

# The Good Word Study Guide – 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2026

## Lesson #1: Reality Check, March 28-April 3

(Italics are the sole responsibility of Mike Barnett and are used for emphasis.)

The Bible tells us that our world is infected with evil. Where did evil come from? Why did sin arise in the first place, and why has it continued to exist for so long?

**Matt. 13:24-27** Here is another story Jesus told: *“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. <sup>25</sup> But that night as the workers slept, his enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat, then slipped away. <sup>26</sup> When the crop began to grow and produce grain, the weeds also grew. <sup>27</sup> “The farmer’s workers went to him and said, ‘Sir, the field where you planted that good seed is full of weeds! Where did they come from?’*

**Matt. 13:28** *“‘An enemy has done this!’ the farmer exclaimed.*

**Matt. 13:36-39** *“Then, leaving the crowds outside, Jesus went into the house. His disciples said, ‘Please explain to us the story of the weeds in the field. <sup>37</sup> Jesus replied, ‘The Son of Man is the farmer who plants the good seed. <sup>38</sup> The field is the world, and the good seed represents the people of the Kingdom. The weeds are the people who belong to the evil one. <sup>39</sup> The enemy who planted the weeds among the wheat is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world, and the harvesters are the angels.’”*

In this parable Jesus said that He was the farmer who planted the good seed. Note Jesus planted only *good* seed! The enemy who planted the *weeds* among the good seed is the devil, Jesus said.

So according to Jesus the reason why there is evil here on planet earth is because the devil planted evil on/in our world. How can we be sure that Jesus is not responsible for evil’s existence or its lingering on? And what is the nature of evil?

The Bible addresses these questions via many avenues. When I began studying this I saw only three or four paths down which to travel, but now I have found so many I can hardly fit them on a page.

Below is a Word smart art depiction of what I now see. The various categories link together and support the infinite goodness of God. You may wish to print the smart art below so you can better follow as I attempt to unpack what I have discovered so far.

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Why do you and I need a Savior? Firstly, because sin would have killed the entire human race the moment we humans first embraced it. But God in His mercy intervened and kept us alive. Secondly, if allowed to operate for a longer period of time, we need a Savior because sin damages our whole selves and God alone can fix us. Scripture tells us:

**Ephesians 4:22-24** You were taught to *put away* your former way of life, *your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts,* <sup>23</sup> and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, <sup>24</sup> and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

We ruin and deceive ourselves *by our own lusts/desires*, in other words, sin both ruins us and deceives us that it is ruining us. If we are to be fixed, to be healed, we must be re-created by God, born again, John tells us in his gospel. So the Apostle Paul wrote that we must *put away* our old selves and *be re-created by God* so we can be the kind of people God originally created us to be. Why do we need God to do this for us?

**Ecclesiastes 8:8** No one has power over the wind to restrain the wind, or power over the day of death; there is no discharge from the battle, *nor does wickedness deliver those who practice it.*

Sin has no power within itself to fix us, to care for the wounds it inflicts, to heal us from sin itself, nor does it have a desire to fix us! Therefore, we need someone outside of our sin-infected selves to save us from sin. We need to be *re-created according to the likeness of God* in true righteousness and holiness. God is the only one *able* to do this and thank God He is also *willing* to save us from sin! God is both willing and able to help us, to cure us of our sin-damaged condition.

Faith, that is, our trust in God, is the means God uses to re-create us in His image. But true faith is earned, never blind. God must prove Himself trustworthy and that means He must show that He is not in any way responsible for the rise and development of evil.

But how might we come to know that God is not in any way responsible for sin's existence or continuance? The categories in the blue smart art above offer us a variety of paths wherein God's infinite goodness is established. Let's start with the top category and move clockwise around the circle. You might want to print page 2 of this document and use it follow the discussion below.

### Godly Expectations

Godly expectations surface in both the OT and the NT. For example: In this first passage below the Lord's expectations were that his choice vines (Israel) would produce sweet grapes but they did not!

**Isaiah 5:1-4** Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. <sup>2</sup> He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. <sup>3</sup> And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. <sup>4</sup> *What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?*

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With the words: “what more was there to do” God stated unequivocally that He had done everything He could do so that His vines *could and would* produce good fruit. This is a key idea because it tells us that God is not responsible for evil, whether in the world generally or seen in the life of His followers. *God’s actions*, that He had lovingly done all that could be done, *make even God question why then did His choice vines produce sour grapes? For which question even God provided no answer!*

With: “When I expected...why did it” God expressed both His expectation (sweet grapes), given all that He had done, and His utter bewilderment at the results! Again, even God cannot tell us why people sin!

In the passage below God’s expectations were that His people would not deal falsely, that is, treasonously betray Him, but instead they did! Again, given all that God had done for His people, why did they rebel against Him and grieve the Holy Spirit?

**Isaiah 63:8-10** For he said, “*Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely*”; and he became their savior <sup>9</sup> in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. <sup>10</sup> But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit....

Thirdly, Jesus told a parable wherein the owner of the vineyard (representing God the Father) sent numerous agents (prophets) to a group of renters, which the renters treated badly; finally, the owner expressed his sure expectation that his renters would respect his last agent, his own son (Jesus), but they did not!

**Mark 12:5-7** Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. <sup>6</sup> He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘*Surely, they will respect my son.*’ <sup>7</sup> But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’

Many readers seem to want to mask or even remove these godly expectations because they cannot see how they mesh with God’s foreknowledge, but these divine expectations help reveal God’s infinite goodness, and therefore the innocence of God regarding evil. God is neither the cause of evil nor is He the reason it has continued as it has.

*If God were to expect a poor outcome as a response to His love would we not wonder whether God Himself was somehow at fault?*

So again, these godly expectations help establish the utter goodness, and therefore the complete innocence, of God regarding the rise and development of evil.

### Penetrating Questions

The second category is that of “Penetrating Questions.” These questions drill down into the heart of the matter regarding the existence and development of evil.

#### God’s Penetrating Questions:

*“Why are you so angry?”* The LORD asked Cain. *“Why do you look so unhappy?”* **Genesis 4:6.**

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Notice that these two questions ask why? Why is Cain angry and unhappy? Again, God is in some sense genuinely puzzled. By these questions God is implying that nothing He has done led (or even could or should have led) Cain to become, let alone stay, angry and unhappy. Notice also that Cain offered no answers to God's questions. Why not? Because there were none to give! In the following five passages no response is given to God's heart-broken enquires, spoken by God or by His prophets.

**Isaiah 50:2** *Why was no one there when I came? Why did no one answer when I called? Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? By my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a desert; their fish stink for lack of water, and die of thirst.*

**Isaiah 55:2** *Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.*

**Jeremiah 2:5** Thus says the LORD: *What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?*

**Jeremiah 2:31** And you, O generation, behold the word of the LORD! *Have I been a wilderness to Israel, or a land of thick darkness? Why then do my people say, "We are free, we will come to you no more"?*

**Malachi. 2:10** *Are we not all children of the same Father? Are we not all created by the same God? Then why do we betray each other, violating the covenant of our ancestors?*

No one rose up to answer God's questions, like Cain all were silent! Why? Sin is not defensible, not because God is unwilling to listen to human responses, but because sin is unreasonable, illogical, inexcusable, and therefore impossible to explain or defend.

### God's People Also Asked Penetrating Questions:

**1Samuel 20:32-33** Then Jonathan answered his father Saul, *"Why should he [David] be put to death? What has he done?"* <sup>33</sup> But Saul threw his spear at him to strike him; so Jonathan knew that it was the decision of his father to put David to death.

King Saul's answer to his own son's penetrating question was to hurl a spear at him! Saul engaged in a violent act, but no valid answer was offered. Why not? Because, as Jonathan said elsewhere, David had put his own life on the line and battled Goliath, thus rescuing the nation from being conquered by the Philistines. In other words, given all the good that David had done for King Saul and God's people, *it made no sense* for Saul to desire David's death. So when asked why David should die, **Saul's only answer was to throw a spear!**

When Paul confronted Peter regarding Peter's own (mis)conduct, there is no response recorded. (Have you ever noticed how guilty people often respond with silence?)

**Galatians 2:11-14** But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, *because he stood self-condemned;* <sup>12</sup> for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. <sup>13</sup> And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup> But

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when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, *“If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”*

### Jesus Also Asked Penetrating Questions:

**Matt. 14:31** Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him [Peter], saying to him, “You of little faith, *why did you doubt?*”

Peter had asked if he could also walk on the water, just as Jesus Himself was doing. But after walking on it for a bit Peter began to doubt. Once again, there is no recorded answer to a penetrating question. Think--what would Peter have said to justify his doubt of Jesus? Had Peter not seen Jesus Himself walking on the water and performing other miracles?

In the next three biblical passages note how the responses to questions asked were that of silence.

**Matt. 22:11-12** “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, <sup>12</sup> and he said to him, *‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless.*

**Mark 3:4** Then he said to them, *“Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent.*

**Mark 9:33-34** Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, *“What were you arguing about on the way?”* <sup>34</sup> *But they were silent,* for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.

When the king had already provided a wedding garment for each person attending there was obviously no reason why one couldn't/shouldn't wear it. Yes, according to Scripture it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. And selfishness and hubris are never defensible!

**In Mark 3:4 above** when Jesus healed a man with a withered arm and asked His detractors: Is it lawful to do good or to do harm, we go on to read in **Mark 3:6** that

*“the Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against Jesus, how to destroy him.”*

Like King Saul's reaction toward his son Jonathan, the Pharisees had no answer for the question they were asked so they reacted with violence. Silence and violence were often the responses to penetrating questions regarding the evil existing in one's own heart and mind.

The silence and violence of sinners testifies to the innocence of God in causing evil to exist or continue. Now there are other responses to the penetrating questions regarding evil portrayed in Scripture, but silence and violence are very common responses, then, and even now.

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**Regarding sins of omission:** when we don't do the right thing, what can we say in our defense?

**Regarding sins of commission:** when we do the wrong thing, how can we justify our actions?

### What Have \* Done?

When studying this topic of Penetrating Questions there is one question that is so often used in Scripture that I've given it its own category, which I've universalized with an asterisk because this question shows up in varying forms, like: What is this that you have done? What have I done? What have they done? [Therefore, What have \* done?]

This question is often used to draw a sharp contrast between those who are innocent and those who are guilty of doing some wrong. But that's not all. The question also expresses a powerful form of shock and puzzlement! "Why would X have done this to me! I did nothing to deserve such treatment." Here are some examples:

#### Genesis 3:13

Then the LORD God said to the woman, "*What is this that you have done?*" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

#### Genesis 4:10

And the LORD said [to Cain], "*What have you done?* Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!

#### Genesis 12:18

So Pharaoh called Abram, and said, "*What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?*"

#### Genesis 20:9

Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said to him, "*What have you done to us? How have I sinned against you, that you have brought such great guilt on me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that ought not to be done.*"

#### Genesis 26:10

Abimelech said, "*What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.*"

#### Genesis 29:25

When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "*What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?*"

#### Numbers 22:28

Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and it said to Balaam, "*What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?*"

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### Micah 6:3

*“O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me!*

In Sum, Penetrating Questions and their varied responses, and the question: **What Have \* Done?** are often used to establish one’s goodness, and therefore one’s innocence regarding evil. In this regard, note Micah 6:3 above where God asked this question. Because God has loved His people with an unfailing love, evidenced by all the good things He has done for them (see Micah 6:4-5), He is genuinely puzzled as to why they have responded to His love with treasonous rebellion instead (see Micah 6:7).

### Inexplicable Actions

So far we’ve tackled the categories of Godly Expectations, Penetrating Questions, What Have \* Done?, all of which support the idea that innocence exists and that God is not responsible for the rise or development of evil.

Now we’re moving on to the next two categories: Inexplicable Actions and Einstein’s Theory. In these two categories we’re looking at actions people undertook that defy understanding. They are illogical, unreasonable, inexcusable, and are therefore unexplainable. Yes, the person or people chose to do X, but a choice to do something is not the same thing as a valid reason for doing X.

**Acts 3:14** But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you,<sup>15</sup> and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

Here is the most inexplicable act in human history! And it is painted out as such by the author of Acts. Why would anyone ask for a *murderer* to be released, let alone so they could kill the *Author of life*?

In **Isaiah 44** we read of those who: plant a tree, chop it into pieces, burn some parts of it, make a god from one part of it, worship that wooden part, and even pray to it, asking it to rescue them. This is all portrayed with a sense of complete bewilderment! Surely idolatry qualifies as an inexplicable act, as an act of utter insanity! Why would someone think that a mere block of wood, which they have partially and easily destroyed to accomplish mundane tasks, is somehow a god who can rescue them?

But oddly, this category of inexplicable actions worsens, if that’s possible, for oftentimes a person or a group of people do the same inexplicable thing *repeatedly*!

### Einstein’s Theory

Which brings us to Einstein’s Theory, not the one usually thought of, but this one: *Insanity is doing the same thing while expecting (or hoping for) different results.*

For example, in **Genesis 12:10-20** Abram (Abraham) lied about his wife and said she was his sister. This did not work out well, but in Genesis 20 Abraham repeated this very same mistake!

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What's more, in **Genesis 26:1-11** Abraham's son Issac chose to repeat this same evil, with a similarly poor outcome. Why do, *let alone repeat*, actions that are clearly not beneficial to all? There are no valid reasons for doing as they did.

**Judges 2:3** contains another What Have You Done question from God Himself. After His query, and for the remainder of the book of Judges, we read of a nasty cycle where God's people abandon Him and serve other gods, fall into oppression, cry out to God, He rescues them, so they enjoy some years of peace, but they ultimately chose to abandon God again, and this cycle repeats ad nauseum.

First, why did they abandon God? Was He not good to them? Second, why abandon God *repeatedly*? Abandoning God is itself an inexplicable action, but doing so *repeatedly* is in a category of insanity all its own! Einstein's Theory accurately describes and interprets the *repeated* making and serving of idols and pagan gods throughout Scripture. Such acts simply don't work out well so why do them *again and again*?

Sin is completely unreasonable. One cannot excuse it or defend it. Simply put, it makes no sense! It is inexplicable. One can neither understand it nor explain it. As Einstein's Theory directs us: *To sin the same sin repeatedly while expecting different results is itself an indicator of insanity!*

### Sin is a Type of Insanity

So speaking of evil as a type of insanity, we read in **Ecclesiastes 9:3 NASB 77**:

*The hearts of all are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live....*

With such an assertion the author does not mean that madness is evil, as if those with mental health concerns are more evil than others, but rather Ecclesiastes is saying instead that evil itself is a type of madness!

This biblical truth, that evil is madness, prepares us for when we see Ellen White portray sin as *a type of insanity*, and to better "hear" her when she says that sin *deranges* the whole human organism.

All sin is selfishness. Satan's first sin was selfishness. He sought to grasp power, to exalt self. *A species of insanity* led him to seek to supersede God. The infinite value of the sacrifice required for our redemption reveals the fact that sin is a tremendous evil. *Through sin the whole human organism is deranged*, the mind is perverted, the imagination corrupted. Sin has degraded the faculties of the soul. Temptations from without find an answering chord within the heart, and the feet turn imperceptibly toward evil. **Ministry of Healing 451:2**

The reason why no one, *not even God*, can explain why sin arose and why it lingers, is because sin is inexplicable; it is a type of insanity.

### Evil Practices

*Deceit, lust, etc., are all insane acts.* There is no way to understand why we do the evil things we do, no matter what evil is within our focus. Take deception, for example, which Scripture defines as a fundamental characteristic of sin (see **Hebrews 3:13**).

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**Obadiah 3-4** *Your proud heart has deceived you, you that live in the clefts of the rock, whose dwelling is in the heights. You say in your heart, “Who will bring me down to the ground?”* <sup>4</sup> Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the LORD.

