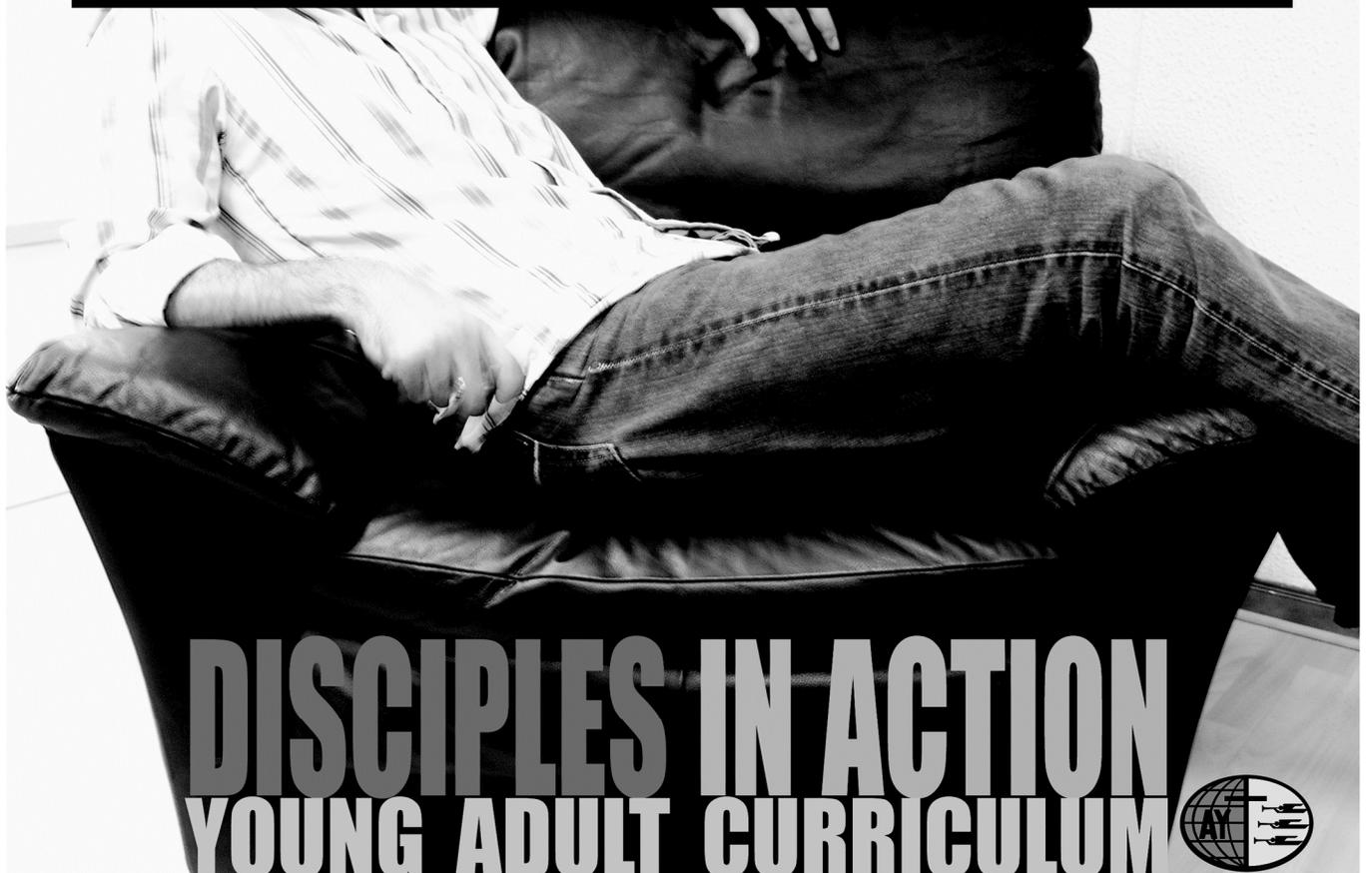


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DISCIPLES IN ACTION

YOUNG ADULT CURRICULUM



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D.I.A.

Disciples in Action

CURRICULUM

**assisting young people in their
discipleship journey**

Produced by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist® Youth Ministries Department



Starting over or just taking a bold step?

D.I.A.

the youth and young adults discipleship curriculum will help you
on your journey toward an authentic walk with Jesus

Disciples in Action Curriculum™

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How to Use the Disciples in Action Curriculum (D.I.A.)

The purpose of this guide is to provide some general instructions to churches, schools, and groups as leaders begin to develop or revise the program to meet their groups' individual needs.

This curriculum is a resource designed to assist young people, ages 18 to 25, in their discipleship journey and proposes a number of elements or foundations that constitute the experience. While it is recommended for individuals, youth groups, and churches to follow the process that is being proposed, leaders may reorganize the material to respond to and maximize their unique circumstances and opportunities.

The *Together Growing Fruitful Disciples* framework, on which this curriculum is based, is the scope of learning. While it does not necessarily describe all the tools considered valuable for us in our spiritual journey, it identifies a core of learning that is essential for everyone. There are many different ways to approach this curriculum, but regardless of the approach, it will represent the beginning point of a discipleship journey! However, the completion of the series should not be viewed as the culmination of the discipleship process, but rather as an essential step in the ongoing discipleship journey. It should answer the questions, "What will life look like after this series?" "What is the expected outcome?"

The suggested length of each session is 90 minutes.

Growing Disciples Inventory (GDI): This suggested pre- and post-session activity can be found at www.growingfruitfuldisciples.org/gdi. This eighty-four-question inventory is aligned with the TGFDF framework to aid in determining areas of growth that have taken place in a disciple's life and areas in which one needs to grow. The online version includes a graphic representation of the inventory results as well as a Spiritual Growth Action Plan. For those of you who may not have access to the Internet, or would like to allow others to experience the inventory without having them go through the entire online version, the "short form" version, available on the back page, is an excellent alternative.

Connector is the power base of each study. This is the Bible text. Whether it is one verse or several chapters long, this will provide the link between the mind and the heart.

("All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" 2 Timothy 3:16, NIV)

The Themes for each session are derived from the Indicators that are listed for each Commitment.

Big Idea is one statement that sums up the essence of the session. It serves as the intersection between the topic and the themes.

The Journey (60 minutes)

- **Exploration** (30-40 minutes) is the biblical and philosophical exploration of the main ideas on which the session is built. Each session will include interactive learning to help lead the group in the most effective way possible. **Note:** The leader should make sure to make the interactive sessions exciting and natural. Feel free to adjust each exercise to the size of the group. Familiarize yourself with the "interaction" segments before the session and make sure to infuse excitement into each illustration.

- **Reflection** (10-15 minutes) should focus on helping the participant reflect and respond to the truths they have just discovered. Questions are included in this section.
- **Application** (10-15 minutes) is how the lessons can be applied to everyday life.

Leader's Information is handy information that will help coach the leader throughout the meeting. For example, if a group activity is suggested, the leader will be given ideas of how to alter the activity for different sized groups. Where appropriate, relevant writings from the Spirit of Prophecy are also included.

Dig Deep is optional and may not be found in all lessons. They are informative sidelights that add insight to a particular passage, word, fact, or Core Belief. These can also provide insights on youth culture, current events, and philosophy throughout each study. Where appropriate, relevant writings from the Spirit of Prophecy are included.

Disciple in Action is where the writer pulls a challenge from the lesson for the participant to act on using what they have learned during this session.

Mentors should be assigned to each participant during their first week of attendance. Additional information is found on page 9, in the introduction.

The **Debriefing Session** is a brief summary with leading questions that tie the sessions in a series together. The youth leader or the facilitator should be able to assess the level of integration of concepts that has taken place over the sessions in the series and give the young person an opportunity to discuss what worked and what did not work for them. By this time (end of each series) the young people should have already been putting into practice some, if not all, of what was studied and suggested in the sessions. Leaders should use this time to examine if participants are embracing the life changing habits or disciplines that have been presented and discussed.

Noteworthy information can be found at the beginning of some series. This is information that will give added insight into one of more of the lessons in a particular series. Please read this information and refer back to it in the lessons indicated.

Plan the Work. Work the Plan!

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Disciples in Action

INTRODUCTION

“Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples’” (Luke 11:1, NKJV).

It’s often believed that being a disciple of Jesus is an “automatic” event. Once you’ve accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, all you have to do is read the Bible and pray, and all will be well. Of course, those are imperative to the Christian journey. But *how* do we read the Bible? *How* do we pray? *How* do we best open our hearts and minds so that the Holy Spirit can do His work in us? That’s what *Disciples in Action* (DIA) is all about!

DIA is built on the Together Growing Fruitful Disciples (TGFD) framework. This framework is the foundation of a discipleship model designed to help us think more clearly and deeply about the spiritual growth and maturity of ourselves and others as disciples of Jesus Christ. It identifies four growth processes around which we believe the disciple’s journey occurs:

- **Connecting:** Growing in relationship with God, others, and self
- **Understanding:** Growing in knowledge of Jesus and His teachings
- **Ministering:** Growing in participation of God’s mission of revelation, reconciliation, and restoration
- **Equipping:** Growing in the body of Christ by walking alongside other disciples in order to support, nurture, and strengthen in love

All four processes in this model are centered on and accomplished through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Separating these processes may seem artificial, but it does allow us to bring clarity to vital aspects of discipleship that might otherwise be overlooked.

In this model, *commitments* for the growing Christian are articulated for each of the individual processes. Within each process, *commitments* are further divided into key aspects of spiritual growth called *indicators*. These *indicators* represent behaviors through which, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can grow and mature as disciples of Jesus Christ. They also represent a lifetime of following Jesus.

Spiritual Mentors (or Partners, Companions) are crucial in our discipleship journey, as revealed in the *equipping* aspect of this model. Actually, the support, nurture, and strengthening derived from our walking alongside each other in this journey is foundational. Thus, you’ll find in this DIA curriculum that each participant is to be assigned a mentor right from the start.

Whether the person is much older or just a little older, the mentor should be someone who the participant can trust and look to as a role model for learning how to live the Christian life. Some qualities of a mentor should include:

- a willingness to share his/her walk with God.
- sincerity and honesty in sharing their faith stories.
- openness in communication.

- a willingness to provide support and encouragement by listening and giving honest feedback without trying to force change. (Spiritual accountability is not about giving up control. It is about allowing another person to help us accomplish spiritual goals that we have set for ourselves.)

Another element of growing is that of assessment. It answers the question, “How am I doing?” Of course, each disciple’s journey is unique; the work of the Holy Spirit cannot be replicated in a lab as we do vitamins and pharmaceuticals! “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8, NKJV). However, it is possible to assess the direction of one’s life. Thus, the DIA curriculum directs leaders to utilize the Growing Disciples Inventory (GDI), located at www.growingfruitfuldisciples.org/gdi. This eighty-four-question inventory is aligned with the TGFDF framework to aid in determining areas of growth that have taken place in a disciple’s life and areas in which one needs to grow. The online version includes a graphic representation of the inventory results as well as a Spiritual Growth Action Plan.

The inventory is also available on the back page as a “short form” that contains only twenty questions. For those of you who may not have access to the Internet, or would like to allow others to experience the inventory without having them go through the entire online version, the short form is an excellent alternative.

Scripture encourages us to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12b, 13, NKJV). While it is God’s work in us through His Holy Spirit, the DIA curriculum is an excellent tool to help young people experience God’s work in their lives and to assist them in trusting Him to that work.

SERIES ONE

Sessions 1-5

SESSION 1:	DEVELOPING A DYNAMIC, DEEPENING, LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD BY BRENDAN PRATT
SESSION 2:	UNDERSTANDING THAT CHRIST CALLS ME TO BE HIS DISCIPLE BY KIMBERLEY TAGERT-PAUL
SESSION 3:	SEEKING OPPORTUNITIES IN ALL DAILY ACTIVITIES TO MINISTER TO OTHERS BY EURYDICE OSTERMAN
SESSION 4:	HELPING BELIEVERS ENGAGE IN A TRANSFORMATIONAL DEVOTIONAL LIFE BY KRIS STEVENSON
SESSION 5:	DEBRIEFING SESSION BY DEBBONNAIRE KOVACS

Session 1: Developing A Dynamic, Deepening, Love Relationship With God

To develop a dynamic, deepening, love relationship with God, I am:

- communing with God regularly through His word, prayer, and other Christian disciplines.
- participating with other believers in worshipping God on Sabbath and at other times.
- worshipping God daily as a living sacrifice by choosing His will over my own will.
- paying attention to what God is doing and praising Him for His love and faithfulness.

Big Idea

God created you for a unique, deepening, love relationship with Him.

Connector

Look: Romans 12:1-2, Colossians 3:17

Memorize: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:1-2).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

God Seeks a Dynamic Relationship With You.

God is in love with you. Over and over again in the Bible, God reminds you that you’re His child and that He desperately seeks an intimate, growing relationship with you. A dynamic relationship with God starts with knowing that God, for reasons we will never fully understand, loves you beyond your wildest imagination. As a response to God’s love, we can connect with Him and allow Him to grow in and through us.

Beyond communicating to us through His love letter, the Bible, and through prayer, God also communicates through wise people, promptings of the Holy Spirit, and even through nature—where He shows us His power and care. In connecting with God, different people find different spiritual practices helpful. Some people find the arts or solitude particularly valuable, while others connect with God deeply through keeping a journal where they include their thoughts about God as they meditate on Scripture or reflect on their relationship with God in general. Some people’s journals don’t just contain words; they contain poems, drawings, even cut out

pictures that mean something to them. Art, music—every kind of creativity can be a doorway for experiencing God. Solitude, particularly in nature (as Jesus frequently sought) is one of the best ways to connect with the Creator.

The ways we connect with God are often referred to as “Christian disciplines.” Christian disciplines are not a measure of your spirituality. It is simply any activity that helps you connect with God and that allows Him to work in and through you. They become the habits/practices that we put in place so that we can grow in the fruits of the Spirit. Disciplines will not earn God’s love; you are already loved by Him. They are to help us grow towards the life God desires for us.

- What would be your advice if someone asked you to outline the top three factors for growing healthy relationships?
- Describe how it feels to stare into a sky full of stars, yet at the same time remember that the God of the universe cares intimately about you.
- What do you think are the top three factors that stop people from connecting with God?

We Connect With God Through The Bible.

One of the main ways God connects with His children is through His Word. In the Bible, God uses people to tell us the story of how much He deeply desires you and how He wants to spend eternity with you. Through various characters, teachings, visions, and even poems, God communicates values and practices that He knows will allow you to live life with significance now and will shape you for eternity.

In a world that bombards us with noise, consumerism, and all sorts of other worldviews, the Bible reminds us that we exist for God’s glory, and that a relationship with Him is the most important thing. We are given clarity about what really matters.

Studying the Bible is not about just knowing more; it’s about change in our lives. The Pharisees prayed and studied, however, they did so in a self-seeking way rather than looking for a connection with God. You can know that hydrogen and oxygen make water, but that makes no difference if you’re dying of thirst. Knowledge is good, but only if it brings about change that leaves you with a stronger love for God and people. When you ask God to shape you through Scripture, you will increasingly find yourself learning lessons from Bible characters, dwelling on promises, and seeing the world through new eyes.

- Who is your favourite Bible character? What does that character tell you about God and what lesson might you learn from that character?
- Can you think of a time when God brought a Bible verse to your mind at just the right time?
- What do you think it means to be “washed in His Word”?

We Connect With God Through Prayer.

Another primary way of connecting with God is through prayer. Prayer can, at first, come across as being a bit odd. It might seem a little strange to talk to someone we can’t physically see—and even stranger to listen to them. However, in prayer we are not really telling God things He

doesn't know, but rather inviting Him to be part of our lives, seeking His guidance, and entrusting situations into His control. We can pray in our minds throughout the day, inviting Him into our lives, but it is also important to have some more structured times of prayer during which we worship God, seek His leading, and renew our invitation to Him to work in and through us. There is also incredible power in praying for and with other people.

Ultimately, prayer is about coming humbly before God and inviting Him to lead. God really wants to hear your voice—after all, you're His child.

From the Pen of Ellen G. White

“Christ impressed upon His disciples the idea that their prayers should be short, expressing just what they wanted, and no more. He gives the length and substance of their prayers, expressing their desires for temporal and spiritual blessings, and their gratitude for the same. How comprehensive this sample prayer! It covers the actual need of all. One or two minutes is long enough for any ordinary prayer. There may be instances where prayer is in a special manner indited by the Spirit of God, where supplication is made in the Spirit. The yearning soul becomes agonized and groans after God. The spirit wrestles as did Jacob and will not be at rest without special manifestations of the power of God. This is as God would have it” (*Testimonies to the Church, Volume 2* 581.1).

To the Leader

Read this:

“And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat?” (Matthew 6:5, *The Message*).

Please share practical ways of praying with your group. Below are six simple ways to change your life through prayer (taken from Barbara Bartocci's book, *Grace on the Go: 101 Quick Ways to Pray*).

1. **GIVE AN ALARM-CLOCK ALLELUIA.** When your alarm goes off in the morning, open your eyes and repeat this line from the Psalms: "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad." Commit to living in gratitude for the day, and you'll soon notice how much happier your day is.
2. **PRAY WITH YOUR SNOOZE BUTTON.** My friend Annie has an alarm clock with a snooze-reminder that goes off ten minutes after the initial ring. When her alarm goes off, she sits up in bed without turning on the light and breathes slowly and deeply. "I pay attention to each breath, to my heartbeat, to the feel of my skin against the sheets. I don't plan my day. I merely sit prayerfully in the early morning quiet. It centers me." When her snooze-reminder gives its ten-minute buzz, she turns on the light and goes about her usual morning business.
3. **PRACTICE HOLY CURIOSITY.** A September 2005 issue of *Harvard Business Review* said, "As a society we are biased toward answers. Answers settle matters and tell us it's safe to move forward. Questions are troublemakers, poking holes in ideas and plans."

But Albert Einstein said: "The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existence. Never lose your holy curiosity." What a wonderful combination of words! Holy curiosity—our ability to wonder, to inquire, to welcome what is new, and to keep our minds open to truth when and where we find it—surely this is one of the most miraculous qualities that human beings possess. Maintain an open mind today. Ask questions. Acknowledge truth when you find it. Pray to be led by holy curiosity.

4. **BE MORE ACCEPTING.** Once, in the midst of a quarrel, my husband cried, "Why can't you accept me for who I am?" The anguish of that question immediately stopped me, for isn't that what all of us want? To be loved for who we are? But how can we accept another unless we first accept ourselves? For years, I held myself to an impossible standard of perfection, and if I had to be perfect, why, those I loved had to be, too. We can only love God and our neighbour to the extent that we love and accept ourselves. Today, whenever you look in a mirror, make eye contact with yourself, and say aloud, "I love myself. Not as I will be. Not as I could be. But as I am." Did you believe the words you said aloud? If not, ask the Holy Spirit to aid you in greater self-acceptance. Then add these words: "I accept others as they are."
5. **PICK A PRAYER PARTNER.** Every week, Twila and her friend Helen meet for thirty minutes of prayer. After asking for God's grace in the words they speak to one another, they share how they have used spiritual principles in their lives over the past week. Then they discuss any problems that are bothering them. Lastly, they hold hands and take turns praying aloud, first for those on their prayer lists, and then for each other. "In the beginning, it seemed awkward to pray out loud with someone," admits Twila, "but now I'm convinced there's a reason why it says in the Gospels, 'Where two or more are gathered in my name there I am in the midst of them.' Praying together is very affirming. We rarely skip our prayer time together." Invite God into your midst. Say a prayer with a friend.
6. **PRACTICE NIGHTTIME TAPS.** Relax into sleep with TAPS prayers. Offer thanksgiving for the day's blessing. Show adoration for the Creator who has given us this incredibly rich universe. Petition for your needs and those of your loved ones. Express sorrow if you've hurt another in any way. Sleep well.
 - Why do you think studies often show that many Christians do not pray?
 - What ideas do you have for how you could make your prayer time more intentional?

Sabbath: Strengthening Your Connection

A particularly vital point of connection with God is the Sabbath. Sabbath reminds us to reflect on our priorities. It's not about having one day separate and then living the other six like any other person. It's about strengthening and re-energizing our connection with God and His eternal values. Our Sabbath experience can change the way we worship, the way we interact with others, and strengthen our relationship with God.

Sabbath is designed for us to take a break from "time = money" consumerism traps. It reminds us that we are created for eternity and that life is not about the abundance of our things. Rather,

life is about dynamically connecting with God and people. Sabbath gives us a break from the things that can clutter up the rest of our lives and provides a great opportunity to spend time worshipping, connecting, serving, growing, and sharing.

- Why do you think God invented the idea of Sabbath?
- Why do you think it's important to take a break from "time=money" consumerism?
- How can you make your Sabbath experience personal?

Your Connection Is Unique

The way you connect most deeply with God and just how God grows you will be unique to you. He made you that way. By looking at various characters in Scripture we see that people connect with God in different ways. Some people feel deeply connected to God through learning intellectually about Him. For others it is primarily through worship, serving, nature, relationships, or contemplation/reflection. All of these ways of connecting are important and part of a balanced, growing relationship with God. However, you will more naturally connect through some of these ways than others. Remember that everyone is wired differently. Together we can learn from one another and stretch in our experience of connecting with God.

- Can you think of a time when you felt particularly close to God? What factors do you think shaped this closeness?
- What Christian disciplines have you tried and what made them work or not work?
- When are you best able to hear God communicating with you?

Connecting With God In Your Everyday Life

God wants to connect with you and live in the ordinary, everyday moments of life with you. Sometimes we think that a spiritual moment needs to be something unusual or out of the ordinary. However, your everyday, ordinary life is exactly what God would love to experience with you.

The apostle Paul talks about doing absolutely everything, even the everyday things, with God. He calls it being a "living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). It seems a strange combination of words; however, being a living sacrifice simply means that every part of our life is an offering to God.

The Message describes it like this: "So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work and walking around life – and place it before God as an offering."

For Paul, your ordinary, everyday life is the very place to be an offering to God. We don't often think of walking around and going to sleep as being spiritual activities, but Paul says our every thought, word, and action can be an act of worship to God.

Of course, this living sacrifice life isn't something we attempt in our own power. Jesus is not sitting in the audience watching us perform. Jesus wants to do the ordinary, everyday things of life with us. He wants to work in and through us. We live life in partnership with Him. Being a

living sacrifice is about focusing on Jesus' presence with you as you go through the seemingly inconsequential moments of your day.

- How easy is it for God to get your attention in your ordinary day?
- Would you like to spend an ordinary day with Jesus in person?
- How aware are you of the possibility of meeting God during your day?

Making a Plan – Training in Godliness

Like any healthy relationship, growing in connection with God takes intentionality. We don't become healthier and increase our muscle tone by just sitting back and seeing what happens. If we want to get fit, we make a plan. It's the same with spiritual fitness. In growing in Christ we need to orient our lives around practices and habits that remind us of what matters and give God space to work in us.

Imagine you are at the starting line to watch the Olympic marathon. Just before it starts, an official spots you and explains that your country needs you to run. Regardless of how hard you tried, you would probably struggle, unless you're already a serious athlete. If you were given a year to prepare and you were serious about it, you would shape your life around habits and activities that trained your body. You would start running short distances and gradually increase them. You might eat differently and arrange your day differently so you could get to the gym. You might buy different shoes and find a coach. When the time came to run in the marathon, you would be able to do by training what trying alone does not allow. It's the same for training in godliness (1 Timothy 4:7b-8). Training means to arrange your life around certain exercises and experiences that will enable you to become over time what you are not yet able to be—even by trying hard.

In attempting to grow a dynamic relationship with God, many people try, fail, and think this life of connectedness with God is not for them, or even wonder if it exists at all. Discipleship is not a matter of trying harder, but rather engaging in a lifestyle of "training in godliness."

- Have you ever found yourself trying to connect with God and feeling like you're going nowhere? How would you explain the difference between training and trying?
- What do you think a plan for "growing in godliness" might look like in your life?

Reflection

- What do you think your friends would say are the top three factors that drive you?
- What do you think are the top three things that get in the way of growing in your relationship with God?
- If in the future an archaeologist was to study your messages, credit card statements, and diary, what would they conclude your priorities are?
- What do you think it means to love God with all your heart?
- What factors might stop you from getting started on your "training in godliness" plan?

- If you cut back using the computer one hour a week, how could you use this time to be in the presence of God or others?
- Would your friends say that being around you is a bit like being around Jesus? What would have to change for this to be the case?

Application

God Gives You The Choice.

Too often we can live life with no regard for God's perspective. Even sadder is that instead of looking to God for our meaning and fulfillment we chase the next thing that promises to fill the void. It might be a new body shape, car, or relationship – each promising a sense of fulfillment and none delivering. There is nothing inherently wrong with these things; they are just not designed to give us ultimate meaning and purpose.

The same God who made the world offers to remake your life and live the everyday moments in relationship with you. God did not make you to be a puppet, with strings for Him to pull—that would make you His toy. Rather He made you with purpose and the power to choose so that He could have a relationship with you. He does not force a relationship. God's desire is to be invited into your everyday situations and live life deeply with you.

Take some time now to direct your thoughts back to Him: ask for His help or His guidance, or simply share your heart with Him.

- What changes in your schedule can you make right now to make space to “train in godliness”? (Share with your accountability partner.)
- What ideas do you have to give yourselves reminders of God's presence throughout the day?
- Identify a time this week where you can simply be still and focus on God's love for you. Where and when will it be?
- What one Christian discipline will you train in this week? Where and how will it happen?

Prayer Time

- In your prayer time, remember to thank God for loving you so much.
- Pray about the factors that might be getting in the way of your connection with God.
- Ask God to work in and through you in the ordinary, everyday moments of your life.

Session 2:

Christ Calls Me to Be His Disciple

To understand that Christ calls me to be His disciple, I am learning that:

- by beholding Jesus and abiding in Him, I will continue to grow more Christ-like.
- the love of Christ constrains me to a life of obedience and self-denial.
- all biblical teachings illustrate the character and mission of Christ.
- being a disciple involves all of my life – my worldview, my relationships, and my purpose and mission.
- I will participate in the body of Christ and its work in the world.
- I accept life – both now and eternally – as a gift from God to be shared with others.

Big Idea

When Christ calls you to Him, He sends you to others. A disciple isn't just a student, but is also a messenger.

Connector

Look: Mathew 4:18-20 (NIV), Mathew 6:33, Mark 10:28-30

Memorize: “As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers; Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’ At once they left their nets and followed him” (Matthew 4:18-20).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

By Beholding I Become Changed

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45 NIV).

God created us with minds that absorb like sponges. We drink in what we see, what we spend time doing. Nothing can be truer in our walk of discipleship with God. To become His disciple, we need to absorb Him into our lives. His disciples did that when He walked with them. Their lives revolved around time with the Savior. So should ours.

Let's look at the men who became the very first disciples of Jesus. Who were these men Jesus called? Were they educated? Were they rich? Did they have families? Did they have positions of importance within the church?

Jesus chose ordinary men. Most were fishermen—men used to hard work, little pay, and long hours without sleep. He chose men who knew the importance of faithfulness, who were not afraid to work hard to get the job done. Men with personality—firebrands, some. Peter, James, and John were all known for their fiery personalities. Simon and Andrew were both zealous, seeking truth.

Were they perfect men? The Bible shows us clearly that they weren't. They had faults—many of them. So what was it about their characters that made Jesus call them to become disciples? What can we learn from studying their calling to discipleship?

Their calling, like ours, was one of an instant. The moment Jesus calls you to Himself, the moment that you surrender your heart to Him, you are called to be a disciple. The disciples left their nets and their families and followed without question. Many of those Jesus healed did the same. Instantly, their focus was on their Savior and His kingdom. The same should be true of us. We have the good news, and we shouldn't keep it to ourselves. The world is hungry for what we have found. We are called to share it.

Learning how to best do this is not so instant! It is easy to make mistakes in our zeal to share Christ with others. The disciples showed us this—they wanted to take the world by storm. So do many of us. But storming our way into others' lives is not the most effective method.

As a group, answer the following questions:

- Why was it important for Jesus to choose ordinary men?
- Did their character traits limit them from becoming effective disciples?
- How can your character traits make you an effective disciple? Make a list in your personal journal.

How can we grow as disciples and in discipleship? By beholding, we become changed. 2 Corinthians 3:18 tells us this. The disciples had the advantage of looking into the Lord's eyes and seeing in them the depth of His love for them. We have the privilege of looking into Scripture, daily studying it as the basis of our spiritual diet. We may feast on the truths that have lasted through eons of years unchanged, and so behold Him as well. We are to follow the example that Jesus set, seeing in His Word His love for us.

You can't rely on others' words to strengthen and teach you. A disciple of Jesus is a student of His Word. Have you ever read the Bible through? Do you know that by reading three chapters a day, in one year you will have read the Bible from cover to cover? It's a wonderful way to start learning all about Jesus—and His Father, whom He came to show us. As you read through the Old Testament, you'll learn about God's character of love and learn to truly love Him. Then, the New Testament will show you His character through His son. The two Testaments go together in a powerful way. And in less than thirty minutes a day, one year later you'll have the whole picture. Then, like layers of an onion, God will be able to reveal new truth from His word to you as you are ready to receive it. You'll fall in love with His Word in a new way—and will be famished when you miss it.

From the Pen of Ellen G. White

“Open the Bible to our youth, draw their attention to its hidden treasures, teach them to search for its jewels of truth, and they will gain a strength of intellect such as the study of all that philosophy embraces could not impart. The grand subjects upon which the Bible treats, the dignified simplicity of its inspired utterances, the elevated themes which it presents to the mind, the light, sharp and clear, from the throne of God, enlightening the understanding, will develop the powers of the mind to an extent that can scarcely be comprehended, and never fully explained. The Bible presents a boundless field for the imagination, as much higher and more ennobling in character than the superficial creations of the unsanctified intellect as the heavens are higher than the earth. The inspired history of our race is placed in the hands of every individual. All may now begin their research. They may become acquainted with our first parents as they stood in Eden, in holy innocence, enjoying communion with God and sinless angels. They may trace the introduction of sin and its results upon the race, and follow, step by step, down the track of sacred history, as it records the disobedience and impenitence of man and the just retribution for sin” (*Messages To Young People*, p. 255-6).

Discuss

As a group or individually, think of ways that you can make the study of God’s Word a daily part of your life. What do you need to do to find the time to study daily? Would making an appointment with God help you to be faithful in this? Would listening to Scripture through electronic media make it easier? Could you use your commute to work or classes as a specific time for this? Would reading from different translations help? Would keeping a Bible journal help you to focus on what you are reading and want to study it more?

Needed: Christian Fellowship

Before Jesus’ public ministry began, He did something with His disciples that He continued up until the end of His earthly ministry. He spent time with them, instructing them, encouraging them, praying for them. For each of us today, that same fellowship is important. Church attendance is a vital link in our growth as disciples. Hebrews 10:23-25 tells us this. Take the time to look up this Scripture now.

Does it seem that Paul is speaking to us today?

Is it easy in our busy lives to sleep in, miss church, and thus the chance for fellowship that helps us grow as disciples?

We live in a busy world. Jesus never promised that following Him would be easy. He did promise that the rewards would be out of this world. Being a disciple means being disciplined. Time is valuable. Time fellowshiping with other believers is valuable, too. It is a tool Jesus used with His disciples, and one that He wants us to use, as well. Sharing insights with others and listening to what they have learned will make us more rounded as Christians and more effective as disciples.

From the Pen of Ellen G. White

“Many become inefficient by evading responsibilities for fear of failure. Thus they fail of gaining that education which results from experience, and which reading and study and all the advantages otherwise gained cannot give them” (*Messages To Young People*, p. 194).

By beholding Jesus and abiding in Him, I will continue to grow more Christ-like.

Beholding Jesus in His Word and beholding Him by fellowshiping with others are important parts of our discipleship tool kit. What other possible “tools” would be important to put in our kits? Does fellowship have to stop as we leave church each Sabbath?

The disciples met daily, breaking bread in fellowship and encouragement. Today, that would seem almost impossible, but it’s not. The Internet has made socializing an instant tool. It is easy to keep up with others and seek their advice and encouragement as you grow in your walk of faith. Texting is another tool that keeps you in close contact with those you know. Why not use it to talk about Jesus, share thoughts and prayer requests to grow and help others to grow? There are also wonderful books that not only open Bible truths, but can help you become a more disciplined and effective disciple. Journaling your experiences and thoughts is also an effective means to growing in Jesus. As you grow, you’ll have more and more to share with others.

Jesus also used quiet time to fellowship with His Father. This was so important that Jesus taught His disciples to spend time in prayer, too. Communication is important in any relationship, but it is vital for a Christian. Time in prayer will help us be able to trust Christ with all aspects of our lives. It will help us to surrender our very will to the Father and find His will for our lives. It strengthens, refreshes, and encourages us. Communication is a two way process. If we spend quiet time with God, He will speak to us. We just have to listen, and that often takes quiet time, literally.

Application

Christianity doesn’t end with our repentance and conversion. It is only the beginning—the beginning of a wonderful journey called discipleship. To disciple effectively, we need to be constantly growing. As we behold the character of God, we can do this in many ways.

Questions (Can be answered as individuals in journals or as a group.)

1. How can you embrace the discipleship that Jesus has called you to?
2. What barriers do you see in your life that are limiting your ability to become an effective disciple? How can you break these barriers down?
3. It is easy to make excuses, especially when we are busy. Do you use excuses to limit your discipleship? What are they? How can you change these excuses into challenges?
4. What happened to Moses as he spent time with God on the mountain? What can happen to us as we spend time with God?

Reflection

Discipleship Means All of Me

Do you enjoy God? Psalm 37:4 tells us that we are to delight ourselves in the Lord. The Septuagint translation (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) has the most marvelous rendering of these words: "Indulge thyself with delight in the Lord."

Indulging in some things is not good for us, but oh so tempting. Eating just a little of that half-gallon of ice cream residing in your freezer is sometimes hard to do. Eat the whole half-gallon and you'll know it. You'll feel sluggish, irritable, and probably sick to your stomach. One thing you'll know is that it wasn't worth it.

Indulging yourself in the Lord is never a bad thing. You can't spend enough time with Him once you come to know how very much He loves you, what He has done for you, and what wonderful things He plans to do in your life.

Can you be half-pregnant?

Can you be half-married?

Do you like your food half-cooked, your pizza half-baked?

Discipleship calls for a total commitment. You can't do it half-way. When you come to truly know God and His character, you won't want to.

So go ahead and indulge yourself with delight in the Lord. You will never be sorry that you made this commitment. And as you grow, you will naturally want to share what you have learned with others. That's God way.

Questions for Journaling

- What is my favorite method to "indulge myself with delight in the Lord"?
- Where and when do I feel closest to God? How can I make more time in my life to meet Him there?
- If I could tell someone only one thing about God, what would it be? Is that the focus of my life? Should it be?

Life is a Gift to be Shared With Others

Read John 1:35-40 (NIV)

Andrew was an interesting disciple. Several times we see him in Scripture, and most often he is telling someone about Jesus. That was his first act upon meeting Jesus. He went to get his brother, who became a rock of a man in his faith. Andrew got it right: he found Jesus and immediately went to find others and tell them about their Savior.

Do you remember when you first fell in love with Jesus? Did you want to immediately share the good news with others? Have you let that first love be impacted by just living?

It's time to remember how you began your relationship and find those roots of undeniable love—love that is so full, it makes you feel excited and ready to burst with its goodness.

Are you willing to make that commitment today? Discipleship is not for the faint, but you don't have to rely on your own strength. God will give you all you need to truly be His disciple.

Questions (Can be answered as individuals in journals or as a group.)

- How can I, today, make the ultimate commitment to become a true disciple of the Lord?
- What will I do when I become discouraged? What plan can I make to remember my first love—and follow it fully into true discipleship?

DISCIPLE IN ACTION

Make a list of places that you frequent where you can share the good news of God's love. The most important first step is making friends. Letting others know you care is the most effective way to disciple. "I'm praying for you," is easy to say, but make sure you mean it. Then find other, more practical ways to show your love. Most people will be receptive to this and be thankful for your friendship. Jesus cared about others' needs, and then He presented the gospel. Find ways you can show others that you truly care. You can also tell your own stories. Share what God has given you. Letting others know you are doing this for God is a good way to share His love.

How would you need to change your approach to share the gospel at work? Sometimes you just need to start out simple—and then move forward. Tracts are a good way to introduce others to your faith. Basic facts about God's love can be shared almost anywhere: you can put them into the canister of your bank, place them on the table at a restaurant, leave them at a hospital. Look for everyday ways to make a simple difference.

Include God in every aspect of your life. That is what discipleship is all about.

Dig Deep

In our busy lives, things don't usually get done unless they are planned. Right now, set aside time this week to tell someone about Jesus. Who will it be? Don't leave it to chance; plan it. People respond to people. Discipleship is all about others. You share your good news, and then help them in turn to share what God has done. It's an endless ring, but a joyful one, especially as you see the ones you have shared with, share with others. It's too easy to neglect this duty as a disciple. So brainstorm now on ways that you can share the gospel with someone right away. Then do it.

From the Pen of Ellen G. White

"As long as we are in this world, we must be linked one with another. Humanity is interlaced and interwoven with humanity. As Christians we are members one of another. . . . The Lord designs us as His sons and daughters, whom He calls His friends, to help one another. This is to be a part of our practical Christian work" (*Our High Calling*, p.184).

Session 3: To Seek Opportunities in all Daily Activities to Minister to Others

To seek opportunities in all daily activities to minister to others, I am:

- inviting God to change me to bear the fruits of the Spirit.
- choosing Jesus as a daily companion and sharing Him joyfully.
- investing myself in service wherever the Holy Spirit leads.
- carrying out my occupation as a calling to ministry.
- building networks for friendship, fellowship, and support.

Big Idea

God wants you to share His love by ministering to others so that they, too, can experience His saving grace and develop a unique, deepening, love relationship with Him and in turn, minister to others.

Connector

Look: John 15:12 (see also John 8:31, 32; 13:35, 15:8)

Memorize: “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

In this life, change is inevitable. Nothing stays the same. Only God remains the same, for He says, “*I am the Lord, I change not*” (Malachi 3:6). This means that none of His love, patience, mercy, or loving kindness will ever change toward us no matter how hopeless we may feel we are. As we open our hearts to receive the Holy Spirit, God will bring “gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely” (Galatians 5:22-23, *The Message*) as we minister to others.

At the very heart of the good news is the reality that Jesus has ushered us into an abundant, eternal kind of life that begins in the here and now and will reach its glorious climax when Jesus comes back to take us to His glorious kingdom. He has come that we might have life, and life to the full. This new kind of life is brought about by the transformation that the Holy Spirit initiates as He takes residency in our hearts. Centered in love, this new kind of life is marked by selfless service in the footsteps of the Master Himself.

1. The greatest law of life in the universe is the law of service. God provides for every living thing. Christ came to the earth to serve and give His life for humankind, and the angels are occupied in caring for the needs of humanity. The same law of service is seen throughout nature. The birds and animals, the trees, grass, and flowers, sun, moon, and stars all provide something of benefit to others.

Strive to live a life of service; go out of your way to be kind to someone. Kindness is rewarding. Giving is a condition of healthy living—a law of mental well-being. Getting our minds off ourselves and working for the good of others is just what we need to give us strength to get well. It also reminds us that we are not the only ones with problems.

There can be no growth or fruitfulness in the life that is centered in self. If you have accepted Christ as a personal Saviour, you are to forget yourself, and try to help others. Talk of the love of Christ, tell of His goodness. Do every duty that presents itself. Carry the burden of souls upon your heart, and by every means in your power seek to save the lost. As you receive the Spirit of Christ—the Spirit of unselfish love and labor for others—you will grow and bring forth fruit. The graces of the Spirit will ripen in your character. Your faith will increase, your convictions deepen, your love be made perfect. More and more you will reflect the likeness of Christ in all that is pure, noble, and lovely.

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Gal. 5:22, 23. This fruit can never perish, but will produce after its kind a harvest unto eternal life. (White: Christ's Object Lessons, pp 68, 69).

The most precious fruit of sanctification is the grace of meekness. When this grace presides in the soul, the disposition is molded by its influence. There is a continual waiting upon God and a submission of the will to His. (White: The Sanctified Life, p.14).

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" (White: The Acts of the Apostles, 134).

Upon close examination of the fruits of the Spirit, you will see that the character attributes of these fruits fall into three categories. The first three are a direct result of our growing relationship with God—love, joy, and peace, the greatest and most fundamental of these being love, so that we can represent Christ to the world.

Joy and peace are the companions of love, for a heart and mind governed by love cannot help but exude happiness that seeks to be shared with others. Hence, the next three attributes—patience, kindness, and goodness.

As God is patient with us, so must we be patient with others as they grow and develop their Christian characters. Only as we become secure in our experiential love of God will we be able to perform random acts of kindness without seeking a reward; we can share a smile to brighten one's day, or we can speak an encouraging word to a despondent soul. Thus will our goodness shine forth as the noonday.

Finally, as we relate to others in love, our faith will continue to grow and our humility will increase as we witness the incredible ways in which God will use us to bless others. We will also learn to be temperate as we reveal the fruits of the Spirit within our lives.

2. A true disciple recognizes and responds to the needs of God’s suffering children in the local community and around the world.

As we study the life and method of Jesus while on earth, we see that He went to the people and ministered to them. Thus, He was accused by the Scribes and Pharisees of hanging out with winebibbers and persons of ill repute. *“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost”* (Luke 19:10).

As did Jesus, we must be willing to invest our time, talents, and means wherever the Holy Spirit might lead. As we become sensitive to the physical, mental, social, and spiritual needs in the local community, we can respond mercifully as individuals or as a church to these needs as they are discovered. We are to speak out and act to relieve suffering and injustice in society. We must determine to reduce human suffering by being a faithful steward of God’s creation.

The Saviour ministered to both the soul and the body. The gospel which He taught was a message of spiritual life and of physical restoration. Deliverance from sin and the healing of disease were linked together (White: *Ministry of Healing*, p. 112).

True, godly ministry will illustrate and coincide with the character and mission of Christ. These teachings will shape one’s worldview, relationships, and impact one’s purpose and mission in the Christian life. Thus, God has given to us the opportunity to be co-laborers with Him in making disciples for the kingdom of heaven.

When, as erring, sinful beings, we come to Christ and become partakers of His pardoning grace, love springs up in the heart. Every burden is light, for the yoke that Christ imposes is easy. Duty becomes a delight, and sacrifice a pleasure. The path that before seemed shrouded in darkness, becomes bright with beams from the Sun of Righteousness. (White: *Steps to Christ*, p.59)

3. A true disciple will promote the ministry of service by building networks for friendship, fellowship, and support.

As Jesus ascended into heaven He asked the disciples to go witness in Judea, and in Samaria, and into the uttermost part of the earth, and witness they did. They went about making so many disciples to the point that they became known as Christians. The disciples prayed with intense earnestness for a fitness to meet men and in their daily intercourse to speak words that would lead sinners to Christ. Putting away all differences, all desire for the supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship. They drew nearer and nearer to God. (White: *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 191).

God is asking that we do the same. Pray for the Holy Spirit to prepare you to reach others for Christ, choose to be aware of the spiritual climate locally and globally, and find ways to use your spiritual gifts to help tell the world the story of Jesus. Each of us must be able to give a reason for our faith when asked and be willing to share the story of our personal relationship with Jesus with community members, family, friends, and co-workers.

