2. Hymn (one that matches the topic) (4 mins)
3. Prayer for Transformation (3 mins)
4. Recognition of Friends and Invitees (5 mins)
5. Welcome, Remarks and Fellowship (use a special fellowship song)..... (5 mins)
6. Special Musical Item (4 mins)
7. Theme Song (Lord Prepare Me to Be a Sanctuary)..... (4 mins)
8. Bible Study(30 - 40 mins)
9. Special Prayer Session (based on prayer emphases)..... (5 mins)
10. Closing Song(4 mins)
11. Prayer(1 min)
12. Announcements (announce topic for next meeting and ask each one to bring a friend)..... (3 mins)
13. Fellowship & Departure(2 mins)

TOTAL: 80 - 90 minutes

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JESUS: WHO IS HE?

Key Text: *“And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*
Matthew 16:16

INTRODUCTION

In response to Jesus’ question, “Whom say ye that I am?”, Peter said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Peter’s response was in contrast to what the majority of Jews said about Jesus. “Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets” (Matthew 16:14).

While it was nice that the people associated Jesus to great and powerful men as Jeremiah and Elijah, it was not enough to acknowledge Him merely as a prophet or as a good Man. It was critical to their salvation that they acknowledge Him as the Messiah or the Christ, the Son of God.

To accept Jesus as the Son of God, means that we accept Him, not only as a good Man; not merely as a faultless Man; but as Lord and King of our lives on whom we depend for salvation and sustenance.

1. **Jesus asked His disciples, “Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?” What was the response of the disciples, and what would be some of the responses today, if you should attempt to ask this question of the major religions and groups today?**

READ: Matthew 13:14

NOTES: According to J. Warner Wallace, “Jesus is the one religious leader who is most frequently mentioned by religious groups, whether or not they happen to be Christian. Every major religious movement considers Jesus to be an important religious figure. Every movement makes some effort to account for His existence and teaching.”

Jews: Jesus was Mary’s Son, a Teacher, a Miracle Worker, Claimed to be the Messiah

Islam: Jesus was born of a Virgin, to be Revered, was a Prophet, was a wise Teacher, a Miracle Worker

Jehovah's Witnesses: Jesus is God's only direct creation, that everything else was created by means of Christ, and that the initial unassisted act of creation uniquely identifies Jesus as God's "only-begotten Son".

Ellen G. White commented on the report that the disciples gave about what the Jews in their day thought about Jesus,

“Sadly the disciples were forced to acknowledge that Israel had failed to recognize their Messiah. Some indeed, when they saw His miracles, had declared Him to be the Son of David. The multitudes that had been fed at Bethsaida had desired to proclaim Him king of Israel. Many were ready to accept Him as a

prophet; but they did not believe Him to be the Messiah” (*The Desire of Ages*, 411).

2. **Why do you think that most of Israel did not accept Jesus as the Messiah?**

READ Matthew 13:14, John 12:37-43, Isaiah 53:1-5

NOTES:

The character of the Messiah that the Jews in Christ's day looked for was one who could deliver them from the power of the Romans. They were not willing to accept that this Man, who grew up as a peasant's son, whose mother they knew, could be the Messiah. They knew He was without fault, but they did not accept Him, because if they did, they would have had to accept His lifestyle and His teachings. This they were not willing to accept. Therefore, Isaiah rightly asked the question, "who hath believed our report and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

3. **In response to Jesus' direct question, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:15–16). How important is it that we acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God and not merely a prophet; or a miracle worker?**

READ: John 20:30, 31; 3:15, 16

NOTES:

According to Ellen G. White, "The truth which Peter had confessed is the foundation of the believer's faith. It is that which Christ Himself has declared to be eternal life" (*The Desire of Ages*, 412).

The Jews clearly understood the 'Son of God' to be One who is not only equal with God, but is "very God" (John 5:18).

The fact is, that if the Jews acknowledged Jesus as merely a prophet, then He is a man to be admired and to be accorded great respect. But, if He is the Son of God, if He is the Messiah, the Christ, then He is not merely to be admired, but to be obeyed.

As a matter of fact, as the Son of God, we have no life without Him. He is our only hope of eternal life (John 3:16). As the Son of God, He is not only Redeemer, but Creator and Sustainer of all things (Colossians 1:16, 17; Hebrews 1:3). This, Peter (and the other disciples), were not afraid to confess. "He (Peter) waited not for kingly honors to crown his Lord, but accepted Him in His humiliation" (Ibid, 412).

To accept Jesus as the Son of God, means that we accept Him, not only as a good Man; not merely as a faultless Man; but as Lord and King of our lives on whom we depend for salvation and sustenance.

4. **Jesus said, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). What arrangement has God made for the world to get the opportunity know Jesus? How are we expected to respond to His call?**

READ: John 6:44; 12:32; 3:14-16; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; John 1:14, 18

NOTES:

God wants us to know Him; for this knowledge brings eternal life. He reveals Himself to us through His Son (John 1:18). Jesus is referred to as the, “express image” of the Father (Hebrews 1:3). In Christ, man does not only have a full revelation of God’s glory, but the hope of forgiveness and to be restored to right relationship with God. That is why, it is so important to know Jesus. However, of ourselves, we cannot seek after God, it is the Spirit of God Who exalts Jesus and is constantly revealing to man’s conscience, the need to repent of their sins and accept Christ as Lord. According to Ellen G. White, “The light shining from the cross reveals the love of God. His love is drawing us to Himself. If we do not resist His drawing, we shall be led to the foot of the cross in repentance for the sins that have crucified the Saviour. Then the Spirit of God through faith produces a new life in the soul. The thoughts and desires are brought into obedience to the will of Christ. The heart, the mind, is created anew in the image of Him who works in us to subdue all things to Himself” (*The Desire of Ages*, 176).

REFLECTION

Jesus, in His prayer, found in John 17, said, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). To know Jesus is critical to our salvation and sustenance. To know Him, not only as the son of Joseph and Mary; not only as a carpenter; not only as a miracle worker. It is important to know Him as Saviour; as Redeemer; as Lord. When the Woman of Samaria knew Him merely as a Jew, she was ready to enter into a theological debate. However, as Jesus pressed the conversation, and she got to know Him as the Giver of living water; as One who could not only fix her husband problem, but her entire life, she was willing to give all and do all for Him (see John 4).

PRAYER FOCUS:

- A deeper understanding of who Jesus is
- To overcome whatever prejudices or pre-conceived ideas that might prevent us from knowing Jesus as we should
- To make it a lifelong journey to know Jesus more

JESUS: THE LAMB OF GOD

Key Text: "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

INTRODUCTION

There is a reason that Jesus' life was such a mystery and misunderstood by so many. It is an apparent paradox, that that which was at the centre of His mission and purpose in this world was the cause of such misunderstanding—His substitutionary life and death for the sinner (1 Timothy 3:16; Isaiah 53:3-7; Philippians 2:5-9). While hanging on the cross, fulfilling His mission, His enemies taunted, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him." (Matthew 27:43 NKJV).

In order to appreciate Jesus' death on the cross, there are two important truths to keep in mind, 1) Jesus was not forced to die. He voluntarily gave up His life, and 2) Jesus' mission was not to save Himself; He came to save humanity.

In this lesson, we examine Jesus' role as the "Lamb of God"; man's substitute.

1. **John the Baptist declared Jesus to be the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). As a disciple of John, witnessing this declaration, what would you be thinking that John meant by this statement?**

READ: Isaiah 53:3-7; Genesis 22:13, 14; Revelation 13:8

NOTES: From the promise in Genesis 3:15 of the “Seed of the Woman” to the time when the veil in the temple was rent after Christ’s death on the cross, God’s people looked forward to the “Lamb of God” who would “take away” the sin of the world. “In order that man might realize the enormity of sin, which would take the life of the sinless Son of God, he was required to bring an innocent lamb, confess his sins over its head, then with his own hands take its life a type of Christ’s life” (Haskell, Stephen, *The Cross and Its Shadow*, pg. 20). Jesus was the centre of the sacrificial system. As the true worshippers like Abel, Noah, Abraham and the patriarchs offered their sacrifices, they were aware that the “blood of bulls and goats” could not take away their sins (Hebrews 9:4, 5). By faith, they saw Jesus lifted upon a cross to take away their sins and they believed in Him for salvation.

2. **Discuss the qualities that a sacrificial lamb had to possess and how these were fulfilled by Jesus.**
 - a. “Without blemish” (Leviticus 1:3) – 1 Peter 1:18, 19; 2:21, 22; 1 John 3:5
-

Lesson 2

b. Lamb was killed by sinner (Leviticus 1:4, 5) – Isaiah 53:6

c. Lamb was submissive to master, even to death (Isaiah 53:7) – Philippians 2:5-7

3. **What are some of the things that the death and resurrection of Jesus accomplished on our behalf?**

a. Hebrews 2:14, 15; 1 Corinthians 15:55-57

Jesus' death and resurrection have assured us of victory over death and the fear of death. Death is one of man's greatest. In Christ, we have the assurance of victory over this tyrant. This means that not even death can prevent those who serve Jesus faithfully from receiving their reward (Romans 8:38, 39).

b. Colossians 2:15

According to the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol. 7, the term "principalities and powers" can be used to identify both earthly rulers or supernatural beings. The context of this passage suggests that Paul speaks to supernatural beings. In His ministry, Christ did triumph over Satan and his angels. "Christ's life of victory, culminating in Calvary, spelled the doom of the devil. Satan's disguise was torn away. His methods of operation were laid open before the angels and the entire universe. . . . By his cross Jesus stripped from the principalities and powers of darkness both their robe of office and authority as princes of the world." (pg. 205).

c. 2 Timothy 1:10

Jesus has "abolished death" and makes it possible for man to have eternal life.

d. Luke 24:46, 47

Because of what Jesus has done, repentance and forgiveness of sins are made available to the world.

e. John 7:37-39

Through the death of Jesus man is able to receive the Holy Spirit in his life. By nature, man's heart is governed by self and the flesh. But, Jesus has opened the way for us to receive the Holy Spirit, so that we can walk in obedience to the word of the Lord (Romans 8:1-16).

4. **The Bible says that the “Lamb of God” was “slain from the foundation of the world”. Discuss the idea that Jesus knew of His death and suffering before He came into the world; yet He chose this path. What does this reveal about God’s love for humanity?**

READ: Revelation 13:8, 1 Peter 1:18-20; John 3:16

NOTES:

“Even before He took humanity upon Him, He saw the whole length of the path He must travel in order to save that which was lost. Every pang that rent His heart, every insult that was heaped upon His head, every privation that He was called to endure, was open to His view before He laid aside His crown and royal robe, and stepped down from the throne, to clothe His divinity with humanity. The path from the manger to Calvary was all before His eyes. He knew the anguish that would come upon Him. He knew it all, and yet He said, “Lo, I come: in the volume of the Book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart.” Psalm 40:7, 8. White, E. G. (1898). *The Desire of Ages* (Vol. 3, p. 410). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

REFLECTION

As we study the life of Christ, it is important to appreciate what His death and resurrection mean to us. It was a pivotal moment in the drama of the great controversy, when Jesus took our sins upon the cross, died and arose the 3rd day. By this, Jesus has gotten authority over all that could hinder us and has gotten the right to give us all that we need for salvation (see Matthew 28:18; Hebrews 2:17, 18).

PRAYER FOCUS

- Praise God for the wonderful sacrifice of His Son for our salvation
- God will help us to appreciate the victories and opportunities that Christ’s death has open to us.

JESUS: OUR HIGH PRIEST

Key Text: “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17).

INTRODUCTION

It is of utmost importance to realize that after we accept Christ and become Christians our Saviour does not abandon us. He will always accompany us in our Christian pilgrimage.

In other words, after Jesus died for our sins and ascended to heaven He did not leave us here to struggle alone against Satan. He ascended to heaven to continue to work on our behalf before the Father. His heavenly ministry has important implications for our Christian life.

In this lesson, we will be exploring what the Bible teaches about the work that Jesus started in heaven after He ascended and how it affects our day to day lives.

- 1. In reference to Jesus, the Bible says, “when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3 NKJV). At the right hand of the Father, He functions as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, applying the merits of His sacrifice on our behalf. What difference does it make to your spiritual life to know that the grace of God is constantly available to you through the High Priestly ministry of Jesus? (Why do you think God made this arrangement?)**

READ: Hebrews 7:25; 4:14-16; 1 John 2:1, 2

NOTE: After His resurrection and ascension into heaven, according to the Bible, Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father on His throne (see also 1 Peter 3:22). At the right hand of the Father, Jesus functions as our High Priest. As our High Priest He mediates for us, through the merits of His blood, the forgiveness of our sins, provides answers for our prayers, and sanctifies us

- 2. In Hebrews 5:1, 2, the author outlined some qualifications for a high priest. He said, “For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness.” Discuss the ways in which Jesus has fulfilled these qualifications in order to be appointed our High Priest.**

Lesson 3

- a. "Taken from among men" – Hebrews 2:14-17; John 1:14
-

- b. "Appointed for men in things pertaining to God" – Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1, 2; 1 Timothy 2:5
-

- c. "He can have compassion on those who are ignorant . . . since himself is also subject to weakness" – Hebrews 2:18; 4:15
-

3. The Bible says that Jesus was "made like His brethren"; he "was made in the likeness of men".

- a. In what ways was Jesus "like us"?**

Galatians 4:4

Luke 2:40, 52

Matthew 26:38; Luke 19:41

John 19:28

John 4:6; Matthew 4:2; 8:24

- b. In what way was He NOT like us?**

READ 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5; 1 John 1:8

NOTES:

Jesus' humanity was revealed by His birth; His growth into manhood; His human attributes such as hunger, sleep, thirst and crying. Jesus was so identified with His peers, that they could hardly recognize Him as God. "Christ did not make believe take human nature; He did verily take it. He did in reality possess human nature" (*Review and Herald*, April, 1906). On the other hand, Jesus took everything about man, except His sinful nature. "He took the nature of man in its fallen state, bearing the consequences of sin, not its sinfulness. He was one with the human race, except in sin." (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 56).

- 4. The Bible clearly teaches that the ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary will not last forever. We are currently living during the time of Christ's ministry in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary—a type of Judgment where (at the close of this work) the saints will be sealed forever. Discuss the significance of the fact that Jesus, our Saviour and High Priest, is also our Judge.**

READ: Romans 8:31-34; Revelation 3:5; John 5:26, 27

NOTES:

It is reassuring to know that our Judge is also our Defender (Romans 8:32, 33). He is on our side. He has done all and will do all that is necessary to save us.

It also says to us that we should live in close communion with Him through the study of the Bible and prayer in order to be spiritually strengthened to overcome the enemy. Since He provides for us all we need for salvation there is no excuse to be found without the wedding dress (Matthew 22:12).

REFLECTION

“Christ had ascended to heaven in the form of humanity. The disciples had beheld the cloud receive Him. The same Jesus who had walked and talked and prayed with them; who had broken bread with them; who had been with them in their boats on the lake; and who had that very day toiled with them up the ascent of Olivet,—the same Jesus had now gone to share His Father’s throne The disciples no longer had any distrust of the future. They knew that Jesus was in heaven, and that His sympathies were with them still. They knew that they had a friend at the throne of God, and they were eager to present their requests to the Father in the name of Jesus. In solemn awe they bowed in prayer, repeating the assurance, “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy

Lesson 3

may be full” John 16:23, 24, White, E. G. (1898). *The Desire of Ages* (Vol. 3, p. 832). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

PRAYER FOCUS

- Thank God for the ‘mercy seat’.
- God will help us to pray more

JESUS: OUR COMING KING

KEY TEXT: “Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel” (John 1:49).

INTRODUCTION

Currently, this world is governed by people and principles that most of the time conflict with the principles purported by the word of God. Life on this earth therefore, can be made difficult for the followers of Christ. Jesus warned His disciples not to get their hopes up about being accepted by this world. He said to them, "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:18–19). He also encourages us saying: “But take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

God's people are told to expect a kingdom in which they are not second class citizens; a kingdom whose "Builder and Maker is God"; a kingdom that is governed by the loving power of God.