**Obadiah 7** *All your allies have deceived you, they have driven you to the border; your confederates have prevailed against you; those who ate your bread have set a trap for you— there is no understanding of it.*

One simply cannot fathom why any created beings would think themselves invincible. Nor can we understand why someone’s allies would attack them. But look more closely at the intriguing nature of self-deception. (I am indebted to Dan O. Via, Jr. for some of these thoughts and expressions.) But here are some further texts:

**Galatians 6:3** *“For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves.”*

**1 Corinthians 3:18** *“Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise.”*

Clearly self-deception is a human problem. It is *selfish love* that prompts us to lie, not only to others but also to our own selves! The irrational step in self-deception is found in our attempt to draw a boundary between our inconsistent self-beliefs, so we can hide them from each other! What “causes” us to do this? A cause that is not a reason! A choice to do something is not the same as a reason for doing it. Which brings us to the next category in the smart art graphic on page 2, Without Cause.

### Without Cause

This is an expression often used in Scripture to describe Inexplicable Actions, yes, even insane actions. Because it is found numerous times in Scripture I have given it its own category. The original Hebrew word is translated in different ways throughout Scripture; it is not uncommon for it to be rendered “for no reason.” At root it seems to mean “nothingness,” while the Greek of the NT below consists of two words, together meaning “no cause, no blameworthiness.”

**1Samuel 19:5** for he [David] took his life in his hand when he attacked the Philistine, and the LORD brought about a great victory for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced; *why then will you sin against an innocent person by killing David without cause?*

**Acts 13:28** *Even though they [the Jewish leaders] found no cause for a sentence of death, they asked Pilate to have him [Jesus] killed.*

According to various biblical passages, sinners attack people who did not provoke them, they attack others without cause. In our sin-damaged world we too often think that people always deserve what others do to them. Both parties must be at fault. It takes two to tango, we often say. But Scripture teaches us that one party can be innocent, that he/she did nothing to provoke the one(s) who hurt them. The Bible teaches that incidences of unprovoked harm support the idea that *God did nothing to warrant the response of sin!* There is

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no weakness in: God's character or the way in which He gently and wisely governs the universe or in His purposes for people. *Sin is an action without a cause or a reason for doing it!*

### Claims of Innocence

The above 1Sam 19:5 passage juxtaposes the expression without cause with: Claims of Innocence. Jonathan said that David was *innocent* so why attack David *without cause*?

**Regarding human innocence, we read:**

**Psalm 94:21** *They band together against the life of the righteous, and condemn the innocent to death.*

**Jeremiah 37:18** Jeremiah also said to King Zedekiah, *"What wrong have I done to you or your servants or this people, that you have put me in prison?"*

**Consider also the innocence of Jesus, of which we read:**

**Matthew 27:4** He [Judas] said, *"I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."* But they said, *"What is that to us? See to it yourself."*

**Acts 13:28:** *Even though they [the Jewish leaders] found no cause for a sentence of death, they asked Pilate to have him [Jesus] killed.*

Jesus set side-by-side *His own innocence* against the guilt of those who would later die, most likely in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

**Luke 23:31:** *"For if these things are done when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"*

**Innocence is also supported by an explosive assertion:**

### Far Be It!

**1Samuel 20:8-9** Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a sacred covenant with you. *But if there is guilt in me, kill me yourself; why should you bring me to your father?"* <sup>9</sup> Jonathan said, *"Far be it from you! If I knew that it was decided by my father that evil should come upon you, would I not tell you?"*

The above passage attaches David's question: "But if there is guilt in me" to Jonathan's powerful response: "Far Be It!" together these expressions lay a claim to David's innocence. The expression: *Far Be It!* Is often used to convey a powerful sense of innocence in the face of possible claims of guilt.

**Listen to Abram's claim regarding God:**

**Genesis 18:25** *Far be it from you [God] to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"*

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The explosive words: Far Be It! are often used to establish a claim of innocence, the innocence of various humans and even the innocence of God!

### Admissions of Guilt

**But we can also view God's innocence via a reverse category: Admissions of Guilt, usually done by human beings, which we often label confessions.**

**Daniel 9:5-7** we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. <sup>6</sup> We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land. <sup>7</sup> *"Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you.*

Here God's innocence is explicitly stated in sharp contrast to the guilt of His people.

### Face & Postures

People in the Bible often expressed their belief in the innocence of God, in sharp contrast with their own guilt, by use of facial imagery and various postures. For example:

**Ezra 9:6 REB** 'I am humiliated, my God,' I said, 'I am ashamed, my God, to lift my face to you. Our sins tower above us, and our guilt is so great that it reaches high heaven.

**Ezra 9:15 REB** Lord God of Israel, you are just; for we today are a remnant that has survived. *In all our guilt we are here before you; because of it we can no longer stand in your presence.'*  
*In Scripture, people hide their face from God and fall on their face before God, some with a deep sense of awe, but even those probably with some sense of their own sinfulness. Such desires, to hide one's face from God, is a physical way of saying that God is innocent and we humans are the one in the wrong.*

Because of their own guilt and sense of responsibility for wrongdoing people also say that *they cannot stand before God, using physical imagery to state that God is innocent regarding the cause and continuance of evil.*

### Laying On of Hand(s)

The laying of one's hands (or a hand) upon a sacrificial offering also *physically* indicated guilt and responsibility for evils done in sharp contrast with God's unblemished innocence regarding evil.

**Leviticus 4:4** He must bring the bull to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting before the Lord, *lay his hand on its head*, and slaughter it before the Lord.

**Leviticus 16:21-22** *Laying both his hands on its head he [the high priest] must confess over it all the iniquities of the Israelites and all their acts of rebellion, that is all their sins; he is to lay his hands on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness in the charge of a man who is waiting ready.* <sup>22</sup>

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The goat will carry all their iniquities upon itself into some barren waste, where the man will release it, there in the wilderness.

*The laying of one's hand(s) on a sacrificial offering is another physical way of making clear one's own or a group's responsibility for the existence and continuance of sin, while declaring God to be innocent.*

### Sin Is Mysterious

Because sin has no cause, no reason for its existence or its development, sin is completely and eternally mysterious. Using the term "lawlessness" the Bible labels sin as a mystery, and nowhere in Scripture is this mystery explained.

**2 Thessalonians 2:7** For *the mystery of lawlessness* is already at work.

Ellen White comments on the mystery of sin several times; here are some of her significant comments regarding the mysteriousness of sin:

*In the day of final judgment, every lost soul will understand the nature of his own rejection of truth....In the judgment of the universe, God will stand clear of blame for the existence or continuance of evil. It will be demonstrated that the divine decrees are not accessory to sin. There was no defect in God's government, no cause for disaffection. **The Desire of Ages 58***

*Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin. **The Great Controversy 493***

*Sin appeared in a perfect universe....The reason of its inception or development was never explained and never can be, even at the last great day when the judgment shall sit and the books be opened....At that day it will be evident to all that there is not, and never was, any cause for sin. **That I May Know Him 15***

When we juxtapose the first Ellen White quote with the third, we see that in the final judgment *God was stand clear of all blame for the existence or continuance of evil*, while in that same judgment the reason for sin's inception or development *has never been explained, and never will be explained!*

### Summary

That God expected (and still expects!) positive responses to His great love teaches us that God is innocent regarding sin's rise and its lingering on. There is no weakness in God that has inevitably led to the origin and development of sin.

By asking penetrating questions, including what have \* done questions, innocence and guilt are established, and God is portrayed as innocent regarding evil.

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Sinners engage in inexplicable actions, often the same actions repeatedly; actions against others can be engaged in without provocation, without cause, which leads us to believe that sin is a type of insanity. All evil practices (deceit, lust, etc.) are acts of insanity.

Claims of innocence are put forth in Scripture in various ways, including through the expression far be it, by admissions of guilt (confessions), use of facial and posture imagery, and the laying on of hands. Scripture refers to lawlessness as a mystery.

### Benefits of: Believing That God Is Innocent! That Sin Has No Cause!

What are the benefits of believing that God is in no way responsible for the origin or development of evil? Of believing that God did not *cause evil to arise* nor has He in any way *caused it to continue*? At the very least four possibilities come to mind:

**Firstly**, that God is innocent, that there is no reason, no cause, for the existence or continuance of sin *is itself a satisfying answer*, when studied out! Anything less than God's complete innocence would be an insurmountable barrier to faith in God.

**Secondly**, the certainty that sin is illogical, unreasonable, inexcusable, unjustifiable, foolish, and yes, downright insane, fosters a stronger desire to accept God's love and break away from sin.

**Thirdly**, knowing that God *has done, is doing, and will continue* to do, everything He can to bring nothing but good to everyone fosters a strong love for God and a deeper trust in Him.

**Fourthly**, one of the strengths that we seek to gain from God's own heart is the desire and ability to forgive others for the unjustifiable wrong that they have done to us. As C.S. Lewis wrote: "To be a Christian means to forgive the *inexcusable* in others because Christ has forgiven the *inexcusable* in us."

Believing that God is innocent, that sin has no cause, will help us see more clearly, not only the true nature of sin, but also the true nature of forgiveness.

### Questions:

Does the idea that sin is a type of insanity (perhaps now seen in a more systematic or comprehensive manner?) seem new to you? Why or why not? Are you persuaded by it? Why or why not? What might you add to the above arguments that support the idea that sin is a mystery because it simply is not rational?

Should this idea: that God is not responsible for the rise and development of evil be a separate doctrine of our church? Why or why not?

Would you agree that your own sinful actions are acts of insanity? If so, which of your sinful actions best illustrates this idea?

Why and how does Christ's forgiving the inexcusable in *you* help you forgive the inexcusable in *others*?

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## Holiness

What is holiness? Has holiness always been an attractive notion to you? Or are you part of those who have often failed to see any beauty in traditional ideas of holiness? Are you satisfied with how the Bible itself presents holiness? Or do you wish for more? Or wish for better?

Certainly, Scripture highlights the holiness of God. For example:

**Isaiah 6:3** And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts...”

**Psalm 99:3, 5, 9** “Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he!” <sup>5</sup> “Extol the LORD our God; worship at his footstool. Holy is he!” <sup>9</sup> “Extol the LORD our God...for the LORD our God is holy.”

Like Psalm 99:3 above, **Isaiah 57:15** says of God: “**whose name is holy.**” **In the Bible the word “name” occasionally refers to a label, but more often it refers to one’s reputation or character. This creates another window for studying the concept of holiness.** For example:

**Psalm 103:1-5** Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, *bless his holy name.* <sup>2</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul, and *do not forget all his benefits—*<sup>3</sup> *who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,* <sup>4</sup> *who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,* <sup>5</sup> *who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.*

Many ideas surface within this passage, but to bless the LORD’s holy name means to recognize and keep as a guiding principle in one’s life the reality that everything God does for others is beneficial to them. God’s name, that is **God’s holiness, is portrayed by what God does, and all of what God does promotes flourishing:** He forgives all our iniquity; heals all our diseases, redeems our life from the Pit; crowns us with steadfast love and mercy; satisfies us with good as long as we live, so that our lives are renewed!

This is why the Bible speaks about the “**beauty of holiness,**” see Psalm 29:2; 96:9; Isaiah 55:5.

## Questions

Yet if the people presented in Scripture were called to be holy as God is holy (Leviticus 19:1), why are there so many deeply flawed people shown in the Bible’s stories?

What can you and I learn from the interactions of a holy God *with sinners*?

What can we learn from a holy God’s interactions *with non-sinners* (other members of the Trinity or angels who did not rebel against God)?

## Attracted to God!

God does not bring us to Himself by condemning us! Or by coercing us! Scripture tells us that God draws us to Himself.

**Jeremiah 31:3** Long ago the LORD appeared to me: “I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore, with unending love I have drawn you to myself.”

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**Proverbs 16:6 NLT** Unfailing love and faithfulness make atonement for sin.

This was my own experience with God; By His unfailing love for me, I was drawn to God! Many tried to guilt trip me to God, but that only hardened me against Him.

No one will be ultimately lost because they rejected a horrid God. John Wesley said it clearly:

“It is less absurd to deny the very being of God, than to make him an almighty tyrant.” ***A Treatise on Justification, Vol. 10, p. 334, para. 2***

It is only by refusing to be drawn by the unfailing love of God that we will be lost, and then only as an inherent consequence of our refusal, as Ellen White wrote:

“If you refuse to respond to the drawing love of Christ, you will finally grow rebellious and defiant.”  
***The Youth Instructor, March 2, 1893***

**Psalm 27:4** *One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.*

### Questions

If you have grown up hearing the Bible, what passages bothered you the most? Are there any that contributed to a disinterest in or a disregard of God? On the other hand, what passages have become anchors for you? Might Jeremiah 31:3 be one of those? John 3:16-17, maybe? Hebrews 13:5, perhaps?

Have you reflected on John 17:23 where Jesus asserts that God the Father loves others (sinners, no less!) as much as He loves Jesus Himself?

In what ways or through what means has God drawn you to Himself? Do you know the difference between being drawn to God versus other coercive methods often used to get people to merely attend religious services or be part of various religious groups? Could you list some of these differences, perhaps even share them with others, perhaps at Sabbath School?

### Becoming Self-Aware

**Isaiah 6:1-5** In the year that King Uzziah died, *I saw the Lord* sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” <sup>4</sup> The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> *And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”*

“As the prophet Isaiah beheld the glory of the Lord, he was amazed, and, overwhelmed with a sense of his own weakness and unworthiness, he cried, ‘Woe is me!...*Isaiah had denounced the sin of others;*

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*but now he sees himself exposed...He had been satisfied with a cold, lifeless ceremony in his worship of God. He had not known this until the vision was given him of the Lord.” The Faith I Live By, p. 190*

Often, even in religion, we counsel ourselves and others to become more self-aware, as if we can discern who we really are, and learn from ourselves whom we should become.

Yet gazing inward is not all that it’s cracked up to be. When we look inside ourselves, we fail to really see who we are, let alone who we could be. Sin blinds us, making most of us imagine we are better than we really are, and it blinds us as to whom we could be. But a long look at the LORD instead can give us the perspective we need.

### Questions

Is it possible that, like Isaiah, you have been satisfied with a cold, lifeless ceremony in your worship of God?

How much time each day do you spend getting to know God? Is that sufficient time?

While there are numerous ways to get acquainted with God, the big three have always been: *prayer, Bible study, and unselfish service to others*. Do you regularly engage in these three? If not, how might you incorporate them into your life?

Has God changed your opinions regarding who you are and who you can be? If not, do you really know God?

### Repentance

Of all the things people fear **regrets** often rise to the top. When we get to the end of our lives are we going to feel incredibly disappointed by the life we lived, and perhaps even more by the life we didn’t? Repentance is how God helps humans prevent living a life full of regrets.

What is repentance? When I was younger it seemed more like a mere knuckling under to an almighty God, who seemed oddly hungry for others to worship Him.

But now I don’t see repentance or God that way. Repentance has surfaced as an immeasurably helpful character quality!

In 1 Kings 8 (and 2 Chronicles 6) King Solomon addressed what might happen to God’s people. They might turn away from God, and as a result make a mess of their lives. Then what? Solomon described their return to God as a coming to their senses:

**1Kings 8:47-48** *yet if they come to their senses in the land to which they have been taken captive, and repent, and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, ‘We have sinned, and have done wrong; we have acted wickedly’; <sup>48</sup> if they repent with all their heart and soul...and pray to you....*

Like the prodigal son in **Luke 15:17**, those exiled by their captors **begin to experience a renewed sanity!** This renewed sanity is called repentance in Scripture. When repenting, for the first time, or for the first time in a

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while, we begin to think about things as God does; that is, we see things/people/ourselves for what they/we really are.

Repentance is one of the earliest steps toward the good life! Toward a life without regrets because we now see God and life clearly.