Share: What are five factors that can prevent me from effectively ministering to others?

Application

- List three fruits of the Spirit that have already helped me in ministering to others.
- List one aspect of ministry that one should do each day as a disciple of Christ.

Dig Deep

Reflecting God’s Character in Ministering to Others

The character of God is expressed in ten attributes that are the standard for His disciples. Satan has succeeded in perverting those attributes and has been able to execute his plan of making them void through the fall of humankind, which has resulted in sin and our sinful natures. However, a strong connection with God will produce spiritual growth and the fruits of holiness, which will be made manifest in the life of the disciple.

The loveliness of the character of Christ will be seen in His followers. It was His delight to do the will of God. Love to God, zeal for His glory, was the controlling power in our Savior’s life. Love beautified and ennobled all His actions. Love is of God. The unconsecrated heart cannot originate or produce it. It is found only in the heart where Jesus reigns. “We love, because He first loved us.” 1 John 4:19, R.V. In the heart renewed by divine grace, love is the principle of action. It modifies the character, governs the impulses, controls the passions, subdues enmity, and ennoble the affections. This love, cherished in the soul, sweetens the life and sheds a refining influence on all around (Steps to Christ, p. 59)

We can be encouraged that God has not left us without guidance. If we trust in Him and are willing to follow His leading through the Holy Spirit, He will “direct our path” and “guide us into all truth.” After all, these are expressions of His character, so He will make Himself personally responsible for the sincere soul to know the truth about Him.

Share

- Identify a biblical character who best demonstrated the character of Christ.
- Identify someone you know who demonstrates the essence of Christ’s character.

Dig Deep

Ministering through Music

Music can have an impact upon the way we see Jesus. Therefore, its character should reflect the attributes of Christ’s character in order to turn the mind heavenward.

“The value of song as a means of education should never be lost sight of. Let there be singing in the home, of songs that are sweet and pure, and there will be fewer words of censure and more of cheerfulness and hope and joy. Let there be singing in the school, and the pupils will be drawn closer to God, to their teachers, and to one another. . . . Singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer. Indeed, many a song is prayer”
(*Education*, pp. 167, 168).

God has given to humankind the gift of music. It is clear that music will have consequences both now and through eternity. If one is heaven-bound, the character of one's music should resemble, as nearly as possible, that which represents the character of the Savior and of heaven.

“Song is a weapon that we can always use against discouragement. As we thus open the heart to the sunlight of the Savior's presence, we shall have health and His blessing”
(*Ministry of Healing* p. 254).

Share an experience where you or someone else's musical rendition ministered to the souls of the hearers in such a way that you could feel the Spirit of God surrounding you.

Apply and Integrate: List three ways in which you can improve your ministry.

Reflection

In order for me to grow spiritually, bear the fruits of the Spirit, and minister effectively, I must connect with God every day—not just one day a week. God's Word will be rooted and grounded within me through Bible study, worship, and songs that reinforce the themes necessary for this spiritual growth.

- What lifestyle changes have I made in an attempt to behold Jesus, abide in Him, and grow more Christ-like?
- What fruits of the Spirit have I recently seen developing within me?
- What are some of the biblical teachings on ministry that illustrate the character and mission of Christ?
- How does my lifestyle impact my ministry?
- What is my worldview, my purpose, my mission?
- How can I participate in ministry in my community?
- How can I effectively use music to minister to the unchurched?

Application

Choosing God First

Sometimes we do not understand or just plain forget to consider God's perspective of how to effectively minister. Although He has promised to “guide us into all truth,” we are guilty of manufacturing substitutes instead of asking Him first for guidance and help. He wants us to seek Him first and in turn, He will “supply all [our] needs” for an effective ministry.

DISCIPLE IN ACTION

- Share with your spiritual partner a change that you will make during the coming week to enhance your relationship with God in order to minister more effectively.
- Choose with your spiritual partner an aspect of ministry to begin training in and how you will implement it.

Prayer Time

- Pray that God will help you to minister effectively via the time, talents, and means He has given you.
- Pray that God will make you fruitful in your ministry.
- Pray for others who are interested in ministry.
- Thank God for His blessings and the opportunities afforded for you through this discipleship program.

Session 4: Helping Believers Engage in a Transformational Devotional Life

To help believers engage in a transformational devotional life, I am showing others how to:

- study the Bible to know Christ and to develop a biblical worldview.
- communicate with God through prayer and Christian meditation.
- participate in other Christian disciplines to be open to the Holy Spirit.
- set priorities to allow for regular, quality devotional time.
- seek spiritual growth opportunities with other believers.

Big Idea

Our relationship with God grows through Bible study and prayer, both personally and within a community of believers.

Connector

Personal Prayer: Matthew 7:7, Matthew 26:41, Philippians 4:6, James 5:13

Corporate Prayer: Acts 1:14, John 17:21, Acts 4:31, Jude 1:20

Intercessory Prayer: Romans 1:9, Ephesians 1:16, 1 Samuel 12:23

Memorize: “Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, NLT).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

Personal Devotions

The very heart of your Christian life is personal devotion. Even if you have been a Christian only a short time, you probably were encouraged to have your own personal devotions. But what exactly does that mean? How do you have devotional time? Is it like meditation? Do you just sit there quietly with your Bible in front of you, hoping something will happen?

Many Christians feel perpetually guilty for not doing devotions, because they are not sure what they should do. If this is your experience, here are some suggestions for how to get started or improve your devotional time.

Bible Study: The Bible is God's Word. Start a conversation with Him! There are a number of different ways to do this.

- a. **Read a one-year devotional Bible.** These Bibles come in different versions but are organized so that if you read a section every day for a year you will finish the whole Bible. Rather than just start at the beginning and plow through to the end, many one-year Bibles are organized so that you read a section of Scripture along with a portion of Psalms and Proverbs every day.
- b. **Pick a book of the Bible.** Choose a book of the Bible that you are interested in studying. Each day read a portion. Allow God's Spirit to speak to you through the passage. It might be just a couple of verses, or maybe an entire section. Use underlining and highlighting to keep track of things that speak to you. Consult a Bible commentary, Bible concordance, and the writings of Ellen White to bring an added dimension to what you are studying.
- c. **Read a devotional book.** This is probably the easiest way to get started. However, there is no substitute for being in the Word yourself.

Prayer Time: The biggest complaint made about prayer time is that people find that their mind wanders. Adding some structure to your prayers can make it easier to stay focused. Use whatever method works the best for you.

- a. **ACTS.** This is an acronym that stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Each word is a type of prayer. Adoration is praise to God for just being God. Most praise songs fit this category. Confession is a time to not only confess your sins, but to listen and let God clean out your heart. Thanksgiving flows naturally from your understanding of who God is and what He has done for you. It is important to focus on being thankful and not just on what you need from God. Finally, bring your prayer requests to God in supplication. You can even organize your prayer requests to make it easier to remember. Start by praying for yourself and your immediate family, then move out in broader and broader circles, praying for work or school associates, extended family, friends, your local church, and even national issues. Many people keep a written prayer list so they don't forget the names they want to pray for. It's even easier to keep that list on a laptop or phone.
- b. **Write your prayers.** Some people find it easier to stay on track if they journal every day. The nice thing about a journal is that you have a record of your spiritual journey to look back on.
- c. **Sing your prayers.** Praise songs are a wonderful way to express your adoration for God. Singing brings you closer to heaven and lifts your spirits.
- d. **Pray out loud.** If possible, say your prayers out loud. This should keep you awake and on track!

Share: As a group, share some of the techniques that each of you use to help stay focused on your personal devotions. What other ideas do you have that can enhance your personal time with God?

“It was in hours of solitary prayer that Jesus in His earth-life received wisdom and power. Let the youth follow His example in finding at dawn and twilight a quiet season for communion with their Father in heaven. And throughout the day let them lift up their hearts to God” (Ellen White, CG 525.2).

Group Devotions

A lot of emphasis is placed on personal devotions, but group Bible study and prayer are just as important. If personal devotions represent our vertical relationship with God, group study is the horizontal relationship. When you experience both aspects, it enriches and completes your relationship with God.

Bible Study

Many different methods exist for group Bible study. The most obvious one is the Sabbath school lesson. There are lots of other Bible study curriculums available as well. Another option is to read a book such as *The Purpose Driven Life*, or to watch a video series like the *NOOMA* DVDs. All of these are good options, but just like in personal devotions, it is important to focus on time spent in the Word.

The simplest method of Bible study requires no major preparation, but it works very well. As a group, choose a book of the Bible you would like to study. Read a section aloud, usually two or three paragraphs long. Then have other group members read the section aloud again using different Bible versions. After hearing the same passage several times, with slightly different interpretations, the class will find lots of material to discuss. Since you will move in order through the Bible book, the members will know which section will be read ahead of time and can prepare if they want.

Prayer Time

One important element of group prayer is intercession. As a class you should take the time to share prayer requests with one another. Prayer tends to be the last thing a group focuses on. It is often used as a ten second bookend to a meeting. However, you will find your study group extremely blessed if you make prayer the center of your study time.

Some do's and don'ts for group prayer time:

Do

- Designate a specific amount of time to prayer.
- Do ask for prayer requests. Someone can keep a record of these in a journal, if desired. It is often nice to look back on requests and record the answers that were received. The real names of people in the requests do not have to be used to ensure privacy.
- Encourage everyone to pray silently during quiet moments.
- Designate someone to begin and end the prayer time. Those persons can pray more than once if they choose, but it will help people to know when prayer time is over.
- Do remember to pray for the prayer requests.

Don't

- Don't force anyone to pray out loud. Some people are not yet comfortable praying in public.
- Don't go around the circle praying. People tend to focus on how many people are left to pray, rather than on what is being said.
- Don't worry if no one prays and there is an awkward silent gap. Just use the time to pray silently.

Community

There are other aspects that groups share besides Bible study and prayer. True Christian community and fellowship includes bearing one another's burdens, sharing life's trials and triumphs, eating together, worshipping together, and working together, among others.

Share: What examples of Christian community are there in the Bible? What activities did these groups share?

"It is in the order of God that those who bear responsibilities should often meet to counsel with one another and to pray earnestly for that wisdom which He alone can impart. Unitedly make known your troubles to God. Talk less; much precious time is lost in talk that brings no light. Let brethren unite in fasting and prayer for the wisdom that God has promised to supply liberally" (Ellen White, CD 188.1).

Reflection

As a group, or in smaller groups of five to seven people, discuss what the format of an ideal Bible study group would be. Decide on factors such as:

- When and where will the group meet?
- Who will be a part of the group?
- How long will the group meet? (Both length of time and how many times during the year)
- What will be studied?
- How will it be studied?
- What other components of group community will you include in your study? (For example, prayer, social, worship, service, testimony)
- Who will lead out in each section?

Make a written plan outlining the format of your study that includes each component.

Application

Finish up your study time together by practicing group prayer. Have someone write down the prayer requests that the group has. Avoid discussing these in great detail, since that wastes prayer time. Designate someone to begin prayer and someone to end. Tell the group that you will pray for ten minutes, whether anyone is talking aloud or not. No one has to pray, and people can pray as many times as they would like. As part of your prayer requests, invite the Holy Spirit to be part of your lives, your group, and your church.

Dig Deep

“Let little companies meet together to study the Scriptures. You will lose nothing by this, but will gain much. Angels of God will be in your gathering, and as you feed upon the Bread of Life, you will receive spiritual sinew and muscle. You will be feeding, as it were, upon the leaves of the tree of life. By this means only can you maintain your integrity” (Ellen White, PaM 274.1).

“Nothing tends more to cement the hearts of Christians than praying together. Never do they love one another so well as when they witness the outpouring of each other’s hearts in prayer.”

—Charles Finney

DISCIPLE IN ACTION

Note: See page 7 for an explanation of the mentoring partnership

- Meet with your accountability partner regularly to pray and talk about the challenges you face in being faithful in your personal relationship with God. They can help you to work through any difficulties you encounter.
- If you don’t have a mentor/accountability partner, pray that God will bring you someone to pray with. Having a prayer partner is a huge boost to your personal spiritual life. God loves to answer those prayers! A prayer partner should be someone of the same sex because praying together with someone is a very intimate experience. Make sure that you guard your prayer time to avoid using it to complain, gossip, or talk about unimportant things. The best rule is to pray first and talk second!

Prayer Time:

- Choose one method for Bible study during your personal devotions this week.
- Practice one of the suggested methods of personal prayer or journaling.
- Begin a prayer list and pray for specific people and their needs this week.

LEADER'S INFORMATION

If your group is quite large it will be easier to break into smaller groups of five to seven people to complete the activities. However, since these activities are focusing primarily on being a group, the optimal idea would be to keep everyone working together during the activities, so as to experience the dynamics of community.

Here are some additional resources about small groups and prayer:

Delighting in God, by Kris Coffin Stevenson

Reinvent your Sabbath School, by Chris and Yolanda Blake

Releasing God's Power, by Becky Tirabassi

Too Busy not to Pray, by Bill Hybels

What Happens When Women Pray, by Evelyn Christenson

Session 5

DEBRIEFING LESSONS 1-4

Time: 90 minutes. *Try to spend approximately 15-20 minutes discussing each section below, leaving time for small group prayer and commitment at the end.*

Discipleship begins and ends with Jesus—the focal point!

The call to be a disciple comes the second you make the choice to accept Jesus. Learning how to be a good and effective one takes a bit longer. Yes, training in godliness must be intentional.

During these four sessions, we have explored many facets of what it means to have a true, abiding, whole-life relationship with God. We discovered that there is no instant, microwaveable way to spiritual growth. Growing spiritually takes time, and everything we do on a daily basis affects this journey—the friends we keep, how we relate to each other, the songs we sing, the things we watch—in short, everything we do.

But the greatest growth comes when we allow Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, to transform us and make us want to be like Him, want to spend time with Him—sitting at His feet and listening to him. Like Martha, we too can learn what is really important “...and it will not be taken away...” (Luke 10:38-42).

Then, like the disciples, we will say, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).

During these four sessions, we have explored many facets of what it means to have a true, abiding, whole-life relationship with God. Here is an overview of the four “Big Ideas” we’ve looked at:

1. God created you for a unique, deepening, love relationship with Him.
2. When Christ calls you to Him, He sends you to others. A disciple isn’t just a student, but is also a messenger.
3. God wants you to share His love by ministering to others so that they, too, can experience His saving grace and develop a unique, deepening, love relationship with Him, and in turn, minister to others.
4. The God and Creator of the universe, who created undiscovered worlds and galaxies, still wants to be intimately involved with you. He shows you this by making Himself available through His Word and by actively using different means to have one-on-one time with you.

During Session 1, we looked at the ways we develop this love relationship with God—primarily through Bible study, prayer, and worship, especially with others on Sabbath.

Bible Study and Prayer

Think about and discuss:

- Have your ideas and attitudes about the Bible and prayer changed during these sessions? If so, how?
- In what ways did you find your devotional life changing as you tried out some of the suggestions and activities? For instance, did you begin (or already have) a prayer journal? Was it only written, or did it contain art and doodles and other things? Do you like or dislike the idea? If you don't, what would you prefer to do to make your relationship with God more visible and real to you?
- Which methods of prayer and Bible study were the most helpful to you and why? Which were not helpful, and why? Did you discover anything not mentioned in the session that you would like to share?
- Did you make a plan for training yourself in greater godliness? How is it working for you? What are some of the blessings you have found? What are the obstacles you face? Ask your group if they have ideas and solutions. You can all share both your blessings and your problems and ideas.

Worship and Sabbath

- Of course, what we do in the church building on Sabbath is only a small part of what worship really is. Every discipline and practice in this session is all about worship, from private devotions to prayer partners to corporate worship on Sabbath. In fact, our every thought, word, and action *is* worship one way or another. We might want to be careful and attentive to whom or what we're worshipping!
- Have your attitudes toward worship changed during these sessions? If so, how?
- Did you find a prayer partner? What are the blessings and challenges of this relationship? (Of course, do not share any personal details of prayers with the whole group.)
- Are you developing a growing ability to remain aware of God's presence and your connection to Him all day? Are you catching yourself sometimes worshipping something else entirely? What do you do when this happens?
- How does fun relate to worship?

During Session 2, we explored what it means to be a disciple. We learned that being a true, wholehearted disciple has more layers than we might have thought.

First, Behold Christ

“Beholding Christ and becoming changed” is exactly what Session 1 was all about. Look back at some of the questions and issues you just discussed (on Bible study, prayer, and worship), but this time, instead of viewing them as a sort of test of “how well I’m doing in my devotional life,” ask yourselves and each other, “What did this teach me about Jesus?”

Second, Grow

We learned that the call to be a disciple comes the second you make the choice to accept Jesus. Learning how to be a good and effective one takes a bit longer!

- Have you found that, as your awareness of God’s presence grows, so does your awareness of the little calls that come in your daily life? Are there some you can share?
- Have you had some blessings and exciting new connections with other people? Have you made some painful errors? What might you do differently the next time?
- What questions and suggestions do you have for your group?

Third, Get Together

Jesus is recorded as doing *some* one-on-one work, and of course our personal relationships with Him are unique, and different from any other on the earth. But He spent, by far, the most of His time with groups—both large and small. And He never once called someone to be a disciple alone.

- Why do you think the “two-by-two” principle is effective?
- What are some things you have done as a disciple that you think should be done alone?
- What are some things you have done or want to do as a disciple that will require another person? Several others?
- What did you think of the Ellen White quote that included this line: “Humanity is interlaced and interwoven with humanity”?

During Session 3, we looked at ways to minister to others. Of all the principles we have explored so far, this one is the most able to be integrated into our daily lives of work, study, and play.

The Journey of Change

- As you reflect together on all the things above and how they are working together in your life, where do you see yourself moving forward?
- Where do you see yourself moving backward?
- Where do you feel stuck?
- What suggestions can the group give each other?

Service

The session asserts that the great law of life is service. If God is love and all who love are of God, then love must equal service.

- How do you find this to be true or not true in your life? Think both of the ways you give and the ways you receive service.
- Can there be such a thing as love without service, or true service without love? Why or why not?
- What do the fruits of the Spirit have to do with love and service? Which ones do you see most clearly being brought into your life with God? Which ones do you most long to develop more fully?

Recognizing and Responding

The needs of the world are sometimes missed or misinterpreted by Christians. We can be so focused on saving people's souls that we forget their bodies. As Adventists, we don't believe in a separate soul. We believe that peoples' bodies and physical needs *are* part of their souls' needs! But we still are hesitant to enter the world of social action, despite the fact that this is where Jesus spent the vast majority of His time.

- Brainstorm some of the great needs of the billions on this earth. You could write them on a white board. It won't take two minutes to fill the board! Now, each person pick one or two needs that call the most to their hearts.
- What are you doing to find ways to help meet this need? Are you *doing*, or just *talking*?
- Are the needs you're called to work for global, local, or both? What are some ways you can help in your own family, workplace, school, neighborhood? What are some ways you can help globally?
- Tell each other one way you will serve this week. Then hold each other accountable.

Networking for Ministry

- "Social networking" is the buzzword of our age. In what ways are you presently involved in social networking, both on- and offline?
- What are some ways you use these platforms for ministry? (Don't think only of specifically religious ministering. Those needs you brainstormed didn't only speak to spiritual natures.)
- What are some ways you could minister more effectively? Do you need a partner? A group? Do you think online networks are sufficient? Why or why not?
- Are there ways you have used social networking skills that actually worked against God's kingdom? What will you do to change that?
- How can music and other arts be connected with personal devotion, groups, churches, discipleship, and ministry?

In Session 4, we explored ways to transform the devotional life.

- In many ways, this session comes full circle back to session one. Why do you think this is so?
- What are some of the differences you have seen in your devotional life that have happened specifically because of your attempts to grow your discipleship?
- What are some of the differences that have occurred because you have tried to minister?
- What are some ways you want to grow now?
- What are some ways you could envision yourself growing in the future?
- Are there any fears and concerns you feel on this topic? Can you share them with the group and practice ministering to each other right now?

Leader: Be sure to watch the clock and save time for serious prayer. There is no need to cover every one of these questions. Some will be more or less relevant to your particular group. Some will cause great discussion and interest—those are the ones to spend more time on. But at least fifteen minutes before you want to close, wind it up and divide the group into small groups with instructions to pray specifically for the things that have been brought up in the discussion.

If you know some are already prayer partners, you may want to put those together. A good prayer group might consist of two pairs of prayer partners. You could even have people take notes from the beginning, writing down issues, concerns, blessings, and fears that are brought up so that they will be able to pray intelligently for each other.

End by praying aloud for each one in the room and commissioning them to go forth for God. You can make a ceremony of it, if you wish. They could light each other's candles, or put prayer requests in a basket, or anything you or they think of.

SERIES TWO

Sessions 6-10

SESSION 6A: DEVELOPING AN INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY THAT IS COMPLETE IN CHRIST BY MICHAEL IKECHUKWE OLUIKPE

SESSION 6B: DEVELOPING AN INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY THAT IS COMPLETE IN CHRIST BY ERIKA PERPALL

SESSION 7: UNDERSTANDING THAT GOD IS THE SOURCE OF LIFE BY DEBBONNAIRE KOVACS

SESSION 8: INVESTING MYSELF IN THE DISCIPLESHIP OF OTHERS BY TRACY MORGAN

SESSION 9: HELPING BELIEVERS BUILD CHRIST-LIKE RELATIONSHIPS BY TRACY MORGAN

SESSION 10: DEBRIEFING SESSION BY DEBBONNAIRE KOVACS

READ THIS FIRST!

INFORMATION FOR SESSION 7: UNDERSTANDING THAT GOD IS THE SOURCE OF LIFE

First Causes

Creation is a hot topic these days. There is a range of beliefs, from no creator at all, to some vague “life force” (possibly intelligent, possibly not) working in or through everything, to some form of creator who seeded the primordial soup and left, to theistic evolution, in which a real Creator God made everything but used endless periods of time to do it and is doing it still, to simple, biblical six-day creation by the one and only, most high, triune God. Most of these beliefs are held passionately and more or less rigidly, leaving little room for even hearing what others believe, let alone actually listening respectfully to them.

As far as possible, attempt not to be drawn into debates or arguments on the subject; however, if arguments arise, Christians need to remember to be Christ-like even in our disagreements. We can listen to each other with love, respecting the person and his or her right to disagree with us, even if we cannot truthfully respect the belief stated. Rather than arguing ways and means, we can focus on the most important truth of all—A real God made all of us and how we live our lives matters to this Creator. People who fully accept secular evolution have a long way to go before accepting God’s existence, let alone His Creatorship, but those who at least believe that God *is* can usually be reached by focusing on the spiritual challenges He brings to our lives: What does it mean that God made me? What blessings, what challenges, what demands does that put on my life? As a person draws nearer and nearer to the Source of all life and the Source of one’s own life, the power and love of the Creator become more and more overwhelming, until the concept that He crafted all this miraculous life and love deliberately, lovingly, recently, and in six actual days seems perfectly feasible after all.

It’s always safe to concentrate on the love! It really does bring all other things in its train.

“The physical organism of man is under the supervision of God, but it is not like a clock, which is set in operation, and must go of itself. The heart beats, pulse succeeds pulse, breath succeeds breath, but the entire being is under the supervision of God. ‘Ye are God’s husbandry; ye are God’s building.’ In God we live, and move, and have our being. Each heartbeat, each breath, is the inspiration of Him who breathed into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life—the inspiration of the ever-present God, the great I AM.” (The Review and Herald, November 8, 1898.)

New Creation

John 1 says that Jesus was the active force in creation, though of course all three Persons of the Godhead were actively involved and are clearly shown as present in Genesis. When it comes to re-creation, Jesus is again the active agent. Again, of course, all three are active. God the Father made the decision and sent His Son. The Spirit was extremely involved throughout Jesus' life on earth and is in some senses even more active now than Jesus is, bringing and managing our daily New Life. However, Jesus was the one who "put a face on God." One of His important roles as incarnate God was to make God visible to us. John made the point both in John 1 and in 1 John 1 that he was speaking of something he himself had seen, heard, and touched. This is the reason one of Jesus' favorite titles for Himself was Son of Man. He is our brother in a way that could not be possible before His birth, and now we can "see, touch, even taste" God in ways that would not be possible had He not visited us.

This is the major focus of this study. It's one thing (and very important!) to understand that God is the Source of life in the sense that He was the one who first created the planet, the light, air, plants, animals, and us. It's even more important to understand that God is the immediate Source of *my* life, that He is working daily, momentarily (with or without my cooperation) in an attempt to guide me into His paths.

Most important of all is to understand that He is the Source of *new life*, that I am His child, "born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:13, NIV). This is a Source I cannot do without, any more that I could do without the breath He created for my lungs and created my lungs for, any more than I could do without the water He made for me and made me out of, any more than I could do without the love and touch He made people to give me and made me to give to others.

"The mind devoted unreservedly to God, under the guidance of the divine Spirit, develops generally and harmoniously. The weak, vacillating character becomes changed through the power of God to one of strength and steadfastness. Continual devotion and piety establish so close a relation between Jesus and his disciple that the Christian becomes like him in mind and character. After association with the Son of God, the humble follower of Christ is found to be a person of sound principle, clear perception, and reliable judgment. He has a connection with God, the source of light and understanding. He who longed to be of service to the cause of Christ, has been so quickened by the life-giving rays of the Sun of Righteousness, that he has been enabled to bear much fruit to the glory of God." (*Christian Education*, 199)

Session 6a: Developing an Individual Identity in Christ

To develop an individual identity in Christ, I am:

- surrendering my heart and will to God.
- learning that God places infinite value on me.
- recognizing my continual need for God’s forgiving and empowering grace.
- inviting the Holy Spirit to guide in my ongoing reflection and actions.
- embracing cultural expectations that are aligned with God’s Word (the Bible) and replacing those that are not.

Big Idea

True identity is centered on God’s point of view, not on that of human beings.

Connector

Look: 1 Samuel 16:7

Memorize: “The Lord said . . . Do not consider his appearance or his height, . . . The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (NIV).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

Who are you?

Read Jonah 1: 8; John 1:22. What are the questions in these texts that are related to identity?

“Who are you? . . . What do you say about yourself?” (John 1:22, NIV). The question “Who are you?” goes beyond your name and home address. Though what you see when you look in the mirror can be an introduction and summary of who you are, it is not the whole picture. The answer to that question goes beyond all the information on your personal ID card, regardless of how many of those you have—national ID, student ID, worker ID, bank ID, driver’s ID, etc..

“Who you really are” has to do with your background, your abilities, and most importantly, your personality and character. It has to do with who you are inside—especially when people get to spend time with you to know you better.

The question, “Who are you?” can be summed up in words like “identity,” “self-concept,” “self-worth,” and “self-esteem.” The answer to this question is a function for success in life.

You determine who you are based on three main viewpoints: that of yourself, the people around you, and God. Apart from yourself, what people say about you and what God says about you are major influences on your personal identity. Most of the time you and I are more concerned about the first influence—the influence of people and what they think about us.

Many young people do not like themselves because of their looks, size, height, social relationships, and habits, among other things. Many feel worthless and unimportant, especially when they think they do not meet the standard set by their society and the world. They compare themselves with the supermodels and artistes of the media world and do not fit in.

Apart from the influence of people through social media, there is the view of your parents, friends, and teachers about who you are. Many young people have a poor identity or self-esteem because these important people in their lives judge them based on their background, past performances, or deeds. Sometimes, in our personal lives, we are stuck between wanting to please these people and wanting to be ourselves. When we do not live up to their standards and expectations, they look down on us and that often leads to us feeling bad about ourselves.

Some youth feel they are not *American Idol*, *America’s Next Top Model*, or *America’s Got Talent* material and feel bad and inferior about themselves. Other youth feel that they qualify for one or all of the above and feel good and proud about themselves, feeling superior to those who do not qualify.

However, the real standard to measure and define who we are is God’s standard. He is the One who really knows, sees, and defines who we are—because no one else knows, sees, and defines us the way God does. He is the One who really knows who we are on the inside (1 Samuel 16:7). ***That is the part of our identity that matters the most.***

What do the following texts say about God’s view of who we are? What is so special about our identity according to these verses?

1. Genesis 1:26-28
2. Psalm 8:5
3. Psalm 100:3
4. Psalm 139:13-16
5. Isaiah 43: 1a, 7
6. Acts 17:24-28

Evolution teaches by implication that human beings are nothing more than a chemical accident that happened by chaotic chance, therefore there is nothing special about our identity. But the Bible differs from this view of origin. The Genesis account presents a God who created everything—including human beings—by plan, order, and design (Genesis 1:1-31).

Your identity is rooted in your origins—where you come from. The Bible is clear that you are not a product of evolutionary chance but are intelligently designed by God, the Creator, Himself. Because of this, you have a special identity as a child of God created in His image. God has made you so unique that there is no other person like you in the whole universe! The fact that every human being, even identical twins, has their own DNA, fingerprints, and unique anatomical features testifies to how special and unique you and I are in all creation. No one else shares the exact same traits with you.

In addition, you are also special by creation because, unlike all other creatures of God, human beings are created in His image. You have the impress of divinity in your being.

But what does it mean to be created in God's image? The Spirit of Prophecy states:

“Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator – **individuality**, power to think and to do...It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train youth to be thinkers and not mere reflectors of other men's thought” (*Education*, p.17).

Your individuality is a central part of your identity. It is that part of you that shows you are created in the image of God. According to the quote above, God created you to be yourself in Him, and above everything else to follow His plans for your life, even more than following that of your parents, family, friends, teachers, or other human beings. When you live to fulfill God's plan and accomplish His purpose in your home, neighborhood, school, or workplace by being yourself, contributing your own positive and creative ideas, thoughts, abilities, skills, talents, and unique methods, you bring glory to Him and reflect His image. God recognizes that no one can do what He created you to do as creatively or as uniquely as you can. No one does it exactly as you do. Your individuality is special to God. It is a reflection of His image in you.

So who are you? By creation, you are God's child, made in His image with a special and unique personality and individuality that no one else has or shares.

Dig Deep

A New YOU!

As mentioned earlier, apart from what others think about who you are, what you think about yourself is very important. One of the reasons why we do not like who we are is our sinful moral make up. The bad character traits in us, the wrongs we do, the mistakes we make, and the guilt we feel after a bad temper outburst, lies, lust, among others make up major reasons why we do not like who we are. In all of us, there is a mix of good and bad. We love the good, virtuous character traits in us and we hate the bad defects and deeds that we manifest. Sometimes these defects and deeds are seen by others and they hate who we are because of them. But even when people may not see the manifestation of the bad in us, we know how bad we are deep inside our hearts and consciences. It can be a pretty depressing struggle (Romans 7: 15-24).

The Bible explains that though human beings are created in God's image, the original sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, caused us to become sinners (Genesis 2:16, 17; 3:6; Romans 5:12). This has marred the original image of God in us and, as a result, we are all born with a fallen and sinful human nature (Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:10, 23). Therefore, God's image, likeness, and divine character in us, which has been marred by sin, needs to be restored. We need a new moral identity—better than the fallen sinful identity we had from birth.

What is God's solution to the negative character defects that make up our identity? (To be answered from the Bible verses/passages below. Try to involve all participants in this activity).

- Psalm 32:1, 2
- Psalm 103: 12
- Isaiah 44:22
- Jeremiah 31:34
- Micah 7:19
- Ephesians 1:7
- Colossians 1:14
- Hebrews 9:14
- 1 John 1:9

Through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, God made forgiveness available to us to cover, cleanse, and purge us from our character defects and sins that lead to death. Accepting God's forgiveness personally by believing in and making Jesus Savior and Lord is a very important part of receiving a new identity in Christ (John 1:12,13).

Apart from God's forgiveness, which pardons and clears the guilt of our sins, God also makes available and possible a transformation process from our sinful human nature to the godly, Christ-like character He originally intended us to have. This begins with the new birth experience (John 3:3, 5, 8) and continues after baptism as sanctification. Sanctification is a daily, continual growth process that involves consciously permitting God, through His Holy Spirit, working through our choices, to give us victory over our sinful character defects. It involves doing away with old, sinful habits and character traits and spending more time investing in good, healthy, Christ-like character traits and habits. It is described as "putting off the old self—the old identity" and "putting on the new self—the new identity in Christ" (Ephesians 4:23-32; Colossians 3:1-17). This begins with a new "heart" (mind) given by God at the beginning of this process (Psalm 51:10-12; Ezekiel 36:26, 27; Psalm 40:8; Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16) and results in "the transforming of the mind" as the process continues (Romans 12:1, 2).

The result is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)—a new person with a new orientation, perspective, and worldview on life. A person who no longer lives a life controlled by the natural impulses of the fallen human nature, but instead lives a life controlled by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1-17 Galatians 5: 16-26). Through this process, God redeems our identity from its fallen state. Through the new birth and sanctification, we are redeemed and have a new identity in Jesus Christ.

The good news is that, even though sin has messed up your moral identity and continues to do so, God's plan of salvation has made provision to transform you and restore His original image in you. His grace is available to save you from the power of sin and to change you into an individual with a godly character. Though sin is part of who you are at birth and by nature, you are saved by grace and recreated for good works (Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:11-14). Through this available grace, you are accepted by God in the Beloved and you are complete before God in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:5, 6; Colossians 2:9, 10, KJV). ***This is your new identity in Jesus Christ.***

Accepting God's plan of salvation through Jesus makes you part of a new community—the church, God's family on earth. Through Jesus Christ, you receive a new identity as one of God's saints, as part of His people, part of those who have accepted God's plan to restore us to His original image. You become part of His special people on earth to make known His light in this world's darkness through your character (1 Peter 2:9, 10). The church of God, where there is love and unity in diversity, becomes your new family (Galatians 3:26-28; Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:4-6; Colossians 3:9-11). This new family becomes part of your new identity as well.

So who are you? In Christ, you are a redeemed saint—a sinner saved by grace in the process of transformation into a godly character and restoration to God's original image. You are a member of God's family, His church. You belong to God by redemption and recreation (Isaiah 43:1). This is your new identity.

Dig Deep

Implications of Identity

What do these Bible verses say about characteristics of a good, healthy identity? Match the letters with the appropriate options below.

- A. Galatians 5:22,23; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Peter 3:3, 4
- B. Romans 12:3; Phil 2:1-7
- C. Romans 12: 4-8; 1 Corinthians 12
- D. 2 Corinthians 10: 12; 13:5; Galatians 6:4
- E. Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 6:14,15; 7:12; 18: 35; 22:39, 40; Ephesians 4: 32; Colossians 3:13
- F. Jeremiah 31:34; Micah 7:19; 1 John 1:9; 2 Peter 1:3, 4
- G. Daniel 3:16-18; Acts 5:32
- H. Galatians 3: 26-28; Ephesians 2: 19-22; Col 3:11; 1 Peter 2:9

_____ Focusing on building /developing inner qualities (character/virtues) by God's grace

_____ Identifying and celebrating spiritual gifts and talents—using them for God's glory and to build up /serve others, especially in the church

_____ Positive peer pressure – belonging to and identifying with God's family, His people (the church), where there is the celebration of unity in diversity

_____ Being humble and willing to learn from others in areas where they excel better than you – always willing to learn (humble yourself without feeling inferior)

_____ Being patient, tolerant, and forgiving of others as Christ has been to you—loving others as God has loved you

_____ Not afraid or ashamed of being different – of doing what God says even though it is against popular culture

_____ Depending totally on God’s grace—accepting God’s love and forgiveness when you fail or fall and receiving His power to rise out of failure and overcome

_____ Not comparing oneself to others—knowing that each one’s style and story is different

Unhealthy Identity/Self-Esteem	Healthy Identity/Self-Esteem
Not comfortable in your own skin; not happy to be you. Always wanting to be someone else (feeling inferior)	Happy to be “you”
Hating yourself – magnifying your personal problems, seeing personality in a bad light, from a negative perspective (self-pity)	Loving and appreciating yourself; Always seeing yourself from a positive perspective
Negative peer pressure- following the crowd to do evil- Bullying, Drug addiction, sexual immorality, etc.	Positive peer pressure. Surrounding yourself with godly people who provide influence and support to do good, not evil
Depending on popular culture to determine true worth/self-image (people pleasers)	Depending mainly on God for true worth/self-image (God pleasers)
Fear and Cowardice	Faith and Courage
Pride, Arrogance, feeling superior, looking down on others	Humility – knowing one’s limits
Miserable living	Abundant living
Surviving	Thriving
Bad health (Depression)	Good health (Celebration)
Failure	Success
Death (Suicide)	Life

After you have been recreated in Christ, the result is a healthy identity that is manifested in your relationships with others, especially by the way you treat them. Apart from the examples stated above, the key manifestation of a healthy identity in Christ is love for others. This love is manifested in a number of ways: humility, patience, tolerance, appreciation, and forgiveness towards others. The basic point here is that you treat everyone as God in Christ has treated you. God's love for you, which you have enjoyed, is shared with others. Your love for God is manifested in your love for others (Matthew 18: 21-35; Ephesians 4:32; Col 3:13; 1 John 4: 7-12, 19-21).

In addition, your view of your identity greatly determines and affects how you live your life. As seen in the examples above, a new identity recreated in Christ brings a lot of benefits in this life, while your old identity without Christ has a lot of disadvantages for life. ***When you have a healthy identity in Christ, you live a successful life, full of meaning, purpose, significance, and fulfillment.*** Most importantly, a healthy identity in Christ helps you to live here on earth the kind of life God created you to live in the very beginning. Through this identity, you manifest, reveal, and reflect more and more the restoration of the image of God in you.

Dig Deep

Identity for Eternity

You are so special to God because He created only one of you. There are no two identical people in the world/universe. Each one is unique. Imagine a mother with ten children. If she loses one of them in death, you cannot comfort her by saying, "Don't worry, you still have nine other children still alive with you." No matter how many other children she still has, she will always remember and treasure the uniqueness of her deceased child. Just as a mother knows each child, God knows all His children and appreciates them. Each one is so important to Him that He gave His life to redeem each one from sin. Even if there was only one sinner to be saved, He would still have died to redeem that special one. ***Yes, Calvary is the true cost of the soul. It shows God's infinite value of one soul.*** Here are some quotes from the Spirit of Prophecy:

"One soul is of infinite value; Calvary speaks of its worth" (Gospel Workers, 184; Messages to Young People, p 207).

"He who gave His life to redeem man sees in every human being a value that exceeds finite computation. By the mystery and glory of the cross we are to discern His estimate of the value of the soul. When we do this, we shall feel that human beings, however degraded, have cost too much to be treated with coldness or contempt" (Ministry of Healing, p.162).

"Christ gave Himself for sinners. With what anxiety for the salvation of souls we should be filled as we see human beings perishing in sin. These souls have been bought at an infinite price. The death of the Son of God on Calvary's cross is the measure of their value" (Testimonies, vol. 8, 28).

“The value of a soul, who can estimate? Would you know its worth, go to Gethsemane and there watch with Christ through those hours of anguish, when He sweat as it were great drops of blood....At the foot of the cross, remember that for one sinner Christ would have laid down His life, you may estimate the value of a soul” (Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 196).

“If God cares for a sparrow...how will he care for the purchase of the blood of Christ? One soul is worth more than all the world. For one soul Jesus would have passed through the agony of Calvary that that one might be saved in his kingdom. ‘Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows”” (The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, May 3, 1892).

If God values your personality and individuality, what happens to it after death? The Bible clearly states that after death, the soul (person)—that special divine creation of dust and breath from God (Genesis 2:7; Psalm 139:13-16)—ceases to exist. At death, the dust returns to the ground and remains in the grave (Genesis 3:19; Ecclesiastes 12:7) and the life of the person—all the activities and achievements on earth—ends (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6). The Bible is also clear that everyone who has died awaits resurrection in the grave (Job 7:9, 10; 14: 10-14). Since death is like a sleep (Ps 13:3; 2 Kings 2:10, John 11: 11, 14), resurrection is the judgment received after waking up from the sleep of death (Hebrews 9:27). At the resurrection, each one will receive judgment—a reward either to eternal life or eternal destruction (Daniel 12: 2; John 5:25, 28, 29). However, the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy make it clear that after resurrection, the personality and individuality of the resurrected person is preserved and restored. This is evident in the examples of resurrection in the Bible such as the widow of Zarephath’s son (1 Kings 17:17-24), the Shunammite woman’s son (2 Kings 4: 17-20, 32-37), Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5: 35-42), the widow of Nain’s son (Luke 7:11-17), and Lazarus (John 11:1-44). This is particularly clear in the appearances of Jesus after His resurrection. On the road to Emmaus, the disciples recognized Jesus by His usual way of blessing the food (Luke 24: 28-35). They touched and recognized His physical features and His kindly, gentle, and loving personality after His resurrection (Luke 24: 36-43; John 20: 10-21:17). **God values the special uniqueness of who you are so much that He preserves and restores it at your resurrection.** Even death does not destroy your personality and individuality—your identity.

Here are some quotes from the Spirit of Prophecy that support this fact:

*“As Jesus arose from the dead, so those who asleep in Him are to rise again. We shall know our friends, even as the disciples knew Jesus. They may have been deformed, diseased, or disfigured, in this mortal life, and they rise in perfect health and symmetry; yet in the glorified body their **identity** will be preserved. ...In the face radiant with the light shining from the face of Jesus, we shall recognize the lineaments of those we love”* (Desire of Ages, p. 804).

*“Our personal **identity** is preserved in the resurrection, though not the same particles of matter or material substance as went into the grave. ...The spirit, the character of man, is returned to God, there to be preserved. In the resurrection every man will have his own character. God in His own time will call forth the dead,*

*giving again the breath of life, and bidding the dry bones live. The same form will come forth, but it will be free from disease and every defect. It lives again bearing the same **individuality** of features, so that friend will recognize friend” (Manuscript 76, 1900 quoted in *SDA Commentary* vol. 6, 1093).*

“As the wicked went into their graves, so they come forth with the same enmity to Christ and the same spirit of rebellion. They are to have no new probation in which to remedy the defects of their past lives. Nothing would be gained by this. A lifetime of transgression has not softened their hearts. A second probation, were it given them, would be occupied as was the first in evading the requirements of God and exciting rebellion against Him....In death these experienced no change. As they come up from the grave, they resume the current of their thoughts just where it ceased. They are actuated by the same desire to conquer that ruled them when they fell” (Great Controversy, p. 664).

Wonderful! So remember that you have a special identity in God’s sight—an identity that He will love to preserve for all eternity. If you refuse His love and salvation, He will miss you and your special individuality for all eternity. He will miss that special personality that He created and died for like a mother misses her deceased child.

CONCLUSION

Who are you?

So who are you? What do you say about yourself? What is your identity?

Most of the time, we answer these questions taking our cues from the people around us. We think we are what everybody else thinks and says we are. Apart from what you see in the mirror when you look in it, what the bio or info says about you on your ID, what you really say or think you are and what everybody else says about you, God sees and knows that there is more to who you are than all of the above. ***The true definition of your identity is found in what He thinks and says about who you are.*** He truly sees and knows the essence of your identity—who you really are inside.

So what does God say or think about who you are?

First, He sees you as special and unique because you are created by Him in His image, with a personality and individuality so unique that there is no one in the universe that is an exact match of you.

Second, He loves you so much that He gave His Son to provide forgiveness for your sinful deeds in order to gradually restore in you His divine character through His grace.