In this lesson we study how this kingdom will be established.

- 1. There are a number of prophecies about Jesus, the Messiah that suggest that He would be born a King. Discuss the idea that though He was born a King, yet Jesus was born in a manger. (He did not receive a royal welcome into this world.)**

READ: Genesis 49:10; Isaiah 9:6, 7; Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 9:9; Luke 2:2; John 1:49.

NOTES:

Jesus' mission in this world was not to seek worldly kingship. He did not come to take over the government or legislative powers; He came to invite people to allow God to rule over their hearts . He came to die, so that we can have the privilege of once again claiming God as our King.

- 2. Jesus came into this world as a King. However, He refused to interfere with or accept legislative power in His time. What does this tell us about Jesus' strategy and the type of Kingdom He seeks to establish?**

READ John 6:18; 18:33-36

NOTES:

“The government under which Jesus lived was corrupt and oppressive; on every hand were crying abuses,—extortion, intolerance, and grinding cruelty. Yet the Saviour attempted no civil reforms. He attacked no national abuses, nor condemned the national enemies. He did not interfere with the authority or administration of those in power. He who was our example kept aloof from earthly governments. Not because He was indifferent to the woes of men, but because the remedy did not lie in merely human and external measures. To be efficient, the cure must reach men individually, and must regenerate the heart. Not by the decisions of courts or councils or legislative assemblies, not by the patronage of worldly great men, is the kingdom of Christ established, but by the implanting of Christ’s nature in humanity through the work of the Holy Spirit. White, E. G. (1898). *The Desire of Ages* (Vol. 3, p. 509). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

- 3. Why do you think it would be contradictory to His mission for Jesus to simply take over the government of this world without making provision for man's heart to be changed? Why wouldn't this work?**

READ: John 19:15; Luke 19:12-14

NOTES:

This world is not more so in need of a "good government" as it is in need of a change of heart. Without a change of heart, we will not appreciate a government that is righteous and holy in its operation. As Ellen G. White suggests, "The sinner could not be happy in God’s presence; he would shrink from the companionship of holy beings. Could he be permitted to enter heaven, it would have no joy for him. The spirit of unselfish love that reigns there—every heart responding to the heart of Infinite Love—would touch no answering chord in his soul. His thoughts, his interests, his motives, would be alien to those that actuate the sinless dwellers there. He would be a discordant note in the melody of heaven. Heaven would be to him a place of torture; he would long to be hidden from Him who is its light, and the centre of its joy. It is no arbitrary decree on the part of God that excludes the wicked from heaven; they are shut out by their own unfitness for its companionship. The glory of God would be to them a consuming fire. They would welcome destruction, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them" *Steps to Christ*, pg. 17.

- 4. In Revelation 19 John, in vision, sees Jesus coming as King of Kings. Discuss what factors need to be in place for Jesus to take control of the government of this world.**

READ: Revelation 11:15; Daniel 2:44, 45; Matthew 24:14

NOTES:

Jesus is not coming to take over the parliament or presidency of the nations of the earth. He is not coming to improve upon what man has created. He is coming to destroy all earthly kingdom, establish a new heaven and a new earth and then will He setup His kingdom that will last forever (Daniel 2:44, 45). However, before He does this, He will put an end to sin, Satan will be destroyed, the curse of sin will be removed, and His people are sealed for eternity.

REFLECTION

“God desires from all His creatures the service of love—homage that springs from an intelligent appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced allegiance, and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.” White, E. G. (1911). *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan (Vol. 5, p. 493)*. Pacific Press Publishing Association. Because this world is in rebellion, Jesus will not take rulership, because He will not do so by force. Therefore, He is pouring out His love in our hearts through the power of the Spirt as the governing principle in our lives (Rom 5:5).

PRAYER FOCUS

- For God’s kingdom to come and for His will to be done on earth as in heaven
- That God will continue to transform my heart as He prepares me to be part of His kingdom
- As many persons as possible will accept Christ and submit to His will

CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

KEY TEXT: “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, The moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Psalm 8:3–4).

INTRODUCTION

In attempting to give an explanation for the present situation of his people, Moses went to the beginning. He went to how it all started. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

How have they gotten to this point? That they are slaves to another nation; that they have no will of their own; that their only hope is in a promise that was made thousands of years ago. How did we get into this mess? His people are slaves to Egypt; treated as if they are non-entity. Treated as if all they are worth is working in a muddy pit until death. Their children seem to have no value, because they are killed in great numbers to appease Pharaoh’s fear.

In trying to get perspective on where they were, as a people, and the hope that they have in the promises of the God of their fathers, Moses goes to the beginning.

Similarly, as we study man’s present moral condition in light of the hope of salvation, it is important that we take into perspective God's original purpose for man.

1. Why is it important for us, as we study God’s work of redemption to go back to God’s original purpose for man?

READ: Psalm 8:3-8; Genesis 1:26, 27

NOTES:

It is important to reflect on where we are coming from in order to appreciate what God has done and is doing for us. Though our minds have been tainted by sin, and it is difficult to appreciate the perfection that God created at the beginning, we can, by faith accept the record that God gave, that man was created in the image of God.

Commenting on the creation of man, Ellen White wrote, “As man came forth from the hand of his Creator, he was of lofty stature and perfect symmetry. His countenance bore the ruddy tint of health and glowed with the light of life and joy. Adam’s height was much greater than that of men who now inhabit the earth. Eve was somewhat less in stature; yet her form was noble, and full of beauty. The sinless pair wore no artificial garments; they were clothed with a covering of light and glory, such as the angels wear. So long as they lived in obedience to God, this

robe of light continued to enshroud them" White, E. G. (1890). *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets as Illustrated in the Lives of Holy Men of Old* (Vol. 1, pp. 45–46). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

“Man was originally endowed with noble powers and a well-balanced mind. He was perfect in his being, and in harmony with God. His thoughts were pure, his aims holy. But through disobedience, his powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love.” White, E. G. (1892). *Steps to Christ* (p. 17). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

2. Discuss the qualities that suggests that man was God’s crowing act of creation.

READ: Genesis 1:26, 27; 2:16; Psalm 8

NOTES:

When Moses went to the beginning, he saw God meticulously and carefully creating a world for man’s habitation. Step by step He established the world by His wisdom. When He came to the sixth day, the crowing act of His creation is man. Everything seemed to have been created for the benefit, comfort and sustenance of the human race. Man was created in the image of God. He is Gods son, Gods friend, Gods servant and God’s appointed steward of this world.

3. DISCUSS your understanding of what the Bible means when it says that man was created in God’s image. What does this say about man’s worth and how should this knowledge affect the way we treat each other?

READ: Genesis 1:26, 27; James 3:8, 9; Genesis 9:6; Matthew 25:45

NOTES:

Though the image of God in man has been marred by sin; yet, God identifies Himself with us, in such a way that whatever is done to the "least" of us, is considered to be done to Him (Matthew 25:45). In spite of our fallen condition, the death of Christ has placed

great value and potential on human life. God expect us to see our worth in light of the cross and to view our fellowmen in a similar light.

4. In spite of their perfect beginning, discuss the idea that Adam and Eve were still dependent upon obedience to God for sustenance?

READ: Genesis 2:16, 17

NOTES:

Man was created perfect, but not independent of God. Man's happiness and sustenance depended entirely on their conformity to the will of God.

REFLECTION

Quite often we allow our failures or success in life to define us. We measure ourselves merely by our human potential. This unbalance value system is also used to measure others. Therefore, we tend to place value on people's lives, based on their financial or social status. The Apostle James identifies this practice as opposed to the basic principles of God's law (James 2:1-4). God wants us to view ourselves and the life of others in light of what He created us to be and what He has done for us through His Son Jesus Christ.

PRAYER FOCUS

- God will help us to discern the great value that God as Creator and Redeemer has placed upon man
- To treat and view others as God views them

"I KNOW WHAT IS IN MAN"

KEY TEXT: "But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all *men*, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man" (John 2:24–25).

INTRODUCTION

In response to His first recorded miracle—turning water into wine—the Bible says that many Jews believed on Him (Jesus) (John 2:23). However, Jesus' response appears to be a little 'cold'. The Bible says that, ". . . Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man." John 2:24–25 (ESV).

Jesus seems to be saying here, "I know all men; no matter their financial standing; their religious profession; their ethnic background, I know what is in man. So, I don't need anyone to tell me that 'this man is good' or 'that man is trustworthy'. I know what man is capable of."

The common thread that binds all men together is that "all have sinned" and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). By our inherited sinful nature, we all have one common denominator—we are sinners, in need of grace.

Position, religious profession, academic achievement and possession have often led us to forget how greatly deprived and in need we all are, but in the eyes of Jesus, these things cannot disguise our true nature.

In this lesson, we study the effects of sin upon man and our inability to do anything about our condition.

- 1. The Bible says, "Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD" (Jeremiah 17:5). What does Jeremiah mean here when he says, "trust in man"? Make a list of things about man that makes it a foolish thing to trust in him?**

READ:

- a. Psalm 146:3-4
-

- b. John 2:23-25; Romans 7:16-21
-

- c. Romans 8:5
-

2. Describe the various effects that Adam’s disobedience has on humanity. How do you see those effects manifested today?

a. Genesis 3:8

b. Romans 3:9-19

c. Romans 5:12; Genesis 3:19

d. Psalm 51:5

e. John 8:44

NOTES:

"Man was originally endowed with noble powers and a well-balanced mind. He was perfect in his being, and in harmony with God. His thoughts were pure, his aims holy. But through disobedience, his powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love. His nature became so weakened through transgression that it was impossible for him, in his own strength, to resist the power of evil In his sinless state, man held joyful communion with Him “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Colossians 2:3. But after his sin, he could no longer find joy in holiness, and he sought to hide from the presence of God. Such is still the condition of the un-renewed heart. It is not in harmony with God, and finds no joy in communion with Him." White, E. G. (1892). *Steps to Christ* (p. 17). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

3. Discuss the effects that sin has on the governing principles of this world? And explain why the Apostle John admonishes us to “love not the world” (1 John 2:15).

READ: 1 John 2:15-17; Matthew 4:8-10; Ephesians 2:1-3

NOTES:

By disobedience, man has not only fallen into sin, but he becomes a lawful captive of Satan. And though salvation is available, the many take side with the devil and their sinful nature. Therefore, the general principles that are in operation in this world are contrary to those of God. That's why the Bible says, ". . . whosoever . . . will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). Sin does not only affect the human heart, but the environment in which we live.

4. **How would you respond to someone who says that all men have "good" in them and once you suppress the wrong and do the right, then man will eventually overcome evil?**

READ: Jeremiah 13:23; Romans 8:5-7

NOTES:

“It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them. “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.” “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Job 14:4; Romans 8:7. Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort, all have their proper sphere, but here they are powerless. They may produce an outward correctness of behaviour, but they cannot change the heart; they cannot purify the springs of life. There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can be changed from sin to holiness.” White, E. G. (1892). *Steps to Christ* (p. 18). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

REFLECTIONS

Sin has severely damaged the image of God in man. Because of sin, man has become estranged from God; enslaved to Satan; inherited a sinful and a fallen nature and except for the grace of God, he would have been without any hope of overcoming his condition. The only hope that man has to overcome is in Jesus, the Son of God.

PRAYER FOCUS

- For a clearer understanding of human nature in order to appreciate our need to depend on God.
- Deeper willingness to trust in God alone for salvation and hope

THE GIFT OF CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

KEY TEXT: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

INTRODUCTION

She was caught red-handed. Based on the narrative, it would suggest that a 'sting operation' was put in place. The Pharisees needed a "bait" to prove that Jesus' theology was not practical. The Bible doesn't give her a name in John 8, but some Bible commentators suggest that she is Mary Magdalene. She was caught in the very act of adultery and not only dragged before Jesus, but before the crowd, her sins were made known.

"They (the Pharisees) said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" John 8:4-5 (ESV). You know the story. By the time Jesus put out the challenge that the first person to start the stoning is the one who "is not guilty of worst sins than this woman", only, ". . . Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him" John 8:9 (ESV).

She was left with the only One who was without sin; the only One who had the right to stone her; the One who gave Moses the Law; the only voice that was left to say anything. And what did He say to her? "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

This story perfectly illustrates the fact that Jesus' righteousness is a gift. We do not deserve it, but He offers it to take the place of our sinfulness so that we can stand before God without guilt.

- 1. Think of what Christ did in order to provide us with this perfect righteousness. What does this say about how deep man had fallen into sin and the great love that God has for us.**

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; Isaiah 53:7

NOTES:

It is wonderful to receive the righteousness of Christ, but it is also important to contemplate the price that was paid for our redemption, so that we can better appreciate it. "The cross was associated with the power of Rome. It was the instrument of the most cruel and humiliating form of death. The lowest criminals were required to bear the cross to the place of execution; and often as it was about to be laid upon their shoulders, they

resisted with desperate violence, until they were overpowered, and the instrument of torture was bound upon them Jesus did not count heaven a place to be desired while we were lost. He left the heavenly courts for a life of reproach and insult, and a death of shame. He who was rich in heaven's priceless treasure, became poor, that through His poverty we might be rich. We are to follow in the path He trod" (White, E. G. (1898). *The Desire of Ages* (Vol. 3, pp. 416–417). Pacific Press Publishing Association).

2. **What evidence does the Bible give to suggest that the life of Jesus was accepted as man's substitute?**

READ: Luke 3:21, 22; Matthew 27:51, 52; John 19:30

NOTES:

“Christ did not yield up His life till He had accomplished the work which He came to do, and with His parting breath He exclaimed, “It is finished” (John 19:30). The battle had been won. His right hand and His holy arm had gotten Him the victory. As a Conqueror He planted His banner on the eternal heights. Was there not joy among the angels? All heaven triumphed in the Saviour's victory. Satan was defeated, and knew that his kingdom was lost (White, E. G. (1898). *The Desire of Ages* (Vol. 3, p. 758). Pacific Press Publishing Association).

3. **According to the Bible, what do we need to do to receive the righteousness of Christ?**

READ: Romans 3:21-28; 4:3-5

NOTES:

The righteousness of Christ is not given to those who “work for it”, Paul says, it is given to those who believe in Jesus. That is why Jesus is called, “The Lord Our righteousness”. The only hope that we have of being in right relationship with God (justified) is to believe in Jesus for salvation.

4. **A garment is the most important metaphor used to illustrate Christ's righteous provision for us. This garment is most times referred to as “white raiment”. What**

exactly does this “white raiment” represents? Also, discuss what lessons can be derived from the idea that Christ’s righteousness is represented by a garment.

READ: Revelation 3:5, 18; 19:8; Matthew 22:11-14

NOTES:

The white raiment represents the pure character of Jesus that is imputed by faith to the saints for salvation (Revelation 7:13). The ‘white’ represents the spotless purity and holiness of that character. But Christ also wants to impart His character to His followers. This is done through the process of sanctification. He wants to recreate in us the image of God. “This robe, woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising. Christ in His humanity wrought out a perfect character, and this character He offers to impart to us. “All our righteousness are as filthy rags.” Isaiah 64:6. Everything that we of ourselves can do is defiled by sin. But the Son of God “was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin.” Sin is defined to be “the transgression of the law.” 1 John 3:5, 4. But Christ was obedient to every requirement of the law. He said of Himself, “I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart.” Psalm 40:8. When on earth, He said to His disciples, “I have kept My Father’s commandments.” John 15:10. By His perfect obedience He has made it possible for every human being to obey God’s commandments. When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness. Then as the Lord looks upon us He sees, not the fig-leaf garment, not the nakedness and deformity of sin, but His own robe of righteousness, which is perfect obedience to the law of Jehovah.” (*Christ Object Lesson*, 311).