That repentance is a renewed sanity can be seen not only in 1 Kings 8:47; 2 Chronicles 6:37, and Luke 15:17, but also in **Jeremiah 8:6**, where a lament surfaces:

*“no one repents of wickedness, saying, “What have I done!”*

As we’ve seen earlier, “what have \* done? questions” often express shock at being badly treated for no reason. Jeremiah 8 uses the expression to express shock *and sorrow* because one’s own self has done wrong and one is finally coming face-to-face with the insanity of one’s own actions!

So how can this renewed sanity be obtained? How can we be truly sorry for what we’ve done, rather than merely being sorry that we got caught?

**Romans 2:4** tells us that it is God’s kindness that leads us to repentance! It is not God’s huffing and puffing in preparation for blowing our house down, nor His ability to outmaneuver or outlast us, that leads us to repent; no, it is His kindness!

We humans are dependent creatures; we need God to gift us with what we require each day, including a repentant spirit. And so we read that repentance is something God gifts to needy people like us:

*“God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance....” Acts 5:31*

Tying this together is: **2 Corinthians 7:10**, which says:

*For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.*

Repentance, a gift from Jesus, leads us to confess that our wrongdoing has never been excusable or rational (What have I done?). Repentance takes us off the pathway of regrets, and repentance itself is not a regrettable action. Repentance is a new mindset, a complete turnaround, a drastic change in how we look at (and live) life.

### Questions

Jesus said that He came to call sinners to repentance (**Luke 5:32**), have you answered Jesus’ call? When was the last time you repented? Have you embraced *a lifestyle* of repentance?

What did Jesus mean when he said: “Bear fruit(s) worthy of repentance?” See **Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8**.

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## Lesson #2: To Know God, April 4-10

Several books on my bookshelves wrestle with the idea of “a hidden God.” My Amazon wish list contains a few as well. So here we will put the big question earlier than normal:

### Question

**How can we understand the character of God, who is both the single most important character in the Hebrew Bible and yet absent from the majority of it?**

As we read Scripture, we note that God often uses stand-ins for Himself. Why?

#### Stand-Ins for God:

- A. Angels
- B. Humans
  - a. Judges
  - b. Kings
  - c. Prophets
  - d. Humans speak about God:
    - i. God’s friends
    - ii. God’s foes
  - e. Narrator
- C. Nature
  - a. Animate
  - b. Inanimate
- D. Absence

### Additional Questions

**How many of these stand-ins are *created, sin-damaged, or sin-traumatized*?** The *reliability* of their witness for/about God is what then?

What then is God’s *risk* in allowing these (created, sin-damaged, and/or sin-traumatized) creatures and objects to speak *for* Him and *about* Him?

Do you consider as you could how challenging it is for God to allow *His enemies* (sinners) to portray Him to an entire world? Would you do that? Would you allow a *deranged* individual to be your PR person? Or let a sin-damaged object or non-human creature illustrate who you really are?

Why does God take this risk so often and for such a long period?

**Regarding the reliability of the above Stand-ins for God:**

**Here is a list depicting a descending order of reliability:**

- 1) God—when he appears/speaks.
- 2) Narrator—the persona built into the text telling us stuff.

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- 3) Angels
- 4) Humans
- 5) Nature

We need such a list because those who speak for God or make claims about God are often unreliable characters. Even those on God's side are: created, sin-damaged or sin-traumatized! Does knowing this force us to become suspicious as we read Scripture?

Perhaps, but it can just make us cautious. God and the narrator are the ones we can trust, while the others we examine more prayerfully and carefully.

**Another scale of reliability has been created for assessing the above list of reliability:**

- 1) Direct statements by the narrator about motives, attitudes, feelings, values, or other directly asserted qualities of these 'characters.'
- 2) Reports of inner thoughts or speech of the character.
- 3) Direct speech of the character.
- 4) Actions of the character.
- 5) What other characters say about the character.
- 6) External descriptions of a character.

Why do Christians make such lists? Because they are concerned about assessing the reliability of those who have become our primary teachers regarding God. Let's be brutally honest, folk in the Bible make mistakes, misunderstand, and even lie. Except Jesus, even the best of God's followers did these things!

### Additional Question

Assess the above three lists—what do you think about the work of others who have wrestled long and hard with the idea of knowing God? Are they spot on or too critical?

### The Hiddenness of God

**But back to the first idea: why does God appear so distant, perhaps hidden at times, even in Scripture? And how might we begin to get a better grasp of his "absence"?**

God's hiddenness was not a minor problem for God's people, nor was it treated as such! It was incorporated into the very language of prayer! Rumblyings of discontent were given legitimate expression within the worshipping community? It's okay to bellyache to God and bellyache about God!

**Here are some biblical texts regarding the hiddenness of God:**

**Psalm 27:9** *Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!*

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God's hiddenness is linked to His anger, but not all instances of God's hiddenness are negative, see verse below! God also has been asked to hide his face from human sins!

**Psalm 51:9** *Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.*

God's hiddenness is also linked to negative verbs, yet when such verbs are negated within the passage or context then they are not a threat.

**Psalm 22:24** For he did not *despise* or *abhor* the affliction of the afflicted; *he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.*

Time is also linked to God's hiddenness, but there is a sharp contrast drawn between how humans view such time and how God does, see the three passages below.

**Psalm 10:11** They think in their heart, "*God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it.*"

**Psalm 13:1** How long, O LORD? *Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?*

**Isaiah 54:8** In overflowing wrath *for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer.*

People ask questions regarding why God hides his face. It is okay to question God about such things!

**Psalm 44:24** *Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?*

Sometimes contrasting verbs surface within a passage regarding God's hiddenness.

**Ezekiel 39:29** and *I will never again hide my face from them, when I pour out my spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD.*

There are consequences of *not hiding* God's face and consequences of *hiding* it.

**Psalm 22:24** For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; *he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.*

**Psalm 104:29** *When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.*

When I was younger the idea of a hidden God was very problematic for me! Certainly, I felt that He was hidden to me! So you can imagine the joy I felt when I began collecting and studying passages that highlight *the nearness of God*, in contrast to a hidden God.

**Deuteronomy 4:7** *For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him?*

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**Deuteronomy 30:14** No, *the word is very near to you*; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

**Psalms 34:18** *The LORD is near to the brokenhearted*, and saves the crushed in spirit.

**Psalms 73:28** But for me *it is good to be near God*; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, to tell of all your works.

**Psalms 75:1** We give thanks to you, O God; we give thanks; *your name is near*. People tell of your wondrous deeds.

**Isaiah 50:8** *he who vindicates me is near*. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me.

**Isaiah 51:5** *I will bring near my deliverance swiftly*, my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope.

**Isaiah 55:6** *Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near*;

**Jeremiah 23:23** *Am I a God nearby, says the LORD, and not a God far off?*

**Jeremiah 30:21** *Their prince shall be one of their own, their ruler shall come from their midst; I will bring him near, and he shall approach me, for who would otherwise dare to approach me?* says the LORD.

**Lamentations 3:57** *You came near when I called on you; you said, "Do not fear!"*

**Matthew 3:2** *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."*

**Matthew 4:17** From that time Jesus began to proclaim, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."*

**Matthew 10:7** As you go, proclaim the good news, *'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'*

**Mark 1:15** and saying, *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."*

**Luke 10:9** cure the sick who are there, and say to them, *'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'*

**Luke 10:11** *'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'*

**Luke 24:15** *While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them,*

**Romans 10:8** But what does it say? *"The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart"* (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);

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**Romans 13:11-12** Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. *For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers;*<sup>12</sup> *the night is far gone, the day is near.* Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light;

**Ephesians 2:13** But now in Christ Jesus *you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

**Philippians 4:5** Let your gentleness be known to everyone. *The Lord is near.*

Scripture teaches us that knowing God is critical! I now know God as One who is near to me! But I also have become more familiar, perhaps even more comfortable, with the notion of a hidden God, a topic I am still studying.

**John 17:3** *And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*

### Questions

*How might we deal with the notion of a hidden God?* Is it best to “hide” such an idea? (Note the irony of doing so!) How might we instead stare such an idea in the face--directly tackle it so that we might come away stronger for having done so? (Did we not, for example, see that hiddenness is not always a negative action?)

Is God sometimes hidden and sometimes near? Or could He simultaneously be hidden while also being near? Is this an either/or event or is it a both/and? Is it even more than these?

*What can we learn from the nearness of God?* How can you and I better incorporate the nearness of God into our lives, such that the reality of his nearness is good for us and not a perceived threat to us?

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### Lesson #3: Pride Versus Humility, April 11-17

In 1988 Margaret Becker wrote a song titled *Pico Boulevard*. In it she expressed her failure to find the balance between need and desire, and thus fell right into line, this line:

“Let me be somebody someone else wants to be;”  
lost my joy and humility down on Pico Boulevard.

This is a problem most of us have—we fail to find the balance between need and desire. More pointedly, we want to be somebody someone else wants to be! This was not only the gist of the Lucifer’s original sin:

**Isaiah 14:12-14** How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! <sup>13</sup> *You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of assembly on the heights of Zaphon; <sup>14</sup> I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.”*

But it was also what Satan tempted Eve with:

**Genesis 3:4-5** But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; <sup>5</sup> for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, *and you will be like God,*

**True humility consists of unselfishness, a life principle whereby one puts others first, as seen clearly in the life of Jesus:**

**Philippians 2:4-6** *Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,*

Others, those who have closely followed God in the past, have adopted this principle as their own and lived it out. People like Prince Jonathan and John the Baptist:

**1Samuel 23:16-17** Saul’s son Jonathan set out and came to David at Horesh; there he strengthened his hand through the LORD. <sup>17</sup> He said to him, “Do not be afraid; for the hand of my father Saul shall not find you; *you shall be king over Israel, and I shall be second to you;* my father Saul also knows that this is so.”

**John 3:27-30** John answered, “No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. <sup>28</sup> You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.’ <sup>29</sup> He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. <sup>30</sup> *He must increase, but I must decrease.*”

The Old Testament persistently warned people about the dangers of pride:

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**Proverbs 6:16-19** There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: <sup>17</sup> *haughty eyes*, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, <sup>18</sup> a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that hurry to run to evil, <sup>19</sup> a lying witness who testifies falsely, and one who sows discord in a family.

**2Chronicles 26:16** But when he had become strong *he grew proud*, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to make offering on the altar of incense.

The New Testament presented Jesus as the One who could give us a humble, that is, an unselfish heart, so we could put others first:

**Matthew 11:28-30** “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and *learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest* for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Ellen White wrote:

Christ humbles the proud heart by giving it a view of Himself, His generosity, His great love. **The Youth Instructor, September 28, 1899**

Using sharp contrasts, Jesus consistently revealed the importance of humility:

**Luke 14:7-11** When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. <sup>8</sup> “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; <sup>9</sup> and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. <sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. <sup>11</sup> For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

**Luke 18:9-14** He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: <sup>10</sup> “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘*God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.*’ <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ <sup>13</sup> But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘*God, be merciful to me, a sinner!*’ <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; *for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.*”

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Ellen White wrote of a sharp contrast between God and Satan:

He [Satan] is directly opposed to God in his tastes, views, preferences, likes and dislikes, choice of things and pursuits; there is no relish for what God loves or approves, but a delight in those things which He despises.... *Mind, Character, and Personality, Vol 1, 22:3*

**It is this sharp contrast between God's humility and Satan's pride especially that is the core of the Cosmic Conflict between Good and Evil.**

### Questions

Do you agree that humility is basically unselfishness? If not, what is humility?

How can we be humble?

What areas in your life today would be better if you were simply humble?

When you read the Bible do you see a sharp contrast between God and Satan? What would it take for you to see the sharpness of this contrast?

# The Good Word Study Guide – 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2026

## Lesson #4: The Role of the Bible, April 18-24

**Romans 10:17** *So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.*

In 1978 I finally chose to attend college. I was then 22 years old. I was a bit anxious, knowing that I had not been in an academic program in four years! But I had spent the last two of those four years studying the Bible for myself. For 2-3 hours a day I had used an exhaustive concordance, my Bible, and any other religious books I had, cross-referencing as much stuff as I could. I also made notes on 4x6 cards. First quarter in college, I was delighted to pull a 3.97 GPA.

But I dropped out of college after only 2 years and became a locksmith instead, another interest of mine. I also volunteered in my local church, doing whatever they asked, from janitorial and maintenance to head elder duties, over a few decades I did it all!

20 years later, I went back to college, this time to Walla Walla University, again with some angst! But that first quarter back in the academic saddle led to another 3.97 GPA.

**I credit studying the Bible for my skills in the academic world.** I believe God Himself was my teacher for those 22 years! God not only taught me stuff; He also taught me *how to learn*! One of my favorite Ellen White quotes reads as follows:

The character of [John] Wycliffe is a testimony to the educating, transforming power of the Holy Scriptures. It was the Bible that made him what he was. *The effort to grasp the great truths of revelation imparts freshness and vigor to all the faculties. It expands the mind, sharpens the perceptions, and ripens the judgment. The study of the Bible will ennoble every thought, feeling, and aspiration as no other study can. It gives stability of purpose, patience, courage, and fortitude; it refines the character and sanctifies the soul.* An earnest, reverent study of the Scriptures, bringing the mind of the student in direct contact with infinite mind, would give to the world people of stronger and more active intellect, as well as of nobler principle, than has ever resulted from the ablest training that human philosophy affords. "The entrance of Your words," says the psalmist, "gives light; it gives understanding." ***The Great Controversy 94:2***

This is a favorite quote of mine because it describes what has happened to me as I have studied the Bible. Since I began studying the Bible for myself, my devotional life has always been quite robust! And very diverse! I can honestly say that studying any book of the Bible is a pleasure for me!

**Perhaps more globally speaking, we could ask *what is the role of the Bible?*** Well, *love requires freedom, and freedom is supported through influence. God uses His word to influence us, to persuade us, to teach us who He is, what He is like, and how He governs the universe, so that we might become His friends! Once persuaded to become God's friend, the Bible is one of the primary means God uses to help us become like Him.*

**Proverbs 1:23** I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you.

These are not the words of some human praying to God; these are the words of God speaking to humans! Because friendship requires open and frequent communication, God has seen to it that the Bible was created and that it is still available to us today!

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### Question

Like Wycliffe, does your life daily show that you treasure God's word? How?

I was once asked if I would like to contribute a new truth to God's global church, and to Adventism in particular. My answer was a decided YES! Why wouldn't I want to do that? In fact, in my above comments regarding the origin and development of evil I went so far as to ask if the insanity of sin (supported also by the existence of divine innocence) should be added to our doctrines. I believe this is a doctrine-worthy-topic! And one that has been sorely underdeveloped by us as Adventists, especially given our teachings regarding the cosmic conflict between good and evil. Are my ideas of this topic entirely new? No! But every time I have shared my insights regarding it people tell me it's the *first* time they have ever heard anyone preach on the subject! Imagine that!

### Jesus made it clear that discipleship involves new gems of truth!

**Matthew 13:52 NLT** Then he [Jesus] added, "*Every...disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a homeowner who brings from his storeroom new gems of truth as well as old.*"

### Ellen White wrote:

*"Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. Testimonies, Vol. 5, 706*

Yes, new truths take time to finally "stick." They are vetted in various ways as well. But one of the roles of the Bible is to offer up new truths, as well as confirm old truths.

### Questions

What would it take for *you* to embrace a new biblical truth?

Or do you find yourself embracing so many new ideas that others question the validity of your so-called new truths?

Do you still have (and still cultivate) an appetite for old, established truths?

Do you understand how older and newer truths support each other? How might you improve your grasp of the overall teachings of Scripture and how they are linked?

What should it take for *the church* to embrace a new biblical truth?

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## Lesson #5: How to Study the Bible, April 25 - May 1

On my desktop computer I have a file titled *Biblical Books*. In that file is another file titled *Amos*, a biblical book I am currently studying. In my Amos file I have individual files for each chapter in the book of Amos, so *Amos 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.*

I have additional files titled *Background Stories of the Nations* (that are mentioned in Amos 1 & 2). Another file is simply titled *Exile*, wherein I have placed a few documents I created while exploring the notion of Israel's Assyrian exile.