Third, because you are part of His church family, He loves you and longs to take you home with His people to spend eternity with Him when His plan of redemption is complete.

You may have had a terrible past filled with mistakes and sin. You may still have some sinful habits that you are not proud of. Sometimes these are obvious to people around you and cause them to hate who you are. These things make you feel bad about your identity and look down on yourself, and for good reason. Despite all of these, the Bible is very clear on what God thinks about who you are: You are His beloved and that is the most important part of your identity. He loves you so much and He has done a lot to prove it (Isaiah 43: 1-4; Jeremiah 31:3; John 3:16; 16:27; Romans 5:8; 1 John 4: 9, 10, 19). Though people around you may accuse, hate you, and look down on you because of your imperfections and defects, God's love reaches out to you in forgiveness, draws you to Himself, and sets you on the path to restoration from the destructive power of sin. This is what His grace does. As seen in the stories of the prodigal son (Luke 15:20-32) and the adulteress (John 8:1-11), though God hates sin, He loves the sinner and His grace is greater than all sin. **NOTHING YOU DO CAN CHANGE WHAT GOD THINKS AND SAYS ABOUT YOU.** Nothing but your choice can separate you from His love, which is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:37-39). Even that choice wouldn't make Him stop loving you. But He loves you too much to force you to live with Him.

So who are you? What do you say about yourself? What is your identity? Apart from all you see in the mirror, apart from all your bio info on your IDs and vital documents, apart from all that people say and think about you, do not forget to make central this part of your identity: **"I AM THE ONE WHOM JESUS LOVES."** This is the part of your identity that matters the most and that makes all the difference.

Reflection

What do you think about the statement "image is everything"?

Discuss the implications of its importance in the world and then for the Christian.

Assume that evolution was true and there was no God, what are the implications for one's self-esteem? Would it make any difference in our identity? Would there be any other good reason to feel special apart from God?

What would the world be like if everyone had a healthy identity rooted, founded, and centered on God? Imagine and discuss.

Application

- How do you feel about yourself? Why do you feel like this about yourself? Give three basic reasons. Do you see yourself differently after understanding what God thinks of you?

- Apart from the fact that you are God's creation and redemption, what other aspects of your life and person are you grateful to God for? What are the things you appreciate about yourself? You can share the answers in the areas of your gender, nationality, race, family background, spiritual gifts or talents, etc.

DISCIPLE IN ACTION

What are the things you do not like about yourself? Write them out on a sheet of paper. What things on the list can you change or improve upon? What things on the list cannot be changed? In your devotional and prayer time, think of what you can do to make the necessary changes on the things you can change and pray about these changes. Try to see the things you cannot change from a positive point of view.

This week find five or ten people, either in your home, neighborhood, school (college), office, or church, and tell them what you like about them. Compliment, appreciate, and encourage them. Try to do this especially for those whom people do not usually compliment or appreciate.

LEADER'S INFORMATION

The questions in bold print are to be answered from the Bible verses or passages supplied. Group members are to read these verses, which have the answers to the questions asked. Try to make sure that everyone in the group is involved in reading the Bible and finding the answers.

The fill in the blanks/matching activity above also involves reading the Bible to find the answers. Encourage all to participate.

The leaders can summarize and present the key points of each **DIG DEEP** section within the time limits provided. The session should close with a prayer.

Session 6b: Developing an Individual Identity in Christ

To develop an individual identity in Christ, I am:

- surrendering my heart and will to God.
- learning that God places infinite value on me.
- recognizing my continual need for God's forgiving and empowering grace.
- inviting the Holy Spirit to guide in my ongoing reflection and actions.
- embracing cultural expectations that are aligned with God's Word (the Bible) and replacing those that are not.

Big Idea

To know that we are created in the image of God, and He sent His Son to die for us because we are of infinite value to God. We should respond to this love by aligning ourselves with our Creator.

You are priceless because of the value God has placed on you.

Connector

Look: Gen. 1:26

Memorize: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

Activity: Have your participants write two or three phrases that describe themselves. Put all the descriptions in a box. Pick one, and read it aloud to the whole group. Then everyone has to guess who the person is.

Leader's Hints: You can have people volunteer to pick out of the box, read it, and guess who it is for a small group where everyone is familiar with each other.

If someone asked, "Who are you?" most of us would respond by giving our name. But you are more than just a name. You are more than just your mother's child. You are more than just a

young person. Do you know who you really are? I have never met you, but I know you. I know where you came from. It's true. I can trace your origin. Let's do it together!

What does the Bible say about the origin of humanity?

1. Genesis 1:26
2. Genesis 5: 2
3. Isaiah 43: 1
4. Malachi 2:10

So, we see that God did not just create people; He made us in His own image. And yet, that is only the beginning of your story.

Ellen White says, "Man was the crowning act of the creation of God, made in the image of God, and designed to be a counterpart of God.... Man is very dear to God, because he was formed in His own image. "In order to understand the value which God places upon man, we need to comprehend the plan of redemption, the costly sacrifice which our Saviour made to save the human race from eternal ruin. Jesus died to regain possession of the one pearl of great price. . . ." (*Lift Him Up*, p. 48).

Besides making us of such great value to Him, God made us of great value to the world. He gave us a purpose for being here. Again, what does the Bible say?

1. Matthew 5: 13
2. Matthew 5: 14
3. Philippians 2: 15

The imagery Jesus uses is just powerful! What does salt do? It gives taste and it preserves. What does light do? It shatters darkness.

God has given us a great task and great potential. But how do we unleash this power?

Consider a light bulb. It has the power to dispel darkness – but only if it is connected to the power source. Consider salt – if it has no savor, it is useless. So, how do **we** accomplish our purpose? This is the part where many of us get stuck. It's time to come out of the trance and fulfill our role. But first, "What is our power source?"

Search and Discover

1. Exodus 15:2
2. 2 Samuel 22:33
3. 1 Chronicles 16: 11
4. Psalm 18:1
5. Psalm 18: 32

How do tap into the power?

1. Psalm 27:14
2. We must wait: Psalm 86:16

3. We must pray: Isaiah 26:4
4. We must trust: Proverbs 10:29
5. We must follow His way: 1 Peter 2:21, 3 John 1:11

Activity

Have your group members make a human maze. Blind-fold a volunteer and have him or her attempt to walk through the maze, following the directions of another volunteer. Then have another volunteer lead another blindfolded volunteer through the maze.

Leader's Hints: You can vary the size and complexity of the maze based on the size of the room and the number of people. You may even use chairs or trash cans in the maze.

Life can sometimes bring some unexpected twists and turns, and we feel like we are walking blindly through a maze. Isn't it nice to know that we have our own personal guide leading the way?

Reflection

Now that you know who you are, do you know where you are going? Things that are of great value require special attention. That is why God took the time to write us a love letter and, just in case you missed the point, He sent us the Spirit of Prophecy. He gives our lives direction and He provides sign posts along the way.

1. How do I know which way is God's way?
2. Am I following God's way?
3. Should there be exceptions to the rule? (e.g. cultural differences, personal taste, etc)
4. Where do you draw the line between "fitting in" and standing up for Jesus?

Application

Without God, we are as valuable as the dirt on the ground. In God, we are worth the value of His Son. We are precious and protected. We are so precious to Him that He left detailed instructions to ensure our happiness. When you look in the mirror you should not only see blue eyes or brown eyes, or freckles or pimples. When you look in the mirror, you should see a child of God – made in His image; you should see the one He gave His life for. You should see the one He is counting on.

I know. It is mind-boggling to think that we matter to God. But we do. We matter so much that He even counted the strands of our hair. He plotted the course of our lives. The ball is in your court now. How will you play it? Here are some suggestions:

1. Begin each day with God.

"Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 93).

2. Study the Bible Daily.

“Search the Scriptures for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39 KJV).

3. Discover the Joy of Sharing Christ.

“God might have committed the message of the gospel, and all the work of loving ministry, to the heavenly angels. He might have employed other means for accomplishing His purpose. But in His infinite love He chose to make us co-workers with Himself, with Christ and the angels, that we might share the blessing, the joy, the spiritual uplifting, which results from this unselfish ministry” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 79).

Dig Deep

God’s plan for our lives includes our mission – our ministry. He saved us so that we may serve Him and our fellow men. But He does not leave us to stumble around in the dark. Through Scripture and inspired writings, He gives us hope and comfort.

Read the following quotes from Ellen White and consider how they may apply to your life.

Helping the Tempted

“The lost coin in the Saviour’s parable, though lying in the dirt and rubbish, was a piece of silver still. Its owner sought it because it was of value. So every soul, however degraded by sin, is in God’s sight accounted precious. As the coin bore the image and superscription of the reigning power, so man at his creation bore the image and superscription of God. Though now marred and dim through the influence of sin, the traces of this inscription remain upon every soul. God desires to recover that soul and to retrace upon it His own image in righteousness and holiness” (*Ministry of Healing*, p.163).

“But Jesus did not bid the disciples, “Strive to *make* your light shine;” He said, “ *Let* it shine.” If Christ is dwelling in the heart, it is impossible to conceal the light of His presence. If those who profess to be followers of Christ are not the light of the world, it is because the vital power has left them; if they have no light to give, it is because they have no connection with the Source of light” (MB 40.2).

“For sinful men, the highest consolation, the greatest cause of rejoicing, is that Heaven has given Jesus to be the sinner’s Saviour. . . . He offered to go over the ground where Adam stumbled and fell; to meet the tempter on the field of battle, and conquer him in man’s behalf. Behold Him in the wilderness of temptation. Forty days and forty nights He fasted, enduring the fiercest assaults of the powers of darkness. He trod the “winepress alone; and of the people there was none with” Him (Isa. 63:3). It was not for Himself, but that He might break the chain that held the human race in slavery to Satan” (*Our Father Cares*, pp. 209, 210).

Session 7: Understanding that God is the Source of Life

To understand that God is the Source of life, I am learning that:

- God is the creator and sustainer of the universe, including all people created in His image.
- God is a triune God consisting of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- God reveals Himself to us in many ways, but most clearly through His Son, the incarnate Word.
- God is love and He desires from me a response of love for Himself and for others.
- the God-given purpose of humanity is to glorify God through daily life, work, and relationships with others.

Big Idea

The great Creator God had a purpose in creating this world, and He has a purpose for my life.

Connector

Look: John 1:1-5; 1 John 2:7-11

Memorize: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it” (John 1:1-5).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

God as Source of Life

You can probably say Genesis 1:1 from memory: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” You may have been able to say this when you were a small child. What does it mean? Are there new thoughts to be found in this small text?

Of course you believe God is the Creator. If you pay any attention at all to the daily miracles of life on this planet (the sun comes up exactly when and where we expect it every single day, no matter what, for one of millions of examples), then you have no trouble believing that such a God could have created everything in a moment, let alone six days, and could also have made everything look as old or as new as He chose. But you could believe all this without actually *knowing* this Source of life. In fact, you could believe all this just because somebody told you so, without ever having examined it for yourself.

If you read on in Genesis 1, you find that the Spirit of God “moved upon” (KJV), “was moving over” (NASB), “was hovering over” (NIV), “was moving, (hovering, brooding) over” (Amplified), or “brooded like a bird above” (*The Message*) the waters. What’s all this about? Well, it gives a whole new feeling to the bare statement of fact of verse 1. Have you ever seen a chicken or other bird on a nest? The bird goes into an almost trancelike state. She gets up only briefly once a day to eat and drink. The rest of the time, 24/7, she gives herself entirely to the all-important task of keeping her eggs warm, turning them regularly, and waiting for them to grow. Nothing else matters to her. Mother birds have been found dead, spread over eggs or babies (often still alive and safe) after a fire or other disaster. The lives of their babies mattered more to them than life itself. This word, “brooding,” in English, is the one the author chose to describe what the Spirit of God did at the beginning of time.

Reading further, you find that God speaks into existence light and lightning bugs, galaxies and grasshoppers, tides and tigers and tiger lilies and, by the way, the space/time continuum. But not people. This hovering, maternal-sounding Maker bends down and scoops up dirt (which He made not long before) and water (ditto) and carefully sculpts a person “in Our image and likeness” or, as *The Message* puts it, “in Our image, . . . reflecting our nature.”

1. What thoughts and feelings arise in you when you think of the phrase “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”?

2. What thoughts and feelings arise in you when you consider the Spirit brooding like a mother bird?

3. What does it mean to you that humans were created in God’s image and reflecting His nature? What are some ways we can still see that likeness today? What are some ways we can no longer see that likeness?

4. What choices do you make on a daily basis that determine how much or how little you reflect God's likeness?

God the Three-in-One

Good luck understanding or explaining this one! You've probably heard several analogies—a three-ply cord, an apple (skin, flesh, core), an egg (shell, white, yolk), the three states of water (liquid, frozen, steam). They help. Maybe. Some. The fact is, we don't *get* the idea of a three-personality person! We either tend to think of them as three different, separate Gods, which gets us in trouble with the whole doctrine of monotheism, or we think of one God with three different faces, which gets us in trouble with. . . well, to Whom, exactly, was Jesus praying? And Who did He say was coming after He left?

Fortunately, we don't have to understand fully in order to love fully, or we'd all be in trouble, because who fully understands their spouse or child? We get that the Father/Maker/Defender is, as the Old Testament commonly puts it, "God above all other gods." King of Kings. "That without which there would be nothing at all."

We get that the third Person of the Godhead is Spirit—all-pervasive, all-encompassing, all-knowing, all-loving. The one who "lives in us" while at the same time in Whom "we live and move and have our being." Okay, we don't exactly *get* that, but we accept it. And thank God for it!

Most of all, we thank God that He gave Himself a face. Jesus, we get. Mostly. He was a man, a Jew, probably tanned and bearded, probably dark-haired. Maybe long-nosed. He had hands and feet and a smile that embraced the world and eyes that you could drown in.

And He loves us. He/They love(s) us. This we know!

1. What are some of the analogies that help you try to understand or explain the Trinity?

2. How much does it matter to you how well you understand this concept? What helps you to love anyway, without fully understanding?

“If you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father.”

We’ve already studied many ways to know God. He reveals Himself to us in nature, in each other, in His Word, in music and art, and the inexplicable peace that comes when we simply point our hearts toward His and open them. But we know that one of the most important ways God reveals Himself is in the fact that He came and lived among us. There are unnumbered lessons in the incarnation. Here are three important ones to consider.

- **He came.**

This is a pretty amazing fact, all by itself. The very idea that an infinite God could step into His own creation is kind of like Mary Poppins and the chimney sweep stepping into their sidewalk art—only, even less believable. How did He do it? That, we’ll never understand. Why did He do it?

Ah, now *that’s* the truly amazing thing! Because He didn’t just chalk a picture on the sidewalk and then decide to care about the little cartoon chalk beings. He didn’t make toy robots in His lab and then decide to enter their mechanical little world. He didn’t even make pets, with actual personalities, and then fall in love with those. *He made beings “like Himself” and fell in love with them.* He invented people with minds and hearts, and the capacity to stare into a sunset with awe. He gave us, if you can believe it, a little spark of His own creativity, so that we can take bits of the “stuff” He left around for us to play with and make paintings and create dances and name babies and write silly rhymes and invent tiny little devices that can hold thousands of those paintings and songs and dances and pictures of the babies.

So, when these beings started using their creativity to talk to snakes and make weapons and hit babies and dance to demons, **He came.**

- **He saw.**

One of my favorite names of God in the whole Bible is the one Hagar gave Him—“the God who sees me” (Genesis 16:13). Jesus saw—really *saw* the people around Him. He saw the truth Nicodemus didn’t want Him to notice. He saw the desperate need in the heart of the woman at the well. He saw the value of a leper and the love of children and the longing of the adulterer and what the demoniac really wanted to say.

- **He conquered.**

He lived the life, never deviating from love. He endured the sarcasm and sneers and the misunderstanding. He answered the questions and touched the untouchable and cried when He rebuked the unrepentant. He fought the devil with Scripture and with His own unbounded love, and when the time came, He died the death. You know. *The* death. The one that’s supposed to last forever, and which would have swallowed our entire race if He hadn’t thrown Himself in the way.

He conquered *that* death.

1. What have you learned about God by looking in the face of Jesus?

2. How would you tell the story of Jesus “coming” into your own life?

3. What has He conquered for you? How are you helping or hindering His work?

Love: A Round Trip

1 John 4:19 reminds us that we only love because God loved us first. Love is like air and water—it has to flow, and it abhors a vacuum. Where there is low pressure, wind forms, to move air to fill that low pocket. If you push an upright, empty cup down into the water, as soon as the water can get over the rim, it will rush to fill the hole. Love is like that. When someone is in desperate need of love (that would be us), God’s love rushes even faster to fill the vacuum and pours all over us. If we are living in that love, it will not only pour all over us, it will overflow all around us. When we see someone who is particularly “unlovely” (as we tend to put it, and that’s the polite term!) our first reaction will be to long to pour love all over that person.

We’re never as good at it as God is, of course. We may embarrass or hurt someone when all we meant to do is love. But people can tell when love is real, even if it’s a little inept. They tend to forgive clumsiness that comes from true, heart-deep love.

But what if we don’t respond? What if we put up our spiritual umbrellas when God’s love comes pouring down on us? What if we scrunch up our scroogy hearts, frown ferociously, fold our arms tightly, and refuse to accept the love of God?

Well, it’s not possible for us to stop the flow of God’s love. But it is possible for us to dam up our own hearts so that we’re stones in the river instead of life-giving pumps, passing on the water of life. The water will still flow around us, but there will be ripples and distortions and white water.

Love has to be a round trip to really fulfill its destiny. It has to flow both to us (from God and others) and away from us (to God and others.)

1. Name three ways God’s love has flowed into your life lately.

2. Name three ways God has used His other children to pour His love into your life lately.

3. Name three ways you'd like to pour out some of that love on someone else this week.

Reflection

God didn't just sit down one day and decide it would be fun to make a universe and see what happened. He had a plan. He had a plan for this world, and He has a plan for His children. Jesus put it the most succinctly and simply:

“Love God.

Love everybody else.

Do it with all you've got.”

That's a free paraphrase, but you get the point.

If you have a journal, here are some things to reflect on, or you could discuss them with your friends or with your group.

- What does it really mean, deep in my heart, that God is the Source of all life, and of my life? What difference does it make to me?
- In what ways can I make the face of God visible to those around me through my own life in this world?
- When I get up in the morning, what is the first thing I do to remind myself of and bask in God's love?

Application

Having reflected on these things, challenge yourself to find ways to make them real and visible in your daily life.

- How do I order and plan my day to show God's love to others?
- What could I do differently to be more intentional about this?
- When was the last time I felt the impulse to show love to someone who was not immediately appealing to me? What happened? What would I do differently another time?

Session 8:

Investing in the Discipleship of Others

To invest myself in the discipleship of others, I am:

- willing to be mentored by maturing Christians, and accountable for my spiritual growth.
- willing to be humble and honest when sharing my walk as a disciple.
- committing time and effort to mentoring growing Christians.
- working intentionally to train fellow believers to disciple others.

Big Idea

As Christians, we are not only committed to developing our own relationship with God, but also to helping train and mentor others in their faith.

Connector

Look: Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:7-10, Acts 2

Memorize: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’” (Matthew 28:18-20, NIV).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

The long-awaited appointment had finally arrived. Jesus told His eleven remaining followers to meet Him on the mountainside of Galilee so He could give them further instructions before His final departure. The men who had been closest to Him for three and a half years gathered together with hundreds of other curious new believers, waiting in anticipation to see their risen Master. When Jesus finally appeared to them, they fell to their knees and worshipped Him. Many in the crowd had seen the miracles and wonders performed by Jesus during His ministry,

but something about seeing this God-Man who had escaped the chains of death standing before them caused them to tremble in reverence.

When Jesus spoke, He explained to His followers that they now had a special work to do. He gave them the authority to make disciples of the people of all nations. He told them to baptize new believers and teach them everything He had shared during His time on earth as well as everything that had been written in the Scriptures. This was a huge undertaking for this small group of uneducated, unpopular misfits, but He ended His commission with words of encouragement. He knew their journey would not be an easy one, but He promised to be with them through all of their trials (Matthew 28:18-20, *Desire of Ages*, pp. 818-828).

A short time later, He met again with the eleven near Bethany. He gave His closest followers a special blessing and told them again that His Holy Spirit would come soon to fill them with power. When He finished speaking, He ascended into heaven right before their eyes. As they stood staring into the sky, two heavenly beings broke the awed silence by reminding the men that Jesus would be back again. The disciples knew they had an urgent work to do, so they returned to Jerusalem to watch and wait for the power of the Holy Spirit to come and help them finish the work that had to be completed before Jesus' return (Luke 24:50-51, Acts 1:8-10, NIV).

Just days later, the disciples and other members of the new faith were gathered together to celebrate the Day of Pentecost. While they were together, the promised Holy Spirit came to them and filled them all with God's power. This allowed them to witness to the crowds gathered in the city of Jerusalem. In that one day, three thousand new believers were converted. These new believers then went on to share what they had learned with everyone they came in contact with.

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and the story of Pentecost in Acts 2 remind us that when Jesus gives us directions, and we follow them for His glory, He can use us to do amazing things, both then and now. Every single member of the body of Christ has the privilege and responsibility of sharing in this work. Our most urgent desire should be to share our faith and win souls for the soon coming Kingdom.

This may seem like an intimidating endeavor. Perhaps you don't feel you have the necessary gifts. Maybe you think that because you aren't a natural preacher or teacher, that you have no part in this commission, but everyone has a part to play. Whatever your calling or profession in life, you can minister to God's children. This can be done by being a Christ-like witness to those around you. Comfort the hurting, feed the hungry, share God's love with everyone you meet. When they believe, they can then teach others, just like the converts at Pentecost.

Jesus' commission tells us to take His message all around the world. But what if circumstances prevent us from traveling abroad? Ellen White tells us, "While we may not be called to be missionaries to foreign countries, we can still reach souls right at home. We need not go to heathen lands, or even leave the narrow circle of the home, if it is there that our duty lies, in order to work for Christ. We can do this in the home circle, in the church, among those with whom we associate, and with whom we do business" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 81).

Start with your own family, neighbors, and co-workers. Find ways to show unexpected love and compassion. Tell them what Jesus has done for you. Let them see the changes in your life. Share God's Word with them. Like a stone tossed into a still pond, you will see the ripple effect as each new disciple goes off to make new disciples. The results of our thoughtful care and ministry toward others will only be fully realized in heaven.

It was Jesus who spoke the world into existence (John 1:1-4). He possesses the power to send beings more powerful and holy than ourselves out to complete the work of spreading His message to the world, but instead, He has entrusted us with this task. "In His infinite love He chose to make us co-workers with Himself, with Christ and the angels, that we might share the blessing, the joy, the spiritual uplifting, which results from this unselfish ministry" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 80). Jesus knows that by allowing us to work with Him, not only will we be a blessing to others, but our faith will continue to grow and mature as well.

- Who do you know that needs to hear the Good News?
- How have you witnessed to people in the past?
- How do we grow when we teach others?

Reflection

When the believers met together in Jerusalem for Pentecost, they had put away all of their differences and were of one mind and mission. Jesus had promised the Holy Spirit would come to them and that they would be given the ability to win souls. They waited eagerly, but not idly. "The disciples prayed with intense earnestness for a fitness to meet men and in their daily intercourse to speak words that would lead sinners to Christ" (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 37).

We now labor to hasten the day that Jesus will come again in the clouds to take all believers into His kingdom (John 14:2-3). Jesus will come again and everything around us tells us it will be very soon. While we wait, we cannot be idle. It is Jesus' desire that all should be saved and it is our responsibility to give everyone the opportunity to know of the love and sacrifice that He made for us all.

- Why is it important to build relationships within the church?
- Can you think of a time that your church family was united to complete a task? What was the outcome?
- What can you do personally to help unite fellow believers in your community?

Application

As a follower of Jesus, we are called to spread God's message to everyone, but in order to be a successful witness, we must allow ourselves to be mentored by others. Our church communities are full of like-minded Christians who have experience and wisdom that can be

invaluable to growing believers. Get to know these seasoned saints and learn from them. Humble yourself and share your experiences with them. If you're struggling in your walk, tell them about it. Maybe they've had similar struggles and they have learned how to find success in Jesus. Not all lessons have to be learned the hard way.

Even if you feel you have a lot to learn and a long way to go before you are an "experienced" Christian, you still have an obligation to help train new believers. How many times did Jesus heal and convert a lost soul who immediately ran off to share the story? Take the time to reach out to others. Tell them what Jesus has done for you. Try leading out in a Bible study. You don't have to be a scholar or theologian. There are plenty of easy-to-follow study guides available to help you guide others through God's Word. If you pray for the Holy Spirit to fill you as He filled the believers at Pentecost, you will be given the wisdom and courage to complete this work. And don't worry, Jesus promised to be with you always!

- Who at your church can be a mentor to you? Who can you mentor?

Dig Deep

In a world of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, it is easy to share our thoughts with hundreds of people instantly. Most of us update our status several times a day without much thought as to how it will be received by our friends. Occasionally, you may be asked to re-post a status in order to pass a message along to as many people as possible. Perhaps it's about ending a disease such as cancer or diabetes. Maybe it's to find a lost pet or to advertise for an upcoming event. Whatever the cause, there are always a few who are willing to participate. Imagine if we dedicated the same time and energy into making new disciples. If we share God's message to the people living in the end times, and we ask them to pass it on to everyone they know, how many people could be reached?

What can we possibly say to reach the people in our lives? It's really not as difficult as it might seem. Ellen White tells us in *Christ's Object Lessons* that "Thousands can be reached in the most simple and humble way. The most intellectual, those who are looked upon as the world's most gifted men and women, are often refreshed by the simple words of one who loves God, and who can speak of that love as naturally as the worldling speaks of the things that interest him most deeply.

Often the words well prepared and studied have but little influence. But the true, honest expression of a son or daughter of God, spoken in natural simplicity, has power to unbolt the door to hearts that have long been closed against Christ and His love.

Let the worker for Christ remember that he is not to labor in his own strength. Let him lay hold of the throne of God with faith in His power to save. Let him wrestle with God in prayer, and then work with all the facilities God has given him. The Holy Spirit is provided as his efficiency. Ministering angels will be by his side to impress hearts" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 231).

DISCIPLE IN ACTION

- Think of a way you can share Jesus with someone in your life and try putting this into practice. Contact your accountability partner during the week to talk about your experiences.
- Start a Bible study or small group with the goal of training and mentoring others who are growing in their faith. Ask your accountability partner to assist you in getting the group started.

Prayer Time:

- In your prayer time remember to ask for help and guidance from the Holy Spirit.
- Pray for the members of your church community so they will be united in sharing the Gospel message.
- Ask God to open doors and provide witnessing opportunities.

LEADER'S INFORMATION

Activity Idea

Have each person in the group take out their cell phone and write down the names of the ten people they talk to the most. If someone doesn't have a cell phone, it should be easy enough to come up with a list of names from memory. Point out that each person on the list could be considered either a mentor or someone who needs to be mentored.

Now have them look at each name individually, and write down two people that person knows, who could in turn be reached by them. When this has been done for everyone on the original list, you will have thirty names on the paper. You could repeat the exercise as many times as necessary to make the point that each one of us touches many different lives. Reiterate the fact that if we minister to those closest to us (and allow them to minister to us), they will then go out and continue the work in their own lives.

For encouragement, read *Steps to Christ* page 83:

The humblest and poorest of the disciples of Jesus can be a blessing to others. They may not realize that they are doing any special good, but by their unconscious influence they may start waves of blessing that will widen and deepen, and the blessed results they may never know until the day of final reward. They do not feel or know that they are doing anything great. They are not required to weary themselves with anxiety about success. They have only to go forward quietly, doing faithfully the work that God's providence assigns, and their life will not be in vain. Their own souls will be growing more and more into the likeness of Christ; they are workers together with God in this life and are thus fitting for the higher work and the unshadowed joy of the life to come.

Session 9: Helping Believers Build Christ-like Relationships

To help believers build Christ-like relationships, I am showing others how to:

- assess themselves, acknowledge defects of character, and invite God to remove them.
- work with God to care for themselves and live a balanced life.
- cherish, respect, and nurture family members as children of God.
- be disciplined by other believers in the body of Christ.
- resolve conflicts within the home, church, workplace, and community.

Big Idea

Being part of the body of Christ means we must build and nurture relationships with other believers and work together in unity.

Connector

Look: Romans 12:4-5, 10-13, 1 Samuel 12:1-25

Memorize: “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:4-5, NIV).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

King David sat on his throne, half-heartedly listening to the cases brought before him. His mind wandered as the complaints against neighbors seemed to go on and on. He thought about the wars waging in the nations surrounding his lands. He thought about the people God had given him to govern. He thought about his growing family, and then he thought about her – Bathsheba. She was his newest wife and she was about to give birth to her first child. Whenever he thought about her, he felt a pang of grief and regret. He had first seen her less than a year earlier. She was bathing on her roof top while her husband, Uriah the Hittite (one of David’s mighty soldiers), was off waiting out the besieged city of Rabbah. If only he had stayed with his men...

When David saw the beautiful young woman, he thought he had to have her. Even though he already had seven wives and ten concubines, he sent for her. Like a loyal subject, she came to him, and he took advantage of his power and position.

A few weeks later, Bathsheba sent word to him that she was expecting a child. David knew immediately that he was the father. After all, he was the one who had kept the troops, and her husband, away from home so long. Everyone would wonder how Bathsheba's child was conceived while Uriah was away. It wouldn't take long for people to start talking about the palace guards who were sent to her house. Surely people noticed her coming to his quarters. Maybe even her grandfather, who was one of his advisors (2 Samuel 11:3; 23:34; 1 Chron. 27:33), would start to question him.

In order to cover his sins, he tried to convince the woman's husband to go home to spend time with her, but Uriah would not go. He was a loyal, God-fearing man who did not think it was right to spend time with his wife when the other soldiers (and the Ark of the Lord) were still on the battlefield. David did not miss the subtle rebuke to himself in Uriah's refusal.

When all attempts to send the man home failed, David made arrangements to have him sent to his death on the battlefield. Sure, people were suspicious. It was a siege after all. There was no reason to send the man so close to the walls, but he was desperate. Besides, he was the King of Israel. If he wanted to take the woman as his wife, he had every right to her, didn't he?

With Uriah out of the picture, David took Bathsheba into his home and now she was days away from giving birth to their child. He should have been happy, but he was miserable.

Just then, a familiar face walked into the court room and interrupted his dark thoughts. It was his old friend, Nathan, the prophet of God. David focused all his attention on the case Nathan brought before him.

Nathan told him of a poor man who had nothing but a little ewe lamb. He loved the lamb like a child and he even fed it from his table. There was also a rich man who had great wealth and countless flocks of sheep. One day, the rich man stole the lamb from the poor man. He killed the pet and fed it to his guests.

David was irate when he heard the story. Surely the rich man could have used one of his own lambs. What a horrible crime this man had committed! "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die!" he exclaimed (2 Samuel 12:5b). That's when Nathan looked him squarely in the face and said, "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7).

David felt as if all of the wind had been knocked out of his body. He knew Nathan was referring to the crime he had committed against Uriah the Hittite. He was just a poor soldier with only one beloved wife, and David took her from him. He knew it was time to end the spiral of wrongdoing. It might have been easier to get angry at the prophet, but David knew in his heart it was time to take responsibility for what he had done. The only real solution was to admit that he had sinned. As soon as he confessed, he felt the forgiveness of God. There were still consequences to be faced, but he knew the Lord was merciful and just.

- How does the Bible show God’s mercy in this story? (See Additional Leader Information for more guidance on this discussion.)

Reflection

David’s great sin is generally looked at from the perspective of the king. We often overlook Nathan’s crucial role in the story. Try to imagine what it was like to walk into the throne room of the most famous warrior-kings of all time and tell him he was wrong. Discuss the following questions as a group.

- What thoughts do you think were going through Nathan’s mind when he stood before the king?
- Why do you think he chose to use a story to illustrate the sin to David?
- What would you do if you saw a friend doing something wrong?
- If someone sees something wrong in your life, would you want them to talk to you about it or keep it to themselves? Which would benefit you in the end?

Application

When Jesus came to earth, it was His prayer that His followers would work as one (John 17:11). We are to be like one body working together for a common goal (Romans 12:5). In order to do this successfully, we must be willing to help our fellow believers acknowledge defects of character. This is the only way true forgiveness can be acquired. Knowing this, we have to also be willing to allow others to guide and mentor us. This can at times be a sensitive issue. No one wants to point out another person’s flaws and we certainly don’t want others pointing fingers at us. But as Christians, it is crucial that we help each other grow in a loving, respectful way. If one of our brothers or sisters is sinning and we don’t do anything about it, there will be division among the believers. If we allow conflicts to divide us, we won’t be able to complete the work Jesus has given us to do as His disciples.

So what do you do if you know someone has an issue that needs to be pointed out? Go directly to the words of Jesus: “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15-17, NIV). It is important to point out here that Jesus loved pagans and tax collectors, but He did not embrace their sins.

It’s never easy to confront someone, but if it is done in a prayerful, loving, respectful way, it can help the person grow. Even if our initial instinct is to talk to our friends about the problem or to

just bury it and hope it goes away, we have to remember that biblical council was given to us in order to help us grow as disciples.

- Have you ever had to witness a fight between friends or family members? How did it make you feel?
- How can we prevent hard feelings when we “rebuke” someone else’s sin?
- How should we react if someone points out our sin?

Dig Deep

In the New Testament letters that Paul wrote to the early churches, we see several examples of conflict resolution that we can learn from. In 1 Corinthians, for example, Paul talks to the church about several issues, beginning with rumors that the church was divided and arguing among themselves. He tells them directly, “I appeal to you brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1 Corinthians 1:10, NIV). Paul wanted the new believers to respect and nurture one another as children of God. He encouraged them to resolve their disagreements and to be united. He often acknowledged his own defects of character and asked God to give him the strength to overcome and remove his own sins. In doing so, he led others by his own example.

We too can be examples to other believers. When we prayerfully assess our own character flaws and pray for God to help us remove them, we are giving a silent witness to those around us. Your friends, family, and co-workers will see the changes God makes in your life and they will long for the same peace. When we work with God to take care of ourselves and others and we strive to live a peaceful balanced life, others will be drawn to our message.

- What are some examples of conflict in the Bible? How were they resolved?

DISCIPLE IN ACTION

- Journal some of the changes you would like to see in your own life. During your prayer time, ask God to help you with these issues. Document the results.
- Think of ways you can show your friends and family members that you cherish and respect them as children of God. Contact your accountability partner during the week to talk about your experiences.
- If you have had a past grievance with someone within the church, talk to your accountability partner about the best way to resolve the issue.

Prayer Time:

- In your prayer time ask God to help you see your own defects of character and to remove them from your life.
- Pray for the members of your church community so they will be able to put aside hurt feelings and move forward in unity to spread the Gospel message.
- Ask God to help you build Christ-like relationships with others and to lead others to do the same.

LEADER'S INFORMATION

After reading the story of Nathan's rebuke in 2 Samuel 11, read Psalms 32 and 51; as a group, discuss David's repentance and forgiveness. Discuss why God sent Nathan. What might have happened if one of his friends, brothers, or sons had confronted him with his sin? Ask the group to list examples of God's mercy toward David. Here are some examples as you guide the group through the discussion:

- God allowed David to live and to continue ruling Israel.
- Even though David and Bathsheba's first son died, their second son, Solomon, was given the throne (as well as great wisdom, wealth, and respect).
- Nathan the prophet sent word after Solomon's birth that the Lord was with the child. The name Nathan gave the baby was Jedidiah, which means "loved by the Lord."
- David and Uriah's wife Bathsheba are named in the lineage of Jesus (see Matthew 1:6).

Session 10

DEBRIEFING LESSONS 6-9

Time: 90 minutes. *Try to spend approximately 15-20 minutes discussing each section below, leaving time for small group prayer and commitment at the end.*

Discipleship begins and ends with Jesus—the focal point!

Who am I? Who are you? Most importantly, who is God?

Everything, from life on earth, to our personal existence, to our daily dose of New Life starts and ends with the Creator God. Father, Son, and Spirit created us, redeemed us, and are working to rebuild us. We have one idea about ourselves and who we are. Our family has another, our friends still another, and our work or school associates yet another. But only God, who designed us, really *knows* who we are, and more than that, who we are meant to be.

In Sessions 5 through 9, we have explored the concepts of personal identity and self-esteem, God as source of all, and then how that understanding will impact our relationships inside and outside the body of Christ. We have recognized that if we truly find our identity in God, we will want that same peace and security for others, and will invest ourselves in helping others make that connection with God and their deepest, truest selves. We will seek daily to build strong relationships and to honestly and lovingly resolve conflict when it threatens to undermine either someone's self-image or the health of the group.

Here is an overview of the four Big Ideas we explored:

1. (A) True Identity is centered on God's point of view, not on that of human beings. (B) You are priceless because of the value God has placed on you.
2. The great Creator God had a purpose in creating this world, and He has a purpose for my life.
3. As Christians, we are not only committed to developing our own relationship with God, but also to helping train and mentor others in their faith.
4. Being part of the body of Christ means we must build and nurture relationships with other believers and work together in unity.

During Session 6, we looked at what it means to have a self-identity that is founded in God rather than in others' or our own opinions.

- What are some of the ways you have identified yourself in the past? Have you had a problem with low or unrealistically high self-esteem? Did these lessons help? If so, how?
- What does it mean to you to center your identity in God's view of you? What do you think He thinks of you? If you are worried about God's opinion of you, for example, if you see Him as angry or vindictive because of your failings, how does this impact your self-identity?
- Did your group try the exercise of writing descriptions of yourself or others and then trying to guess who was being described? How did it work? Why were you able or not able to recognize someone from their description?
- What are five unique things about you that make you different from another child of God?
- How does your sense of being fallen and sinful affect your sense of self? Do you feel comfortable and secure in the knowledge and experience of God's forgiveness? If not, what can you do? What do you need from your friends and group?

In Session 7, we considered with awe and wonder the living Source of all that is.

- Have you always known God created you, or did you learn this recently? Share the differences among the group, and what difference this has made in self-esteem issues.
- God not only created physical life, He has offered new spiritual life as well. What are three specific signs of new life you see in yourself? In the person sitting next to you?
- What are three things you love about your new life in Christ?
- How has He "come, seen, and conquered" in your own life? Share a story that illustrates this. Have you also shared this story with someone who is curious about God and Jesus and the spiritual life? How did he/she respond?
- What have you learned about God by looking at Jesus?
- Did you journal about things you'd like Him to conquer in your life? What has happened so far in that area? What praises and prayer requests do you have?
- Have you tried to increase your ability to reflect God in your daily life? What has changed?

- Did you experience the outpouring of God's love, and have you seen that overflow on to others? What has been the result?

In Session 8, we explored the Great Commission and how it relates to us. We learned that it covers more than just the standard definition of “witnessing,” it includes a life of unity and friendship in the body of Christ, the church.

- What are some methods of witnessing you have tried? Which ones did you like or not like, and why? Of those reasons, as you discuss with the group, try to decipher which reasons are simply because of different personality styles and gifts, and which might be actually more or less effective witnessing tools and methods. Do these things change over time and in different generations?
- The lesson spoke of ministering and being ministered to. Why are both necessary? What is the danger in seeing ourselves only as those who *give* God's love and truth, rather than also as those who need it and can receive it in many different ways? Can you find examples of Jesus being ministered to?
- The lesson mentions an accountability partner several times. Do you have one? Have the two of you experimented with different ways of ministering and being ministered to?

In Session 9, we explored the thorny and difficult issues of building relationships and resolving conflict when those relationships falter.

- This lesson talked about developing relationships. This could take two forms: developing relationships within the church, centered around witnessing and mission, and building relationships outside the church, for the purpose of spreading God's love. What are some of the differences, and why do you think this is important?
- What is the difference and interrelationship between witnessing and mentoring? Are both important? Why?
- Discuss the difference between the role of a prophet like Nathan or an apostle or church leader like Paul in confronting sin, and the role of a single person who needs to talk to a friend about something that's wrong. Do you think we are ever called to confront sin in another, even if it has no immediate bearing on our own relationship?
- For example, if Shari has hurt Lisa's feelings, it is certainly up to Shari and Lisa to get together and try to heal this relationship. Lisa may have to go to Shari and prayerfully, tactfully tell her the truth: “When you said _____, I felt _____, because I thought _____.” But if Shari sees that Lisa is going out with a man she thinks is an unhealthy influence on Lisa's life, then what are her responsibilities? What if they see someone in the church who is not a personal friend, but who is doing something that they see as hurtful to the congregation as a whole? Then what are their responsibilities?

- When was the last time someone pointed out a sin to you? What was your reaction? Why? What would you do differently? What do you wish the other person had done differently?

To sum up:

What do you see as the single most important factor in building healthy, whole relationships, both with God and with each other?

SERIES THREE

Sessions 11-15

SESSION 11A: DEVELOPING CHRIST CENTERED FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS BY RON FLOWERS

SESSION 11B: UNDERSTANDING GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY BY RON FLOWERS

SESSION 12: UNDERSTANDING THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE HUMAN FALL BY PHILIP ORESO

SESSION 13: RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF OTHERS GLOBALLY BY KERRYAN FRANCIS

SESSION 14: HELPING BELIEVERS STUDY AND OBEY GOD'S WORD BY STEVE THOMAS AND JULIAN THOMPSON

SESSION 15: DEBRIEFING SESSION BY DEBBONNAIRE KOVACS

Session 11a: Developing Christ-centered Family Relationships

To develop Christ-centered family relationships, I am:

- recognizing that my commitment to Christ defines every human relationship.
- contributing, supporting and extending unconditional love to those within my family circle.
- holding as sacred my family commitments and responsibilities to parents, siblings, as well as the extended family.
- practicing hospitality, welcoming into my family or home those whom God brings to my attention.

Big Idea

God made us social beings and placed us in families. He has provided through Christ the divine resources to help us live in unity and harmony.

Connector

Look: Gen. 1:26; 2:22-25; Deut. 6:4; Ps. 127:1; Eph. 2:14-22; 5:21-6:4; 1 John 2:9-11; 4:8, 16

Memorize: “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground’” (Gen. 1:26).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

A Rabbi once asked his students, “How can we determine the hour of dawn, when the night ends and the day begins?”

One student suggested, “Is it when you can distinguish between a dog and a sheep in the distance?”

“No,” the Rabbi answered.

“Is it when you can distinguish between a fig tree and a grapevine?” asked a second student.

“No,” said the Rabbi.

“Please tell us the answer then,” urged the students.

Said the wise teacher, “It is when you have enough light to look human beings in the face and recognize them as your brothers and sisters. Until then the darkness is still with us” (Adapted from Henri Nouwen, “Adam's Peace,” *Signs of the Times*, May, 1989).

The rabbi was giving his students important lessons about human relationships—that ultimately we as human beings are all one family and how we relate to one another is profoundly

significant. We cannot tell if the rabbi had ever read the letter of 1 John, but his teaching illustrates very well the truth found there (cf. 1 John 2:9-11).