REFLECTION

Christ’s righteousness is offered as a free gift. However, if we are to benefit, we ought to receive it by faith. This is God’s saving faith. But the Lord also wants to impart to us His holy character in order to sanctify us. Others will be able to see Christ’s life in our lives. His robe of righteousness is free but it will sanctify us. All we need to do is submit ourselves to Christ on a daily basis and He will impart to us the gift of His righteousness that it might become our own.

PRAYER FOCUS

- That God will cover us with the righteousness of Christ
- That God will sanctify us through the righteousness of Christ

RIGHTEOUSNESS APART FROM THE LAW

KEY TEXT: “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:” (Romans 3:21, 22).

INTRODUCTION

It is very tempting to think that the “gift” of righteousness frees us from our duty to obey God’s law. A cursory reading of Paul’s writings could suggest that this is the case. Paul knew this, and that is why he intermittently made it clear that though he wants his readers to appreciate the grace of Christ, they should not take it for granted that grace releases them of their obligations to God.

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” (Romans 6:1). “What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid” (Romans 6:15). “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (Romans 3:31). These are only a few of the clarifications that Paul placed in his writings to explain his position on the law.

Jesus had to do similar clarifications to make sure that His radical teachings on salvation were not misinterpreted to mean that God’s law is made void. “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil”, Jesus said (Matthew 5:17). To the rich young ruler, Jesus said, “. . . if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17). To the woman who was caught in adultery, after assuring her of forgiveness, He said to her, “go and sin no more.”

In this lesson, we will study the relationship between Christ’s righteousness/justification by faith and the law of God.

- 1. Righteousness is defined as “right-doing” (1 John 3:7) or simply, being in right relationship with God by accepting Him as Saviour (Philippians 3:9). How does the Bible define what is right? What is God’s standard of righteousness?**

READ: James 2:9-12; Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14; Exodus 20:3-17

NOTES:

“God requires perfection of His children. His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character. This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom. The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God’s law, and when those who claim to be children of God become Christ-like in character, they will be

obedient to God's commandments. Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven. Clothed in the glorious apparel of Christ's righteousness, they have a place at the King's feast. They have a right to join the blood-washed throng" (White, E. G. (1900). *Christ's Object Lessons* (p. 315).

- 2. How do you explain Paul's statement, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;" in light of the fact that the law is God's standard of righteousness?**

READ: Romans 3:19-28; Galatians 2:16-21

NOTES:

The "righteousness of God" that Paul spoke about, is the righteousness of Jesus Christ that is offered to the sinner as a free gift. This righteousness doesn't come as a result of man's obedience; it comes as a gift. Therefore, no man should look to his own works for righteousness. It is to be understood, then, that we do not have any hope of meeting God's perfect standard on our own. Only through connection with Jesus, by faith, can we hope to meet the righteous standard of God; for He is our righteousness (Isaiah 54:17; Jeremiah 23:6; Galatians 5:5).

- 3. Describe how the Holy Spirit helps the believer to fulfil the Law of God.**

READ: Romans 8:3-4; Psalm 40:8; 37:31; Hebrews 8:10

NOTES:

Man's nature is so weak, that by himself, he cannot obey the law of God. Therefore, salvation does not only include forgiveness for pass sins (justification); but together with this the believer receives a new life from above. This new life is made possible by the Holy Spirit, who enables the believer to live a life of obedience (Ezekiel 36:26, 27).

- 4. How would you respond to someone who says that Christ's death on the cross frees us from obligation to keep the law?**

Lesson 8

READ: Romans 10:4; Matthew 19:16-19; Romans 3:31

NOTES:

As mentioned above Christ's death on the cross and the gift of the Holy Spirit are all for restoring us to right relationship with God. Once we accept Christ as Saviour and receive the Holy Spirit, our desire is to please God. God requires perfect obedience to His Law. Though we cannot meet this standard by ourselves, it would be contradictory to our growth in grace, to live a disobedient life while claiming to be in relationship with Christ (Romans 6:1, 2).

REFLECTION

The point that was made in lesson 5, is critical here. In order to appreciate where God's vision for our salvation, it is important to reflect on His original purpose at creation. When God created man, He made Him perfect expecting from him obedience to the word of God. Man has fallen into sin, and now must depend on the imputed and imparted righteousness of God. The first saves us and the second prepares us for heaven. Saving righteousness enables us to obey God's commandments.

PRAYER FOCUS

- For power to know and do the will of God
- For Christ to live out His righteousness in us

FOR BY GRACE . . . THROUGH FAITH

KEY TEXT: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9).

INTRODUCTION

To experience freedom from guilt is a desire that has driven the spiritual journey of mankind for centuries. Men have invented all manner of methods and ideas about how to “appease the gods” and experience peace. Even within the Christian Church, for centuries, the majority of Christendom had lost sight of the Biblical principles of salvation. Countless spurious inventions took the place of the pure Bible doctrine on salvation, including the “Indulgences” (where persons were taught that they could pay for full remission from sins with money, or by enlisting in the pontiff’s army) (Great Controversy, 72). In describing the conditions that existed in the church during the times of the Waldenses and the Dark Ages, E. G. White comments,

“ . . . Under the guidance of pope and priest, multitudes were vainly endeavoring to obtain pardon by afflicting their bodies for the sin of their souls. Taught to trust to their good works to save them, they were ever looking to themselves, their minds dwelling upon their sinful condition, seeing themselves exposed to the wrath of God, afflicting soul and body, yet finding no relief. Thus conscientious souls were bound by the doctrines of Rome. Thousands abandoned friends and kindred, and spent their lives in convent cells. By oft-repeated fasts and cruel scourgings, by midnight vigils, by prostration for weary hours upon the cold, damp stones of their dreary abode, by long pilgrimages, by humiliating penance and fearful torture, thousands vainly sought to obtain peace of conscience. Oppressed with a sense of sin, and haunted with the fear of God’s avenging wrath, many suffered on, until exhausted nature gave way, and without one ray of light or hope they sank into the tomb” (*The Great Controversy*, 72, 73).

- 1. In contrast to what was taught about salvation during the Dark Ages, how does the Bible describe the simple process by which man is saved?**

READ: Ephesians 2:8, 9; John 3:16

NOTES:

The Bible is clear, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9). Like creation, salvation is the result of God’s work; man’s work is to receive this precious gift. There is nothing that man can do to improve upon the grace that God provides.

- 2. READ Numbers 21:4-9. Using the sting of the serpent to represent sin and the brazen serpent to represent Christ, what does this story teach us about how we receive this free gift of salvation?**

READ: John 3:14, 15; Romans 4:3-5

NOTES:

“The lifting up of the brazen serpent was to teach Israel an important lesson. They could not save themselves from the fatal effect of the poison in their wounds. God alone was able to heal them. Yet they were required to show their faith in the provision which He had made. They must look in order to live. It was their faith that was acceptable with God, and by looking upon the serpent their faith was shown. They knew that there was no virtue in the serpent itself, but it was a symbol of Christ; and the necessity of faith in His merits was thus presented to their minds” (White, E. G. (1890). *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets as Illustrated in the Lives of Holy Men of Old* (Vol. 1, p. 430). Pacific Press Publishing Association).

We receive Christ’s righteousness by faith. By faith we believe that our sins have been washed away; by faith we accept that we have been clothed by the righteousness of Jesus and are accepted by God. Truly, this is the believer’s response to God’s gift to believe in the Son of God for salvation (John 6:29).

- 3. As we exercise faith in the merits of Christ for salvation, what does He give to us in exchange for our guilt and sin?**

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:21; Zechariah 3:3, 4

NOTES:

“The believing sinner is pronounced innocent, while the guilt is placed on Christ. The righteousness of Christ is placed on the debtor’s account, and against his name on the balance sheet is written: Pardoned. Eternal Life.” (n.d.). *The Review and Herald*, 2374.

- 4. How would you explain to a friend who is burdened with guilt the steps to take in experiencing salvation and freedom from guilt?**

Lesson 9

READ: Acts 2:37, 38; 3:19; 1 John 1:9

NOTES:

Salvation begins with the Holy Spirit's work on your heart to reveal the love of Jesus and to bring conviction of sin (John 16:8). If you do not resist the pleadings of the Holy Spirit, He will lead you to confess, repent of your sins and claim the righteousness of Christ as your atonement. By this step you are saved (justified) and will remain so, if you continue to exercise faith in the merits of Jesus on a daily basis (Hebrews 3:14).

REFLECTION

The truth about salvation is so simple that even a child can understand it. Yet, for some, it can get quite complicated and confusing. The key to overcoming the confusion, is to surrender all to Jesus. Stop trying so hard to "get it right"; let us go to God with uplifted hands and hearts and allow Him to direct us. "Draw nigh to God" says the Apostle James, "and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8).

PRAYER FOCUS

- That God will forgive and cleanse us of our sins
- That we might continually depend on God for salvation

CONDITION OF THE RIGHTEOUS (JUSTIFIED)

KEY TEXT: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).

INTRODUCTION

It is usually a challenging task for a new believer to understand the nature of his/her "new life". Understanding what has changed? What remain the same? What rights do we have as Christians? What are our limitations?

On one hand, some persons are terrified at the fact that they are still challenged with "evil thoughts". For some reason they thought that once you are "born again", those thoughts should have vanished. On the other hand, some persons are slow to believe that they are truly changed; that God does not hold their sins against them; or that they have truly been "cleansed" from all their sins.

In this lesson, we look at what the Bible teaches on the true condition of the justified believer.

- 1. How does the Bible describe the spiritual condition of those who receive the righteousness of Christ by faith?**

READ: Romans 8:1-3; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Isaiah 1:18

NOTES:

The Bible describes the believer in Christ as a "new creature/creation". He has been changed; justified and cleansed. "The righteousness of Christ is placed on the believers account, and against his name on the balance sheet is written pardon, eternal life" (OHC 53). The challenge that most Christians have is to believe this. Here, Ellen G. White suggests, "You have confessed your sins, and in heart put them away. You have resolved to give yourself to God. Now go to Him, and ask that He will wash away your sins and give you a new heart. Then *believe* that He does this because He has promised If you believe the promise, believe that you are forgiven and cleansed, God supplies the fact; you are made whole. Do not wait to *feel* that you are made whole, but say, "I believe it; it is so, not because I feel it, but because God has promised" (*Steps to Christ*, 50, 51).

- 2. Look at the following metaphors that the Bible uses to describe the condition of the believer in Christ and explain what lessons can be learnt from each about the believer's condition:**
 - a. "born again" John 3:3-6**

“No one can fully unravel the mystery of the new birth. The Holy Spirit works upon us, and we are "born again" or "regenerated" (John 3:4-8). There is a fundamental change in the direction of our life, our attitudes, our values. We retain our individuality, but now it is no longer self-centered; we have turned away from feeding our ego and toward serving God and man. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (verse 6).” (“Dynamics of Salvation”, *Adventist Review*, July 31, 1980) pg. 7

b. "restoration" (1 Thess. 5:23; Romans 12:1,2)

“Under the power of the Spirit, the nearly obliterated image of God in us is in the process of continual restoration. There is a restoration of the mental, physical, and spiritual person (1 Thess. 5:23). Instead of anxiety and inner conflict, we have "the peace of God, which passes all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). We have the abiding joy of the Lord, willing to do His will and good pleasure (chap. 2:13), and living for His glory. We honor Him in our body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, presenting it as a "living sacrifice" in service (1 Cor. 6:19, 20; Rom. 12:1, 2). There is a restoration of interpersonal relationships. We see all persons as God sees them without pride of race, social class, sex, or religion: All are one in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:28). We love others: we appreciate them for what they are; we seek to understand the circumstances that have molded their lives; we care for them with Christlike concern.” (Ibid., 7).

c. "justified" Romans 5:1; Galatians 2:16

Justification takes us into the court room. “We are regarded as criminals, arraigned at the bar of God's justice. As the law is read out to us, we know that we are guilty”. We cannot answer for ourselves, “But now there is a stir in the court. Our Advocate rises to speak in our behalf. Instead of agreeing to our death, He presents His own death; while acknowledging our disobedience, He points to His own obedience. Instead of claiming our righteousness, He covers us with His own righteousness (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 311).” (Ibid., 7).

d. "forgiven" Luke 5:20, 23, 24

“This word is related to the world of financial transactions. According to Jesus' parable of the two debtors, we are confronted with a debt that we can never repay. It is so immense that we can never hope to cope with it (Matt. 18:25-35). This debt represents our sin. In the midst of this hopeless condition, however, God freely cancels the debt through Jesus Christ. "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). All of our accounts are fully paid up; we enjoy the status of those who have no more debts of sin, and who therefore forgive their debtors (Matt. 18:32, 33).” (Ibid., 7).

e. "reconciled" 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19

“The picture here is drawn from human relations. Friends have fallen out; bitter feelings of estrangement have taken hold. One party, however, has already acted to

restore the relationship; He has gone to the full extent, and beyond human expectation, thought, or activity, to make matters right. God has once again taken the initiative; He has "reconciled us to Himself through Christ" (2 Cor. 5:18, N.A.S.B.).

f. "adopted" (Galatians 4:4, 5; Romans 8:15).

"This model is one of family relationships. We are in a wretched condition, orphans in a hostile world. We seek a home, a place of acceptance, a place to belong. We are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12, K.J.V.). Then one day we are adopted. Our Father completes all formalities, paying the full adoption price and thus making us His own children. He welcomes us into His home and gives us all its rights and privileges. We receive the full status of His sons and daughters. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4, 5, K.J.V.; cf. Rom. 8:15; Christ's Object Lessons, p. 250)."

- 3. How does the Bible describe the continuous struggle that the justified believer faces? What is the underlining cause/source of this struggle? And what is the secret to victory?**

READ: Romans 7:14-24; Philippians 3:12-14

NOTES:

"The Christian will feel the promptings of sin, for the flesh lusteth against the Spirit; but the Spirit striveth against the flesh, keeping up a constant warfare" RH – May 3, 1881. While the believer receives a "new heart" at conversion he does not receive a new body until the resurrection. Therefore, as long as he is in this mortal flesh, the believer will be challenged by the "old man" to return to the "old way" of doing things. However, the Apostle Paul admonishes us to "crucify" the flesh with the affections and lust. And to "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God." (Romans 6:12, 13).

REFLECTION

There is so much that takes place in us and for us when we, by faith, accept Jesus as Saviour. The challenge most times, is for us to believe all of God's promises. Just as, by faith, we come to

Lesson 10

Christ, by faith we ought to believe that we are truly justified; we are adopted; we are forgiven; we are cleansed; we are born again. Let us now, in response to God's gift of salvation "walk worthy" of our calling in Christ (Eph. 4).

PRAYER

- God will help us to understand and appreciate His gift of salvation
- Faith to believe and claim God's promises of restoration
- Power to live the life of the justified

JUSTIFICATION ILLUSTRATED

KEY TEXT: “And he (Abraham) believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

INTRODUCTION

The Bible uses many parables and personal experiences to teach justification by faith. I believe, that the best way to learn and practice this truth, is to draw lessons from the sacred record of how God worked in the lives of His saints.

God recorded the experiences of His people in order that we can learn from their mistakes and be encouraged by their successes.

In this lesson, we will look at what the Bible teaches about justification by faith through the lives of His people.