Another file is titled *Key Words in Amos*; another: *Mourning in Amos*; another file, titled *Oracles Against the Nations* currently contains 10 separate documents wherein I have collected various oracles against nations (scattered throughout Scripture and also found in Amos) like Oracles About/Against: Ammon, Aram, Edom, Israel, Judah, Moab, the Philistines, and Tyre & Sidon. For future learning purposes I even created a table comparing/contrasting in a side-by-side format what was said about each of these nations in Amos. One doc in this file is a collection of Scripture texts that insist that *God Does Not Show Partiality!* Other additional files include: *Slavery in Amos*, *Theodicy in Amos*, and *Time/Chronology in Amos*.

Then there are individual documents that I have yet to place in the larger Amos files. Documents like *Characterization of God in Amos*, *Hope in Amos*, *Questions Asked in Amos*, *Quoting Others in Amos*, *Social Justice in Amos*, *Woe Oracles in Amos*, etc.

All in all, my larger Amos file is becoming robust. In our computerized world, creating documents is easy! Why Amos? Why not! (In the above I'm offering hints regarding how to study the Bible.)

**How can we study the Bible? The simple answer is prayerfully and carefully, with an interest in doing what God guides us to do!** But let's explore Bible study more!

### Questions

When you open the Bible do you just casually read it or do you study it?

Do you take notes of some kind when you study the Bible? If not, why not?

Have you ever tried journaling while you read the Bible?

What in the Bible interests you? Perhaps even grips you?

What bothers you in Scripture? Are you in a position where you can home in on these things or would it be better for you to wait until you are a stronger Christian?

**Bible study often begins with** a few minutes taken *here and there*; then it becomes *a few minutes each day*; then *longer periods of time are taken each day*, until it becomes something you simply cannot live without! But if you slip up, start again!

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I learned to read when I was 4 years old and cannot recall when I didn't know how to read so I thought that beginning a devotional life would be a walk in the park for me. But it was not!

I learned the ideas listed below slowly and painfully! I was not a theologian or a pastor when I began doing these things; I was a locksmith! Now I am a retired pastor, but that came about when I was already in my forties.

If you choose to read later in the day skip the early steps.

**First**, I recommend you get out of bed and read somewhere where you won't be frequently interrupted, if possible. I recommend using a table or desk, but some prefer other forms of usefulness or comfort. Use technology, if possible, to take notes.

**Second**, before reading, splash some cold water in your face to make yourself more alert; then drink some (warm/hot?) water to get your body and brain hydrated.

**Third**, pray, asking God to enlighten you as you study. God will give you success, but it will probably take time! Why? Because God is interested in shaping your life through what you read, while teaching you *how* to study, and not simply giving you exciting content. Yes, there will be exciting discoveries, but they come as your life and study skills grow.

**Fourth**, take notes! List some of your questions! Seek for answers to those questions as you read. Prepare yourself to take the long road! Become a lifelong learner!

**Fifth**, discipline yourself to think about what you read as your day unfolds. Not every daily task demands our full attention, which offers us bursts of time wherein we can think about what we read. If done regularly, you will be surprised at what God will teach you during such moments!

**Sixth**, how does God want to shape your life with what He is teaching you? *What does He want you to do?*

**Seventh**, imagine your way into the world of the text. What additional insights come to mind?

**Lastly**, keep reading! Keep asking questions and taking notes! Don't let those free moments slip away wherein you could be thinking about what you read.

Is it possible for you to join a small group where you could study the Bible with others? Age is not usually the issue; studying with older and younger people is equally enjoyable!

**John 7:16-17** Then Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. <sup>17</sup> *Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own.*

Though study skills of varying kinds can be helpful, in the above passage Jesus laid out the basics. **Resolving to do what God wants you to do is the primary key to learning.**

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That said, I have been blessed by books that offer Bible study methodologies of differing kinds. The most accessible is **Rick Warren's *Bible Study Methods: Twelve Ways You Can Unlock God's Word***. 12 different methods for studying the Bible are laid out, step by step in this book.

Another is ***The Art of Biblical Narrative* by Robert Alter**. Alter focuses on studying stories in the Bible and his book is a classic when thinking about biblical stories. The chapter on *repetition* alone can change one's ideas about why there is so much repetition in the OT. (If money is not a problem, consider Shimon bar Efrat's book *Narrative Art in the Bible*; it too is excellent.)

A third, that may open your eyes to a new concept for Bible study, is titled ***Perspective Criticism* by Gary Yamasaki**. This book details how point of view can be seen and studied in Scripture. Point of view in this case refers to sight as a subjective opinion. Movies are often used to illustrate this book's ideas.

In the OT, for example, *the Hebrew phrases* "in the eyes of" and "in front of" and "good in the eyes of" reflect someone's thought and judgment. In other words, they express opinion. Not everyone in the Bible perceives factual, objective reality in the same way! See **Genesis 29:20**, for example, where Jacob is said to have worked another 7 years for his wife Rachel, but those years seemed like just a few days to him! Becoming acquainted with how to study point of view is a fresher take on Bible study.

These three books are all inexpensive and readily available, books that offer ideas and teach methodologies not doctrine! They teach us how to study the Bible. If you chose to read any of these three books, take notes regarding *how to study the Bible*.

Why not turn Warren's book, for example, into fill-in-the-blanks computerized documents, which you can use repeatedly via copy and paste or save as a template-- docs which you can also enlarge or shrink at will? All these books offer methods that are illustrated, but you want the how-to-methods, not the illustrations per se, so create notes detailing what you find helpful. Then put these new ideas to work for you!

**For questions, see above.**

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## Lesson #6: Prayer Warriors, May 2-8

Though I am now using them for a different purpose than he did, I am indebted to Greg Boyd for some of the concepts I am sharing below regarding why we pray.

**Why do we pray?** In a nutshell, the reason why we pray has to do with our God-given reality.

- A) Love requires freedom.
- B) Freedom creates risk.
- C) Risk creates moral responsibility.
- D) Moral responsibility is generally proportionate to influence.
- E) Influence is (generally) irrevocable.
- F) Power to influence is limited.

**Regarding love & freedom:** genuine love requires significant freedom. And such freedom is supported through influence, not coercion. God influences humans. Humans influence other humans. Humans also influence God through prayer.

**Before you panic:** influencing God is not: manipulating God, tricking God, overcoming His unwillingness to do good, nor is it calming God down.

**Regarding influence:** When God influences us, He may tell us stuff we don't already know. Other humans may also tell us stuff we don't know when influencing us. But when we pray, we humans *never* tell God stuff He doesn't previously know!

**Matthew 6:7-8 NLT** "When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. <sup>8</sup> Don't be like them, *for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!*

God often must influence people who are: suspicious to His point of view, reluctant to follow His advice, and even hostile toward Him. We humans also influence others who possess these same traits. But God does not share these negative character traits! So, when we pray, we do not have to overcome God's suspicion, or His reluctance, let alone His hostility toward us!

Whether we are influencing God or others: we present our wants/needs. Generally, these can be/are met only *after* they have been presented. Why? Because time is an essential element of influence, whether we are influencing God or humans.

**To have love and freedom we must also have the ability to influence. Prayer supports the existence of real love and significant freedom because it is a type of influence.**

**There are also practical reasons why we pray:**

- 1) Friendship requires open and regular communication.
- 2) You and I have wants and needs.
- 3) God wants to talk to us!

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### Regarding our wants & needs:

**Matthew 6:11 NLT** Give us today the food we need,

### Regarding our heart's desires:

**Psalms 37:4 NLT** Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart's desires.

“Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. He who numbers the hairs of your head is not indifferent to the wants of His children.” **Steps to Christ, 100.**

### Regarding God's desire to talk with us:

**Proverbs 1:23** I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you.

**These are God's words to us! He wants to pour out His thoughts to us! He wants His words, His messages, to be known, to be clear to us!**

### Why pray?

**1 Peter 5:7 NLT** Give all your worries and cares to God, *for he cares about you.*

**Matthew 7:11** So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.*

It is a part of God's plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask. **The Great Controversy, 525**

**God's responses to prayer:** God answers prayers in multiple ways; He might say:

- A) Yes
- B) No
- C) Yes/No → Better!
- D) Wait/Later
- E) Maybe?
- F) Unprayed answers

**Yes, no, and wait/later are all straightforward, though waiting is painful!**

**How can we respond to periods of waiting?** By leveraging our waiting times! We can use those periods to pray, worship, study God's word, seek fun times with others, and serve others. These activities will change us for the better as well as help the time fly by.

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**Yes/No→ Better!** Is when God answers our prayers, so—yes, but at the same time He doesn't give us what we asked for, so—no, but instead He gives us something better than we asked for!

For example, Elijah asked God to kill him now (**1 Kings 19:4**). God answered this prayer: with a yes, He would meet Elijah's needs, but with a big fat NO as to killing Elijah! Instead, God gave Elijah food, water, strength, direction, and finally a partner, a trainee, Elisha, who shared and then took the burden of Elijah's work from him. God then took Elijah to heaven! Elijah never experienced death! Definitely, Yes/No→Better!

**Maybe?** Is an ambiguous category in which I lump odd stories, such as:

**Deuteronomy 3:23-28** *"At that time I pleaded with the LORD and said, <sup>24</sup> 'O Sovereign LORD, you have only begun to show your greatness and the strength of your hand to me, your servant. Is there any god in heaven or on earth who can perform such great and mighty deeds as you do? <sup>25</sup> Please let me cross the Jordan to see the wonderful land on the other side, the beautiful hill country and the Lebanon mountains.' <sup>26</sup> "But the LORD was angry with me because of you, and he would not listen to me. 'That's enough!' he declared. 'Speak of it no more. <sup>27</sup> But go up to Pisgah Peak, and look over the land in every direction. Take a good look, but you may not cross the Jordan River. <sup>28</sup> Instead, commission Joshua and encourage and strengthen him, for he will lead the people across the Jordan. He will give them all the land you now see before you as their possession.'*

Yet oddly, Moses did end up in the land of Canaan! It just wasn't when he wished to go; in fact, it was much later! And under vastly different circumstances!

**Mark 9:2-4 NLT** Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed, <sup>3</sup> and his clothes became dazzling white, far whiter than any earthly bleach could ever make them. <sup>4</sup> *Then Elijah and Moses appeared and began talking with Jesus.*

**For lack of a better label, I call this a maybe!** Study the prayers listed below prayerfully and carefully and see what God teaches you about them!

**These are odd prayer stories:**

Abraham & God in Genesis 18  
Jacob wrestling with God in Genesis 32  
Moses & God in the Golden Calf episode in Exodus 32  
Moses' complaint to God in Numbers 11  
Balaam & God in Numbers 22-24  
The Lord denying Moses entrance into Canaan in Deuteronomy 3; Mark 9  
Hezekiah and God in Isaiah 38  
Syro-Phoenician woman & Jesus in Matthew 15  
Jesus & God in Gethsemane in Matthew 26; Luke 22

**People in both the OT and the NT knew that God is compassionate, approachable, and flexible!** This is why we find these odd prayers in the Bible.

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And as for the label: **Unprayed answers**, because God is good He does not always wait for us to ask before He gives us what we need! For prayer-as-influence to support freedom God does not need to wait until we ask every single time!

**Romans 8:26** *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.*

**Prayer is a deep subject!** People approached Jesus over 180 times with questions. Of these Jesus replied with a direct answer, maybe three times? The rest Jesus responded to with a different question, a story, or some other indirection. Jesus loved making people think for themselves—prayer often operates the same way! Prayer makes us think!

### Questions

Why *should* we pray? Why *must* we pray?

How should we think about the odd prayers in Scripture?

Are you okay with God answering some prayers only if He is asked to do so? Why or why not?

Why did Jesus often answer questions put to Him directly so indirectly?

In what ways does prayer make you think?

Do you believe that God is compassionate, approachable, and flexible? If not, is there one of these that especially troubles you? And if so, which one and why?

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### Lesson #7: Practical Prayer, May 9-15

I've chosen to focus this lesson on the idea of *Praying as Learners*.

From the cradle to the grave Jesus' life was bathed in prayer. In fact, even before His birth we find both Zechariah and Jesus' mother Mary offering praise to God, see Luke 1. The baby Jesus, brought into the Temple to be circumcised, was the object of thanksgiving to God as the deeply committed Simeon and Anna recognized Jesus as the long-awaited deliver of Israel, see Luke 2.

And at the other end of Jesus' life, Jesus' final words, uttered as He hung dying on the cross, are an anguished cry to God the Father, see Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; and John 19. Luke tells us:

**Luke 5:16 NLT** But Jesus *often* withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.

**During much of His public ministry, Jesus was surrounded by crowds.** They often pressed themselves upon Him, pushing to get closer so they could hear and see Him or be healed by Him from some disease. At times, neither Jesus nor His disciples could find time to eat because they were so busy ministering to people's needs. **But Jesus always made time to pray!** He sought out places where he could be alone and there, He poured out His heart to His Father, an act done regularly and frequently. We also learn that Jesus sought out quiet places to pray, places where He would not be interrupted or distracted. Mark wrote:

**Mark 1:35** *In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.*

It was a Sunday morning, very early before sunrise, when Jesus went out to pray. The previous day, a Sabbath, had been extremely busy. Jesus had taught in the synagogue in Capernaum, cast out a demon from a possessed man, and then Jesus went to the home of Peter and Andrew, where Jesus also healed Peter's mother-in-law. After sunset, that same Sabbath, the whole town gathered at the door of that home bringing the sick and Jesus healed them.

We have no idea when the last person left and Jesus was able to finally get some sleep, but it must have been late! Yet early the next morning, before anyone else was stirring in the house, Jesus was up and out the door, looking for a quiet place to pray! Jesus' prayer life reveals the importance of individual, personal, and private prayer.

**At special times during Jesus' life and ministry prayer took on an even deeper significance.**

**Luke 3:21-22 NLT** One day when the crowds were being baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. *As he was praying, the heavens opened,* <sup>22</sup> *and the Holy Spirit, in bodily form, descended on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy."*

It was at His baptism that Jesus committed Himself to the mission for which He had come to earth. And while He was praying the Holy Spirit came upon Him in a rich measure, and God Himself affirmed Jesus' character and mission.

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**Luke 6:12-13 NLT** One day soon afterward *Jesus went up on a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night.* <sup>13</sup> *At daybreak he called together all of his disciples and chose twelve of them to be apostles.*

Jesus' choice of disciples came only after praying all night long!

**Luke 9:28-31 NLT** About eight days later Jesus took Peter, John, and James up on a mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup> *And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was transformed, and his clothes became dazzling white.* <sup>30</sup> Suddenly, two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared and began talking with Jesus. <sup>31</sup> They were glorious to see. And they were speaking about his exodus from this world, which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem.

Peter, James, and John had earlier fallen asleep, and they woke up only in time to hear the end of Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah, where they saw and heard this:

**Mark 9:7 NLT** Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, *"This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to him."*

These events happened while Jesus was praying. I think there's a connection there, yes?

Jesus said repeatedly that His time had not fully arrived, **see John 2 & 7**, but in the final week of His life, Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified," **see John 12:21**.

Some Greeks had come to Jerusalem for the Passover; these people were but a faint representation of all who would accept Jesus. But before this would occur, Jesus spoke about how a kernel of wheat must die to produce many seeds. Jesus, sensing the painful separation of Himself and God, cried out:

**John 12:27-28 NLT** "Now my soul is deeply troubled. *Should I pray, 'Father, save me from this hour'?* But this is the very reason I came! <sup>28</sup> Father, bring glory to your name."

With His words Jesus offered an anti-prayer, right? *Jesus refused to pray this one prayer, but the negated prayer is still critical to understanding Jesus' prayer life.* Despite the horrors of separation from God, Jesus still asked that God's name be glorified!