Designed for Relationships

We have been created in the image of a relational God, who is revealed in Scripture as three persons in close communion with each other—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (cf. Matt. 3:16, 17). Human beings bear within them the need and capacity for social connection, for intimate relationships. The first human being, fresh from the creative fingers of God, with a Creator to worship, a beautiful world to behold and countless creatures to enjoy, nevertheless sought for special human companionship. His aloneness was “not good” (Gen. 2:18), so God created a woman and brought her to the man in marriage, with the intention that they would be close companions and partners, united as “one flesh” (Gen. 2:22-25). With marriage as its centerpiece, the family is the Creator’s primary provision for the intimate relationships for which the human heart yearns.

Let the Lord Build the House

Sin with its selfishness disrupted the harmonious family relationships that God had created. Adam and Eve’s sin toward God and conflict with each other was followed by the ripping apart of their family by envy, jealousy, and the murder of one son by the other (Gen. 3, 4). All families inherit their legacy: “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Nevertheless, unity, harmony, and peace are still God’s design for human relationships, especially in the close confines of home and family (cf. Psalm 133:1; Eph. 4:3; 5:21-6:4). We are called to declare the glory of God, to express in our daily lives the image of our Maker, the triune God who is One (Deut. 6:4) and who is Love (1 John 4:8, 16).

Scripture contends that it is vanity to attempt to build a house without engaging the Lord as the Builder (Ps. 127:1). God must be included in our home and family relationships so that we can have His blessings of love, unity, harmony, and peace among us. Scripture guides us in knowing how to fashion relationships according to the divine blueprint.

Application

1. How is Christ the key to unity in the family and church?
2. What does Christ’s making “one” out of “two” (Eph. 2:14) mean to families?

Building on Christ as the foundation. Christ is God’s answer to sin and the disruption to family life that sin causes. Through His death on the cross, Christ reconnects the divine-human relationship and removes the barriers that separate people from each other (2 Cor. 5:18-21; Eph. 2:14-22). “To create out of the two a single new humanity in himself, thereby making peace” (Eph. 2:15 NEB) is language that applies equally to other divisions among people, including those that occur in families. The news that God has dealt with human brokenness through Christ is good news that helps couples to truly know “one flesh” unity in marriage and enables family members to be reconciled when they have been wounded by conflicts. Since God has done this, what is needed now is for individual family members to attach themselves to Christ through faith and through Him to heal the breaches in their relationships.

Becoming one through love. Unity among His followers was on Jesus’ mind when He prayed to His Father on the eve of His crucifixion (John 17:21-26). He pleads “that the love you have for me may be in them” (vs. 26). *Agape* is the biblical word for God’s love used in this prayer. Experiencing this *agape* love is essential to unity. It differs from human love in that it is *unconditional* while human love is *conditional*; it is *self-giving* rather than *self-serving*, and it is

unchangeable, whereas human love is *changeable*, fickle and unreliable. God’s love is not natural to the sinful human heart (John 5:42). It comes into the believer’s life as Jesus dwells there by His Spirit (Rom. 5:5; 8:9, 11).

- What are the characteristics of *agape* love that give it such power to draw individuals together?

Agape love has sometimes been portrayed as stoic and dispassionate. However, it is an encompassing word that includes *philos*, the love of friends for each other. In the movie “Home for the Holidays,” several adult siblings return home to be with their parents for American Thanksgiving. Their dysfunctional relationships are soon on display and conflicts erupt. One daughter shouts to the others, “We’re family; we don’t have to like each other.” The scriptural view, however, is that Christians—whether at home or at church—should *like* each other and be *friends*. Jesus spoke of His disciples as “my friends” (John 15:14). Paul and Peter encourage believers to love each other as friends: with the “warmth of mutual affection” (Rom. 12:10 NEB); with “brotherly love” (1 Pet. 1:22). The truth is that people who are cold seek warmth and huddle together wherever it is warm. Christian homes and congregations should be settings where people are drawn together by all the affection, tenderness and caring of a family where people are truly fond of one another.

Reflection

In what way does mutual submission express the gospel remedy for the discord, disunity, and distance that sin has brought into families? Discuss the steps necessary to introduce or reinforce this principle in your home.

Submitting to one another. Paul counsels Christian believers to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21). The word “submit” means to place oneself humbly before another person on the basis of voluntary choice. This unique principle began with Christ (Matt. 20:26-28; John 13:4, 5; Phil. 2:5-8) and characterizes all those who are filled with His Spirit (Eph. 5:18). “Reverence for Christ” is what motivates people to submit in this way (Eph. 5:21 NIV). Mutuality in self-giving was, and still is, a revolutionary Christian teaching about social relationships—all are one in Christ. There are no exceptions.

The proving ground of mutual submission is in the home. If this principle is effective there, it will make a dramatic difference in the church. Paul moves immediately from the introduction of the principle of mutual submission to discuss its application in families. Three pairs of relationships are addressed in Eph. 5:22-6:9—the most common, yet most unequal relationships in the society. The intent is not to reinforce an existing social dominance by one over another, but to show how the faith culture of Christ operates when there is a radically different voluntary submission of believers to one another in love. These directives must have astonished the believers of the first century. They leveled the ground around the cross and opened the way for true oneness to be experienced in relationships.

The gift of forgiveness. At the heart of Christianity is an incredibly wonderful concept—*forgiveness*. It is God’s gift to families when hearts and relationships have been wounded. Scripture presents forgiveness as both *unconditional* and *conditional*. Through the cross of Christ, unconditional forgiveness is offered, even before the offenders ask for it (Luke 23:34; cf. Acts 5:31; 13:38; 26:18). By His grace God made a fountain that has washed us and invites us to come, repent, and be clean (compare Rom. 2:4). As humans we can forgive unconditionally when we choose to let go of the destructive malice of revenge. We remind our wounded hearts that Christ has atoned for all sin, ours against God and that of others against us. We then pass forgiveness on. The hurt one is now freed within, whether or not the offender asks for

forgiveness. It does not, however, free the wrongdoer from responsibility, from the need to repent, or from all the consequences of the abusive behavior.

Conditional forgiveness is presented in Scripture as forgiveness with an “if” that represents human choice to receive or not the unconditional forgiveness of another: 1 John 1:9; (on the part of God); Luke 17:3, 4 (on the part of humans with one another). If unconditional forgiveness is ultimately to be effective in restoring relationships, there must be repentance on the part of the wrongdoer. Recognizable earmarks of true repentance include: stopping the offending behavior, giving a sincere apology, taking responsibility for the behavior and damage done, showing care for the pain of the wronged one, making restitution in every way possible, and making changes to protect against re-occurrence.

Is reconciliation a condition of forgiveness?

Reconciliation—full restoration of the relationship—is not synonymous with forgiveness. Forgiveness can occur and there be no reconciliation, but real reconciliation can certainly not occur without forgiveness, especially the conditional aspect of forgiveness, being addressed. The gateway to the possibility of reconciliation is true repentance on the part of the wrongdoer with all the earmarks mentioned above. Without true repentance, reconciliation is not a safe course to be considered.

At best, reconciliation may take a very long time, if it is possible at all. Sometimes, and we see this often in cases of abuse and violence, even repentance may not be enough to make reconciliation possible. The destruction wreaked in the relationship is so devastating as to leave no building blocks for restoration. All that can be done is to grieve the lost relationship and minister God’s healing grace to the survivors. For reconciliation to take place there must be a desire and re-commitment on the part of both to begin again to rebuild love and trust. When such a desire is present, the reconciliation process may be accomplished over time through improved communication, the processing of the needs and feelings of all concerned, making changes in destructive relational patterns, and the resolution of conflicts and differences in ways that meet the needs of everyone. Through forgiveness, the wounded can find *personal* healing, but *relational* healing is a delicate process involving not only forgiveness, but also rebuilding trust.

Lighthouses—The wonder of our faith is the good news that God knows all about us, yet loves us “even when we were sinners” (Rom. 5: 8). He sympathizes with our weaknesses and is full of compassion and longsuffering. Knowing Him, we extend the same loving courtesy to others. We grow to love one another as Christ has loved us (John 13:34). Through our family relationships, God wants to show His love to the world. “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). As families learn to live together according to the Word of God, His grace is diffused to all whose lives they touch, winsomely drawing others to Jesus.

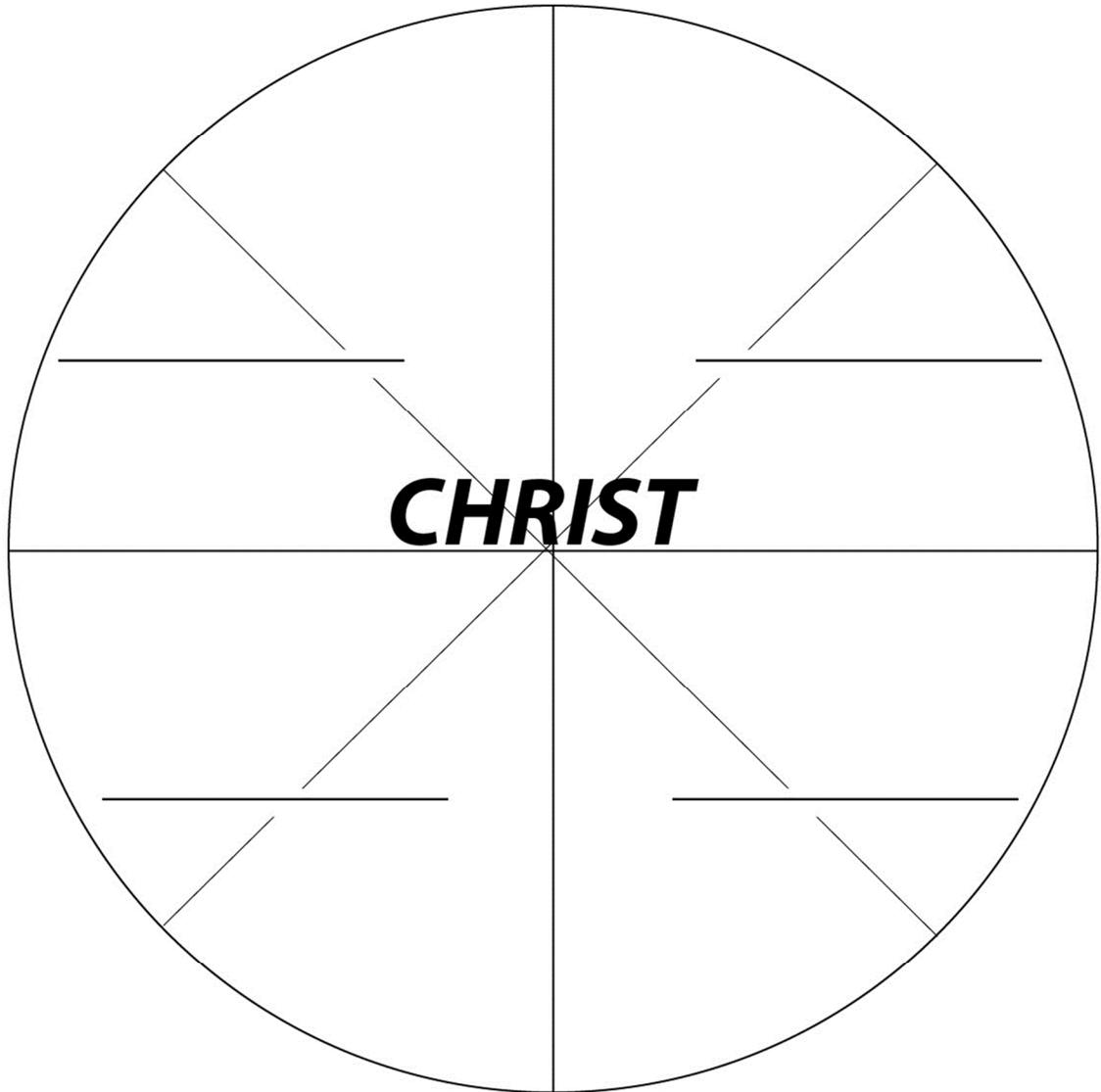
- Why is it important for Christians to like each other?
- How can we like other Christians who seem so very different from us?

Application

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. Try placing your name where the word “love” appears. Invite Jesus to bring these qualities of *agape* love into your life by His Spirit. Discuss with others in your group the insights you received.

DISCIPLE IN ACTION

Enlarge the following diagram to show the relationships in your family as spokes on a wheel with Christ as the hub. The lines connecting family members all pass through Christ. Write your names and those of others in your family or church on the blanks in the circle. How does Christ at the center make a difference in your relationship with the others? What changes in behavior are likely to result when we understand that Christ stands between us and family members as our Mediator? What if only one moves closer to Him?



LEADER'S INFORMATION

Confessional Leadership

It can be daunting to lead a discussion on family themes. Here, as perhaps with no other topic, a sub-text is attached to what the leader says. The class hears not only what the leader says, but what each one lives. This reality has led many a leader, convicted that his or her own home falls short of the ideal, to decline to open the subject of family relationships with others, or to avoid bringing up certain topics with which the leader may or may not be comfortable. A subtle message may thus be conveyed that God has to do only with happy homes. Yet Jesus declared that those who are whole do not need a physician, but rather those who are sick. Jesus specializes in imperfect people and imperfect homes. Thus, if leaders can be authentic, can convey that in this they walk with the youth and experience family as they do, that they strive to bring their families to a perfect Savior rather than striving to be perfect without Him, group members grasp hope and strength. The leader becomes an example of one who is experiencing grace and the gospel in the context of family living. Youth go away with a clearer vision of how the Christian message can make a difference in their family relationships.

Quotations:

1. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 37: "The first work of Christians is to be united in the family. . . . The more closely the members of a family are united in their work in the home, the more uplifting and helpful will be the influence that father and mother and sons and daughters will exert outside the home."
2. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 99: "The divine love emanating from Christ never destroys human love, but includes it. By it human love is refined and purified, elevated and ennobled. Human love can never bear its precious fruit until it is united with the divine nature and trained to grow heavenward. Jesus wants to see happy marriages, happy firesides."
3. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 179: "The cause of division and discord in families and in the church is separation from Christ. To come near to Christ is to come near to one another. The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not a superhuman effort to overcome difficulties--though there will be much of this to do—but union with Christ."
4. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 179: "Picture a large circle, from the edge of which are many lines all running to the center. The nearer these lines approach the center, the nearer they are to one another. . . . The closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall be to one another."

Session 11b: Understanding God’s Plan for Marriage and Sexuality

To commit to developing and maintaining sexual purity, I am:

- recognizing that my commitment to Christ takes priority over every human relationship.
- holding as sacred my commitments and responsibilities to God, spouse, children, and myself.
- passing on the Christian faith to my children through both teaching and living an authentic Christian life.
- creating moral/sexual boundaries.
- committing to live by biblical standards of sexual morality.

Big Idea

Though in our time sexuality has become uncoupled from marriage, these two are closely intertwined in the biblical value system. As God’s gift of sexuality is more fully understood against the backdrop of His plan for marriage, both singles and marrieds will be able to experience greater personal and relational fulfillment.

Connector

Look: Gen. 1:26-28, 31; 2:18-25; Prov. 5:3-20; Mal. 2:14; Matt. 19:4-6; 1 Cor. 7:3-5; Eph. 5:21-32; Heb. 13:4

Memorize: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground’” (Gen. 1:28).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

A Very Good Day

Creation of humankind as sexual beings. Day six of creation week was a very good day! Then, God created humankind. They were fashioned as sexual beings—male and female. In Genesis 1, God addresses the new humans as coregents over the earth and charges them to use the reproductive capacity of their sexuality to bear children (Gen. 1:26-28). Genesis 2 focuses more particularly on the details of the creation of male and female, including the divine assessment that the absence of a suitable companion for Adam was “not good.” The woman, the “helper corresponding to him,” is created from Adam’s flesh. Rapturous joy bursts forth from the man as he recognizes himself for the first time as “man” and the new being as “woman,” a counterpart and companion for him (Gen. 2:18-25).

Creation of marriage as an institution. On this sixth day, God also institutes marriage as the centerpiece of the family (Gen. 2:23-25). Beginning with Genesis, God’s design for marriage is presented as a lifelong, exclusive union between a male and a female with three essential elements: 1) leaving father and mother; 2) being joined to each other; and 3) becoming one flesh. “Leaving” means that a distinct new family unit is created, publicly recognized by the couple’s families, the community of faith, and the society at large. “Being joined” speaks of a mutual commitment made by the couple that is expressed in a formal marriage covenant. “One flesh” entails their sexual union as well as the process of growth in intimacy, unity, and fulfillment as their two lives converge emotionally and spiritually. At day’s end comes the evaluation: “God saw all that he had made, and it was *very good*” (Gen. 1:31, emphasis supplied).

A positive attitude toward sexuality. The report of this day as being “very good”—when humans were created with their sexual characteristics—helps with a problem that frequently handicaps the discussion of sexuality in Christian circles, i.e., *dualism*—a philosophical view that the characteristics of the physical body are unholy and therefore detrimental to the flourishing of the spirit, which is holy and seen as somehow separate from the body. This idea, traceable to the Greek Hellenistic period, infiltrated both Jewish and Christian thinking with negative attitudes toward the human body and sexuality. Wherever this view is still prevalent, it hampers a wholesome approach to the topic of sexuality.

The Bible, however, presents a wholistic (holistic) view of human beings with no dichotomy between body and spirit. A person is a “living being,” a whole entity with “body” and “breath of life” (Gen. 2:7). Worship for the Psalmist, for example, involves the totality of one’s being (Ps. 63:1; 84:2). The wise man encourages his son to freely enjoy sexual delights with his wife (Prov. 5: 18, 19). A whole Bible book, the Song of Solomon, unashamedly presents the sexual attraction and passion that draws a man and woman to each other and blossoms within their married love. In the New Testament, the total person is the object of Christian sanctification; all that one is and has is set apart for the holy purposes God intended (1 Thess. 5:23). “Glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19, 20).

To Marry or not to Marry

For men and women to marry is God’s general plan for humankind (Gen. 2:18, 20-24), though some individuals are specifically called, like Jeremiah, to live singly (Jer. 16:1-9). God does not condemn people for not marrying. Christian believers have the freedom to marry or not. Many individuals do not marry and the reasons are varied. The apostle Paul, for example, chose to live as an unmarried man for the sake of involvement in the mission of spreading the gospel, an especially arduous assignment in his time, unbefitting family life (1 Cor. 7:8). For still others, circumstances dictate their choices, such as a personal health or medical condition, the fact that they may be needed more to care for other family members, or the unavailability of suitable Christian partners (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14). The fellowship of the Church, the household of God, is available to all regardless of their state as single or married.

Marriage and sexuality. Sexuality and marriage are especially intertwined in the biblical value system, and though some by choice or circumstances may face adult life alone, the privilege of sexual intimacy is reserved only for marriage. The Genesis blueprint for marriage was reaffirmed by Jesus (Matt. 19:4-6) and upheld by the apostles. “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (Heb. 13:4).

A lifelong union of one male and one female is specifically intended in the divine blueprint, with married couples expected to adhere to the standard of sexual faithfulness to each other (Ex.

20:14, 17; Matt. 5:27, 28; 1 Cor. 6:15-19; Heb. 13:4). Marriage is a covenant relationship, based on promises made to each other before God (cf. Mal. 2:14).

Clearly, sexual intimacy in marriage has a procreative function (Gen. 1:28). A loving home, where a husband and wife have made a covenant with each other in marriage, is the divinely ordained setting for bearing and rearing children. The procreative mandate to our first parents notwithstanding, Scripture never presents procreation as an obligation of every couple in order to please God. Divine revelation does place a high value on children and expresses the joy to be found in parenting (Matt 19:14; Ps 127:3), but the decision to bear children should be intentional, based on factors such as the ability to provide for them (1 Tim 5:8), the well-being of the mother (3 John 2; 1 Cor. 6:19; Phil 2:4; Eph 5:25), and the circumstances into which children will be born (Matt 24:19). We are stewards of God's creation and of our children. Parenting is a special form of stewardship. We must look beyond our own happiness and desires to consider the needs of others (Phil 2:4).¹

Sexual intimacy, however, serves a unifying purpose needed throughout marriage, apart from conceiving children. "One flesh" in the creation account signals this unity and Paul alludes to the mystery of it (Gen. 2: 24, 25; Eph. 5:32). The unbounded delights of sexual love-making in marriage are presented in the Song of Solomon without reference to bearing children. The wise man counsels his son in Proverbs 5 to be satisfied and captivated "always" by the sexual love of his wife (Prov. 5:19). In Paul's writings, we find that, since each partner's body belongs to the other, loving mutuality is to characterize the sexual relationship of husbands and wives who follow Christ. Decisions about their sexual experience are made together; neither one should seek to deny sexual privileges to the other (1 Cor. 7:3-5). The scriptural use of "the wife of your youth" (Prov. 5:18; Mal. 2:14, 15) reinforces the biblical value that marriage is lifelong and shows further that sexual intimacy is to be savored into old age. Sexual faithfulness to a married partner may require sexual abstinence in cases of protracted illness or disability. Separation caused by work or travel especially requires commitment to fidelity. Not that abstinence for marrieds—any more than for singles—is a small thing, but Christian couples make the sacrifice. Extremity serves only to highlight what they have come to know about the mystery of love in marriage—sex is for marriage and not marriage for sex. (See also *"Birth Control: A Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Consensus."* <http://adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat44.html>. The statement addresses the ethical issues that arise from the concurrence in marriage of the unifying and procreative purposes of sexuality. It offers guidance regarding appropriate methods of birth control.)

This commitment of loyalty and exclusivity to one partner in a marriage covenant is used in Scripture to illustrate the covenant faithfulness of God, the heavenly Husband, for His Bride (Is. 54:5; 62:5; Mark 2:19, 20). No wonder the Scripture declares that God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16), even though for the hardness of human hearts it was permitted (Deut. 24:1ff; Matt. 19:8). Each marriage has the potential to bear witness to the power of God working in human hearts to bring the differentness of a man and a woman together in a profound oneness. Along with all the other heartaches and complications it brings into the lives of former partners and their children, divorce mutes that witness.

Safeguarding the Creator's Gift

Like a precious gem destined for a royal crown, human sexuality finds its ultimate showcase in heterosexual marriage. God had a special purpose in creating humankind as male and female (Gen. 1:16-18). While each bear His image, the joining of gender opposites in the "one flesh" of marriage reflects the unity within the Godhead in a special way. It also provides for procreation of a new life, an original human expression of the divine image. Scripture therefore places off limits all uses of the human sexual powers that would defeat or pose as a counterfeit to His divine purpose.

Sexual intimacy with a person who is not one's spouse or is the spouse of another is immoral (Ex. 20:14, 17; Heb. 13:14). The command bans singles from sexually intimacy with a married man or woman. Joseph knew this moral boundary: "How . . . could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God (Gen. 39:9)?"

Sexual intercourse between members of the same sex is denounced (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; cf. Rom. 1:26, 27; 1 Cor. 6:9). A variety of aberrant sexual behaviors, including bestiality and sexual relationships between males and females who are close family relatives, are prohibited (cf. Lev. 18, 20). The New Testament views the bodies of Christians as redeemed by Christ and therefore His property. Since they belong to the Lord, believers' bodies are not meant for sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:13).

God speaks about premarital sex. Sexual characteristics, present in girls and boys from birth, become pronounced at the time of puberty. Biologically, the sexual organs mature well ahead of the time when emotionally and socially—not to mention educationally or economically—youth can manage the momentous choices of adult life. Sexual instincts are real and they are powerful. Knowing well the realities of human development, Scripture nevertheless urges upon youth its value that sexual intimacy is a privilege of marriage.

A bountiful fountain. Counseling the unmarried to wait for marriage and the married to be faithful, Proverbs 5:3-20 presents the unfavorable comparison between love for the "right" woman (sexual bonding and intercourse within marriage) and love for the "wrong" woman (sexual bonding and intercourse outside marriage). The advice of the wise man is that the godly unmarried individual should *reserve* and, if married, should *preserve* his or her deepest affection and sexual intimacy for marriage. The powerful attraction of illicit love must be weighed against its life-threatening consequences. Addressing men specifically, Proverbs uses the imagery of water as a delicate symbol of sexuality. The pleasure and satisfaction of a bountiful fountain springing from committed married love is contrasted with waste water soiling the streets through unfaithfulness. Casual sexual liaisons lack commitment and fall far short of true intimacy. Material, physical, and emotional resources are squandered and regret results in old age. Most importantly, one must answer to God for the choices made in life.

A "door" or a "wall"? We find God's plan for premarital sexual abstinence also in the Song of Solomon. A poetic flashback in Song of Sol. 8:8-10 has the bride (Shulamith) reflecting on her brothers' concern for her as a little girl. How will she handle puberty, they wonder? They use the metaphor of a "wall" to speak of chaste behavior and the metaphor of a "door" to speak of sexual promiscuity. If she is a *wall*, that is, if she protects her virginity, they will reward her. But if she is a *door*, allowing easy access to herself, they will have to "enclose" ("guard" or "constrict") her until she is married. Reflecting on this and speaking as an adult, Shulamith strongly declares the values and commitment by which she has lived. "I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers" (NIV). "Dear brothers, I'm a walled-in virgin still, but my breasts are full" (The Message). "Thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment" (NIV). The verse expresses the joy of coming to marriage *whole*, as a virgin. "Contentment" is from the Hebrew *shalom*, often translated "peace," but with a root meaning of "wholeness."

Elsewhere, the Song further supports premarital chastity. Solomon declares on their wedding night, "You are a *garden locked up*; you are a *spring enclosed*, a *sealed fountain* (Song of Sol. 4:12 NIV, emphasis supplied). Commentators agree that these symbols describe her virginity. Also, in several asides to the "daughters of Jerusalem," a poetic device of an imaginary group of young women that allows her inner thoughts as a young bride to be expressed, Shulamith advises, "Do not awaken love until its time" (2:7; 8:4). Several versions translate this similarly to: "Do not stir up or awaken love until the appropriate time" (Holman Christian Standard Bible). The comment is made following sexual love play, as if Shulamith would warn against such a level of intimate sexual expression and lovemaking outside the covenant of marriage.

Singleness and sexuality. As challenging as waiting for marriage can be for youth amid the flush of adolescence, with a decisive focus on being a “wall,” and with reliance on God’s power, it is doable. Delay until marriage is one thing. But what of those singles whose waiting has gone on interminably? While some seem more comfortable with being adult, single, and celibate, others know the feeling of Adam whose aloneness was declared by God “not good.” Well into adulthood they long for the blessing of a sexual partner and for the experience of marriage, or perhaps to marry again after being widowed or divorced. They struggle through long and lonely nights with tears. All of the sexual energy and desire that is part of being an adult male or female does not dissipate just because a suitable partner cannot be found. What does God have in mind for such as these?

The reality is that some Christians who want to marry will never know the joy of physical and emotional sexual satisfaction in the arms of a marriage partner. The biblical emphasis on sexuality as something that can be fulfilled only in marriage can result in an unhealthy bias in Christian communities that leaves many Christian singles feeling second-class at best and at worst marginalized or alienated. Further, advice and suggestions from those who are married can often be well-meant but misguided and hurtful. The church is at its best when it facilitates ministry to one another without bias and prejudice, when all are accepted equally as members of the body of Christ, and when a lot of honest listening occurs. We must learn to “rejoice with those who rejoice” and “mourn with those who mourn” (Rom. 12:15). Loss must be grieved, hopefully with the support of loving fellow believers, before any resolution can come.

In recent years, ministry for singles has developed and much thoughtful, reflective writing has been done by Christian singles on the topic of sexuality. A simple Internet search for works on Christian singleness will reveal a plethora of resources that can be helpful. The best among these have grasped the divine plan for sexuality in marriage, but understand as well that sexuality is something much bigger, that sexuality shapes our lives in many ways, creating the distinctive physical and emotional components of manhood and womanhood, influencing a person’s capacity to give and receive affection and to connect with others in friendship. Importantly, they have found healthy ways to resolve sexual longing in the awareness that happiness and satisfaction are ultimately not defined by the presence or absence of a mate, but by one’s relationship with God.

Submitting Our Sexuality to God

The reality of sin in human nature is universal. Sin ignores God’s stated will for human sexuality and pursues another agenda of personal, selfish desire. Furthermore, Satan exploits the weakness of our nature.

The good news is that God has smiled upon the human family in the person of His Son and has reconciled the world to Himself. Jesus Christ has triumphed over sin. Satan is an enemy who has been defeated. In Jesus Christ, God has bound Himself to humanity with a tie of love that can never be broken except by human choice. He has given us His Holy Spirit to comfort us and strengthen us for living for Him.

God forgives those who repent of sin (1 John 1:9). The gospel enables individuals, who formerly engaged in promiscuity and sinful sexual activity, to be part of the fellowship of believers (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11). God feels human pain and graciously comforts and extends His keeping power (2 Cor. 1:3, 4; 12:9; Jude 24).

When the gospel rings clear, we create the best likelihood that people will be drawn to Jesus and find hope and peace and joy in the assurance of salvation that is theirs in Him if they will only unclasp their hands to receive it. It is only when we submit our sexuality to God that the call

to living holy sexually makes sense. The gospel and the gospel alone is the most powerful motivator for sexual purity. It is a call to which those who have experienced grace will respond.

Summary

The divine will is evident again and again in the Word of God that the precious bestowment of human sexuality is to be sacredly guarded. Its ultimate emotional and physical display is in heterosexual marriage. Our age, however, is one that has uncoupled sexuality from marriage. Greater emphasis on individualism and sexual freedom, a decline in the number of couples who marry and stay married, along with social acceptance of alternative sexual practices constitute a cacophony of voices that threaten to shout down the biblical view as antiquated. Youth today stand at the crossroads. We who know that old does not necessarily mean old-fashioned must make sure that the biblical view on sexuality and marriage is discernible, legible to be read in words, and visible to be seen in lives. Then we must appeal with Jeremiah: "This is what the LORD says: 'Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls'" (Jer. 6:16).

REFLECTION

Think Over

1. In what ways does Scripture help us to become more comfortable with the idea that male and female sexuality is good?
2. What is it that makes marriage such a compelling metaphor for intimacy with God?
3. Why is it important to guard God's creation design for sexuality?
4. How does the picture of God as the heavenly husband inspire and inform our human marital covenants?
5. What should be the attitude of Christians to fellow believers who are experiencing marital difficulty or have divorced?

APPLICATION

In what ways has this study heightened your awareness of competing views about sexuality? What are the strengths of the biblical view that sexuality and marriage are inextricably intertwined? What are the challenges to this view today? List one or two areas where you would like to deepen your study of the biblical view of sexuality. Discuss your conclusions with others in your group.

DISCIPLE IN ACTION

Christians have a loving Creator to thank for the special gifts of sexuality and marriage He gave to the human family.

Married couples: Express thanks to God for your spouse. Think of a special romantic way—a new perfume, a candlelight dinner, a CD of romantic music, a get-away for the two of you—in which you can affirm the gift of sexuality that you share.

Youth: Express thanks to God for couples that model sexuality in a healthy way. Then show appreciation to a married couple for the way they portray marriage. Mention some specific loving gestures or actions they incorporate in their relationship that you consider a model for how you would like to relate to your future married partner.

Adult singles: Express thanks to God for the experiences of married love on the human level that have enabled you to glimpse the depth of God’s love as a divine husband to His bride, the church. Then take time to tangibly express feelings of closeness that you experience with a good friend, with family members, or with fellow believers at church. You might also try writing a love letter to God.

LEADER’S INFORMATION

Balancing Openness with Discretion

One of the greatest gifts parents and leaders can give youth is the willingness to discuss sexual subjects. Raising the topic, though, can be a frightening task. Not many adults feel comfortable doing it. However, the greatest enemy of sexual wholeness may well be silence about it. It is never too late to teach children and youth about healthy sexuality because our learning on this topic is lifelong.

Our own sexual history, sexual traumas experienced in the past, or sexual addictions that may afflict us may contribute to our discomfort. Personal reflection, along with healthy dialogue with a spouse, counselor, pastor, or friend may contribute to healing and a greater level of comfort with our own sexuality. Many Christian books (see the brief bibliography) are now available that can provide valuable aids to help parents and leaders become more intelligent about, and at ease with the topic.

At the same time as we endeavor to be more open about the topic of sexuality, we must also have appropriate sensitivity and respect. Jesting, joking, and treating the subject casually or with street language do not befit this special gift of God to His children. Also, discretion must be used in choosing what to share out of one’s personal stories. Openness toward the topic does not mean full disclosure of one’s sexual experience.

Tips for discussing sexuality with youth:

- Discuss choices and options, which are easier for adolescents, rather than “do’s” and “don’ts.”
- Keep the focus of the discussion on processing the teen’s feelings, attitudes, and beliefs rather than your own.
- Ask questions that lead to reflection: “How do you feel when you see that?” “What do you and your friends think that means?” “Have you had a chance to talk this over with others?”
- Spring-board into conversation from magazine articles or television reports, such as date-rape, sexual harassment, and abuse.

- Affirm adolescents often for what they are doing well in handling issues of sexuality.
- Confront problematic behavior positively, avoiding over-reaction: “It’s normal for you to be curious about sex. I would like to talk with you about what women/men are really like and what healthy sexuality means to them.” “I know what it’s like to be attracted to those kinds of videos. It’s pretty normal. I’d like to share some things about sexuality that the videos don’t always tell you.”

Quotations:

1. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 340, 341: “Jesus pointed His hearers back to the marriage institution as ordained at creation. . . . Then marriage and the Sabbath had their origin, twin institutions for the glory of God in the benefit of humanity.”
2. Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 64: “Like every other one of God’s good gifts entrusted to the keeping of humanity, marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty.”
3. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 176: “True love is a high and holy principle, altogether different in character from that love which is awakened by impulse and which suddenly dies when severely tested. It is by faithfulness to duty in the parental home that the youth are to prepare themselves for homes of their own. Let them here practice self-denial and manifest kindness, courtesy, and Christian sympathy. Thus love will be kept warm in the heart, and he who goes out from such a household to stand at the head of a family of his own will know how to promote the happiness of her whom he has chosen as a companion for life. Marriage, instead of being the end of love, will be only its beginning.”
4. Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, pp. 103, 104: “The children need to be instructed in regard to their own bodies. There are but few youth who have any definite knowledge of the mysteries of human life. They know but little about the living machinery. Says David, ‘I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made’. . . . Continue to teach your children in regard to their own bodies, and how to take care of them. Recklessness in regard to bodily health tends to recklessness in moral character.”

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Session 12: Understanding the Consequences of the Human Fall

To understand the consequences of the human fall from God’s original plan, I am learning that:

- the great controversy between God and Satan originated in heaven.
- because of the disobedience of the first human beings, I have a will to sin and a sinful nature.
- the Ten Commandment law of God expresses the character of God and gives the standard for human conduct.
- the natural world no longer reflects the perfection in which God created it.
- the Bible is needed to interpret the natural world as an expression of the character of God.

Big Idea

The consequences of the human fall and the great controversy at large help you to understand God’s love for you.

Connector

Look: Prov. 16:18; Matt 5:17-19

Memorize: “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov.16:18 NIV).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

God’s character and purpose in His law

In your own words, how can you describe God? Many communities of people the world over have given God different names and descriptions depending on how much importance they attach to Him. One common phrase we usually hear about God is, “God is good all the time; all the time God is good.” The main reason why God is good to you and me all the time is because His love is boundless. Period. He gives it in equal measure to all His children, devoid of any limitation.

The quality of love is deeply entrenched in the character of God since the beginning of time. When Lucifer and other angels rebelled against Him in heaven, God had the power to destroy them completely at one go. However, as a compassionate Savior, He chose the law of love as the foundation of His government. He sought through His mercy to draw back the rebels from the abyss of ruin into which they were about to plunge. But the rebels resisted His mercy until their cup was full to the brim, and they had to pay the price.

In the same way, we sometimes resist God's mercy and continue to sin until we are totally lost into it. However, God does not want us to perish in sin. He remains loving to us, even as He remained loving to the rebels in heaven. Each one of us is a special child of God and His love and care are upon us at all times. Owing to the sinful nature we inherited from our first parents (Adam and Eve), we are prone to sin.

It is for this reason that God has given us His law expressed in the Bible, to serve as the mirror through which we look into our spiritual and moral conduct. God changes people through His word in the Bible. We need to embrace this change because we live in a world that no longer reflects the perfection in which God created it.

Share: What do you think is the best way to mend the rift caused by sin between God and humankind?

Dig Deep

The "great controversy" is the name we have given to the greatest battle of all time—the battle between good and evil, light and darkness, God and Satan. It is what draws the dividing line between the character of God and that of Satan. The Bible states that the rebellion started in heaven with one archangel filled with pride and indulgence in self-exaltation. Before then, the heavenly community was in perfect harmony. God the Creator commanded the highest authority. Christ was second in command and glory. Lucifer was the leader of all the angels.

"Little by little Lucifer came to indulge the desire for self-exaltation ... Instead of seeking to make God supreme in the affections and allegiance of all created beings, it was his endeavor to secure their service and loyalty to himself. And coveting the glory with which the infinite Father had invested His Son, this prince of angels aspired to power that was the prerogative of Christ alone" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 35).

The selfish desire to be equal to God was the driving force behind the great controversy that would mar the celestial harmonies for millennia to come. But God, in His infinite power over everything, allowed this rebellion to take place in order to explain in detail His character of infinite love and mercy. Self-exaltation, which caused the great controversy in heaven, is the main way Satan has used to lure us into his trap ever since. We often see ourselves first before we give our Creator the first priority in our lives. This keeps us from recognizing the direct connection between God's character and His law, which He has given us to check our spirituality and morality.

The Ten Commandment law is a set of instructions from our Father in heaven to show us how we should allow Him to bring His character into our lives. The laws are vital for our relationship with God as well as with our fellow humans. One lesson we can learn from the great plan of redemption for each of us is that it opens our eyes so we can see sin and its consequences.

"Satan's rebellion was to be a lesson to the universe through all coming ages-- a perpetual testimony to the nature of sin and its terrible results. The working out of Satan's rule, its effects upon both men [and women] and angels would show what must be the fruit of setting aside the divine authority. It would testify that with the existence of God's government is bound up the well-being of all the creatures He has made. Thus the history of this terrible experiment of rebellion was to be a perpetual safeguard to all holy beings, to prevent them from being deceived as to the nature of transgression, to save them from committing sin, and suffering its penalty" (*Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 42-3).

Share: Where in your life do you see the great controversy play out? What does the character of God in dealing with Satan teach you about how He deals with you when you commit sin?

Reflection

It is a fact that at various points in your life you have continually witnessed the effect of sin and its circumstances. The great controversy is always active, although, owing to our sinful nature, we cannot fully understand the circumstances revolving around it.

- Why do you think that God did not destroy Satan immediately at the start of the great controversy? How much time to change do you think God should give you before He destroys you completely after sin?
- Suggested alternative question: Why do you think God did not allow Lucifer's sin (deliberate disconnection from God, the source of life) to destroy him immediately? How long do you think He should allow this "sin experiment" to go on before allowing sin to have its natural consequences and destroy itself and everything and everyone unalterably connected with it?
- What are some of the impacts of the great controversy that we still feel now, thousands of years after Lucifer started it and our first parents chose to join it?
- What role does the Ten Commandment law play in your life, especially in shaping your character?
- Look at the environment around you. Do you see the great controversy in play? What is not perfect as originally created by God?
- Does the Bible give you enough freedom to live as you want? Or does it enslave you to live by some specific rules? Give reasons for your answer.

Application

Shedding Light on the Great Controversy

The biblical tale of the great controversy is enough to show you that something was wrong somewhere, which led to this pain and suffering and uncertainty that we experience in the world today. Perhaps you have a friend or you know of a person who is still in the dark about the great controversy. God wants you to shed light on the origin of the duel, how we are involved in it, and how we can come out of its web.

The Ten Commandment law expresses God's loving character and gives us the rationale for our conduct as Christians. God gave us the Ten Commandments to restore us, to set us free, and help us survive in a world engulfed in sin. For this reason the Bible stands out as the only vessel that will steer us back to the direction of God. The Bible will help us to interpret the world and set for us a guideline for Christian living.

God wants you to understand His character through His written Word. As His child, you have a mission to accomplish, to reenergize your love for Him and apply the Bible suitably in all areas of your life.

DISCIPLE IN ACTION

In some parts of the world, Christianity is dying and the use of Bible has been neglected. With your accountability partner, share how you will do a mission this week to promote the world of God in the areas where it is dying.

Choose one commandment of God that appeals to you most. Share with your partner how you will apply this commandment practically in your life for the next three weeks and encourage others to do the same.

Prayer time

- In your prayer time, thank God for His love for you despite your sinful nature.
- Pray about three factors which may be hindering your better understanding of the great controversy.
- Ask God to give you the insight and power to resist the temptation of pride and selfishness.

LEADER'S INFORMATION

The spirit and letter of the Ten Commandment law

Considered as the basic tenet of Christianity, the Ten Commandment law defines our relationship with our Creator as well as the social interaction we have with each other across the globe. In recent times the media has highlighted that religion is dying, especially in the west, and atheism is taking its toll.

One of the reasons that might weaken the foundations of our Christian belief and propagate atheism is failure on our part to utilize the spiritual and doctrinal energy entrenched in the Ten Commandments. God created us in His own image, but sin caused alienation and marred the image of God in us. In the confusion that followed in the aftermath of sin, humanity is now divided as to whether to seek God or Satan.

However, God intends to bring us back to His camp. How then, do we seek Him? The Bible says, "To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20, KJV).

"The law is the *Torah*. The term can be understood in a narrower and wider sense. Not just in the New Testament but even in the Old Testament law (*tôrāh/nomos*) was used to designate the Books of Moses (Joshua 8:31) *Torah* involves instruction commands and guidance. It comes from God and His revealed will. As such it is authoritative and is a gracious gift" (Ekkehardt Mueller, *The Foundation of Christian Life*, LEAD magazine Jan, Feb, Mar '09, p. 56).

Against this backdrop, we are obliged as Christians to revisit the law again and again to renew our sight of God's intention for us in this life. God could in no way enslave us by giving us the law. He had removed His people from Egypt and now they were free, liberated and joyful to breathe again the sweet air of freedom. This kind of liberation had to come from an act of obedience to the law as well as complete reverence to God. In the words of George Vandeman, "He was trying to keep them free. He knew there were a lot of false gods around that could make them slaves again" (*Sail Your Own Seas*, p. 32).

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2. George Vandeman, *Sail Your Own Seas* p. 32

Session 13: Recognizing and Responding to the Needs of God's Suffering Children Locally and Globally

To recognize and respond to the needs of God's suffering children locally and abroad, I am:

- looking for physical, mental, social and spiritual needs in the community.
- responding mercifully to the discovered needs, individually and/or as a church.
- speaking out and acting to relieve suffering and injustice in society.
- reducing human suffering by being a faithful steward of God's creation.
- acting compassionately on behalf of people who are disadvantaged or at risk.

Big Idea

As children of God we are called to reach out to our brothers and sisters, especially those who are not yet part of the household of faith, and minister to their needs in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

Connector

Look: James 1:27; Matthew 25: 31-46

Memorize: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27, NIV).

THE JOURNEY

"A Christian is a Christlike man, a Christlike woman, who is active in God's service, who is present at the social meeting, whose presence will encourage others also. Religion does not consist in works, but religion works; it is not dormant" (Letter 7, 1883, p. 935.14).

Exploration

It is important to reach out to members of our community who are hurting in different ways and equally important to render assistance to help alleviate their pain and suffering.