- 1. What is your understanding from the statement, “And he (Abraham) believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6)? Look at the way this statement is interpreted and applied by the New Testament writers to assist in your response.**

READ: Romans 4:1-5; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23, 24

NOTES:

“Paul used this text as the cornerstone on which he erected the doctrine of justification by faith (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6). Although the possibility that Abram would have children had decreased since God’s first promise, as his age increased, he did not hesitate to take God’s word that it would be so. The Hebrew verbal form, translated “he believed,” he’emin, is from the same root as the word amen, with which we emphasize our desire that God may hear and fulfil our prayers. This verb expresses complete trust in the power and promises of God. The particular form of the verb here used expresses, furthermore, that this was not just Abram’s historical experience at the moment, but an abiding character trait as well. He kept on believing. Abram’s faith and childlike trust in God did not make him “righteous”; rather, the Lord, “counted it to him for righteousness.” For the first time these important concepts, faith and justification, are brought together. It is obvious that Abram had no “righteousness” until it was credited to him by God. And if he had none, no man has ever had. Abram was a sinner and needed redemption, as does every other human being; but when righteousness was imputed to him, mercy and grace were also extended, effecting the pardon of his sin and bringing the rewards of righteousness. Here for the first time the full importance of faith is brought to view. Here also, for the first time, imputed righteousness is mentioned. From this point onward both

fundamental concepts run through the Holy Scriptures, to find exhaustive and masterful treatment by the pen of the apostle Paul (see Rom. 4). Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 312). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

- 2. READ Luke 15:8-18. What lessons can we learn about justification by faith from how the father treated his son when he returned home?**

NOTES:

Based on the story, the son deserved punishment. He deserved to be scolded; he deserved to be treated with contempt and to be put on probation, to make sure he is genuine. But the father did none of these. Because the father's love reflects the love of our heavenly Father towards the sinner. When we go to God just as we are, He doesn't treat us as we deserve. The Bible says that, "heaven rejoices" when the sinner returns home.

- 3. READ Luke 18:9-14. What lessons can we learn from the Publican's attitude regarding how we should approach God and the attitude that God accepts? (see Proverbs 28:13).**

NOTES:

What makes the publican more "justified" than his fellow worshipper, is that, he first recognized his sinfulness. He did not approach God based on any merit of his own; he approached God based on his great need. Referring to the Publican, Ellen G. White said, "He felt that he had transgressed against God, that he was sinful and polluted. He could not expect even pity from those around him, for they looked upon him with contempt. He knew that he had no merit to commend him to God, and in utter self-despair he cried, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." He did not compare himself with others.

Overwhelmed with a sense of guilt, he stood as if alone in God's presence. His only desire was for pardon and peace, his only plea was the mercy of God. And he was blessed. "I tell you," Christ said, "this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." White, E. G. (1900). *Christ's Object Lessons* (pp. 151–152). Review and Herald Publishing Association. "The prayer of the publican was heard because it showed dependence reaching forth to lay hold upon Omnipotence. Self to the publican appeared

nothing but shame. Thus it must be seen by all who seek God. By faith—faith that renounces all self-trust—the needy suppliant is to lay hold upon infinite power” Ibid, 159.

- 4. In the story of the paralytic, this man was paralyzed for 38 years, when Jesus walked by. He looked to the “moving of the river” for hope. However, at the words of Jesus, this man was healed instantaneously. What does this story teach us about the power of Jesus to heal every condition of the heart?**

READ: John 5:1-9

NOTES:

Sometimes, we are tempted to think that our condition is too grievous for God to heal us by His grace instantaneously. We are tempted to doubt God’s power. However, like the paralytic that was healed instantaneously by simply taking Jesus at His word, so we need to claim God’s promises to forgive. “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). Let us believe that the Lord can and will do this when we ask Him.

REFLECTION

God uses many illustrations to highlight His power to change lives. These stories are written for our learning; to inspire our faith in the power of God to forgive and to heal. Let us trust in the grace of God as we are inspired by these examples. The author of Hebrews illustrates this point when he listed the ‘heroes’ of faith as a means of inspiring us to follow suite.

PRAYER FOCUS

- That my life will be an example of God’s power to save and heal

LIVING CHRIST'S LIFE

KEY TEXT: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the book of Acts, Paul and the other Apostles championed the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. They raised up churches in every city and places they went. Most of the converts were either Jews or Gentiles who attended the Jewish synagogues.

One of the challenges that the early church faced, was that some Jewish leaders who became Christians urged the new converts that in order for them to be saved, they needed to be circumcised according to the Law of Moses. Acts 15:1-2.

They attempted to show that without circumcision the salvation of the Gentiles was not complete. It's as if they were saying, ‘we accept that Christ has saved you, but for your salvation to be complete, you must be circumcised’.

You will find that Paul spent quite a bit of time in his Epistles debunking this idea—that we can be saved by keeping the “Law”. Romans 3:19-31.

We still face similar questions today. “How should we live as Christians?”

In this lesson, we study how to live the life of the justified.

- 1. How would you explain the challenge that Paul had with the believers in Galatia in light of our discussion on living the life of the justified?**

READ: Galatians 3:1-3; Hebrews 10:38, 39; Galatians 2:20; Romans 1:17

NOTES:

The challenge that the Galatians believers faced, was that they were being led astray by some of the “Circumcision” to believe that in order to “be saved”, or maintain your salvation, one needs to be circumcised and to follow the legalistic practices of Judaism. Thus, according to Paul, they were saved by grace, but they wanted to “be made perfect” on their own. Galatians 3:1-3. This, Paul, refuted. Paul made it clear that salvation cannot be done in our own strength, whether to start the journey or to complete it. To live the life of Christ, the believers were to continue in exercising the same faith by which they were saved. “We do not live the Christian life in a manner other than the way in which we first accepted salvation. Having accepted salvation through faith, we do not now trust in

human accomplishment (Gal. 3:1-5). At every point in the new life, from its beginning to its ultimate glorification, we depend entirely on grace received through faith. "As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him" (Col. 2:6; *Steps to Christ*, p. 69)." ("Dynamics of Salvation", *Adventist Review*, July 31, 1980). According to the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:17, "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (NIV).

- 2. The Christian will face temptation on a daily basis to turn from the path of faith that he has started on. What does the Bible teach about the role of "freedom of choice" in maintaining one's faith and what important choice is the believer called upon to make in order to be successful in his walk with the Lord?**

READ: Romans 6:11-13; John 15:1-5; Hebrews 3:4

NOTES:

There will be constant temptation to give up on our walk with God. Though we are not to depend on ourselves; though we cannot change our hearts, under the influence of the Spirit we can choose to serve God. This is the secret to success in our walk. Just as we chose Christ at the beginning, we should everyday keep on choosing Him. This is what it means to "abide" in Christ. "You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can choose to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him." White, E. G. (1892). *Steps to Christ* (p. 47). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

- 3. How does Christ illustrate the formula for victory in living the Christian life? What lessons can we learn from this illustration?**

READ: John 15:1-5

NOTES:

Christ is the source of our salvation and sustenance. We will never graduate from our need to depend on Him. The only formula for success in the Christian walk is dependence on Christ.. "Now that you have given yourself to Jesus, do not draw back", says Ellen G. White, "do not take yourself away from Him, but day by day say, "I am Christ's; I have given myself to Him;" and ask Him to give you His Spirit and keep you by His grace. As it is by giving yourself to God, and believing Him, that you become His child, so you are to live in Him. The apostle says, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him." Colossians 2:6. White, E. G. (1892). *Steps to Christ* (p. 52). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

4. **READ Matthew 14:22-32. What lessons can we learn from Peter's experience in "walking on water" regarding what it takes to live the life of faith in Christ Jesus?**
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NOTES:

Peter's experience in walking on water teaches much about the salvation experience. First of all, we learn that salvation happens only through the power of God. Just as how walking on water is unnatural to Peter, so is salvation. No amount of training or practice could get Peter to walk on water, he did so only by faith, trusting in the words of Jesus. So is salvation. We are saved only because of God's provision and promises. Secondly, only by keeping his eyes on Jesus could Peter keep on walking on the water. So is our walk with the Lord. It can only be done successfully by fixing our eyes on Jesus."Our dependence is not in what man can do; it is in what God can do for man through Christ. When we surrender ourselves wholly to God, and fully believe, the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. The conscience can be freed from condemnation. Through faith in His blood, all may be made perfect in Christ Jesus. Thank God that we are not dealing with impossibilities. We may claim sanctification."— Selected Messages, book 2, p. 32." (Ibid., 6).

REFLECTION

The Apostle Paul gives us the formula for success in the justified walk, he says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Before we can live Christ's life, we must give up our own. This is a most challenging process, because self will continually struggle to regain supremacy. That is why, it must be a daily commitment to choose the Christian life; Christ's righteousness and not our own.

PRAYER FOCUS

- For consistent dependence on Jesus

- For daily surrender to Jesus

CHRISTIAN MATURITY

KEY TEXT: “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever” (2 Peter 3:18).

INTRODUCTION

Most of us can remember the first time we attempted to ride a bicycle. We remember how well we received the instructions. However, at first attempts, we did not do so well at balancing as we thought we should. It took some time for us, after much practice, to get over the awkwardness of trying to keep balance while focusing on the where we are going.

For a new Christian, getting adjusted to the new experience of keeping our focus on Jesus and His will for us could be challenging. We often get distracted and forget where we are going. Maturity in Christ represent practicing constant and consistent dependence on the Lord.

In this study, we will look at what the Bible teaches about growing in Christ; from being a babe to a mature man or woman in Christ.

- 1. The new Christian is described in the Bible as being a “babe”. How does the Bible describe this stage of spiritual growth?**

READ: 1 Peter 1:1, 2; 1 Corinthians 3:1, 2; Ephesians 4:14

NOTES:

In the Bible (or specifically the New Testament) The word translated as “Babes” is the Greek word nepios. This word refers to Christians who are young in faith and are still learning the basic principles of Christianity. “Babes” can also be used to refer to Christians who are not so young (in terms of the length of time they have been Christians) but who have not yet perfected the graces of the Spirit in their lives (Hebrews 5:12-14).

- 2. What is God’s ultimate goal for each born again Christian?**

READ: Ephesians 1:3, 4; 4:13-16; 1 John 4:18, 19

NOTES:

Jesus accepts us as we are with our shortcomings and limitations. However, He has a vision for our lives. His vision is to have us depending on Him at all times. He wants us to be mature in faith and understanding, so that He can demonstrate His power in our lives. As He said to Peter, "why did you doubt?" Why did you stop believing? Why did you stop trusting Me? Peter eventually got the point complete dependence on God. John 21:15-20. So did Abraham and the other patriarchs. Hebrews 11.

3. READ Mark 4:26-29. Identify and discuss at least 4 lessons on spiritual growth that is taught in this parable.

I. _____

II. _____

III. _____

IV. _____

NOTES:

There are quite a few things to learn from this parable about how God works in our lives to mature the graces of the Spirit. Jesus, who is the Author of salvation, as well as of creation, teaches us principles of dependence and obedience in this parable. As in the parable of the sower Matt. 13. the seed represents the word of God; the soil represents the heart and the fruit; the character of Christ. How Christ works to mature our character is a mystery (as He explained to Nicodemus [John 3:3-8]) and a miracle from God. Our duty, is simply to maintain our connection to and dependence on God and He will do the rest (Philippians 2:12, 13). The time that the farmer "sleeps" does not represent carelessness or neglect, it represents trustfulness and rest in the promises of God. It represents the fact that while we "abide" in Christ, there is no need for anxiety or fear about whether or not we are growing. "A life in Christ is a life of restfulness. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there should be an abiding, peaceful trust. Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. Your weakness is united to His strength, your ignorance to His wisdom, your frailty to His enduring might. So you are not to look to yourself, not to let the mind dwell upon self, but look to Christ. Let the mind dwell upon His love, upon the beauty, the perfection, of His character. Christ in His self-denial, Christ in His humiliation, Christ in

His purity and holiness, Christ in His matchless love—this is the subject for the soul’s contemplation. It is by loving Him, copying Him, depending wholly upon Him, that you are to be transformed into His likeness.” (White, E. G. (1892). *Steps to Christ* (pp. 70–71). Pacific Press Publishing Association.)

- 4. How would you respond to the argument that “once you are born to be saved; nothing can cause you to be lost?” Discuss what the Bible teaches concerning the role that human effort has in spiritual growth and what are the consequences for failing to do our part?**

READ: Matthew 3:10; John 15:2, 6; 2 Peter 2:19-21

NOTES:

It is a known principle of life that anything that is not growing is either dying or is dead. According to John the Baptist, “. . .the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matthew 3:10). Jesus also said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: . . . If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast [them] into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:6).

Therefore, a Christian who is not growing is unimaginable; he is probably no longer a Christian.

According to Ellen G. White, “There are those who attempt to ascend the ladder of Christian progress; but as they advance they begin to put their trust in the power of man, and soon lose sight of Jesus, the Author and Finisher of their faith. The result is failure--the loss of all that has been gained. Sad indeed is the condition of those who, becoming weary of the way, allow the enemy of souls to rob them of the Christian graces that have been developing in their hearts and lives” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 532, 533).

REFLECTION

God’s vision for our lives, is that we should stand “holy and without blame before Him”. This is what He will accomplish in us by faith in Him and by trusting in His forgiving grace and on the power of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:1).

PRAYER FOCUS

- God will give us the faith to keep abiding in Christ, so that He can accomplish His work in us.

Lesson 13

- That we might grow daily in taking on the likeness of Christ, as we put off old habits

SANCTIFICATION ILLUSTRATED

KEY TEXT: “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13–14).

INTRODUCTION

The word of God outlines the work of grace upon the hearts of His chosen. The Bible presents the calling, the trials, the failures, weaknesses and the eventual victory of those that follow the Lord to the end. These are recorded, “. . . for our learning”, Paul says, “that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

We take note that though these men and women were genuine in accepting the call of God, it did not free them from the need to grow in understanding; in faith and practicing the truth of God’s word. God’s calling did not free them from the weaknesses of the flesh. They found their victory only through daily; moment by moment dependence upon the grace of Christ.

“None of the apostles and prophets ever claimed to be without sin. Men who have lived the nearest to God, men who would sacrifice life itself rather than knowingly commit a wrong act, men whom God has honored with divine light and power, have confessed the sinfulness of their nature. They have put no confidence in the flesh, have claimed no righteousness of their own, but have trusted wholly in the righteousness of Christ.” White, E. G. (1911). *The Acts of the Apostles in the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Vol. 4, p. 561). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

In this lesson, we take time to study the work of Grace in the lives of a few saints, so that we can be encouraged in our walk with the Lord.

1. **READ the following passages of Scriptures and discuss what they say about how Jesus worked with His disciples (in particular, Peter) to develop their faith from babes to maturity in Christ. Mark 3:13-19; Luke 22:31-34; John 21:15-18**

NOTES:

“The Saviour knew the character of the men whom He had chosen; all their weaknesses and errors were open before Him; He knew the perils through which they must pass, the responsibility that would rest upon them; and His heart yearned over these chosen ones. White, E. G. (1898). *The Desire of Ages* (Vol. 3, pp. 291–292). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

2. **READ Genesis 22:10-12. What is your understanding of what the “Angel of the Lord” meant when He said, “. . . now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me”?** Reflect on Abraham’s journey of faith from his call (Genesis 12); to the many times he failed to trust God completely. What does this say about what God really wants from us and His willingness to be patient with our shortcomings?

NOTES:

It took many years for Abraham to get the point about trusting God completely. God waited patiently. When God said to Abraham, “now I know that thou fearest God”, it does not mean that Abraham was not converted before. It means that Abraham had gotten the point about what it means to put his faith into action, even when his life and the dearest things to him are at stake. This is the faith that will lead to submission to God in all things.