**Jesus' followers sensed that Jesus could teach them about prayer so the 12 disciples asked:**

**Luke 11:1** *"Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."*

There are two versions of **Jesus' model prayer**, one in **Matthew 6:9-13** and the other in **Luke 11:2-4**. These two versions show some variations, but they contain the same elements, offered in the same order. Let's look at **Matthew's**. It **has an introduction and ending that we often forget about**.

**In essence**, when you pray: do not pray so you can be admired as a religious person. Do not babble on and on. These two cautions seem to address two groups of people, the Jewish leaders and many pagans.

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What comes after Jesus' model prayer is also critical to understanding our Lord's prayer:

**Matthew 6:14** For if you forgive others their wrongdoing, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don't forgive people, your Father will not forgive your wrongdoing.

**Forgiven people have forgiveness implanted in their hearts! All three of these cautionary statements flow naturally from a correct understanding of God's character:**

- 1) God is friendly and giving: He loves reality; therefore, He rewards real (not fake) motives. We humans are all sinners—that is reality.
- 2) It is not necessary to manipulate God with flowery words or long prayers. He knows our needs, and He is kind, so arm-twisting isn't necessary.
- 3) A right relationship with God leads to a right relationship with others.

**Let's turn to Jesus' prayer itself.**

**Matthew 6:9-13** "Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. <sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread. <sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And don't let us yield to temptation but rescue us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and power and the glory forever. Amen.

**Our Father.** With the word "*Our*" Jesus makes it clear that we too may call God our Father. God the Father loves us as much as He loves Jesus, an astonishing thought! (see John 17:23).

Jesus wants us to be assured that we too may have a close relationship to God, our *Father*, and in doing so Jesus also reminds us of our close relationship to each other—the pronoun is "our." Each person we meet on earth is our brother or sister, we are family!

When Jesus calls God our Father, He refers to the intimate relationship between a child and parent. The person we pray to is someone who knows us and loves us, and whom we can know and love.

**Our Father—these two words contain the entire message of the Gospel:**

**Galatians 4:4-7** But when the fullness of time had come, *God sent his Son*, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> in order to redeem those who were under the law, *so that we might receive adoption as children.* <sup>6</sup> And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "*Abba! Father!*" <sup>7</sup> *So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir*, through God.

**Romans 8:15-17** For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "*Abba! Father!*" <sup>16</sup> it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that *we are children of God*, <sup>17</sup> *and if children, then heirs*, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

**When Jesus taught us to pray "our Father" He taught us something with enormous consequences** for our personal life, as well as for society at large. Jesus loved portraying God as Father. (In the OT the term Father is found only 14 times, yet in the 4 Gospels alone, Jesus alone used the term 170 times!)

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**Our Father *in heaven*.** With “in heaven” we enter a new realm. As we pray, we enter heaven itself!

Often, when we pray, *our earthly situation/environment* continues to weigh us down. But with “in heaven” we discover that *there are more than just our wants and needs at stake, and there are resources beyond what this planet can offer*. This is why the Bible draws a distinction between our earthly fathers and our heavenly Father:

**Isaiah 55:8-9** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. <sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Our earthly fathers are infinitely different from our heavenly Father. Plus, because God is not limited physically to some spot here on earth He is never beyond our range, especially when we need him most!

**After this content-rich introduction: Jesus’ prayer takes on a definite structure.**

The Lord’s Prayer	
YOU	US
Hallowed be Your name.	Give us this day our daily bread.
Your kingdom come.	And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.	And don’t let us yield to temptation but rescue us from the evil one.

**Beginning with the YOU, the God-side of Jesus’ prayer:**

**Hallowed be Your name:** Scripture tells us repeatedly that God has so many admirable qualities that to know God is love God!

God’s name stands for His personhood, His identity, His true self, His character and being. God has made it possible for us to know Him personally. By revealing His name to us, God took the risk of its being abused and misused! Unfortunately, it would take entire libraries to contain the various ways we humans have abused and misused God’s name.

In the name of God, wars have been fought and acts of terror have been committed. In the name of God, people have been enslaved and held in bondage, oppressed and robbed of their free will, rejected, condemned, and expelled from their homes and communities. People have misused the name of God for personal profit and for gaining power and attention.

Another risk that God took by revealing His name to us is that people might simply ignore it or neglect it. We neglect or ignore his name whenever we live our lives as if God doesn’t exist; when we don’t care about what matters most to Him in this world, such as caring for the poor, preserving his creation, working for social justice, and sharing His name with others.

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Everyone who prays with understanding, “Hallowed be your name,” faces the reality of his or her life in the light of God’s holiness.

**We often make God’s name stink by our acts of carelessness, by our pettiness, our desire for power or money or attention, and our neglect of others.**

**Your kingdom come.** Throughout Jesus’ life on earth, the message of “the kingdom of God” and was the core of all His teaching and actions. Jesus explained it in his parables and demonstrated it by his acts of healing and a host of other miracles. He said:

**Luke 4:43** *“I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose.”*

This good news of God’s kingdom is mentioned more than 100 times in the Gospels alone—90 times by Jesus. We see the significance and urgency of this message ringing through in Jesus’ words:

**Matthew 6:33** *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

When praying “*your kingdom come*” we are asking for God’s kingdom to be implanted in our own hearts, and in the hearts of others around us, and that Jesus would return and all the universe would be nothing but the kingdom of God.

**Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.** Jesus said of Himself:

**John 4:34** *“My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work.*

A psalm describes the Messiah with these words:

**Psalms 40:8** *I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”*

**We are to pray that God’s will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. In heaven service to God, obedience, is never done in a spirit of legality, or a spirit of compulsion—everyone delights to do God’s will.**

Though the Ten Commandments are an expression of God’s will, there is much more to consider when asking what is God’s will.

**1 Timothy 2:4** *God our Savior: wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.*

*Jesus said that He came to seek and save the lost, Luke 19:10. In Ephesians we read:*

**Ephesians 1:7-8 NLT** *He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. <sup>8</sup> He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.*

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**Ephesians 1:8-9 NLT** *He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.* <sup>9</sup> God has now revealed to us his mysterious *will* regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan.

**Ephesians 1:10 NLT** And this is the plan: At the right time *he will bring everything together in Christ*—everything in heaven and on earth.

**But why would we need to pray that God’s will be done on earth?** What hinders God’s will here on our planet? Two groups: we do, human beings do, and so do evil angels, who now inhabit our earth as well. And because of angelic and human rebellion against God, God’s will is not done on here on earth as it is in heaven.

Even when keeping God’s laws, is it our *delight* to do so? Do we have God’s love written on our hearts?

**Luke 18:18 NLT** Once a religious leader asked Jesus this question: “Good Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus replied: “you know the commandments: ‘You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother.’”

**Luke 18:21** The man replied, “I’ve obeyed all these commandments since I was young.”

When Jesus heard his answer, he said, “There is still one thing you haven’t done. Sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” But when the man heard this he became very sad, for he was very rich.

The spirit of unselfish love for others had no place in this religious leader’s heart, though he boldly claimed to have kept all of God’s law his entire life, but had he?

**We must never forget that God works in us; we do not, cannot, crank out obedience on our own:**

**Philippians 2:13** For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

**Jeremiah 31:33** “I will put my law deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

**Through Jeremiah God has made it clear that this is the only way we will ever be able to do God’s will on earth as it is done in heaven! Our job is:**

**Hebrews 12:1-2** Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. <sup>2</sup> *We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus*, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.

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Here is how the first half of Jesus’ model prayer can become a reality in our own lives. We keep our eyes on Jesus and God’s will permeates our life.

The Lord’s Prayer	
YOU	US
Hallowed be Your name.	Give us this day our daily bread.
Your kingdom come.	And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.	And don’t let us yield to temptation but rescue us from the evil one.

**Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well—those are Jesus’ words found in Matthew 6:33; clearly, Jesus modeled these words in the Lord’s Prayer. God and His interests came first in Jesus’ model prayer.**

When we have prayed that God’s name be honored, and therefore admired, that his kingdom be established, and His will be done, because he is *our Father*, everything in His house belongs to us for we are His children and His heirs!

**Now let’s study the US side of Jesus’ model prayer. Timeframes in Jesus’ Model Prayer:**

**Present**—our daily needs.

**Past** sins—we’re not asking God to forgive us for present or future sins.

Protection from **future** sins.

There are three requests in the US side of Jesus’ prayer and they coincide with the three timeframes that we are familiar with: past, present, and future. Regarding the present, we read:

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

**Give.** The first word says that God is a generous person, a giver, and we are not demanding but asking God to meet our needs.

**God gives according to his riches, we’re told, so why doesn’t He give us a surplus of bread? Why must we pray for bread each day?**

The story of the Prodigal Son illustrates what happens when people are given more than they can manage. The boy wasted his money on loose living, lost everything and nearly starved to death. If we belong to God, then all is ours, but God holds it in trust for us lest the devil seduce us into losing it, like he did with the Prodigal Son.

**Us/our** It might surprise us to see that God does not give us what we need so we *alone* can thrive, but rather our prayer is that we want God to meet *our* needs so we can *share* what He gives *with others*.

It is not give *me my* daily bread but give *us our* daily bread.

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Jesus said in

**Luke 14:12-14:** “When you put on a luncheon or a banquet, don’t invite your friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors. For they will invite you back, *and that will be your only reward*. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Then at the resurrection of the righteous, *God will reward you* for inviting those who could not repay you.”

**This day/daily** These two terms show us that God satisfies our *need*, not our *greed*. The story of God giving Israel daily manna illustrates this part of Jesus’ prayer very well. Manna could *only* be picked up each day; it would not survive the night, except on Fridays, then they could pick up enough to last two days so they could celebrate the Sabbath without having to work for that day’s food.

God does not want us to selfishly, greedily stockpile His gifts; so, He gives them to us *as they are needed and as they are used, for our benefit and for the benefit of others!*

The story of God giving manna also makes it clear that while God gives to meet our needs, we do not get to be lazy and just receive without actively doing what we can do. People had to actively collect manna, which was smaller in size and had fallen on the ground. Collecting manna was like harvesting food from the garden—some work was required; plus, if they wanted to cook it, that was also entirely on them to do.

**Bread** With the word “bread” we are taken into the world of *synecdoche—a part represents the whole*.

The God who sent ravens to feed Elijah will also take care of *all our needs*, **see 1 Kings 17**.

This prayer for daily bread also includes the *spiritual* food that will nourish our hearts for eternal life.

Jesus said more:

**And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.**

The key words are: ***as we also***. This phrase has to do with forgiving others in the same *manner* and to the same *extent* as God forgives people. But it does *not* mean that God will only forgive us *after* we have forgiven others.

Jesus illustrated this clearly in **Matthew 18:21-35**, in the story of the two debtors. One man owed the king tons of money, more money that he could ever hope to repay, but the king forgave him the entire debt.

Unfortunately, the story goes on to say that that same forgiven man refused to forgive another man who owed him an infinitely smaller debt; in fact, he threw this much poorer man who owed him money into prison. The king heard about the first man’s unforgiving spirit and so then treated him the same way that the first man treated the second man who owed him money.

Jesus’ story clearly teaches us that *forgiveness is experienced first*, before it can be passed on to others, *but after forgiveness is experienced, it should become the operating principle of our lives*.

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If forgiveness does not become part of who we are, then our refusal to forgive others reveals a disinterest and a disrespect for true forgiveness, and a disconnect with it as well. This is what the Bible reveals:

**Colossians 3:12-13 NIV** Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and *forgive one another* if any of you has a grievance against someone. *Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

**And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.** All humans are linked to God and others in an obligatory manner. Meaning: this is how we *ought* to treat God and others.

We are *supposed* to treat God and each other well, but we don’t. When we don’t, we ask for forgiveness of our *debts*, for how we *ought* to have treated God and others, but did not.

Most of us know what it is like to owe others. And when we don’t pay, few, if any, forgive us our debts. But God’s ways are not our ways! He forgives us even though we *ought* to have treated Him better; *we ought to have loved Him because He first loved us.*

But *after* responding positively to God’s love and being forgiven, we *now* possess the spirit of forgiveness, so we extend forgiveness to others who have wronged us.

**But here is where many make a huge mistake, being forgiven is *not* a feeling;** it is taking God at His word—*trusting* that when He says He forgives us that He has really forgiven us.

But before we pray this part of the Lord’s prayer, that is, ask for forgiveness, God must work in our hearts in such a way that we are convicted that we are sinners.

**The New Testament has five words for sin:**

- 1) Hamartia
- 2) Parabasis
- 3) Paraptoma
- 4) Anomia
- 5) Opheilema

**Hamartia** means missing the target—the failure to be what we could and should have been. Who among us would claim that we are all we could and should have been, and have done all that we could and should have done?

**Parabasis** is stepping across—crossing the line between right and wrong. Do we always stay on the right side of the line that divides, say, honesty and dishonesty? Do we never, by word, or by silence, twist or evade or distort the truth?

**Paraptoma** is slipping across—being swept away by some impulse or emotion. This sin is not as deliberate as the following one, it speaks of when we lose control and slip into one sin or another.

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**Anomia** describes lawlessness—knowing what’s right but doing what’s wrong anyway! We humans are tempted to do what we like to do, what we want to do, regardless of what laws might be in place to guard us and others.

**Opheilema** deals with debt—the failure to pay that which we owe, what is due. Not doing what we *ought* to do. This is the word found in the Lord’s Prayer. Who of us can claim that we have *always* done what we *should* have done?

**These words offer us reasons why we should pray from our heart: And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.**

But there is more to the Christian life than forgiveness; God implants in us a desire to *not* sin. And we then rely on His power *to keep us* from sinning. And so we read:

**And don’t let us yield to temptation but rescue us from the evil one.**

Here is our honest admission that when it comes to sin, we are in way over our heads and we need someone to rescue us!

Older versions of this text, *Bring us not into temptation*, but **the Scriptures are clear: God is not and never will be a source of temptation for anyone!**

**James 1:13 NIV** And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, “God is tempting me.” God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else.

**But what about temptation? Where does it come from?** Newer translations come in handy here too, since they translate the last phrase as being rescued, not just from evil, but ***from the evil one***.

The Bible places the responsibility for evil on several sources. Here it is the devil, which agrees with Jesus’ own experience; we read in **Matthew 4** about the devil tempting Jesus.

**But Temptation, the Bible says, comes from: without and within.** *Without*: from the devil, from the world we live in, from others. But temptation also comes from *within*:

**James 1:14-15 NLT** *Temptation comes from our own desires*, which entice us and drag us away.<sup>15</sup> These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.

**And don’t let us yield to temptation but rescue us from the evil one.**

And because God loves freedom, He has given us a part to play, we can ask God to give us strength and then do everything we can do to cooperate with God in answering our prayer.

The possibility of being rescued from evil and the evil one, of allowing God to shape our character so that we might become faithful people, that is an awesome privilege and reality.

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**For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

These words are not actually found in the oldest and best Greek manuscripts of the Bible. In fact, these words do not appear in Luke's version of the Lord's prayer either.

That said, they do reveal the spirit of the Scriptures regarding God and His kingdom. **With these words Jesus' model prayer ends like it begins, with a focus on God, and not on us.** For *Yours* is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

It's possible that these words are a paraphrase of 1 Chronicles 29:11-12, which reads:

**1Chronicles 29:11-12** Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O LORD, and this is your kingdom. We adore you as the one who is over all things. <sup>12</sup> Wealth and honor come from you alone, for you rule over everything. Power and might are in your hand, and at your discretion people are made great and given strength.

### Questions

What practical lessons can we learn from Jesus' model prayer?

Do your prayers regularly contain both YOU and US content?

What can you do to further God's kingdom?

How can you better deal with temptation when it comes your way?

What victories over temptation has God given you this week?

Besides your interests and your life, what else does God want you to be focused on?