Share: *What are some of the ways members in our community suffer?*

Suffering can happen in many different forms. For some people it is physical illness; for others it is feeling discriminated against; for some it is emotional, such as losing a loved one; for others it is feeling the pangs of hunger, isolation, or homelessness. There are those persons who suffer openly while others suffer in silence. There are many ways in which we as children of God can minister to the needs of our brothers and sisters in our community. However, before we can meet a need we have to know what these needs are. A good start is to be a friendly person in your community. When we come across the problems our brothers and sister face, we should respond.

GROUP EXERCISE: Case Study

It is Sabbath, and you are headed out to church. It is music day and you have been looking forward to this special day for a long time because of the plans that have been put in place. On your way to church you have to pass a river; while passing the river you hear someone screaming for help! What would you do?

Dig Deep

There are a number of high points to take away from James 1:27 and the above Spirit of Prophecy quotation. For this session we will highlight two major areas of focus:

- a. Christ-likeness
- b. Active participation in the service of God

Christ-likeness

Share: Use words from the bag to describe or paint a picture/portrait of Jesus.

The word “likeness” according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary means “copy” or “portrait.” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com>) Based on that definition, we can say that “Christ-likeness” means to be a copy of Christ, to be a portrait (picture) of Him. To be a copy of Christ or portray Him to the world, we have to know what He did and how He lived. Most of His time here on earth was spent ministering to the needs of others in so many different ways. Can you recall the stories of His performing His first Miracle by turning water into wine (John 2: 6-10) and talking to the woman at the well of Samaria?

Jesus stated His mission this way, “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.” (Luke 4: 16) He came not for the righteous but to call sinners to repentance. (Matthew 9:13) Jesus had a burning passion for souls and turned no needy person away. It was He who, when His disciples refused the children, said the famous words, “Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not for of such is the Kingdom of heaven.” (Mark 10: 14) There are many other stories in the Bible that speak of our Lord and His compassion for human kind, His love for each soul. The call is for us to be like Him, to mirror His character, to copy Him, to be a living portrait, to daily thirst for the salvation of souls. Ellen G. White calls it a “hunger for souls.” (*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, volume 3 p. 121) Speaking on the subject of imitating Christ, she goes on to say:

Is not God the proper object of imitation? It should be the work of the Christian’s life to put on Christ, and to bring himself to a more perfect likeness of Christ. The sons and daughters of God are to advance in their resemblance to Christ, our pattern. Daily they are to behold His glory, and contemplate His incomparable excellence. Tender, true, and full of compassion, they are to pull souls out of the fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. (TM 122.3)

Active Participation in the Service of God

As Christians we are saved to serve. Have you ever watched a great movie or maybe had a sumptuous meal from a restaurant? Maybe it was a new song you heard and became very excited about it; or it could even have been a new toy. Can you remember your reaction? Did you just sit by and keep the movie/food/song/toy to yourself? More than likely you did not. You

were too excited to keep quiet. This is how we should be when we meet Christ. One of my favorite texts in the Bible contains these words spoken by Jesus to Peter, "...when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren," (Luke 22:32, KJV). That instruction was not only applicable to Peter back then but also applies to us today. Our religion is one of actively reaching out to our brothers and sisters with the chief aim being that of leading them into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. I dare say that Christianity, then, is not a noun but a verb. I can imagine a few raised eyebrows at this point. However, if we look back at James 1:27, this is what it says: "pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (NIV). This is a text about doing and being; it is one that describes Christianity using action words – "to visit" and "to keep."

Additionally, our religion goes beyond the spiritual outreach and extends to the social – "visit orphans and widows in their trouble." Our other connector text, Matthew 25:31-46, looks at the judgment where Jesus divides His followers into two classes – the sheep (the saved) and the goats (the lost). In the context of these verses, how did He make the distinction between the two classes? It was through their service. If you quickly reread the verses you will realize that He points to ministry on several fronts – prison ministry, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, housing the homeless, and visiting the sick. Do you find it interesting that these are the grounds on which the separation is made? I do. And it also says to me that these are very important areas of work for the Christian.

Share: What are some practical ways in which you can actively participate in the work of meeting the needs of others?

Speaking out and acting to relieve suffering and injustice in society

So far we have established that to be a Christian means that you are an active participant in the soul winning of the church. This work also involves advocating on the behalf of God's suffering children. "Advocacy is speaking up for, or acting on behalf of, yourself or another person." (<http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/NR/ronlyres/319F70A9-C8D0-4AEB-81B1-D747E8959EC5/0/Whatisadvocacy.pdf>). One of the challenges to truly developing a Christ-like character in this regard is that to minister to the needs of others could sometimes cause us to be sidelined (ostracized).

Imagine being at school/college and hanging with your friends when all of a sudden a young lady walks by. Your friends start to laugh at her and describe her as being fat and ugly. But what your friends do not know is that you know her and she is also a friend of yours—someone you find to be genuine and good company to be around. It is a tough situation because you know that if you tell your friends that she is also a friend of yours, you could become an object of their ridicule just as she is at present. On the flipside, to not say anything will mean that they will continue to put her down and her feelings will be even more hurt, especially when she sees that you are not willing to stand up for her. You know deep down that what they are doing is wrong. What do you do?

Our example, Jesus, faced these situations as well. He was criticized for associating with Zacchaeus, "a sinner." (Luke 19:7) He was also put down for being a friend of sinners. However, He declared to His disciples and we can safely infer that He was speaking to us as well, that the world will treat us in the same manner that it treated Him. (John 15: 18-19) Standing up for this girl is not the popular choice, but it would be the right thing to do even though you risk losing your popularity. Let us borrow a few lines from a popular song by the Gospel duo Mary Mary that speaks to doing what is right no matter if it costs you the popular vote:

Never asked to be part of the in crowd...! Yeah, I've
been left out, looked over Just for carrying this cross on my
shoulder. But it's okay with me. If I'm the last one that's picked
for the team. I'll sit on the sideline.

As long as He's sitting with me.
(<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/marymary/sittingwithme.html>)

Even though we may lose some friends when we choose to do what is right and speak up for the rights of those who face hardships and discrimination, we have the assurance from Jesus that, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," (Matthew 28: 20, NIV).

Reflection

So very often as Christians we tend to think that the work of saving souls is the work of others. And we are content with that. But as the text in Matthew 25 revealed, the work to be done is an individual work. As you think about the discussion so far, ponder the following questions:

1. When was the last time you reached out to someone in need?
2. How do you respond when you see someone being laughed at or ridiculed?
3. What matters to you more, doing what is right or doing what is popular (even if it is wrong)?
4. If Christ were to come today, what group would you be placed in (sheep or goats)?

Application

Finding hurting persons is not a very difficult task these days. Living in an imperfect world means that we will experience difficulties ourselves and will very often encounter others who are suffering. Some will cry out openly and ask for help while others will go through it in silence. In our walk as Christians we may lend a helping hand to these persons by sharing a kind word, by praying with/for them and listening to them as they share their hurts, fears, and concerns. There are some persons in our communities who suffer but feel like they do not have a voice. As a disciple of Christ called to work with Him, you can be the voice to that "voiceless" person through advocacy and providing practical assistance where possible.

You may not always be able to minister directly to a need on your own and may oftentimes need additional help and support. It is very important to be aware of the different ministries in your local church and the leaders of those ministries. Additionally, you may be of even greater help to someone by pointing them to a health, social service, etc. that is available to meet their need(s).

Above all else, it is important to remember that Christianity is practical living.

DISCIPLE IN ACTION

- Share with your accountability partner one lesson you would like to practice this week from the session to help you become more in tune with the needs of those in your community and be a true disciple for Christ. Contact each other during the week to see how things are working out with this.
- Choose one aspect of Christ-likeness that you want to learn more about this week. Inform your accountability partner about this and seek his/her guidance in putting together a study plan.

Prayer Time

- When you pray ask the Lord to give you a desire to win souls for His Kingdom.
- Pray that God will give you a sensitivity towards others that will allow you to see their needs and be willing to help.
- Ask God to help you to choose to do what is right even when the wrong thing is more popular.

LEADER'S INFORMATION

The objectives of the session are that participants will:

- **Know** the importance of reaching out to members of our community who are suffering in different ways and the value of rendering assistance to help alleviate their pain.
- **Feel** the need to reach out to their community and minister to God's suffering and disadvantaged children.
- **Respond** by becoming actively involved in witnessing.

Activity: Case Study

This is based on a true story from Jamaica where two young men stopped and jumped into a river on Sabbath to save the lives of persons who were at risk of drowning. You may read the story at, http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/161848_Boys-break-Sabbath-tradition-to-rescue-drowning-motorists.

Activity: Painting a portrait of Jesus

For this exercise you will need a sheet of poster board with the heading, "Portrait of Jesus." In addition you will need or a box or bag with the following words written on separate pieces of paper: Healer; friend of sinners; voice of the voiceless; compassionate; defender of the oppressed (These are just some suggestions. You may add words you feel are suitable given the focus of the exercise). It might be helpful to have each word on either a different color paper or written in different colors. As many persons as possible will select a word from the bag/box and place it on the poster board until all the words have been used up. You may then use two or three minutes to get feedback on the portrait from the participants.

In the **apply and integrate** section of the session you may provide practical tips on how participants can get involved in witnessing. These may include but are not limited to:

1. Getting involved in a witnessing project being run at your church, school, within the community – small group ministries, tract distribution, etc.
2. Inviting someone to church
3. Befriending a new person who comes to church
4. Using your gadgets and technologies to share a kind word with a contact (e.g. facebook, text messaging)
5. Pray for souls; that the Lord will make you a soul winner

Session 14: Helping Believers Study and Obey God’s Word

To help believers study and obey God’s word, I am showing others to:

- understand the purpose of Scripture.
- discover study methods that will help them engage in regular Bible study.
- apply biblical principles to live their lives thoughtfully and faithfully.
- use tools to more effectively interpret biblical meanings.
- discern spiritual truth in a balanced manner.

Big Idea

The way in which we study the Bible can greatly influence the way in which we obey the Bible.

Connector

Look: 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 1 Peter 1:20-21, Luke 24:25-27; 44-45

Memorize: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

THE JOURNEY Exploration

Mahatma Gandhi once said, “You Christians have in your keeping a document with enough dynamite in it to blow the whole of civilization to bits; to turn society upside down; to bring peace to this war-torn world, But you read it as if it were just good literature, and nothing else.”

The document of which he spoke was the Bible. The suggestion underlying this profound critique of our faith is that we as Christians—or more specifically as Seventh-day Adventists—should read the Bible as it ought to be read and treat the Bible as it ought to be treated; then our ability to witness and impact this present world for good will increase exponentially. Although Gandhi was not himself a Christian, he recognized an important principle that many of us overlook, namely, that the way in which we study the Bible can greatly influence the way in which we obey the Bible. This impact can be for the good, but as history has shown, it can also be for the bad.

“No book has been so loved, so hated, so revered, so damned as the Bible. People have died for the Bible. Others have killed for it. It has inspired man’s greatest, noblest acts and been blamed for his most damnable and degenerate Wars have raged over the Bible, revolutions have been nurtured in its pages, and kingdoms crumble. Wars have raged over the Bible, revolutions have been nurtured in its pages, and kingdoms crumbled through its ideas. People of all viewpoints—from liberation theologians to capitalists, from fascists to Marxists, from dictators to liberators, from pacifists to militarists—search its pages for words with which to justify their deeds.

“The Bible’s uniqueness does not come from its unparalleled political, cultural, and social influence, but from its source and its subject matter. It is God’s revelation of the unique God-man: the Son of God, Jesus Christ—the Savior of the world.” (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe...*, p. 11)

The Reason for the Bible

Since it is the revelation of the unique God and contains the express will of God, with instructions for all those desiring to develop a relationship with Him, it is necessary that we truly understand its purpose.

So, if the way in which we study the Bible will greatly influence the way in which we obey the Bible, it becomes all the more important to develop appropriate Bible study habits so that we can in turn develop and render appropriate attitudes of obedience. For the Bible to become the *Word of God* we will need to use our minds to hear what God is saying to us.

Dig Deep

First Principles of Biblical Interpretation

One of the first principles when it comes to studying and obeying God’s word is to think about *how* we think! Indeed this is where many people have gone astray in their attempts to study and obey the Bible.

Whether we realize it or not, no one is able to approach Scripture with a blank mind; we all hold certain presuppositions - *assumptions or attitudes* - that influence how we come to understand and interpret the Bible (*Reid, 2005:27*). The proper name for the process of thinking about how to understand and interpret a biblical text is called *Hermeneutics*, and if you have ever discussed the Bible with someone who is an Atheist, you will realize just how important Hermeneutics can be.

I remember having a debate with a good friend of mine who was an Atheist at the time. She questioned me over whether the miracles of Jesus really took place. To justify my position I turned to the pages of the Bible; to justify her position she turned to the Encyclopedia. My belief in the authority of Scripture meant that I viewed the Bible as being the ultimate source of truth in these matters; her belief in rationalism meant that she viewed science as the ultimate source of truth. Therefore, although we were both reading the same Bible text, we were approaching it from very different perspectives, and because we were approaching the text from very different perspectives, we both arrived at very different conclusions.

For Seventh-day Adventists, the following attitudes and presuppositions are understood as being necessary for interpreting and developing an understanding of the Bible: openness, honesty, faith, humility, obedience, love, and prayer.

Share: How might these influence the way you interpret and understand the Bible?

The Purpose of Scripture

Since it is the revelation of the unique God and contains the express will of God, with instructions for all those desiring to develop a relationship with Him, it is necessary that we truly understand its purpose.

Through the centuries, the faithful have recognized that spiritual growth requires disciplined and

steadfast attention to Scripture. In Jesus' day Jewish religious leaders searched the Scriptures because they believed "that in them you have eternal life" (John 5:39).

The first Christians recognized how essential it was to apply their minds to Scripture. For one thing, convincing those who lived in a Jewish context of the truth of their message required it. In Acts, Luke provides us with a graphic picture of the application of their mind to Scripture (8:26-40). However, none surpassed that of the Apostle Paul, a converted Rabbi, in establishing an argument by searching the Scriptures "to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Paul's arguments were carefully worked, based on Scripture, into every letter. In fact, as the primitive church increased in converts from among non-Jewish community members, they held steadfastly to the importance of studying Scriptures. Notice Paul's statement, "All Scripture is inspired by God, and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2Tim.3: 16-17).

"Wars have raged over the Bible, revolutions have been nurtured in its pages, and kingdoms crumbled through its ideas. People of all viewpoints—from liberation theologians to capitalists, from fascists to Marxists, from dictators to liberators, from pacifists to militarists—search its pages for words with which to justify their deeds." (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe...*, p. 11)

Indeed history has shown that many people have used the Bible to 'justify their deeds', but is this really the purpose of the Bible?

*And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall **beat their swords into plowshares**, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more. - Micah 4.3*

***Their sword will become our plow**, and from the tears of war the daily bread of future generations will grow. - Adolf Hitler*

Are individuals like Hitler who have used the Bible to justify their actions, interpreting the Bible correctly? Was God's purpose in giving us the Bible to provide us with a means of exonerating inhumane actions?

In short, the answer to the questions above is a resounding no!

According to Timothy, the purpose of Scripture is 'so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:17 NIV). If our use of the Bible does not line up with this principle, then unfortunately we will be mistaken in our understanding. We are to allow the Bible to equip us, rather than having us equip the Bible. In other words, we must allow the Bible to speak for itself and not attempt to make the Bible say what we would want it to say. The process of attempting to understand the Bible on its own terms is called "Exegesis." The process of reading into the Bible what we might want it to say is called "Isogesis." The Bible student who attempts to understand the Bible from a perspective of "Openness and Honesty, Faith, Humility, Obedience, Love and Prayer" will carry out "Exegesis" and not "Isogesis."

Share: Think about the world in which we live; do people today still use the Bible to justify their actions be they good or bad?

Application

In this section we will be conducting an "Exegesis" exercise in order to uncover further what the Bible says about its purpose. The process outlined below can also be used to gain further insight and meaning from any Bible text:

1. **Read the Text** - Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. If possible it is best to read the text in more than one Bible version.
2. **Write down an outline** - Write down an outline of the text, highlighting what you believe are the most important words or statements. *In this case your outline should include a list of what the text says are the four purposes of the Scripture.*
3. **Find out what the main words mean** - Using both an English dictionary and a Bible Dictionary (electronic version available at <http://www.Biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary>), write down the meaning of each of the four reasons/purposes of the Scripture.
4. **Look up the words in a concordance and examine how they are used** - Using a Bible concordance, or if you have a Study Bible you will find one at the rear, look up how each of the words you have listed are used. What meanings have you discovered?
5. **Reread the same passage and replace each word with the meanings you discovered.**
6. **How does this passage apply to us today?** As well as gaining an understanding of a Bible passage, it is also important to consider what Bible principles a passage gives us and how they might apply to our lives today.

After completing Steps 1-6, depending on time, encourage some of your students to share what they have learned with the rest of the class. Take note of your class's reactions as they share. Finally, read Luke 24:25-27; 44-45. Ask the class the following questions:

- How does Jesus use the Scripture?
- What was He actually saying about its overall theme and contents?

LEADER TIPS

- Divide your students into groups of two or more.
- If possible, try to make English Dictionary's, Bible Dictionaries, and Concordances available for your students to use. If this is not possible, another option is to photocopy the appropriate excerpts and make these resources available to students as handouts.
- Encourage your students to copy and use this Structure in their everyday Bible study.

DISCIPLE IN ACTION

- Write out again the four areas that Scripture can be used for. Draw a star beside the areas with which you feel you have the least experience and share them with your accountability partner.
- Use the above 6 Step Outline in your Bible study this week, and share what you have learned with your accountability partner.

Dig Deep

According to Ellen G. White, "many are the ways in which God is seeking to make himself known to us and to bring us into communion with him." Commenting on the purpose of the Scripture, she wrote:

"God speaks to us in his word. Here we have in clearer lines the revelation of his character, of his dealings with men, and the great work of redemption. Here is open

before us the history of the patriarchs and prophets and other holy men of old. They were men “subject to like passions as we are.” We see how they struggled through discouragements like our own, how they fell under temptations as we have done, and yet took heart again and conquered through the grace of God; and beholding, we are encouraged in our striving after righteousness. As we read of the precious experiences granted them, of the light and love and blessing it was theirs to enjoy, and of the work they wrought through the grace given them, the spirit that inspired them kindles a flame of holy emulation in our hearts, and a desire to be like them in character, like them to walk with God.” (*Steps to Christ*)

For Ellen White, Scripture is the expressed will of God. It reveals all that is necessary for our daily walk with God and sufficient information for our salvation. In order to better understand God’s purpose, please read *Steps to Christ*, chapter six, “A Knowledge of God,” and chapter eight, “Growing Up into Christ.”

1. How does Ellen White incorporate the Scripture in her writing?
2. In what four ways does God speak to us in the twenty-first century?
3. What special lessons are to be learned from a study of the Bible characters?
4. What will be the positive result of study and meditation on Scripture?
5. What should precede Bible study?

Reflection

1. What should be the basis of your standard for truth?
2. Why do these verses say that you can rely on Scripture for teaching as well as correcting and training?
3. Describe a time when you relied on sources other than God’s Word to receive guidance for your life?

Prayer Time:

Pray for God’s help to understand and obey His word.

LEADER’S INFORMATION

How to use study tools to more effectively interpret biblical meanings

Like other complex and profound writings, Scriptures will scarcely reveal their insights to us unless we learn all we can about the author, purpose, date, place, circumstances of writing, and many other things. Different kinds of literature will pose different challenges. To discover the deep truths that we all desire from the writings of the Bible requires disciplined study using the best methods and information available.

Tools for the study of the Bible

To properly interpret passages from the Bible and avoid reading our ideas and impressions into the area we are studying, we have an abundance of excellent English translations as well as some acceptable paraphrases for serious students of the Scripture. However, we need to be careful in the selection of the various translations. This is because older translations can be misleading as languages become dated—words change. [1 Thessalonians 4:15, King James

Version: "That we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (that is, precede or go before) them which are asleep." While this was understandable, in the seventeenth century, this translation will be misleading to the twenty first century reader because of the development of the English. "Prevent" in modern, English today, means to stop.]

Study Tools:

Concordances

Most study Bibles include a concordance. **Each concordance is keyed to a particular translation of the Bible.** You wouldn't use Strong's Concordance, for example, for the Revised Standard Version (RSV) translation. Strong's is keyed to the King James Version (KJV) translation.

For a particular translation, a concordance lists major names, places, terms, and words and tells you where they appear in the texts. The concordance entry for people's names also briefly describes that person, as a dictionary would.

Use a concordance to:

- Find all the places the Bible mentions an important person, place, or idea.
- Read brief information about people in the Bible.
- Locate quotations using key words.

If you use a study Bible, you'll always have a concordance available.

Online Searches

A faster way to locate biblical words and phrases is to search a Bible translation online:

- Search the **Revised Standard Version** (RSV) translation (with Apocrypha) [online](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/r/rsv/) at the University of Michigan Digital Library. (<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/r/rsv/>)

Search the **New Revised Standard Version** (NRSV) online at Bible Study Tools (<http://www.biblestudytools.com/nrsv/>)

Bible Dictionaries

- A good Bible dictionary may be the most useful tool a student committed to Bible study could own. In many ways, it's more like a one-volume encyclopaedia focused on the Bible. You can:
- **Quickly find information about the Bible's people and places**, whether you're reading new texts or need to refresh your memory. What's the difference between the Pharisees and the Sadducees? What do we know about ancient Antioch?
- **Learn about the objects of the Bible's world.** You'll understand the beginning of Exodus much better if you read the Bible dictionary's entry on "brick." You'll understand many texts of the Bible better if you read the entry on "water."
- **Learn about the Bible's social, cultural, economic, and religious worlds.** What was a "family" in biblical times? What was "marriage?" How did most people make their livings? How did Jews worship in the time of Jesus?
- **Get overviews of each biblical book and of important theological ideas in the Bible.** How do the meanings of holiness, faith, love, and grace develop across the Bible? What did sacrifice mean to people in the time of Jesus?
- A good Bible dictionary's entries are based both on citations from the biblical texts themselves and on modern biblical scholarship. The editors of the dictionary may have a particular theological orientation, which means not all Bible dictionaries are helpful.

Parallel Bibles

Parallel Bibles are special Bible study tools that some advanced beginner and intermediate students may find helpful:

- **Parallel Bibles** let you compare several different translations of a single biblical text.

KEEP LEARNING

Read John 1:1-18. Read all the cross-references that connect with texts of the Old Testament. What do you learn that helps you better understand the beginning of John?

How to Use Bible Study Tools

- Invest in a good parallel Bible or read one on-line. Parallel Bibles contain several different versions side by side, designed to help you better interpret the text. Some popular versions are the King James Version, New International Version, New American Standard, Amplified, and the Message, but there are many other versions as well. Most parallel Bibles have between two and four of these different versions side by side.
- Refer to a concordance to help study topics or find specific passages. A concordance is an alphabetical index of words used in the Bible. You can search a certain topic or word used in the Bible, and be referenced to every verse in the Bible that the word is used. There are on-line concordances, which make it easy to look up virtually anything. This can be helpful if, for example, you can remember only a portion of a Scripture and want to find it in the bible. The concordance is also a good reference if you are studying a particular topic.
- Use a Bible lexicon, or word study dictionary, such as “The New Strong’s Complete Dictionary of Bible Words or an Expository Dictionary of Bible Words.” (Word Study Dictionaries: Every word in the Greek New Testament is explained in great detail, covering all context usages for these words. Numbered to Strong’s numbering system, each word has a basic definition and further commentary is provided.) Every word in the Greek New Testament is explained in great detail, covering all context usages for these words. Numbered to Strong’s numbering system, each word has a basic definition and further commentary is provided. This is helpful for words that are translated in different ways, and also allows you to find Greek and Hebrew definitions of words in the Bible
- Read commentaries in addition to reading the Bible. Commentaries are interpretations of the Bible written by people, designed to help you understand what the Bible means. Ministers or biblical scholars write many. Keep in mind, however, that this is a person’s interpretation of what the Bible means, and it may differ from the beliefs that you have.
- Acquire a devotional to be used during your daily Bible study, or subscribe to one that can be sent to your email, such as “The Word For Today” (<http://www.ucb.co.uk/w4u>) or Ellen White Estate Daily Devotional. (<http://www.whiteestate.org/devotional/subscribe.asp>) Here, you would spend a portion of each day devoting time to God to pray and study His Word, and devotionals are designed to help guide you in that process. Each daily devotional usually focuses on a certain topic and specific Scriptures. They are written from another person’s point of view and usually contain personal stories that relate to that day’s verses. Some also allow you to journal how that passage relates to your life.
- Commit to a plan to help you read the Bible during the course of a year. There are books and on-line guides that are designed to help you accomplish this. Some are offered in a chronological plan, while others give a daily reading plan that may contain readings from both the Old and New Testament. This is helpful because it gives you a structured plan to read a specific amount of text each day.

Session 15

DEBRIEFING LESSONS 11-14

Time: 90 minutes. *Try to spend approximately 15-20 minutes discussing each section below, leaving time for small group prayer and commitment at the end.*

Discipleship begins and ends with Jesus—the focal point!

Summary

During sessions 11 through 14, we have literally studied from our hearts and homes to the world and back to our own hearts again. First, we explored what it means to have healthy Christian families and what to do when they falter. Next, we took a look back through the ages to the origins of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, which is clearly the origin of all our difficulties with sin and sorrow, beginning in our first family and moving onward from there. After that, we looked out toward a suffering world and reminded ourselves that the family of God extends to His children on every continent—both those who know they are His and those who do not. We realized that the controversy and Fall have affected every human being and every family. Throughout this series, of course we have depended on what the Bible has to say and how it guides us in these difficulties, but in the final session we spent time exploring just that—how can we understand and apply the Bible to our own lives, and how can we help others to see that need and do the same?

As always, it begins and ends with God and His words, works, and plans. We are blessed beyond measure to be privileged to join in His efforts to bring the controversy to a final close, forever and ever. Amen!

Here is a review of the Big Ideas we have covered:

1. a. God made us social beings and placed us in families. He has provided through Christ the divine resources to help us live in unity and harmony.
b. Though in our time sexuality has become uncoupled from marriage, these two are closely intertwined in the biblical value system. As God's gift of sexuality is more fully understood against the backdrop of His plan for marriage, both singles and marrieds will be able to experience greater personal and relational fulfillment.
2. The consequences of the human fall and the great controversy at large help you to understand God's love for you.
3. As children of God we are called to reach out to our brothers and sisters, especially those who are not yet part of the household of faith, and minister to their needs in the spirit of Jesus Christ.
4. God gave the Bible to show His children what He is like, how He works, and how to work with Him. The simplest person, by the help of God's Holy Spirit, can learn to understand the Bible and its purposes in human life.

During session 11a we discovered that God has provided divine resources to enable us to have close relationships in our families, and we learned to respond in practical and specific ways to strengthen those relationships.

Designed for Relationships

- Are there new insights and understandings about families and relationships that you have learned as a result of this session? Share with the group.
- What is the difference, if any, between liking and loving? Is one more important than the other? Do they always go together?
- Is your family/church a place that's warm, where people are drawn to gather? Are there changes you would like to see happen to make that more true? What can you personally do about it?
- What is submission? What is it not? What do you like/dislike about it?
- Think of daily realities in your life when you are the one doing the submitting, such as student or worker. When do you submit willingly and when not? Now think of realities in which you are the one being submitted to. From your side, is this an act of love, or domination?
- What about equal relationships, such as marriage or friendship, which move back and forth at different times, one submitting in one matter, the other submitting in a different matter. How can these pairs make decisions that will help these moments of submission be loving and joyful rather than painful and resentful?

Forgiveness/Reconciliation

- Have you seen Christ heal breaches? Are there breaches you wish He would heal?
- Whom do you need to forgive? Who needs you to ask forgiveness?
- What is the difference between forgiveness and full reconciliation?

In session 11b we learned to bring a more Christ-centered mindset about sexuality to a personal understanding of ourselves and our relationships, and that God created humankind as sexual beings and gave the institution of marriage as the setting for the fullest expression of sexual intimacy.

- This subject can be difficult to discuss, but in a prayerful and trusting setting, it can only help. Try to be as open and honest as you can about issues and questions, without telling personal secrets and especially without so much as a hint of the private issues of others you may know about. God created sex and sexuality and intended it to be a huge blessing to us. That's the very reason Satan has perverted it so successfully, and you need to know as much as you can about God's values in order to avoid being taken in by his lies.
- Do your *thoughts* about sex and sexuality and your *feelings* about them match? Why or why not? Explore this, both personally in the privacy of your prayers and journal, and, if possible, within the group.
- How has divorce affected your life? Name some ways you have seen the grace of God operate even in that brokenness.

- Is chastity as important for men as for women? Why?
- What does it mean to you to submit your sexuality to God? Have you clearly and intentionally done this? What feelings does it bring up?

Session 12 helped us understand the consequences of the human fall from God's original plan. Discuss.

- Does God destroy sinners, or does sin destroy sinners? Would it be possible for God to destroy sin without destroying any sinners in the process? Why or why not? What insight does this give you into why He is waiting so long and so patiently before making a final end?
- What one word would you give to describe the very beginning and heart of sin? You may want to write the different answers on a white board and compare them. Can the group distill all their answers into *one* word?
- Have you been able to find practical ways to share your views of the great controversy with someone? Share the results.

In session 13 we discovered how to recognize, and respond to the needs of suffering, both locally and globally. Discuss.

- Share some ways in which you have been involved in helping to alleviate the suffering of others. (Don't include only "official," organized relief efforts, but also personal, individual ones.) How did it feel? Are there other ways you would like to become involved?
- Becoming involved in a "big issue" such as discrimination is one thing. Quietly standing up for one person, as in the example of the girl who was being ridiculed in this session, is another. It can be harder. How are you at doing that? Can you share a story of a time someone stood up for *you* and what it meant to you?
- Has the time you have spent with your group in this session made any difference in your ability to stand against negative peer pressure?
- Did you and your accountability partner try any of the exercises suggested? What were the results?

Session 14 helped us understand the purpose of Scripture and examined tools that will help us interpret spiritual truths in a balanced manner. Discuss.

- Did you try the exercise about the four purposes for Scripture given in 2 Tim 3:16, 17? Share the results in your heart and in your life.
- Share some ways in which Bible study has helped you and enriched your life.
- Are there difficulties or questions you would like the group to help you with?
- How can reading the Bible help you understand God more?
- Do you think the Bible can help you define your purpose in life?

SERIES FOUR

Sessions 16-20

SESSION 16:	DEVELOPING CHRIST-CENTERED RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH BY TRACY MORGAN
SESSION 17:	UNDERSTANDING THAT GOD HAS PROVIDED FOR MY REDEMPTION BY DEBBONNAIRE KOVACS
SESSION 18:	SUPPORTING THE MINISTRY OF THE LOCAL AND GLOBAL CHURCH BY DEBBONNAIRE KOVACS
SESSION 19:	HELPING BELIEVERS LIVE A CONTAGIOUS, HOLISTIC CHRISTIAN LIFE BY CALVIN ROBERSON
SESSION 20:	DEBRIEFING SESSION BY DEBBONNAIRE KOVACS

READ THIS FIRST!

INFORMATION FOR SESSION 17: UNDERSTANDING THAT GOD HAS PROVIDED FOR MY REDEMPTION

Grace or Works?

Christians have been trying to tease apart the specifics of what might be called “the grace/works conundrum” since not too long after Jesus went back to His Father. But in fact, the debate began *long* before that. We could go back to any of the prophets, alternately preaching works: “keep the Sabbath, pay your tithe, make honest sacrifices, *be kind!*” and proclaiming grace: God loves even the unregenerate sinner and would do anything to restore that one.

Or we could move earlier, to Moses, who spent pages and pages and pages on instructions for every detail of life (works) and yet kept insisting that God’s love (grace) was the basis of everything and that our response to it should be to “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5).

We can see it beginning already in the story of Cain and Abel--making the wrong sacrifice in the wrong spirit is rebuked (works) but God comes in person to speak to the erring one and urge him back into the way of truth (grace). Or earlier still, when Adam and Eve sinned and promptly hid (the immediate result of sinful actions), but God hunted them down and offered redemption (always His immediate response to sinful actions.)

Is this as far back into history as we could go? No, there’s still the terrible story of Lucifer, that great mystery. How could a perfectly beautiful, perfectly loving being, so surrounded by love and grace that he and his friends didn’t even know there was a law (ref), possibly decide to turn away from that? Here’s the really incomprehensible part--Satan claimed *God* was unfair and harsh and demanding, and that he could run the universe better, with more freedom. His modus operandi ever since has been to come up with works systems that are increasingly unfair, harsh, and demanding, ever since! You have to crawl on some sort of pilgrimage on your knees to get God to love you. You have to sit on a flagpole for weeks, or beat yourself, or lie on nails, and maybe you might be able to get God to love you. You have to burn up your child in a fire on the arms of a leering idol!

Alternatively, you could choose the “fun” route. There is no God anyway, so do whatever you want. Drink, take drugs, eat anything, read, watch, and say anything. End up in chains of addiction you can’t break, and call that “freedom”!

Grace Alone

Have we now moved back as far as we can? No, never. There is still God. God was, is, and will be. God was there in the silence, there to see the first wave/particles of light, there to hear the first whispers of waves on a rocky planet. And God was *always* all about grace. God is love, all true love comes from God, and love is grace. Love and grace are forgiving above all. God had a heart for forgiving before anyone ever sinned and needed it.

God is the source of life, and knows what kinds of actions, or works, will keep us physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially healthy. And if you add up all those adverbs, you get “spiritually.” The Bible doesn’t teach that we *have* a spirit or soul, but that we *are* one, and all those divisions we like to make, mostly for quite practical and useful reasons, add up to one healthy spirit. This healthy spirit, or person, does the acts or works of righteousness because that is what living the life of grace and love is all about. This healthy soul knows what it means to mess up, fall down, be picked up by God, cleaned up, forgiven, and taught better.

And this healthy soul knows how to pass that spirit of love, grace, and forgiveness on. Praise the Lord!

Session 16: Developing Christ-Centered Relationships in the Local and Global Church

To develop Christ-centered relationships in the local and global church as a member of the body of Christ, I am:

- being supported and nurtured by the community of believers.
- praying with and for fellow believers, rejoicing with those who rejoice, and caring for those who are in need.
- loving and serving the church's children, continuing to disciple them as they mature into adults.
- treating others redemptively when they are disciplined or shunned by church or society.
- keeping informed and responding to news and stories of the world church.

Big Idea

As members of the body of Christ, we must be willing to accept others where they are and help lead them to a redemptive relationship with God.

Connector

Look: Romans 12:9-21, Acts 9:1-31

Memorize: "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited" (Romans 12:15-16, NIV).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

News was spreading all over Damascus. Saul of Tarsus was coming with the authority of the chief priests to arrest Christ's followers and take them back to Jerusalem. Everyone knew what would happen if Saul found them. His reputation for cruelty had spread as far as the fleeing members of the infant church. Ananias, one of the disciples living in Damascus, waited in dread for the knock at his door. It was just a matter of time before he was found. What about all the other believers? How long would it take the eager and efficient Saul to flush them all out? Ananias could not rest, so instead he prayed and asked God to protect his church family. As he prayed, a heavenly messenger came to him and told him to go to a nearby boarding house to

minister to one of the occupants there. The angel told him the location and then told him the name of the man he was to help – Saul of Tarsus. That couldn't be right! This messenger had to know that Saul was part of the Jewish mob that stoned the beloved deacon Stephen, and since then he had been hunting and killing followers of Jesus with a zeal that was nothing short of evil. How could he step foot in the same room as this man? It could be a trap. Saul was sure to kill him—or worse, torture him until he led him to other believers. Ananias argued with the angel, but he was told again to go to Saul.

With the words still ringing in his ears, Ananias mustered up the courage to walk to Straight Street to the house of Judas to find Saul of Tarsus. When he arrived in Saul's room, he saw a broken, despondent, blind man lying on the floor. It was obvious he hadn't had anything to eat or drink in days. Where were his friends from Jerusalem? How could they have left him in this condition? Ananias stepped forward and placed his hand on Saul's head. He explained that God had sent him there so he would receive sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost. Immediately, something that looked like fish scales fell off of Saul's eyes and he could see again.

The first face Saul saw was that of a follower of Jesus—a man he was sent to capture and kill, but instead he found himself helpless and repentant. Since seeing Jesus on the road to Damascus and hearing His voice, he had been tormented with regret over the wrongs he had committed against the followers of the true Messiah. Now, weak and exhausted, he was completely at the mercy of this stranger. But Ananias did not harm Saul. Instead he ministered to him like the angel had instructed. Before Saul even took a bite of food or a drink of water, he was baptized. He was then fed and taken to meet the other disciples. At first there was obvious suspicion and fear, but once the Christians found out that Saul was a convert, they embraced him and protected him against the Jewish leaders who quickly turned on their former champion. The believers in Damascus even helped him escape the city so he could return to Jerusalem.

- Do you think it would be hard to embrace someone who once tried to harm you or your loved ones?

Reflection

Saul traveled all over the region proclaiming Jesus wherever he went. In spite of the wrongs he had done to the early church, he was accepted and nurtured by his fellow believers. Saul changed his name to Paul, and he went on to become one of the greatest missionaries of all time. Just as the angel predicted, Paul carried God's name to the Gentiles and their rulers as well as the people of Israel (Acts 9:15). He led countless followers to Jesus and is credited with writing half of the books in the New Testament. Imagine what would have happened if the early church had shunned Saul.

- What if Adolph Hitler or Osama Bin Laden accepted Christ before they died? How do you think they would have been received by your church? How would you personally treat them?
- Do you think some people just aren't worthy of forgiveness? Talk about reasons why or why not.

Application

When Jesus was on earth, He ate with sinners and tax collectors. The Pharisees, who were always looking for a way to trap Him, asked His disciples why He would keep such company. Jesus overheard the conversation and told them “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17).

As Jesus’ instruments today, we have to be willing to be kind to others and treat them redemptively. If someone has been shunned by church or society, we are still to treat them as children of God. We need our community of believers to nurture and support us when we stumble, so it is only fair that we give that same care to others who are in need. When we see someone who is hurting, we are to care for them and help lead them back to the Savior.

No one was beneath Jesus’ care. Whether it was a crooked tax collector or a small child, Jesus was careful to attend to the needs of everyone. When His disciples tried to send the children away, Jesus rebuked them. He embraced the children and put His hands on them, showing His love and concern for each of them. Our churches and communities are full of children and young people who need to be discipled and mentored as well. As Christians, we can show our love to these children, guiding them in a maturing relationship with Jesus.

- What are some of the needs of members of your community?
- How can your church as a whole help meet those needs?
- What are some ways you can minister to children and show them they are important too?
- What can you do personally to reach out to those who have been shunned by society or church?

Dig Deep

As members of a world-wide church of more than 16 million members, how can we all be part of one body? The answer is actually quite simple. If we all have the same mission, and we are united under one Savior, working toward the goal of heaven for ourselves and everyone else we come in contact with, we are one body. Whatever our gifts and talents might be, we are to work together as one on both a local and global scale. When we pray for fellow believers and share in their joys and sorrows, it draws us closer to them as a family. Those believers may live in our own home or on the other side of the world, but they are all part of the same whole.

In our technological society, it is easier than ever to stay current on worldwide news. With just a few mouse clicks or finger slides, we can find out what is happening around the world in mission fields and churches. Our Sabbath school quarterlies and mission magazines also keep us informed on what is happening. If we stay current on what is happening worldwide, we can respond by sending help and prayers when needed. We will also have the added benefit of rejoicing in the victories won in even the most remote corners of the world.

- Do you have contact with believers in other parts of the world?
- How can you stay knowledgeable about what is happening outside of your own local church?

DISCIPLE IN ACTION

- Find the contact information for a missionary who is currently working in the field. Get in touch with them to find out what their needs are. Pray for them and work toward getting them the help they may need.
- Get a list of non-attending members at your church. Contact as many of them as you can and invite them back to church. Pray with them and continue to pray for them.
- Reach out to the young people at your church. Make a point of saying hello and finding out their names and interests. Try to build relationships with the children whenever possible.

Prayer Time:

- Start a prayer journal and write down the people you know who are struggling or in need. Systematically pray for each person on the list every day. Be sure to write down the answers to prayers as well.
- Pray for those who have sinned and turned away from God—even if they have hurt you personally.

Session 17: God Has Provided Everything That is Needed for My Redemption

Understanding that God has provided everything that is needed for my redemption, I am learning that:

- salvation and eternal life are gifts to me through the grace of God.
- Christ came to earth to reveal the character of God and to die in my place as atonement for my sin.
- the love of God draws me to feel sorrow for my sin, to confess, and to repent.
- God forgives sin and restores brokenness.

Big Idea

God loves me so much that He made me, gave His Son to save me, and walks with me daily to restore me. I don't have to do anything to earn that.

Connector

Look: Ephesians 2:8-10; John 3:16

Memorize: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:8-10, *Today’s New International Version*).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

God Gives Salvation Freely

What is salvation? There are a lot of possible answers:

- Salvation is eternal life.
- Salvation is deliverance from sin and its consequences.
- Salvation is living a right life with God.
- Salvation is a gift that comes through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

These are all true. However, the definition of the word itself may surprise you. It is derived from the Latin *salvus*, which means “well, unharmed, or sound” (myEtymology.com). It’s a word that’s about health and wholeness, like the Hebrew *shalom*.

In other words, God is interested in our wholeness. He created a whole world with whole human beings on it. Everything they needed for a life that was “well, unharmed, and sound” was there—food, shelter (if any was needed), fellowship, work, play, and rest. The serpent said, “No, this isn’t all you need. You won’t be *really* whole until you know as much about evil as you do about good.” (He’s still saying that, by the way. You hear variations on it all the time.)

So we broke it. The wholeness of Adam and Eve’s relationship with God and with each other was the first thing broken, and the soundness of the world was close behind. Thorns, weeds, blood, sweat, tears. . . world wars, pollution, a fading ozone layer. We’re groaning together, the world and its inhabitants (Romans 8:22).

And we can’t fix it. We keep thinking we can. We keep trying. But the fact is, we’re in a hole too deep for us to get out of. If we want to work with God to save His children and His hurting world, we must first accept the hand He is holding down to us. He is willing, able, and more than eager to pull us out of the muck and give us a job helping to pull others out and put everything back together again.

Adam and Eve were in a mess. And so are we. But God has a plan.

1. How would you have defined salvation before this session? Would you define it differently now?

2. What are some ways you feel broken?

3. What are some ways you see brokenness in others around you? In the world?

4. How has God healed your brokenness?

God Steps Into the Muck

I wonder what Adam and Eve *thought* God meant when He told the serpent, “He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen 3:15, TNV). I wonder how much He explained about the Deliverer, who He would be, how He would come. I wonder if they had even an inkling that it would be *God Himself*, coming as a human baby. I wonder if even Satan knew that. . .

Once upon a time, really truly, here in this historical world, a baby was born in a stable for animals to a real, human mother, probably a teenager, worn out from traveling for days only to find no room to stay in. There was a real (probably scared) father present (who knew, by the way, that this baby wasn’t his, and knew Whose it was, too! How weird is that?). There were likely some women to help. There was blood, sweat, and tears, just as the Fall had wrought, even “pain in childbirth.” Jesus had to come into the results of the curse, step into a world very different from the one He’d planned and crafted by hand.