3. **Using the following Bible passages, explain what you understand about ‘sanctification’. What role does the word of God plays and what is our duty in the process?**

READ: Ephesians 5:25-27; John 17:17; Matthew 7:24-25; James 1:21, 22

NOTES:

“We build on Christ by obeying His word. It is not he who merely enjoys righteousness, that is righteous, but he who does righteousness. Holiness is not rapture; it is the result of surrendering all to God; it is doing the will of our heavenly Father *Religion consists in doing the words of Christ; not doing to earn God’s favor, but because, all undeserving, we have received the gift of His love.* Christ places the salvation of man, not upon profession merely, but upon faith that is made manifest in works of righteousness. Doing, not saying merely, is expected of the followers of Christ. It is through action that character is built”. White, E. G. (1896). *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (pp. 149–150). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

4. **According to the Bible, how long does the process of sanctification (preparation for heaven) takes?**

READ: Philippians 3:12-14; 1:6; 1 John 3:1-3

NOTES:

“Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a lifetime. It is not gained by a happy flight of feeling, but is the result of constantly dying to sin, and constantly living for Christ. Wrongs cannot be righted nor reformations wrought in the character by feeble, intermittent efforts. It is only by long, persevering effort, sore discipline, and stern conflict, that we shall overcome There is no such thing as instantaneous sanctification. True sanctification is a daily work, continuing as long as life shall last.” White, E. G. (1958). *The Faith I Live By* (p. 116). Review and Herald Publishing Association. "We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged. Even if we are overcome by the enemy, we are not cast off, not forsaken and rejected of God." White, E. G. (1892). *Steps to Christ* (p. 64). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

REFLECTION

“The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven. Many commit the error of trying to define minutely the fine points of distinction between justification and sanctification. Into the definitions of these two terms they often bring their own ideas and speculations. Why try to be more minute than is Inspiration on the vital question of righteousness by faith?” White, E. G. (1958). *The Faith I Live By* (p. 116). Review and Herald Publishing Association. In the end, our salvation (justification or sanctification) depends only upon faith in Christ Jesus.

PRAYER FOCUS

- For wisdom to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification
- For power to live a victorious life in Christ

DEFINING CHRISTIAN MATURITY/PERFECTION

KEY TEXT: “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat” (Hebrews 5:12).

INTRODUCTION

In the previous lesson, we observe examples of how God worked in the lives of patriarchs and apostles to establish them in the faith. God took these men as they are with their faults and shortcomings, with the purpose of moulding their characters after His likeness.

Based on what the Bible teaches, we believe that God's purpose for us is to bear fruit to His glory (John 15:1-7). This fruit represents the reproduction of Christ's character in our lives; the restoration of the image of God in us. According to Ellen G. White in her book *Christ Object Lessons*, page 67, “Christ is seeking to reproduce Himself in the hearts of men; and He does this through those who believe in Him. The object of the Christian life is fruit bearing—the reproduction of Christ's character in the believer, that it may be reproduced in others”. “Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own” (Ibid, 69).

This work for us can only be accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit and God’s work in our lives. Therefore, man’s duty, is simply to remain in God’s workshop by faith.

We also noted in the previous lesson, that it took some time for the disciples and the patriarchs to get the point about total and consistent dependence on Jesus. As they matured, they learnt to distrust self and trust completely in the Lord. In this lesson, we will study what the Bible teaches about Christian maturity—how to understand and measure our growth in grace.

1. **Read the following Bible passages and discuss a definition for what it means to be spiritually mature.**

READ Hebrews 5:11-6:1-3; Ephesians 4:11-16; Matthew 5:43-48; 1 John 4:18, 19

NOTES:

In the Bible, the mature (“full of age”) are those who are referred to in the King James Version as being “perfect”. The term 'perfect' here does not refer to the idea of being without fault, but, it identifies one who is mature in faith—“one who has attained his moral end, the goal for which he was intended, namely to be a man obedient in Christ”

(Ibid, 1761). This is the goal that God has for each of us as Christians. It doesn't mean that mature Christians cannot make mistakes or that they are faultless. We will always have to rely on Christ's forgiving grace. When Jesus said, "be ye therefore perfect", it does not refer to a static state of being. It means that, in our actions, we should reveal the unselfish love of Christ; in faith, we must demonstrate unwavering confidence and in understanding we are no more "tossed to and fro" in our minds about what we believe.

2. **Examine and discuss each item in the table below that uses what the Bible teaches on spiritual growth to measure maturity in the three major aspects of the Christian's life:**

A SPIRITUAL CHECK UP

<i>Examining our practice of the principles of LOVE or measuring our CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT</i>	
The “Babe” in Christ	The “Mature” in Christ
1. Struggles with unforgiveness and envy (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).	Practices unconditional love (1 Corinthians 13:4-8; Matthew 5:38-48).
2. Obeys God to merit His favour (Matthew 5:20; Luke 18:9-14).	Obeys God as an expression of gratitude and love for what He did for all of us on the cross (1 John 5:3).
3. Must be coerced and scolded into obedience. i.e. <i>The children of Israel in the wilderness experience</i>	Willing to serve the Lord out of love and appreciation for His goodness.
4. Continually stumbles and need again and again to be taught the doctrine of repentance towards God and forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 5:12).	Daily walks by faith in obedience to God's word. If he/she makes mistakes, he/she confesses and repents immediately and continues to follow the Lord (Philippians 3:12-14).
Examining our growth in FAITH	
The “Babe” in Christ	The “Mature” in Christ
5. Gets discouraged and complains about trials and temptations.	Trials are seen as opportunities to grow.
6. Sees chastening as a sign of God's displeasure (Hebrews 12:3-12).	Accepts God's chastening as a sign of love.

7. Mind is filled with uncertainty and fear about the Christian life (1 John 4:17, 18).	Understands that one's future and success as a Christian is based upon God's providence and our submission to His loving will
Checking our stability in our UNDERSTANDING of the DOCTRINES of Christ	
The "Babe" in Christ	The "Mature" in Christ
8. Tossed to and fro in his/her mind about the truth (Ephesians 4:14-15).	Knows what he/she believes and have proven truth by study and experience (Hebrews 5:14).
9. Feeds on milk (1 Peter 2:2; Heb. 5:13).	Feeds on strong meat (Hebrews 5:13, 14).

3. Does Christian maturity exclude us from the need for continual growth in grace?

READ: Philippians 3:11-14

NOTES:

No, it does not. "At every stage of development our life may be perfect; yet if God's purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be continual advancement. Sanctification is the work of a lifetime. As our opportunities multiply, our experience will enlarge, and our knowledge increase. We shall become strong to bear responsibility, and our maturity will be in proportion to our privileges. White, E. G. (1900). *Christ's Object Lessons* (pp. 65–66). Review and Herald Publishing Association. "God takes men as they are, and educates them for His service, if they will yield themselves to Him. The Spirit of God, received into the soul, will quicken all its faculties. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the mind that is devoted unreservedly to God develops harmoniously, and is strengthened to comprehend and fulfill the requirements of God. The weak, vacillating character becomes changed to one of strength and steadfastness. Continual devotion establishes so close a relation between Jesus and His disciple that the Christian becomes like Him in mind and character. Through a connection with Christ he will have clearer and broader views. His discernment will be more penetrative, his judgment better balanced. He who longs to be of service to Christ is so quickened by the life-giving power of the Sun of

Lesson 15

Righteousness that he is enabled to bear much fruit to the glory of God” (*The Desire of Ages*, 251).

REFLECTION

The perfection that God seeks from us, is really perfect dependence on Him. For, based on the previous statement by Ellen G. White, once we cooperate with Him, He will bear fruit in our lives. The challenge is to keep on believing, from beginning to the end, so that God can do His work in us.

PRAYER FOCUS

- For increased and consistent faith in the Lord while He works in my life
- For daily growth in grace and in the knowledge and practice of the truth

FAITH: SECRET TO VICTORY IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Key Text: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ²For by it the elders obtained a good report" (Hebrews 11:1–2).

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wondered what is the secret to a consistent relationship with God? What is the secret to the success of men like Job, Paul, Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Elisha, Elijah and many others? Men, who were subject to like passions as we are; yet, they demonstrated the power of God in their lives with consistency. What is it that gave Paul such assurance that he could say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7, 8).

About the Apostle Peter, Ellen G. White said, "The apostle Peter had had a long experience in the things of God. His faith in God's power to save had strengthened with the years, until he had proved beyond question that there is no possibility of failure before the one who, advancing by faith, ascends round by round, ever upward and onward, to the topmost round of the ladder that reaches even to the portals of heaven" White, E. G. (1911). *The Acts of the Apostles*. Pacific Press Publishing Association.

Our righteousness is found in Jesus and what He has and will do for us. What is expected from us is to exercise faith in His love and power. Therefore, the secret to a victorious Christian life is faith. The Apostle Paul confirmed this thought, when he outlined in Hebrews 11 that it was by faith the Elders (Patriarchs) received a good report (approval) from God.

1. **What is faith? What role does faith play in our walk with the Lord?**

READ: Hebrews 11:1; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Hebrews 10:35-39; Romans 10:17

NOTES:

According to Hebrews 11:1, “. . . faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” “Faith is trusting God—believing that He loves us and knows best what is for our good . . . Our lives, ourselves, are already His (God’s); faith acknowledges His ownership and accepts its blessing” (Ellen G. White, *Education*. 1903 253). In other words, Faith gives us the ability to accept the unseen **realities** presented to us in the word of God (Romans 10:17). It is by faith that we believe and hold to the things of God. The things of God come to us by revelation -- through the Scriptures (Romans 10:17; Romans 1:19-21; Psalm 19:1-7). It is necessary to exercise faith, because

many of the things revealed in the word of God (present and future) are not seen with the eye; but they are true. Paul mentioned that it is by faith we have come to believe and accept that the world was created by the word of God (Hebrews 11:3). Most of all, we have been saved by exercising faith in the merits and atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ for salvation and by faith we continue to hold onto God (Ephesians 2:8, 9; Hebrews 10:35-39).

2. **DISCUSS the level of concern that Jesus had for the disciples to exercise consistent faith. What does this say about how important faith is to success in the Christian walk?**

READ: Matthew 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 8:10

NOTES:

While Jesus was on earth with His disciples, “lack of faith” was one of the main problems He had with them. Jesus longed to have His disciples trust in Him, not only sometimes, but all the time. Often you would hear Him upbraid His disciples, “O ye of little faith”, “why did you doubt?”, “faithless generation”, “have faith in God”, and so on. Jesus knew that in order for them to be truly blessed and to accomplish the work He had for them to do, the disciples needed to be mature in faith; they needed to exercise a constant and abiding trust in God, even in the face of difficulty (see Luke 18:1-8). Paul also pointed out that most of the Israelites who traversed the wilderness for forty (40) years, did not enter into God's rest, because of a lack of maturity in their faith. “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Hebrews 4:2).

The problem the Israelites in the wilderness had, was that they were not consistent in their exercise of faith. When they saw God's miracles, they rejoiced in the knowledge of His presence, power, love and wisdom, but when they faced difficulty they chose not to depend on or trust in God's love—they gave in to doubt and discouragement (see Psalm 106).

“Wherefore” says the Lord, “I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” Paul told the believers that the only way to truly partake of Christ, is if “we hold the beginning of our confidence **steadfast unto the end;**” (Hebrews 3:14, emphasis supplied).

3. **DISCUSS what do you believe a mature faith looks like?**

READ: Hebrews 3:14; James 1:5-8; Hebrews 10:38, 39; Hebrews 12:1-7

NOTES:

“It is not a conclusive evidence that a man is a Christian because he manifests spiritual ecstasy under extraordinary circumstances. Holiness is not rapture: it is an entire surrender of the will to God; it is living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; it is doing the will of our heavenly Father; it is trusting God in trial, in darkness as well as in the light; it is walking by faith and not by sight; it is relying on God with unquestioning confidence, and resting in His love” (E. G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*. 1911 51).

4. **What is the key to developing maturity in faith?**

READ: Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:6; James 2:14-26

NOTES:

The word of God is the source of our faith. We follow God’s will for us claiming all His promises. This is the secret to victory. The word of God leads us to place our faith in Him. There are things that we ought to accept about God that will help us to have strong and consistent faith--faith must accept/believe 1) that God is; 2) who God is; 3) the privilege of submitting to God.

- a. **Faith accepts that God is.** It is not our faith in God that causes Him to exist; faith only accepts the fact of His existence based on the evidences given. In order to have solid spiritual growth, this is something that faith must accept and hold to unwaveringly.
- b. **Faith accepts who God is.** In order for spiritual growth to take place and be sustained, faith needs to go further than believing that God exists. According to the Apostle James, “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19). In order to have a faith that is more advanced than the devils’, you need to also accept, not only that God exists, but what He is capable of and the claims that He makes on your life. Therefore, faith goes further to accept who God is, in reference to His character and ability. It would be impossible to outline all of God’s attributes. However, for the purpose of this study, some examples of God’s attributes that

faith needs to be aware of and hold to are—His omnipresence, His omniscience, His omnipotence, His wisdom, His faithfulness, and that He loves us unconditionally.

- c. **Faith submits to God.** The greatest demonstration of our faith in God and who He is, is that we obey His word. Because God is everywhere, there is no place I can go to relieved of my obligation to Him. Because He knows everything, even my thoughts, I must honour Him at all times. Because He is able to do all things – I am never out of strength to do His will. Then I must obey Him under all circumstances. My obedience is what demonstrates that I truly believe these things about God. God is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent and I have the privilege of trusting Him and submit to His will in all things.

REFLECTION

It was the Apostle John who said, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). God does not expect us to fight our battles in our own strength. However, by exercising faith in His power, we give God permission to fight our battles. The greatest demonstration of our faith is when we claim God’s promises and obey His commands.

PRAYER FOCUS

- “Lord, help my unbelief”
- That God will increase our faith

LIFE OF THE JUSTIFIED: BIBLE STUDY AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

KEY TEXT: “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:1–2).

INTRODUCTION

We all know that as Christians, we need to read our Bibles. We also know that for some Christians Bible-reading is not always exciting. It is not every morning; you will awake with anticipation towards “getting into the word”. If we do not have a clear understanding of the role of Bible reading, it will be easy to give up the habit when faced with monotony.

However, for the mature Christian, Bible reading is not merely a ritual; it is conversation with God. It is one wing of the ‘devotional bird’ of prayer and Bible study that helps us to build intimacy with God. As we listen to His voice and talk with Him.

Therefore, Bible reading is not done only when it is exciting to do so; it is done because it is the only authoritative source of inspiration. It is God’s voice to us. As we prayerfully read the Scripture, the Holy Spirit is by our side to bless us with spiritual understanding.

There can be no spiritual life without this daily experience.

1. What role does the word of God play in our spiritual growth?

READ: Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 2:1, 2; Matthew 4:4

NOTES:

The spiritual resources that Jesus provides for our growth are found in His word. “The life of Christ that gives life to the world is in His word. It was by His word that Jesus healed disease and cast out demons; by His word He stilled the sea, and raised the dead; . . . The whole Bible is a manifestation of Christ, and the Saviour desired to fix the faith of His followers on the word. When His visible presence should be withdrawn, the word must be their source of power” (E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 219). That is why Peter encouraged the new Christians—“as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). To the Jews, Jesus said, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world (John 6:51). You partake of the life of Christ by studying and obeying His word (John 6:63). As Christ lives in you, you live your life by faith in Him (Galatians 2:20). [Notice that Gal 2:20 does not say that we live the life of Christ but that we live our life by faith in Christ].

2. What counsel would you give to a new Christian who wants to know what steps to take in getting the best out of Bible study? Discuss each of the following steps recommended by the Bible as to how we can get the best out of Bible study.

- a. **READ:** Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1, 2
-

NOTES:

You should make it a goal to prayerfully read the Bible every day and to read it entirely (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1, 2). If you read three (3) chapters of the Bible each day and five (5) chapters on Sabbaths (Weekends), you can complete the entire Bible in one (1) year. Reading the entire Bible will help you to become acquainted with the overall principles and teachings of the Bible that will guide you in the Christian life.

- b. Acts 17:11; Isaiah 28:9, 10
-

NOTES:

In order to get a deeper understanding of Bible truths especially difficult passages, you will need to do more than reading; you need to take time to study the Bible. According to Ellen G. White, “We should carefully study the Bible, asking God for the aid of the Holy Spirit, that we may understand His word. We should take one verse, and concentrate the mind on the task of ascertaining the thought which God has put in that verse for us. We should dwell upon the thought until it becomes our own, and we know ‘what saith the Lord’” (The Desire of Ages, 219).