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## Lesson #8: Having Faith, May 16-22

Perhaps this lesson might be better titled **Exercising Faith** since we never generate faith ourselves. As the SS Quarterly itself says: It's not something we can generate ourselves, for "God has dealt to each one a measure of faith" (**Romans 12:3**), and faith is a gift from God (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). Thus, faith is a gift that God has given everyone, but that does not mean that everyone is exercising faith in God.

Yet exercising faith is not a mere mental assent to a doctrine or a group of doctrines, or even to the existence of God/Jesus/Spirit. **Faith that saves is a heartfelt trust in the LORD.**

Exercising faith toward God is done when we take God at His word. Scripture repeatedly says that God is good! Good to others and good to us! When we are *convicted* that this is so, when we *trust* that this is so *and thus live our lives accordingly*, then we are exercising faith in God.

A *preference* describes something I like. A *conviction* describes something I cannot live without. **When we are convicted that God is good, we would die before surrendering our trust in God's goodness!**

Even though we do not create or generate faith, we are responsible for exercising it, as Romans tell us:

**Romans 10:17** *So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.*

Ellen White wrote plainly:

*Where there is not only a belief in God's Word, but a submission of the will to Him; where the heart is yielded to Him, the affections fixed upon Him, there is faith, faith that works by love and purifies the soul. Steps to Christ, 63:2*

**Yet the character of our submission to God is different than often imagined!**

*The government of God is not, as Satan would make it appear, founded upon a blind submission, and unreasoning control. It appeals to the intellect and the conscience. Steps to Christ 43:4*

**We must also be firm regarding the true nature of faith:**

*Through faith we receive the grace of God; but faith is not our Savior. It earns nothing. It is the hand by which we lay hold upon Christ, and appropriate His merits, the remedy for sin. The Desire of Ages 175:4*

**All too often church people speak about how faith works or prayer works, as if faith or prayer is really creating the positive outcome for them. No! It is God who is doing good for us, in response to our faith or to our prayers.**

**What about signs?** Are they the best evidence for establishing one's faith? Is asking for a sign itself evidence that one doubts God more than one trusts God? Does God give signs? Sometimes, but not always. Why not?

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If our hearts are opposed to what God wants for us a sign from God will likely do us more harm than good. In other words, if we're already resisting God, we will also be more inclined to resist the sign that God gives, thus hardening our heart against God even more.

*God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His Word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Steps to Christ, 105:2*

As a worker, Christ did not allow his labor to be of a character merely to satisfy curiosity or to give such demonstrations of truth as to make doubt impossible. He came to open the treasures of heaven, that others might search and find. **The Youth Instructor, October 27, 1898**

### Question

Why do you think God has never removed the possibility of doubt?

### What about feelings?

You must guard against making feelings a criterion; this of itself is not evidence that you are a child of God, or that you are not. **The Youth Instructor, August 18, 1886**

Many pass long years in darkness and doubt because they do not feel as they desire. But feeling has nothing to do with faith. That faith which works by love and purifies the soul is not a matter of impulse. It ventures out upon the promises of God, firmly believing that what he has said, he is able also to perform. Our souls may be trained to believe, taught to rely upon the word of God. That word declares that the "just shall live by faith," not by feeling. **The Youth Instructor, July 8, 1897**

Not one of us needs to feel a doubt as to where we are, or to think, "I wish I knew where I stand before God," but, by living faith, we must sink ourselves in God; and when we do that, His life will shine upon us. **Sermons and Talks, Vol. 1: 304:3**

*A feeling of assurance is not to be despised; we should praise God for it; but when your feelings are depressed, do not think God has changed. Praise Him just as much, because you trust in His Word and not in feelings. You have covenanted to walk by faith, not to be controlled by feelings. Feelings vary with circumstances. 6Lt 42, 1890, par. 12*

### Question

Does this mean that God does not care about how we feel?

What Bible passages teach that God does care about our feelings?

Would you rather die than give up your conviction that God is good?

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## Lesson #9: Sin, the Gospel, and the Law, May 23-29

I did not wish to combine these three topics into one lesson, so I've decided to focus on just the law this week, while offering some thoughts regarding sin and the gospel to next week's lesson on repentance and forgiveness.

**God's law is a transcript of God's character. We see this when we compare their shared attributes:**

God's Character in His Law!	
God	God's Law
<b>Righteous</b> (Ezra 9:15)	<b>Righteous</b> (Psalm 119:172)
<b>Perfect</b> (Matthew 5:48)	<b>Perfect</b> (Psalm 19:7)
<b>Holy</b> (Leviticus 19:2)	<b>Holy</b> (Romans 7:12)
<b>Good</b> (Psalm 34:8)	<b>Good</b> (Romans 7:12)
<b>True</b> (Exodus 34:6)	<b>True</b> (Psalm 119:142)

Let's look at a few of these just so we can anchor this thought in our mind, for example, holy and good.

### God Is Holy & Good

**Leviticus 19:2** You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

**Psalm 34:8** O taste and see that *the LORD is good*.

### God's Law Is Holy & Good

**Romans 7:12** *So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.*

### Why did God give the Ten Commandments to human beings?

**Deuteronomy 4:37-40 NLT** *Because he loved your ancestors, he chose to bless their descendants, and he personally brought you out of Egypt with a great display of power. <sup>38</sup> He drove out nations far greater than you, so he could bring you in and give you their land as your special possession, as it is today. <sup>39</sup> "So remember this and keep it firmly in mind: The LORD is God both in heaven and on earth, and there is no other. <sup>40</sup> If you obey all the decrees and commands I am giving you today, all will be well with you and your children. I am giving you these instructions so you will enjoy a long life in the land the LORD your God is giving you for all time."*

**Deuteronomy 33:2-3** Moses said: The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran. With him were myriads of holy ones streaming along at his right hand. <sup>3</sup> *Truly he loves his people and blesses his holy ones. They sit at his feet and receive his instruction.* [translation mine]

**Mark 12:30-31** you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' <sup>31</sup> The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

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**Romans 13:9-10** The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>10</sup> *Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.*

**Galatians 5:14** *For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

**In essence, God loves people and, because God loves people, He wants them to live good long lives! To live a good long, life means to love others as God loves us!**

**Again, why should we keep God’s law?**

**Psalms 119:129 NLT** Your laws are wonderful; therefore I obey them!

**What makes God’s laws so wonderful?** There are too many reasons to enumerate here so let’s focus on just one because it is repeated in Scripture:

**Deuteronomy 4:40** If you obey all the decrees and commands I am giving you today, *all will be well with you and your children. I am giving you these instructions so you will enjoy a long life....*

**Deuteronomy 5:16** Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, *so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you....*

**Deuteronomy 5:29** If only they had such a mind as this, to fear me and to keep all my commandments always, *so that it might go well with them and with their children forever!*

**Deuteronomy 5:33** You must follow exactly the path that the LORD your God has commanded you, *so that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you are to possess.*

**In Deuteronomy 6:2-3, 18, 24 Moses repeated this thought: it is in your own best interests and in the best interests of others for you to keep God’s law, especially the Ten Commandments!** Eight times in three short chapters Moses said this.

**Ellen White also communicated this many times; here is one such remark:**

God’s prohibitions and injunctions are not intended to merely display His authority, *but in all that He does He has the well-being of His children in view.* **Patriarchs and Prophets, 600**

**Moses seems to have anticipated ongoing questions regarding the enduring value of God’s laws because Moses oddly comments on the notion in Deuteronomy 5:**

**Deuteronomy 5:1-3** “Hear the laws and regulations I am giving you *today....*The LORD did not make this covenant with our ancestors, but with all of us who are alive *today.*”

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The chronological reference point of the passage is “today.” “Today” is always the day for hearing and obeying the Ten Commandments. Moses made this point with a great deal of emphasis in the Hebrew, which literally reads:

**Deuteronomy 5:3** “The LORD did not cut this covenant with our fathers, *but with us, we, these ones, here, today, all of us, living,*”

**Moses elaborated like this to make it crystal clear that the Ten Laws are meant for people who are alive today!**

**Moses also anticipated future questions regarding God’s laws:**

**Deuteronomy 6:20 NLT** “In the future your children will ask you, ‘What is the meaning of these laws, decrees, and regulations that the LORD our God has commanded us to obey?’

**Note the instruction offered regarding how to answer such a question:**

**Deuteronomy 6:21 NLT** “Then you must tell them, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand.

This is in complete keeping with how the Ten Commandments are given in both of their versions:

**Exodus 20:2 NLT** “I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. [Ten commandments then follow]

**Deuteronomy 5:6 NLT** “I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. [Ten commandments then follow]

Therefore, it seems almost unnecessary to say that keeping God’s law is just as important for us today as it was for God’s people in the past. Just as God, in His great love, rescued the Israelites from their oppressive situation, so we too can say with the Psalmist:

**Psalms 86:11-13** *Teach me your ways, O LORD, that I may live according to your truth! Grant me purity of heart, so that I may honor you.* <sup>12</sup> With all my heart I will praise you, O Lord my God. I will give glory to your name forever,<sup>13</sup> *for your love for me is very great. You have rescued me from the depths of death.*

Being first loved by God, being rescued by God from whatever harms us, and then being taught by God appears to be God’s normal way of treating sin-damaged people!

**Why is it so important for the universe to be governed by law?**

Humanly speaking, such a structure is required for us to be able to form intentions to act and to successfully carry out our acts. However, this also means that we have a lot of power to affect our world for good or for evil. By giving us such power for good or evil God shows His respect for us. God did not make us to be

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insignificant creatures! Plus, the law of cause and effect, for example, is part of this notion that everything is governed by law. Cause and effect lead us to believe that the right means must be employed to achieve a desired end. Which means that the notion of the end justifying the means is false!

And just like that, being governed by law does not seem burdensome! Right? Laws make it possible for us to succeed as intelligent creatures and they protect us.

**Yet every law in the Bible has been altered to suit sin-damaged people.** The Apostle Paul is very clear regarding this:

**1 Timothy 1:9** For the law was not intended for people who do what is right. It is for people who are lawless and rebellious, who are ungodly and sinful, who consider nothing sacred and defile what is holy, who kill their father or mother or commit other murders.

**Don't panic because, in principle,** all other created, intelligent beings are also governed by the same laws but note my words "in principle."

But in heaven, service is not rendered in the spirit of legality. When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, *the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of.* In their ministry the angels are not as servants, but as sons. There is perfect unity between them and their Creator. Obedience is to them no drudgery. Love for God makes their service a joy. **Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, 109:2**

**I expect heaven to "feel" this way: humans will have no immediate recognition that we are still being governed by God's laws. Why not? Because obedience will not be any kind of drudgery; our love for God will make our obedience a joy! This is a huge blessing for those of us who are authority challenged!**

**Here and now, because the law is a transcript of God's character, it also operates as a mirror, as James wrote:**

**James 1:22-25** But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. <sup>23</sup> For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. <sup>25</sup> But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

**Seeing ourselves in the law, that is, in a transcript of God's character, helps us become accurately self-aware.** We don't just look inwardly; we look at ourselves through God's law, through this transcript of God's character. In this way the law is a blessing to us and not a burden even today!

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## Questions

How do you feel about being governed by law?

What good things may occur because we are governed by law?

What dangers might surface because we are governed by law?

Try answering the questions stemming from what is called the Euthyphro Dilemma:

- a. Are morally good actions morally good simply because God chooses them?
- b. Or does God choose them because they are—independent of His choosing them—morally good?
- c. Something other than options a & b?

*For those seriously authority challenged:* how do you deal with being governed by law?

What does Ellen White mean in the quote below when she advises us to preach Christ in the law?

As a people, we have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain. *We must preach Christ in the law....* **Review and Herald, March 11, 1890, par. 3**

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## Lesson #10: Repentance and Forgiveness, May 30 – June 5

Sin is first and foremost a killer! If God had not intervened, anyone and everyone who sinned would die immediately. The only reason we sinners are not dead yet is because God stepped in and regifted us life; He did this in such a way that there was no gap between the time in which we humans sinned and the next smallest amount of time imaginable! From the outside, it simply looked like we had just kept on living.

God's grace gave us time, our lifetime--whatever that may be, but grace does not erase all of sin's damages; now they are seen (for what they are!) stretched out over time, our lifetime, and the entire history of our world.

In lesson 1 we saw that sin is a type of insanity. Sin *deranges* the entire human organism. It can do so only if it is allowed time in which to do its destructive work. The only reason we are alive and able to function is because as soon as there was sin there was a Savior.

### Paul wrote in Ephesians:

**Ephesians 2:1-2 NLT** *Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. <sup>2</sup> You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God.*

### The realities of sin:

**Sin causes death:** physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual death! If sinners received the real and full consequences of sin at the time that they first sinned, then they would have died soon after. If Adam and Eve had received these consequences, they would have quickly died, and we would never have existed. But what if God had regifted them *physical life*, but not otherwise have changed their condition? Adam and Eve, though physically alive, would have been completely unable to positively respond to any gracious move that God might ever make toward them.

But it is just this problem, and others that may be like it or linked to it, that the Everlasting Covenant addresses!

### The Everlasting Covenant



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That covenant, an agreement between the Holy Trio, the Trinity, made in eternity past was that they would regift life to sinners and love them as much as They love Each Other!

**John 17:23** I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me *and that you love them as much as you love me.*

And, that they would do all that needed to be done and could be done (given that they also would regift us with freedom to choose), they would do everything needed and possible to provide us a remedy so that we humans could be saved from sin and rejoin their family and live with them forever! Sin-free, with Them, forever!

But how did they choose to overcome the real problems that sin created? Even if they regifted us with physical life, we would still be unable to respond to their unfailing love! Unless they chose to not let *any* of sin's damages strike us, we would be physically, mentally, and emotionally damaged, that is, our whole human organism *deranged, and spiritually dead!* Why? Because humans had voluntarily chosen to sin, to engage in an act of insanity and leave God's family. Why leave the Giver of life?

**Spiritually dead means there would be nothing inside us that would enable us to make new and better choices, and sin has no remedy within itself to cure us!**

**Ecclesiastes 8:8** No one has power over the wind to restrain the wind, or power over the day of death; there is no discharge from the battle, *nor does wickedness deliver those who practice it.*

But the Holy Three desired to create a remedy that would honor our freedom to choose. So how did they handle these very real and difficult problems that sinners had put them in? Specifically, how did they deal with our spiritual deadness?

**The Bible speaks of God's solution to the problem of sin:**

**Ephesians 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.

**When Christians speak of grace they often portray its many facets, such as:**

Common Grace  
Prevenient Grace  
Justifying Grace  
Transforming Grace  
Empowering Grace  
Forgiving Grace

Grace is like ice cream; it comes in many flavors! Justifying grace is when God reckons us righteous. Transforming grace is when he makes us into new creatures. Empowering grace is where God energizes us to live a new life, and forgiving grace is for when we fail to be like Christ. Why do sinners need these different facets of grace? Because we cannot do these things for/to ourselves!

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This answer leads to what is called prevenient grace; the grace that comes before saving grace! Prevenient grace is well illustrated when Jesus washed his disciples' feet even though they had yet to be converted!

It was written of Jesus, that having loved his own in this world, he loved them to the end or to the uttermost (see **John 13**). Even though they had not yet been converted, Jesus loved his disciples just as much as he loved God his Father! And God the Father loved these 12 men just as much as he loved Jesus (see **John 17:23**). They were loved even though Jesus' 12 disciples were focused on being the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (see **Matthew 18:1; Mark 9:34; Luke 9:46; Luke 22:24**).

The OT reveals that sinners are born bent, twisted, crooked, burdened, without integrity, and with no desire to do what is fair and right. We constantly cross lines of good and do instead what is clearly wrong. We're ruined, we consistently rebel against good authority; we're confused and often create agitation for both ourselves and others around us. Neither are we faithful, but instead we are treacherous. We sin through mistakes, willful negligence and ignorance, and often sin because we did not give due consideration. And this is a just a short list of the meanings of *some* Hebrew words.