We won’t even try to understand the “how” of this amazing miracle. Humans probably won’t understand that even after living in heaven for thousands of years. But why? That’s the real question. Why did He do that?

Father, Son, and Spirit loved you that much. Loved me that much.

We couldn’t climb out of the hole, and we hadn’t done very well at hearing the advice God called out to us through the prophets He sent over the centuries. The best they could do was attempt to somewhat prepare a people for a shocking invasion of reality by the God they’d been either terrified of or disrespectful to, by turns. Or both.

So Jesus came Himself. He came to say two things:

1. This is what God looks like. God loves you, right in your mess, and is willing to touch you even if you’re leprous, heal you no matter how you got sick, speak to you even if you’re an outcast, restore you even if you’re a really *bad* sinner.
2. You can’t do this, but I can. I can come down into the hole and still have enough strength to climb out, making a way for you on my back, as it were. Hang on!

Here is an important point about which there’s more controversy than there needs to be. Jesus did not come to say, “Here’s how it’s done, just watch Me and you can climb out by yourself.” He did come to say, “This is the way I want you to live after I pull you out.” There’s a difference.

His life, His death, His resurrection are sufficient for everyone on the planet. Say yes, and hang on! There’s more to come.

1. Have you ever tried spending some time really meditating on the birth of Jesus? Find a quiet place and some time, pray for insight, and let your imagination really grab hold of what it would be like to be that teenage mother, that nervous father. What would you think as you held your firstborn in your hands and marveled at His tininess and strangeness, like every other new parent in the world, but then tried to get your head around *this is GOD!!* Quite unlike any other parent ever? Write about your thoughts.

1. What are some of the specific ways you've helped to dig your own hole? Pray for help in plain language that helps you to understand, though God already does.

2. How do you explain the difference between Jesus as our complete and sole salvation, and Jesus as our example? In what ways are both true?

Restoration

Jesus came, lived a sinless life, died a courageous and unimaginable death, and rose again. I know it; I believe it; now what? Surely knowing all of this and accepting its reality into my life ought to make me a better person, right? Well, yes, but as Ellen White points out in *Steps to Christ*, "The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature" (p. 64).

This means that restoration will be inextricably bound up with forgiveness. Jesus saves us. He does this by His own act, without any help from us, though it doesn't do us as much good until we turn our faces toward His and accept it. But after that, He wants to teach us how to live.

People have generally gone in two mistaken directions on this subject. Either everything depends on doing All The Right Things In Exactly The Right Way (and if you don't know where you're going wrong I'll be glad to tell you!), or God loves us and once we say yes to Him anything we want to do will be fine. It's up to Him to make us perfect. Or. . . maybe just to declare that what we're already doing counts as perfect. Yeah, that's better. Not...

As usual, the road has two edges, and you can crash off either side. The truth in the center of life with Christ is, He saves me, I accept that, He declares me righteous through His own perfection, He then sets out to take the rest of my life to teach me how to live a righteous life. That is, a life of perfect love and endless grace. If I am living in connection with Christ moment by moment, my first reaction to sin will be grace, too, just like His. I'll long to find ways to bring wholeness and health to the broken sinners I see around me. So I'll reach out to try to help. . . and I'll blow it. I'll make somebody feel patronized or judged when that was the opposite of what I meant.

Or I'll be too tired, or too busy, or too (fill in the blank) and not try to help at all, which is worse.

Or, let's face it, I'll just be selfish!

I need forgiveness. Again. There's plenty of forgiveness available. The question will be, will I realize I need it? Will I remember to look back into the face of Jesus, which I forgot for a minute or a day? Will I see those eyes of love and feel the breaking of the hard shell around my heart? Having got that far, will I accept forgiveness freely given, or still try to somehow earn it?

And then, will I pass it on? If I truly understand my own condition and truly accept the unbelievable grace of God in erasing that and working hard to restore me, I'll want everyone to know what that feels like. I won't be like the ungrateful servant who ran out and put his petty debtor in prison after being forgiven for a debt that would take three lifetimes to repay.

1. Why is restoration so bound up with forgiveness?

2. What do you need to be forgiven for?

3. What and whom do you need to forgive? What will you do about it?

Reflection

God has everything you need, right in His hand. That hand is stretched out toward you. Have you taken it? Do you take it again, every hour of every day? Do you point it out to others and urge them to take it, too?

If you have a journal, here are some things to reflect on, or you could discuss them with your friends or with your group.

- I know in my head that God has provided everything I need for salvation and redemption, but sometimes I try to avoid some parts of the package, or try to find ways to save myself. What are some of these ways, and what am I willing to do about it?
- What does it really mean to me that Jesus came to save me—would have done it even if I'd been the only sinner?
- Are there ways I make forgiveness too hard or too easy? Do I sometimes excuse or condone instead of forgiving? Do I sometimes think I can't forgive because that would mean I don't take the sin seriously?

Respond:

Having reflected on these things, challenge yourself to find ways to make them real and visible in your daily life.

- How do I order and plan my day to intentionally and visibly live a life of wholeness and redemption?
- Whom should I talk to, and let them know I forgive them? Whom should I forgive in my heart and not even tell them, because they never knew I was hard-hearted toward them and it would hurt them worse to know?
- Is there something I need to ask forgiveness for? Are there ways to make restitution? Is there something I already know I'm forgiven for, but I have a hard time accepting it and living in that light? Or is there someone I can't forgive? Who might be willing to talk with me and help me?

Session 18: Supporting the Ministries of Local and Global church with Personal Resources

To support the ministries of the local and global church with personal resources, I am:

- managing my resources with the understanding that they all belong to God.
- returning a faithful tithe and giving offerings systematically.
- serving in one or more ministries of my local church.
- participating personally, as possible, in global service projects or ministries.

Big Idea

God has blessed me with many gifts, and wants me to manage them for Him and His work, for my own and others' blessing.

Connector

Look: Malachi 3:6-12; Leviticus 19:9, 10; 23:22; 1 Corinthians 12

Memorize: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6, *Today's New International Version*).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

It All Belongs to God

In Psalm 50:10, God says, "Every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine." The hairs on our head, the unique prints carved into our fingertips, the ability to think and speak and act, our musical gifts, painting talents, and athletic abilities were all created and given by God.

Money belongs to God, too, even though He's not the one who invented it. All societies start out bartering, and as long as Jane has something Joe needs and they can trade directly, that's easy. It's still possible if Joe has something Jane wants and Jane has something George needs, and George can do something for Joe, but it's getting complicated. At some point, someone used God-given intelligence to say, "Let's decide together that this particular kind of shell or stone will represent a certain amount of labor, goods, or service. Then we can all trade freely."

But where did they get the shells and beads? Where did they get the brains, muscles, and talents to do the things they did for each other? God gave them. Ultimately, it is impossible for us to give anything to God that He didn't already give to us.

It would behoove us, then, to remember this before we make any decisions concerning how much of which things we'll "give" to God. It's all already His. We are His, too, but He lets us decide whether or not we want to live that way. If we decide we do, then we are His in a new, all-inclusive way. Suddenly, we want nothing more than to be of use in His kingdom. We offer up everything we own and wish there were more. And when it comes to financial details, we think, "Ten percent? That's all He wants back? Wow, if only my bank and credit card companies were so moderate! Not to mention the Tax Man!"

So we begin the adventure of learning how to manage, or steward, God's goods. And we soon discover tithing is only the tip of the iceberg. If it all belongs to God, then what kinds of videos will He want in His library? What kind of TV to watch them on? How much should I spend on clothing and personal needs, and what statement do I make by my dress and behavior? Which job would He like me to take, and how many hours a week should I work? Someone who belongs entirely to God and is living like it will be certain that family time is inviolate, and not just on Sabbath, either.

Then, what about "the poor and needy"?

People who belong entirely to God will learn to really see those around them. They will discover there are always those who need more than they do, whether in physical goods or love or self-respect, and they'll look for creative and loving ways for those persons to meet their needs and still maintain dignity.

Leviticus talks about the ancient practice of gleaning. It's stated just as directly as any other command of God; in fact, it's right before repeats of "do not lie" and "do not steal": "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:9, 10, TNIV). That's pretty clear. Imagine if our country ran that way. All the farms would have corners and edges where, if a person was willing to work and pick the food, they could have it.

There are some ways in which we do something like this. Thrift stores sell used things and overstock stores sell things that haven't sold, and these things are available, not for direct work, but for a smaller amount of money, so that the working poor can afford them. However, these things are often very poor quality, and it doesn't apply to food. If you actually don't have enough to eat, you must go through an undignified, even humiliating "begging" process known as "applying for assistance."

Perhaps some creative Christian will come up with a better method, allowing people who can't find paying work to still keep their self-respect and work for what they need, and helping people with disabilities to understand that they, too, contribute to the human family, even if it's only through their smiles, or their very existence.

It all belongs to Him—including every human being.

1. Make a list of the temporal ways in which God has blessed you. Be as complete as you can.

2. Now list the ways you are using all of these blessings for God's kingdom. Be creative--it doesn't necessarily mean in recognized "religious" ways.

3. What are some ways that you can promote a "gleaning" mentality? Do you have a "field" you could share from?

4. Beyond tithe, how can you be systematic and intentional about financial support for God's work in the world?

Non-Financial Giving

When we think of "stewardship," or supporting God's work in the world, we tend to think of money first. And it is important, certainly. However, it's probably the least important of the gifts you have been given or can give back. If God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, He certainly owns you and me, especially if we have made the daily choice to live His way.

You may be familiar with the lists of spiritual gifts in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. Perhaps you have taken one of the tests available to help you determine what some of your gifts are. If not, it's a good idea to try. The next step is to try using some of them.

The first and often easiest place to begin is in local church ministry.

Are your gifts of the up-front variety? You could do special music, make a presentation on health or some local news such as Pathfinders or Investment, or even preach a sermon. Would you rather work behind the scenes? There are always tasks such as helping with cleaning, decorating for a certain season, helping with a potluck, or running the sound system. Are you somewhere in between? Perhaps you'd like to be an usher or a greeter. Have you ever considered leading a Sabbath school discussion or starting a small group? And there's always need for people to help in children's departments! Sometimes the work a young person does in his or her local congregation leads to a career or vocation. In any case, it will develop your interest and ability to work for God in a variety of ways, and it's a good place to practice and find

out which things you really are good at, and which you may want to let someone else do. Where else but in a loving church family?

Most of our work for God, however, unless we do become pastors, Bible workers, and so on, will necessarily lie outside the church doors. There are a multitude of opportunities for volunteering in your local community, no matter how small or large it may be. You can do individual things, like mowing lawns for elderly or disabled people, taking meals to shut-ins, or offering to babysit free of charge for a single parent you know. Or you could call your local social service agencies and see what's available on a more organized level. There may be after-school programs, or literacy programs, or Red Cross, Unicef, March of Dimes, and more. Volunteerism is on the rise. Shouldn't God's people be in the forefront? Volunteers find their own lives enriched far beyond what they may give to others.

Most importantly, serving people opens doors to locked hearts. That is, if the service is really done with love. People can tell. Phonies will not fool them, but they will open up to people they learn to trust, and when they do, you will have made a new friend and discovered doors unlocking in your own heart, as well. You will find opportunities to share the blessings God has given you as you learn to follow Him, and to invite others to try it, too. And you will grow into someone you hardly recognize—someone loving, giving, and full of the joy of life.

1. Make a new list, this time of spiritual and emotional gifts, talents, and abilities you feel God has entrusted to you. Again, be as complete as you can

2. What are some of the ways you already use these gifts to build the kingdom of God? What new things would you like to try?

3. How do you work for God outside the church? What have been some of the results?

4. How would you encourage someone else to use their gifts for God?

Global Neighbors

Not everyone can go physically to another land to work for God, but everyone who gets the chance, even for a short-term mission trip, should jump at it. Those who have gone, almost without exception, come back saying their lives have been changed forever. The Seventh-day Adventist church has lots of opportunities for these missions. And if you feel God is calling you to a greater commitment, to live and work for an extended time in another culture, you should explore that while you're young and before life sweeps you past the opportunity.

In the meantime, there are other ways to support global mission, besides, of course, mission offerings.

- First, you can partner at home with a missionary or mission family abroad. Many now have blogs or websites where you can keep up, offer prayers when they go through tough times, listen when they need to talk, offer counsel if you have it, and encourage them at all times. These people serve on the front lines of the Great Controversy, and their task, while incredibly rewarding, is also difficult, demanding, even dangerous, spiritually and sometimes physically.
- Secondly, we are becoming more and more a global family, with the reach of technology that allows you to have Facebook friends from every continent and talk face to face on a computer in time zones that require some creative scheduling on both ends. Could you see your time online as a mission for God? And what would that mean? One thing that we've all learned is that online communication has to be careful. Without facial expressions and body language, emails and posts can easily be misunderstood. Then there's the security issue. We have to be careful both about personal information and about what spiritual subjects we choose to air. Christians have been known to end up in some flaming debates that were not Christ-like at all, no matter what the original subject may have been. And what if you get all heated and angry about an issue that you come to see differently as you grow and mature in Christ?

We are so used to 24/7 contact and technology that we may treat it like we (shouldn't) treat our little sisters or best friends—rant and sneer and ridicule, and apologize later. The problem is, we can't *really* take back the words we've said that hurt people, and if it's online, it lives forever!

The bottom line is, people who belong entirely to God will strive to be Christ-like at all times and in all situations. And that means every day, every store, every street, every classroom and work station becomes a mission outpost for the kingdom. It all belongs to Him! Let's support it and His work for it in every way we can.

1. Have you ever been on a mission trip? If so, share some stories. If not, what plans might you make to go?

2. Do you partner with a missionary or mission family? Would you like to? How will you go about finding one, and what do you think you can do to help and support their work?

3. Have you thought about your online presence as a mission? How could you work for God in this way?

Reflection

Every single thing we have, are, and do is because of God. Even if we are rebelling and refusing to live His way, that's because Jesus died to give us freedom of choice. If we are dedicated to God, we will dedicate all our resources, from physical, monetary, temporal blessings to talents, gifts, spiritual abilities, and our very hearts and souls to Him.

If you have a journal, here are some things to reflect on, or you could discuss them with your friends or with your group.

- Do I have any resistance to giving God back His full 10%? If so, why? What can I do to change that?
- What is my attitude about giving beyond tithe? What excuses, if any, do I make? What are some blessings I've received when I've given freely and cheerfully?
- Have I seen some ways that people use online forums such as Facebook in an attempt to be missionaries, but it felt forced or preachy to me? Why did I have that reaction? How can I avoid the same mistake?

Respond:

Having reflected on these things, challenge yourself to find ways to make them real and visible in your daily life.

- How can I budget my time, money, and other physical resources to be sure God gets His 10% back and give more beyond that?
- What are the ways I serve in my local congregation? What are some things I'd like to try? Who will I ask to help me get started?
- How could I go on a mission trip or support someone who has?

Session 19: To Help Believers Live a Contagious, Holistic Christian Life

To help believers live a contagious, holistic Christian life, I am showing others how to:

- understand the biblical teaching to love the Lord with our heart, soul, strength, and mind.
- explain how Christ is the center of all biblical teachings.
- express Christ's love by creatively using their talents and interests.
- apply biblical principles to every aspect of their lives—mind, body, and spirit.
- lead someone to accept and follow Christ.

Big Idea

Christianity is not to be lived in a bubble or in isolation from secular society, but rather, because of the active and indwelling love of Christ, it should be an infectious experience that affects everyone with whom we come in contact.

Connector

Look: 1 John 4:-21, Matthew 22: 37-40

Memorize: “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love” (John 5: 8, 9).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

It is difficult to read a book, watch a movie, or speak about relationships without eventually hearing about love. It is a present force in our society and in our lives. God, through His Word, speaks of love profusely in the Old and New Testaments. It is the one common thread that runs through the entire fabric of Scripture. In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul gives this definition of love: “And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away” (1 Corinthians 13:2-8 ESV).

These characteristics are the outgrowth of someone who has experienced love. Many may look at this text and conclude that this standard is too high to reach. But, if we look closely, most of us can see an area or areas where we have fallen terribly short of this ideal.

[**interaction**—If you have a large group, separate into small groups of four or five and give the participants time to share any occasions where they have seen this kind of absolute love shown. As an alternative, if you are leading a small group, have them respond by raising hands. Allow a few minutes for open discussion.]

From our discussion, you may be asking yourself, “Who on this earth can be always patient and kind and never irritable?” “Who would dare say that they believe all things and can endure all things?” It seems an impossible task. However, this is the beauty of this passage. Of ourselves, it is an impossible task to love this way. This is why the first and greatest love requirement is not to love our neighbor, but rather to love God.

The Pharisees asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment. “And He replied to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (intellect). This is the great (most important, principal) and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as [you do] yourself. These two commandments sum up and upon them depend all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22: 37, 38, Amplified).

We find from this text that loving God is our first priority. Have you ever wondered, “How do I love God?” Is it enough to just utter the words toward heaven? How do you show love to someone who is as big and self-sufficient as God? What can you say to Him that will make a difference?

Application

[Ask your group for examples of how to express love to God. Allow a few minutes for discussion.]

God is Love

The Bible describes God as Love in 1 John 4:8. It says, “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” This simple statement is heavy with truth. If you do not love others around you, you do not know God. The verse does not say that God is lovable or that God is loved or that God is loving, but rather God is love. This means that God does not get love from some other wonderful place and then gives it to you. It begins with Him. If He did not exist, love would not exist. It is impossible to separate the two. Therefore, we cannot concoct or generate love on our own. It does not originate with us, but with God.

Because love begins with God, He does not need our love to feel validated or whole. He is not insecure or lacking when we do not love Him. He instructs us that the only way to show that we love Him is to take the love that He gives us through our relationship with Him and share it with those around us.

(interaction) [Have a sheet of paper with the words “I love you because...” written at the top. Supply a pen and then have the participants write a very brief personal compliment about the person sitting next to them. The compliment has to be about the person—not about their watch or dress. (For example, a student can say, “you have great taste,” not “you have nice pair of shoes.”) Watch the paper go around the room. If there is a large group, you may have to send a sheet down each row, but everyone has to write a very brief compliment about the person next to them. You may read 1 Corinthians 13 while they do this or play a song. If you have time at the end, read aloud some or all of the compliments written. Let them know that they have just literally shown their love for God. Allow a few minutes for discussion]

Jesus told His disciples, “I have loved you, [just] as the Father has loved Me; abide in My love [continue in His love with Me]. If you keep My commandments (if you continue to obey My

instructions), you will abide in My love and live on in it, just as I have obeyed My Father's commandments and live on in His love. I have told you these things, that My joy and delight may be in you, and that your joy and gladness may be of full measure and complete and overflowing. This is My commandment: that you love one another [just] as I have loved you (John 15: 9-12, Amplified).

So we show our love to God by how we treat people around us each day. The verse says, if you love me, keep my commandment, and His commandment is to love one another as He loved us.

How much did He love us?

Romans 5:8 says, "But God shows and clearly proves His [own] love for us by the fact that while we were still sinners, Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One) died for us" (Amplified) .

The entire Bible leads up to this point. The Old Testament sanctuary services point us to the cross of Calvary and to Jesus, our wonderful Sacrifice. All biblical teachings find their end in Jesus our Messiah and the fact that He loves us so much that He was willing to give the ultimate gift, His life. This was done while we were still sinners, or still His enemies. Needless to say, many would not do anything positive to an enemy, much less give them life.

(interaction) [Ask "How many of you like money?" Hold up a five dollar bill. Then ask, "By a show of hands, who would like this money? Everyone's hand will undoubtedly go up. Next, ball the bill in your hand and ask the question again. (All hands go up.) Next, throw the bill on the floor and stomp it and ask again. (Fewer hands will go up.) Next, cough on the bill and ask. If hands still go up, rub the bill under your arms or do something else creatively gross. Youth will laugh, and always a few will still raise their hand. The point is: No matter what happened to the bill, it never lost its value. It's still five dollars. It's the same with God's love: regardless, of what we've done or what has been done to us, we never lose our value in His sight. It's the instructor's choice to keep or to give away the money!]

This is the Godly love we are to show to one another. Regardless of race, gender, looks, smell, or family, when we love because God loves us, there will be no limit. This is how we attract people to Christ. We win them with love and acceptance. Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for each other" (John 13:35).

A disciple. An Ambassador

A disciple is one who follows another. As Christians we are not only called to be disciples, but also to make disciples of others. This is done through how we love each other. God even makes it easy for us to love. He doesn't tell us to be abnormal, but rather through your gifts and talents you are to bring others to Christ. All our gifts and talents were given by a loving God who wants to show His love to others through us. You are His ambassador. Whether you are a singer, an artist, a spoken word artist, an athlete, or a great talker, God gave you that gift to reflect His love.

Paul, in his letter to the church at Ephesus, said our gifts have a specific purpose. "Their purpose is to prepare God's people to serve and to build up the body of Christ. This is to continue until all of us are united in our faith and in our knowledge about God's Son, until we become mature, until we measure up to Christ, who is the standard. Then we will no longer be little children, tossed and carried about by all kinds of teachings that change like the wind. We will no longer be influenced by people who use cunning and clever strategies to lead us astray. Instead, as we lovingly speak the truth, we will grow up completely in our relationship to Christ, who is the head. He makes the whole body fit together and unites it through the support of every joint. As each and every part does its job, he makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (Ephesians 4:12-16, GOD'S WORD Translation).

All our gifts are to be used through His love and are designed to build His kingdom. When we are using our gifts in this manner, His love will automatically draw people to our side and then we will have an opportunity to share Christ with them.

Reflection

God sincerely desires to have a deep and loving relationship with you. He wants to reveal more of His love to you each day, but our hearts have to be sensitive enough to receive Him when He does.

Since love is shown through action, try to do your best to describe what God's love looks like.

1. Can you think of times when you have not been very loving because of how someone looked?
2. How is your own opinion of yourself affected when you consider how God values you? When you consider how God values you, does it change your opinion of yourself or does it remain the same?

Application

Sometimes it's much easier to just say "I love you" than to really show it. How do you think you could change the way you show love to your annoying brother or sister or even your parents? The first place you learn to show God's love is in your family. Give an example of something you can do to show love to your family.

1. Do you know what your gifts and talents are? It is important that you know, because these are the methods God will use to win others to Himself. If you do not know your gifts, here are a few easy steps to finding out:
2. First, find out what you really enjoy doing. Next, find out what you are complimented on the most. It may be singing or just how you speak, or even the fact that you are always the positive one.
3. Lastly, read 1 Corinthians 12 and find out where you fit in.

Dig Deep

What is love?

"Encourage the expression of love toward God and toward each other. The reason why there are so many hardhearted men and women in the world is that true affection has been regarded as weakness and has been discouraged and repressed. The better nature of these persons was stifled in childhood; and unless the light of divine love shall melt away their cold selfishness, their happiness will be forever ruined. If we wish our children to possess the tender spirit of Jesus and the sympathy that angels manifest for us, we must encourage the generous, loving impulses of childhood" (*Desire of Ages*, p. 516).

It is important that as young people, the valuable lessons are loved and utilized to avoid the negative attitudes Mrs. White speaks of. A deeper reading of 1 John 4 will also give invaluable insight in how we should relate to those around us.

A recent newspaper article reported this survey:

If you had to choose between your significant other or your pet, who would win? The Associated Press reports that in a recent survey, 14 percent picked the pet. The story doesn't get into the reasons WHY the respondents picked lover or pet, but I'm really curious about it. If you fall in love with someone who only loves you on the condition that Fido, the dog, goes elsewhere, then that's probably not the right person for you anyway. But if you fall in love with someone who loves you madly, but is terribly allergic to Fluffy, the cat — well, then, Fluffy would likely need to find a new home. But take this quote from the story, from Fidel Martinez: "I've had numerous relationships with women. My dog has never let me down." (Yuma Sun Newspaper, January 26, 2011 by Roxanne Molenaar-Assignment Editor)

Some people find it easier to love their pet than to love their neighbors. This may be because pets give unconditional love. With humans, that's not always the case. We always take a risk with loving because it may not be returned. However, the thing that causes us to shy away from love is the very thing that makes love worth it. That thing is our humanity. Often the people with the greatest capacity to hurt us may have the greatest capacity to love us.

Ellen White gives us this counsel: "The divine love emanating from Christ never destroys human love, but includes human love, refined and purified. By it human love is elevated and ennobled. Human love can never bear its precious fruit until it is united with the divine nature and trained to grow heavenward" {HP 202. 3}.

DISCIPLE IN ACTION

- Share with your accountability partner one way in which you will do something practical to show God's love to a close family member. Contact your partner mid-week to share your progress.
- Use this week to discover your talents or gifts. Find out what you love to do and the areas in which you are complimented the most. Share your findings with your accountability partner.

Prayer Time:

- Take time to pray about ways to express God's love to the people around you.
- Ask God to reveal His love to you through others and learn how to praise Him for it.
- Pray for God to bring someone into your path this week with whom you can share Jesus

LEADER'S INFORMATION

- The leader should make the interactive sessions exciting and natural. Feel free to adjust each exercise to the size of the class.
- Make sure to familiarize yourself with the love chapters in Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 3, 4, and John 15.
- Before doing this session, read *Steps to Christ*, chapter 8, "Growing Up in Christ."

Session 20

DEBRIEFING SESSIONS 16-19

Time: 90 minutes. Try to spend approximately 15-20 minutes discussing each section below, leaving time for small group prayer and commitment at the end.

Discipleship begins and ends with Jesus—the focal point!

Summary

In Sessions 16 through 19, we have explored an interesting progression: We have moved from learning about what it means to have human relationships centered in our relationship to God, to understanding that God has provided all we need for redemption, to stewarding the resources, both tangible and intangible, that He has given us, to passing on the Good News and helping others begin or continue the same journey. At first glance, it may seem that these four subjects don't track together very well, but consider it further. Everything (*everything*, from Session 1 onward) begins and ends in the love of God. If we have any desire at all to love those around us, it has to begin with loving God and centering all things in Christ and His sacrificial spirit. This leads to true redemption, not just of our souls, but of our earthly relationships. These two sides of the Christian life, loving God and loving others, lead us to commit all that we are and all that we have to Him, which is what we define as stewardship. And why do we commit all that? Simple! Because now that we know what it means to live a whole, free life in Christ, we want everyone around us to share in that joy. So we pass it on, with excitement and enthusiasm. That's infectious, so they pass it on, and *they* pass it on. . . forever and ever, amen!

Here is a round-up of the four Big Ideas we studied:

1. As members of the body of Christ, we must be willing to accept others where they are and help lead them to a redemptive relationship with God.
2. God loves me so much that He made me, gave His Son to save me, and walks with me daily to restore me. I don't have to do anything to earn that.
3. God has blessed me with many gifts, and wants me to manage them for Him and His work, for my own and others' blessing.
4. Christianity is not to be lived in a bubble or in isolation from secular society, but rather, because of the active and indwelling love of Christ, it should be an infectious experience that affects everyone with whom we come in contact.

During session 16 we discovered that Christ-centered relationships in the local and global church include giving and accepting forgiveness; being supported and nurtured by the community of believers; loving and mentoring those who are younger, as they mature into adults; and keeping informed and responding to news and stories of the global church.

Session 16: Christ-Centered Relationships

- How did the personalization of the story of Saul's conversion affect you? As you thought and prayed about the questions, did you find your attitudes toward hurtful people changing? Have you forgiven someone who badly hurt you or someone you love?
- Share a time when someone reached out to you in love and forgiveness. How did that affect you?
- Have you thought about the idea of being a mentor to someone younger than you are? What might you be able to share with someone who is, perhaps, just learning to love and follow Jesus?
- We all believe the church should be united, but what does that mean and what does it not mean? In this context, discuss the difference between unison singing and harmony singing. What insights can you gain from this metaphor?
- Share some ways you each keep contact with believers in other parts of the world. Have any of you gone on a mission trip at some point? How much did it mean to you to have contact from home?

Session 17 helped us understand that God has provided everything that is needed for our redemption, and that Christ died in our place to redeem us to Himself.

Session 17: Redemption

- What are some ways you've been noticing brokenness since you studied this session together?
- Have you tried to find some ways to help heal the brokenness, in yourself, your friends, your enemies? What is happening in that arena?
- The author said this:
- *Here is an important point about which there's more controversy than there needs to be. Jesus did not come to say, "Here's how it's done, just watch Me and you can climb out by yourself." He did come to say, "This is the way I want you to live after I pull you out." There's a difference.*
- Discuss this thorny issue. Where do you stand? Why?
- Share some of the mistakes you feel you've made in loving others, both those done through selfishness and those you honestly meant well, but messed up through awkwardness or simple human frailty. What are some of the feelings this raises, both when you first realize you've made a mistake, and when you turn and accept God's

forgiveness? What helps you to try again rather than hiding away and refusing to try anymore?

In session 18 we learned that everything we have belongs to God, and supporting the church with personal resources, does not only mean tangible gifts like our finances, but also the intangibles, like our time, talents, and spiritual gifts.

Session 18: Stewardship

- What does stewardship have to do with love and restoration of relationship?
- How have your temporal blessings helped or hindered your walk with God and others?
- How have your intangible gifts, such as talents and spiritual gifts, been used in ways that help or hinder your own and others' spirituality? Is there anything you want to change, do more or less of? How?
- Share what has happened in your life as a result of being more careful and intentional in your stewardship of the resources, tangible and intangible, which God has entrusted to you.
- Have you been successful in encouraging another to use his or her gifts for God? What have been the results?
- Have you changed your budget, either of money or of time?

During session 19 we learned that Christianity is not to be lived in a bubble or in isolation from secular society, but rather, because of the active and indwelling love of Christ, it should be an infectious experience that affects everyone with whom we come in contact.

Session 19: Passing It On

- What have you learned since studying this session about how your love for God impacts your ability to be loving toward others?
- Here is an interesting exercise: Write down the names of ten people who are mentors to you, one way or another. In the original sense of the word, you are a "disciple" to these people. Now, write down the names of ten people who might be considered your disciples. Consider what you are teaching these followers, as opposed to what you might *want* to teach them, now that you're paying attention.
- Share what has happened as you and your accountability partner have tried to show love better in your families.
- It might seem like an odd idea, but what could we humans learn from pets that might actually strengthen our relationships and make it easier for others to keep on loving us faithfully? Do you think animals might be closer to the unconditional love with which God began Creation? If so, why?

SERIES FIVE

Sessions 21-26

SESSION 21:	DEVELOPING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH BY KIMBERLEY TAGERT-PAUL
SESSION 22:	UNDERSTANDING THAT GOD PROVIDED EVERYTHING FOR MY RESTORATION BY DEBBONNAIRE KOVACS
SESSION 23:	EMBRACING THE EVANGELISTIC MISSION OF THE CHURCH BY BALVIN BRAHAM
SESSION 24:	HELPING BELIEVERS DISCERN WHERE GOD IS WORKING BY KIMBERLEY TAGERT-PAUL
SESSION 25:	HELPING BELIEVERS USE SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO FULFILL A PERSONAL CALL TO MISSION AND MINISTRY BY MICHELLE RILEY-JONES
SESSION 26:	DEBRIEFING SESSION BY DEBBONNAIRE KOVACS

READ THIS FIRST!

INFORMATION FOR SESSION 21:DEVELOPING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

Many Christians are sometimes hesitant to share their faith with people outside of the church. Discipleship assists in overcoming that hesitation. Reaching beyond the church doors is essential in discipleship.

A short skit is included in this lesson. You may want to have your group prepare for this ahead of time by assigning parts in advance. It is very simple and requires your audience to use their imagination. Be ready with other suggestions to help your group reach beyond its borders and bring the light of Christ into their world.

Session 21: Developing Positive Relationships with Those Outside the Church

To develop positive relationships with those outside the church, I am:

- showing respect to and praying for non-Adventist and the un-churched because all are of infinite value to their Creator.
- being a good neighbor, participating in community life, and helping those in need.
- being ethical in all my business dealings and in my professional and personal life.
- reflecting the character of Christ in all my interactions with others.

Big Idea

As Christ's disciple, I am called to minister God's love to others outside the church as well as inside of the church. My life can be an example that will bring others to Christ and then to the truth of God's Word.

Connector

Look: Colossians 2:6-10, 2 Corinthians 9:13, John 17:23

Memorize: "I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23 NIV).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

God Loves Me as Much as He Loves Jesus

Have you ever been asked a question you were *sure* you knew the answer to—so confident that you knew there could be only one answer—yours? A co-worker asked me one of those questions one day. It was really quite simple, or so I thought. She asked if I thought God loves us as much as He loves Jesus. What? Was she crazy? Could she truly believe that God loves us as much as His only Son? Could it be?

I read and reread John 17:23. I had belonged to Jesus, His son, for a very long time, but the concept of just how much God loved me was about to change. A six-month study to prove this concept wrong ended not as I expected. Everything I read pointed to the fact that God does indeed love us as much as He loves Jesus. Amazing. It took a while to let the beauty of this truth sink in, but once it did, I had something more to face.

If God loves me as much as He loves Jesus, how should I love others?

Some people make it easy to love them. Others . . . well, I'm sure you know what I mean. I began looking around me. There were people everywhere. People who thought they didn't need to change out of their pajamas before going to the store, people who thought shouting on their cell phone while walking in public was acceptable—even when they were using words that shouldn't even be whispered—people who lived a very different lifestyle than I did. Yet, looking at them, I had to acknowledge that God loved them as much as He loved me—every one of them—no matter how I felt.

As a group, answer the following questions:

- If God loves us as much as He loves Jesus, what does that say about how we should love others?
- Are there any exclusions?
- As a group, perform the following skit.

SKIT: WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

Setting: A busy national store. (Tell your audience this is the setting and let them use their imaginations if it's not possible to put up shelves, aisles, carts, etc.)

Cast: Five different shoppers: four females, one male. (See description of each below.) Someone in a robe to portray Jesus and a young man standing with Him, watching the scene from the side of the stage.

- **Shopper One is on her cell phone, shouting into it while pretending to push a grocery cart.**

“Yeah, I just got a bargain. You won't believe it. Three extra pair of underwear in the bag. Yeah, only four bucks. They are all white, but I can live with that. Want me to pick some up for you? Yeah, I think they have size 12.” (Pushes cart off the stage while still talking.)

- **Shopper Two has a pretend cart with a pretend child in it; shopper is yelling at the child.**

“Would you stop that? I keep telling you. I'm not saying it again. You got it? You do that once more and I'm going to tell your father. Stop that. I told you. I'm not telling you again. If you don't stop, you won't get any candy when we are done. Stop that. I already told you. I'm not telling you again.” (Pushes cart off stage.)

- **Shopper Three is pushing a pretend cart and reaching for groceries on the shelf. This shopper has on P.J. bottoms and a crazy top and is talking to a friend who is dressed in shorts and a tight fitting top.**

“Yeah, I know. I probably shouldn’t have slept with him. He said he loved me, but I don’t know. I’ve only known him for two weeks.

“Can you fall in love that fast?”

“I’m worried. What if I’m pregnant?”

“What then?” (Pushes cart off stage.)

- **Shopper Four is pushing a pretend cart and struggling to reach things—looking around but not meeting anyone’s eyes. This shopper is muttering to himself and has mental issues.**

“Used to be easy. Not now. I know they want to hurt me. Don’t look at them. It’s in their eyes. I can see it. They think I can’t see them. But I can. Got to hurry before they get me.”

- **Shopper Five is pretending to push a cart and watching over several children.**

(She picks up items, looks at the price, and puts them down.) “We’ll find something we can afford for Mommy to cook. Let’s just keep looking. Maybe some cereal, or how about macaroni and cheese? I know we had it last night. Maybe some eggs. Let’s just keep looking.” (Pushes cart off stage.)

Jesus (Putting His arm around the young man standing beside Him.)

“You ask, ‘Who are my neighbors?’ Here they are, my son. Take care of my sheep, will you?”

Young Man: “But they are so. . .”

Jesus: “Different than you?”

“Yes, I know. But you have something in common: I love you all. Very much.”

(Lights go out slowly.)

Discuss

- Reread John 17:23. What does it mean to you? How have you interpreted this verse?
- What does loving others mean in the context of this verse?

“We each have a work to do. We may be of different nationalities, but we are to be one in Christ. If we allow peculiarities of character and disposition to separate us here, how can we hope to live together in heaven? We are to cherish love and respect for one another. There is to be among us the unity for which Christ prayed. We have been bought with a price, and we are to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits” (MS 20, 1905. 2 MCP 426.4).

- Read the quote above from Ellen White. Are we only to respect those who are different if they are church members and therefore part of our family?
- How will treating others with respect and love change their perception of us?
- How do you love a difficult person? How do you love them if they are in the church? How do you love them if they aren’t yet a follower of Christ? Should there be a difference? If so, why?

Reflection

Applying God’s Love in All Areas of My Life

“No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light” (Luke 11:33).

So you have the light—what are you doing with it?

When we are called to Christ, our wants and desires begin to change, but we still have to live in the world. How do we share our light with others who don’t necessarily see what we have to share in a good light?

- Have you ever been in a situation where being a Christian wasn’t very popular?
- Have you ever had to respond in a way that you knew Christ would want you to, only to be made fun of?

Let’s say you are in a store. You are happily shopping away and it comes time to pay for your purchases. The cashier gives you your change, and you see that they have given you more than you should have received. Do you return it?

- What if it is more than \$20?
- What if it is less than \$5?
- What if it is less than \$1?
- What if it is less than .25?

Now, what if the cashier knew that you are a Christian? What if she wanted to see how you would react? What if the slip-up wasn't a slip up at all? What if it was a test? Would the amount matter? Would your reaction matter?

Turn the tables. What if the store overcharged you by \$20? Would you go back for them to make things right? Would you do it for \$5? How about if it were less than \$1?

Others are watching us to see what the light of Christ looks like. In this world of darkness, they really want to see light. But they want a true light—one that is consistent and dependable, one they can throw themselves at, one that will change their lives. Jesus is that light. How we show Him to others matters. Not just at church, but in every aspect of our lives, including the minutest detail.

The world watches to see how we will react in many situations. They listen to our words. They watch us at work to see if we will be faithful, to see if we'll "borrow" things that don't belong to us. They watch us when we least expect it. Sitting down to eat in a crowded restaurant, do you take time to pray? Are you nice to the waitress even if she is having a bad day and not being friendly?

Our lives of light are made up of many little details. Be sure that others are watching—and not just for the big stuff. They are ready to pick apart every little thing we do. Is that fair? Probably not. But it is a surety that you take on when you become a Christian—just as an athlete does in professional sports and ad branding. It is a choice to promote your brand, in this case, the love of Jesus.

We won't be perfect, at least not until Christ comes again and transforms us. But the world is watching for a consistency that they need.

"The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:12, NIV).

Answer the following questions in your journal:

- Do you feel that the "night is nearly over"?
- How important is it to you personally that the "day is almost here"?
- What "deeds" in your life are closer to darkness than light?
- What can you do to let Jesus turn them to light?

Application

Today, more than ever before, the opportunities to witness are at the touch of your finger. The Internet and social networking puts us in touch with the whole world easily. One touch of the “Enter” key on our computer, and our words can and will be read by literally thousands.

That’s good, right?

It can be. Social networking on the computer and other electronic devices can be a wonderful way to share the gospel with other seekers. Sometimes, a short note typed with the intention of encouragement can change lives we probably won’t meet in this lifetime. We can influence people to stay encouraged, to look to God’s Word, and draw closer in their relationship with our gracious Savior.

On the other hand, venting in the heat of the moment can also be read by those same thousands. A careless word or thought can turn our witness into smoke that vanishes before our eyes. Once entered, it usually can’t be taken back. And that becomes a tragedy. We need to be careful in our choice of words and topics in this electronic age so that others will be turned to Christ, not turned away.

The world has a right to hear the gospel from us. After all, Jesus has changed our lives from darkness to light. We have received His grace, and as His disciples, we are told to share this gift with others. It is a gift so precious, we need to guard it in our lives so that others won’t be turned away from desiring its redeeming power.

Dig Deep

Even youth lead a busy life. It is one of the devil’s favorite tricks to keep us from doing the work God has called us to. It is much more convenient to ignore witnessing outside of church than to actively engage in it, but each community has people who are hungering for truth, and they want to see it lived out, not just spoken of. Making mistakes is part of growing, and we shouldn’t expect instant perfection. As a Christian, our lives will be under “the microscope of the world.” They will look for any imperfection, but showing consistent Christian love will help others see that we are truly trying to live God’s love. Being a Christian and a Seventh-day Adventist isn’t just religion, it is a life-style. It should and must affect every area of our life: our work, our study, and our recreation.

From the Pen of Ellen G. White

“There is something for all to do besides going to church, and listening to the word of God. They must practice the truth heard, carrying its principles into their every-day life. They must be doing work for Christ constantly, not from selfish motives, but with an eye single to the glory of Him who made every sacrifice to save them from ruin” (GW92 15.3).

DISCIPLE IN ACTION

We are reborn with a purpose. We are saved to share His grace. The world is waiting to hear, see, and know true Christians that live and breathe the love of God. Will they be disappointed if we aren't perfect? Some may. They've been hurt by others under the name of Christ and, unfortunately, turned off by what some have to say. Showing them God's love in our imperfect lives with consistency and grace can restore hope to many who are hopeless.

Questions

- In what area of your life do you have interaction with the most people outside of church?
- How can you share the light of Christ in that situation?
- What other areas of your life do you “rub elbows” with others outside of the church? How would a quiet but faithful witness work in those areas?
- Make a list of other ways you can have an impact for truth. Can you do things like visit other churches for musical concerts and show them what a true Seventh-day Adventist Christian looks like? How about at community events? Take the challenge to take the list that you made and put it into action. Each step forward counts for Christ!

Session 22: Understanding that God has Provided Everything Needed for my Restoration

To understand that God has provided everything needed for my restoration, I am learning that:

- Jesus died to redeem me from sin and now lives to restore me to physical, mental, and spiritual wholeness.
- through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ will live in me and I will live in Him.
- because every person is created in God's image, my relationships will be based on love, forgiveness, and respect.
- the Holy Spirit daily prompts me to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with my God.
- God expects me to be a steward of all He created.
- the great controversy ends when God brings an end to sin and restores earth to its original perfection.

Big Idea

God is not satisfied with simply saving me from the consequences of my sin; He wants to restore me to the life of love for which I was created.

Connector

Look: John 4:10-14, 21-24; Micah 6:8; Revelation 21:1-7

Memorize: "Those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14, *Today's New International Version*).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

Through the Tomb to the other Side

The way to the glory of God often leads through darkness. Have you ever noticed that? In the midnight of a trial we don't think we will survive, that's when we truly learn to trust God. And in the end, there is often a blessing we never could have imagined.

So it was with the cross of Jesus. He “couldn’t see through the tomb,” we’re told (DA 753). In other words, even Jesus wasn’t sure He would survive this trial. We can see that for ourselves, both in what He said on the way to Gethsemane, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Matt. 26:38), and in His pleading prayers to be freed from this “cup.” He knew He would die. At that moment, as a human being, He had only His trust and faith, just as we do, to help Him cling to the promise that He would then be reunited with His Father. But He did cling. He held to “Thy will be done,” and He conquered. And on the other side of that cross and silent tomb, there was glory that perhaps even the human Jesus couldn’t imagine, at least on that night in the garden.