- c. Psalm 119:11
-

NOTES:

While it might be impractical to memorize the entire Bible, it is very important to memorize some key Bible texts and principles. The word of God is our main safeguard against temptations. That is why the Psalmist David declared, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11). It was because Jesus had the Scriptures memorized that He was able to resist the temptations of Satan (Matthew 4:1-11). Therefore, besides reading and studying the Bible, it is important to commit portions of Scriptures to memory. “The mind must be restrained, and not allowed to wander. It should be trained to dwell upon the Scriptures, and upon noble, elevating themes. Portions of Scripture, even whole chapters, may be committed to memory, to be repeated when Satan comes in with his temptations” (Our Higher Calling, 88).

d. Matthew 7:24, 25

NOTES:

The main objective of Bible Study is to get to understand the principles of God’s word so that we can put them into practice. Therefore, the final and most important step in Bible Study is to obey it. Obeying God’s word involves replacing sinful practices with the guidelines from the word of God. This is part of what it means to be “sanctified by the truth” (John 17:17).

3. What approach should we take when we meet upon portions of Scripture that are difficult to understand?

READ: 2 Peter 3:15, 16

NOTES:

“Many, especially those who are young in the Christian life, are at times troubled with the suggestions of skepticism. There are in the Bible many things which they cannot explain, or even understand, and Satan employs these to shake their faith in the Scriptures as a revelation from God. They ask, “How shall I know the right way? If the Bible is indeed the word of God, how can I be freed from these doubts and perplexities?” God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith.” White, E. G. (1892). Steps to Christ (p. 105). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

REFLECTION

Through the word of God, we receive spiritual understanding. This understanding inspires our faith. And through the word of God, we claim God’s promises and obey His commands in order to copy the life of Jesus and make it our own. It is our spiritual resource bank.

Lesson 17

PRAYER FOCUS

- For deeper understanding of the word of God and faith to practice its principles
- Greater appreciation for the role that Bible reading plays in my spiritual growth

LIFE OF THE JUSTIFIED: PRAYER AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

KEY TEXT: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7).

INTRODUCTION

If the Word of God represents food to our spiritual life; Prayer is to our spiritual life what breathing is to us physically. It is not breathing that keeps us alive; it is the breath of life that God's from God. Yet, if we do not utilize the air through inhaling, we will eventually suffocate and die. So it is with prayer. The power of God that keeps us alive and helps us to grow spiritually has been provided for us in abundance and more than we can ever ask for (2 Peter 1:3; Ephesians 3:20). However, if we do not ask for and thus receive power, we will have no life in us (Matthew 7:7-11; Acts 1:6-8).

Prayer helps us to partake of God's grace and power that He has made available to us through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:14-16). "Prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven's storehouse" (*Steps to Christ*, 94-95). Because we are constantly in need of God's blessings; the word of God encourages us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17; see also Luke 18:1, 2). This does not mean that we are to constantly be on our knees in prayer, but that we are to maintain an unbroken connection with God by faith. For "without unceasing prayer and diligent watching we are in danger of growing careless and of deviating from the right path" (Ibid, 95).

1. **What is prayer and what role would you say that prayer plays in our spiritual growth?**

READ: Matthew 6:5-15; 1 Samuel 1:12-16; Luke 11:9-11

NOTES:

Prayer is conversation with God. It is the other wing of the 'devotional bird'. Through prayer, we are able to tell God our problems, ask Him for help, receive strength from Him and express thanks to God for His goodness. All that we lack, all that we need for spiritual growth, by prayer and supplication, we are free to ask of God (James 1:5).

2. **DISCUSS: Why do you think prayer is necessary, since God already knows everything?**

NOTES:

Prayer helps us to develop and maintain a good *relationship* with God. Without communication a relationship would die for lack of intimacy and sharing. Prayer helps us to be intimate with God as we share our deepest thoughts, needs and feelings with Him.

Prayer is the means by which we *ask for and receive strength* and blessings from God. “It is part of God’s plan to grant us in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow if we did not thus ask” (*Great Controversy* p. 525).

Prayer helps us to *defeat temptation* when we call upon God for help. The battles that we have to fight in the Christian pathway are greater than we can handle in our own strength. This is why we need to pray—we need to pray for power to overcome temptation and to do God’s will.

Prayer helps us to *maintain a continuous and unbroken connection with God*. Connection with God is essential to spiritual growth; prayer is the only means by which we can maintain a constant connection with God. This is why the Apostle Paul encourages us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

It is through prayer that we *confess our sins* to God and *receive forgiveness* from Him.

3. According to the Bible, what are some things that we are to pray for?

READ:

a. James 1:5

b. Luke 11:13

c. Matthew 5:44

d. Matthew 6:11

e. Matthew 6:13

f. Matthew 6:12

Lesson 18

g. Matthew 6:10

h. James 5:13-14

i. 1 Timothy 2:1-4

NOTES:

Prayer is heaven's ordained means of success in the conflict with sin and the development of Christian character. The divine influences that come in answer to the prayer of faith will accomplish in the soul of the suppliant all for which he pleads. For the pardon of sin, for the Holy Spirit, for a Christ-like temper, for wisdom and strength to do His work, for any gift He has promised, we may ask; and the promise is, "Ye shall receive" (White, E. G. (1911). *The Acts of the Apostles in the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Vol. 4, p. 564). Pacific Press Publishing Association).

4. What are some conditions that need to be met in order for us to have success in prayer?

READ:

a. Matthew 6:6; Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12

b. Hebrews 11:6

c. Luke 18:9-14

d. Matthew 6:14, 15; Matthew 5:23, 24

e. Psalm 66:18

f. Luke 18:1-8

g. Matthew 7:7-11

REFLECTION

Think of what your spiritual life would be like without the ability to pray. It would surely stifle. Ellen G. White said it correctly, “The darkness of the evil one encloses those who neglect to pray. The whispered temptations of the enemy entice them to sin; and it is all because they do not make use of the privileges that God has given them in the divine appointment of prayer.” White, E. G. (1892). *Steps to Christ* (p. 94). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

PRAYER FOCUS

- For a deeper and more consistent prayer life

LIFE OF THE JUSTIFIED: THE HOLY SPIRIT AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Key Text: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

INTRODUCTION:

According to Acts 19:1-5, Paul met some believers in Ephesus and asked them, “Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believe?” “And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.” The conversation that followed led to the baptism or re-baptism these believers by both water and the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:6).

Each time I read this story, I usually ask a few questions of the text, “What is it that led Paul to ask them about receiving the Holy Spirit?”, “Why is the baptism of the Holy Spirit so important to the Christian life? What role does the Holy Spirit play in restoring us to the image of God?”

In this lesson, we seek to answer these questions and more.

- 1. In light of the work that the Holy Spirit accomplished in and through the church since Pentecost, what do you think could have led Paul to ask the believers in Ephesus the first question he asked them in Acts 19:1-6?**

READ Acts 19:1-6; 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

NOTES:

Paul knew what spirit-filled and spirit-led believers should look like. He understood the blessings of Pentecost and the power that the Holy Spirit brings, not only for transformation of character, but for preaching the gospel. Therefore, when he met these believers, who, apparently through the preaching of Apollos (before his meeting with Aquilla and Priscilla) knew only the “baptism of John”, he “probably noticed in these men a want of spiritual gifts, and perhaps a lack of peace and joy and radiance that were revealed in those brought fully into the message of the gospel.” (*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol. 6, pg. 371, 372.*)

- 2. Before His crucifixion, Jesus spent much time speaking to His disciples about the promise of the Holy Spirit (John 14-16). Why do you think He did? Why is the promise of the Spirit so important to the church?**

READ John 16:7-11; Acts 1:6-8; John 7:37-39

NOTES:

The space afforded in this lesson is too small to exhaust the teachings of the Bible on the role of the Holy Spirit. If you ask me ‘what does the Holy Spirit do for the believer?’, I would answer, ‘everything’. All that Jesus promised, in terms of spiritual life, growth and perfection for the believer, it is the Holy Spirit that makes it effective in our lives. The Holy Spirit “convicts us of sin”; gives us new life; empowers us for witnessing; gift us for ministry; teaches us the word of God; translates our prayers and seals us for eternity. According to Ellen G. White, “This promised blessing, claimed by faith, brings all other blessings in its train” (*The Desire of Ages*, pg. 672).

3. What role does the Holy Spirit play in our transformation of character?

READ 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18; Romans 8:3-14; John 3:3-6; Galatians 5:22, 23

“The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail. The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world’s Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church” (*The Desire of Ages*, 671). “Having brought conviction of sin, and presented before the mind the standard of righteousness, the Holy Spirit withdraws the affections from the things of this earth and fills the soul with a desire for holiness. “He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13), the Saviour declared. If men are willing to be molded, there will be brought about a sanctification of the whole being. The Spirit will take the things of God and stamp them on the soul. By His power the way of life will be made so plain that none need err therein” (*Acts of the Apostles*, 52).

4. What are the conditions for receiving and cooperating with the Holy Spirit in His work of transforming and empowering us?

READ Acts 2:37-39; Luke 11:9-13; Phil 2:1-3; Acts 2:1

NOTES:

The first step in cooperating with the Holy Spirit, is really to accept His appeal to look upon Jesus and be saved. He leads us to repent of our sins and receive new life from above. On a daily basis, we submit ourselves to Christ and seek for a fresh baptism of His presence; He works to transform our lives from glory to glory. The Holy Spirit doesn't come to take directions from us; He comes to give directions. Therefore, an important attribute in cooperating with the Holy Spirit, is humility; willingness to give up all for the sake of Christ; all our personal ambitions must be surrendered that the Holy Spirit can have full control. As Ellen G. White mentioned about the preparation days before Pentecost, "Putting away all differences, all desire for supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship" (*Acts of the Apostles*, 36).

REFLECTION

The Holy Spirit brings to us all what Jesus promised and made available for our spiritual lives. It is a privilege for us to receive the presence of God in our lives through the Holy Spirit. This is made possible only through the death of Jesus. We ought to cherish this Gift. "Since this is the means by which we are to receive power, why do we not hunger and thirst for the gift of the Spirit? Why do we not talk of it, pray for it, and preach concerning it? . . . Wherever the need of the Holy Spirit is a matter little thought of, there is seen spiritual drought, spiritual darkness, spiritual declension and death. Whenever minor matters occupy the attention, the divine power which is necessary for the growth and prosperity of the church, and which would bring all other blessings in its train, is lacking, though offered in infinite plenitude" (*Acts of the Apostles*, 50).

PRAYER FOCUS

1. For a greater understanding and appreciation of the gift of the Spirit
2. For the baptism of the Holy Spirit

LIFE OF THE JUSTIFIED: COMMUNITY AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

KEY TEXT: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:" Ephesians 4:11–13 (KJV 1900)

INTRODUCTION

Persons have often questioned the relevance of attending or being a member of a Church. Some persons say, 'If I can stay at home and read my Bible, why do I need to go to Church?' "As a matter of fact, there are so many hypocrites in Church that it doesn't make sense I bother to go." But Church is God's idea. Church refers to the community of believers; God's family; His flock; His people; His kingdom on earth; the body of Christ; the Potter's house.

God has no other entity for salvation, representing Him and doing His work, outside of His Church. It is the Church that He is working on to be without spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:25-27). Jesus is not merely preparing individuals for His Kingdom, He is preparing His church; His bride. He will not be satisfied until ". . . we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:" Ephesians 4:13 (KJV 1900).

Therefore, it is impossible to experience mature spiritual growth outside of a community. The individual who stays at home and read the Bible, is reading materials that were prepared by members of God's church.

In this lesson, we study further on the importance of community to spiritual growth.

- 1. How would you respond to someone who claims that it is not necessary to be part of a church? What are some practical benefits of being part of a church community? Why is being part of a community so important to one's spiritual growth?**

READ: Acts 2:42-47; Romans 12:4, 5; Hebrews 10:24-26; Acts 20:29, 30

NOTES:

Besides the fact that Church is God's idea, there are a number of benefits to be derived from being part of God's community. Here are a few:

- a. *Authenticity*. Being a member of the Church identifies us as genuine believers (Romans 12:5; Ephesians 2:19).¹
- b. *Support*. Through the church, we benefit from the combined wisdom and experience of other believers. The Bible teaches that there is great strength in unity (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Hebrews 10:24-26).
- c. *Accountability*. The church provides the spiritual accountability that is necessary for spiritual growth and maintenance of purity in practice and belief. In other words, through the leadership structure of the Church, God expects to safeguard the church against false doctrines and fanaticism (Acts 20:29, 30).

2. Think about the authority that has been invested in and responsibilities that God has given to the church. What does this say about the church's responsibility towards the spiritual growth of its members?

READ: Acts 20:25-31; 1 Timothy 3:15; Matthew 16:16-18; Matthew 28:18-20; 18

NOTES:

The charges that are given to the leaders of God's church identifies the fact that God holds the church responsible for putting mechanisms in place for the spiritual growth of its members. When Jesus was done discipling the apostles (in relation to His work on earth), He said to them, now "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19–20). In other words, all that I have taught you; all that you see Me do; all the experience you have gathered, go and teach others the same.

3. Besides its connection with Christ, a church finds her strength in unity. What role does each member play in helping to achieve and maintain unity within the church/community?

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-3; James 4:1-4; Philippians 2:1-4

¹ Warren, Rick, *The Purpose Drive Church*, pg. 313

NOTES:

As members of the body of Christ, we each have a duty to overcome every principle of selfishness and pride that promote disunity. This process begins with surrendering our own hearts to the Lord so that we can have victory over worldly principles. According to Ellen G. White, “It’s not the opposition of the world that most endangers the church of Christ. It is the evil cherished in the hearts of believers...on the other hand, the strongest witness that God has sent His Son into the world is the existence of harmony and union among men of varied dispositions who form His church” (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 549).

4. Why is unity so important to the body of Christ?

READ: Acts 2:1-4; John 17:20-23

NOTES:

"There is nothing that Satan fears so much as that the people of God shall clear the way by removing every hindrance, so that the Lord can pour out His Spirit upon a languishing church and an impenitent congregation. If Satan had his way, there would never be another awakening, great or small, to the end of time. But we are not ignorant of his devices" (White, E. G. (1958). *Selected Messages From the Writings of Ellen G. White, Book 1*, p. 124. Review and Herald Publishing Association). A united church is not only the best testimony to the power of God's work in the life of the believer, but it prepares the church for the out pouring of God’s Spirit. “The great outpouring of the Spirit of God, which lightens the whole earth with His glory, will not come until we have an enlightened people, that know by experience what it means to be laborers together with God. When we have entire, wholehearted consecration to the service of Christ, God will recognize the fact by an outpouring of His Spirit without measure; but this will not be while the largest portion of the church are not laborers together with God" (*The Review and Herald*, July 21, 1896).

REFLECTION

When Jesus said to His disciples, “Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you”, He invested the church with authority and the responsibility for the spiritual growth of its members. So, whether we take the position of one who needs to be nurtured or one who nurtures others, we all need to be part of the body of Christ.

PRAYER FOCUS

- That God’s church will fulfil her purpose of making disciples and preparing them for the kingdom of God

Lesson 20

- For unity in God's church

LIFE OF THE JUSTIFIED: COMMUNITY AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH (PART 2)

KEY TEXT: "And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

INTRODUCTION

Not only is community necessary for spiritual growth, but it is the place where spiritual growth is manifested. It is in relationship with others that our Christianity is best revealed. According to the Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook, "If Christian love won't work at home, it won't work anywhere" (*Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook*, 48).

The Apostle Paul, in the book of Ephesians, spends the first half outlining the theology of righteousness by faith and the second half, calling the believers to walk worthy of their calling. In Paul's mind, to walk worthy of this calling involves how we relate to others. According to Ellen G. White, "One well-ordered, well-disciplined family tells more in behalf of Christianity than all the sermons that can be preached" (*My Life Today*, 124).

In this lesson, we look at how spirituality is revealed in relationship with others.