The NT says we are dead, enslaved, living in darkness, hard of heart, and alienated from God. And still this does not cover all that is said! In short, we're a complete mess! Sin-damaged and spiritually dead!

**John 6:44 NLT** *For no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me,*

**Romans 3:9-12 NLT** Well then, should we conclude that we Jews are better than others? No, not at all, for we have already shown that *all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under the power of sin.* <sup>10</sup> As the Scriptures say, "*No one is righteous—not even one.*" <sup>11</sup> *No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God.* <sup>12</sup> *All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one.*"

**John 15:5 NLT** "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. *For apart from me you can do nothing.*

**Romans 8:7-8 NLT** *For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will.* <sup>8</sup> That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.

**1 Corinthians 2:14 NLT** *But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it,* for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.

**If this is what sinners are, how do we become both willing and able to follow God?**

Jesus said it plainly, "For no one can come to me *unless the Father who sent me draws them to me.*" This is our starting point!

*Many are confused as to what constitutes the first steps in the work of salvation. Repentance is thought to be a work the sinner must do for him/herself in order that he/she may come to Christ....While it is true that repentance must precede forgiveness...yet the sinner cannot bring*

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*him/herself to repentance, or prepare him/herself to come to Christ....The very first step to Christ is taken through the drawing of the Spirit of God; as man/woman responds to this drawing, he/she advances toward Christ in order that he/she may repent.* Repentance is no less the gift of God than are pardon and justification, and it cannot be experienced except as it is given to the soul by Christ. **1 Selected Messages 390-391** [inclusive language mine]

**So how might sinners be motivated and empowered to respond to the Holy Spirit's drawing? Two solutions have been offered by religious people: 1) Absolute Predestination or 2) Prevenient Grace.**

**The first option, absolute predestination** annihilates the need for free will, as God makes all of the choices regarding salvation. God alone chooses both who will be saved and who will be lost.

**While in the second option, prevenient grace,** God restores free will, thus giving people the possibility, perhaps even the probability, of choosing to being drawn to Christ.

Absolute predestination also dramatically changes one's conception of common grace, which is a popular term used by Christians. What is meant by common grace?

**Common grace is best revealed by this biblical verse:**

**Matthew 5:45 NLT** For he [your Father in heaven] gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.

*Common grace is just a handy way of saying that God, in his grace, gives good gifts of varying kinds to everyone, whether they choose to follow Him or not!* But these good gifts do not exhaust God's gifts to people. God gives many other rich gifts *to Christians only*, first, because He is good and He always has more to give, and secondly, because those who choose to follow God are willing to receive additional gifts and put them to good use. Christians have chosen to let God open their hearts to receive more of His gifts!

Even though all Christians would likely cite Matthew 5:45 to describe common grace it still is differently understood by religious people.

**In Absolute Predestination, Common Grace:**

Is given to every person.

Reveals God's goodness.

May produce a (selfish?) type of gratitude in the sinner.

Which further condemns the sinner for his/her rebellion against God.

But common grace is NOT an invitation to be saved!

**In Prevenient Grace, Common Grace:**

Is given to every person.

Reveals God's goodness.

Does produce gratitude in the sinner.

May further condemn the sinner, but only IF they persist in rebellion against God.

Common grace IS an invitation to be saved!

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This so-called prevenient grace does many things for sin-damaged humans, like:

**Prevenient grace gives us the ability to positively respond to God’s unfailing love!** It does not position sinners like Adam and Eve before their fall, but it bridges the gap such that we can choose to rejoin God’s family and experience moral and ethical change for the better, here and now, while also waiting for Jesus to return so we might then be placed back into the same position and place as Adam and Eve were before they sinned.

### **Prevenient Grace:**

This preparatory grace draws sinners close to God, lessens their blindness and resistance to divine remedies for sin, restores their will to accept God’s revealed truth, and this grace enables repentance.

Now prevenient grace is not a biblical term, but it is a biblical concept! Multiple examples can be found scattered throughout Scripture. **The story of the Last Supper is a powerful example** of the unselfish kindness of Jesus that helped break down the many barriers that prevented Jesus’ 12 disciples from being converted. But there’s more!

**Scripture uses the idiom of being drawn** to tell us what God is doing—He’s coming close to us and attracting us to Himself in order to overcome our sin-damaged state.

**John 6:44** *For no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me, and at the last day I will raise them up.*

**John 12:32** *And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.”*

**Hosea 11:4** *I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.*

**Jeremiah 31:3** Long ago the LORD said to Israel: “I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. *With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself.*

**Jeremiah 30:2** speaks of God’s grace; it is a grace that draws people to God, a grace that consists of (and is filled with) God’s unfailing love!

Prevenient grace not only draws sinners to God, it also illuminates them to see beauty in holiness, to be able to discern reality from fiction and lies.

**John 1:9** The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

### **God carries the weight!**

We cannot generate, create, manufacture, or crank out the faith we need. Faith is a gift from God to sinners!

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**Ephesians 2:8** For by *grace* you have been *saved* through *faith*, and this is not your own doing; *it is the gift of God*.

**Romans 12:3** Through the grace God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves *by the faith God has given us*.

**Prevenient grace even gifts back to us the ability to trust God again.** Scripture teaches us that grace, salvation, and faith are all gifts from God. God is the one who meets our every need! As sinners we cannot fix our sin-damaged selves!

**Ephesians 2:4-5** *But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us<sup>5</sup> even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.*

**What then are the general characteristics of Prevenient Grace?**

**1) It's universal!**

**1Timothy 2:6** He gave his life to purchase freedom *for everyone*.

**Titus 2:11** For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation *to all people*.

**John 12:32** And when I am lifted up from the earth, *I will draw everyone to myself.*"

**John 3:16** "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, *so that everyone who believes* in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

**Scripture is clear that God loves everyone! Ellen White expressed it like this:**

Wherever there is an impulse of love and sympathy, wherever the heart reaches out to bless and uplift others, there is revealed the working of God's Spirit. In the depths of heathenism, men [people] who have no knowledge of the written law of God, who have never even heard of the name of Christ, have been kind...at the risk of their own lives. Their acts show the working of a divine power. The Holy Spirit has implanted the grace of Christ in the heart of the savage, quickening his/her sympathies contrary to his/her nature, contrary to his/her education. The Light that enlightens every person who comes into the world is shining in his/her soul; and this light, if heeded, will guide his/her feet to the kingdom of God. **Christ's Object Lessons, 385** [inclusivity mine]

**Prevenient Grace enlightens and enables sinners to respond to God and rejoin His family. Why is prevenient grace universal?**

**2 Peter 3:9** *The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.*

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**Matthew 18:12-14** “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost? <sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he will rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn’t wander away! <sup>14</sup> In the same way, *it is not my heavenly Father’s will that even one of these little ones should perish.*

**Because God wants all to come to repentance and not even one to perish, prevenient grace is universal.**

### 2) Prevenient grace is inescapable!

Jesus died for everyone!  
All are drawn to Jesus!  
God has brought salvation to everyone!  
God loves the whole world!

**Inescapable is not the same as irresistible. We may resist prevenient grace, especially God’s call for us to rejoin His family, but we cannot escape common grace or prevenient grace!**

### 3) Prevenient grace frees our will!

**Philippians 2:13** *For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.*

**Because we are sin-damaged, we do not have a free will, we have a *freed* will!**

**The fourth general characteristic of prevenient grace is:**

### 4) Prevenient grace leads to saving grace!

Grace clearly has a progressive nature. It leads sinners/us on to better and still better things! When we react positively to God’s prevenient grace, we then embrace God’s saving grace.

It is true that prevenient grace does not forgive our sin or save us, but it gives us insight into the unfailing love of God so that we see His many kindnesses to us, and this leads us to be both convicted of our sin and gives us a desire to love God in return, and thus to become kind to others as God has been kind to us!

Now prevenient grace does not change us *unfailingly, irresistibly* because our wills have been *freed*, which has implications which we will address next, but prevenient grace *likely* leads to saving grace, which shows that if we do *ultimately* resist God’s unfailing love our resistance to God is even worse than what it might first appear.

But saving grace is just as progressive as prevenient grace; generally speaking, saving grace gives us first justification, then sanctification, and finally glorification, and these are clearly progressive states and events.

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### 5) Finally, prevenient grace makes us responsible! Which has both a:

Positive sense  
Negative sense.

Prevenient grace is simply the drawing, convicting, calling, enlightening, and enabling grace of God that comes to sinners/us before conversion. It makes adequate insight into God's unfailing love inevitable, which then makes our repentance and faith probably, but not irresistible due to our freed wills.

#### Summary of characteristics of Prevenient Grace:

- 1) Universal!
- 2) Inescapable!
- 3) Frees our will!
- 4) Leads to saving grace!
- 5) Makes us responsible!
  - a. Positive sense
  - b. Negative sense

#### What then are the functions and benefits of prevenient grace?

##### 1) It convicts us that God is good and we sinners are not! This leads to:

Admiration of God!  
Loathing of self(ishness)!

Scripture tells us in **John 16:8** that the Holy Spirit convicts us sinners of sin and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.

##### 2) Prevenient grace also calls us to be saved and to become like Jesus.

Drawn/Called—the idioms used to describe prevenient grace

**John 12:32** And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will *draw* everyone to myself."

**2Thessalonians 2:14** He *called* you to salvation when we told you the Good News; so you can share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**2Cointhians 5:20** So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his *appeal* through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "*Come back to God!*"

#### Again, why does God need to do all of this? Why does God need to offer us common grace and prevenient grace?

**1Corinthians 2:14** *But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.*

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**2Corinthians 4:4** *Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.*

**We need Jesus, the light that lightens everyone who comes into this world!**

Creation, Scripture, and Jesus, these three gifts can open our eyes to see and admire God's unfailing love for sinners/us!

**Prevenient grace leads to saving grace, which together give us power—to do what?**

**John 1:12-13** *But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave power to become children of God.*  
<sup>13</sup> They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

**In summary, the functions of prevenient grace are:**

**Conviction:** admiration of God and loathing of self(ishness).

**Calling/Being drawn:** to rejoin God's family and become like Jesus.

**Enlightened:** to know God.

**Power:** the right and ability to respond positively to God.

**Three benefits of prevenient grace:**

- 1) It helps makes sense of Bible teachings.
- 2) It teaches us that God is good. He loves everyone and is actively seeking and working for their best good.
- 3) It highlights human responsibility, which supports human freedom and dignity.

**I've been blessed with something Ellen White wrote about grace:**

...it is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin...Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them...Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort, all have their sphere, but here they are powerless. They may produce an outward correctness of behavior, but they cannot change the heart. There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men [people] can be changed from sin to holiness. That power is Christ. His grace alone can quicken [resurrect, bring back to life] the lifeless faculties of the soul, and attract it to God, to holiness. **Steps to Christ, 18 [inclusivity mine]**

**The love of God makes Him kind even to sinners! God's love for us while we are still sinners is the most amazing feature of His great love!**

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## Questions

Have you responded to God's many kindnesses to yourself and to others?

Have you asked God today if you could rejoin His family?

Have you ever heard of the term or notion Prevenient Grace? What do you think of the idea?

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### Lesson #11: Setbacks, June 6-12

Something we hate to admit is that we are the ones who often create our own setbacks! Yes, we live in a sin-damaged world and sin wreaks havoc on all, but:

**Luke 6:46-49 NLT** “So why do you keep calling me ‘Lord, Lord!’ when you don’t do what I say? <sup>47</sup> I will show you what it’s like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then follows it. <sup>48</sup> It is like a person building a house who digs deep and lays the foundation on solid rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against that house, it stands firm because it is well built. <sup>49</sup> But anyone who hears and doesn’t obey is like a person who builds a house right on the ground, without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against that house, it will collapse into a heap of ruins.”

This is a parable of Jesus that also reveals a major setback, one man’s house completely collapses! The context of Jesus’ story is that it was delivered on what is often called the Sermon on the Plain, which is Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus’ sermon was delivered after Jesus had healed a man with a withered hand. Let’s pick up that thread.

**Luke 6:6 -11 NLT** On another Sabbath day, a man with a deformed right hand was in the synagogue while Jesus was teaching. <sup>7</sup> The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees watched Jesus closely. If he healed the man’s hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath.

**Luke 6:8 NLT** But Jesus knew their thoughts. He said to the man with the deformed hand, “Come and stand in front of everyone.” So the man came forward. <sup>9</sup> Then Jesus said to his critics, “I have a question for you. *Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?*”

**Luke 6:10 NLT** He looked around at them one by one and then said to the man, “Hold out your hand.” So the man held out his hand, and it was restored! <sup>11</sup> At this, the enemies of Jesus were wild with rage and began to discuss what to do with him.

We’ll address how this conflict is linked to our parable in a bit. But after this conflict Jesus went away and spent the entire night in prayer because the next day he was going to select the disciples whom he would especially train, these would be the ones closest to Him throughout His ministry. After choosing them, we read:

**Luke 6:17-18 NLT** When they came down from the mountain, the disciples stood with Jesus on a large, level area, surrounded by many of his followers and by the crowds. There were people from all over Judea and from Jerusalem and from as far north as the seacoasts of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>18</sup> They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those troubled by evil spirits were healed.

So Jesus was then not only with the 12 disciples, but also with this large crowd of people, and to them Jesus delivered what we call the Sermon on the Plain, Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount. When speaking to this large group, Jesus said:

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Sermon on the Plain	
Happy Are You (Who):	Woe to You (Who):
<b>Are poor</b>	<b>Are rich</b>
For yours is the kingdom of God.	For you have received your consolation.
<b>Are hungry now</b>	<b>Are full now</b>
For you will be filled.	For you will be hungry.
<b>Weep now</b>	<b>Are laughing now</b>
For you will laugh.	For you will mourn and weep.
<b>When people hate, exclude, revile, defame you on account of the Son of Man.</b>	<b>When all speak well of you</b>
For surely your reward is great in heaven.	For that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

Here we see a great reversal of thinking and expectations. Those who we see as happy in this life are not as happy as we imagined, plus, they will not be happy in the future life!

But those whose life we thought miserable here and now are not as bad off as we thought, and in the future, they will be the ones celebrating! Life on our sin-damaged planet is not what it seems. Nor will the outcome of our life here be what it seems now. Why? Because character determines destiny! Jesus says, and He will go on to say more about this:

**Luke 6:27-31 NLT** “But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. <sup>28</sup> Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. <sup>29</sup> If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. <sup>30</sup> Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don’t try to get them back. <sup>31</sup> *Do to others as you would like them to do to you.*

**Then Jesus went on to defend the logic of all this by saying:**

**Luke 6:35-36 NLT** “*Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid.* Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will *truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked.* <sup>36</sup> *You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.*

By describing for us what God is really like and offering us the privilege of becoming like God in character, Jesus is appealing to us to make our own choice in favor of God.

But others held different beliefs about God, and to those Jesus also turned His attention:

**Luke 6:39** Then Jesus gave the following illustration: “Can one blind person lead another? Won’t they both fall into a ditch?”

The first blind person, the one attempting to guide other blind people, that first blind person seems to represent the Scribes and Pharisees collectively. The second blind person, the one being guided, appears to portray those to whom Jesus was delivering His sermon on the plain.

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Jesus was then cautioning the second group to be careful what they accepted from the Scribes and Pharisees—that the Scribes and Pharisees were often blind to the truth *about* God and the truth *from* God.

**Luke 6:47** I will show you what it's like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then follows it.

Jesus, on the other hand, also wanted His listeners to do more than just listen to what he had to say *about* God and *for* God; *Jesus wanted His hearers to act on His words!*

But in the immediate context we saw Jesus' earlier Sabbath conflict spilling over into Jesus' later words, and into the tiny parable about builders. Are you following Jesus' reasoning?