And He did it for us. He had a far larger idea than just rescuing us from this fallen world and from death. He wanted to give us the full, rich lives we were meant to have, even here. He wanted us to “live abundantly” (John 10:10).

How does that happen? What does it even mean? The full answers to these questions are greater than our grasp of them, but there’s one simple answer: Love. Simple—but not easy! Jesus’ days were filled from the moment He awoke until the moment He slept, and even in His dreams, with love. He loved His Father and spent hours in communion with Him through reading the scrolls He had available to Him, repeating the old stories His mother had taught Him, and prayer.

Because of that, He loved everyone around Him, too. With His heart full of God’s love for Him, as lowly as He may have felt as a Galilean carpenter, it was easy for Him to see the beloved child of God in the faces He saw daily.

That’s what He wants to do for us. He did go through the tomb, He did come back more than a conqueror, and He does live for us this very moment. He says He’ll bring us life, victory, joy, and that the vehicle for all of that is love, love, and more love.

- Think of, and perhaps share, a time in your life when great blessing came through great trial.
- How can you express some of your enormous gratitude for what Jesus chose to do for you?
- What do you think are some of the features of “abundant life” that you would like to make real in your life? How do you see God working to make these things a reality?
- Who has shown love to you this week? What was the effect on you?

Immanuel

Immanuel means “God with us” in more ways than one. It means that God, who has always been with us, came to live visibly with us so we could be more aware of His presence. It means that God has a human face like ours now—even a body like ours. Jesus still has His physical form and always will. He will be the only one with scars in the new reality God is creating. How, then, can God be “with us” as Jesus promised?

John 14:16-20, one of the clearest passages on the truth of the triune Godhead, explains how it works: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me.

Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”

Let’s break this down:

Step 1: Jesus asks the Father.

Step 2: the Father sends the Spirit.

Step 3: the Spirit, who is invisible to the world, lives “with us and in us,” and because of that, we know Him.

Step 4 gets interesting: Jesus has already said He is leaving, but now He says He won’t leave us as orphans, but “I will come to you.” Even though the world won’t see Him, we will. Clearly, He’s seeing the Spirit as nearly interchangeable with Himself. In fact, He later says the Spirit “will not speak on his own,” but “will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you” (John 16:13, 14). The trinity is so unified that we can’t begin to understand it. What God says and does, Jesus says and does, what Jesus says and does, the Spirit says and does, and what the Spirit says and does, God says and does.

And sure enough, the result, which we could call **Step 5** in our list, is that we will realize that Father, Son, and we are all one in the Spirit. So now, Immanuel/God with us creates a whole new way of living. Now it’s even more complicated than a three-way God—we’re in the mix, too!

The little book, *Steps to Christ*, is one of the clearest treatises on the life in Christ that has ever been written. On pages 62-3, Mrs. White describes the result of abiding in Christ and learning to continually surrender the will to Him. First, she describes the instantaneous process we call justification or “imputed righteousness:”

“If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.”

In other words, He did the work, and we get the credit. His character is *imputed*, or credited, to us. Next, she shows what Immanuel, the indwelling Spirit, accomplishes in the way of the lifelong process of sanctification, or becoming holy:

“More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the continual surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. So you may say, “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. So Jesus said to His disciples, “It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.” Matthew 10:20. Then with Christ working in you, you will manifest the same spirit and do the same good works—works of righteousness, obedience.

“So we have nothing in ourselves of which to boast. We have no ground for self-exaltation. Our only ground of hope is in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and in that wrought by His Spirit working in and through us.”

This is a moment-by-moment process, and like all things we learn by practice, it involves some falling and forgiveness. But God never gets tired of picking us up, dusting us off, and starting again. The question is, do we keep reaching out for Him?

How would you describe the threefold Godhead and what their actions are in your life?

Have you intentionally invited the Holy Spirit into your heart and your daily moments? What would help you to remember to maintain the connection and constantly surrender your will to His?

Mrs. White mentions “works of righteousness and obedience.” We tend to make lists, but the Bible keeps it pretty simple. What is the one, great work of righteousness and obedience, according to what Jesus taught His disciples during their three years with Him, and reiterated in His last hours? (See John 15:12, 13.) How would it help with obedience if we could keep that one command before us every day?

Justice, Mercy, Humility

When God begins to set the world right, which He tends to do one person at a time, He begins by setting right the foundational thing that’s wrong—your two-way relationship with Him. He loves you. That’s a fact as immutable as the law of gravity. He’s been loving you since before you were born, and nothing you’ve done will ever stop Him. So He comes in love and calls you, and when you respond, He begins to teach you that you are safe in that love and always will be. For some people, just this one thing takes their whole life to really settle into, and that’s okay, because it’s the one and only thing we really cannot do without. At all!

But if you have responded to Him and felt that opening, brightening, thawing inside that shows His love is active in you, He then begins to set your outer world right, too. He wants to teach us to love as He does, all the time, everybody, no conditions. Because those people mentioned above, who have such a hard time learning to trust God’s love, generally got that way because they have been so hurt by other humans. The fact is, the main way that He shows His love on this earth is through us. That’s why we’re called the body of Christ. We’re His hands, His eyes, His feet, His mouth. So when we are doing the devil’s legwork for him instead (and there are a *lot* of people doing that), what happens is hatred or indifference instead of love. Then, when somebody comes along and says, “Hey, did you know God loves you?” the person who has been the target of this hatred and indifference doesn’t even know what that means, let alone how to believe it.

- So, Spirit-filled Christians set out to **do justice**. They pay attention when people are being marginalized and made powerless, and they do something about it. They notice when children are told, in words or actions, that they are worthless, and they counteract that with all the love they have. They work actively for issues of peace and fairness, for ways of caring for those who need care in ways that maintain their dignity and worth as humans and children of God.
- Spirit-filled Christians **love mercy**. They always can imagine a reason why someone might be acting in hateful or indifferent ways, and they seek to love the oppressor as well as the victims, and to empower both in ways that will make them both more human, not less. They are well aware of their own weaknesses and have no time for

backbiting or judging the weaknesses of others, though they do hold each other accountable.

- Spirit-filled Christians who are working for justice and loving mercy can get so excited at the results (or so frustrated at the lack of visible results) that they can get caught up in pride—either “look what I’m doing for God!” or “why is this not working when I’m trying so hard?” So they pay particular attention to **walking humbly with their God**. They make sure, as Jesus did, that their devotional relationship comes first and foremost because they know they cannot succeed at any of the things they’re trying to do if that vertical relationship is not in place.

But when it is. . . watch out! Spirit-filled Christians turned the entire known world upside down in the first century after Jesus was so briefly here. And they’re doing it again. They’re noticing what is going on with the planet God so lovingly created for us, and they’re moving to protect and steward it, knowing we will be held accountable for its treatment, not to mention the fact that the health of God’s beloved children depends on the health of their environment. They’re penetrating jungles, both concrete and rainforest, and finding people who don’t know the Good News yet, and they’re spreading the joy. They’re quietly working in neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces, letting people see and hear and touch that the love of God is real.

Because one of these days, the universe will be set really *right*, once and for all. And they want *all* God’s children to be there, when. . .

“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love” (GC 678).

1. Are you certain that God loves you? How do you know?
2. Are you certain that you love Him back? How can you tell?
3. Of all the voices competing for your attention, how can you discern the ones that are calling you to work for God? What are some of your own, personal tasks in the Great Commission?

Reflection

There simply is no way to express the gratitude and love that wells up in us when we really get a glimpse of God’s amazing love and grace. When we are aware of the Spirit moving in us, and even when we’re not, we can see God’s fingerprints and footprints all around us. Each of us have personal ways of helping others to see those touches of God’s love and grace on our daily workaday world. It is the most exciting thing in life when we catch on to one of those ways, act on it, and see what God does in our lives and others’ lives. That’s generally even more of a blessing to the giver than to the receiver, and if giving helps the other person become a giver, too, then the results are exponential.

If you have a journal, here are some things to reflect on, or you could discuss them with your friends or with your group.

- Read the stories of Jesus' betrayal and death at the ends of the four gospels. Then spend some time in intense meditation on those events. Write about your feelings.
- Have you intentionally asked the Holy Spirit to live in and through you? What do you see happening? If not, do you find yourself resisting? Are there fears you might pray about and talk to your accountability partner about?
- Write about your ideas of justice, mercy, and humility. How have you seen these things active in your life? How have you seen the effect when they are absent or distorted?

Application

After having reflected on these things, challenge yourself to find ways to make them real and visible in your daily life.

- What are some specific ways I can be Jesus' hands, feet, or mouth this week?
- How can I work for justice and peace this week?
- How can I show that I love mercy this week?
- In what ways do I make sure that I am walking humbly with my God?

Session 23: Embracing the Evangelistic Mission of the Church

To embrace the evangelistic mission of the church, I am:

- praying for the Holy Spirit to prepare me to reach others for Christ.
- choosing to be aware of the spiritual climate locally and globally.
- using my spiritual gifts to help tell the world the story of Jesus.
- able to give a reason for my faith when asked.
- sharing the story of my personal relationship with Jesus with community members, family, friends and co-workers.

Big Idea

Participants should know that the natural tendency of human beings is to waver between trust in God and the persistent tendency to disobey Him. However, through constant prayer, they can witness effectively to others, and the Holy Spirit will give them power over the natural and persistent tendencies. They should feel the need to accept God's invitation to utilize their spiritual gifts to evangelize others who have not yet committed their lives to following Jesus. And, they should respond by participating in evangelistic initiatives to influence those who are yielding to the persistent tendency to disobey God, to turn to Him instead.

Ellen White says, "The work above all work,—the business above all others which should draw and engage the energies of the soul,—is the work of saving souls for whom Christ has died. Make this the main, the important work of your life" (*Messages to Young People*, page 227).

Connector

Look: Matthew 28: 18-20; John 15: 16; Acts 2:38; Revelation 3:20

Memorize: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15: 7, 8, NIV).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

PRAYER INSIGHTS: Effectiveness in witnessing is emboldened through prayer.

Colossians 4:2-6—Amplified Bible

“Be earnest and unwearied and steadfast in your prayer [life], being [both] alert and intent in [your praying] with thanksgiving. And at the same time pray for us also, that God may open a door to us for the Word (the Gospel), to proclaim the mystery concerning Christ (the Messiah) on account of which I am in prison; that I may proclaim it fully and make it clear [speak boldly and unfold that mystery], as is my duty. Behave yourselves wisely [living prudently and with discretion] in your relations with those of the outside world (the non-Christians), making the very most of the time and seizing (buying up) the opportunity. Let your speech at all times be gracious (pleasant and winsome), seasoned [as it were] with salt, [so that you may never be at a loss] to know how you ought to answer anyone [who puts a question to you].”

- **In this text, the apostle Paul suggests that as Christians we should devote ourselves to prayer.** Through such strength and persistence as conveyed by the word in the Greek language that he uses (*kartereite*), prayer becomes the continual duty of Christians that enables active watchfulness both for us and for others, rather than engaging in lethargy (4:2).
- **In 4:3, Paul implies that as Christians our awareness of our need for prayer and our actual persistence in prayer are the basis of our strength to succeed in whatever we do for the Lord.** Whenever as Christians we convince ourselves that we are capable of doing things on our own, we are in serious spiritual danger. That conviction leads to loss of power and minimal effectiveness.
- **According to the Apostle (Col. 4:5), when as Christians we are intentional and constant in prayer, opportunities come to us for witnessing.** In response to our prayer, the Holy Spirit empowers us to relate to others with tact and sensitivity. We should not antagonize others for not following the principles of the Lord, and neither must we blame them for failing to accept the gospel.
- **Prayer enables us as Christians to elevate our conversation to a high level through the Holy Spirit that takes full control of our lives (Col. 4:6).** As persistent, praying witnesses of Christ, the Holy Spirit directs us to become attractive, pleasant, and winsome in our conversations. Such attitudes open opportunities for us to get the attention of others who are not of the faith, maintain their interests, and open up opportunities for us to answer questions about the Christian faith.

Share: Discuss the dynamic impact that the relationship between prayer and the Holy Spirit can have on the personal life and witness of young people.

Prayer in evangelism may be practiced through A.C.T.S. (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication are practices integral to effective prayer for evangelism and soul winning.

1. In **A**doration, we tell God how much we appreciate Him, adore His holiness, express our love for Him, and praise Him for His power and majesty. In adoration of God, we recognize His transcendent greatness both in heaven and on earth. *"How awesome are your deeds!"* (Psalm 66:3).
2. In **C**onfession, we acknowledge our weaknesses, tell Him where we have fallen short, and ask for help and strength to turn away from future temptations. We likewise acknowledge to Him the failings of other persons whom we would like to see in His kingdom when Jesus comes to claim the righteous. *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9).
3. In **T**hanksgiving, we thank God for His love, His faithfulness, His patience, for sending Jesus, His son, to die on the cross for us. Thank Him for the Holy Spirit's indwelling in our hearts and for His being our conscience, our counselor, and that "still small voice." We thank Him for the opportunity to be involved in witnessing and for those whom He will enable us to reach and impact through the power of the Holy Spirit. *"Glorify him with thanksgiving"* (Psalm 69:30).
4. In **S**upplication, we express our reliance on Him for material needs, for our repentance over failures in faithfulness and our renouncing of mercilessness as a way of life. We seek forgiveness for our own failings, and like Moses speaking on behalf of the children of Israel (Exodus 32:11-14), we supplicate on behalf of those whom we would like to see saved in His kingdom. Through supplication, we tell the Lord what we want – SOULS! Be specific! – call them by name. None of our requests is too big for God to manage. *"Make your requests known to God"* (Philippians 4:6).

Share: How can Seventh-day Adventist young people be more intentional and constant in prayer for soul winning?

From the Pen of Ellen G. White

"Those who will put on the whole armor of God and devote some time every day to meditation and prayer and to the study of the scriptures will be connected to heaven and will have a saving, transforming influence upon those around them" (5T 112).

"God's workers must be men and women of prayer... that they may be light and strength to others" (RH Nov.10, 1885).

"There are souls who have lost their courage; speak to them, pray for them. There are those who need the bread of life. Read to them from the Word of God. There is a soul sickness no

balm can reach, no medicine heal. Pray for these, and bring them to Jesus Christ. And in all your work, Christ will be present to make impressions upon human hearts” (CME 22.5).

“Let the stewards of the manifold grace of God seek out these souls, visit their homes, and through the power of the Holy Spirit minister to their needs. Study the Bible with them and pray with them with that simplicity which the Holy Spirit inspires. Christ will give His servants a message that will be as the bread of heaven to the soul” (COL. 235).

“Let us also pray earnestly in behalf of those whom we expect to visit, by living faith bringing them, one by one, into the presence of God. The Lord knows the thought and purposes of man, and how easily He can melt us! How His Spirit, like a fire, can subdue the flinty heart! How He can fill the soul with love and tenderness! How He can give us the graces of His Holy Spirit, and fit us to go in and out, in laboring for souls!” (ChS 169.2).

Share: What about prayer gets your attention most from the counsel of the Spirit of Prophecy?

Dig Deep

Spiritual GiftS: Getting it Right!

The Apostle Paul addressed the question of Spiritual Gifts in I Corinthians 12: 12–31.

- A warped concept of spiritual gifts infested the church at Corinth. Some members had inflated ideas of their personal importance because they thought they possessed more public and spectacular gifts of the Holy Spirit than others. Others coveted wrongfully some of the gifts that were conspicuously exercised by others.
- The gifts of the Holy Spirit that were intended for uniting the members of the church in Corinth became the foundation for division among the Christian believers. This schism over spiritual gifts among the members gave rise to the need for the apostle Paul to bring some perspectives to the question of spiritual gifts among the members of the church.
- Paul emphasized that basic to an acceptable appreciation of spiritual gifts is an understanding that the church is the body of Christ and He is the Head of the Church (Ephesians 5:22). As a body, the church has many interdependent parts (1 Corinthians 12: 12-26). The way the gifts of the Holy Spirit are intended to function is synonymous to the way the body with its various parts functions.
- When Christians are baptized into the body of Christ, they receive gifts from the Holy Spirit that enable them to participate in the body of Christ, the church, in a manner to build up and keep the church united. Paul says, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor. 12: 13). This is what is referred to as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as according to Prime, “no one can be a member of the body of Christ without the experience of the baptism by the Holy Spirit” (Prime, D. 2005. *Opening up 1 Corinthians* 111–114, Leominister: Day One Publications). Paul says, “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ” (Rom. 8:9). When an

individual receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he or she therefore is considered as being born again.

The apostle Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians 12: 14-20 that each member of the body must be involved in the functioning of the body, otherwise the body does not function optimally. In this interdependent relationship, every member of the body is needed and has a job to do in order to maintain unity, growth, and functionality (verses 21-26). For this task, each is given a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Each believer is expected to be able to identify his/her gift(s) as endowed by the Holy Spirit and to utilize such gift(s) within the body, realizing that everyone does not get the same gift (1 Cor. 12: 27–30). In the same manner, the spiritual gift that each member possesses must not be regarded as his or hers to be used only for his or her personal/limited church interest. The gift(s) of each believer belongs to the entire church and should be used to fulfill the God-given purpose for which it was given.

Share: How do spiritual gifts properly appreciated and used enable Seventh-day Adventist young people to act?

From the Pen of Ellen G. White

- “The Holy Spirit commits to every Christian some gift or talent which is to be used to advance the kingdom.--The present is our day of trust. To every person is committed some peculiar gift or talent which is to be used to advance the Redeemer's kingdom. All God's responsible agents, from the lowliest and most obscure to those in high positions in the church, are entrusted with the Lord's goods. It is not the minister alone who can work for the salvation of souls. Those who have the smallest gifts are not excused from using the very best gifts they have, and in so doing their talents will be increased. It is not safe to trifle with moral responsibilities nor to despise the day of small things. God's providence proportions His trusts according to the varied capabilities of the people. None should mourn because they cannot glorify God with talents which they never possessed and for which they are not responsible” (4T 618).
- “Every gift that the Lord has entrusted to us is to be valued and used. The smallest gift is not to be overlooked. The Lord gives to every man according to his several ability to use the gift bestowed. Each should be encouraged to use his gift. The least talented may enlarge his capabilities by doing his best. The church of Christ is made up of vessels large and small. The Lord can use the smallest gift to advance His cause, if the possessor has faith in Him” (6MR 107-108).

Reflection

What is your spiritual gift(s)?

Divide yourselves into small groups of seven or eight. In your group, pray earnestly for the aid of the Holy Spirit and then explore Romans 12:1–13, 1 Peter 4:8–11, and 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31. Make a list of all the spiritual gifts mentioned in these texts and do the following exercises:

- Discuss what each of these passages adds to your understanding of the proper use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- Identify which of these gifts you think each member of the group possesses. There may be other gifts possessed by members of the group that are not included in the passages studied. It would be good to identify such gifts.
- Each group member should indicate whether or not they acknowledge possession of the gift(s) attributed to them by the members of the group.
- If any member of the group does not confirm the gift(s) attributed to them by the other members of the group, they should indicate what they think is their gift from the Holy Spirit.
- A list should be made of the spiritual gift(s) that each member of the group possesses.
- As a team, the group may determine how they should utilize their gifts, both individually and corporately, to tell others about the story of Jesus.

Application

Sharing the story of my personal relationship with Jesus with community members, family, friends, and co-workers

Considering the Natural Tendency of Human Beings:

- At age sixteen, King Uzziah began his reign in Judah and continued for fifty-two years. He started off well, honoring the Lord and doing what was right in the sight of the Lord. However, after he became powerful, he allowed himself to be controlled by pride and succumbed to the persistent tendency to disobey the Lord. That led to rebellion in his later life (see 2 Chronicles 26: 1-22).
- Uzziah usurped the priestly roles of authority by inappropriately offering incense, which was a function of the priests only. Uzziah's leadership also influenced and encouraged the people of Judah's persistent tendency to disobey. The Scripture says that Uzziah failed to remove the high places and *"the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there"* (2 Kings 15:4). As judgment from the Lord, Uzziah was struck with leprosy for his violations of the law of the God.

As a Friend and yet as Father and Creator, God made the first move to reach out to all human beings even when they were enjoying the pleasure of their delight and giving in to the persistent tendency to disobey Him. Here is how Isaiah characterizes the debut:

“In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!’ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isaiah 6:1-5).

Share: Discuss how God develops relationships with human beings as implied in this text.

Dig Deep

The security of the people of Judah under the military genius of Uzziah, their commander and chief, lulled them into complacency. They spurned the warnings of the Lord and became overly corrupted in their prosperity. At that point, Uzziah, a good king for fifty-two years who had then become arrogant, profaned the temple, contracted leprosy, and died in shame. Now at the point of his death, a powerful army of Assyrians was advancing on the people of Judah. Instead of seeking the Lord, the nations turned against Him to idols.

Throughout history, it has been true that kings competed with God, but fell in shame; people turned from Him to worship idols, but their false Gods crumbled. **Amidst all the apostasies, the Lord revealed Himself to Isaiah as the sovereign Lord—with a promise to preserve a remnant through which the Savior should come.** Acceptance of the Savior would lead to the creation of a community of believers who would be His covenant people to reach the world with the saving gospel message of Jesus.

God is the one who reveals Himself to human beings. Without His revelation, no one would know Him. He revealed Himself to Isaiah in a time of national crisis and constantly reveals Himself to individuals to serve Him and to witness for Him. When Isaiah met the Lord, he could not resist the Lord’s invitation to take His message to others. He said: “Here am I Lord, send me” (Isaiah 6:8).

Share: How Does God reveal Himself to young people today for them to become involved in witnessing for Him and how should they respond?

How many people will be in heaven because of you?

C. H. Spurgeon, the renowned 19th Century English preacher, told this story about King Cyrus, the man who conquered Babylon and freed the Jews from captivity: A visitor who was admiring Cyrus' gardens said it gave him much pleasure. "Ah," said Cyrus, "but you have not so much pleasure in this garden as I have, for I have planted every tree in it myself." Spurgeon then commented, "One reason some saints will have a greater fullness of heaven than others will be that they did more for heaven than others. By God's grace they were enabled to bring more souls there."

Seventh-day Adventists do not believe that anyone will go to heaven having a greater fullness of heaven than others because they did more for heaven than others. Everyone who goes to heaven will go based on the grace of Christ—a free gift, rather than by merit. None will have a greater fullness of the Kingdom than another. When we get to heaven it will be such a joyous occasion that nothing that may cause jealousy and feelings of unhappiness and inferiority will surface. We will all rejoice in knowing that we made it.

However, each of us should engage in serious thinking about how many people will be in heaven because of our efforts under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Ellen White said, "A solemn responsibility rests upon everyone to engage in the work of saving souls. We cannot afford to fold our hands, and engage in interesting nothings, gratifying our tastes and inclinations. We are to win souls for the Master" (*Signs of the Times*, 1889).

If we are able to reminisce about experiences that led to our presence in the Kingdom, then probably some will say to us, "I'm so thankful for you. It was your testimony, your life, your invitation to accept Christ that accounts for my being here today." The apostle Paul anticipated the joy in heaven of seeing people who were there as a result of his ministry. In 1 Thess. 2:19–20 (ESV) he says: "For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy." According to Paul, the Thessalonians will be his hope, joy, and crown of boasting at the public manifestation of Christ because they are the fruit of his ministry as an apostle of Christ.

Share: How many persons would you like to see in the Kingdom because of your evangelistic ministry? How many of those persons can you name right now?

COMMITMENT

Influenced by this study, I am committed to intercede with the Lord for a personal lifestyle of prayer so I can receive the outpouring of His Holy Spirit to be an effective witness for Him.

I am ready to participate in group interactions with others in my church that will help me to identify my spiritual gifts and strengthen my confidence for witnessing.

I am ready to share my faith in Jesus with others who do not know Him and will actively participate in outreach witnessing activities.

Print Name _____ Date _____

Signature _____

LEADER'S INFORMATION

According to Peter Bloch, presentation and participation are two important aspects in the process of training the youth to be effective witnesses for Christ. By presentation, theoretical instructions on “how to do...” is given to them. By participation, they are given the opportunity to be actually engaged in what they will do when they go forward to witness. **Bible surfing and members' evangelization exercises are two initiatives that actually fulfill the demands of presentation and participation.**

Step 1: Bible Surfing

Bible surfing is a method by which individuals challenge themselves to open their Bible, read a passage, look for the main character of the passage, then dig deeper through critical thinking and a curious mind to get meaning from the passage. They may utilize other relevant resources in the process such as Spirit of Prophecy writings, Bible commentaries, and other inspirational writings to substantiate meanings.

In Bible surfing, we search through cross references, looking at maps, or thinking about stories from the Word that highlight a point in Scripture.

Bible surfing experiences take the surfer through memorizing the names of each of the fundamental doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and then a study of selected biblical or doctrinal topics that they will cover when they go out to engage prospects in their faith sharing endeavors.

If this is an Adventist Youth Society (AYS) initiative, at least twice per month the special feature for the AYS program may be designated for Bible surfing on selected topics. This study in AYS small group units could encourage small group involvement that enhances the Bible learning

process of each youth. Through Bible surfing, each member of the AYS studies and is able to explain specific biblical or doctrinal topics of the Bible.

Step 2: Members' Evangelization Exercises

In order to build confidence for witnessing to others, each member who participates in the Bible surfing experience may be involved in members' evangelization exercises where they are expected to witness to other members of the church on topics discussed in the Bible surfing experience. This will also include sharing personal experiences and expressing praises to the Lord for His goodness. Where possible, they should utilize their spiritual gifts in order to improve their witnessing ministry.

Benefits of Bible Surfing and Members' Evangelization Exercises

Bible surfing and members' evangelization exercises will help the youth to develop confidence in utilizing their spiritual gifts and Bible knowledge to contact others and share the gospel story about the love of God and the faith of Jesus.

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Session 24: Helping Believers Discern Where God is Working

To help believers discern where God is working, I am showing others how to:

- pray for a clear understanding of what God wants to accomplish through them.
- recognize the work of the Holy Spirit within and around them.
- discern where God is calling them to serve.
- assess the needs of those God has called them to serve.
- evaluate the culture they are called to serve in, in order to find and reach others.

Big Idea

God is working in my life and the lives of others who I am helping to disciple. I am called by God to assist those I am discipling, to help them discern His will for their particular mission/service to others, and to help them develop an understanding of the needs and cultural context of the people they are called to serve.

Connector

Look: Psalm 32, 1 John 1:9, Romans 12:1-2, 2 Peter 1:1-10

Memorize: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:1-2).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

Eagles are great parents

By now, you must be feeling like a parent. You’ve embraced the concept of discipling and have used all that you have learned to reach out to others with the good news you have found. And there they are, those precious ones who have chosen to follow Jesus, partly because you have been faithful and He has worked through you to minister in their lives.

Now what do you do?

Just like rings in a pond, the circle must go on and on and on, ever widening. But the thought hits you . . . they are just babies, so new in the Word, how can they be expected to go back out into the world? What plans does God have for them? How will they serve and to whom?

Before you get too worked up, let's take a look at how eagles raise their young.

Imagine a tiny chick being born from an egg the size of a goose's egg. Every four to five days, about a pound of weight is added to its growth. By three weeks of age, this growing bird is about one foot high and its feet and beak are almost adult size. By its eighth week, the parents, who have carefully kept their talons balled into a fist so they wouldn't accidentally skewer their young, know it's time to help their children along.

Junior perches on the nest's edge, stretching his large wings, when Mom, without ceremony, shoves her precious child off the protection of the nest. Junior may only make it to the next limb down. Looking up, he must wonder about what his mother has just done. Soon though, after he has recovered from his booting, he practices with his parents' encouragement and learns to spread his wings and fly.

So, parenting is finished for Momma and Poppa eagle, right?

Not a chance.

This is when the young eagle's real education begins. The parent birds continue to feed their babies, but they also teach them hunting skills. The fledglings learn from their parents for months, and even then, Mom and Pop stay around the area watching from the sidelines for a long time, helping to make sure that their precious babies are safe and learning the skills they need to be an eagle. Unlike most animals, eagles have learned that the survival of their young depends on them staying nearby for a longer period of time to help them when needed.

If eagles can get it right, shouldn't we?

The people whom you have disciplined need your help and guidance. They need someone to talk to about problems they might encounter when sharing their faith. They need help to know how to answer difficult questions. They just need to know that you are there to walk beside them as they in turn seek to make new disciples.

Reflection

As a group, answer the following questions:

- What is one of the first areas that a new disciple must access?
- What tool is best used to accomplish this?
- What gift did Jesus give us to aid in leading us to the answers for these questions?

As an individual, answer the following questions:

- Make a list of the people you are mentoring in this discipling process.
- Schedule specific time to pray for them.

- Schedule specific time to pray with them.
- Be sure to ask for the Holy Spirit’s guidance in helping them develop ideas where God might be calling them to serve.

From the Pen of Ellen G. White

“There is work for you to do in the church and out of the church. “Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.” The fruit we bear is the only test of the character of the tree before the world. This is the proof of our discipleship. If our works are of such a character that as branches of the living Vine we bear rich clusters of precious fruit, then we wear before the world God’s own badge as His sons and daughters. We are living epistles, known and read of all men” (*Testimonies for the Church Volume 5, Page 348*).

Are you missionary material? What about those you are mentoring?

- Have you traveled to a land far away and made great sacrifices for God’s kingdom? If so, then you probably call yourself a missionary. It is a noble calling. It is a God-given calling that few are equipped to fulfill.
- If not, what is your ministry, then? Do you work through your local church to reach out to the youth in your area? Are you involved with prison ministries? Do you help your local center serve food to the homeless or provide other aid to hurting families?
- Guess what—that makes you a missionary, too!
- Anything involved with the ministry is a mission—one that God has especially equipped you for. And in equipping you, He is using your gifts to draw others to Himself. Why? Because you have uniqueness that someone else can relate to.
- As others are drawn to you and what you believe and live, they will be transformed by God’s grace. You will feel a special connection to them because of this.
- You will become their coach, encouraging them as they in turn reach out to others.
- As you pray for your mission field, they too are finding theirs. It may be as close as their next door neighbor. It may be as far away as the setting of the sun in another time zone. Each individual has a unique mission plan mastered by . . . well, the Master.
- How do you, and they, determine where to serve?
- God hasn’t left us wanting. He has given us tools that help in finding our mission field and in serving the people that it contains.
- Some of these tools include: Bible study, prayer, fasting, worship, giving. Discipleship has to become intentional. We have to use the tools that God has given us. If we don’t, they become rusty, and so do we. God calls us to call others; the Bible is clear on that fact. Our tool boxes need to be utilized if we are to help others.

Answer the following questions as individuals in a journal or as a group.

- What do you feel is the most effective tool for you to use in helping the people you disciple?

- Can the most effective tool be different for different people? Why or why not?
- Which tools in your tool box get the most workout? Which ones do you need to pick up and use more?
- What convinced you that you were following God's plan for your life in your mission field? How can you help that translate to those whom you are discipling?

Reflection

Do disciples ever make mistakes? Let's look at the Bible to find our answer.

1. First, take a look at Jacob. He knew that God had a plan for him . . . and then he took matters into his own hands. He fooled his brother into a hasty oath and then planned the deception of his father. Did God use him later—after he repented from his mistakes? Absolutely.
2. Moses' life was planned by God, too. Moses, nurtured by his birth parents, finally went to live in the palace with the king and his adoptive mother, the princess. Being groomed in the best schools available didn't stop his impulsiveness or prevent his sin. He killed a man. We all know that God led him in one of the greatest stories of the Bible. Even then, he still made mistakes. But remember who buried him (Deuteronomy 34:4-7). God loved Moses.
3. Others followed. There was David and his adultery, Peter and his denial of Christ, the list goes on and on. Yet, every one of these individuals sought to serve God and, when they repented of their mistakes, were forgiven and guided.

Are you any different?

You will make mistakes. It is inevitable. The only way not to make a mistake is to not try—keep things status quo, ride under the radar and enjoy life as you know it. God's promise of a more abundant life doesn't mean just in the heavenly realms. He means for it to start here—on this earth. The only way that abundant life can be reached is to reach out and beyond our comfort zone into the world, scary as it is, and grab those seekers who are looking for what you have.

Like all good parents, you will make mistakes with your disciples. You'll push them too hard, or not enough. You might not always have the answers to every question. You'll mean well, but caught up in your own busy life, you may neglect them at some point.

It's O.K. Mistakes can challenge us to become better. But it takes action to have reaction. So don't be afraid to start . . . and using God's tools, you will find success with God.

Discuss

- Have you made mistakes in your discipling? How have they impacted your ministry?
- Do you feel God can use you, mistakes and all? Can He use those you are mentoring, even if they aren't perfect?
- Is there anything holding you back from full service to God?

- How can you break through this obstacle and abandon yourself into God’s leading and His loving?

Application

What if I told you, “I love you with all my . . . liver”? Would you think you must not be loved all that much? In some parts of Africa, that’s exactly how they would express their love. The liver is thought to be the seat of emotions. Therefore, loving you with all the liver would be a whole heaping lot of love!

It is very important when discipling that you consider those to whom you are working with. People are different based on many things. This is most obvious if your discipling involves another culture. Understanding cultural influences and patterns must be a part of preparing for the field, but there are less obvious differences that must be considered in discipling. It may not be something your new disciples will think about, so you must make it a point to help them.

Witnessing in the workplace is another example where discipling must be clearly thought out. Knowing the company rules on sharing of one’s faith will help, but they don’t have to be a deterrent. Encompassing God’s love and character into your life will naturally witness to others. Make sure you point this out to those you are discipling. Help them to understand that studying the culture of those whom they want to reach ahead of time will help them know better how to witness, whether it’s someone next door, in the next cubicle, or around the world. Remind them that Jesus used this method. He spoke to each individual and their needs. He looked at the heart first, and then began His teaching. We need to learn to follow that example for more effective discipleship.

Discuss

- Thinking of those you are discipling, where do their God-given talents lead you to believe they can be the most effective inside of the church and outside of it?
- How can you help them see that individuals have different needs and learn to discern them and react to them?

Dig Deep

Ellen White was shown that discipling would happen as God’s workers came closer to Him. Read what she wrote and see how God will lead his workers, as long as we surrender the guiding to Him. Be encouraged.

“Let me tell you that the Lord will work in this last work in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that will be contrary to any human planning. There will be those among us who will always want to control the work of God, to dictate even what movements shall

be made when the work goes forward under the direction of the angel who joins the third angel in the message to be given to the world. God will use ways and means by which it will be seen that He is taking the reins in His own hands. The workers will be surprised by the simple means that He will use to bring about and perfect His work of righteousness. Those who are accounted good workers will need to draw nigh to God, they will need the divine touch. They will need to drink more deeply and continuously at the fountain of living water, in order that they may discern God's work at every point" (*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 300).

DISCIPLE IN ACTION

Using the list of those whom you are mentoring in your discipleship journal:

- Specifically pray for each of them to find their mission field. Pray that God will reveal clearly what His plans for them include.
- Spend time reaching out in prayer with them. Make time to either meet personally, over the phone, or on electronic media to pray together for each other's mission field.
- Help them bear the yoke, just as Jesus helps us bear ours.

"It is the power of the cross alone that can separate man from the strong confederacy of sin. Christ gave Himself for the saving of the sinner. Those whose sins are forgiven, who love Jesus, will be united with Him. They will bear the yoke of Christ. This yoke is not to hamper them, not to make their religious life one of unsatisfying toil. No; the yoke of Christ is to be the very means by which the Christian life is to become one of pleasure and joy. The Christian is to be joyful in contemplation of that which the Lord has done in giving His only-begotten Son to die for the world, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (*Messages to Young People*, p. 138).

Session 25: Using Spiritual Gifts to Fulfill a Personal Call to Mission and Ministry

To help believers use spiritual gifts to fulfill a personal call to mission and ministry, I am showing others how to:

- confer with fellow believers to confirm and refine their areas of spiritual giftedness.
- be prepared for mission and ministry by participating in training programs.
- choose and participate in ministries that use their gifts and talents.
- find ways to support Adventist mission and evangelism, ministries, and education.

Big Idea

You are a child of God—created by Him with your own unique heart, abilities, personality, and spiritual gifts. God brought all those elements together in you so you could serve Him and the world, sharing His love and helping people make personal commitments to Him in your own unique way as He has made you.

Connector

Look: Psalm 9: 1, 2; Psalm 57:9, 10; Psalm 96:3; John 8: 26b; 1 Peter 4:10

Memorize: “Each of you has been blessed with one of God’s many wonderful gifts to be used in the service of others. So use your gift well” (1 Peter 4:10, CEV).

THE JOURNEY

Exploration

God wants us to participate with Him in His evangelistic mission.

Church is important, but all church activity is secondary in importance to sharing the love of Jesus Christ with people. Sharing the love of Jesus is much more important than church programs and activities because it is the relationship people have with Jesus that will determine whether or not they are saved. In sharing the gospel—Jesus’ love to others—you share that He is the answer to their needs.

Sharing the gospel, or being a witness, is not *something we do*—it is *someone we are!* Jesus asks us to “be witnesses” (Acts 1:8). Some people think we should just live our lives, be

examples, and love people unconditionally while we meet some tangible need they may have. They think the church should only be a witness in their social and humanitarian programs.

But have you ever stopped to think that our calling is different than just influencing people positively?

Think about this—even people who don't believe in Jesus can be a positive influence while doing good to others. Our calling is so much more. We are called not only to go, not only to love people, and feed the hungry, help the poor, etc., but also to share the gospel and make disciples for Jesus Christ.

“Making known the gospel” is also another way of describing evangelism. Webster's Dictionary defines *evangelism* as “the promulgation (or “making known”) of the gospel” or “the winning or revival of personal commitments to Christ.” Our being a witness, sharing of the love of Jesus so that others make a commitment, is what evangelism is all about!

To make the gospel known to others, He has given you certain abilities, and these are called spiritual gifts. Some people think evangelism is a spiritual gift that is only given to certain people. It is true that evangelism is listed as a spiritual gift, and Paul says, “some [are] evangelists” (Eph. 4:11). However, like faith and prayer, evangelism is also a universal gift to every Christian. There are some who are particularly gifted in these areas, but all must participate in them with Jesus. Your spiritual gifts are given to you by God so that you can be equipped to effectively share your Christian faith with others – to do the work of **evangelism**.

Surprised? We are told:

- to choose to join Jesus (John 5:20)
- to go everywhere and share the gospel with every one (Mark 16:15)
- that God has gifted us all to do this work (1 Peter 4:10)
- that God will give us the power to witness (Acts 1:8)

Jesus always takes the initiative to involve His people in His activity—and God's invites you to join Him!

Having a relationship with God, a willingness to be molded into the person He has prepared to join Him, will cause Him to reveal to you the special qualities and abilities He has gifted to you for His glory, where He is at work, and what He wants to do through you.

Share: What have you always understood about evangelism? Are you surprised that EVERYONE is called to God's evangelistic mission? How have you witnessed or shared Jesus' love with others?

Dig Deep

Preparing to reach others for Christ

One of the greatest ways in which we can prepare to share the good news is to allow God's love to abide in our hearts and then be ready to faithfully express that love to everyone we meet. If we want to be a soul-winner and a disciple-maker, we must listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. He will always be faithful to speak to us and tell us what to do. As we are empowered and guided we will be enabled to use the moments of our lives to be effective witnesses for Jesus.

There are many benefits that being led by the Holy Spirit brings to our lives and our witness.

- For one, the Holy Spirit's power WILL ENABLE YOU to be a witness. The Bible tells the story of Barnabas as he travelled to Antioch. He encouraged the people in the Lord, and the Bible tells us that he was full of the Holy Spirit (and of faith), and that many people believed on the Lord.
- Another benefit is that the Holy Spirit WILL SPEAK THROUGH YOU as you witness. You do not have to worry about how or what you should say. The Holy Spirit, at the right moment, will tell you just what to say.
- The Holy Spirit WILL GUIDE YOU. He has done it through so many others already. He spoke through Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch who had come to Jerusalem. As a result, the eunuch asked to be baptized. There was also a man named Agabus (see Acts 11:28) that the Holy Spirit spoke through to let people know there was going to be a famine.

And guess what else?

- You don't have to do any of this by yourself. The Holy Spirit WILL ASSIST YOU. The Holy Spirit will work through us so that others can benefit.
- Preparation for evangelism is key and involves spending time in the presence of God. Prayer, worship, and meditation on the Word of God will prepare our hearts for daily divine encounters with the people who cross our paths. Jesus, who has commissioned us to "go" and "be," will be faithful to lead people into your path.

Share: Look up these texts to identify some tips on making preparations to share the gospel. Think about your own experiences and consider what preparations you have made.

- 2 Timothy 2:15
- Acts 1:8
- Acts 4:31; 1 Timothy 2:1-4
- Psalm 51:12-13; Mark 4:19
- 1 Peter 3:15
- Matthew 28:19-20; Hebrews 10:25

What are Spiritual Gifts?

So if everyone is called to evangelism, to share the gospel to others, what are the spiritual gifts God has given to us? Do you know what your spiritual gift is?

In simplest terms, a spiritual gift is a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every believer, according to God's grace, to help us in our own walk of faith and to bring others to Christ.

Share: The Bible gives us key information about spiritual gifts. Fill in the blanks:

1. Every Christian has at least _____ Spiritual Gift (1 Peter 4:10)
2. No Christian has _____ the gifts (1 Corinthians 12:28-30)
3. We cannot _____ our gifts; God does that job (1 Corinthians 12:7-11)
4. There is _____ gift that every Christian possesses (1 Corinthians 12:29-30)
5. Believers must be good _____ of their gifts and will account to the Lord for how they use their gifts (1 Peter 4:10)
6. Spiritual Gifts indicate God's call and purpose or _____ for a Christian's life (Romans 12:2-8)
7. Gifts used without _____ do not accomplish God's intended purposes (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)
8. Spiritual Gifts are for the common good to build up the _____ (1 Corinthians 12:27)

The bottom line is that all we have is from God, so in that sense they are all gifts from God. Scripture, however, appears to set apart spiritual gifts as something different from talents and natural abilities. Perhaps we could say that talents are natural abilities that seem to be hereditary, to run in the genes. Unbelievers, as well as believers, have talents. Perhaps we could say that natural abilities are either talents or skills that have been learned through conditioning from the environment we lived in or training we have received. Again, both believers and unbelievers have natural abilities. Spiritual gifts, however, are an empowerment of divine origin, not a result of genetics, training, or conditioning. Only believers have spiritual gifts.

Ignorance Is Not Bliss!

There is a story about a certain sea captain and his chief engineer who were having an argument as to which one of them was the more important to the ship. Failing to agree, they resorted to the unique idea of swapping places. The chief engineer ascended to the bridge and the captain dived into the engine room.

After a couple of hours, the captain suddenly appeared on the deck covered with oil and soot.

“Chief!” he yelled, wildly waving aloft a monkey wrench.

“You’ll have to come down here; I can’t make her go!”

“Of course you can’t,” replied the chief. “She’s aground!”

Clearly the captain and the chief engineer wanted the best result. But by working in areas where they were not suited or gifted, the outcome was a lot of effort, a lot of sweat, but not necessarily the best result.

Maybe you have looked around in your own church. Some people are just spectators, unwilling to get involved in ministry. Others are actually involved but not necessarily where they are best suited. So the outcome is a lot of programs, a lot of activities, but not necessarily true evangelism – sharing the gospel so that people make a commitment to Christ. Perhaps you too are uncertain about how to get involved, or are involved but not sure it’s where you belong.