- 1. In Ephesians 4 & 5, the Apostle Paul admonished the believers to "walk worthy" of their calling. Part of that admonition included the call to demonstrate principles of love in our relationship with each other. Please READ the texts and discuss below the admonitions and duties we have in each type of relationship:**

- a. Spousal (Ephesians 5:21-28; 1 Peter 3:1-8; Colossians 3:18, 19)

- b. Parent/Child (Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20, 21)

- c. Employer/Employee (Ephesians 6:5-9; 1 Peter 2:18, 19).

- d. Government/Citizen (1 Peter 2:13-17; 1 Timothy 2:1-5)

- e. Our Enemies or those who offend us (Matthew 5:39-48)

- 2. What is the key principle to maintaining good relationships?**

READ: 1 Corinthians 13:1-8; Philippians 2:1-5

NOTES:

Love is the underlying principle that should govern our relationship with others. The Apostle Paul sought to outline how this love should be manifested. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Corinthians 13:4-8, NIV). "Love not only bears with others' faults, but cheerfully submits to whatever suffering or inconvenience such forbearance makes necessary" (White, E. G. (1988). *Lift Him Up* (p. 313). Review and Herald Publishing Association).

3. What type of relationships are the Christians told to avoid and why?

READ: 2 Corinthians 6:14-15; 1 Corinthians 5:9-11

NOTES:

"As disciples of Christ we shall not mingle with the world from a mere love of pleasure, to unite with them in folly. Such associations can result only in harm. We should never give sanction to sin by our words or our deeds, our silence or our presence. Wherever we go, we are to carry Jesus with us, and to reveal to others the preciousness of our Saviour" White, E. G. (1930). *Messages to Young People*, p. 362. Southern Publishing Association). "Never should God's people venture upon forbidden ground. Marriage between believers and unbelievers is forbidden by God" (White, E. G. (1952). *The Adventist Home*, p. 63. Review and Herald Publishing Association).

REFLECTION

Love cannot exist outside of a community. How we relate to others is the test tube for our Christianity. The second principle of the Law is based on, "love your neighbor as yourself". For married couples, the closest neighbor is our spouse. Therefore, Paul rightly charged husbands and wives to love each other based on the love that is manifested between Christ and His church. This principle can be applied to other relationships, including parent/child, colleagues, friends and other relatives. The question is, can these persons say that we are Christians? Do they see a revelation of Christ's character in and through us?

PRAYER FOCUS

Lesson 21

- For a deeper love for our neighbours
- That the love of Christ will be revealed in our relationships with others.

LIFE OF THE JUSTIFIED: MINISTRY AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

KEY TEXT: "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

It is said that, "The Saviour's life on earth was not a life of ease and devotion to Himself, but He toiled with persistent, earnest, untiring effort for the salvation of lost mankind. From the manger to Calvary He followed the path of self-denial and sought not to be released from arduous tasks, painful travels and exhausting care and labour. He said, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." Matthew 20:28. This was the one great object of His life. Everything else was secondary and subservient. It was His meat and drink to do the will of God and to finish His work. Self and self-interest had no part in His labour (White, E. G. (1892). *Steps to Christ*, p. 78. Pacific Press Publishing Association).

"So those who are the partakers of the grace of Christ will be ready to make any sacrifice, that others for whom He died may share the heavenly gift. They will do all they can to make the world better for their stay in it. This spirit is the sure outgrowth of a soul truly converted. No sooner does one come to Christ than there is born in his heart a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus; the saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart. If we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and are filled with the joy of His indwelling Spirit, we shall not be able to hold our peace (White, E. G. (1892). *Steps to Christ*, p. 78. Pacific Press Publishing Association).

In this lesson, we take a look at the relationship between ministry and spiritual growth.

- 1. READ Matthew 28:18-20. Do you think God could have reached the world by Himself or by using angels? Why do you think He chose to use us to minister to others? (Acts 1:6-8; John 21:15-17)**

NOTES:

It is an amazing thought that after working with these men for 3 plus years, Jesus felt that they were now ready to go and do for others what He had done for them. He said, "go and teach others all that I have taught you." ". . . As *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). According to Ellen G. White, "As His representatives among men, God does not choose angels who have never fallen, but human beings, men of like passions with those they seek to save. Christ took humanity that He might reach humanity. A divine-human Saviour was needed to bring salvation to the world. And to men and women has been committed the sacred trust of making known "the unsearchable

riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8). In His wisdom the Lord brings those who are seeking for truth into touch with fellow beings who know the truth. It is the plan of Heaven that those who have received light shall impart it to those in darkness. Humanity, drawing its efficiency from the great Source of wisdom, is made the instrumentality, the working agency, through which the gospel exercises its transforming power on mind and heart" (White, E. G. (1911). *The Acts of the Apostles in the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, Vol. 4, p. 134. Pacific Press Publishing Association).

2. **READ Matthew 5:14-16. In using light to represent the life of a Christian, what is Jesus saying about how natural a part of our lives it should be to minister to others?**

NOTES:

Jesus doesn't ask us to "make" our light shine; He says, "let" your light shine. In other words, once we are connected to Him, who is the "Light of the World", we will be a blessing to others. Once we do nothing to hinder this work, it will be natural for us to shed light on the path of those who are in darkness. "When the love of Christ is enshrined in the heart, like sweet fragrance it cannot be hidden. Its holy influence will be felt by all with whom we come in contact. The spirit of Christ in the heart is like a spring in the desert, flowing to refresh all and making those who are ready to perish, eager to drink of the water of life" (White, E. G. (1892). *Steps to Christ*, p. 77. Pacific Press Publishing Association).

3. **DISCUSS the positive impact that witnessing has on our spiritual life by sharing how it helps to improve the following:**
- a. Our love for God
 - b. Our love for others
 - c. Our understanding of the Bible
 - d. Our Prayer life

NOTES:

It is impossible to do unselfish work for others, without experiencing God's blessing ourselves. "And the effort to bless others will react in blessings upon ourselves. This was the purpose of God in giving us a part to act in the plan of redemption." White, E. G. (1892). *Steps to Christ* (p. 79). Pacific Press Publishing Association. Working for the salvation of others will help us to appreciate the patience and sacrifice that God made to

save us. It will increase our love for people as we pray for them, God's compassion flows through us. The challenge to share God's word will increase our desire to know more of the Bible. Ministry also gives fuel and meaning to our prayer life. According to Ellen G. White, "He who does nothing but pray will soon cease to pray, or his prayers will become a formal routine. When men take themselves out of social life, away from the sphere of Christian duty and cross bearing; when they cease to work earnestly for the Master, who worked earnestly for them, they lose the subject matter of prayer and have no incentive to devotion. Their prayers become personal and selfish. They cannot pray in regard to the wants of humanity or the up building of Christ's kingdom, pleading for strength wherewith to work" (White, E. G. (1892). *Steps to Christ*, p. 101. Pacific Press Publishing Association).

4. **Not all of us are expected to be great evangelists, but all can do something to tell the love of God to others. DISCUSS some general tips for basic witnessing that each of us can use to improve our effectiveness.**

NOTES:

Jesus is the Master Teacher. He is our example of how best to reach others with the gospel. In attempting to reach others, it is difficult to improve upon the method that He employed. Ellen G. White summarized it in this statement, "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Come, follow Me'" (*Ministry of Healing*, 143).

REFLECTION

Reaching out to bless others is an integral part of spiritual growth. If all that we do is to receive from Christ, then our lives will become like the Dead Sea. But, if we allow ourselves to be a channel of blessing to others, there is no limit to our potential. As Ellen G. White says, "He who loves Christ the most will do the greatest amount of good. There is no limit to the usefulness of one who, by putting self aside, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart, and lives a life wholly consecrated to God." White, E. G. (1898). *The Desire of Ages* (Vol. 3, pp. 250–251). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

PRAYER FOCUS

- For at least 2 to 3 persons who you would like to see come to Christ and begin to put a plan in place to reach these persons with the gospel
- For a greater passion and wisdom to reach the lost for Jesus

LIFE OF THE JUSTIFIED: DEALING WITH TEMPTATION

Key Text: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

INTRODUCTION

I read the following statement in a little book on prayer some years ago, "If there were no devil there would be no difficulty in prayer" (Anonymous, 2012-09-22. *The Kneeling Christian*, p. 59. Fig. Kindle Edition). This principle could also be applied to our walk by faith - "if there were no devil there would be no difficulty in our Christian walk." The part that people dread the most about the Christian walk—temptations and trials—cannot be dealt with by merely wishing it will go away or will somehow be made easier. As the author suggests, as long as we are in this flesh; as long as there is a devil, we will face temptation.

What is temptation? Temptation is ‘enticement to sin’ (James 1:14). Sin is disobedience to God’s word (1 John 3:4). Anything that attempts to lead us to disobey God is temptation. The main source of temptation is Satan. Satan works to awaken the evil of our hearts and lead us into rebellion against God. Satan uses people, things and suggestions to entice us to sin, and he is often successful, because of our evil nature.

In order for us to maintain a consistent relationship with God and to experience healthy spiritual growth, it is important for us to be able to identify and defeat the temptations of Satan.

1. **What is temptation? Can the Christian live a life free from temptation? How does the Bible answer these questions?**

READ: Matthew 4:1-11; James 1:13-15

NOTES:

"Temptation is enticement to sin, and this does not proceed from God, but from Satan and from the evil of our own hearts. "God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempteth no man" (James 1:13, R.V). Satan seeks to bring us into temptation, that the evil of our characters may be revealed before men and angels, that he may claim us as his own, (White, E. G. (1896). *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 116. Pacific Press Publishing Association).

2. **What promises of help has God given to us in our battle with temptation and how can our spiritual growth benefit from temptation?**

READ: 1 Corinthians 10:13; James 1:2-5; 1 Peter 1:3-7; Hebrews 2:17, 18

NOTES:

While temptation is a must; defeat is not. Through Jesus, who defeated all the temptations of the devil, we are "more than conquerors". We only need to trust Jesus; follow His leading, then, rather than being a source of frustration, temptation will be a blessing. Because, as we endure temptation and gain victory, we will only grow in faith and confidence (James 1:12). According to Ellen G. White, "God in His great love is seeking to develop in us the precious graces of His Spirit. He permits us to encounter obstacles, persecution, and hardships, not as a curse, but as the greatest blessing of our lives. Every temptation resisted, every trial bravely borne, gives us a new experience and advances us in the work of character building. The soul that through divine power resists temptation reveals to the world and to the heavenly universe the efficiency of the grace of Christ (White, E. G. (1896). *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* p. 117. Pacific Press Publishing Association). "Could our spiritual vision be quickened, we should see souls bowed under oppression and burdened with grief, pressed as a cart beneath sheaves and ready to die in discouragement. We should see angels flying swiftly to aid these tempted ones, who are standing as on the brink of a precipice. The angels from heaven force back the hosts of evil that encompass these souls, and guide them to plant their feet on the sure foundation" Ibid., 119.

3. **If and when we are overcome by temptation, does this mean total failure? Does God abandon us? What should we do when overcome?**

READ: Luke 22:31, 32; Psalm 51; 1 John 2:1

NOTES:

"We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged. Even if we are overcome by the enemy, we are not cast off, not forsaken and rejected of God. No; Christ is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Said the beloved John, 'These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous' (1 John 2:1) (White, E. G. (1892). *Steps to Christ*, p. 64. Pacific Press Publishing Association). "Christ will never abandon the soul for whom He has died. The soul may leave Him and be overwhelmed with temptation, but Christ

can never turn from one for whom He has paid the ransom of His own life (White, E. G. (1896). *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 118–119. Pacific Press Publishing Association).

4. **What are some practical steps to take to overcome temptation? What does the Bible teach as the secret to victory?**

READ: Matthew 4:4, 7, 10; Hebrews 4:14-16; 1 Corinthians 10:13

NOTES:

Here are a few guidelines for overcoming temptation²:

- a. Do not become *discouraged* or *frightened* by temptation. To be tempted is not a sin; we sin when we yield to temptation and choose to disobey God. You need to understand that Satan cannot force you to disobey God. He can tempt, harass, annoy and accuse, but he cannot force you to go against God’s will. Before you sin, you must choose to disobey God.
- b. You must be *willing* to overcome. Satan cannot force us to sin; but neither will God force us to overcome. All provisions are in place for us to overcome, but if we are not willing to turn from sin, we will be overcome.
- c. Maintain a *constant devotional life* and have your mind fortified with the word of God and prayer, so that you are not made an easy prey to Satan’s temptations (Psalm 119:11; Ephesians 6:10-12). By refusing to maintain a strong connection with God through prayer and the study of the word, you make yourself twice vulnerable to the attacks of Satan. According to E. G. White, “The darkness of the evil one encloses those who neglect to pray. The whispered temptations of the enemy entice them to sin; and it is all because they do not make use of the privileges that God has given them in the divine appointment of prayer” (*Steps to Christ*, 65).
- d. Recognize the *situations and circumstances in which you are more vulnerable* to temptation and be prepared to avoid these situations as much as possible. “We are not to place ourselves needlessly in the way of temptation. . . . If by associating with worldlings for pleasure, by conforming to worldly practices, by uniting our interests with unbelievers, we place our feet in the path of temptation and sin, how can we expect God to keep us from falling?” (*Messages to Young People*, 81, 82).
- e. **Pray.** God wants us to call on Him in times of temptation. We are no match for the Devil. Therefore, we need God’s help at all times in order to overcome. When

² Some of these are taken from the book *Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren

we are tempted, we can call upon God with silent prayers, having the assurance that God hears and will help us to overcome (Hebrews 4:14-16).

- f. Recognize that there is **always a way out** (1 Corinthians 10:13). In every time of temptation God always provide a way of escape. Our duty is to believe God's promises and claim them by choosing to depend on God and not give in to temptation.
- g. Keep close watch on your thoughts. When evil thoughts come to your mind **refocus your attention** on godly thoughts. We should resist the devil, but not try to resist temptation. Every time you try to block a thought out of your mind, you drive it deeper into your memory. By resisting it, you actually reinforce it. The battle for sin is won or lost in your mind. Whatever gets your attention will get you. We get rid of a thought by focusing on something else. Sing a spiritual song; meditate on a passage of Scripture; just focus your mind on things that are spiritual; therefore, there will be no space for evil thoughts (Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:1, 2; Ephesians 5:19).
- h. **Realize your vulnerability.** Given the right situation, any of us is capable of any sin. Therefore, no matter how many victories we have had, we must never let down our guard and think we are beyond temptation (1 Corinthian 10:12). "We cannot keep ourselves from sin for one moment. Every moment we are dependent upon God" (*Ministry of Healing*, 179). Therefore, "those who have felt the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit and have tasted of the good life to come, should not think that they are sinless; that they have reached the highest state of perfection, and are beyond the reach of temptation" (*Signs of the Times*, February 4, 1897).
- i. Remember that every temptation provides an equal **opportunity to grow** as it is to disobey. God does not tempt us; but He allows us to be tempted in order that we may understand what is in our hearts that need to be overcome. Therefore, temptation actually provides us with a wonderful opportunity to grow in our relationship with Christ and to draw closer to Him (James 1:12).

REFLECTION

One of the most assuring points to keep in mind when faced with temptation, is that God weighs every trial; every temptation that we will ever face (1 Corinthians 10:13). Not only does He make certain that it is not more than we can handle, but He always make a way of escape. As He did for Peter, Jesus prays for us; He is praying that we will overcome every temptation we face and experience victory as He did. He also prays that if we are overcome, we would not lose hope. With such assurance of help, why should we be afraid. We can certainly "be of good cheer", for Jesus is on our side (John 16:33).

PRAYER FOCUS

- "Lord, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"

Lesson 23

- For wisdom to discern the devices of the enemy and to avoid all his traps

COUNTERFEIT RIGHTEOUSNESS

KEY TEXT: “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:21–23, KJV 1900).