Let's rejoin Jesus and the crowd of people listening to Him:

**Luke 6:46-49 NLT** "So why do you keep calling me 'Lord, Lord!' when you don't do what I say? <sup>47</sup> I will show you what it's like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then follows it. <sup>48</sup> It is like a person building a house who digs deep and lays the foundation on solid rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against that house, it stands firm because it is well built. <sup>49</sup> But anyone who hears and doesn't obey is like a person who builds a house right on the ground, without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against that house, it will collapse into a heap of ruins."

### Some textual features of this parable:

Matthew 7:24-27 has a similar parable, and its setting is the Sermon on the Mount. Other passages contain: "Lord, Lord," see Matthew 7:21-22; 25:11.

### Some cultural information regarding Jesus' parable about the builders:

Building a house on a firm foundation shows common sense. Both God and the Messiah, Jesus, are referred to as a rock or a foundation, and laying a good foundation is considered important in both the OT and NT.

### Question

How many texts can you find that label God/Jesus a rock or a foundation, or that speak of the importance of a good foundation? Also, go back and study Jesus' ongoing reasoning from event to parable, etc.

### Doing the truth one knows is a major teaching of Scripture:

**Deuteronomy 31:12 NLT** Call them all together—men, women, children, and the foreigners living in your towns—so they may hear this Book of Instruction and learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully obey all the terms of these instructions.

**James 1:22-25 NLT** But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. <sup>23</sup> For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. <sup>25</sup> But if you look carefully into

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the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

### Ellen White commented on Jesus' sermon:

Thus Christ set forth the principles of His kingdom, and showed them to be the great rule of life. To impress the lesson, he adds an illustration. It is not enough, He says, to hear My words. By obedience you must make them the foundation of your character. Self is but shifting sand. If you build on human theories and inventions, your house will fall. By the winds of temptation, the tempests of trial, it will be swept away. But these principles that I have given will endure. Receive Me; build on My words.

**The Desire of Ages, 314:3**

### Questions

Do you *do* the good you know to do?

Are you convicted that having a good character is critical? And are you convicted that *you* must have a good character? In essence, are you convicted that character determines destiny?

Are you also convicted that storms will come to your life, and you must therefore build on a solid foundation, the Rock Jesus Christ?

Are you willing to admit that you created/are responsible for many of your own setbacks?

How will having a good character help you when your setbacks are not of your own making?

When you are in the throes of a setback, how might Jesus' Sermon on the Plain help?

### For those who are willing to listen to contemporary Christian music:

Try Whitney Houston's cover of *Go to the Rock*. Listen to Aaron Jeffrey's version of it, titled: *I Go to the Rock*.; listen to *Cornerstone* by TobyMac. These songs address building on Jesus our Solid Rock!

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## Lesson # 12: Share Him, June 13-19

Sharing Jesus with others has more to do with how we are built by God, instead of with how we must force ourselves to do what we are reluctant to do. What do I mean by this statement?

**Matt. 5:14-15** *“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup> No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.*

**2Cor. 4:13** But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture— *“I believed, and so I spoke” —we also believe, and so we speak,*

*It is a law of God that whoever believes the truth as it is in Jesus will make it known. The ideas and convictions of the individual mind will seek for expression. Mind, Character, and Personality, 419:2*

We shall do well to remember that *transgressors are never satisfied to be sinners alone. They will, both by precept and example, seek to draw others away to do as they have done. Youth Instructor, July 1, 1897*

**Sharing the way we choose to live is how we are literally wired! God made us to do just that! Followers of God share their faith in God with others, and sinners are never satisfied to be sinners alone.**

*In one sense* this is neither wrong nor strange; it is how God made us! Expressing ourselves is a gift of God! It reveals/supports God’s non-coercive nature and the existence of true freedom—freedom needs *influence* to be both real and successful. Expressing ourselves also supports *human dignity* for it is based on the premise that what we say and do is significant, life-changing even!

**Expressing ourselves though became a destructive action only when sin commandeered it for its own ends.** Perhaps this is part of what Paul meant when he wrote:

**Romans 7:8** But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. *Apart from the law sin lies dead.*

Sin uses the good gifts God gave for its own ends; without the use of these God-given gifts sin would be dead in the water, unable to do anything.

**But on the positive side,** when we embrace Jesus, and as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus, then we share Jesus with others! This is how we are wired!

### Questions

Is it possible to “disobey” the law of self-expression? Or is it written into our core of being? Why do some remain more quiet about their beliefs and practices? While others trumpet such things to all within their sphere of influence? How does personality mesh with the idea of the law of self-expression? How can you and I become better at sharing our faith in Jesus?

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Along a different vein, but one still linked to sharing Jesus with others:

*Then let our lessons be appropriate for the day in which we live, that we may be co-laborers with God....* Christ is on the field of action, working with those who are laboring for him, that truth may appear in its divine, unchangeable, and eternal character. The Holy Spirit is at work. Divine agencies are combining with the human *to take the important truths from their worn-out setting, reframe them, and hang them in memory's halls, and call men [humanity] to the obedience of God's commandments.* **Youth Instructor, October 27, 1898** [inclusivity mine]

He [Jesus] passed by no human being as worthless, but sought to apply the saving remedy to every soul. *In whatever company He found Himself, He presented a lesson that was appropriate to the time and the circumstances.* **The Desire of Ages, 91**

### Questions

How can *changing something* so that it is appropriate for the day in which we live make that thing appear in its divine, *unchangeable*, and *eternal* character?

Do you feel that we as Adventists are doing well at taking important truths, that perhaps have become worn-out, and reframing them for our day and current circumstances? No matter how you answer, how might we do better at this?

**Jesus, Ellen White wrote, passed by no human being as worthless, but do we do otherwise,** as God's people in the past seemed to have done?

It was not God's purpose that the light he had given to patriarchs and prophets should be confined to the Jewish nation. He designed that it should be carried to all parts of the earth. But the Israelites misinterpreted the command given them in regard to intermarrying with other nations. This command was given to guard God's people from idolatry. But they made it a wall of separation, a barrier to any communication with other nations. They regarded themselves as the only people whom God would acknowledge, and looked upon all others as despised by him. Thus they became narrow in their ideas; and while separating themselves from the heathen, they also separated themselves from God. **Youth Instructor, October 5, 1899**

### Questions

Do we think as the Israelites did, that we are the only people that God acknowledges and look upon all others as despised by Him?

What is your relationship with others within your community? In what ways do you "hang out" with others within your community? Should we engage only in Adventist sponsored ministries? Why or why not?

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### Lesson #13: Into Eternity, June 20-26

**What does the future hold for you?** the SS Quarterly asks. Seventh-day Adventists, rightly or wrongly, done well or poorly, often use the double-edged sword: *the shortness of time* and *the uncertainty of life*, to motivate people.

The shortness of time is urged as an incentive for us to seek righteousness, and to make Christ our friend. *This is not the great motive. It savors of selfishness.* Is it necessary that the terrors of the day of God be held before us to compel us through fear to right action? *This ought not to be. Jesus is attractive.* **Review and Herald, August 2, 1881** (See also Testimonies, Vol. 2, 121 for a similar quote)

**In a very real sense, it does not matter whether time is short or life is uncertain.** What matters is whether we have seen and embraced the sheer loveliness of Christ's character.

Most human beings have plenty of time in which to embrace Christ, but even if time is short or life is uncertain it is still the loveliness of Christ's character that matters!

**Nor should fear or the hope of reward motivate us to seek Christ.**

*It is not the fear of punishment, or the hope of everlasting reward that leads the disciples of Christ to follow Him. They behold the Savior's matchless love, revealed throughout His pilgrimage on earth, from the manger of Bethlehem to Calvary's cross, and the sight of Him attracts, it softens and subdues the soul. Love awakens in the heart of the beholders. They hear His voice, and they follow Him. The Desire of Ages, 480:3*

**Think of various Bible stories that support what Ellen White wrote:**

**Job 1:9** Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God *for nothing*?"

**Satan accused God to His face of buying Job's trust! This was merely one of Satan's many accusations against God. But why then should we ever think that God is buying people's trust by offering them heaven?**

**2Samuel 19:31-39** Now Barzillai the Gileadite had come down from Rogelim; he went on with the king to the Jordan, to escort him over the Jordan. <sup>32</sup> Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old. He had provided the king with food while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man. <sup>33</sup> The king said to Barzillai, "Come over with me, and I will provide for you in Jerusalem at my side." <sup>34</sup> But Barzillai said to the king, "How many years have I still to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? <sup>35</sup> Today I am eighty years old; can I discern what is pleasant and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats or what he drinks? Can I still listen to the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king? <sup>36</sup> Your servant will go a little way over the Jordan with the king. *Why should the king recompense me with such a reward?* <sup>37</sup> Please let your servant return, so that I may die in my own town, near the graves of my father and my mother. But here is your servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do for him whatever seems good to you." <sup>38</sup> The king answered, "Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do for him whatever seems good to you; and all that you desire of me I will do for you." <sup>39</sup> Then all the people

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crossed over the Jordan, and the king crossed over; the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned to his own home.

**Facing an uncertain future, when death seemed more likely than not, Barzillai refused to be rewarded by David! Barzillai was not faithful to David to gain a reward.**

**The woman of Shunem went to great lengths to show hospitality to Elisha. Yet she also made it clear that she did not do these things so she could receive something in return.**

**2Kings 4:28** Then she said, *“Did I ask you for a son, my lord? And didn’t I say, ‘Don’t deceive me and get my hopes up?’”*

**And there is a powerful reason why the Bible does not tell us whether Naaman or his wife released the little Israelite slave girl** who graciously shared her faith so Naaman could be healed (see **2 Kings 5**). Adding such a detail, even if true, might/would have tainted her with a selfish spirit! Reward seeking is not a good thing!

**Luke 22:1-6** Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. <sup>2</sup> The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people. <sup>3</sup> Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; <sup>4</sup> he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police *about how he might betray him to them.* <sup>5</sup> *They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money.* <sup>6</sup> *So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.*

**Judas acted treacherously because he desired a reward. Gaining that reward cost him everything! Rewards are tricky business!**

**Oftentimes Christians act as if heaven is a reward for choosing to follow God. In doing this they may besmirch God’s reputation.** God does not need to buy loyalty! His character of unfailing love is more than good enough to draw and keep followers!

By this I do not at all imply that there will be no heaven! I just want to keep heaven in its proper place ideologically. It was never offered as a payout, the reason for following God. Heaven is instead a natural extension of the goodness of God!

### Challenging Thoughts Regarding Heaven

**When I was younger, I struggled mightily with the words of Jesus regarding human relationships in heaven.** Here is what he said:

**Matthew 22:29-30** Jesus replied, *“Your mistake is that you don’t know the Scriptures, and you don’t know the power of God. <sup>30</sup> For when the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage. In this respect they will be like the angels in heaven.*

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Like many young people I hoped then that Jesus would not come the second time until after I had the privilege of being married. Truthfully, I still wonder about what Jesus said! Given all that God can do, why would marriage in heaven be off the table?

**When I read Ellen White’s Conflict of the Ages series, cross-referencing stuff, I noticed an envelope-like structure to its first and fifth book. Here is the first book:**

God Himself gave Adam a companion. He provided “an help meet for him”—a helper corresponding to him—*one who* was fitted to be his companion, and who *could be one with him in love and sympathy*.  
**Patriarchs and Prophets, 46:2**

**And here in the fifth book:**

There the redeemed shall know, even as also they are known. *The loves and sympathies which God Himself planted in the soul shall there find truest and sweetest exercise*. The pure communion with holy beings, the harmonious social life with blessed angels and with the faithful ones of all ages who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, the sacred ties that bind together “the whole family in heaven and earth” (Ephesians 3:15)—these help constitute the happiness of the redeemed. **The Great Controversy 677:1**

Now in this latter quotation there does seem to be a spelling out of who will comprise those with whom we shall exercise truest and sweetest loves and sympathies, the very same qualities that God instilled in Adam and Eve as a married couple. Only in heaven marriage relationships are not mentioned in the above GC quote. Yet the quotation still seems suggestive to me, but if not, it still shows that God has plans regarding our social lives!

**Plus, I’ve wondered what to do with Ellen’s other ideas, like:**

As the little infants come forth immortal from their dusty beds [graves], *they immediately wing their way to their mother’s arms*. They meet again nevermore to part. **Child Guidance, 260:1** [explanation mine]

Angels “gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the others.” *Little children are borne by holy angels to their mother’s arms*. **The Great Controversy, 645:1**

### Questions

For what purpose are these little ones reunited with their mother [families]? Will these little ones be raised, if possible, by their mothers and fathers?

If it was originally best for children to be raised by a mother and a father on earth, why would that be different in heaven?

Would these little ones be raised in heaven only by their mothers? What if their mother isn’t there, but their father is? Was Ellen White simply misguided on this matter?

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When I've asked others for their insights, I've never been given solid reasoning/material, not even from scholars! So far, not even from Ellen White scholars! I want more! I want better!

**Given our natural interest in human relationships, it does not seem heretical for us to have an interest in learning more regarding relationships in heaven! That doesn't mean we should believe what we cannot support, but neither does it mean that we are wrong to wonder what we should believe! After all, there are these odd hints!**

**Down a different but related track**, in the above quote GC 645:1, Ellen White references that saved humans will enjoy "pure communion with holy beings." It is not just pure communion with holy angels, but pure communion with *holy beings*.

**Scripture addresses the existence of holy beings:**

**Isaiah 40:15, 26** *Even the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as dust on the scales; see, he takes up the isles like fine dust. 26 Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing.*

In the context of nations that are like a drop from a bucket and like dust on the scales, Isaiah went on to write about the heavenly hosts, which vastly outnumber the nations here on earth. These heavenly host seem to be other created worlds with vast populations of beings/people.

**Psalms 103:19-22** *The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all. 20 Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, obedient to his spoken word. 21 Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers that do his will. 22 Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul.*

Psalms 103 addresses the whole of heaven, including the angels, but also all of God's hosts who do God's bidding. Here again the thought of other worlds, other beings/people surfaces. **Other texts speak to the same idea:**

**Nehemiah 9:6** And Ezra said: "You are the LORD, you alone; you have made heaven, *the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. To all of them you give life, and the host of heaven worships you.*

**Daniel 7:3-10** and four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. <sup>4</sup> The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then, as I watched, its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a human being; and a human mind was given to it. <sup>5</sup> Another beast appeared, a second one, that looked like a bear. It was raised up on one side, had three ribs in its mouth among its teeth and was told, "Arise, devour many bodies!" <sup>6</sup> After this, as I watched, another appeared, like a leopard. The beast had four wings of a bird on its back and four heads; and dominion was given to it. <sup>7</sup> After this I saw in the visions by night a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth and was devouring, breaking in pieces, and stamping what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that preceded it, and it had ten

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horns. <sup>8</sup> I was considering the horns, when another horn appeared, a little one coming up among them; to make room for it, three of the earlier horns were plucked up by the roots. There were eyes like human eyes in this horn, and a mouth speaking arrogantly. <sup>9</sup> *As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire.* <sup>10</sup> A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. *A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.*

**Note here in Daniel 7 that thrones, plural, were set in place, and massive numbers of beings stand attending God.** Throughout all time, the Holy Three have shared their thrones with others! See Revelation 3:21; 11:16; Isaiah 14:13; DA 49:1. This is because at their very core each member of the Trinity is unselfish!

### More texts suggestive of other worlds/other beings:

**Ephesians 3:14-15** For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> *from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.*

**Colossians 1:20** *and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

**Luke 2:14** *“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”*

### Questions

How shall we rightly think about seeking Christ, motive-wise?

Why are fear and/or the hope of reward inadequate regarding seeking Christ?

What questions do you have regarding relationships in heaven? Is it okay to ask such questions?

When you meet them, what might you like to ask sinless beings/people who live on other planets?

Imagine what they might be able to teach you. What comes to mind?

The existence of other worlds, other beings/people is important to our Adventist understanding of the cosmic conflict between good and evil. What is the relationship between these other worlds'/beings' existence and the great controversy between Christ and Satan?