Because God has called you, not knowing how God wants to work through you is no excuse. One way to know how God wants to use you for the work He has called everyone to, evangelism, is a proper understanding of the special abilities He has given to you. Earlier in the lesson (Big Idea), we pointed out that God created you with these special abilities, called spiritual gifts, so that you can serve Him and the world to help others make personal commitments to Christ. There are several reasons why you should know what your spiritual gifts are:

1. God inspired many references to spiritual gifts in the Bible. If it was important enough to God, then it should be important to us. See 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14; Romans chapter 12; Ephesians chapter 4; and 1 Peter chapter 4.
2. When the book of 1 Corinthians was written, it was addressed to those who were obviously not very mature in the faith. Paul addressed these as elemental truths, fundamental to the Christian life.
3. We are asked to be good stewards of our gifts. (Read 1 Peter 4:10.) Now it is very hard to be a good steward of something we know nothing about, and of something which we do not even know we possess.
4. Since your spiritual gifts equip you uniquely to serve Him and others, knowing your gifts helps you to plug in to the ministry of your local church where God wants to use you.
5. Paul states that you should make the use of your spiritual gifts a priority in your life. So simply, when you have too many things to do, you must choose to function in the area of your spiritual gifts. You must know your spiritual gifts to set these priorities.
6. Knowing your spiritual gift(s) can be of great help in discerning the will of God. Choices in all aspects of your life can be taken into account whether it will help or hinder the exercise and development of your spiritual gift. For example, if you are not gifted to teach, you have a valuable insight into God’s will when you are considering which major to select for college.

Going back to the story about the sea captain and his engineer—because they were working outside of their gifts, their efforts to make the ship go, no matter how hard they worked, were futile. Not knowing your spiritual gifts can cause discouragement, insecurity, frustration, disinterest, stagnation, etc. You could end up spinning your wheels in activities, roles, and positions that aren't suited for how God wants to work through you. You could also end up being involved in so many things, but all the wrong things.

As the story illustrates, not realizing and utilizing your gifts isn't exactly an enjoyable way to live.

Share: Can you think about a time when you have been involved in the church and have been frustrated, but didn't know why? Are you currently uninvolved but want to know where you can best be used? Do you know what the spiritual gifts are? Share your thoughts with the group.



What are these Spiritual Gifts?

The Bible lists various gifts of the Spirit, which are mentioned in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. It should be noted that there is much discussion among Christians as to exactly how many spiritual gifts there are. As you read the Bible chapters, you will realize that along with the gifts listed, there are gifts mentioned in one chapter that are also mentioned in another chapter. None of these lists are intended to be complete lists in and of themselves of all the gifts God gives.

Romans 12 mentions the following spiritual gifts as the special abilities that God gives to certain members of His church to...

<p>1. Encouragement</p> <p>Romans 12:6-8; Titus 1:9; Acts 11:23-24; Acts 14:21-22; 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12; 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11</p>	<p>... offer comfort, words of encouragement, hope, and reassurance to discouraged, weak, or troubled Christians in such a way that they are consoled.</p>
<p>2. Exhortation</p> <p>1 Timothy 5:1-2; Hebrews 3:13; Hebrews 13:22; 1 Thessalonians 5:14</p>	<p>... help others reach their full potential by means of encouraging, challenging, comforting, and guiding. To present truth so as to strengthen or urge to action those who are discouraged or wavering in their faith.</p>
<p>3. Giving</p> <p>Romans 12:6-8; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; 2 Corinthians 8:2-5; Mark 12:41-44; Matthew 6:3-4</p>	<p>... recognize God's blessings and to respond to those blessings by generously, sacrificially, and cheerfully giving of one's resources (time, talent, and treasure) without thought of return.</p>
<p>4. Leadership</p>	<p>... cast vision, motivate, and direct people to harmoniously</p>

Romans 12:6-8; Hebrews 13:7; Hebrews 13:17	accomplish the purposes of God.
5. Mercy/Compassion Romans 12:6-8; Luke 7:12-15; Luke 10:30-37; Matthew 20:29-34; Matthew 25:34-40; Mark 9:41; Matthew 5:7	... feel exceptional empathy and compassion for those who are suffering (physically, mentally, or emotionally) so as to feel genuine sympathy for their misery, speaking words of compassion, but more so caring for them with acts of love that help alleviate their distress.
6. Prophecy 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 28-31; 14:1-5, 24-25, 30-33, 37-40; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11-13; Deuteronomy 18:18-22	...reveal truth and proclaim it in a timely and relevant manner for understanding, correction, repentance, or edification. There may be immediate or future implications.
7. Teaching Ephesians 4:11-16; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:28-31; Hebrews 5:12-14; Acts 18:24-28	...explain the truths of the Word of God clearly and to apply them effectively so that those taught understand and learn. To instruct others in the Bible in a logical and systematic way so as to communicate pertinent information for true understanding and growth.

1 Corinthians 12 adds these spiritual gifts as the special abilities that God gives to certain members of His church to...

8. Administration 1 Corinthians 12:28-31; Luke 14:28-30	...understand the immediate and long-range God-given goals and to devise and steer the others toward the accomplishment of these goals and directives by planning, organizing, and supervising others.
9. Apostle 1 Corinthians 12:28-31; Ephesians 4:11-16; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Matthew 10:1-8; Acts 2:42-44	... ability to start and oversee the development of new churches or ministry structures by the proclamation and the teaching of true doctrine.
10. Discernment/Discerning of spirits 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 1 John 4:1-6; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16; 2 Chronicles 2:12; Psalm 119:125; Proverbs 3:21; 1 Kings 3:9; Hebrews 5:14	... know with assurance whether certain behavior or teaching purported is from God, Satan, human error, or human power. Enablement to distinguish between truth and error, to discern the spirits, differentiating between good and evil, right and wrong.
11. Faith 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; Mark 5:25-34; Acts 27:21-25; Hebrews 11; Romans 4:18-21	... be firmly persuaded of God's power and promises to accomplish His will and purpose and to display such a confidence in Him and His Word that circumstances and obstacles do not shake that conviction.

<p>12. Healing</p> <p>1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 1 Corinthians 12:28-31; Acts 3:1-10; Acts 14:8-10; James 5:14-16; Luke 9:1-2</p>	<p>...serve as human intermediaries through whom it pleases God to cure illness and restore health apart from the use of natural means. To be God's means for restoring people to wholeness.</p>
<p>13. Helps/Serving</p> <p>1 Corinthians 12:28-31; Romans 16:1-2; Acts 9:36; Mark 15:40-41; Galatians 6:2; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Peter 4:11; Philippians 2:19-23; Luke 22:24-27; John 13:14</p>	<p>... invest your talents in the life and ministry of others enabling them to increase the effectiveness of his/her spiritual gifts.</p>
<p>14. Knowledge</p> <p>1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 2 Chronicles 1:7-12; Colossians 2:2-3; 2 Corinthians 11:6; Daniel 2:20-21; Proverbs 2:6; Proverbs 9:10; Psalm 119:66; Jeremiah 3:15</p>	<p>... understand in an exceptional way the great truths of God's Word and to make them relevant to specific situations in the church. Also, the desire to seek out and learn as much about the Bible as possible through gathering much information and the analysis of that data.</p>
<p>15. Miracles</p> <p>1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 28-31; Mark 16:17-18; Acts 9:36-42; Acts 20:9-12; Hebrews 2:4; Romans 15:17-19; Acts 8:13; Acts 19:11-12</p>	<p>...serve as human intermediaries through whom it pleases God to perform powerful acts that are perceived by others to have altered the ordinary course of nature.</p>
<p>16. Tongues</p> <p>1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 12:28-31, 13:1, 14:1-40; Acts 2:1-12, 10:44-46, 19:1-7; Mark 16:17; Romans 8:26-27</p>	<p>...speak prayer or praise in a language you have never learned or to communicate a message from God to His people. To speak in a language not previously learned so unbelievers can hear God's message in their own language.</p>
<p>17. Interpretation of Tongues</p> <p>1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 12:28-31, 14:1-40</p>	<p>... translate the message of one who speaks in another language the interpreter had not previously learned.</p>
<p>18. Wisdom</p> <p>1 Corinthians 12:7-11 ; James 3:13-18; 2 Chronicles 1:7-11; Acts 6:3-10; 1 Corinthians 2:6-13; James 1:5-8; 1 Kings 3:16-28</p>	<p>... know the mind of the Holy Spirit in such a way as to receive insight into how knowledge may best be applied to specific needs arising for others. To apply knowledge to life in such a way as to make spiritual truths quite relevant and practical in proper decision making and daily life situations.</p>

Ephesians 4 adds the following spiritual gifts as the special abilities that God gives to certain members of His church to...

<p>19. Evangelist</p>	<p>... proclaim the gospel of salvation effectively so that</p>
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Ephesians 4:11-16; Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 2:36-40; Acts 8:5-6; Acts 14:21; Acts 8:26-40; 2 Timothy 4:5	people respond to the promises of Christ through conversion to Christianity and move towards discipleship.
20. Pastor (caring for God's people) John 10:1-16; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11-15; 1 Timothy 3:1-7, 4:11-16; 2 Timothy 4:1-2; 1 Peter 5:1-4	... assume a long-term personal responsibility for leadership and the spiritual care, protection, guidance, and feeding (teaching) of a group of believers. To nurture, care for, and guide people toward on-going spiritual maturity and becoming like Christ.

Additionally, the New Testament lists some other spiritual gifts as the special abilities that God gives to certain members of His church to...

21. Celibacy 1 Corinthians 7:1-9; 1 Corinthians 7:32-35; Matthew 19:10-12	...voluntarily remain single without regret and with the ability to maintain control over sexual impulses so as to serve the Lord without distraction. Persons remain single because they feel they can serve the Lord better that way.
22. Hospitality 1 Peter 4:9-10; Romans 12:9-13; Acts 16:14-15; Luke 10:38; Hebrews 13:1-2	...provide an open home and warm welcome to those in need of food, lodging, and fellowship. It involves a readiness to invite strangers to your home (or church) for the sake of the gospel.
23. Martyrdom Acts 7: 2 Corinthians 11:23-28; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3	...undergo suffering for the faith even to death while consistently displaying a joyous and victorious attitudes that brings glory to God.
24. Missionary Ephesians 3:6-8; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8; Acts 13:2-5; Acts 22:21; Romans 10:14-15; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23	...minister whatever spiritual gifts you have in a different culture or community. Have a stronger-than-average desire to be a part of the fulfillment of the Great Commission around the world.
25. Voluntary poverty 1 Corinthians 13:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Acts 2:44-45; Acts 4:32-35	...renounce material comforts and luxuries and adopt a personal lifestyle equivalent to those living at the poverty level in order to serve God more effectively.

Some scholars also add these spiritual gifts as the special abilities that God gives to certain members of His church to...

26. Craftsmanship / Artist	... create artistic expressions that produce a spiritual response of strength and inspiration, and/or to create,
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Exodus 28:3-4; Exodus 31:1-11; Exodus 35:30-35	build, maintain, or repair items used within the church to be used for ministry or the divine enablement to communicate God's truth through a variety of art forms.
27. Deliverance or Exorcism Matthew 5:28; Luke 10:16-24; Acts 8:7; Acts 16:18; Luke 11:14-28	... confront demonic forces within the lives of spiritually oppressed people, and to help such people find spiritual freedom in Christ Jesus.
28. Intercession Ephesians 6:18; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Kings 13:6; Luke 11:1-10; Matthew 6:6-15; Mark 11:22-25; James 5:14-16; Colossians 4:12-13; 1 Thessalonians 3:10	...pray for extended periods of time on a regular basis and see frequent and specific answers to your prayers to a degree much greater than that which is expected.
29. Music 1 Samuel 16:14-23; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Psalm 33:1-3; Psalm 96:1-2; Psalm 100:1-2; Psalm 149:3; Psalm 150:1-6; Colossians 3:16; 2 Chronicles 5:12-13; 2 Samuel 6:14-15	...present personal witness and inspiration to others through instrumental music, singing, or dancing; to praise God through music in such a way as to enhance the worship experience of others. Those listening or watching become inspired to feel the presence and majesty of God when music, song, or dance uplifts their soul in a manner that brings them closer to their Lord.
30. Writing Luke 1:1-3; 1 John 2:1, 2:12-14; 1 Timothy 3:14-15; Jude 1	...express truth in a written form; a form that can edify, instruct and strengthen the community of believers. To formulate thoughts and ideas into meaningful written forms (stories, sermons, devotions, histories, prayers, songs, or poetry, etc.) so that the reader will find courage, guidance, knowledge, or edification through the words shared with them.

Jesus Used Spiritual Gifts in His Ministry

God gives many gifts to help you in your walk of faith and to bring others to Christ. Jesus was our example and used spiritual gifts in His ministry to help others.

Share: Think about the following stories of Jesus' ministry in the Bible. For each of these stories, looking at the lists of spiritual gifts above, what spiritual gift/s would you say Jesus used?

- Woman at the well
- Encounter with Nathaniel
- Man at the Pool of Bethesda

Unwrapping Your Gifts – DISCOVER!

When you were little and your parents gave you a gift, what would have happened had you left the gift aside without opening it? How would they have felt? Well, you have been given spiritual gifts that Jesus wants you to discover! Not everybody has spiritual gifts. Unbelievers do not. Spiritual gifts are only given to those who have committed to Jesus. Jesus said that one day Christians would do even greater ministry than He did. While this does not mean that any of us are greater than Jesus, it does mean that Christians who are also gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit can minister to more people than Jesus did because there are billions of Christians today spread across the earth. So your personal ministry, using your spiritual gifts, is the continuation of Jesus' ministry.

You have at least one gift, and quite possibly more. Before these gifts can be developed and used, you must first discover what they are. Jesus wants you to know what your spiritual gifts are so that you can know His will for you. Remember, these spiritual gifts are received from the Holy Spirit and are not achieved based on our work. They are a gift to you!

Share: Use your laptop or iPad to take an online Spiritual Gifts Test for youth. (See <http://www.kodachrome.org/spiritgiftiyouth/>) There are several of these tests on the web. If you have been a Christian for a few years, you should use your personal experiences as the basis for your responses. If you consider yourself to be a new Christian, then your responses should be based on how well each statement describes the desire of your heart (even if you have not yet done what the statement talks about). The “test” should be used as a starting place to begin to discover your spiritual gifts, but not as an absolute indicator.

Reflection

Our spiritual gifts are an expression of God's love to the world, given to help you in your walk of faith and to bring others to Christ. Just as Jesus used His gifts, the good news is that we can do the same by obeying the voice of the Holy Spirit to go and be His witnesses, seek to bless people, love them, and lead them to faith in Christ.

- What are the top three or four highest rated gifts identified through the gifts test?
- If you were to ask others who know you, what one or two spiritual gifts would they say you had?
- How does this line up with your view of yourself?
- How does this line up with what you are currently involved in or want to be involved in?
- How might you use these gifts identified to share the gospel with others and lead them to Christ?

Application

There are opportunities all around you – every day.

- There are opportunities that are given to us EVERY DAY that we can use to share Christ with others. As the list of spiritual gifts suggests, not everyone is called to be an evangelist—to go out preaching to the world. BUT, everyone is called to *do evangelism*—to share your faith with unbelievers and lead them to Christ whenever the opportunity presents itself. “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; *make the most of every opportunity*” (Colossians 4:5, NIV).
- God created you—your unique self—so that He can work through you to reach and bring others closer to Him. The Holy Spirit has already enabled you by giving you spiritual gifts. He has promised to speak through you, guide you, and assist you as opportunities to share the gospel present themselves to you.
- Whenever you are with someone, consider it a “divine appointment” to share the good news of God’s love and forgiveness. Evangelism is only one responsibility Jesus wants all His children involved in. Because Jesus is Lord and we want to obey His leading in our lives in the use of our time, Jesus wants you to take advantage of whatever opportunity you have to share His love and forgiveness with others.
- God wants you to have the joy of being actively involved in ministry and of seeing God’s work through you in the exercise of your spiritual gifts. And, as you pray and ask for His guidance, He will strengthen you in the gifts He has given to you and help you to function in ministries that correspond to your spiritual gifts.
- The greatest gift you can give God and others is sharing the love of Jesus Christ with others. Jesus said “*Give, and it will be given to you.*”

DISCIPLE IN ACTION

Share with your accountability partner one or two of your top spiritual gifts. Talk about specific things you could do in the following areas to put your gifts to work. Come up with at least two ideas for each area:

- (a) Home
- (b) School
- (c) Youth Group
- (d) Church (outside of youth group)
- (e) Community
- (f) Work
- (g) Other (your choice)

Form an “exploration group” of persons who share your top one or two spiritual gifts and share your ideas for where those gifts can be put to work. Look for how you can partner with others in the group to continue exploring the spiritual gift through implementing the ideas shared.

God Invites You to Join Him

- “You must get involved to have an impact. No one is impressed with the won-lost record of the referee.” --Napoleon Hill
- Remember that we are in a love relationship with God. In His time He will reveal to you where He is working so you can join Him. God always takes the initiative to involve His people in His activity.
- Pay attention to these principles modeled by Jesus:
 - The Father has been working all along.
 - Now the Father has me working.
 - I do nothing on my own initiative.
 - I watch to see what my Father is doing.
 - I do what I see the Father is doing.
 - The Father loves me.
 - He shows me everything that He, Himself is doing.

Prayer Time

You must be living in an intimate love relationship with God for Him to reveal your spiritual gifts and to show you where you should be at work.

Pray:

- ask God to open your spiritual eyes so you can see what He is doing.
- that as you strengthen your relationship with Him, He shows you the spiritual gifts He has given you.
- that He will mold you into the person He wants, and that you will obey His call and use your spiritual gifts to make the most of the opportunities to share the gospel in your daily life.
- for His power to respond in obedience, so when God shows us what He is about to do, we can step out, assured that the Lord will accomplish His purposes.

LEADER'S INFORMATION

Introducing Youth to Spiritual Gifts

Identify a *Spiritual Gifts Inventory* designed specifically for youth. You may want to divide the spiritual gifts activity into two sessions: Session 1 for taking the inventory; Session 2 to review and discuss the results. If the youth you are working with have been Christians for a few years, encourage them to use their personal experiences as the basis for their responses. If a youth considers himself/herself to be a new Christian, then advise them that their responses should be based on how well each statement describes the desire of their heart (even if they have not yet done what the statement talks about).

To introduce youth to their spiritual gifts, explain each gift and challenge them to begin thinking of a specific ministry or ministries where they can put their gifts to work. Each time you explain a specific spiritual gift, you might have everyone who has that gift to stand so that others can see who has what gift. This will also relate back to the earlier activities. Perhaps you could divide everyone up into groups according to their top spiritual gift and have someone else lead them in a short study of their particular gift.

General Information on Spiritual Gifts

• SDA Fundamental Beliefs	http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html
• Spiritual Gifts List with Definitions and Scriptural References:	http://mintools.com/ministries.htm
• Spiritual Gifts: How Do You Fit Into God's Plans	http://www.adventistreview.org/article.php?id=451

Spiritual Gifts Inventory for Youth

• SDA Youth Spiritual Gifts Test	http://www.gnycyouth.com/article/view/259/1/13
• Ministry Areas Using Your Spiritual Gifts	http://mintools.com/ministries.htm#outreach

Books

1. Fields, Doug and Erik Rees. *Congratulations...You're Gifted!:Discovering Your God-Given Shape to Make a Difference in the World.* Grand Rapids, MI:Zondervan/Youth Specialities. 2008 Available through AdventSource: <http://www.adventsource.org:80/as20/product.aspx?ID=35741>
2. Smith, Wendell. *From Zero to Eternity in 60 Seconds Flat – Influencing Others for Christ at a Moment's Notice.* Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House. 2004 Available through Christian Books: www.christianbooks.com

Session 26

DEBRIEFING SESSIONS 21-25

Time: 90 minutes. *Try to spend approximately 15-20 minutes discussing each section below, leaving time for small group prayer and commitment at the end.*

Discipleship begins and ends with Jesus—the focal point!

As we wrap up this series on Disciples in Action, we are looking outward more clearly than ever. Early sessions focused on internal things like our relationship with God, our prayer lives, and understanding salvation. From the first we have also explored what it means to be mission-minded, to share this great and awesome news about God and grace, but in this last series, we have gotten down to the practical basics of leading others.

First, we have noticed that loving God more deeply and loving other believers has also led us to love those we may have considered “outsiders.” They may be unbelievers, or they may be spiritual seekers but in ways we are not familiar with. We realize more clearly that God loves them, Jesus died for them, and the Holy Spirit is actively working for them, and we have joined in that love and work. This has made our lives richer and fuller, and we’ve learned that it’s really true that God has all we need for complete restoration to an abundant life, even here in this sorrowful and difficult world. So we wanted to get involved. We became evangelists in our own right, learning our spiritual gifts, using them together, and then reaching out to disciple others into this rich and abundant life. If there’s one thing we’re sure of by now, it’s that the story isn’t over yet. God has astonishing blessings in store for us, and we’re never going to get go of His hand!

Here is an overview of the Big Ideas we've explored in Series 5:

1. "As Christ's disciple, I am called to minister God's love to others outside the church as well as inside of the church. My life can be an example that will bring others to Christ, and then to the truth of God's word."
2. God is not satisfied with simply saving me from the consequences of my sin; He wants to restore me to the life of love for which I was created.
3. Ellen White says, "The work above all work, —the business above all others which should draw and engage the energies of the soul, —is the work of saving souls for whom Christ has died. Make this the main, the important work of your life" (*Messages to Young People*, page 227).
4. God is working in my life and the lives of others who I am helping to disciple. I am called by God to assist those I am discipling, to help them discern His will for their particular mission/service to others, and to help them develop an understanding of the needs and cultural context of the people they are called to serve.
5. You are a child of God—created by Him with your own unique heart, abilities, personality, and spiritual gifts. God brought all those elements together in you so you could serve Him and the world, sharing His love and helping people make personal commitments to Him in your own unique way as He has made you.

In session 21 we examined the importance of developing positive relationships with those outside the church; being ethical in all our relationships, both business and personal; and the importance of reflecting the character of Christ in all my interactions with others.

Session 21: Loving "Outsiders" Too?

1. Did you do the shopping skit? What did you think of it? Did it give you any new ideas? Most importantly, has your life changed in the interim? Share some ways.
2. Share some times when you've tried to reflect Christ when it wasn't popular. Also share times you've seen someone else do that. What were your emotions, in either case?
3. Have you seen some of your wants, desires, and values change? What about your deeds?
4. As the author points out, we are not perfect. Sometimes our mistakes cause others to look poorly on the cause of Christ. On the other hand, one of the things the world wants most is authenticity. Have you ever seen a mistake, and the genuine repentance that followed it, cause someone to look *more* favorably on God? Share that story, if you are free to.

In session 22 we saw that God has already provided everything needed for our restoration—Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice on the cross. And because everyone is created in God’s image, my relationships will be based on love, forgiveness, and respect. The great controversy will end when God brings an end to sin and restores the earth to its original perfection.

Session 22: Restoration

1. What do you think of the statement that blessing and glory often come through darkness. When have you seen that to be true for yourself?
2. Have you seen your life grow more abundant since studying these sessions? How? What are you still waiting and praying for?
3. Have you and your accountability partner prayed together for the Holy Spirit to live in both of you? What results do you see? How do you help each other "abide in the Spirit"?
4. In what ways have you seen the setting right of your inner life reflected in your outer life?
5. How have you "done justice" this week or month?
6. How have you shown this week or month that you "love mercy"?
7. In what ways are you learning daily to "walk humbly with God"?

Session 23 looked at embracing the evangelistic mission of the church. We also examined the importance of staying in tune with the Holy Spirit through constant prayer, in order to overcome the natural and persistent tendencies toward sin, and to witness effectively about Jesus.

Session 23: Evangelistic Mission

1. Why do you think there was so much emphasis on prayer in this session? What happens when people attempt to evangelize without effective, fervent prayer? Have you personally experienced this? Have you also experienced what happens *with* prayer? Share the difference.
2. If you did not already know them, was your group able to help you discover what your spiritual gifts are? How have you used them lately for God, both individually and as a group?
3. How has God revealed Himself to you? Have you had a vision like Isaiah? If not, how can you know for sure that He is present in your life?

Session 24 reviewed ways to see how God is working in my life and the lives of others who I am helping to disciple.

Session 24 : Helping Others See God Work

1. How are your disciples/mentees doing? Did this session's practical tips help you to help them? Discuss with the group other questions you may have and tips you have learned.
2. Have you learned more about your discipling "tool box"? Have you made any changes in your tools?
3. Discuss any mistakes you feel you have made, and encourage and pray for each other. You can also pray that these mistakes will not harm the people you are trying to help, but that instead, they will be drawn even closer to God as they see you modeling repentance and learning to do better next time.
4. Can you describe some different "cultures" that exist within the same ethnicity or even the same family? (Example: How about the difference between youth and elders?)

We are all children of God—created by Him with our own unique heart, abilities, personalities, and spiritual gifts. Session 25 explored how God brought all those elements together in us, to be used to bring others to the Kingdom.

Session 25: Spiritual Gifts in Mission and Ministry

1. Do you now have a clear sense of not only your gifts, but some ways God wants you to use them? This will change and grow as you do, but you can know enough to begin.
2. Have you ever tried to work in some capacity that turned out to be clearly not your best gift? What happened? Have you ever tried to work in some capacity you *thought* was not your gift, but you were surprised? What happened?
3. Have you been successful in helping someone else determine his/her spiritual gifts and mission? What are the results so far? How did that feel?
4. Have you tried forming the suggested "exploration group" of people whose gifts are similar and discovering ways of using your gifts together? What are the results so far?
5. What would you think about forming small groups of new believers, each led by a team of two prayer partners who have similar or complementary gifts? You will want to work with your pastors and elders in setting up and evaluating these groups over time.

Scope and Sequence

SERIES 1

Session 1: To develop a dynamic, deepening, love relationship with God, I am:

- communing with God regularly through His word, prayer, and other Christian disciplines.
- participating with other believers in worshipping God on Sabbath and at other times.
- worshipping God daily as a living sacrifice by choosing His will over my own will.
- paying attention to what God is doing and praising Him for His love and faithfulness.
- participating with God in His mission of reconciliation and restoration.

Session 2: To understand that Christ calls me to be His disciple, I am learning that:

- by beholding Jesus and abiding in Him, I will continue to grow more Christ-like.
- the love of Christ constrains me to a life of obedience and self-denial.
- all biblical teachings illustrate the character and mission of Christ.
- being a disciple involves all of my life – my worldview, my relationships, and my purpose and mission.
- I will participate in the body of Christ and its work in the world.
- I accept life – both now and eternally – as a gift from God to be shared with others.

Session 3: To seek opportunities in all daily activities to minister to others, I am:

- inviting God to change me to bear the fruits of the Spirit.
- choosing Jesus as a daily companion and sharing Him joyfully.
- investing myself in service wherever the Holy Spirit leads.
- carrying out my occupation as a calling to ministry.
- building networks for friendship, fellowship, and support.

Session 4: To help believers engage in a transformational devotional life, I am showing others how to:

- study the Bible to know Christ and to develop a biblical worldview.
- communicate with God through prayer and Christian meditation.
- participate in other Christian disciplines to be open to the Holy Spirit.
- set priorities to allow for regular, quality devotional time.
- seek spiritual growth opportunities with other believers.

Session 5: Debriefing Session

SERIES 2

Session 6 a and b: To develop an individual identity in Christ, I am:

- surrendering my heart and will to God.
- learning that God places infinite value on me.
- recognizing my continual need for God's forgiving and empowering grace.
- inviting the Holy Spirit to guide in my ongoing reflection and actions.
- embracing cultural expectations that are aligned with God's Word (the Bible) and replacing those that are not.

Session 7: To understand that God is the Source of life, I am learning that:

- God is the creator and sustainer of the universe, including all people created in His image.
- God is a triune God consisting of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- God reveals Himself to us in many ways, but most clearly through His Son, the incarnate Word.
- God is love and He desires from me a response of love for Himself and for others.
- the God-given purpose of humanity is to glorify God through daily life, work, and relationships with others.

Session 8: To invest myself in the discipleship of others, I am:

- willing to be mentored by maturing Christians, and accountable for my spiritual growth.
- willing to be humble and honest when sharing my walk as a disciple.
- committing time and effort to mentoring growing Christians.
- working intentionally to train fellow believers to disciple others.

Session 9: To help believers build Christ-like relationships, I am showing others how to:

- assess themselves, acknowledge defects of character, and invite God to remove them.
- work with God to care for themselves and live a balanced life.
- cherish, respect and nurture family members as children of God.
- be disciplined by other believers in the body of Christ.
- resolve conflicts within the home, church, workplace, and community.

Session 10: Debriefing

SERIES 3

Session 11a: To develop Christ-centered family relationships, I am:

- recognizing that my commitment to Christ defines every human relationship.
- contributing, supporting and extending unconditional love to those within my family circle.
- holding as sacred my family commitments and responsibilities to parents, siblings, as well as the extended family.
- practicing hospitality, welcoming into my family or home those whom God brings to my attention.

Session 11b: To commit to developing and maintaining sexual purity, I am:

- recognizing that my commitment to Christ takes priority over every human relationship.
- holding as sacred my commitments and responsibilities to God, spouse, children, and myself.
- passing on the Christian faith to my children through both teaching and living an authentic Christian life.
- creating moral/sexual boundaries.
- committing to live by biblical standards of sexual morality.

Session 12: To understand the consequences of the human fall from God's original plan, I am learning that:

- the great controversy between God and Satan originated in heaven.
- because of the disobedience of the first human beings, I have a will to sin and a sinful nature.
- the Ten Commandment law of God expresses the character of God and gives the standard for human conduct.
- the natural world no longer reflects the perfection in which God created it.
- the Bible is needed to interpret the natural world as an expression of the character of God.

Session 13: To recognize and respond to the needs of God's suffering children locally and abroad, I am:

- looking for physical, mental, social and spiritual needs in the community.
- responding mercifully to the discovered needs, individually and/or as a church.
- speaking out and acting to relieve suffering and injustice in society.
- reducing human suffering by being a faithful steward of God's creation.
- acting compassionately on behalf of people who are disadvantaged or at risk.

Session 14: To help believers study and obey God's word, I am showing others to:

- understand the purpose of Scripture.
- discover study methods that will help them engage in regular Bible study.
- apply biblical principles to live their lives thoughtfully and faithfully.
- use tools to more effectively interpret biblical meanings.
- discern spiritual truth in a balanced manner.

Session 15: Debriefing

SERIES 4

Session 16: To develop Christ-centered relationships in the local and global church as a member of the body of Christ, I am:

- being supported and nurtured by the community of believers.
- praying with and for fellow believers, rejoicing with those who rejoice, and caring for those who are in need.
- loving and serving the church's children, continuing to disciple them as they mature into adults.
- treating others redemptively when they are disciplined or shunned by church or society.
- keeping informed and responding to news and stories of the world church.

Session 17: Understanding that God has provided everything that is needed for my redemption, I am learning that:

- salvation and eternal life are gifts to me through the grace of God.
- Christ came to earth to reveal the character of God and to die in my place as atonement for my sin.
- the love of God draws me to feel sorrow for my sin, to confess, and to repent.
- God forgives sin and restores brokenness.

Session 18: To support the ministries of the local and global church with personal resources, I am:

- managing my resources with the understanding that they all belong to God.
- returning a faithful tithe and giving offerings systematically.
- serving in one or more ministries of my local church.
- participating personally, as possible, in global service projects or ministries.

Session 19: To help believers live a contagious, holistic Christian life, I am showing others how to:

- understand the biblical teaching to love the Lord with our heart, soul, strength, and mind.
- explain how Christ is the center of all biblical teachings.
- express Christ's love by creatively using their talents and interests.
- apply biblical principles to every aspect of their lives—mind, body, and spirit.
- lead someone to accept and follow Christ.

Session 20: Debriefing

SERIES 5

Session 21: To develop positive relationships with those outside the church, I am:

- respecting and praying for non-believers because all are of infinite value to their Creator.
- being a good neighbor, participating in community life, and helping those in need.
- being ethical in all my business dealings and in my professional and personal life.
- reflecting the character of Christ in all my interactions with others.

Session 22: To understand that God has provided everything needed for my restoration, I am learning that:

- Jesus died to redeem me from sin and now lives to restore me to physical, mental, and spiritual wholeness.
- through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ will live in me and I will live in Him.
- because every person is created in God's image, my relationships will be based on love, forgiveness, and respect.
- the Holy Spirit daily prompts me to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with my God.
- God expects me to be a steward of all He created.
- the great controversy ends when God brings an end to sin and restores earth to its original perfection.

Session 23: To embrace the evangelistic mission of the church, I am:

- interceding with the Lord for a personal lifestyle of prayer to be an effective witness for Him.
- empowering myself through group interaction to share my faith with others.
- sharing the faith of Jesus to engage others for the Kingdom of God.

Session 24: To help believers discern where God is working, I am:

- teaching them to pray for a clear understanding of what God wants to accomplish through them.
- helping them recognize the work of the Holy Spirit within and around them.
- helping them discern where God is calling them to serve.
- assisting them in assessing the needs of those God have called them to serve.
- equipping them to evaluate the culture they are called to serve in, in order to find and reach others.

Session 25: To help believers use spiritual gifts to fulfill a personal call to mission and ministry, I am showing others how to:

- confer with fellow believers to confirm and refine their areas of spiritual giftedness.
- be prepared for mission and ministry by participating in training programs.
- choose and participate in ministries that use their gifts and talents.
- find ways to support Adventist mission and evangelism, ministries, and education.

Session 26: Debriefing

About the Writers



BALVIN BRAHAM, *Inter-American Division*

Dr. Balvin Braham has over 27 years of experience working with young people both within and outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He served as Youth Director of the West Jamaica Conference for over 10 years, as youth Director of the West Indies Union Conference for 5 years and as Associate Youth Director of the General Conference, Inter-American Division for 5 years.

Presently, he serves at the General Conference, Inter American Division as; Administrative Field Secretary, Assistant to the Division President, Director of Human Resources, Leadership Development Coordinator and Associate Ministerial Secretary, responsible for Evangelism and Church Growth.

Dr. Braham has earned a diploma in Education, Bachelor of Arts degree in Theology, Master of Arts degree in Religion and Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership. He is married to Anett nee Simms, his soul mate, a registered nurse and together they have two grown daughters; Shavannie and Julaine.

Dr. Braham loves young people and commits his life to encourage others to join him in empowering the youth on the journey to the Kingdom of God.



BRENDAN PRATT, *South Pacific Division, Greater Sydney Conference*

Brendan Pratt currently serves as the Discipleship Coordinator for the Greater Sydney Conference in Australia. Prior to this role he pastored the Papatoetoe church in Auckland, New Zealand for ten years. He is married to Amanda and has three boys, Bradley, Benjamin and James. His interests include keeping reptiles and Australian football. He is passionate about seeing what happens when people allow God to work in and through them.



CALVIN ROBERSON, *North American Division*

Calvin N. Roberson is a graduate of Oakwood College, where he earned his B.A. in Theology; he earned his M. Div. at Andrews University and is presently pursuing his doctorate at Ashland University. Calvin began pastoring at the age of 24, and went on to successfully pastor nine churches in the Allegheny West Conference. His congregations have had exceptional growth. In 1986 he got involved in youth ministry when he instituted student mentoring and programs in the public schools in Charlottesville, VA. That passion for youth ministry has also been expressed through numerous youth arts and witnessing initiatives.



DEBBONNAIRE KOVACS, *North American Division*

Debbonnaire Kovacs has been writing since she could hold a pencil, and sold her first story to Junior Guide when she was eleven years old. By her twenties, she recognized that writing and speaking were not just what she loved to do, but

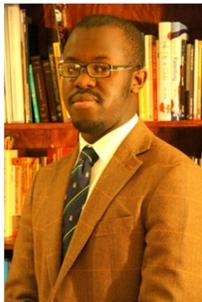
what God wanted her to do. She has written off and on for most of her life, but has been writing full time since 1990, having written fourteen books including the first, second, fifth, and sixth grade Bible textbooks used in Adventist schools in North America, and over 150 stories and articles for all ages. She speaks at camp meetings, women’s retreats, and other events, and also does copyediting. She urges everyone to take their dreams to God and see whether they are more than just dreams. They may be assignments from the King of Heaven.

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ERIKA PERPALL, *Inter-American Division*

Erika Perpall is a wife and mother, a youth Leader, computer professional and Cradle Roll Sabbath School Teacher. Born and raised in the Bahamas, She is the youngest of four girls. Erika matriculated at Andrews University where she obtained a BS in Computer Science. Her hobbies include reading, computer games and travelling. She serves as secretary to the Pathfinder Corporation of The Bahamas and is a volunteer tutor at Lets Read Bahamas.

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Julian Thompson currently serves as President for the Thames Valley Youth Federation (TVYF), A vibrant youth organization supported by the South England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Having completed a degree in Political Science at the University of Nottingham, Julian answered the call to Ministry in 2009 and commenced Ministerial training at Newbold College (UK), where he is completing an MA in Old Testament Studies.

According to Julian, ‘the most important thing that we as leaders can do for our youth is to lead them into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Julian is also a keen saxophonist, and jogs in his spare time.



KERRYAN FRANCIS, *Inter-American Division*

Kerryan Francis is an International Development Worker based in Jamaica who currently works with vulnerable older persons and their families and has worked with other vulnerable groups including at-risk youth.



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Kimberley Tagert-Paul writes from Michigan, United States of America. An internationally published author, her passion is writing for young people. She loves crafts, photography, and reading. She has been married to the love of her life for 30 years and has two sons. When not gainfully employed, she can be found butting heads with her teen son, chasing her four-year old grandson until he catches her, or enjoying the sounds and beauty of Lake Michigan with her husband. Her life goal is to make it to heaven and take as many people with her as she can.

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Michelle Riley-Jones currently serves as the Minister of Music and Worship at the Capitol Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church in Washington, DC. (www.chcsda.org). For this multi-generational congregation, she leads an nearly 200-member ministry--a vehicle of evangelism and discipleship. She is also a prayer facilitator for the church's 24-hour Prayer Line, and a bible study leader for its weekly virtual Bible Study. In addition, she serves as a consultant to pastors and their music and worship teams; and is a project team member and liturgist for the ecumenical project, The African American Lectionary (www.theafricanamericanlectionary.org), funded by Lily Endowment. Michelle owns human resources consulting practice based in Bowie, MD. She attended Columbia Union University (formerly Columbia Union College) in Takoma Park, MD, and graduated from the University of Maryland with a Bachelor's in Personnel and Labor Relations. She is currently completing Masters courses in Christian Ministry at Union Theological Seminary in Dayton, OH.

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RON FLOWERS, *North American Division*

Dr. Ron Flowers is a retired Director of the Department of Family Ministries, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He holds a Doctor of Ministry with an emphasis in marriage and family counseling from Denver Seminary and is the author or co-author with his wife, Karen, of more than 30 major books including a curriculum framework on sexuality entitled *Human Sexuality: Sharing the Wonder of God's Good Gift with Your Children* (Department of Family Ministries, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2003), which has been translated in 10 languages. He and his wife have presented family life seminars on marriage, parenting and family living in some 85 countries.



STEVE THOMAS, *Trans-European Division*

Dr. Steve Thomas is the Youth and Young Adults director of the South England Conference, in Watford, England. Prior to that, he pastored the Reading Central and Whitley Seventh-day Adventist churches, two multi-national dynamic and growing congregations located in Berkshire, England.

In addition to his pastoral and administrative ministry, Pastor Thomas travels internationally, preaching and conducting leadership and relationship seminars.

The author of two books, *Evangelism: The Evangelistic Guide* and *Relationship: Taking the Biblical Approach*, Dr. Thomas has also written numerous Bible study series.

Pastor Thomas has a Bachelor's Degree in Theology, a Master's Degree in Religion, with an emphasis in systematic theology, and a Doctor of Ministry Degree, emphasis in strategic planning. He is also an architect/building surveyor and has utilized this skill in the development of the churches he has pastored.

Pastor Thomas is happily married to his wife Lurline and is the proud father of two young adults, Christina and Stephanie.



TRACY MORGAN, *North American Division*

Tracy A. Morgan lives in Holly, Michigan with her husband and their two sons. She is the author of *Bathsheba: A Story of Sin and Redemption*, and *Samson*, as well as several articles that have been published in *Women of Spirit*, *Signs of the Times*, and *Primary Treasure*.

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THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The development of an effective curriculum is a multi-step, ongoing, and cyclical process. The process progresses from evaluating what we are doing now, to designing an improved program, to implementing a new program and back to evaluating the revised program. Your honest review and analysis of the information provided, its impact on lives (yours and others), as well as on people's perception of its strengths and weaknesses will help form the foundation of future curriculums and resources as we look forward to developing other curricula to assist in the discipleship process of our youth and young adults.

Please send your comments or concerns to dunchiem@gc.adventist.org or write to:

Youth Ministries Department
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904

Growing Disciples Inventory

Take an Inventory of your spiritual walk today. Here's how: Respond to the 20 statements below. Score your answers. Ask the Holy Spirit and Christian friends to guide. Serve and equip others using the two processes you score higher in. Plan to grow in the two processes you score lower in. **THE FIRST 50 PEOPLE TO BRING THEIR COMPLETED INVENTORY TO THE SABBATH SCHOOL BOOTH IN THE ATRIUM WILL RECEIVE A FREE "STEPS TO CHRIST."**

How often is this true of you? Circle one number for each commitment.	Rarely /Never	Not Often	Quite Often	Regularly /Always	Write the number you circled in the white space.
I am developing a dynamic relationship with God.	1	2	3	4	
I keep learning more about what it means to be a growing Christian.	1	2	3	4	
I am seeking opportunities in all my daily activities to minister to others.	1	2	3	4	
I am teaching others how to build Christ-like relationships.	1	2	3	4	
I am discovering who I am in relationship to Christ.	1	2	3	4	
I keep learning more about who God is.	1	2	3	4	
I am helping one or more friends to grow in their relationship with God.	1	2	3	4	
I am helping others to study and obey God's Word.	1	2	3	4	
I am developing Christ-centered family relationships.	1	2	3	4	
I keep learning more about the human fall from God's original plan	1	2	3	4	
I volunteer to serve in my community without reward, outside my family.	1	2	3	4	
I am showing others how to live as committed, healthy Christians.	1	2	3	4	
I am developing Christ-like relationships with church members.	1	2	3	4	
I keep learning more about God's grace and plan of salvation.	1	2	3	4	
I am supporting my church's ministries with my time and/or money.	1	2	3	4	
I am helping others discover where God is working in their lives and world.	1	2	3	4	
I am developing positive relationships with those who are not part of my church or family – at work, in my community.	1	2	3	4	
I keep learning more about how God has provided everything needed to restore me to His image.	1	2	3	4	
I am helping my church tell the story of Jesus e.g. friendship evangelism.	1	2	3	4	
I am teaching others how to use spiritual gifts in God's work.	1	2	3	4	
TOTALS	To score, total each column →				
Processes: C=Connecting; U=Understanding; M=Ministering; E=Equipping	Disciple others through strengths.				C
	Plan to grow in weaker areas.				U M E

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