INTRODUCTION

As clear as the teaching on Christ’s righteousness is, we can get it wrong. Many have gotten it wrong. And the consequences for getting it wrong are detrimental. Satan was successful in hiding the truth about justification by faith from the masses for hundreds of years. It took God’s working through the reformers and many years of sacrifice to unearth this truth and bring it to light.

From our first parents attempting to cover their nakedness with fig leaves, Cain offering the best of the fruit of the ground, to the Pharisees in the New Testament attempting to gain favor with God through works of righteousness, man is prone to deception about what God requires of us.

In this lesson we will study what the Bible teaches about the various “counterfeits” to the righteousness of Christ and how we can avoid this pitfall.

- 1. In attempting to cover their nakedness, Adam and Eve used fig leaves to cover themselves. However, God clothed them with coats of skin. DISCUSS what you believe the fig leaves represent in opposition to the coats of skin and what does this say about how great a temptation it is for humans to invent their own righteousness?**

READ: Genesis 3:7, 8 Romans 10:1-3; Revelation 3:17-18

NOTES:

Any attempt that we make to cover our guilt, outside of the righteousness of Christ is represented by the ‘fig leaves’ that Adam and Eve used to cover their nakedness. Nakedness represents shame, guilt, sense of loss and separation from God. The only thing that can fill that gap in the human heart is Christ’s love; His forgiveness and His righteousness, which is represented by the coats of skin that God clothed them with. Adam and Eve had to take off the fig leaf in order to put on the coat. So it is that we need to let go of our own ideas of what God wants in order to take hold of His righteousness.

2. What is the ultimate danger in taking on counterfeit righteousness?

READ: Matthew 7:21-23; 22:11-14

NOTES:

The ultimate danger for holding to counterfeit doctrines is to find out too late that we were following our own ways and not the Lord. That is why, it is so important to stick close to the Lord and depend totally on Him.

3. What are the varied examples of counterfeit righteousness outlined in the Bible?

READ: Matthew 19:16-20; 1 Samuel 15:13-20; Matthew 23:1-4; Luke 10:38-42

NOTES:

All counterfeit righteousness is produced by human invention, inspired by Satan. Once we begin to trust in our own works and fail to depend completely on Christ, we are sure to divert from the right path. One prominent one in our time, is a doctrine called, “holy flesh”. Where persons believe that humans, in this life, can attain ‘holy flesh’ through conversion or some rituals. Once this is attained, that person will cease from sin. In response to this doctrine, Ellen G. White suggests, “This is only one of the instances in which I was called upon to rebuke those who were presenting the doctrine of an impersonal god diffused through nature, and the doctrine of holy flesh. In the future, truth will be counterfeited by the precepts of men. Deceptive theories will be presented as safe doctrines...I beseech those who are laboring for God not to accept the spurious for the genuine. We have a whole Bible full of the most precious truth. We have no need for supposition or false excitement. In the golden censer of truth, as presented in Christ’s teachings, we have that which will convict and convert souls. Present in the simplicity of Christ the truths that He came to this world to proclaim, and the power of your message will make itself felt. Do not present theories or tests that have no foundation in the Bible.” White, E. G. (1976). *Maranatha, The Lord is Coming* (p. 134). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

4. What are some practical principles outlined in the Bible for avoiding counterfeits?

READ: 2 Peter 3:14-18; Ephesians 6:10-12; 2 Timothy 2:15

NOTES:

Here are a few guidelines for guarding against apostasy from Philip Dunham's book, *Blinded by the Light*:

1. **Study your Bible.** Not just read it, but study it. There is absolutely no way around this one. In order for you to differentiate between what the Bible 'supposedly' said and what it actually says, you must know the general principles of the Bible for yourself. There is no way to know it by merely reading what others say about the Bible; but to read it for yourself.
2. **Study the Spirit of Prophecy.** The counsel here is similar to #1. However, some persons avoid any attempt to read all her writings because it seems such a daunting task. However, I have read through the entire conflict of the ages series in 2 years by simply reading one chapter per day. The church, through the 'Believe His Prophets' program is currently attempting to do so in 5 years, join the program.
3. **Have daily devotional.** This is your source of strength. The prophet Jeremiah says that we are 'broken cisterns'. Meaning, we cannot hold water. We need another source in order to keep a fresh and constant supply. That source is Jesus. We must go to Him daily in order to maintain victory over sin and the deceptions of Satan. Ellen G. White suggests that we cannot even keep ourselves from sin for even a moment without Christ.
4. **Seek counsel.** Here is good counsel, "There are a thousand temptations in disguise prepared for those who have the light of truth; and the only safety for any of us is in receiving no new doctrine, no new interpretation of the Scriptures, without first submitting it to brethren of experience. Lay it before them in a humble, teachable spirit, with earnest prayer; and if they see no light in it, yield to their judgment; for "in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (*Testimonies for the Church*. (1855), Vol. 5, p. 293).
5. **Spend most time with known truths.** Before you go off researching "new light", make sure to establish yourself in the "old ones". For genuine new light will hardly override completely the old.

REFLECTION

Satan deceived Eve into thinking that obedience to God doesn't matter. Today, he deceives many into thinking the same thing, or to think that our obedience without the grace of Christ is enough. Satan is simply insistent that we should not get it right. Our only safe guard is to follow, "thus saith the Lord." Cease from trusting in our own works and trust only in the righteousness of Christ.

PRAYER FOCUS

- For wisdom to know the difference between counterfeit and the genuine
- Nothing will be allowed to replace Christ as ruler in my life

HINDRANCES TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Key Text: "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended" (Matthew 13:20–21).

INTRODUCTION

Jesus taught in the parable of the “sower who went forth to sow”, that it is not every Christian who starts the journey of faith will come to full maturity. Actually, only the seeds that fell on good ground (that represents those who received the word in a good and understanding heart) came to maturity and bore fruit (Matthew 13:23). By the "seeds that fell on rocks" and those that "fell among thorns", Jesus teaches that some who start the journey of faith will fail to bear fruit for His glory.

The basic difference between those who bore fruit and those who did not is that one continued to grow and the other did not. One group was hindered and one overcame all hindrances. As to the things that hinder a Christian from growing up, we could possibly make up an infinite list.

In this lesson, we will look at what the Bible teaches about hindrances to spiritual growth and how to overcome them.

1. **Jesus, in the parable of the sower, hinted at the things that hinder spiritual growth and maturity. DISCUSS each category of "hearers" and make a list of things that hinder spiritual growth.**

READ: Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23

NOTES:

Some seeds fell by the wayside. The “wayside hearers” represents the cold and indifferent to the gospel. They make no profession of faith, therefore, we will not consider this group in our analysis of spiritual growth.

Some fell upon stony places. The interpretation that Jesus gives for this part of the parable is, “..he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended” (Matthew 13:5, 20, 21). It is very easy (from a surface look at the parable) to interpret that the things which hinder spiritual growth in the life of the 'stony-ground' hearer, are the 'tribulation and persecution' that he faces because of the word. However,

this is not true. Tribulation and persecution are not unique to the experience of the 'stony-ground' hearers; tribulation and persecution go for everyone who hears the word. According to the Apostle Paul, as Christians, "...we glory in tribulations....knowing that tribulation worketh experience" (Romans 5:3). As Jesus mentioned in the parable of those who hear His word and do it, (no matter the condition of the house [that represents our lives]) the floods will come and the rains will beat. But whether we stand or fall depends on the level of our experience with the Lord (see Matthew 7:24-29). Therefore, it is not that persecution and tribulation are only for one set of Christians. Therefore, it is the spiritual experience of the 'stony-ground hearers' and not tribulation and persecution that prevent them from growing up to bear fruit in the Lord. Their spiritual experience is described as such, "...they had not much earth"; "no deepness of earth"; "they had no root" (Matthew 13:5, 6). They did not have enough place in their lives for the seed (the word of God) to take root and bear fruit. The earth (where the seed is planted) represents the heart (see Matthew 13:19).

Some fell among thorns. The experience of the seeds that fell among thorns is a little different from those that fell among rock soil. Their problem, unlike the stony-ground hearers, is not a lack of earth, but the thorns that they allow to grow up in their lives. Jesus described their experience as follows, "...some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them." He gave the interpretation: "He . . . that received seed among thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, *choke the word*, and he becometh unfruitful" (Matthew 13:7, 22 emphasis supplied).

Here is presented the experience of one who does grow spiritually; probably even more than the stony-ground hearer. Their problem, then, is not that they do not keep up a good devotional life, or does not value these things. It is not that they do not have a genuine desire to grow in the Lord and to do His work. It's just that they are not careful enough to prevent the wrong things from growing in their lives. The problem with the stony-ground hearer is that there is not enough growth, but the main problem with those that fell among thorns is that, along with the good seed, thorns are allowed to grow.

The thorns, here, represent sinful habits or cherished sins. This hearer's spiritual experience is eventually eroded by an equally absorbing interest. Therefore, as Christ said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other." This hearer eventually holds to the sins that he allows to remain in his life and thus loses his hold on God. According to the apostle Peter, "...of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (2 Peter 2:19). "Sad indeed is the condition" E.G. White comments, "of those who, becoming weary of the way, allow the enemy of souls to rob them of the Christian graces that have been developing in their hearts and lives" (E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 532, 533).

2. **What solution does the Bible give to ensure that we are not hindered or overcome in our growth in grace?**

READ: Luke 8:15; Matthew 13:23; John 8:30, 31; John 15:1-5

NOTES:

Luke's rendering of the parable gives a little more detail about how the 'good ground hearer' was successful in 'bearing fruit'. He says, "But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). The formula for successfully overcoming all hindrances, according to this passage, is to 1) receive the word in a good heart; 2) having received the word, keep it and God does the work of bearing fruit in our lives. In other words, the key to overcoming, is that after you come to Christ, then stay in the workshop. Jesus says, "abide in Me" (John 15); "continue in My word" (John 8:31); "endure to the end" (Matthew 10:22). Paul says, "hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;" (Hebrews 3:14); "cast not away . . . your confidence" (Hebrews 10:35); "continue in the faith grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Colossians 1:23).

For some Christians, the problem is not knowing the "right" things to do; the problem is distraction. We know that in order for us to grow spiritually, we need to read our Bible, pray, go to church, obey the Holy Spirit and exercise faith. However, sometimes we get distracted by so many seemingly important things that we forget to do the things that are most important (Luke 10:38-42).

In addition to that, when we get distracted, Satan leads us into sin and by the time we get back on track, we begin to question whether or not doing the "right" things can truly protect us from temptations. We begin to think that success in the Christian walk is so elusive that no one can truly have that success, when the real problem is that we got distracted. Not that we failed to do the right thing (the things that contribute to our growth) but that we failed to keep doing them. We fail to guard against distractions.

REFLECTION

This is my word of encouragement to you dear reader. That you will not only understand what it takes to grow spiritually, but that you will do them and keep on doing them. Let God take care of the miracle of growth. Just keep your eyes on the horizon. Keep your eyes on the only constant in this world—that is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ:" (Philippians 1:6).

Lesson 25

PRAYER FOCUS

- For wisdom and strength to discern and overcome all distractions to spiritual growth.
- That we might abide in Christ continually

REWARDS OF THE RIGHTEOUS

KEY TEXT: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6–8)

INTRODUCTION

Jesus clearly told His disciples, “in this world, you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). The Apostle Paul also confirmed this truth, “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;” (Philippians 1:29). “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

Based on the path that the Christian must tread, it can, at times appear that he/she is at a disadvantage. It can appear to the world, that the only hope the Christian has, is to await the “new heaven and the new earth”. It can appear this way, even to the Christian himself.

David testified, “. . . as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, *when* I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For *there are* no bands in their death: but their strength *is* firm. They *are* not in trouble *as other* men; Neither are they plagued like *other* men” (Psalm 73:2-5).

In this lesson, we take a look at the rewards of living Christ’s righteousness, both in this life and the life to come.

1. **READ Luke 18:28-30. In outlining the rewards of the righteous, Jesus not only include rewards in the life to come, but rewards to be reaped 'in the present time'. In spite of the obstacles that the Christian faces, outline and discuss some tangible and intangible benefits that a Christian reaps in this present time.**

READ: Matthew 6:33; Romans 5:1, 2; John 14:27; Psalm 34:10

NOTES:

Life is difficult. Both the follower of Christ and those who follow him not will have trials. The difference is that those who do not follow Him will face trials in this life without the hope of eternal life. According to Ellen G. White, “All along the road that leads to death there are pains and penalties, there are sorrows and disappointments, there are warnings not to go on. God’s love has made it hard for the heedless and headstrong to destroy themselves. It is true that Satan’s path is made to appear attractive, but it is all a deception; in the way of evil there are bitter remorse and cankering care. We may think it

pleasant to follow pride and worldly ambition, but the end is pain and sorrow. Selfish plans may present flattering promises and hold out the hope of enjoyment, but we shall find that our happiness is poisoned and our life embittered by hopes that center in self. In the downward road the gateway may be bright with flowers, but thorns are in the path. The light of hope which shines from its entrance fades into the darkness of despair, and the soul who follows that path descends into the shadows of unending night. “The way of transgressors is hard,” but wisdom’s “ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace” (Proverbs 13:15; 3:17). On the other hand, “Every act of obedience to Christ, every act of self-denial for His sake, every trial well endured, every victory gained over temptation, is a step in the march to the glory of final victory. If we take Christ for our guide, He will lead us safely. The veriest sinner need not miss his way. Not one trembling seeker need fail of walking in pure and holy light. Though the path is so narrow, so holy that sin cannot be tolerated therein, yet access has been secured for all, and not one doubting, trembling soul need say, “God cares nought for me” (White, E. G. (1896). *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 139–140. Pacific Press Publishing Association).

2. What is it that gives incentive to the believer in the midst of trials and persecutions?

READ: John 16:33; Romans 8:31, 32; 2 Corinthians 4:17, 18

NOTES:

The believer in Christ has the assurance that once he remains faithful, he will not be destroyed by his trials. He has a rich reward awaiting him.

3. Identify and discuss some of the tangible rewards that await the righteous according to what the Bible teaches.

READ: 2 Timothy 4:6-8; 1 Corinthians 15:50-55; Revelation 22:4; 14

NOTES:

The Bible is laced with promises concerning the rich rewards awaiting the righteous. In Revelation 3, for example, Jesus ended each of His message to the 7 churches with a different promise to the overcomer. “To Him that overcometh”, He says to Laodecia, “will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Revelation 3:21). The promises to the righteous ranges from

resurrection from the dead, translation to immortality, entrance into the city of God, eternal life, privilege of seeing Christ face-to-face, freedom from corruption, death and pain, and much more. ““Alleluia, heaven is cheap enough!” Ellen G. White exclaimed, as she testified of her ‘journey to heaven’ during a vision.

4. Discuss what it means that this corruption will put on incorruption in light of man’s fallen nature.

READ: Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:1-3

NOTES:

“Only after we mortals put on immortality and are thus extricated from our present unholy flesh will we be returned to the innocence of both nature and character that humans enjoyed before sin.” (Rock, Calvin B. *Ellen White and Saving Perfection*, p. 33). “When human beings receive holy flesh, they will not remain on the earth, but will be taken to heaven. While sin is forgiven in this life, its result is not now wholly removed. It is at His coming that Christ is to ‘change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body’ (Philippians 3:21).” *Selected Messages Book 2*, p. 33.

REFLECTION

The end will be better and longer for the Christian. No matter how trying our lives have been, the sufferings of this present world are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. When the rich young ruler walked away from Jesus, “sorrowful” because he was unable to maintain his wealth while following Jesus, he made a big mistake. For he walked away before getting the chance to hear the rich rewards that await those to give all for Jesus. He did not get the chance to hear that those who forsake all and follow Christ will, “in this life” receive a hundred fold, plus eternal life.

PRAYER FOCUS

- God will help us not to become discouraged by our trials, but that we might endure to the end.
- Help us to appreciate the blessings of God, even in this life, in spite of the difficulties.